

The Market for Religious Content: Evidence from Friday Sermons in Pakistan

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The Importance of Religious Content

- ▶ Religion continues to play an important role in the lives of many in developing countries.
- ▶ Recent work suggests the importance of religious leaders and content for belief formation.
- ▶ A natural question follows: why is there substantial heterogeneity in religious content in equilibrium?
- ▶ Is religious content driven by the supply-side or the demand-side?
- ▶ **In this project, I evaluate the drivers of religious content and the extent to which increased information can moderate the prevalence and impact of extremist content.**

Research Questions

- ▶ Is religious content driven by: 1) audience preferences, 2) religious leader preferences, or 3) top-down institutional preferences?
- ▶ To what extent do information frictions exist in markets for religious content and how does alleviating any frictions impact content and religious choice?
- ▶ To what extent do demand-side responses inoculate the consumers of religious content against extremist content?

This Project: Exploring a Market for Religious Content

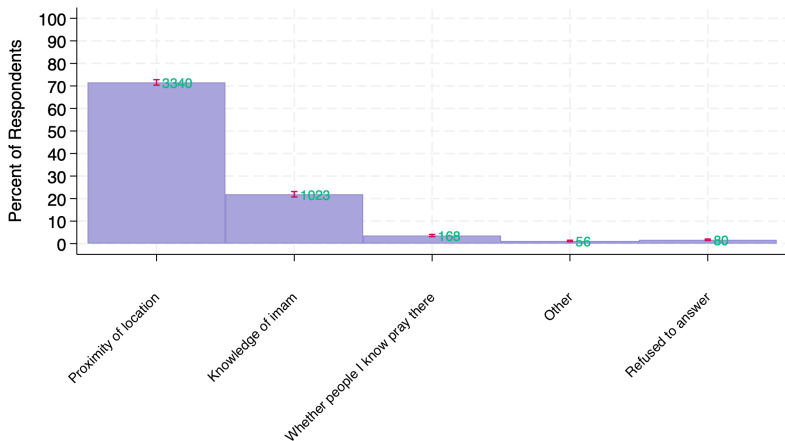
- ▶ **Utilize unique context of mosques and Friday sermons in Punjab, Pakistan, where demand and supply sides of content are directly observable.**
- ▶ Working with a random sub-sample drawn from the universe of mosques in Punjab, I will:
 - ▶ Survey imams, congregants, and mosques to quantify heterogeneity, preferences, and information frictions with respect to sermon content.
 - ▶ Provide imams with information and evaluate impacts on sermon content.
 - ▶ Provide congregants with information and evaluate impacts on mosque choice.

Context: Punjab, Pakistan

- ▶ 97% of the population is Muslim and the province is home to ~70,000 mosques.
- ▶ 90% of males reported going to the mosque for prayer the previous Friday.
- ▶ Friday prayer preceded by a 20-40 minute sermon by an imam. 91% of those who pray report listening to at least 10 minutes of the sermon.
- ▶ Anecdotally, sermons usually imams' primary means of mass communication and a very important source of religious content for adult men.

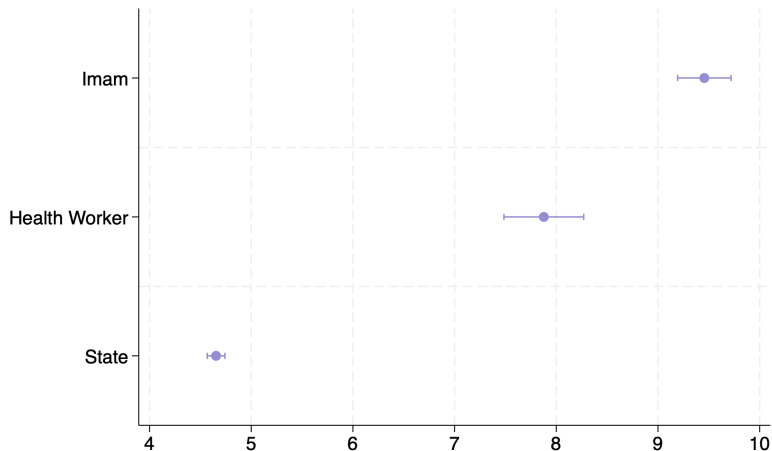
Context: Punjab, Pakistan

Figure: How do you choose which mosque to pray in?



Context: Punjab, Pakistan

Figure: On a scale from 0-10, to what extent do you trust your imam/health worker/state institutions?



Context: Punjab, Pakistan

Much concern has been voiced about the radicalizing potential of sermons...

Pakistani Militant Leader Gives Fiery Friday Sermon Despite Government Crackdown on Group

Hafiz Saeed, who leads the militant group believed responsible for the 2008 Mumbai hotel attack, denounces Pakistani and U.S. governments

By Saeed Shah [Follow](#)

February 16, 2018

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Field Experiment: Design

- ▶ Approx. 2800 imams will be assigned to the following treatment groups:
 - ▶ S0 (Control - 700): No info
 - ▶ S1 (Demand-Side - 700): Congregant preferences
 - ▶ S2 (Personal - 700): Personal preferences
 - ▶ S3 (Top-Down - 700): Senior institutional preferences
- ▶ Approx. 2100 congregants will be assigned to the following treatment groups:
 - ▶ D0 (Control - 700): No info
 - ▶ D1 (Content - 700): Sermon content info
 - ▶ D2 (Non-Content - 700): Congregation and amenity info

Field Experiment: Treatment (Supply-Side)



- ▶ Content preferences over the following four dimensions will be provided:
 - ▶ Social topics
 - ▶ Political topics
 - ▶ Conservative
 - ▶ Emotionally-charged
- ▶ All imams will also be given a sermon manual.
- ▶ **Outcome: sermon content**

Field Experiment: Treatment (Demand-Side)

- ▶ Content information over the following two dimensions will be provided:
 - ▶ Imam religious education and experience
 - ▶ Content ratings
- ▶ Non-content information over the following two dimensions will be provided:
 - ▶ Congregation characteristics
 - ▶ Amenities
- ▶ Information provided for four nearest mosques.
- ▶ **Outcome: mosque choice**

قربى مساجد كے بارے ميں معلومات

	امام تعليم تعليم 7 سہل مٹہي تعليم اور تجربہ؟ 15 سال	نام: جامع مسجد كھجور والى
	9/10 سماجى موضوعات؟	رتبہ:
	2/10 سياسى موضوعات؟	بوسن پارک روڈ، مزار كھجور والى سرڪار كے قريب، سہل آباد
	1/10 قدامت پسند؟	
	2/10 جذباتى؟	

	امام تعليم تعليم 9 سہل مٹہي تعليم اور تجربہ؟ 10 سال	نام: جامع مسجد نور
	5/10 سماجى موضوعات؟	رتبہ:
	9/10 سياسى موضوعات؟	نور مسجد، كومبو گاؤں، راحت پارک كے قريب، لاہور
	5/10 قدامت پسند؟	
	9/10 جذباتى؟	



Conclusion

- ▶ In this project, I analyze a market for religious content from both the demand and supply side.
- ▶ I hope to document the extent of information frictions in this market, explore the drivers of sermon content, and evaluate the effects of increased information.
- ▶ Results will have implications for policymakers seeking to understand the drivers of hate speech and polarization at the local level and who to target for policy interventions.

Thank You!