# Non-extremist Outbidding: Muslim Leadership in Majoritarian India

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Published online: 06 Aug 2018.

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# Non-extremist Outbidding:
# Muslim Leadership in Majoritarian India

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*How do parties representing minorities survive and expand at a time of majoritarian nationalism? Influential accounts suggest that the rise of majoritarianism should give rise to corresponding extremist outbidding in minority parties. Through a detailed case study of an Indian Muslim party in an era of Hindu majoritarianism, this article elaborates a new notion of non-extremist outbidding. It argues that outbidding need not imply appeals that are extremist in the sense that they are exclusionary, or religious, or intransigent. The agency of leaders, relatively neglected, plays a key role in determining the behavior of ethnic parties.*

## INTRODUCTION

How does a minority party survive and expand in a first-past the post system, in an era of majoritarian nationalism? According to one influential explanation, in ethnically diverse societies, the rise of ethnic majoritarian parties should give rise to corresponding extremism in minority ethnic parties, in an outbidding effect.[1] However, ethnic outbidding in the sense of a shift to more extremist demands is not inevitable, scholars have noted. It

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may not occur under certain conditions, for instance, if there are several, dispersed ethnic groups[2], and if the state recognizes multiple ethnic identities[3]. Furthermore, it is possible for ethnic parties to be both moderate, in terms of seeking cross-ethnic cooperation, as well as extremist, in the sense of being strong advocates for the interests of a particular ethnic group, at the same time.[4]

Outbidding, however, need not imply extremism. An identity-based ethnic demand on behalf of a group could be integrationist, rather than separatist. Furthermore, appeals on behalf of a religious group, need not be religious *per se*, but pertain to secular claims regarding discrimination and disadvantage. Scholars have noted that ethnic parties can be "simultaneously pragmatic (regarding resources) and intransigent (regarding identity)."[5] But ethnic parties can be pragmatic with respect to *identity*, as well as resources. While scholars have not usually distinguished between outbidding in the case of ethnic parties representing majority groups and those representing minorities, minority parties are in a relatively weaker position and may benefit more from a moderate stance.[6] The agency of leaders, addressed only in passing by ethnic conflict theorists, plays a key role in determining the behavior of ethnic parties.

An assessment of the role of leadership, furthermore, requires an examination not just of electoral strategies, but also of rhetorical or discursive strategies, what Rogers Brubaker terms politicians' "quasi-performative discourse," relatively neglected by political scientists.[7] As theorists of representation have reminded us, leaders are "shape-shifters,"[8] moving between different representative roles and multiple dimensions of identities. The rhetorical and performative work that politicians do, however, is usually seen in negative and narrowly instrumentalist terms, as a means to mobilize voters in order to win elections in ways that provoke ethnic conflict. By contrast, we argue that a wider perspective is needed on the discursive and rhetorical work of representation for a reckoning of the role of leadership in relation to ethnic identities.

This article focusses on the case of the AIMIM (All India Majlis-e Ittehadul-Muslimeen - AIMIM or Majlis),[9] a small Muslim party based in Hyderabad in southern India.[10] In an era of declining Muslim representation in legislatures, and demoralization in the face of a hegemonic Hindu right party, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the AIMIM has strengthened its position in its regional base of Hyderabad and expanded its national footprint. To explicate this puzzle, we examine the electoral and discursive strategies of the AIMIM and its leader Asaduddin Owaisi, and assess whether these involve extremism, moderation, or both. Owaisi's visibility as a leading spokesperson of Indian Muslims makes this a pivotal case for evaluating the role of leadership in negotiating the multiple challenges for minority representation.

Our analysis is organized as follows. The first section elaborates the analytical framework of the study, drawing upon literature on ethnic outbidding in divided societies, the role of leadership and the work of representation. The second section identifies key features of the electoral strategy of the AIMIM as it seeks to expand nationally in an era of Hindu right dominance. It suggests that these include elements of both outbidding in relation to other claimants for Muslim votes, as well as moderation, involving building cross-ethnic (Muslim-Dalit) alliances. Focusing on discursive performance, the third section examines how Owaisi's representative claims reframe the constituency (the Muslim community), the representative (Muslim party), and the nation in multiple ways that go beyond existing models of Muslim leadership in India. It argues that outbidding in terms of strong advocacy of a minority group's interests, need not imply extremism or separatism. The concluding section summarizes findings and draws out some wider implications of the study for debates on extremist outbidding and leadership.

In terms of method, our analysis is based on qualitative research. Several in-depth interviews were conducted with Asaduddin Owaisi between 2009–2016 in Delhi and Hyderabad. In addition, we examined Owaisi's parliamentary speeches across two parliaments (15th and 16th Lok Sabha), focusing on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address and parliamentary questions, to identify key themes that recur over time. To cross-check and contextualize findings, we examined public speeches and interviewed state and local AIMIM representatives and supporters. Finally, fieldwork was undertaken in the party's Hyderabad headquarters in Dar-us-Salam during multiple visits between 2014–2016. We also attended key public meetings during election campaigns in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi. This case study forms part of a larger study based on interviews with around 70 Indian MPs conducted between 2013–16, focusing on the work of minority representation in a majoritarian polity.

## ETHNIC PARTIES, LEADERSHIP AND IDENTITY-WORK

Broadly speaking, accounts of ethnic parties suggest two types of behavior-extremism and moderation. According to one influential argument, increasing ethnic appeals by major parties should be accompanied by a similar move towards more ethnically exclusive appeals on the part of other parties, as per the logic of ethnic outbidding.[11] However, under certain circumstances, extremist outbidding may not occur. If the structure of social cleavages is dispersed, parties seeking to expand beyond their locality will shift to a more moderate position according to Donald Horowitz, as an extremist stance does not resonate elsewhere.[12] Furthermore, if the

state recognizes multiple ethnic identities, then the politicization of ethnic divisions might lead to extremist bids initially but this is likely to be followed by moderation in ethnic party behavior and the pursuit of centrist positions over time, according to Kanchan Chandra.[13] However, the centrist equilibrium indicated for Indian politics by both societal and state-centered explanations is challenged by the dominance of Hindu majoritarianism in the Indian party system.

Has the growing strength of Hindu nationalist BJP and extremist appeals for the Hindu vote been accompanied by a shift to an extremist stance from parties representing Muslims, or towards greater moderation? Existing explanations of ethnic party behavior have tended to focus on supply-side factors that are exogenous to the parties themselves, such as the nature of the electoral system, the distribution of ethnic minorities, and the nature of political rules.[14] A growing literature also examines the role of exogenous demand-side factors, such as voter attitudes and behavior.[15] While some explanations allow a greater role to political agency,[16] how leaders use their "ethnic identity in a selective and entrepreneurial manner,"[17] remains understudied. Given that ethnic identities are multi-dimensional, *which* dimensions are highlighted in party appeals and whether these involve outbidding, or moderation, or both, depends crucially on leadership.

In the scant literature on leadership, scholars have emphasized its importance especially during times of uncertainty and crisis[18], and identified a range of functions. These include diagnosing problems and formulating policy responses,[19] recruiting and representing followers through mediation with state agencies, as well as "fulfilling the psychological needs" of followers.[20] Entrepreneurship has provided a productive framework for examining the work of leadership, highlighting agency and innovation, the importance of competition, and of the material rewards of office, needed to maintain political parties in business. However, the lens of political entrepreneurship has tended to focus on the material and/or narrowly instrumental motivations in the work that leaders do.[21]

Bracketing out motivations, our article focusses on the discursive work of representation of leadership in relation to ethnic identities. Recent debates on representation in political theory have highlighted the role of the representative in the construction of the identities and interests that they are supposed to represent.[22] This opens the way for a consideration of the "identity- work" done by representatives, of negotiating between diverse and sometimes conflicting demands of different constituencies, which crucially involves rhetorical and performative elements. Particularly when the party to which the leader belongs is unable to consistently win elections (as with small minority parties in our case), "leaders have to be creative in defining what supporters understand by 'winning'" as Andrew Wyatt suggests.[23] Performative attributes become important along with a more

combative rhetorical stance in recruiting and maintaining followers. In the scholarship on ethnic identities in South Asia, however, as elsewhere, the discursive work of leadership has tended to be seen in wholly negative terms. Leaders are seen to make exclusionary appeals along religious and caste lines to mobilize voters in ways that provoke ethnic conflict.[24] While the identity-work undertaken by leaders can undoubtedly be divisive and extremist, it can also involve attempts to build cross-ethnic coalitions and moderation, even under circumstances of heightened inter-group tension.

## MINORITY ELECTORAL STRATEGIES IN A MAJORITARIAN SYSTEM

The persistent under-representation of Muslims in Indian Parliament and in most state assemblies has grown in the era of majoritarian nationalism. Currently, India's 175 million or so Muslims have only 22 representatives in the Lower House of Parliament (Lok Sabha), their lowest-ever proportion (TABLE 1).[25] The average Muslim representation in the Lok Sabha in independent India has been 6 percent, much below the community's average share in the population of 11.61 percent. In the Rajya Sabha, the average Muslim seat share is better at 11 percent since 1952[26], although it does not compensate for their under-representation in the Lok Sabha. The ruling party BJP's capacity to win elections without including Muslims in its slate, reinforces the sense of dispensability of Muslim votes and their political exclusion.[27]

**TABLE 1**  Muslim Representation in Lok Sabha 1952-2014

| Year | Total Elected Members | Muslims Elected | Percentage of Muslims in the Lok Sabha | Muslim percentage in population |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1952 | 489 | 21 | 4.30% | 9.91% |
| 1957 | 494 | 24 | 4.90% | 9.91% |
| 1962 | 520 | 23 | 4.42% | 10.69% |
| 1967 | 518 | 29 | 5.60% | 10.69% |
| 1971 | 542 | 30 | 5.53% | 11.21% |
| 1977 | 529 | 34 | 6.42% | 11.21% |
| 1980 | 542 | 49 | 9.04% | 11.21% |
| 1984 | 529 | 46 | 8.70% | 11.35% |
| 1989 | 534 | 33 | 6.20% | 11.35% |
| 1991 | 543 | 28 | 5.20% | 12.12% |
| 1996 | 543 | 28 | 5.20% | 12.12% |
| 1998 | 543 | 29 | 5.34% | 12.12% |
| 1999 | 543 | 32 | 5.90% | 12.12% |
| 2004 | 543 | 36 | 6.62% | 12.12% |
| 2009 | 543 | 30 | 5.52% | 13.40% |
| 2014 | 543 | 23 | 4.23% | 14.23% |

Source: Data updated by authors from Iqbal Ansari, *Political Representation of Muslims in India: 1952–2004* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2006)

In this adverse environment, the AIMIM has retained its stronghold of Hyderabad, and sought to expand nationally. Having supported the rule of the Nizams and fought against Hyderabad's accession to the Indian state, the Majlis found itself in disarray after military action and the subsequent linguistic division of Hyderabad. The annexation of Hyderabad was followed by retaliatory violence by state agencies against those who were perceived to be close to the Nizam and Razakars.[28] A large number of Muslims died in the ensuing violence, with the party being branded communal for having supported the Nizam's attempts to seek independence from the Indian state. Reinventing itself as the *All India* MIM under a new constitution in 1957, the party has been winning seats in municipal elections in Hyderabad since 1959 and has an impressive record of electoral success in the city.[29] In national elections, it has sent its candidate as MP from Hyderabad continuously since 1984, over 9 parliamentary elections. Regarded as a regional, even local party, under the leadership of Asaduddin Owaisi, the party has sought to expand beyond Hyderabad, contesting selected regional and local elections in areas with substantial Muslim populations.

The party's attempts at national expansion have met with limited electoral success thus far (TABLES 2 and 3). On the one hand, given the high barriers to the emergence of a new party under FPTP, the AIMIM has seen some success, notably in local and state elections in Maharashtra. The party performed well in the municipal elections in Nanded 2012, followed by the 2014 assembly elections and the 2015 municipal elections in the state. It has registered its presence in local government bodies in Uttar Pradesh. On the other hand, the AIMIM is yet to demonstrate a capacity to sustain the electoral gains it has made outside of Hyderabad. In the 2017 Maharashtra municipal elections, for instance, the party lost several seats that it had previously won in 2012. In its regional stronghold, however, the party has demonstrated a capacity to keep winning elections, consistently performing strongly in municipal elections in Hyderabad. During the BJP-Modi wave in 2014, the party retained its assembly seats, polling enough votes to gain recognition as a state party. Even as an incumbent, Owaisi has been winning his parliamentary seat with increasing margins since 2004.

**TABLE 2** AIMIM Performance in State Assembly Elections 2014–17

| Year | State | Seats Contested | Seats Won | Number of Non-Muslim Candidates |
|------|-------|-----------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| 2014 | Telengana | 20 | 7 | 6 |
| 2014 | Seemandhra | 15 | 0 | 2 |
| 2014 | Maharashtra | 24 | 2 | 4 |
| 2015 | Bihar | 6 | 0 | 1 |
| 2016 | Tamil Nadu | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 2017 | Uttar Pradesh | 38 | 0 | 2 |

Source: Election Commission of India, "Statistical Reports of the Elections to the State Assembly," http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx (accessed 28 May 2018)

**TABLE 3** States with AIMIM Representation in the Local Government Bodies in April 2018

| State | Wards |
|---|---|
| Telangana | 137 |
| Seemandhra | 5 |
| Maharashtra | 85 |
| Karnataka | 6 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 29 |

Note: This is the consolidated figure of the total AIMIM representatives in the municipal bodies across the states.

The AIMIM's electoral strategies under Owaisi are relevant for minority parties in majoritarian electoral systems more generally. First, the redrawing of institutional boundaries so that the minority population is in a majority (or in a proportion sufficient to influence electoral outcomes), can enable the election of candidates supported by minorities. A majoritarian electoral system enables the election of minority/minority supported candidates in electoral constituencies in which minorities are in a majority (as for instance with redistricting in the US). The AIMIM presented a well-researched case to the Justice Kuldip Singh Delimitation Commission regarding the placement of boundaries in Hyderabad, which was accepted and commended, according to Owaisi.[30] With the assembly segments of the Hyderabad district located in urban areas where Muslims are concentrated, the party was able to consolidate its position in the city. Another institutional change that has worked to the advantage of AIMIM has been the bifurcation of the state of Andhra Pradesh to carve out a new state. In Telengana, the AIMIM wields influence as a key ally of the ruling regional party. Whereas at the national level, the institutional context in India has been relatively stable, at the regional and local level, electoral boundaries have altered. Leaders can play an important role in pushing for institutional changes that favor small parties.

A second feature of the party strategy has been a focus on municipal and state elections. In urban local bodies polls in Telangana in 2014 for instance, the AIMIM won in over 100 wards, with leadership positions and control of several municipalities. Winning elections in turn enhances the party's reputation for "winnability," as well as its control over patronage goods. Even when the party has not done well, Owaisi defends the decision to contest local and regional elections nationally as part of a longer-term strategy for creating awareness, building an organization for the party in areas where it seeks to expand, and positioning the party as a potential ally in future contests.[31] In the case of small parties, a successful party is also one that makes itself "relevant to the process of alliance formation or altered the pattern of competition within the party system,"[32] although the AIMIM's success in this regard remains to be seen.

A third feature of the AIMIM's electoral strategy is an attempt to forge an alliance between Muslims on the one hand, and Dalit/"backward groups," on the other. The party has fielded several candidates of Dalit and lower caste background in elections at all levels – municipal, state, and national. For instance, of the five Lok Sabha seats contested by the AIMIM in 2014, Asaduddin Owaisi was the lone Muslim member. In the 2015 Aurangabad municipal elections, the party fielded thirteen Dalit candidates, of whom five won in reserved seats with substantial margins.[33] Owaisi has often spoken about forging social coalitions with Dalits and lower OBCs,[34] and whilst critical of other claimants for Muslim votes, has been supportive of the Dalit party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and its leader, Mayawati. These strategies have longer antecedents in AIMIM politics in Hyderabad. The AIMIM's first mayor, in 1986, was of Dalit background, and the party has helped elect Dalit mayors and Deputy Mayors in the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad.[35]

As well as historical antecedents, cross-ethnic alliances are indicated by the institutional constraints of minority representation in a majoritarian electoral system. Parties advocating for electoral minorities have an incentive to broaden their appeal to more groups in a FPTP system in order to achieve plurality.[36] Hence, the strategy of nominating Dalit and lower caste candidates, which has also been pursued by other parties in India. For instance, in the early 1960s, some Muslim candidates fought and won legislative and parliamentary elections on the tickets of Dalit and lower caste parties.[37] More recently, the BSP has often fielded a large number of Muslim candidates, seeking to augment its core Dalit base with the support of Muslim voters.[38] Given the territorial dispersal of Muslims, as well as the geographical proximity of Muslims and Dalits[39], such alliances will continue to make electoral sense for minority parties seeking to muster a plurality of votes.

As the AIMIM's limited success with national expansion shows, however, its strategies do not necessarily offer a winning formula. Muslim voters appear to vote for parties which seem the most likely to win against the BJP, which outside of the former Nizam territories, is not the AIMIM.[40] While the political rallies addressed by Asaduddin Owaisi in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) and Delhi were well attended, in conversations afterwards, voters drew a clear distinction between their admiration for Owaisi on the one hand, and the likelihood of their voting for the AIMIM, on the other.[41] The party's electoral successes in Hyderabad have been based on consolidating the Muslim vote and mobilizing high levels of voting among Muslims to get AIMIM candidates elected, in a context where Hindu votes have been split between rival parties.[42] However, perceptions of minority consolidation can elicit majoritarian backlash and counter-mobilization. Muslim MPs from mainstream parties are often dismissive of the AIMIM,

pointing to the single seat that the party has in Parliament.[43] Several Muslim leaders from secular parties feel that the AIMIM acts as a "spoiler," benefitting the BJP electorally. Finally, with the BJP having successfully incorporated sections among Dalits and "backward castes" as part of its pan-Hindu mobilization, attempts at Muslim-Dalit/lower caste cross-ethnic coalitions face substantial obstacles.

The national footprint of the AIMIM, however, is not to be measured in terms of election results alone. The large audiences that Owaisi's public meetings attract throughout the country are indicative of his appeal to Muslim youth, whether or not they go on to vote for the AIMIM.[44] Unlike other Muslim leaders whose parties have a larger electoral presence, Owaisi's training as a lawyer, as well as bilingual skills in English and Urdu make him adept at debates across platforms. He is equally at home debating constitutional provisions in Parliament and English language television channels, as he is at addressing public meetings during Ramzan in Urdu. Owaisi's speeches and pronouncements are put up promptly on You Tube, Facebook and Twitter accounts, enabling these to reach millions across the country, projecting his image on a national scale.[45] His strong indictment of mainstream parties for failing to protect Muslim interests has been an enduring theme in his parliamentary speeches and public interventions, bringing him to national attention as a leading spokesman for Muslims.

## BREAKING THE MOULD: THE NEW RHETORIC OF MUSLIM REPRESENTATION

In scholarly assessments, the AIMIM has tended to be labelled as a communal force of Muslim conservatism, as reactionary, as opposed to secular nationalist Muslims associated with the Congress and Left parties, resistant to modern education and reform.[46] However, closer attention to Owaisi's discursive performance suggests that he is recasting the archetype for Muslim leadership in India in ways that go beyond the traditionalist-modernist, extremist-moderate, and secular-communal binaries. These reveal greater similarities with the rhetoric of Indian Dalit leaders such as Dr Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram, than with Jinnah and the Muslim League with whom he is often compared.[47] Owaisi's representative claims reframe the constituency, the representative, and the nation along multiple dimensions.

### The Constituency: The Muslim Community

In contrast with the hesitancy of many Indian Muslim MPs, of raising issues of concern to Muslims, or even self-identifying as Muslim for fear of being labelled communal, Owaisi self-confidently claims to speak on

behalf of Muslims in Parliament. Dressed in an immaculate *sherwani*, and greeting the speaker with *adaabs*, Owaisi wears his Muslim identity with pride, unlike many Muslim representatives from center-left parties who abjure any religious markers in their comportment. A key intervention that brought him to national attention was his speech opposing the motion of thanks to the President's speech in 2014. Owaisi's speech high-lighted what he believed were four incidents which shook the very foundations of Indian democracy: the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the slaughter of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992, and the massacring of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. By linking instances of violence against minorities with the murder of Gandhi, the father of the nation, Owasi highlighted how Hindu extremists posed a danger both to minorities and to the Indian nation. In a pointed attack on Prime Minister Modi, he concluded his speech stating that he stood in parliament as the son of Ehsaan Jaffri, the former MP who was brutally killed during state sanctioned violence against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, and brother of Ishrat Jahan, who was killed in a fake encounter with the police in Gujarat during Modi's tenure as the Chief Minister. At a time when Muslims were fearful for their future following the BJP's victory in 2014, his assertion of kinship with Muslims killed in Gujarat reinforced his image as a brave leader willing to stand up to a powerful government on behalf of his community. Owaisi's rhetorical style of drawing together the numerous instances of persecution of Muslims across the country, serves to unify Muslims of disparate sects, languages, and castes into a single whole, a unity that he as their representative, embodies in his own person.

Asaduddin's embrace of the mantle of Muslim spokesman, at a time when other Muslim leaders are unwilling or unable to raise Muslim concerns, can be seen as an instance of *non-extremist outbidding*. His insistence on the recognition of Muslim identity devalued or rendered invisible in dominant Hindu supremacist as well as secular-liberal narratives, contrasts with so called moderate nationalist Muslim representatives, who seek either to minimize their religious identity, or otherwise align it to secular parties. His rhetorical style of identification with the community as a whole serves to project a singular community that is defined by its religious identity and united by its experience of violence and discrimination at the hands of state agencies.

At the same time, the underlying principles invoked in rhetorical attacks on the BJP and other mainstream parties are standard liberal protections for individual life and liberty, equal citizenship, and non-discrimination enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Like other post-independence Indian Muslim leaders (notably Syed Shahabuddin),[48] Owaisi has emphasized general principles of universal application, rather than special protections for

Muslims urged by Jinnah and the Muslim League. Speaking of the failure of state agencies to punish those responsible for the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, he asserts "I do not want to live as a second-class citizen … . I have got a right to know what justice can be done to me."[49] Criticizing the constitutional article which says a Dalit can only be a Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist as discriminatory on religious grounds ("[is] this not reservation based on religion?"), he has urged the inclusion of Muslims in the policy of reservations for Dalits "not on the grounds of religion, but … our socio-economic backwardness, which has been proven by empirical data."[50] In a context of increasing hate speeches and demeaning epithets against Muslims, he has called for a law for punishing those who term Muslims as Pakistanis or fifth-columnists. Unlike an older generation of Muslim leaders weighed down by nostalgia for the past glories of Islam in India, and the trauma of cultural losses such as the destruction of the Babri Masjid, Owaisi's approach has been pragmatic and focused on Muslims' rights as equal citizens of India.

The role of a community leader, however, does not always sit easily alongside a defense of liberal freedoms, and this can be observed in Owaisi's case as well. On Muslim religious concerns, he has often taken a conservative line, favoring deference to dominant group practices over the protection of individual freedoms, notably in relation to the rights of women and LGBT. A leading member of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), he opposed the abolition of the triple *talaq* sought by Muslim women's organizations, on grounds of state non-intervention in religious personal laws.[51] He has castigated the government for considering the decriminalization of homosexuality and not declaring Salman Rushdie as *persona non grata*.[52] Nevertheless, to construe Owaisi's position as that of a religious traditionalist would be a mistake. A long-standing critic of the *Hajj* subsidy for Muslims, he has termed it a "criminal waste,"[53] and called for its funds to be transferred to scholarships for Muslim girls.[54] Owaisi's construction of Muslim identity is distinct from that of the *ulama*, Muslim religious leaders, who have backed the Congress party in return for its support for Islamic religious and cultural institutions.[55] Unlike other leaders of Muslim-led parties, he also claims to speak to issues that affect all Indians, not just Muslims, rejecting his "bracketing as a Muslim."[56] At the same time, there has been a discernible shift in emphasis in Asaduddin Owaisi's speeches in the House since the 2014 election of a Hindu nationalist government, with a greater focus on the cultural domination of Muslims. While this can be seen as an instance of outbidding in the context of the BJP's numerous initiatives Hindu cultural domination, it is not extremist in the sense of being exclusionary of non-Muslims.

## The Representative: A Muslim-led Party

Owaisi's advocacy of the need for a Muslim-led party distinguishes the AIMIM from secular mainstream parties and can be seen as an instance of ethnic outbidding. Nevertheless, in contrast to the position of Jinnah and his Muslim League, the AIMIM does not claim to be the sole representative of Muslims, or the spokesman only for Muslims (its membership is open to non-Muslims). The party avows to "protect and promote the rights of Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, Other Backward Classes, Other Minorities and all other underprivileged communities in India" and allegiance "to the nation's secular democracy," as well as the Indian Constitution.[57] Owaisi has argued that it is because mainstream political parties have failed to address the interests that Muslims share with other Indians that there is a need for a Muslim-led party such as the AIMIM.[58] His arguments for Muslim political representation show strong parallels with those put forward by leaders of Dalit parties, such Kanshi Ram and in a longer historical perspective, Dr Ambedkar. Like many Dalit representatives, Owaisi uses the term "political minority" for Muslims, seeking to distance the latter from the separatist connotations of "religious minority" associated with Jinnah's claims. Like Dr Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders, he has argued that political representation for a group is a means for addressing its socio-economic disadvantage,[59] that a political minority "needs to be represented if they are to realise their constitutional rights … which have been denied to the community for long".[60]

> The more I visit India, the more I am convinced of my political theory or ideology … that where-ever there are a substantial number of Muslims living, either in a village, … or a metropolitan city, you don't find any development over there. … because you do not have a political voice, representation [of Muslims] … you must have political representation of your own, not by any other party whether they are so called secular or … communal … other parties … allow one or two Muslims to win, and … to get strengthened financially … but the community at large does not benefit.[61]

How political representation leads to socio-economic empowerment is not spelt out, as in many claims for "backward" caste representation, but the model of group accommodation through cultural recognition alone is rejected. In ways that parallel Dr Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi, Owaisi has criticized the Congress for gestures of cultural accommodation of Muslims while failing to address their socio-economic deprivation and political marginalization: " … you don't want us to get in Parliament, you don't want us to get in employment … but you want to hold *Iftaar* parties

for us [laughs] … give …[cultural subsidies for Muslims] towards scholar-
ships, it will do a great benefit …"[62] In his parliamentary and public
speeches, Owaisi has explicitly invoked Dr Ambedkar to make a case for
reservation for Muslims in employment and education, terming him "a big-
ger leader than even Gandhi"[63]:

> The reason we are asking for reservation, is this, Dr Ambedkar had
> rightly said … Education is like drinking the milk of [a] tigress … Why
> do you keep us backward? [64]

Owaisi's exhortations that Muslims stop depending on the Congress
and other secular parties for their protection and instead pursue self-
representation through their own party has an anti-paternalist thrust similar
to arguments associated with the emergence of lower caste political parties
in the 1980s-90s.[65] Like leaders of lower caste parties, he claims to be "an
equal stakeholder in this country,"[66] asserting that Muslim youth have the
same aspirations as those from other communities, to a share in
development with dignity. Rejecting the claims of secular mainstream
parties such as the Congress to act as the guardians and protectors of
Muslims, Owaisi adopts a slogan of a Dalit party "*Vote humara, raj
tumhara, kab tak chalega*" (Our vote and your rule, how long will this
continue?).[67] He calls on Muslims to stop being clients of secular parties,
and instead become "masters of their own destiny".[68] Owaisi also says
that a Muslim party like the AIMIM is needed because Muslim
representatives from mainstream parties have not been a strong voice on
behalf of the community, a criticism that many Dalit representatives also
make of those elected to seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes. Scholars
have noted that processes of party nomination and election in India are
such that the Muslim representatives elected are "inclined to be docile," or
else they may not "get the ticket" in the next election.[69] Owaisi portrays
Muslims as a homogenous community for purposes of reservations, in
contrast to leaders such as Ali Anwar who have argued for reservations for
"backward" Muslim groups. The emphasis on the need for strong advo-
cates for Muslim interests, defined largely in secular terms of disadvantage
and discrimination that unify the community as a whole, is similar to
that of Dalit and "backward" caste parties. As such, Asaduddin
Owaisi's representative claims can be seen as an instance of outbidding
that is not extremist in the sense of being fundamentally religious and sep-
aratist in its appeal.

## The Frame: Nation, Democracy, and Institutional Liberalism

The AIMIM has long had to counter perceptions of being an extremist party, not only in the sense of Muslim exclusiveness, but also for "concealed separatism."[70] While asserting the need for a Muslim-led party, Owaisi has sought to allay Indian nationalist fears of Muslim separatism associated with Partition, invoking concepts of national unity, democracy, and development from the constitutional vocabulary,[71] as well as defending liberal institutions.

Arguing that the decreasing number of Muslims in Parliament is a trend that is "grave" in terms of its implications, Owaisi says: "This is an august House wherein we come and convey our feelings. If you close the door and do not want to see my face, then what is the option left for me?"[72] He says that currently a Muslim who feels let down by mainstream parties "is coming to me, but God forbid, tomorrow he may go to fundamentalists, what is the alternative for him?"[73] Unlike minority leaders who are often wary of elections, Owaisi reflects an electoral optimism perhaps based on the AIMIM's electoral successes in Hyderabad, holding that "the real respect that one gets is by winning an election."[74] Like his father before him,[75] Asaduddin sees the role of the AIMIM as restoring faith in the democratic system among demoralized Muslim youth, and thereby countering extremism. Owaisi has also sought to speak to Indian nationalist concerns regarding development, while questioning its narrow interpretation among policy-makers in terms of GDP growth, foreign investment, and the stock-market, saying that "14% [Muslim percentage] of India's population lagging behind [is] not good in the country's interest."[76] At the same time, he has sought to challenge Hindu supremacist definitions of national identity from a standpoint akin to constitutional patriotism.[77]

Beyond elections, Owaisi has been a strong advocate of parliamentary mechanisms such as questions, debates, and committees for holding governments to account, criticizing other Muslim MPs for not making good use of parliamentary devices. Even as Indian parliamentary proceedings have frequently descended into acrimonious chaos amidst disruptions, he has carved out for himself an image as a serious parliamentarian in the Westminster tradition, and is highly regarded for the quality of his speeches.[78] Owaisi's questions have focused on Minority Affairs, Human Resource Development, Home Affairs, the ministries in charge of a gamut of programmes that affect the physical security and socio-economic welfare of minorities.[79] He has served in the standing committee on Defense among others, his personal favorite,[80] and is a member of the standing committee on Social Justice and Empowerment that deals with minorities.[81] He has also pressed for a stronger National Commission for Minorities, with constitutional status and powers comparable to the

National Commission for the Scheduled Castes.[82] Asaduddin Owaisi's advocacy of constitutional values and parliamentary mechanisms, alongside quotas for Muslims as a means of minority protection, reflects a radical liberal approach in the tradition of Dr Ambedkar,[83] of seeking social transformation through institutional change, rather than extremist mobilization against the system.

## Countervailing Features

The AIMIM's continuing hold over the politics of Hyderabad is often attributed by its critics to violence, hooliganism, and financial malfeasance. The party has a reputation of acting as an urban mafia in the old city of Hyderabad, akin to the Shiv Sena in Mumbai, with Asaduddin and his brother Akbaruddin Owaisi as its larger-than-life "dons." Asaduddin's critics often speak of a Janus-faced politician, who has cleverly used the media to carve out an image as a liberal moderate with English-speaking audiences, while acting as parochial community leader and rabble-rouser on the streets of Hyderabad, mobilizing muscle power against opponents. Some suggest a division of labor between the Owaisi brothers that allows the AIMIM to pursue a dual strategy, with Asaduddin presenting the party's reasonable, moderate, national face, and Akbaruddin Owaisi, the leader of the party in the state assembly known for his incendiary speeches to Muslim audiences, keeping a check on political rivals, often through violence.[84] With the youngest brother, Burhanuddin, the chief editor of the party mouthpiece, *Etmaad*, the Owaisi brothers are seen to represent old style dynastic politics, and the party, a family inheritance that has allowed them to combine their political interests with business deals to acquire personal wealth. Their political rivals in Hyderabad allege that while the AIMIM projects itself as the protector of Muslims, it is mainly the Owaisi brothers that have benefitted from its family business model, based on acquisition of valuable real estate (notably *Waqf* properties).[85]

While a detailed analysis of party behavior in Hyderabad is outside the scope of this article, a few observations are in order. An accomplished orator, Asaduddin Owaisi's rhetorical style is adapted to suit the sensibilities of the targeted audience. His public speeches to Muslim audiences are heavily influenced by the Islamic style of elocution.[86] His command over spoken Urdu both formal and colloquial, peppered with caustic wit, make him the star turn in the annual *Milad-ul-Nabi* celebrations[87] in the party head-quarters in Dar-us-Salam. Astute in tailoring content to the venue, Asaduddin's speeches inside mosques such as the Friday sermon during Ramzan, avoid statements which are overtly political.[88] Of his run-ins with the law, which include being booked for assault in the heat of

electoral battles, he has said that he will respect the decision of the courts, re-affirming the authority of liberal institutions over violence.[89]

Fieldwork in Hyderabad suggests that while the charges levelled against the Owaisis by their political rivals are seen to have some merit, the AIMIM and its leadership continue to enjoy substantial support among poorer Muslims, and seem to be gaining newer adherents among Muslim elites and some intelligentsia, in a context marked by an ascendant Hindu right. Political rivals point to Asaduddin Owaisi's lucrative land deals that are seen to have made him wealthy during the city's boom years ("earlier we could buy them, now they can buy us" says an Opposition party leader ruefully), and to the high capitation fees charged by the Owaisi engineering and medical colleges (managed by Akbaruddin). However, constituents continue to flock to the party office, mostly poor Muslims and women, waiting patiently for help with letters and forms that would enable them gain access to government benefits and avoid sanctions. [90] In a practice started by Asaduddin's father Salahuddin, the AIMIM's representatives in the municipality, state assembly, and parliament are supposed to sit between 11-2pm everyday (except Friday when the office is closed) to deal with the requests and complaints of their constituents. When Asaduddin arrives, the crowd surges to see their hero in person, and have to be held back by party functionaries to form an orderly queue as he takes his place next to other representatives to sign letters and forms.

Charismatic authority derives also from extraordinary deeds, and in Asaduddin's case, an influential image that circulates among AIMIM sympathizers is that of his back bearing injuries from beatings by the police. This resonates with Islamic narratives of sacrifice and martyrdom, reinforcing his image as a hero bearing the marks of violence on his body, bravely taking beatings from the police on behalf of the community. His popularity among Muslim audiences appears to derive not so much from religious sources of authority, nor from modern, constitutional discourses alone, as from a capacity to combine these in his discursive performance. In the central reception room in Dar-Us-Salam dominated by a larger than life photograph of his father Salahuddin Owaisi, the former party leader, clean-shaven and suited, Asaduddin with his immaculate beard and *sherwani*, presents a neo-traditionalist contrast. He denies that the party strategy has changed under his leadership, claiming merely to be following in the footsteps of party leaders like his father, a stance of deference to elders and tradition that characterizes Indian political discourse more generally.[91] He has court cases to attend to, but visiting the party office to meet with constituents even briefly is also necessary, to keep up the party tradition. A seasoned observer of local politics asks – "the question is, even when people are dissatisfied with the party, they continue to vote for them – why?" The answer is not difficult to find.

Formidable challenges exist for Muslim representation in contemporary India. In addition to the electoral constraints posed by a first-past-the-post system for a dispersed minority, there are substantial ideological constraints. On the one hand, advocates of Muslim representation face the taint of separatism and being "fifth columnists" associated with the division of the country and creation of Pakistan in 1947. On the other hand, they have to contend with prejudicial interpretations of India's official ideology of secularism, in which any attempt to raise Muslim concerns is castigated as communal. In the decades following independence, Muslim leaders sought to address these challenges by aligning with the Congress party, and more recently with regional and caste parties. Since the ascendancy of the majoritarian Hindu BJP, challenges to Muslim representation have intensified. Asaduddin Owaisi's refusal to be cowed in the face of hegemonic Hindu nationalism, to carry the stigma of Partition, makes him popular among Muslim youth, as do the causes he has championed, such as an end to the persecution of Muslims in the name of terrorism, and opportunities for education and jobs. His proficiency in constitutional law as well as Islamic discourses mean that he is better placed than other Muslim leaders to bridge differences of class and educational background among Muslims. At the same time, the popularity of his speeches has not so far translated into sustained electoral success for the party in national contests beyond Hyderabad. Whether Asaduddin Owaisi's attempts to surmount the substantial challenges for Muslim representation in India will be electorally successful at the national level, remains to be seen.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paradox of the increased footprint of a small Muslim party in the context of the dominance of the Hindu nationalist BJP cannot be understood adequately through dominant accounts of extremist outbidding.[92] Outbidding can explain how a party seeks to outdo other claimants for intra-group support. For instance, in Sri Lanka, a Sinhala-only policy was pursued in the 1950s by the principal political parties competing to be the lead party among Sinhala voters.[93] Similarly, in India, the BJP has pursued a Hindu majoritarian agenda to consolidate its position as the lead party among Hindu voters. This has also created favorable ground for the expansion of a party like AIMIM, which positions itself as a strong voice for Muslims, seeking to outbid the mainstream secular parties that Muslims have tended to vote for. However, our findings also suggest that outbidding can co-exist with moderation simultaneously,[94] and not just sequentially. In terms of electoral strategy, this is seen in the AIMIM's pursuit of cross-ethnic alliances (Muslim-Dalit/backward caste), at the same time as

projecting a strong Muslim voice in relation to other claimants for Muslim votes.

Furthermore, our study shows that outbidding need not be extremist, in at least three respects. First, outbidding, even when rooted in the interests of a group, need not be exclusionary of other groups. Demanding protection for the rights of Muslims as Indian citizens, Asaduddin's rhetoric draws on, and develops further, the normative resources of India's constitutional framework for disadvantaged minorities. In seeking to reframe minority identities, successful minority representatives also reach out to majority voters, and build public opinion around universal principles that appeal to larger sections of the population. [95] Second, outbidding in the sense of strong advocacy on behalf of a religious group, need not be a religious appeal, in the sense of being rooted in religion. Asaduddin's advocacy of Muslim reservations in terms of social justice and democratic self-representation emphasizes Muslims' material, secular interests over their religious concerns in ways that reflect more commonalities with Dalit and "backward" caste parties in India, than with parties such as the Muslim League. Third, even when outbidding involves religious claims, it need not be extremist in the sense of intransigent. For instance, while espousing a conservative position on some Muslim issues (e.g. support for *triple talaq* as part of Muslim personal law), Owaisi has also criticized existing practices and suggested the need for social reform.[96] Demanding the right to express his religious opinions, he also accepts the freedom of others to disagree, and the authority of the higher judiciary to adjudicate in cases of conflict, suggesting a pragmatic, sometimes liberal approach.

It may be that the forms of non-extremist outbidding we have identified are to be found in parties of territorially dispersed minorities. Whereas existing scholarship on outbidding has tended to focus on parties of majority communities, our case suggests that minority leaders may pursue a moderate course. In other words, parties representing minorities may seek to outbid each other in ways that are not extremist, perhaps because they tend to lose more by an extremist stance, in contrast to parties representing majority groups.[97]

While scholars have recognized the multi-dimensional and dynamic character of ethnic identities, the further question of how social and institutional identities are configured in processes of representation, and the role of leadership in the process, has rarely been addressed. Focusing on a small Muslim-led party, this article has examined the role of Muslim leadership in negotiating the electoral and ideological challenges for minority representation in an era of Hindu majoritarianism. While success in the electoral arena remains important for reputation as well as access to goods for sustaining patronage networks, we have highlighted the discursive domain for the evaluation of the role of leadership, focusing on how

Indian Muslim identity is sought to be re-imagined in an era of Hindu majoritarianism. Of course, leaders' attempts to transform the terms of ethnic representation may not be successful, either electorally in convincing voters, or discursively, in attracting a large following. This depends on wider structural, institutional ideological factors that they do not control, including the strength of rival claimants for minority votes, majoritarian counter-mobilization, entrenched primordialist conceptions of identity, to name a few. Nevertheless, without a reckoning of the role of leaders in redefining the terms of political engagement, and influencing the terrain of political alternatives, our understanding of extremism and moderation, and their implications for ethnic conflict, remains radically incomplete.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## FUNDING

## NOTES

1.  Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1972).

2.  An ethnic party is understood here as deriving "support overwhelmingly from an identifiable ethnic group" and serving "the interests of that group." It does not need to be ethnically exclusive. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 291.

3.  Kanchan Chandra, "Ethnic Parties and Democratic Stability," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 2 (2005): 235–252.

4.  Paul Mitchell, Geoffrey Evans, and Brendan O'Leary, "Extremist Outbidding in Ethnic Party Systems is Not Inevitable: Tribune Parties in Northern Ireland," *Political Studies* 57, no. 2 (2009): 397–421.

5.  Mitchell et al, "Extremist Outbidding," 397.

6.  We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers and Neil DeVotta for highlighting this point.

7.  Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

8. Michael Saward, "Shape-shifting Representation," *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 4 (2014): 723–736.

9. The party's origins date back to efforts in the late 1920s to forge a common political platform for diverse Muslim sects in the Deccan. The name translates as Association of Muslim Unity. Rasheeduddin Khan, "Muslim Leadership and Electoral Politics in Hyderabad: A Pattern of Minority Articulation-I," *Economic and Political Weekly* 16, no. 15 (1971): 783–794.

10. A London trained barrister and elected MP for Hyderabad since 2004, Asaduddin Owaisi is the son of Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi, who was Hyderabad MP between 1984–1999. His grandfather, the lawyer Abdul Wahid Owaisi, assumed charge of the Majlis in 1957.

11. Rabushka et al., *Politics in Plural Societies.*

12. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups,* 38.

13. Chandra, "Ethnic Parties," 239.

14. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups*; Chandra, "Ethnic Parties."

15. For Ireland see Mitchell et al, "Extremist Outbidding"; for India see Oliver Heath, Gilles Vernier, and Sanjay Kumar, "Do Muslim Voters Prefer Muslim Candidates? Co-religiosity and Voting Behaviour in India," *Electoral Studies* 38 (2015): 10–18.

16. See Chandra, "Ethnic Parties."

17. Karen Bird, "The Political Representation of Visible Minorities in Electoral Democracies: A Comparison of France, Denmark, and Canada," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 11, no. 4 (2005): 425–465.

18. Max Weber, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by Hans Henerich Gerth and Charles Wright Mills (Routledge: Oxford, 1991), 245.

19. Henry Hart, "Political Leadership in India: Dimensions and Limits," in *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State–Society Relations*, edited by Atul Kohli (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 18–61.

20. Andrew Wyatt, *Party System Change in South India: Political Entrepreneurs, patterns and Processes* (London: Routledge, 2010), 85–88.

21. Scholars do note that conceptions of rational self-interest can include normative beliefs and values.

22. See eg. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 158; Saward, "Shape-Shifting". In the context of South Asia, see Thomas Blom Hansen, "Politics as Permanent Performance: The Production of Political Authority in the Locality", in *The Politics of Cultural Mobilization in India*, edited by John Zavos, Andrew Wyatt, and Vernon Hewitt (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22.

23. Wyatt, *Party System Change*, 95.

24. See Paul R Brass, "Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia," in *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (London: Routledge, 2000), 879–911.

25. Data updated by authors from Iqbal Ansari, *Political Representation of Muslims in India: 1952-2004* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2006).

26. Authors' calculations, based on total number of Muslim members in the Rajya Sabha between 1952–2017, including those nominated or elected multiple times.

27. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, the BJP fielded only 7 Muslim candidates among 428 candidates, of whom none won. In state assembly elections since 2014 in West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, the party gave tickets to a total of 9 Muslims. It fielded no Muslim candidate in U.P., where Muslims form 19.26% of the population.

28. Abdul Gafoor Noorani, *The Destruction of Hyderabad* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2013).

29. For details, see Javeed Alam, "Communalism Among Muslims: the Majlis-e-Ittehad ul-Muslimeen in Hyderabad," in *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, edited by T.V. Satyamurthy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 231–33.

30. Interview, 26 December 2015, Hyderabad.

31. Interviews, 26 December 2015 and 27 December 2016, Hyderabad. The stated position of the party is to not venture into regions where Muslim-led parties are electorally successful, such as Kerala and Assam.

32. Wyatt, *Party System Change*, 14.

33.  The AIMIM's Dalit leader in Aurangabad hailed the party as a savior of Dalits for "convincing Muslims to vote for Dalit candidates selflessly." Quoted in Mohammed Akhaef, "Owaisi's MIM Wins 26 Seats in Aurangabad Civic Polls, Tears into Congress, NCP Bastions," *The Times of India*, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/aurangabad/Owaisis-MIM-wins-26-seats-in-Aurangabad-civic-poll-tears-into-Congress-NCP-bastions/articleshow/47034066.cms (accessed 26 September 2017).

34.  This was exemplified in its slogan of "Jai Bhim, Jai Meem" in the Maharashtra elections.

35.  Syed Aminul Hasan Jaffrey, "All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM): A Party with a Vision," n.d.

36.  Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups.*

37.  See Theodore P. Wright Jr, "The Effectiveness of Muslim Representation in India," *South Asian Politics and Religion* 105, no. 22 (1996), and Omar Khalidi, "Muslims in Indian Political Process: Group Goals and Alternative Strategies," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 1/2 (1993): 43–54.

38.  Kanchan Chandra, "Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh: The Ethnification of the Party System and Its Consequences, " in *Indian Politics and the 1998 Election: Regionalism, Hindutva, and State Politics*, edited by Ramashray Roy and Paul Wallace (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998): 55–104.

39.  A large number of parliamentary constituencies where Muslims constitute more than 20 percent of the population are reserved for the Scheduled Castes. See *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India* (Government of India: Cabinet Secretariat, 2006).

40.  On Muslim voting behaviour, see eg. Heath et al, "Muslim Voters."

41.  Interviews with voters in public meetings addressed by Asaduddin Owaisi in Kishanganj, Bihar 16 August 2015; Sambhla U.P. 7 February 2017; Okhla Delhi, 20 April 2017.

42.  Khalidi, "Muslims in Indian Political Process."

43.  Interviews, July 2016, Delhi and 27 December 2016, Hyderabad.

44.  Ch Sushil Rao, "Asaduddin Owaisi Rallies Crowd at UP Flashpoints," https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/asaduddin-owaisi-rallies-crowds-at-up-flashpoints/articleshow/56612918.cms, (accessed 11 May 2018). Among the attendees we spoke to, the general refrain was that they had come to listen because he spoke up for Muslims, raising issues which Muslim leaders from mainstream parties were unwilling to do such as justice for the victims of anti-Muslim violence, socio-economic deprivation in the community and growing vigilantism by Hindu cow protection groups.

45.  Asaduddin Owaisi's listed number of followers on Twitter are 397K and Facebook 2,410,472, more than any other Muslim politician of note.

46.  Khan, "Muslim Leadership"; Mushirul Hasan, "Indian Muslims Since Independence: In Search of Integration and Identity," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1988): 818–842. For a more nuanced assessment of the AIMIM, see Alam, "Communalism Among Muslims".

47.  See Patrick French, "Opportunist or Rockstar? Owaisi Recasting Muslim Politics in India", *Hindustan Times*, http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/opportunist-or-rockstar-owaisi-recasting-muslim-politics-in-india/story-b01NPeoH46yXRfUq5UOUSO.html (accessed 27 September 2017); Faisal Devji, "Is a Dalit-Muslim Alliance Possible?" *The Hindu*, http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/Is-a-Dalit-Muslim-alliance-possible/article14598312.ece (accessed 11 May 2018). There are some parallels between Asaduddin and Jinnah, in the advocacy of constitutionalism, and criticism of Muslim religious authorities. Furthermore, in the 1930s, the Muslim League had pursued an alliance between Indian minorities, including Dalits and lower castes, similar to the AIMIM's approach. We are grateful to Faisal Devji for highlighting these points. We contend, however, that the parallels between Asaduddin and Jinnah are limited, for the reasons elaborated below.

48.  For a perceptive analysis of Syed Shahabuddin, see Hilal Ahmed, *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India: Monuments, Memory, Contestation* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015).

49.  *Lok Sabha Debate* (henceforth LSD), 8 June 2009.

50.  As per the 1950 Presidential Order and article 341.1, Scheduled Caste status and benefits are restricted to Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. Muslims are included in lists of Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, but not in official lists of Dalits. See Asaduddin Owaisi, "The Constitution (Scheduled) Castes Orders (Amendment Bill)," *LSD*, 24 August 2013 on the discrimination against Islam and Christianity in the designation of Dalits.

51. The passage of the Triple Talaq Bill by the Indian government on 28 December 2018 was followed by a series of meetings organised across states under *Jalsa Tahafuz-e-Shariat* (preservation of Shariat) addressed by Asaddudin.

52. *LSD*, 14 March 2012.

53. *LSD*, 13 July 2009.

54. When the BJP government abolished the *Hajj* subsidy in 2017, he welcomed this and demanded that similar concessions provided to Hindu religious groups be removed as well.

55. Khalidi, "Muslims in Indian Political Process," 43.

56. See Shoaib Daniyal, "Why Are You Bracketing Me as A Muslim? Asaduddin Owaisi On Why He Won't Say "Bharat Mata Ki Jai," *Scroll,* https://scroll.in/article/805382/why-are-you-bracketing-me-as-a-muslim-asaduddin-owaisi-on-why-he-wont-say-bharat-mata-ki-jai (accessed 27 September 2017).

57. Jaffrey, "AIMIM," n.d.

58. In 1998, the AIMIM had joined forces with the IUML to advocate a Muslim party at the national level, holding that the secular parties which Muslims voted for had used the community "as a vote bank and neglected them." See *The Muslims of India: A Documentary Record*, edited by Abdul Gafoor Noorani (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 280.

59. *LSD,* 8 June 2009.

60. *LSD,* 27 November 2015. This emphasis on political representation echoes that of Dalit leaders, notably Kanshi Ram – see Chandra, "Post-Congress Politics."

61. Interview, 26 December 2016, Hyderabad.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *LSD,* 27 November 2015.

64. *LSD,* 2 February 2010. Previously, Asaduddin is on record as having opposed reservations for Muslim "backward castes" as divisive of the community.

65. For more details, see Rochana Bajpai, "Rhetoric as Argument: Social Justice and Affirmative Action in India, 1990," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2010): 675–708.

66. *LSD,* 8 June 2009.

67. *LSD,* 8 June 2009.

68. French, "Opportunist or Rockstar?"

69. Wright, "The Effectiveness of Muslim," 110.

70. Khan, "Muslim Leadership," 791.

71. On India's constitutional vocabulary, see Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

72. *LSD,* 8 June 2009.

73. Interview, 17 December 2009, Delhi.

74. Interview, 31 December 2014, Hyderabad.

75. Khalidi, "Muslims in Indian Political Process."

76. Interview, 31 December 2014, Hyderabad.

77. *LSD,* 2 March 2016.

78. He received a *Sansad Ratna* award in 2014 as one of the top performers in the 15th Lok Sabha, an award that seeks to improve voter awareness of the duties of parliamentarians, http://www.sansadratna.in/2013/12/heroes-of-15th-lok-sabha-to-be-honoured.html (accessed 27 September 2017).

79. More details available in the dataset created by authors on Asaduddin Owaisi's parliamentary questions and debate participation, 2009–2017.

80. He was refused re-nomination in 2014. Interview, 31 December 2014, Hyderabad.

81. There is no standing Committee for the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

82. *LSD,* 27 November 2015.

83. On Ambedkar as a radical liberal, see Rochana Bajpai, "Liberalisms in India: A Sketch," in *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 53–76.

84. Nathan A. Moore, "Redefining Nationalism: An Examination of the Rhetoric, Positions and Postures of Asaduddin Owaisi" (Master's Report: University of Texas, Austin, 2016), 35.

85. French, "Opportunist or Rockstar?"

86. Moore, "Redefining Nationlism," 12.

87. The festival has been popularized by the AIMIM and serves to promote its image as the pre-eminent spokesman for Muslims. Parvez Z. Fareen. "Celebrating the Prophet: Religious Nationalism

and the Politics of Milad-un-Nabi Festivals in India," *Nations and Nationalism* 20, no. 2 (2014): 218–238.

88.   In public gatherings that commemorate Ramzan, there is more discussion on political issues.
89.   Associates say his practice of yoga has made him more cool-headed.
90.   On how the AIMIM emerged as the pre-eminent organisation for Muslim masses following state failure in the aftermath of so-called police action in Hyderabad, see Alam, "Communalism Among Muslims," 237–47.
91.   Interview, 26 December 2016, Hyderabad.
92.   Rabushka et al., *Politics in Plural Societies*.
93.   Neil DeVotta, "From Ethnic Outbidding to Ethnic Conflict: The Institutional Bases for Sri Lanka's Separatist War," *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 1 (2005): 141–159.
94.   Mitchell et al., "Extremist Outbidding."
95.   Bird, "Political Representation"; Wright Jr, "The Effectiveness of Muslim Representation in India," 598.
96.   B. Nitin, "Welcome SC Verdict on Triple Talaq, Implementation Will be a Challenge: Owaisi to TNM," https://://www.thenewsminute.com/article/welcome-sc-verdict-triple-talaq-implementation-will-be-challenge-owaisi-tnm-67220 (accessed 11 May 2018).
97.   Neil DeVotta, personal communication, 20 April 2018.

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