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Religious Polarisation, Economic Vulnerability, and Electoral Realignment: Evidence from West Bengal, India

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Religious Polarisation, Economic Vulnerability, and Electoral Realignment: Evidence from West Bengal, India*

Abstract

This paper contributes to the debate on identity politics by examining whether the religious composition of voters predicts electoral outcomes. Focusing on West Bengal, India, we use assembly constituency-level data from six elections between 2011 and 2024 to examine how the Muslim population share at the constituency level relates to party performance. We show that religious composition becomes a much stronger correlate of electoral outcomes in the later period (2016 onwards) of our sample: constituencies with higher Muslim shares increasingly align with the incumbent Trinamool Congress (TMC), while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) consolidates support in constituencies with lower Muslim shares. We further document heterogeneity within predominantly Hindu constituencies: economically vulnerable areas – proxied by a higher share of marginal agricultural labourers – remain relatively more supportive of the TMC, even as better-off agricultural constituencies shift towards the BJP. Essentially, while Muslims tend to consistently vote for TMC, there is also a poorer-Hindu vote consolidation in favour of TMC after controlling for the caste and education dimensions. Together, the results suggest that West Bengal's recent electoral realignment reflects both strengthening religious polarisation and an interaction between identity-based mobilisation and material considerations, with implications for political competition and accountability in democracies.

JEL classification

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Keywords

religion, electoral-outcome, TMC, BJP, West Bengal, India

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1 Introduction

Elections in democracies are contested along several dimensions. Earlier work emphasised economic conditions as a primary determinant of electoral outcomes (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000). More recent decades, however, have witnessed a renewed prominence of identity politics and populism across many democracies (Besley & Persson, 2021).

A central axis around which identity-based mobilisation often takes shape is religion. Islamic nationalism has helped sustain Erdoğan's political dominance in Turkey, while religious mobilisation was also prominent in the political episode surrounding the removal of Governor Purnama in Indonesia. India has similarly witnessed the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu-nationalist party. Comparable dynamics have been observed in Western Europe and the Americas: in France, far-right politics has sought to position itself as representative of a conservative Catholic bloc; in the United States, appeals to conservative Christian values have been associated with the rise of leaders such as Trump; and religious politics has been linked to political movements supporting leaders including Bolsonaro in Brazil and Fabricio Alvarado in Costa Rica (Vaishnav, 2019; DeHanas & Shterin, 2018; Davies, 2010). Taken together, these examples underscore the global resurgence of religious mobilisation as a component of contemporary political competition.

Existing explanations for the rise of populism and far-right parties have largely focused on three themes: immigration (Halla et al., 2017; Mayda et al., 2022), economic shocks and policy preferences (Fetzer, 2019; Autor et al., 2020), and historical and cultural underpinnings (Kaplan & Mukand, 2011; Ochsner & Rösel, 2017). In contrast, there has been comparatively limited constituency-level empirical work that isolates how religious composition relates to electoral outcomes. This paper contributes to that gap by examining whether constituency-level religious composition – particularly the Muslim population share – predicts party performance in West Bengal, a state in eastern India.

The setting is West Bengal, where political competition has changed sharply in recent years. At the national level, the salience of religion in electoral mobilisation has increased since 2014, when the BJP-led government came to power. Between 2014 and 2019, India experienced agricultural distress and an economic slowdown, alongside unemployment reaching its highest level in four decades (Varshney, 2019). Yet the BJP returned to power in 2019 with a larger parliamentary majority (Visaria, 2023). Despite economic distress, a growing literature argues that the BJP's rise coincides with a consolidation of Hindu votes, including among poorer and lower-caste groups.¹

West Bengal itself has witnessed a rapid transformation in its political landscape. A coalition of left-wing parties, commonly referred to as the Left Front, governed the state continuously

¹ The religious composition of India comprises a Hindu majority and a Muslim minority population. Other religions such as Christians and Sikhs form a substantive population as well. The caste identity is unique to India, generally comprised of well-off forward castes and lower scheduled castes and tribes (SC and ST).

from 1977 to 2011.² During this period, it enacted major structural reforms such as Operation Barga (land and tenancy reform), distributed homestead land among poorer households, and implemented Panchayati Raj institutions to support decentralised governance and other programmatic policies (Visaria, 2023; Bhattacharyya, 2009). Increased political competition from the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) is argued to have coincided with a shift towards more clientelist forms of benefit distribution in the Left Front's later years (Dey & Sen, 2016; Bardhan et al., 2020).³ Since 2011, the Left Front has experienced a sharp decline, the TMC has remained the incumbent, and the BJP has gradually gained a foothold across parts of the state, largely at the Left's expense. This political shift – from long-standing left governance to a competitive environment in which the BJP emerges as the principal challenger – provides a setting in which identity-based mobilisation, including along religious lines, may become more salient.

Religious composition is particularly relevant in West Bengal. Hindus constitute about 70.54% of the state population, and Muslims about 27.01% (Census 2011). West Bengal also shares an international border with Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority country. Prior work argues that the mere presence of ethnic or religious cleavages is not sufficient for identity politics; rather, identities become politically salient when groups constitute a large enough share of the electorate and when political competition creates incentives for mobilisation (Posner, 2004; Eifert et al., 2010). West Bengal plausibly satisfies these conditions: it has a large Hindu majority, a substantial Muslim minority, and an increasingly competitive multi-party environment. This makes it a useful setting to study whether and how religious composition is associated with electoral outcomes.

In light of this, the paper addresses two questions. First, does the Muslim population share systematically predict electoral outcomes in West Bengal, particularly in the later period of our sample? Second, what factors help explain why the incumbent continues to win in constituencies where Muslims do not constitute a large share – pointing to an interaction between religious polarisation and programmatic or material considerations?

Our analysis spans almost one and a half decades (2011–2024) and covers six elections in West Bengal, including three assembly elections (2011, 2016, 2021) and three parliamentary elections (2014, 2019, 2024). In India, parliamentary (Lok Sabha) elections determine the national government and are conducted at the parliamentary constituency (PC) level, while assembly elections determine the state government and are conducted at the assembly constituency (AC) level. Elections can sometimes occur simultaneously or in close succession, which may alter voter behaviour;⁴ for instance, Balasubramaniam et al. (2020) show that simultaneous elections can increase the baseline probability of a party winning both central and

² These include the CPI(M), CPI and All India Forward Bloc and other ideologically 'left' parties.

³ Examples include the diversion of NREGS funds preferentially towards own constituencies and away from opposing ones.

⁴ In 2014, the states of Odisha, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh held national and state elections in the same year.

state elections. West Bengal is advantageous in this respect because, during 2011–2024, the elections considered are neither simultaneous nor proximate (within 180 days) of each other. We therefore study electoral outcomes at the AC level across these six elections.

A key component of the analysis is the construction of constituency-level measures of religious composition. Because the Census reports religion only at the block level, we construct assembly-constituency-level Muslim population shares by spatially aggregating block-level information using village population weights derived from shapefiles. To the best of our knowledge, existing work has not constructed religious composition measures at the electoral constituency level using this approach.

Exploratory evidence suggests that the BJP's vote-share gains over 2011–2024 are not strongly differentiated by caste, literacy, or an economic proxy, but vary sharply along religious lines. In particular, BJP gains are concentrated in constituencies with relatively low Muslim population shares and decline as Muslim concentration rises. The TMC exhibits the opposite pattern, with larger vote-share increases in constituencies with higher Muslim shares, while the Left's trajectory is comparatively muted along religion and strongly negative along other dimensions. These descriptive patterns are consistent with rising religious polarisation in West Bengal, and motivate a more systematic analysis of how religious composition predicts party performance.

Our main findings show that the constituency Muslim population share becomes a strong predictor of electoral outcomes in the later period of our sample. In particular, the Muslim share is only weakly related to party outcomes up to 2016, but from 2019 onwards it is strongly and consistently associated with higher TMC vote shares and winning probabilities and lower BJP vote shares and winning probabilities, with similar patterns persisting through the 2024 parliamentary election. We also show that constituencies with very high Muslim shares do not mechanically drive these results: the findings are robust to right-winsorising the Muslim share at the 95th percentile.

At the same time, Muslim consolidation alone cannot explain the TMC's ability to win enough seats to govern, because many constituencies have relatively low Muslim population shares. This motivates our second result: within predominantly Hindu constituencies, economic structure moderates party performance. Using interactions between Muslim share and agricultural labour composition, we find evidence of a within-Hindu divide: constituencies with higher shares of marginal agricultural labourers (a proxy for economic vulnerability) remain relatively more aligned with the TMC in the later period, whereas constituencies with higher shares of main agricultural labourers exhibit stronger BJP consolidation. We interpret these patterns as suggestive of an economic cleavage that interacts with religious polarisation – potentially because welfare-oriented politics may remain salient among economically vulnerable voters – even though identifying the underlying voter-level mechanism is beyond the scope of constituency-level data.

Together, these results imply that West Bengal's recent electoral realignment is characterised by both a strengthening religious cleavage and heterogeneity within the Hindu electorate that limits the consolidation of a uniform "Hindu vote," with implications for how parties compete and mobilise voters in settings where minority populations are electorally pivotal.

Putting together these findings establishes the growing importance of religion in shaping political outcomes and provides one of the first pieces of constituency-level empirical evidence in the context of West Bengal. These results are important and worrisome because their consequences are at least twofold.

First, if the salience of religion continues to increase, political parties may adopt strategies and policies that deepen social cleavages and sow disharmony.⁵ Voters, in turn, may incur costs to maintain religious identity and de-emphasise other identities, including class-based groupings. When identity considerations dominate material interests, economically disadvantaged voters may support parties or policies that do not align with their economic preferences (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Bonomi et al., 2021; Velasco, 2020). This mechanism has been highlighted as one explanation for the BJP's ability to attract poorer voters (even if not the most economically vulnerable), including during periods of economic distress. Moreover, as more 'client' voters support the incumbent, each individual client becomes willing to re-elect the incumbent at a lower perceived performance threshold. Anticipating this softer electoral discipline, the incumbent exerts sub-optimally low governance effort (Sarkar, 2018). Second, religious polarisation can lead voters to place less weight on democratic norms and procedures (Fishkin et al., 2021), raising broader concerns about the functioning of electoral accountability in contemporary democracies.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the background of the changing political milieu of India and the state of West Bengal in recent decades. Section 3 describes the data employed and presents an initial background. Section 4 outlines the empirical framework. Section 5 details the motivating evidence and the main results. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2 Background: Changing Political Milieu of India and the State of West Bengal

2.1 India: The Shifting Nature of Politics

Comparative political economy has long treated elections as referenda on government performance, especially growth, inflation and employment (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000). In India, much of the post-Independence period was likewise shaped by state-led development and welfare. Studies of "social banking" show that directed rural branch expansion reduced poverty and widened financial inclusion (Burgess & Pande, 2005), while programmes such as

⁵ Possibly through politically instigated religious riots, a common occurrence in India.

the mid-day meal scheme, the Public Distribution System and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act embedded distributive politics within a framework of basic entitlements (Drèze & Goyal, 2003; Himanshu & Sen, 2013; Imbert & Papp, 2015).

Yet these policies were rarely politically neutral. Their delivery often passed through panchayat leaders, brokers and legislators, and micro-level evidence shows that ruling parties may favour their own constituencies, reinforcing clientelist "party-citizen" ties (e.g. Dey & Sen, 2016). This welfare-plus-clientelism framework forms the backdrop to recent political change (Sarkar, 2018).

From the 1990s, the decline of Congress's dominance and the rise of regional parties produced a fragmented party system. Chhibber and Verma (2019) argue that competition increasingly came to be organised along two ideological axes: state-market and secular-Hindu nationalist. The BJP's national dominance from 2014 onwards can therefore be understood as the consolidation of a Hindu-nationalist, pro-market yet welfare-friendly pole.

A large body of work characterises the Modi era as combining Hindu majoritarianism, centralised leadership and a distinctive "new welfarism". Jaffrelot (2021) argues that the BJP has pushed India towards an "ethnic democracy", while Varshney (2019) sees the 2019 landslide as a moment of electoral vibrancy alongside mounting liberal deficits. Anand, Dimble and Subramanian (2020) use the term "new welfarism of India's Right" to describe the Modi government's emphasis on targeted, individually branded schemes rather than broad public goods. These programmes are heavily personalised and symbolically tied to Narendra Modi, and have helped sustain BJP popularity despite uneven macroeconomic outcomes (Subramanian & Felman, 2023; Kailash, 2024).

Recent work, therefore, suggests not a simple decline of economic voting, but a reframing of economic performance through identity and leadership. Kailash (2024) shows that voters respond to welfare delivery, yet beneficiaries often credit Modi and the BJP even where schemes are co-financed by state governments. Parallel survey and qualitative studies show that Hindu nationalist narratives around national security, strong leadership and civilisational pride shape how citizens interpret both welfare and economic performance, often overriding local grievances (Pew Research Center, 2021; Jha, 2021; Dutta and Abbas, 2024). In this context, religion and identity have become increasingly central to national politics. Sircar (2022) argues that the BJP seeks to construct a pan-Indian "Hindu vote", while a broader literature links Hindu nationalism to constraints on civil society, independent media and minority rights (Jaffrelot, 2021; Vaishnav, 2025). The post-2014 period is thus best understood as the fusion of majoritarian nationalism, personalised leadership and targeted welfare, within which state politics such as West Bengal's are increasingly interpreted through religious and identity-based lenses.

2.2 West Bengal: Emergence of Religion in the Political Landscape

West Bengal's recent "religionisation" of politics is best understood against a longer history in which class and "party-society", rather than religion, structured competition. The CPI(M)-led Left Front combined land reform, panchayats and dense party networks in a "government as practice" regime that absorbed social cleavages while keeping overt religious mobilisation relatively muted (Bhattacharyya, 2016). Electoral geography of Lok Sabha polls from 2004 to 2019 shows how this order unravelled: the Left declined, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) rose, and the BJP emerged as the main challenger, with especially strong gains in SC/ST seats and border regions where Hindutva and anti-immigrant rhetoric resonated (Biswas, Khan and Ahamed, 2021).

A key shift in this new TMC-BJP bipolarity is the salience of caste-religion-refugee politics. Sinharay's work on the Matua community shows how a historically marginalised Dalit refugee group from East Bengal has been mobilised through religious institutions and courted by both TMC and BJP as a Hindu/Dalit refugee vote-bank (Sinharay, 2014; 2019). This anticipates later debates around CAA/NRC and links directly to the border constituencies where, especially between 2014 and 2019, the BJP made its sharpest gains.

This religious cleavage is layered on top of resilient Bengali regionalism. Chatterjee (2014) characterises West Bengal as a "two-level game" in which financial and cultural regionalism constrain nationalising projects. Vincent's (2022) ethnography finds that while organisations such as ISKCON cultivate Hindu nationalist worldviews, voting behaviour diverges sharply by origin and language: non-Bengali Hindus tend to support the BJP consistently, whereas Bengali Hindus, attached to a plural Bengali identity, often support TMC in state elections. Sircar (2021) likewise highlights long-run pluralist and secular traditions that made many voters see the 2021 Assembly election as a choice between "Hindi-Hindu nationalism" and a Bengali, regionally rooted alternative.

Another strand of work highlights welfare populism and party-society as the institutional vehicle through which religion and identity now operate. Studies of the 2021 Assembly elections frame the contest as one between TMC's welfare populism and the BJP's right-wing competitive populism, with schemes such as Duare Sarkar, Swasthya Sathi, Kanyashree and Sabuj Sathi helping TMC assemble a broad subaltern coalition (Debnath and Chatterjee, 2021). Analyses of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections argue that welfare alone cannot explain TMC's success; they instead emphasise Muslim consolidation, dense local organisation and the strategic use of "Brand Mamata" in a party-society structure where access to state resources remains mediated by partisan networks (Debnath, 2024; Debnath and Hazam, 2025). This aligns with Mahmood and Bhattacharya's (2023) description of TMC as a populist regime fusing leader-centric rule, welfare and regional identity.

The Hindutva project in Bengal has also been analysed in both electoral and organisational terms. Chatterjee and Mahmood (2025) argue that while "political Hindutva" - the BJP's bid

for state power - has stalled since 2019, "cultural Hindutva" has advanced through RSS shakhas, schools and the politicisation of festivals such as Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti, normalising Hindu majoritarian idioms in everyday life. Dasgupta (2023) similarly shows how Sangh Parivar networks have expanded a saffron social infrastructure after 2014.

The other side of this polarisation is one-way Muslim consolidation. Studies of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections argue that Muslims increasingly treat support for TMC as a "politics of survival" in the context of CAA/NRC and rising Hindu majoritarianism, especially in demographically pivotal constituencies (Debnath, 2024; Debnath and Hazam, 2025). Allie (2024) identifies a broader post-2019 trend towards unified anti-BJP Muslim voting, while Jaffrelot and Ahmed (2024) show that Muslim vote choices in 2024 were shaped by perceptions of discrimination and fear more than by narrow patronage. In Bengal, this interacts with TMC's welfare regime and Bengali sub-nationalism to generate strong minority consolidation without producing a fully consolidated "Hindu vote".

Finally, micro-level work on clientelism shows how access to public resources can be channelled through partisan networks, creating material incentives for political alignment (Shenoy and Zimmermann, 2021; Dey and Sen, 2016). Combined with the literature on religion-as-ethnicity, which contrasts a more consolidated Hindu-Muslim cleavage in Assam with a still-fragmented one in Bengal (Sircar, 2022), the picture that emerges is of a state where religion has become a major axis of electoral competition, but always refracted through regional identity, welfare populism and party-society. This is the complex milieu in which the role of religion in West Bengal's electoral outcomes must be understood. Section 3 will present the data set used for the empirical analysis to address the research questions mentioned in Section 1.

3 Data and Context

The analysis draws on multiple secondary data sources that are merged at the assembly constituency (AC) level.

Election data are obtained from the Election Commission of India (ECI), which conducts and publishes results for both parliamentary and state assembly elections. These data include vote shares by political party, winning candidates, and related electoral outcomes. In India, each parliamentary constituency (PC) subsumes between five and seven assembly constituencies, and election results are reported at the AC level. This structure allows us to exploit within-PC variation even in parliamentary election years. We use harmonised election data compiled by the Trivedi Centre for Political Data (TCPD).

Demographic and socio-economic information comes from the Census of India. We rely primarily on the 2011 Census, which provides data on gender composition, caste shares, literacy, labour market characteristics (including agricultural labour), and religious affiliation.

In addition, we compile historical census information on religious composition from 1971 onwards, which is used in robustness exercises.

Census information is available at several administrative levels, including districts, blocks, and villages. For most demographic characteristics, we construct assembly constituency-level measures by aggregating village-level information from villages within each constituency. While village boundaries nest within both blocks and assembly constituencies (ACs), block boundaries do not coincide with AC boundaries. As a result, some blocks overlap multiple constituencies. Because religious composition is reported only at the block level in the Census, we construct constituency-level measures of religious composition by aggregating block-level information using population weights derived from village-level data.

Specifically, we use village-level shapefiles and population counts from the Census to determine the distribution of villages across blocks and ACs. Since villages are fully contained within both a block and an AC, village populations can be used to calculate how much of an AC's population originates from each block. Let Pop_v denote the population of a village v , and let V_{bi} denote the set of villages that belong to both block b and constituency i . The population weight assigned to the block b in constituency i is therefore defined as

$$w_{bi} = \frac{\sum_{v \in V_{bi}} Pop_v}{\sum_{v \in V_i} Pop_v},$$

where V_i denotes the set of all villages in the constituency i . This weight represents the share of the AC's population that resides in the block b .

Using these weights, we compute the Muslim population share of the constituency i as the population-weighted average of the Muslim shares of the blocks that intersect the constituency:

$$MuslimShare_i = \sum_b w_{bi} MuslimShare_b,$$

where $MuslimShare_b$ denotes the Muslim population share in the block b obtained from the Census.

This procedure allows us to construct a constituency-level measure of religious composition that respects administrative boundaries and uses the finest available population information from the Census. Because religious composition is observed only at the block level, this approach implicitly assumes that the spatial distribution of religious shares is approximately uniform within blocks. Any within-block variation in religious composition would introduce measurement error in the constructed constituency-level measure. To the extent that such variation is random, the resulting measurement error would tend to attenuate the estimated coefficients toward zero; in other words, our estimated coefficients may capture a lower-bound of the actual effect.

We also use data from the Socioeconomic High-resolution Rural-Urban Geographic Platform for India (SHRUG), which provides annual measures of development and economic activity, such as night-time lights, at the AC level.

These sources are merged to construct a unique panel covering 294 assembly constituencies observed across six elections: three assembly elections (2011, 2016, and 2021) and three parliamentary elections (2014, 2019, and 2024). Appendix Table A1 reports summary statistics for the main variables used in the analysis. To the best of our knowledge, no other study has used all 294 assembly constituency-level data spanning six consecutive elections in West Bengal.

Figure 1 plots average party vote shares in West Bengal over time. The figure shows that, while the Trinamool Congress (TMC) largely sustains its vote share across elections, the Left experiences a sharp decline after 2016, alongside a rapid rise in support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This period coincides with a broader reconfiguration of political competition in the state.

From the mid-2010s onwards, political competition in West Bengal increasingly featured mobilisation along religious lines. The TMC adopted policies and rhetoric aimed at minority voters, while the BJP positioned itself as a party representing Hindu interests and criticised the incumbent for minority-oriented policies (Roy, 2017). Over the same period, the Left, which historically emphasised class-based and redistributive issues, experienced substantial electoral erosion. These developments motivate our focus on religion as a potentially salient dimension of electoral behaviour, relative to other socio-economic identities.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Muslim population shares across constituencies in West Bengal. Appendix Figure A4 presents constituency-level election winners across elections, while Appendix Figure A5 maps Muslim population shares and the share of marginal agricultural labourers across constituencies. Together, these figures illustrate the increasing spatial alignment between electoral outcomes and religious composition over time. In 2011, electoral dominance by the TMC and the Left is not strongly correlated with the concentration of Muslim voters. By 2019 and 2021, however, constituencies won by the TMC and the BJP appear increasingly segregated along religious lines, with the TMC performing strongly in Muslim-concentrated regions of central and southern Bengal, and the BJP dominating largely Hindu regions in the north. At the same time, there remain predominantly Hindu constituencies in which the TMC continues to perform well, suggesting the presence of additional socio-economic factors that mitigate religious voting. Similar patterns are observed when comparing the 2016 and 2021 assembly elections, as well as the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections.

4 Methodology

We first present a set of stylised facts that motivate the idea that religious composition, particularly the Muslim share, may shape electoral outcomes and, relatedly, political competition. We then estimate the following baseline specification separately for each year t :

$$Y_{p,i,d,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Muslim}_{i,d} + \gamma' Z_{i,d,t} + \delta_d + \epsilon_{p,i,d,t} \quad (1)$$

where $Y_{p,i,d,t}$ denotes an electoral outcome for party p in assembly constituency i from district d in election year t . The key explanatory variable, $\text{Muslim}_{i,d}$ is the percentage Muslim population in constituency i (constructed from the 2011 Census). $Z_{i,d,t}$ is a vector of constituency-level control variables (demographic, socio-economic, and political), and δ_d denotes district fixed effects that absorb time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity at the district level. Standard errors are clustered at the AC level.

Our first outcome is party vote share in a given election year. Estimating equation (1) separately by election year allows us to examine whether the association between religious composition and vote share differs across the electoral cycle.

Beyond vote shares, office-motivated parties ultimately care about winning elections. We therefore also study whether religious composition predicts the probability that a party wins a constituency. Specifically, we define a binary outcome:

$$\text{Win}_{p,i,d,t} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if party } p \text{ wins constituency } i \text{ in district } d \text{ in year } t \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

and estimate equation (1) with $\text{Win}_{p,i,d,t}$ as the dependent variable (again, to obtain election-year specific estimates).

As an additional specification, we study changes in party vote share over time, which helps isolate whether religious composition is associated with the growth (or decline) of parties between elections. We define changes in vote share as:

$$\Delta \text{VoteShare}_{p,i,d} = \text{VoteShare}_{p,i,d,t_2} - \text{VoteShare}_{p,i,d,t_1}$$

and, consistent with Table 2, we consider three periods: 2024–2011, 2024–2016, and 2016–2011. Analysing changes in vote share allows us to assess whether constituencies with larger Muslim shares are systematically those in which parties gained or lost support over time, rather than simply exhibiting higher or lower vote shares in both endpoints.

Finally, we discuss the plausibility of treating constituency-level religious composition as predetermined with respect to electoral outcomes in our sample period. Muslim population shares are constructed from the 2011 Census, and within the context of our six-election panel, there is no evidence of large constituency-level population shocks that would mechanically

drive short-run changes in religious composition. As additional supportive evidence, we compile historical census series on Muslim population shares and show that, after 1971, district-level Muslim shares evolve smoothly without visible discontinuities. We digitise census tables for 1991 and recover 1971–1981 information from archival sources. Since historical census information is consistently available at the district level, within which assembly constituencies are largely contained, we trace Muslim population shares from 1971 to 2011 for a consistent set of districts by pooling districts that were subsequently split. Appendix Figure A1 shows smooth district-level trends, and Appendix Figure A2 shows a similarly smooth trajectory in Muslim population as a share of the state population. Together, these patterns are consistent with the absence of major post-1971 irregularities in Muslim population shares.

5 Results

We now present the empirical results. We begin with descriptive patterns that illustrate how electoral outcomes vary with constituency characteristics, and then turn to regression estimates that quantify the association between religious composition and party vote shares, winning probabilities, and changes in electoral performance.

5.1 Descriptive Evidence

Before turning to the regression estimates, we document descriptive patterns in electoral competition and identity-based voting. Appendix Table A2 indicates that constituencies with higher Muslim population shares are associated with larger winning margins in later elections, particularly from 2019 onwards, consistent with reduced competitiveness in high-Muslim constituencies. We then compare religion with other identity dimensions using Figure 3, which presents LOWESS plots of changes in party vote shares between 2011 and 2024 against Scheduled Caste share, literacy, an economic proxy, and religious composition. Economic conditions are proxied by the share of main and marginal agricultural labourers – typically landless, low-wage workers who are economically vulnerable (Saini et al., 2020).⁶ Across caste, literacy, and this economic proxy, the BJP generally exhibits gains (or limited losses) while the Left declines sharply and the TMC’s patterns are comparatively flat, consistent with a weakening of earlier class- and caste-linked alignments (Sen & Bandyopadhyay, 2023). In contrast, religion displays the clearest gradient: BJP vote-share gains are concentrated in constituencies with lower Muslim population shares and decline as the Muslim share rises, whereas the TMC’s vote-share change increases with Muslim concentration; the regression analysis that follows quantifies these associations more formally.

⁶ Main worker refers to working in a job for more than 180 days in a year as per the census definition. This is in contrast to the marginal worker who works a particular job for less than 180 days in a year.

5.2 Election Outcomes: Does Religion Shape Elections?

5.2.1 Vote share as an outcome

We first examine whether the Muslim population share predicts party vote shares in each election year. Table 1 reports election-year-specific estimates of the association between the Muslim population percentage in an assembly constituency (AC) and party vote share. For the TMC (Panel A), the relationship is small and statistically indistinguishable from zero up to 2016, but becomes positive and precisely estimated from 2019 onwards, with a similar pattern in 2021 and 2024.

In terms of magnitude, Appendix Table A1 reports a standard deviation of 20.324 percentage points in the Muslim population share. Combining this with the 2019 estimate implies that a one-standard-deviation increase in Muslim share is associated with an increase of about $0.338 \times 20.324 \approx 6.9$ percentage points in TMC vote share. Relative to the mean TMC vote share of 43.975 percent, this corresponds to roughly 16 percent of the mean, indicating a substantively large association.

The BJP exhibits the mirror-image pattern (Panel C): its vote share becomes increasingly negatively associated with Muslim population share from 2019 onwards, and the negative gradient remains present in 2021 and 2024. The Left's vote share is positively associated with Muslim share in the later elections as well (Panel B), although the magnitudes are smaller than for the TMC. Overall, Table 1 suggests that religious composition becomes a much stronger predictor of party vote shares in the later period, and that the pattern persists through the 2024 parliamentary election.

5.2.2 Change in vote share as an outcome

The election-year regressions indicate that religious composition is not strongly related to vote shares through 2016 but becomes strongly predictive thereafter. To examine whether the Muslim share is also associated with parties' growth or decline over time, we estimate equation (1) using changes in party vote shares across elections (Table 2). For the TMC (Panel A), Muslim share is positively associated with vote-share gains over the longer horizon and, in particular, over the post-2016 period; in contrast, the association over 2011–2016 is smaller and not statistically significant. For the BJP (Panel C), the Muslim share is negatively associated with vote-share changes over the same horizons, again with little relationship in the earlier period. The Left's change regressions are not precisely estimated over these horizons (Panel B). Taken together, Table 2 reinforces the timing highlighted in Table 1: the strong associations emerge in the later period and remain visible when comparing 2016 to 2024.

5.2.3 Winning probability as an outcome

Finally, we examine whether the vote-share patterns translate into constituency victories. Table 3 shows that from 2019 onwards, the Muslim population share is positively associated with the

probability of a TMC win and negatively associated with the probability of a BJP win. The effects are statistically significant in 2019, 2021, and 2024, and mirror the vote-share results. For example, in 2019, a one-percentage-point increase in Muslim population share is associated with roughly a 1.3 percentage-point increase in the probability of a TMC victory and a similar reduction in the probability of a BJP victory. These results indicate that the association between religious composition and party support is electorally consequential, affecting not only vote shares but also the likelihood of winning seats.

Taken together, Tables 1–3 indicate a clear break in timing: in 2011–2016, religious composition is not a strong predictor of electoral outcomes for the major parties, whereas from 2019 onwards Muslim population share is strongly associated with higher TMC vote share and winning probability, and with lower BJP vote share and winning probability. Importantly, these patterns persist through the 2024 parliamentary election, suggesting that religion remains a central organising dimension of electoral competition in West Bengal in the later period.⁷

5.3 Election Outcomes: Determinants Beyond Religion

The baseline results show that constituencies with higher Muslim population shares are increasingly aligned with the TMC in the post-2016 period. However, many constituencies in West Bengal have relatively low Muslim shares, so Muslim consolidation alone cannot explain the TMC’s continued ability to win enough seats to govern. Hence, we examine how the TMC manages to win elections in constituencies where the Muslim population share is below its median value (i.e., 20.60). This motivates a second question: within predominantly Hindu constituencies, which Hindu sub-groups continue to support the TMC, and under what conditions does this support persist alongside low Muslim presence? We define Hindu sub-groups along three dimensions: economic (proxied by the share of main versus marginal agricultural labour), caste (proxied by the share of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes), and education (proxied by the literacy rate).

A natural place to start is the economic structure. Prior work documents that occupational patterns and religious composition can be correlated in India, with Muslims relatively more concentrated in non-farm and self-employment and less represented among agricultural labour (Shariff, 1995), though these relationships can be state-specific (Lanjouw and Shariff, 2004). West Bengal has a large agricultural workforce and a substantial share of marginal agricultural labourers (Bardhan et al., 2014; Kennedy and King, 2014). Prior evidence suggests that, in West Bengal, Muslims are relatively less likely than Hindus to be engaged in agriculture and more likely to be in non-farm work and self-employment (Mainuddin, 2011; Biswas, 2015). We therefore examine whether variation in agricultural labour – particularly marginal

⁷ We also check robustness of our estimates to outliers. A small number of constituencies have very high Muslim population shares. To ensure that the results are not driven by these right-tail observations, we right-winsorise the Muslim share at the 95th percentile (69.8819%). Appendix Table A3 lists the affected constituencies. The magnitude and statistical significance of the main estimates remain qualitatively unchanged.

agricultural labour (defined as less than 180 days of work per year) – helps explain where the TMC continues to perform well even in constituencies with relatively low Muslim shares.

We first document the relevant spatial and bivariate patterns. Appendix Figure A3 presents LOWESS relationships between constituency religious composition and the share of marginal agricultural labourers, indicating that marginal agricultural labourers are disproportionately concentrated in Hindu-dominated constituencies. Appendix Figure A5 shows that the geographic concentration of marginal agricultural labourers differs sharply from that of the Muslim population, reinforcing that constituencies with high marginal agricultural labour are typically not those with high Muslim shares.

To study whether this economic structure systematically moderates party performance, we extend the baseline framework by including the shares of marginal and main agricultural labourers and their interactions⁸ with the Muslim population share, controlling for the constituency's urban population share along with the standard set of covariates and district fixed effects. The full interaction regression estimates underlying these marginal effects are reported in Appendix Table A4. We summarize the results by graphically plotting the average marginal effects. Figure 4 plots how the marginal effects of main and marginal agricultural labourers on TMC vote share vary across the Muslim-share distribution. Figure 5 provides the corresponding patterns for BJP vote share. We focus on the marginal effects of these interaction terms in constituencies with low Muslim population shares (i.e., below the median).

The interaction patterns indicate a clear within-Hindu divide in the later period. In constituencies with relatively low Muslim shares, the BJP's gains are stronger where the share of main agricultural labourers is higher, whereas the TMC performs relatively better where the share of marginal agricultural labourers is higher. Since marginal agricultural labourers are typically more economically vulnerable than main agricultural workers, this pattern suggests that economic vulnerability may moderate the consolidation of Hindu votes behind the BJP.

These results are consistent with an economic mechanism underlying the within-Hindu divide. In constituencies with low Muslim population shares, the TMC performs relatively better where the share of marginal agricultural labourers is higher, suggesting that economically vulnerable Hindu voters may be less responsive to religious polarisation and more responsive to redistributive politics. In West Bengal, the TMC has relied heavily on welfare provision and targeted transfers, and poorer households – including marginal agricultural workers – may disproportionately benefit from such policies, sustaining support for the incumbent even in predominantly Hindu constituencies. At the same time, we treat this mechanism as a hypothesis rather than a definitive explanation: our constituency-level data do not allow us to observe individual voting behaviour, programme receipt, or the precise channels through which policy

⁸ We also include two additional interaction terms: (i) the interaction between constituency-level SC/ST population shares and Muslim population share, and (ii) the interaction between the constituency-level literate population share and Muslim population share.

affects electoral preferences. Establishing this mechanism directly would require micro-level data beyond the scope of this paper.

In a similar attempt to the above, in Appendices A6 and A7, we plot the average marginal effects of the SC/ST population share and the literate population share, respectively, across the distribution of Muslim population share at the assembly-constituency (AC) level. Focusing on the low end of the Muslim-share distribution (i.e., predominantly Hindu constituencies), the marginal-effects plots show no clear evidence that either caste composition or literacy systematically identifies a Hindu sub-group that consistently sustains the TMC's incumbency (Figure A6 for the TMC; Figure A7 for the BJP).

6 Conclusion

The political realignment in West Bengal after 2016 coincides with a marked increase in the salience of religious composition in shaping electoral outcomes. Using constituency-level data across six elections, this paper documents that the Muslim population share becomes a strong and consistent predictor of party vote shares and winning probabilities from 2019 onwards. Constituencies with higher Muslim shares exhibit systematically higher TMC vote shares and lower BJP vote shares, and these associations persist through the 2024 parliamentary election. The magnitude of these effects is economically meaningful and translates into differences in electoral victory, not merely vote-share margins.

At the same time, religious consolidation alone does not explain the TMC's ability to win across a heterogeneous electoral landscape. In constituencies with relatively low Muslim population shares, variation in economic structure – proxied by marginal versus main agricultural labour – helps explain differential party performance. The evidence is consistent with a within-Hindu divide, where economically vulnerable constituencies remain more aligned with the TMC in the later period, while relatively better-off constituencies exhibit stronger BJP consolidation. Together, these findings suggest that religion and economic vulnerability interact in shaping contemporary electoral coalitions.

The paper does not observe individual voting behaviour and therefore cannot directly identify the micro-level mechanisms driving these patterns. In particular, whether economically vulnerable voters prioritise class-based redistribution over religious identity, or whether welfare targeting reinforces incumbent support, remains an open empirical question. Future work combining constituency-level electoral returns with individual-level survey or administrative data could more directly test these channels.

While this analysis focuses on West Bengal, it highlights how shifts in identity salience can reorganise party competition in settings where religious minorities are geographically concentrated yet electorally pivotal. Understanding how identity and economic structure jointly shape electoral outcomes remains an important area for further research.

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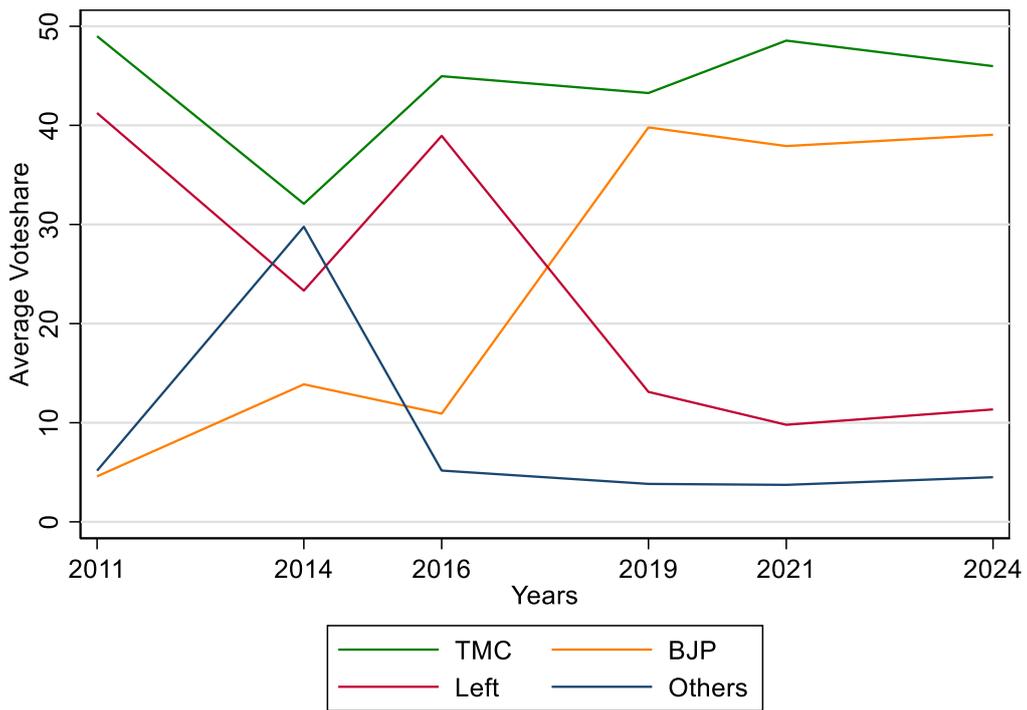
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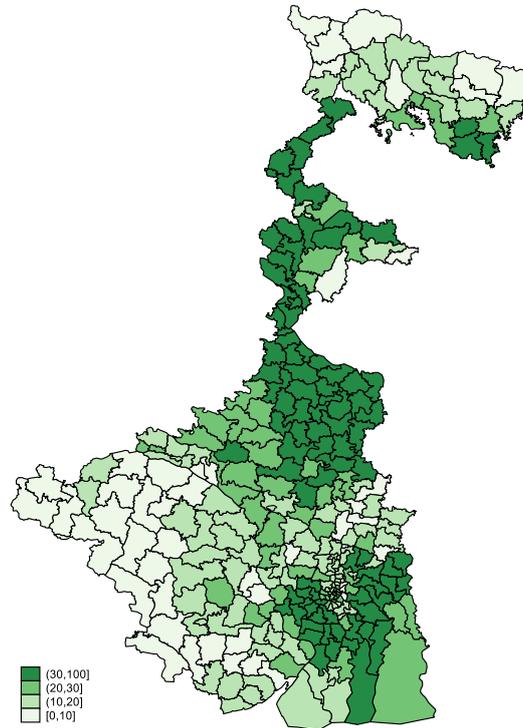
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Figure 1: Average Vote-Shares of Parties Over Time



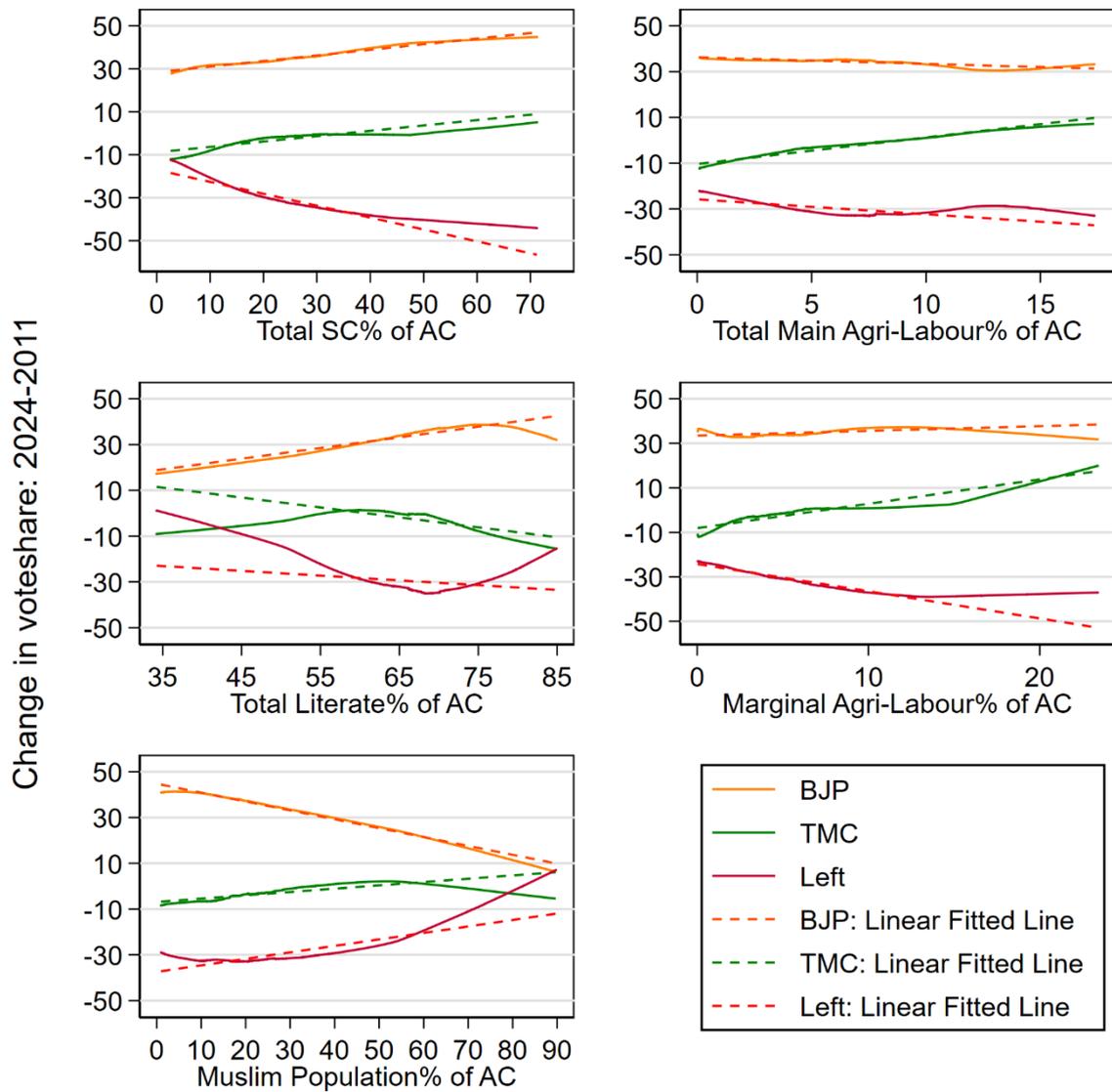
Note: This figure shows the average vote share of the major political parties in West Bengal across elections. The values are expressed as percentages of total votes cast.

Figure 2: Distribution of Muslim Population Percentage at the AC level
Constituency-Wise Muslim Population
Census 2011



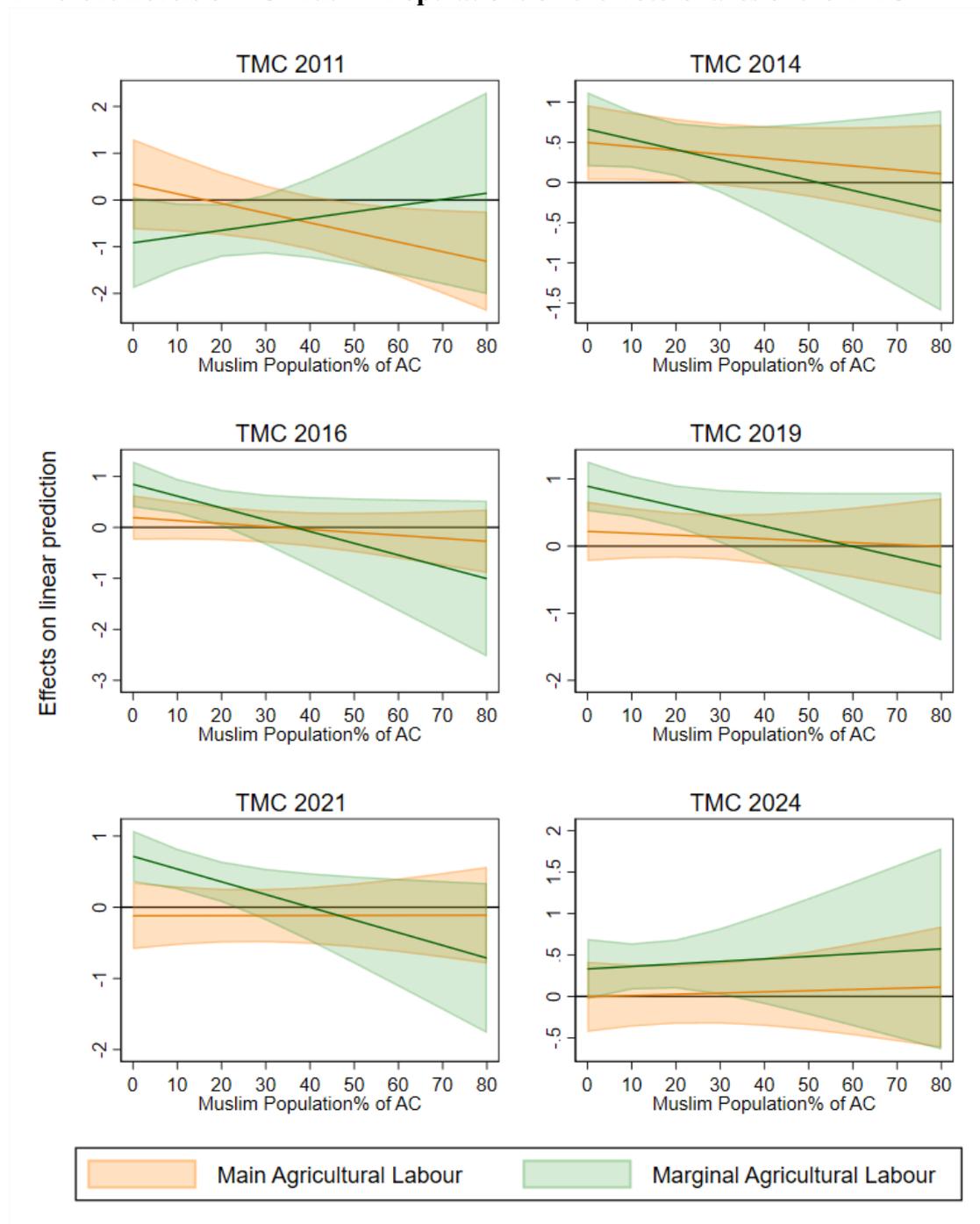
Note: This figure shows the distribution of the Muslim population across assembly constituencies in West Bengal. Population figures are obtained from the 2011 Census. Because religion is reported at the block level in the Census, block-level information is spatially aggregated to the assembly constituency level using population weights based on village-level spatial overlaps between blocks and constituencies. Darker shades represent higher concentrations.

Figure 3: LOWESS of Changes in Party Vote-Share Against Various Identity Markers



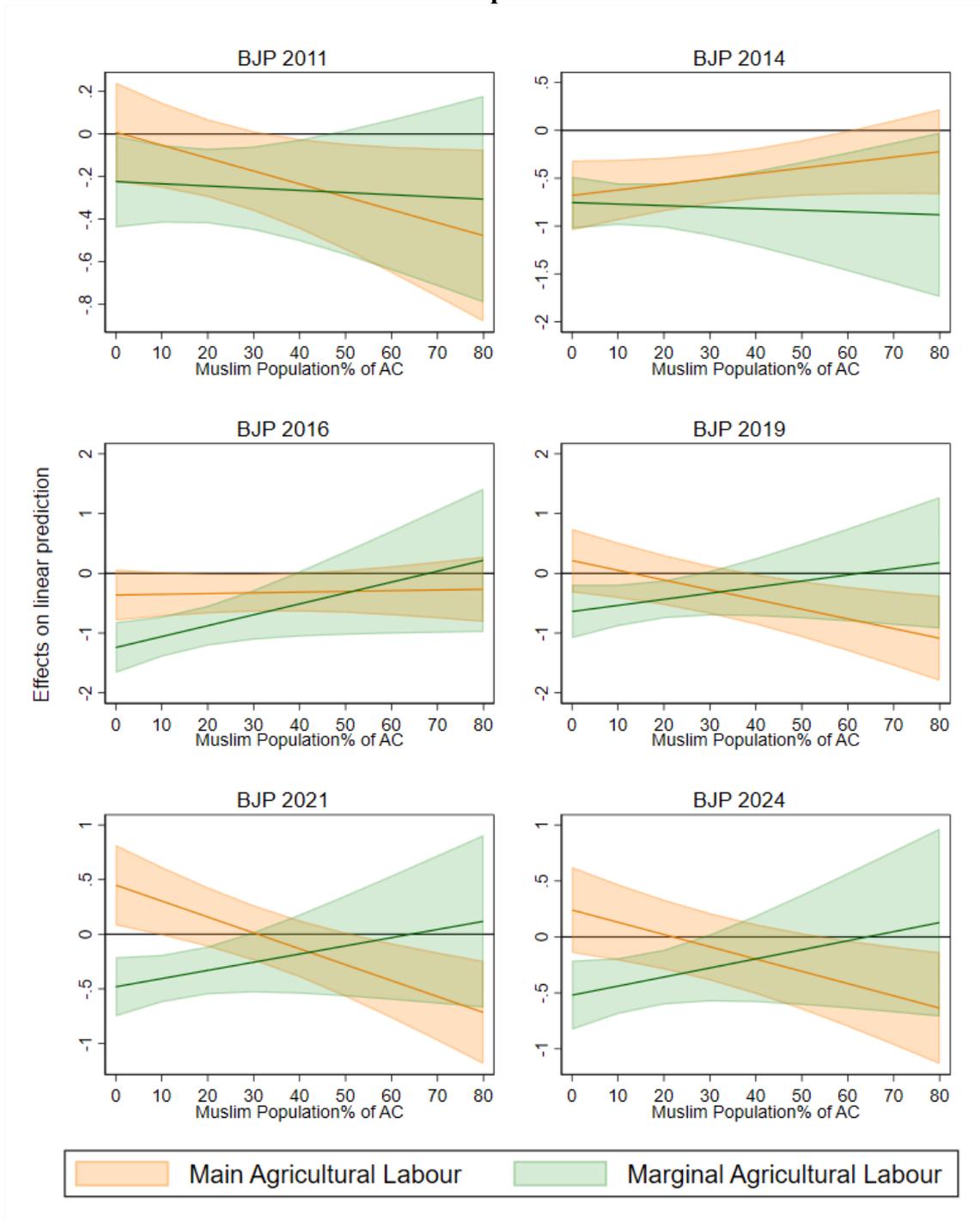
Note: This figure plots locally weighted (LOWESS) regressions of the change in party vote share between 2011 and 2024 against constituency-level characteristics: Scheduled Caste share, literacy rate, shares of main and marginal agricultural labourers, and Muslim population share.

Figure 4: Average Marginal Effects of Main and Marginal Agricultural Workers at Different Levels of AC Muslim Populations on the Vote-Shares of the TMC



Note: The graphs plot the marginal effects of the shares of main and marginal agricultural labourers on TMC vote share at different levels of Muslim population share. All regressions control for the share of the urban population in the constituency.

Figure 5: Average Marginal Effects of Main and Marginal Agricultural Workers at Different Levels of AC Muslim Populations on the Vote-Shares of the BJP



Note: The graphs plot the marginal effects of the shares of main and marginal agricultural labourers on BJP vote share at different levels of Muslim population share. All regressions control for the share of the urban population in the constituency.

Table 1: Effect of Muslim Population% of an AC on the Year-wise Vote-Shares

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>PANEL A: TMC</i>	2011	2014	2016	2019	2021	2024
Muslim Population % of AC	-0.0809 (0.0759)	0.0313 (0.0573)	0.00924 (0.0631)	0.338*** (0.0491)	0.221*** (0.0662)	0.248*** (0.0561)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.469	0.722	0.480	0.644	0.500	0.590
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL B: LEFT</i>	(1) 2011	(2) 2014	(3) 2016	(4) 2019	(5) 2021	(6) 2024
Muslim Population % of AC	-0.0101 (0.0470)	0.00315 (0.0417)	0.0689 (0.0755)	0.153*** (0.0554)	0.218*** (0.0685)	0.122** (0.0610)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.495	0.429	0.431	0.791	0.459	0.793
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL C: BJP</i>	(1) 2011	(2) 2014	(3) 2016	(4) 2019	(5) 2021	(6) 2024
Muslim Population % of AC	-0.00810 (0.0254)	-0.0885** (0.0404)	-0.0581 (0.0435)	-0.554*** (0.0602)	-0.428*** (0.0457)	-0.486*** (0.0473)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.464	0.701	0.530	0.753	0.781	0.790
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL D: OTHERS</i>	(1) 2011	(2) 2014	(3) 2016	(4) 2019	(5) 2021	(6) 2024
Muslim Population % of AC	0.0991 (0.0742)	0.0488 (0.0551)	-0.0200 (0.0405)	0.0629 (0.0481)	-0.0107 (0.0309)	0.112*** (0.0386)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.237	0.808	0.136	0.353	0.300	0.476
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: This table reports regressions of party vote share on the Muslim population share of the assembly constituency. Each coefficient represents the effect of a one percentage-point increase in the Muslim population share on party vote share in the corresponding election year. Robust standard errors clustered at the AC level are reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 2: Effect of Muslim Population % of an AC on Changes in Party Vote Share

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>PANEL A: TMC</i>			
	2024-2011	2024-2016	2016-2011
Muslim Population % of AC	0.342*** (0.0945)	0.243*** (0.0647)	0.0994 (0.0930)
Observations	294	294	294
R-squared	0.522	0.361	0.418
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL B: LEFT</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	2024-2011	2024-2016	2016-2011
Muslim Population % of AC	0.0894 (0.0733)	0.0279 (0.0750)	0.0615 (0.0741)
Observations	294	294	294
R-squared	0.686	0.436	0.347
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL C: BJP</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	2024-2011	2024-2016	2016-2011
Muslim Population % of AC	-0.463*** (0.0456)	-0.413*** (0.0496)	-0.0496 (0.0391)
Observations	294	294	294
R-squared	0.759	0.696	0.442
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL D: OTHERS</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	2024-2011	2024-2016	2016-2011
Muslim Population % of AC	0.0278 (0.0776)	0.139** (0.0582)	-0.111 (0.0854)
Observations	294	294	294
R-squared	0.205	0.184	0.133
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: This table reports regressions of changes in party vote share on the Muslim population share of the assembly constituency. Column (1) reports the change between 2011 and 2024, column (2) between 2016 and 2024, and column (3) between 2011 and 2016. Robust standard errors clustered at the AC level are reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

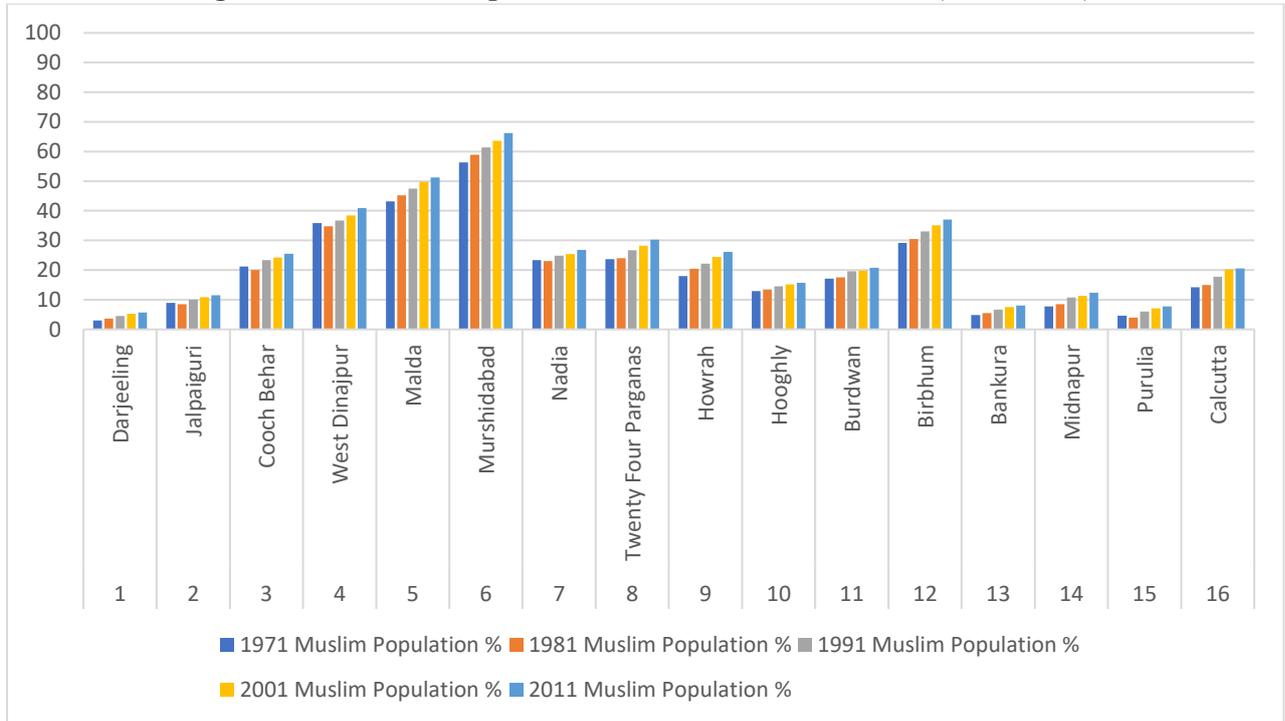
Table 3: Effect of Muslim Population% of an AC on The Winning Probability

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>PANEL A: TMC</i>	2011	2014	2016	2019	2021	2024
Muslim Population % of AC	-0.00275 (0.00336)	0.00237 (0.00290)	0.00447 (0.00327)	0.0127*** (0.00292)	0.00524* (0.00277)	0.00786*** (0.00278)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.448	0.535	0.370	0.510	0.535	0.520
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL B: LEFT</i>	(1) 2011	(2) 2014	(3) 2016	(4) 2019	(5) 2021	(6) 2024
Muslim Population % of AC	0.00284 (0.00340)	0.000510 (0.00242)	-0.00295 (0.00270)	- -	- -	0.00266* (0.00158)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.285	0.154	0.127	-	-	0.410
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>PANEL C: BJP</i>	(1) 2011	(2) 2014	(3) 2016	(4) 2019	(5) 2021	(6) 2024
Muslim Population % of AC	- -	-0.00101 (0.00170)	-0.000331 (0.000797)	-0.0133*** (0.00238)	-0.00614** (0.00242)	-0.0105*** (0.00247)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	-	0.462	0.125	0.567	0.543	0.552
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: This table reports regressions of party winning probability on the Muslim population share of the assembly constituency. The coefficients represent the effect of a one percentage-point increase in Muslim population share on the probability that a party wins the constituency. “-” indicates that the regression could not be estimated because the party had no seat wins in that election year, resulting in no variation in the dependent variable. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

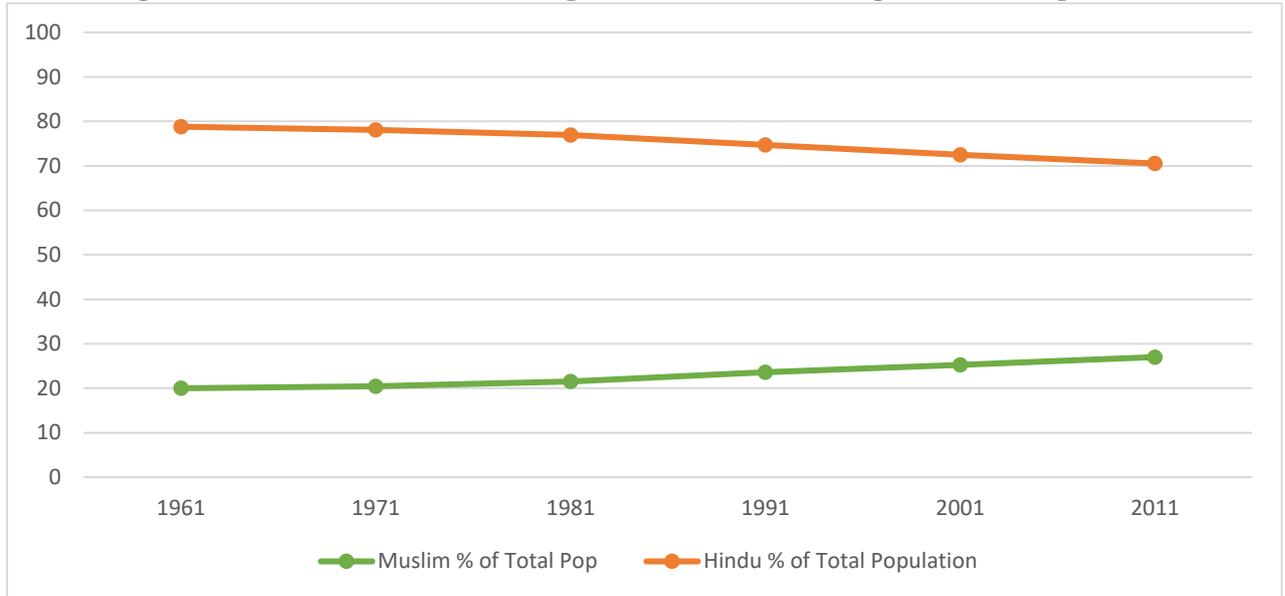
Appendix

Figure A1: Muslim Population% at The District Level (1971-1981)



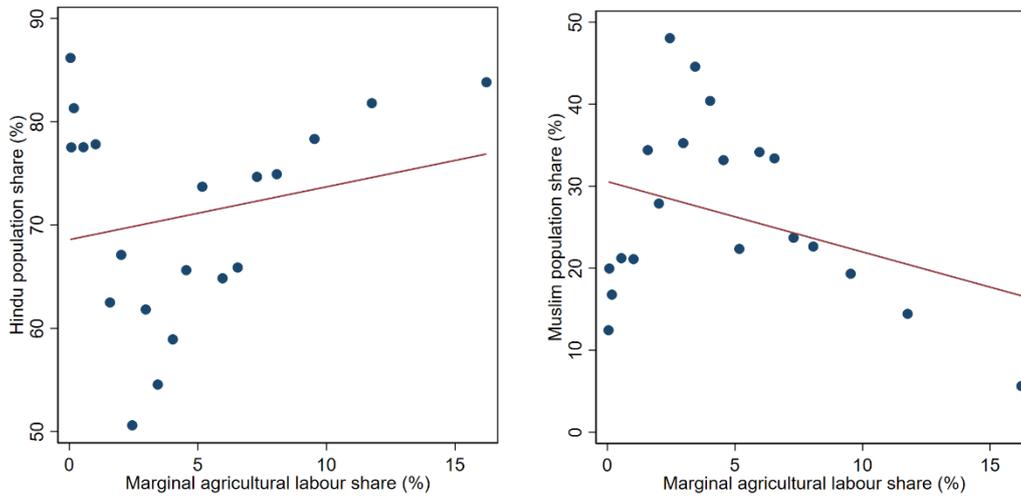
Note: Each histogram shows the distribution of Muslim population shares across districts in the Census years 1971–1981. Assembly constituencies are contained within districts.

Figure A2: Hindu and Muslim Population as a Percentage of State Population



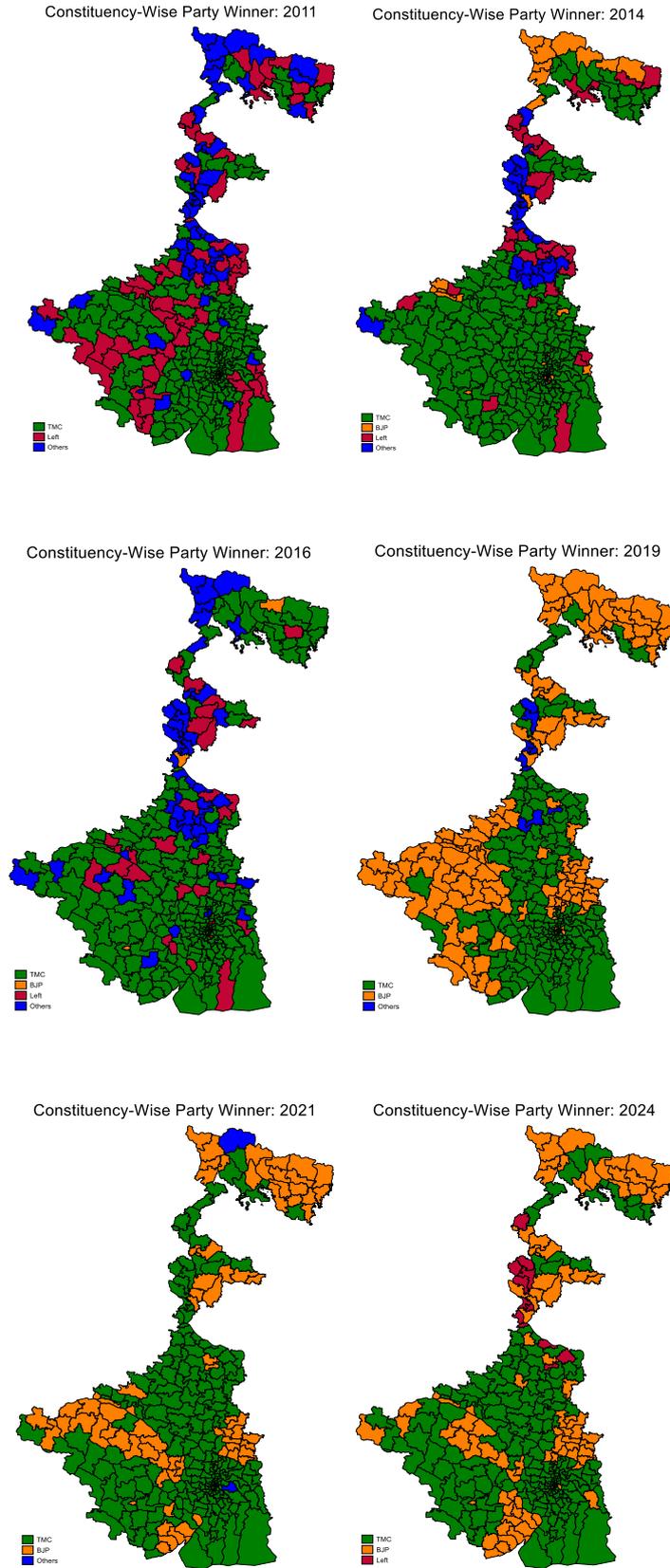
Note: Each line shows the share of Hindus and Muslims in the total population of West Bengal over time.

Figure A3: Relation Between Religious Composition and Marginal Agricultural Labourer Population Share



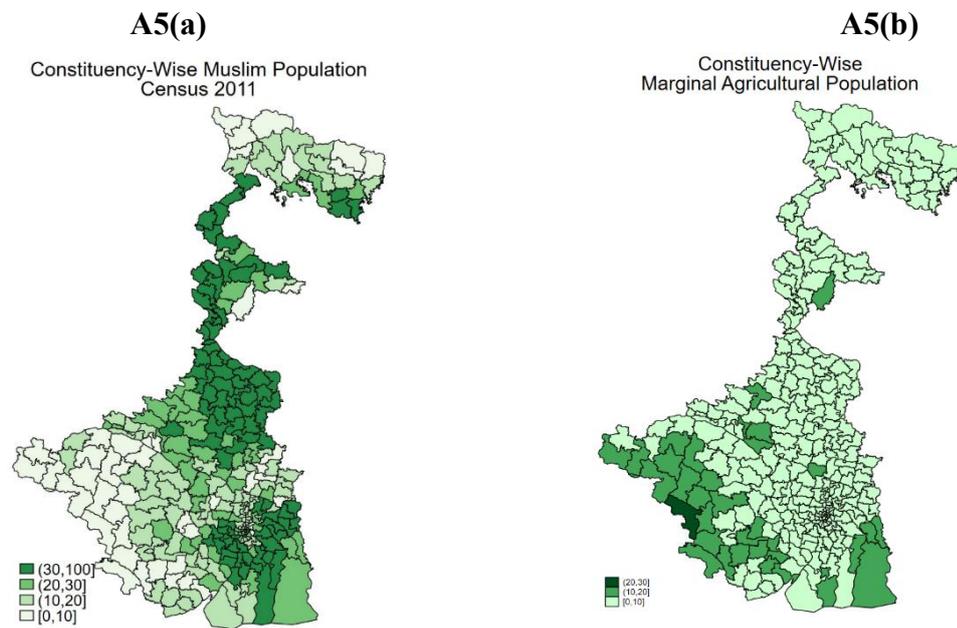
Note: This figure presents binned scatter plots and linear fits showing the relationship between Hindu population share (left panel) and Muslim population share (right panel) and the share of marginal agricultural labourers at the constituency level.

Figure A4: Election Winners at The AC Level Over the Years



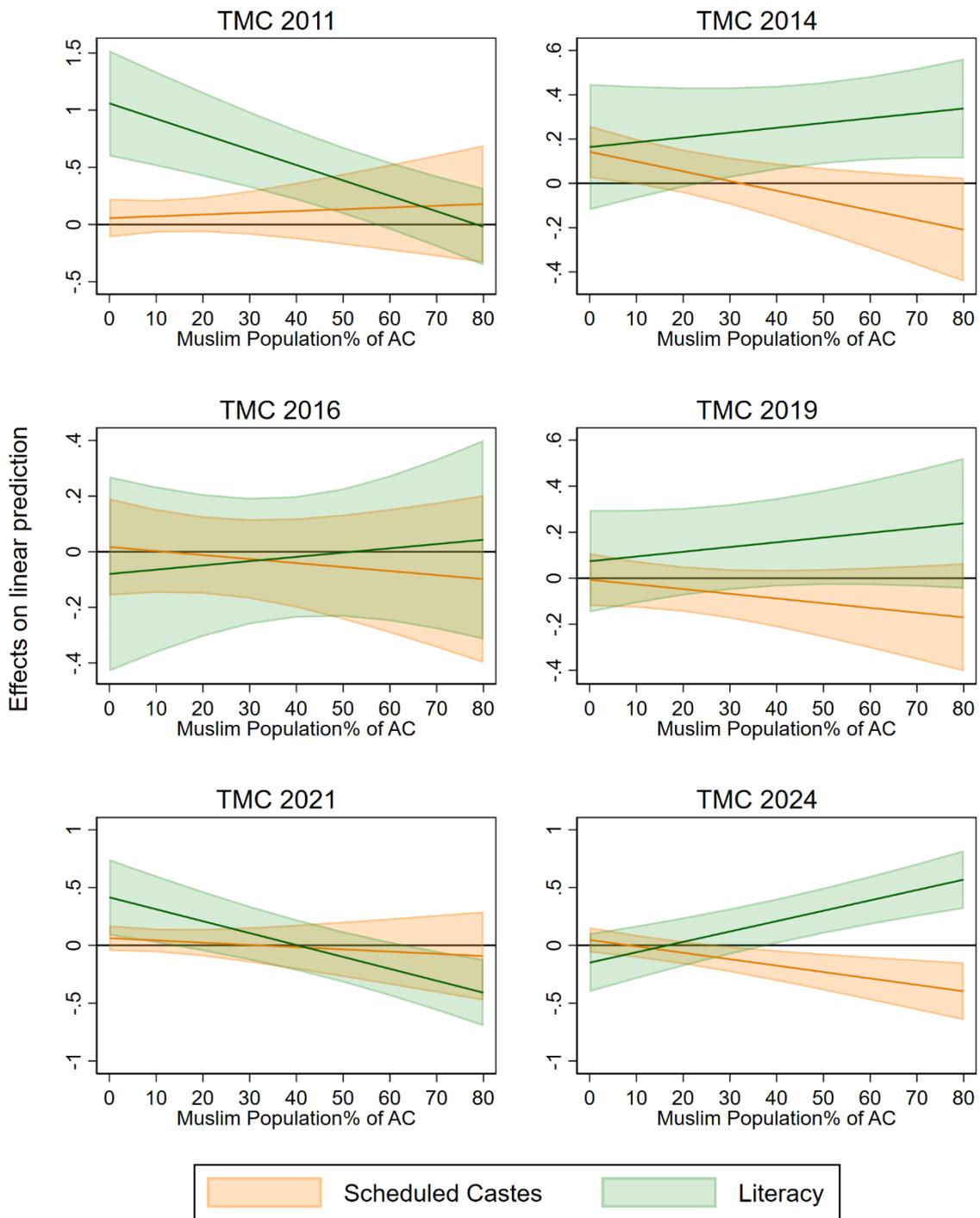
Note: These heatmaps provide information on the constituency-wise election winners in all six years.

Figure A5: Heatmaps Showing Muslim Population and Marginal Agricultural Labourer Population%



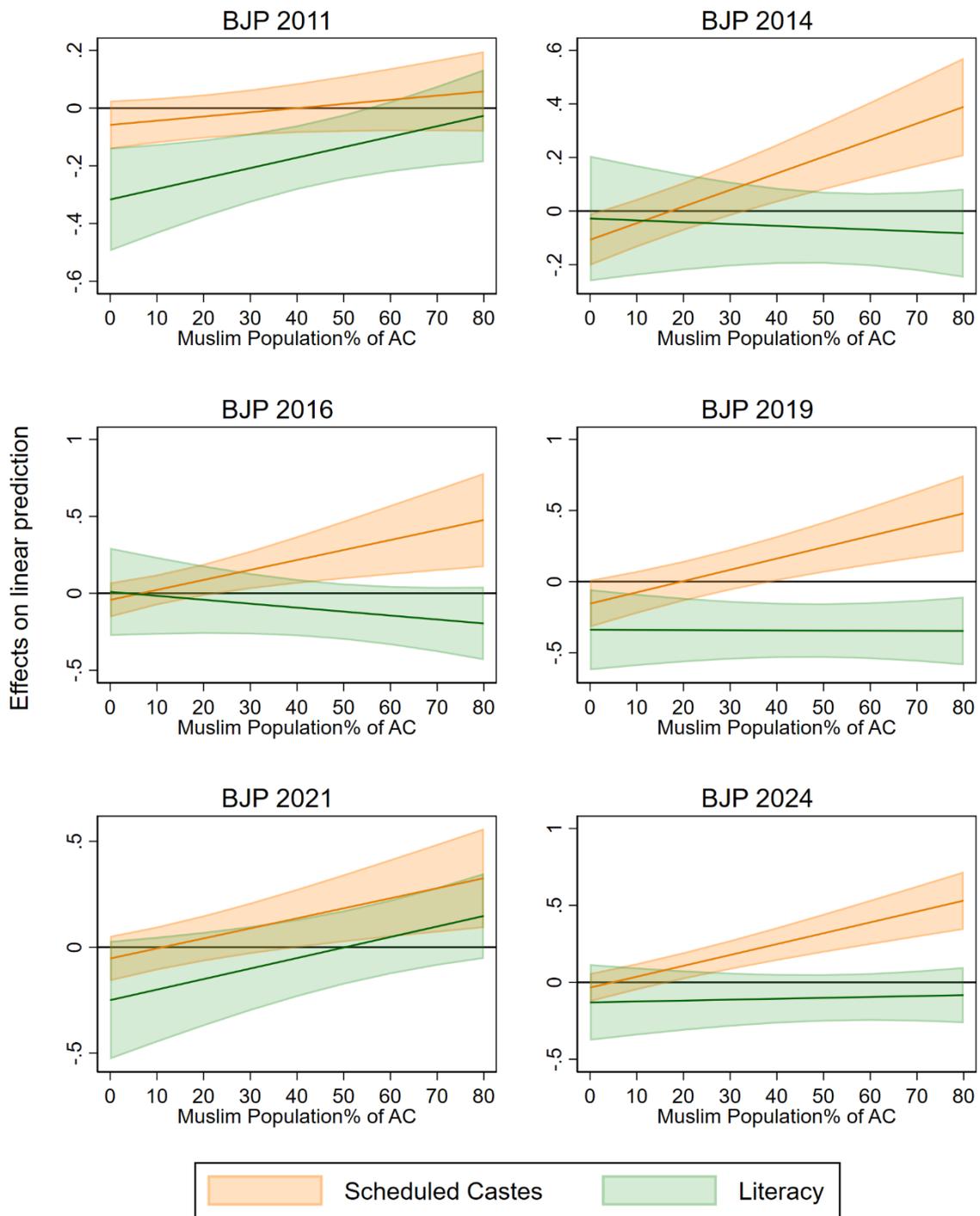
Note: The map A5(a) provides the constituency-wise Muslim population and A5(b) provides constituency-wise share of marginal agricultural labourers, to show the correlation between the two based on population distribution.

Figure A6: Average Marginal Effects of SC Population and Literacy at Different Levels of AC Muslim Populations on the Vote-Shares of the TMC



Note: The graphs in this figure represent the marginal effect of SC population share and share of literate population in the constituency on TMC vote share, at different levels of Muslim population (controlling for the share of urban population in the constituency in the main regression).

Figure A7: Average Marginal Effects of SC Population and Literacy at Different Levels of AC Muslim Populations on the Vote-Shares of the BJP



Note: The graphs in this figure represent the marginal effect of SC population share and share of literate population in the constituency on BJP votes here, at different levels of Muslim population (controlling for the share of urban population in the constituency in the main regression).

Table A1: Summary Statistics

Variable	N=n*t	Mean	SD	Min	p25	Median	p75	Max
<i>Panel A: Demographic Variables</i>								
Muslim Population %	1764	26.573	20.324	.975	11.633	20.602	35.727	89.692
Hindu Population %	1764	70.955	19.205	10.158	63.009	76.507	85.27	95.13
Scheduled Caste Population %	1764	23.222	12.800	2.614	13.113	21.897	31.962	71.205
Scheduled Tribe Population %	1764	5.745	8.281	.036	.432	2.059	6.894	39.65
Literate Population %	1764	67.781	9.437	34.24	61.385	68.511	75.573	84.94
Agricultural Labourer Population %	1764	6.311	4.175	.094	2.775	6.54	9.481	17.351
Marginal Agricultural Labourer Population %	1764	4.645	4.212	.029	1.307	3.751	6.973	23.381
Hindi Speaking Population %	1764	4.532	8.135	0	.331	1.25	4.239	54.37
Male Population %	1764	51.288	0.489	49.93	50.992	51.234	51.514	52.63
Female Population %	1764	48.712	0.489	47.37	48.486	48.766	49.008	50.07
<i>Panel B: Political Variables</i>								
Win Margin	1764	12.386	10.688	0	4.68	10.055	17.04	81.92
TMC vote-share	1764	43.975	10.832	0	38.93	45.448	50.354	96.031
Left vote-share	1764	22.964	15.637	0	8.27	20.717	37.721	94.331
BJP vote-share	1764	24.357	17.371	0	7.718	20.986	40.578	73.417
Others vote-share	1764	8.696	11.628	0	2.751	3.748	6.715	70.738

Note: This table reports summary statistics for the main variables used in the analysis. N is the total observations = n(294 constituencies) * t(6 years). The table also shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum, 25th percentile, median, 75th percentile and maximum value a variable takes.

Table A2: Effect of Muslim Population % on the State Winning Margin

VARIABLES	(1) 2011	(2) 2014	(3) 2016	(4) 2019	(5) 2021	(6) 2024
Muslim Population % of AC	-0.0694 (0.0652)	0.0265 (0.0902)	0.0724 (0.0711)	0.174* (0.0954)	0.342*** (0.0799)	0.233** (0.0963)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.496	0.259	0.252	0.330	0.573	0.336
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: This table shows the effect of an increase in Muslim population on the state's winning margin for every year to signify competitiveness. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A3: List of ACs with a Muslim Population Above the 95th Percentile

AC Number	AC Name	District	Muslim Population %
30	Goalpokhar	Uttar Dinajpur	77.261
46	Harischandrapur	Malda	69.922
47	Malatipur	Malda	73.751
52	Mothabari	Malda	70.912
53	Sujapur	Malda	89.289
56	Samsorganj	Murshidabad	82.608
59	Raghunathganj	Murshidabad	78.390
61	Lalgola	Murshidabad	78.198
62	Bhagawangola	Murshidabad	81.932
63	Raninagar	Murshidabad	82.278
73	Hariharpara	Murshidabad	76.234
74	Naoda	Murshidabad	73.083
75	Domkal	Murshidabad	89.692
76	Jalangi	Murshidabad	75.322

Note: This table lists the assembly constituencies with Muslim population shares above the 95th percentile. In the winsorised specification, Muslim population share in these constituencies is capped at the 95th percentile value (69.88%).

Table A4: Interaction of Religion and Other Characteristics on Vote Share at AC level

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PANEL A: TMC	2011	2014	2016	2019	2021	2024
Muslim Population% of AC	0.928*** (0.295)	-0.029 (0.179)	0.005 (0.300)	0.254 (0.183)	0.990*** (0.245)	-0.307 (0.195)
Total SC% of AC	0.056 (0.102)	0.142** (0.071)	0.017 (0.106)	-0.006 (0.070)	0.062 (0.067)	0.048 (0.066)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total SC% of AC	0.002 (0.004)	-0.004** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.006*** (0.002)
Total Literate% of AC	1.059*** (0.281)	0.164 (0.173)	-0.080 (0.213)	0.074 (0.135)	0.416** (0.200)	-0.149 (0.154)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total Literate% of AC	-0.013*** (0.004)	0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)	0.002 (0.003)	-0.010*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.002)
Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	0.338 (0.587)	0.498* (0.284)	0.193 (0.266)	0.220 (0.270)	-0.119 (0.285)	-0.005 (0.257)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.021 (0.013)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.006)	-0.003 (0.007)	0.000 (0.006)	0.001 (0.007)
Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.915 (0.593)	0.665** (0.281)	0.845*** (0.275)	0.891*** (0.226)	0.716*** (0.220)	0.331 (0.221)
Muslim Population% of AC x Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	0.013 (0.022)	-0.013 (0.012)	-0.023* (0.014)	-0.015 (0.010)	-0.018* (0.010)	0.003 (0.011)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.504	0.742	0.502	0.661	0.549	0.611
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PANEL B: BJP	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Muslim Population% of AC	-0.237* (0.142)	-0.147 (0.152)	0.005 (0.171)	-0.570*** (0.203)	-0.779*** (0.179)	-0.589*** (0.165)
Total SC% of AC	-0.058 (0.051)	-0.107* (0.059)	-0.043 (0.069)	-0.155 (0.101)	-0.053 (0.065)	-0.034 (0.057)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total SC% of AC	0.001 (0.001)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.006** (0.003)	0.008*** (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)
Total Literate% of AC	-0.317*** (0.109)	-0.028 (0.142)	0.009 (0.174)	-0.338* (0.173)	-0.250 (0.170)	-0.130 (0.151)

Muslim Population% of AC x Total Literate% of AC	0.004*	-0.001	-0.003	-0.000	0.005**	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	0.008	-0.680***	-0.362	0.213	0.450**	0.241
	(0.142)	(0.222)	(0.259)	(0.323)	(0.224)	(0.233)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.006	0.006	0.001	-0.016**	-0.015***	-0.011**
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.224*	-0.754***	-1.241***	-0.639**	-0.481***	-0.521***
	(0.131)	(0.165)	(0.258)	(0.272)	(0.165)	(0.188)
Muslim Population% of AC x Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.001	-0.002	0.018*	0.010	0.007	0.008
	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.498	0.722	0.577	0.767	0.806	0.804
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

PANEL C: LEFT	2011	2014	2016	2019	2021	2024
Muslim Population% of AC	-0.159	-0.247	-0.194	0.170	-0.472*	1.062***
	(0.165)	(0.156)	(0.349)	(0.228)	(0.242)	(0.209)
Total SC% of AC	-0.015	0.115**	0.005	-0.002	0.012	0.009
	(0.075)	(0.057)	(0.143)	(0.075)	(0.070)	(0.065)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total SC% of AC	-0.002	-0.004*	-0.007**	-0.005*	-0.004	-0.002
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Total Literate% of AC	-0.351**	-0.266*	0.125	0.226	-0.159	0.469***
	(0.161)	(0.139)	(0.269)	(0.184)	(0.204)	(0.167)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total Literate% of AC	0.002	0.003	0.005	-0.000	0.010***	-0.014***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	0.465*	-0.287	0.787	0.054	-0.051	-0.196
	(0.258)	(0.285)	(0.547)	(0.242)	(0.279)	(0.233)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.002	0.013**	-0.001	0.014*	0.016**	0.012*
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	0.828***	0.615***	0.368	0.002	-0.073	0.085
	(0.225)	(0.217)	(0.383)	(0.170)	(0.200)	(0.135)
Muslim Population% of AC x Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.001	-0.004	0.013	0.002	0.008	-0.011
	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.008)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294

R-squared	0.515	0.445	0.446	0.805	0.507	0.839
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
PANEL D: OTHERS	2011	2014	2016	2019	2021	2024
Muslim Population% of AC	-0.532* (0.299)	0.165 (0.225)	0.184 (0.211)	0.146 (0.171)	0.261 (0.253)	-0.189* (0.102)
Total SC% of AC	0.017 (0.093)	-0.100 (0.079)	0.021 (0.074)	0.163* (0.086)	-0.021 (0.039)	-0.025 (0.025)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total SC% of AC	-0.001 (0.004)	0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)
Total Literate% of AC	-0.392 (0.282)	-0.131 (0.175)	-0.054 (0.113)	0.038 (0.159)	-0.007 (0.135)	-0.205** (0.079)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total Literate% of AC	0.008* (0.004)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.003)	0.005*** (0.001)
Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.811 (0.607)	-0.464* (0.271)	-0.618* (0.352)	-0.487** (0.229)	-0.280 (0.206)	-0.092 (0.170)
Muslim Population% of AC x Total Main Agri-Labour% of AC	0.029** (0.013)	-0.003 (0.008)	0.005 (0.009)	0.005* (0.003)	-0.001 (0.008)	-0.002 (0.002)
Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	0.311 (0.629)	-0.404 (0.294)	0.028 (0.210)	-0.255 (0.257)	-0.162 (0.152)	0.088 (0.094)
Muslim Population% of AC x Marginal Agri-Labour% of AC	-0.011 (0.020)	0.016 (0.011)	-0.008 (0.012)	0.003 (0.008)	0.002 (0.006)	0.001 (0.005)
Observations	294	294	294	294	294	294
R-squared	0.296	0.816	0.150	0.367	0.326	0.522
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: This table reports AC-level regressions of party vote share on Muslim population share, shares of main and marginal agricultural labourers, Scheduled Caste share, literacy rate, and their interactions with Muslim population share. All specifications include the full set of controls and district fixed effects as in the baseline regressions. Robust standard errors clustered at the AC level are reported in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.