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Does the Shot Backfire?

Political Assassinations and the Strategies Adopted by Targeted Political Parties

by Sania Shahid

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Faculty Advisor: Paul Staniland
Preceptor: Burcu Pinar Alakoc

Abstract

Political assassination attempts are a form of political violence that target individuals who hold or are contesting for positions of prominence. While there has been research on the motivations behind political assassinations and the details of the attacks, the steps that political parties follow after they lose their leader or after their leader has been attacked, are under researched. Using instances of failed and successful assassinations of heads of political parties from across South Asia this paper seeks to illustrate the strategies that political parties assume after such attacks. Specifically, the article uses two characteristics of political parties; their succession patterns with regards to whether they are dynastic or non-dynastic, and their structure which refers to whether they are programmatic or personalized, to predict the reactions they will have to the assassination. The three reactions that are measured gauge whether the response will be aggressive or non-aggressive, united, or divided, and public facing or institutionally focused. I first offer a quantitative overview of the reactions gathered from 40 cases of political assassinations in South Asia. I then study four of these cases in-depth. Specifically, I study Rajiv Gandhi's Indian National Congress, Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Abdul Gani Lone's Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference, and Harchand Singh Longowal's Akali Dal party. I find that in most cases (34 of the 40) political parties display united reactions after assassinations. However, there is only a slightly higher preference for public facing reactions (23 of 40) as opposed to institutionally focused ones. Finally, half of the cases (20 of 40) indicate that political parties choose an aggressive reaction to the assassination as opposed to a non-aggressive one.

Keywords: Political Assassinations, Political Parties, Party Strategy, South Asia, Kashmir, India, and Pakistan.

Introduction

Perpetrators of political assassinations take their shot with the intention of harming a specific political leader and by extension that leader's party. The impact on the political party however is not uniform. It depends on several factors, including the characteristics of the political party and the success of the assassination attempt. When the attempt on John F. Kennedy's life on November 22, 1963, was successful, it changed the approach that the Democratic Party could take with regards to future legislation (Joseph, 2018). In fact, it united the nation enough that it allowed Lyndon B. Johnson to advocate for monumental changes to civil and voting rights (Joseph, 2018).

If John F. Kennedy's death paved the way for Lydon B. Johnson to advocate for progressive policies ahead of their time, could the strategies that political parties adopt in connection to an assassination change the reaction that the public has towards those parties? Importantly, how do the strategies that political parties adopt in the event of such attacks vary based on their political characteristics? This paper deals with the latter question, to better understand the leeway that political parties have for their reactions, by identifying the characteristics of political parties and matching those up with the reactions that parties have to assassinations.

Among the limited scholarly work that discusses political assassination attempts, the profiles of perpetrators and targets are highlighted, as is the rationale behind attempted assassinations (Frey 2007). Missing from the narrative are discussions of failed political assassination and the strategies that political parties employ to guide the support of the public in their direction. While some scholars have noted potential impacts to stability in countries and trust in institutions, research on public opinion has only captured reactions to successful assassinations (Spragens 1980; Rudolph 1993). The present study will fill that gap by highlighting the impact of

both failed and successful assassinations on the strategies that dynastic, non-dynastic, personalized, and programmatic parties employ.

In addition to the scholarly contribution that this study will make, it has important policy implications as well. Generally, the link between party strategy and assassination attempts could provide important insights into the kinds of events that motivate higher turnout at polling booths. Specifically, campaigns could be more structured around the cult of personality of a targeted leader than on current policy issues. Therefore, the research would reveal important political strategies and their efficacy.

The following paper will first examine the literature on electoral violence more generally, then it will look specifically at assassinations and showcase the types of leaders who are targeted in assassinations and attempted assassinations and explore the consequences of attempted and successful assassinations on stability and voting behavior. Finally, I will assess how political parties handle electoral violence. The next section presents the theory on the strategies that political parties are likely to adopt based on their political characteristics. I then discuss my research design, which involves a quantitative overview of political assassinations in South Asia followed by case studies into the four different categories of political parties that I present. The leaders that I will be studying in-depth are from three different geographical areas in South Asia. Specifically, Rajiv Gandhi and Harchand Singh Longowal from India, Imran Khan from Pakistan, and Abdul Gani Lone from Kashmir. Finally, I discuss avenues for future research.

Literature Review

The relevant literature on political assassinations combines two different bodies of work. The first, is work that falls under the field of political violence, in the category of assassinations.

The second, is literature on political parties which describes the internal structure and decision-making of such organizations. Before offering my own theory on the strategies that political parties employ after assassinations, I will be reviewing work at the intersection of the two bodies of literature.

The following section will first examine the literature on assassinations generally, showcasing the types of leaders who are targeted in political assassinations and attempted assassinations, and exploring the consequences of attempted and successful political assassinations on stability and voting behavior. A sizeable subfield within political violence has only focused on case-specific descriptions of past attacks (Cohen 1979; Raviv et al. 2002), I will also be reviewing some of these articles for a holistic representation of the state of the literature.

After assessing the effects of political assassinations, I will study the literature on political parties. First, I will refer to typologies of types of political parties to understand differences in incentive structures among different kinds of parties. Then, I will more closely study the strategies that political parties employ to gain insight into their decision-making capacity. Finally, I will assess how political parties react to violence more generally and offer a more detailed description of the interactions between political parties and assassinations more specifically.

Political Assassinations

In this section, I will detail the reasons why leaders become targets of political assassinations. These reasons range from leadership style to their hold on power in their country's governing structure, and because it may suit the agendas of terrorist groups. After outlining reasons for targeting certain individuals, I will detail the main consequences of political assassinations, which are the effects on political institutions. These effects range from civil war and public unrest to decreased support for political parties based on the strategies they employ after the assassination.

Some authors have noted broader effects on the social fabric of society. Others still have found that in some instances, regime type changes from autocracies to democracies may follow political assassinations.

Who Are the Targeted Leaders?

In their paper describing the main characteristics of leaders who are targeted in political assassinations, Yammarino, Mumford, Serban, and Shirreffs (2013) discuss the differences in the frequency of successful assassinations based on power orientation and outstanding leadership. They find that socialized, pragmatic and ideological leaders were the most frequent victims of assassinations, but personalized, pragmatic, and ideological leaders were the most frequent targets of assassination attempts (Yammarino et al 2013). Since the findings of the authors appear contradictory, the study requires more analysis on the reason behind this discrepancy between attempted and successful murders of different personality types. Chin, Escribà-Folch, Song, and Wright (2022) build on this analysis of characterizing the targets of political assassinations. They theorize that dictators who reach high levels of personalism are the targets of their, then marginalized, rivals who rely on assassination as a regime change tool (Chin et al 2022).

Reframing political assassinations in her book “Targets of Terror: Contemporary Assassination,” Laura N. Bell (2021) discusses these attacks as a terrorism tactic. She argues that while assassinations of heads of states may be rare events, lower-level politicians such as local government officials and police personnel are more common targets as part of larger terrorist strategies (Bell 2021). Therefore, as she argues, more research should focus on discerning the patterns of such attacks so that they may be preempted.

Absent from the discussion of targeted leaders, is a conversation on how the targeting of the leader in turn affects their supporters. Specifically, if an assassination is successful, and

followers lose a politician who served as a charismatic leader or a ruthless dictator, how does that affect followers' immediate reactions and their political participation? Importantly, how does this behavior compare to instances in which a beloved leader is targeted but not killed?

Consequences of Political Assassinations

In noting the impact of these attacks, Perliger (2015, 89) finds that political assassinations increase the potential for fragmentation and undermine a country's democracy. Iqbal and Zorn (2008), in their work on the political consequences of assassinations, examine the levels of unrest, instability, and civil war in states that experience the assassination of their heads of state. Furthermore, they find that in cases where a country has an informal and unregulated process of leadership succession, the assassinations' effects are greatest (Iqbal and Zorn 2008, 390). Similarly, in an article about terrorist assassinations and their effect on political institutions, Bell (2019) finds that the most repressive regimes are the most likely to experience political institutional shifts after assassinations. Hoffman and Ware (2022), in their piece on the raising threat of assassinations, note that political assassinations tear the social fabric of society by forcing politicians into taking a delicate middle-ground approach of condemning violence while maintaining their political stance. Jones and Olken (2009), in their assessment of the effects of political assassinations on institutions and war, found that successful assassinations of autocrats produce sustained moves toward democracy.

Within democracies, Krakowski, Morales and Sandu's (2022) analysis of public opinion from Poland reveals how violence is not the only factor which may affect the perceptions of the electorate. The authors find decreased support for the victim's political party because of the negative campaigning strategy that the party used against the government in power at the time (Krakowski, Morales, and Sandu 2022). Such work in connection with political assassinations, is

relatively recent. As such, there is a lot of room to build on the best strategies for political parties to employ after assassinations.

Political Parties

The main stakeholder that I am using to analyze political assassinations in this study, is the political party that the targeted leader belongs to. As such, it is important to establish the pre-existing work on the different types of political parties, the strategies that they employ, and their reactions to violent crimes. Within the category of violent crimes, I will pay particular attention to literature that has been produced on political parties and assassinations.

Types of Political Parties

There are several types of political parties that have been highlighted as distinct for important reasons in political science. The first type of political party that is important for the current study, is personalized political parties. In his paper on the different types of parties that he observes in the age of personalized politics, Gideon Rahat (2022) outlines three organizational patterns in the types of political parties that he finds. These types include “(1) personalized-centralized parties that are all or largely about their leaders, (2) collegial parties that are based mainly on collective decision making and authority, and (3) personalized-decentralized parties that are mostly a collection of autonomous individuals” (Rahat, 2022). The two subtypes that are most relevant for this study fall under the first organizational structure. The personalized-centralized parties could be extremely centered around a leader who is the founder and owner of the party, or a leader of a personalized-centralized party could be considered dominant because they hold the top position of power and gain legitimacy from their position (Rahat, 2022). Other scholarship on personalization emphasizes the importance of understanding that “personalization comes at the

cost of party politics” (Pedersen and Rahat, 2019). Finally, recent work on behavioral personalization is identifying the extent to which voters align with a leader over a party. Stephen Quinlan and Ian McAllister (2021) find that while the number of voters who align with their favorite leader is significant, more voters align with their favorite party.

In defining the different party models, older work on party organization and democracy has found that the cartel party is a new model of organization (Katz and Mair, 1995). In such a model, “colluding parties become agents of the state and employ the resources of the state (the party state) to ensure their own collective survival,” (Katz and Mair, 1995). Another common type of political party that scholars have identified is dynastic. Dynastic parties have been accused on making political systems less representative as they keep power restricted within an influential family (Chhibber, 2011). Despite this trait, such parties have survived because of an absence of party organization, independent civil society associations, and centralized financing for elections (Chhibber, 2011). Other work on political dynasties has analyzed internal party dynamics to understand why party elites maintain control over time (Amudsen, 2013). Such work looks to the process of electing leaders, formulation of policies and coalition making to determine the level of intra-party democracy (Amudsen, 2013).

The final type of political party that I will be discussing is programmatic. Programmatic orientation of political parties has been identified by scholars as a criterion for classifying political parties as opposed to a party classification in and of itself (Gunther and Diamond, 2003). However, these are generally ideologically driven parties (Gunther and Diamond, 2003). Scholars have recognized the importance of programmatic appeals and have attempted to compare politicians’ use of programmatic appeals to attract voters, as compared to other kinds of appeals (Freeze and Kitschelt, 2010).

Party Strategy

In her work on party behavior, Zoe Lefkofridi (2019), finds that parties are often caught in a dilemma between responsibility and responsiveness in constructing their party's political strategy. According to Lefkofridi (2019), domestic institutional factors such as electoral rules and leadership autonomy also shape the party's reactions, which in most cases leans towards avoiding responsibility. Accounting for the number of competing parties, Kenneth Greene (2002) finds that the dominant party tends to have a monopoly over resources which pushes other challengers to rely on activist-based strategies. These activists are rather radical in comparison to the average voter and two-party competition results in a center-fleeing strategy by the challenger whereas three-party competition results in center-seeking strategies by both challengers (Greene 2002).

In addition to understanding the political arena, scholars have tried to identify the factors that push parties to change their ideology. In their paper on changes in party ideology, Adams, Clark, Ezrow, and Glasgow (2004) discuss the influence of shifts in public opinion and past election results on party ideology. They find that while parties respond to public shifts away from the party's policy positions, their ideology is not affected by past election results (Adams, Clark, Ezrow, and Glasgow, 2004).

Political Parties and their Reactions to Violence

To understand how political parties decide their strategies when it comes to violence, Christophe Chowanietz conducted a statistical analysis on 181 terrorist events in five countries. The analysis found that opposition parties tend to rally around the flag and that the decision to rally is affected by the frequency of attacks, the magnitude of the act, and the identity of the perpetrators (Chowanietz, 2010).

Aside from assessing the reactions that political parties have to violence in general, political scientists have conducted research at the intersection of electoral politics and violence. Thad Dunning (2011) explains that the distribution of popular support for contending parties can shape where the violence takes place, the type of violence in question, and incentives to bring violent conflicts to an end. In an examination of the relationship between the organizational strength of political parties and the risk of electoral violence, Fjelde (2020) finds that stronger party organizations are associated with reduced risk of violent electoral conflict. Unfortunately, not all contexts have such parties, which makes electoral violence more prevalent. A study by Sandra Ley finds that such strategic use of violence by organized crime groups demobilizes voters (Ley 2017).

In addition to handling violence in other forms, political parties have interacted with assassinations and attempted assassinations as a prevalent form of violence. According to O'Brien (2007), instead of performing a passive role of the helpless victim, political parties have also been involved in using assassinations as a tool of state policy. The author uses the case of South Africa and the last 15 years of apartheid to highlight instances in which the state has used assassinations as a tool of violence and control (O'Brien. 2007).

Theoretical Framework

To contribute to the existing literature on political parties and assassination, in this section I lay out the theoretical framework for my own argument. I offer a theory on the interaction between the characteristics of political parties, failed and successful assassination attempts, and the strategies that political parties adopt in reacting to assassination attempts. There are two main characteristics of political parties that I am interested in assessing. The first characteristic is

concerned with the succession of political parties, specifically how dynastic parties compare to non-dynastic ones in responding to assassination attempts. The second characteristic is concerned with the party's structure and defining how programmatic parties compare to personalized ones.

For the purposes of this paper, I define dynastic somewhat narrowly to refer to family ties in just the highest rung of political parties. As Pradeep Chhibber (2011) mentioned in his paper on dynastic political parties in India, I am interested in cases where “the top leadership comes from within a family.” I am specifically looking at national and state level representation for the highest office that the political party is contesting for i.e., the office of the Prime Minister, President, or in some cases Member of the National Assembly. I am not looking to define dynastic in reference to local level elections or family legacies in lower rungs of a political party. In considering the structure of these political parties, it is important to note that these party structures are not set in stone. There may be instances where a family is not officially leading a party, but members of a family are nonetheless calling the shots and remain important to the legacy and legitimacy of the party. Such cases would still be deemed dynastic for the purposes of this paper.

The second characteristic of political parties that I am interested in assessing, is how personalized as opposed to programmatic parties react to such attacks. For this paper, I define personalized political parties as parties which are centered around and gain their legitimacy from one prominent individual. On the other hand, programmatic political parties are defined as parties that rely more heavily on a concrete and well-developed agenda that they are fighting for at the national level. According to this criteria, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) which is centered around Imran Khan would be labeled a personalized political party whereas the Shiromani Akali Dal party in India, which is a center-right Sikh-centric political party in Punjab, India, would be labeled a programmatic political party. Under this definition, many smaller separatist, insurgent, and

religious parties would qualify as programmatic over personalized if they are perceived by the public as parties with a set agenda, which is more important to the voter than the leader who is carrying out that agenda. Both characteristics of political parties are considered keeping in mind the time of the assassination or attempted assassination of the political leader in question.

The reason that I consider these two characteristics of political parties over others, is that the succession and the structure of a political party is likely to encompass a lot of the features of parties that define their decision making after political assassinations. For instance, the question of succession, along with catering to the aspect of dynastic order also touches on the party's hierarchy and the degree to which a party is established in the broader political context of the country. Similarly, the structure of a political party deals with the reliance of party members on a particular leader but it also encompasses the question of ideology and by extension the kind of voter base that the party relies on. Both characteristics also define the campaigning strategies that parties are likely to assume which goes hand in hand with their strategies after an assassination, depending on the timing of the attack.

In this paper, political assassinations are considered a conceptually distinct category from other tragedies such as a leader's natural death or dramatic political events that would affect a party's political strategy. This is because of the unique combination of sympathy that comes from targeting that does not come from natural causes of death or from political instability which would in theory affect any/all parties. Furthermore, the political motivation behind assassinations usually means that, in the eyes of the public, the politician has been injured or murdered in the line of duty which is an important consideration for gaining the kind of sympathy that can materialize in votes. The logic here, is that voters will deem the politician committed to their ideology if they are willing to be injured/murdered for it, as such their party gains more credibility, and they gain more votes.

A quote from Sirimavo Bandaranaike after her husband's assassination, highlights the uniqueness of political assassinations in the eyes of the public: "With the victory of reaction achieved by the assassination, it is necessary for my party and me to carry forward into the future ideals and the goals for which my late husband laid down his life," (Barrow, 2014).

In addition to looking at the characteristics of political parties after political assassinations, I am also interested in variation in failed and successful assassinations. To define political assassinations, I borrow from Arie Perliger's (2015, 21) paper on *The Rationale of Political Assassinations*, he defines such attacks as "an action that directly or indirectly leads to the death of an intentionally targeted individual who is active in the political sphere, in order to promote or prevent specific policies, values, practices, or norms pertaining to the collective."

There are several outcome variables that I look to in order to establish the reactions of political parties. First, is whether the response by the political party is aggressive or non-aggressive. An aggressive response involves actions such as blaming the opposing political party and conducting mass strikes and protests. An example of an aggressive response would be that of Sheikh Hasina to an assassination attempt against her in 2004. At the time, Sheikh Hasina blamed the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) for the attack (Reuters, 2018). The leader of BNP, Khaleda Zia, was in power at the time. The deputy attorney general, Motahar Hossain who was fighting the case for Sheikh Hasina said that he would ask for the death penalty as punishment for the perpetrators in the case of a guilty verdict (Reuters, 2018).

A non-aggressive response on the other hand involves declaring a National Day of Mourning, conducting press conferences, and giving speeches in the national assembly regarding the attack and the political future of the nation. Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination in 1951 was followed by a non-aggressive reaction in which the party and the government declared forty days

of mourning and announced that all government offices would remain closed for two days (Trumbull, 1951). Furthermore, there were many discussions in the national assembly regarding the future governance of the country (Trumbull, 1951).

The second outcome that I am interested in investigating, is whether the political party offered a united or divided response. A united response is reflected in a consistent response across prominent party members. The response of the Pakistan People's Party to Benazir Bhutto's assassination indicates a united response where prominent members of the party put their confidence in Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's widower, to lead the party into governance (Haider, 2008). On the other hand, a divided response presents as a disconnected reaction within the political party. Furthermore, the assassination may cause fissures or divisions between the political party. An example of a divided response would resemble that of the Akali Dal party after the death of Harchand Singh Longowal, in this case prominent members of the political party had an internal schism over collaborating with Rajiv Gandhi's government (Mahajan, 2023).

The third outcome that I am interested in investigating is whether the party had a public facing response to the assassination or a more institutionally focused one. A public facing response would present as a lot of media presence and coverage by the party and its members on the assassination specifically. An example of such a reaction would be the Indian National Congress' reaction to Indira Gandhi's assassination (Dutta, 2018). The media coverage after the assassination was extensive and the party members took advantage of the situation to discuss the assassination in detail (Dutta, 2018). On the other hand, an institutionally focused response would involve a legal process that could include a court case or criminal investigation into the attacker. An example of an institutionally focused approach following an assassination would be that of Tehreek-e-Jafaria's after the attack on Allama Hassan Turabi. The party was assured that evidence was being

collected by investigators and that an inquiry committee had been established (Masood, 2006). In fact, the country's interior minister at the time, Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao spoke on the issue stating that it was hard to curb terrorist attacks (Masood, 2006). The party decided not to engage in excessive media coverage over the incident (Masood, 2006).

The reactions of the political parties that I am recording with regards to the outcomes are observed in the three months following the attack. This period is chosen because important leadership decisions and party strategy with regards to the assassination will likely be decided within three months of the attack. However, if I was to observe a longer period, it would be harder to isolate the assassination as the cause of the outcomes. The expected outcomes, based on the characteristics of the political party and the success of the assassination attempt are displayed in the table below:

	Dynastic	Non-Dynastic
Personalized	Aggressive, Remain United, and Public-facing Approach	Aggressive, Divided (if assassinated), and Public-facing Approach
Programmatic	Nonaggressive, Remain United, and Institutionally Focused	Nonaggressive, Divided (if assassinated), and Institutionally Focused

Table 1: Expected party strategy based on the political characteristics of the party, and the success of the assassination attempt.

Dynastic and Personalized

In the case of a dynastic and personalized political party, the expected outcome in terms of the party's strategy would be an aggressive one, where the party remains united, and adopts a public-facing approach. The justification for this prediction is that in the case of personalized political parties, the individual who is heading the party is important to the party's image and

legacy. Furthermore, they have a special appeal with the public. As such, the party would benefit from having an aggressive reaction to the attack (regardless of whether it was a failed or successful assassination attempt) since they would be able to derive support from the public by making the assassination a big deal. The same logic applies to adopting a public facing approach as opposed to an institutionally focused one, since the individuals gain more political clout from a media frenzy around the attack. However, since this is a dynastic party, the family may have a vested interest in finding the attacker because of their personal relationship to the leader. Therefore, there will be some cases where an institutionally focused approach is preferred or is simultaneously adopted alongside a public facing one. Finally, since the party is dynastic there tends to be a clear line of succession in the event of a successful attack. As such a united response is predicted, over a divided one.

Dynastic and Programmatic

In the case of dynastic and programmatic political parties, the expected outcome is that the political party's strategy will be non-aggressive, and institutionally focused as compared to the personalized model. However, as with the previous model, the party is expected to remain united even after the attack. These predictions are justified because a programmatic political party will want to focus on the agenda that it is furthering as opposed to the importance that any one individual has for the political party. Similarly, an institutionally focused approached will be preferred over a public facing one because the party does not stand to gain as much from the media frenzy as perhaps from criticizing ineffective institutions in the country and vowing to change them under their leadership. Finally, since this model also includes a dynastic political party, the

members of the party are expected to remain united even after the attack since succession and leadership are clearly defined.

Non-dynastic and Personalized

A non-dynastic and personalized combination of political party characteristics, is likely to produce an aggressive, divided (in the event of a successful assassination), and public facing party response to the attack. Since the political party is non-dynastic, there is no clear successor who would lead the party if the current leader was murdered. As such, I predict division within the party on deciding the future leadership. However, since the party is also personalized, it benefits from publicizing the impact that the leader's death has had on the members of the party individually and the organization more holistically, so that they can gain sympathy from the public. Similarly, the party will choose a public-facing approach after the attack on their leader because while they may not be personally invested on solving the crime (i.e., identifying the perpetrators and ensuring that they are sentenced), they benefit from media frenzy around the attack because the longer the attack is in the news cycle the longer the party benefits from the image of the main leader who the public is most familiar with.

Non-dynastic and Programmatic

A non-dynastic and programmatic combination of political party characteristics, is likely to produce a non-aggressive, divided (in the event of a successful assassination), and institutionally focused response to the attack. Since the political party is non-dynastic, there is no clear successor who would lead the party if the current leader was murdered. As such, I predict division within the party on deciding the future leadership. However, unlike the previous category in this case the

party is programmatic which means that it is more reliant on ideology than it is on any one leader for its survival. The party will therefore adopt a non-aggressive reaction to the attack, which means that while it will observe a National Day of Mourning and conduct speeches in the national assembly with regards to the attack, it will not get dragged into blaming other political parties for the attack. In this way the party can keep the focus of the public on its ideology as opposed to an individual leader. Furthermore, in line with the strategy of centering their ideology, the party will adopt an institutionally focused approach to dealing with the attack on their leader as opposed to a public facing approach. The institutionally focused approach is more beneficial for the party as they will be able to interact with the different branches of the state, they can point to any inefficiencies in dealing with the investigation through official channels, thereby keeping the focus on policy and ideology where their party is stronger in comparison to others.

Research Design

The research design for this paper is divided into two parts, the first includes a quantitative overview that looks to the general trajectory of political party strategy in response to external stimuli in the form of the political assassination attempts. The second part of the research design follows the cases of a few South Asian political parties with different characteristics and variation in failed and successful assassination attempts. The design is useful in determining not just whether there is variation in the strategies that political parties assume but understanding how the specific circumstances of each case defined the reactions of the parties in question.

Quantitative Representation

In constructing my dataset, I combined data from two pre-existing datasets recording political assassinations globally. The first dataset was compiled by Arie Perliger (2015), who is the author of *The Rationale of Political Assassinations*; it includes 758 attacks. The second dataset was compiled by Benjamin F. Jones and Benjamin A. Olken (2009), as part of their piece *Hit or Miss? The Effects of Assassinations on Institutions and War*, which includes 298 assassinations attacks.

I merged the two datasets, then I restricted the region to South Asia. After this I removed instances where the target of the attack was not a head of state or the head of a political party. In this step, I removed any cases of attacks on individuals who were foreign dignitaries, or individuals who were not at the highest rung of government, such as ministers. Importantly, former heads of state are included in the dataset as they tend to maintain their positions as heads of political parties and their leadership is important to the overall strategy of the party. Finally, I excluded cases of military dictators and independent candidates since they do not have political parties who are affected by their leadership.

The attacks in the dataset include both successful and unsuccessful assassination attempts to assess the response of political parties under both scenarios. Furthermore, the range of cases starts from 1948, since that is the year that the remaining South Asian countries gained independence from the colonial powers that were previously intertwined in their governmental structures. To set an end point for the inclusion of cases, the range ends on April 1st of the current year, 2023.

Overview of Political Assassinations in South Asia

The analysis includes 40 cases of political assassinations or attempted assassinations across South Asia. The list is not an exhaustive list of all leaders who have been attacked in the region. Furthermore, the data shared in this section is not meant to prove the theory, instead it is meant to provide a general understanding of the characteristics and reactions of political parties in South Asia. The breakdown of the cases by country is presented in Table 2 below. The analysis includes 26 different political parties and 36 different political leaders. A complete list of the cases included in the analysis is attached in Appendix A.

Country Name	Number of Cases
Afghanistan	3
Bangladesh	2
India	11
Kashmir	1
Maldives	1
Pakistan	10
Sri Lanka	12

Table 2: Breakdown of the number of attacks included in the analysis, by country.

Of the attacks, only 12 were unsuccessful. The cases that are included are broken down according to the characteristics of the political party that each case pertains to, as displayed in Table 3. The political structure of the party is programmatic for 22 cases and personalized in 18 cases. The succession of the political parties is non-dynastic in 26 cases and dynastic in the remaining 14 cases. Of the combinations of political characteristics, programmatic and dynastic parties are the least frequent whereas programmatic and non-dynastic parties are the most common.

Political Party Succession	Political Party Structure		Total
	<i>Programmatic</i>	<i>Personalized</i>	
<i>Non-Dynastic</i>	19	7	26
<i>Dynastic</i>	3	11	14
Total	22	18	40

Table 3: Breakdown of the attacks based on the political characteristics of parties.

The reactions of political parties to assassinations have been recorded in Tables 4-6 below. The first table, Table 4 displays whether political parties' reactions were united or divided based on their political characteristics, specifically the party's succession and the party's structure. As shown in the data, united responses to political assassinations were much more common than divided ones. Of the 40 cases, 34 had united responses where prominent party members offered the same reaction to the assassination and chose to stay together after the attack. On the other hand, only 6 parties exhibited a divided response which presented either as a disconnected reaction within the political party and a split resulting in the creation of off-shoot parties.

	Reaction of the Political Parties to the Assassinations (United or Divided)		
	Divided Response	United Response	Total
Party Succession (Non-dynastic)			
<i>Party Structure (Programmatic)</i>	4	15	19
<i>Party Structure (Personalized)</i>	2	5	7
Total	6	20	26
Party Succession (Dynastic)			
<i>Party Structure (Programmatic)</i>	0	3	3
<i>Party Structure (Personalized)</i>	0	11	11
Total	0	14	14
Overall	b		

<i>Political Party (Programmatic)</i>	4	18	22
<i>Political Party (Personalized)</i>	2	16	18
Total	6	34	40

Table 4: The reaction of political parties to assassinations (united or divided) based on the parties' succession and parties' structure.

The second reaction that political parties display, which is recorded in Table 5, is with regards to a public facing or institutionally focused approach to talking about and resolving the incident of the assassination specifically. Of the 40 cases, 23 adopted a public facing approach which means that the assassination was talked about a lot by prominent members of the political party in the media. On the other hand, in 17 cases, political parties adopted an institutionally focused approach which means that they preferred to rely on law enforcement agencies to find the perpetrators of the crime.

	Reaction of the Political Parties to Assassinations (Public Facing or Institutionally Focused)		
Party Succession (Non-dynastic)	Institutionally Focused Response	Public Facing Response	Total
<i>Party Structure (Programmatic)</i>	11	8	19
<i>Party Structure (Personalized)</i>	2	5	7
Total	13	13	26
Party Succession (Dynastic)			
<i>Party Structure (Programmatic)</i>	3	0	3
<i>Party Structure (Personalized)</i>	1	10	11
Total	4	10	14
Overall			
<i>Political Party (Programmatic)</i>	14	18	22
<i>Political Party (Personalized)</i>	3	15	18

Total	17	23	40
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Table 5: The reaction of political parties to assassinations (public facing or institutionally focused) based on the parties' succession and parties' structure.

The third and final reaction of political parties, which is recorded in Table 6, is with regards to an aggressive or non-aggressive response to the assassination. This reaction is split down the middle, where in 20 cases political parties exhibited a non-aggressive response which means that they declared a National Day of Mourning, conducted some press conferences, and gave speeches in the national assembly about the attack and the political future of the nation. The same number of cases, 20, show an aggressive response which involves actions such as blaming the opposing political party and conducting mass strikes and protests after the attack.

	Reaction of the Political Parties to Assassinations (Aggressive or Non-aggressive)		
	Non-aggressive Response	Aggressive Response	Total
Party Succession (Non-dynastic)			
<i>Party Structure (Programmatic)</i>	13	6	19
<i>Party Structure (Personalized)</i>	2	5	7
Total	15	11	26
Party Succession (Dynastic)			
<i>Party Structure (Programmatic)</i>	3	0	3
<i>Party Structure (Personalized)</i>	2	9	11
Total	5	9	14
Overall			
<i>Political Party (Programmatic)</i>	16	6	22
<i>Political Party (Personalized)</i>	4	14	18
Total	20	20	40

Table 6: The reaction of political parties to assassinations (aggressive or non-aggressive) based on the parties' succession and parties' structure.

General Analysis

The displayed reactions of political parties are not surprising with regards to the first outcome, which is whether the reaction was united or divided. In this case, it is understandable that most political parties would have a united response to assassinations since splitting off from an affected party may make them less likeable in the eyes of the public. Furthermore, parties benefit from the immediate sympathy that a political assassination grants them because they have had to sacrifice for the political trajectory of the nation. If politicians were to split off after such an attack, they would not benefit from that same sympathy that the original political party would garner. As such, the politically expedient choice would be to remain united after an attack.

For the second outcome, I would expect the results to indicate a higher frequency of public facing reactions as opposed to institutionally focused ones than the current findings show. A public facing reaction buys political parties more screentime in news cycles and more sympathy from the public than an institutionally focused one. However, parties may not always be able to choose an institutionally focused reaction if they are not in control of the government at the time of the assassination. The law enforcement and judiciary in the country may not be entirely independent from the political party that is in control of the government at the time of the attack. As such, an institutionally focused approach may not actually result in just findings about the attack against the targeted politician.

The third outcome which is about whether a political party is aggressive or non-aggressive displays a perfect split between the two options. However, a further breakdown according to party characteristics in this case is very telling because dynastic political parties are more likely to have an aggressive reaction as opposed to a non-aggressive reaction when compared with non-dynastic political parties. The higher frequency of aggressive reactions among dynastic parties may be

explained by the fact that dynastic political parties are better established. Being well-established grants dynastic parties more political capital to take riskier decisions such as blaming other political parties for attacks against their leaders. Smaller, non-dynastic parties do not have that option as such they tend to choose non-aggressive reactions more frequently than aggressive ones.

Comparison with Predicted Outcomes

The main theoretical framework that I offer for the argument contends that the succession patterns and structure of political parties defines their reactions to political assassinations. For each combination of political characteristics, I predicted outcomes above. In this subsection I compare my predictions to the findings for the four combinations of political characteristics. The first combination, shown in Table 7, is that of dynastic and personalized political parties. The predicted outcomes were aggressive, united, and public facing reactions. As shown in the table below, all three of the predictions are accurate.

Dynastic and Personalized		
Predicted Outcomes: aggressive, united, and public facing		
<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Non-Aggressive</i>	<i>Total</i>
9	2	11
<i>United</i>	<i>Divided</i>	<i>Total</i>
11	0	11
<i>Public facing</i>	<i>Institutionally focused</i>	<i>Total</i>
10	1	11

Table 7: The comparison of predicted outcomes with the outcomes recorded in the 11 cases that qualified as dynastic and personalized.

The second combination of political characteristics, shown in Table 8, was non-dynastic and personalized. In this case, the prediction was an aggressive and public facing reaction which would be divided if the leader was assassinated during the attack. While the predictions of an aggressive and public facing reaction were accurate, the prediction of a divided reaction was not. This is likely because as discussed in the general analysis above, a united reaction is more likely to be politically expedient.

Non-Dynastic and Personalized		
Predicted Outcomes: aggressive, divided (if assassinated), and public facing		
<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Non-Aggressive</i>	<i>Total</i>
5	2	7
<i>United</i>	<i>Divided</i>	<i>Total</i>
5	2	7
<i>Public facing</i>	<i>Institutionally focused</i>	<i>Total</i>
5	2	7

Table 8: The comparison of predicted outcomes with the outcomes recorded in the 7 cases that qualified as non-dynastic and personalized.

The third combination of political characteristics for parties, which is shown in Table 9 below, is dynastic and programmatic political parties. The predicted outcomes for such parties were non-aggressive, united, and institutionally focused. As displayed below, the predictions are accurate for all three of the outcomes for the three cases that qualify under this category.

Dynastic and Programmatic

Predicted Outcomes: non-aggressive, united, and institutionally focused		
<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Non-Aggressive</i>	<i>Total</i>
0	3	3
<i>United</i>	<i>Divided</i>	<i>Total</i>
3	0	3
<i>Public facing</i>	<i>Institutionally focused</i>	<i>Total</i>
0	3	3

Table 9: The comparison of predicted outcomes with the outcomes recorded in the 3 cases that qualified as dynastic and programmatic.

Finally, the last combination of political characteristics is non-dynastic and programmatic as displayed below in Table 10. The predictions for this combination hold the most weight as the greatest number of cases qualify for this combination. The reactions of political parties are non-aggressive and institutionally focused for more cases than not, as predicted. However, the responses are united as opposed to divided in most cases in this category. This is likely due to the same reasoning as offered above about united responses being more politically expedient for politicians.

Non-Dynastic and Programmatic		
Predicted Outcomes: non-aggressive, divided (if assassinated), and institutionally focused		
<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Non-Aggressive</i>	<i>Total</i>
6	13	19
<i>United</i>	<i>Divided</i>	<i>Total</i>
15	4	19
<i>Public facing</i>	<i>Institutionally focused</i>	<i>Total</i>

8	11	19
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Table 10: The comparison of predicted outcomes with the outcomes recorded in the 19 cases that qualified as non-dynastic and programmatic.

Case Studies

For this study, I focus on four cases from South Asian countries that typify the categories of party characteristics offered in the theory section. These cases include individual leaders who were assassinated or targeted from India, Kashmir, and Pakistan. In discussing the cases I discuss the circumstances surrounding the attack, the political strategies the respective parties employed after successful and unsuccessful attacks through their speeches and declarations, and characterizing the outcomes as aggressive or non-aggressive, united, or divided, and public facing or institutionally focused. Specifically, I examine the cases of Rajiv Gandhi from India as an example of an assassinated leader from a dynastic and personalized party, and Imran Khan from Pakistan as an example of a leader who was targeted and from a non-dynastic but personalized party. For understanding the reactions of leaders from programmatic parties, I discuss the case of Abdul Ghani Lone from the People’s Conference of Jammu and Kashmir for a dynastic example. Finally, I discuss the case of Harchand Singh Longowal from the Shiromani Akali Dal party as a example of a non-dynastic and programmatic political party.

	Dynastic	Non-dynastic
Personalized	Rajiv Gandhi	Imran Khan (not assassinated)
Programmatic	Abdul Ghani Lone	Harchand Singh Longowal

Table 11: The political characteristic combinations for the four cases studies.

Rajiv Gandhi and a Personalized Dynasty

The first case involves the assassination of the former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi on May 21, 1991, in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu (Crossette, 1991). He had been campaigning for the 1991 election when an explosion by a Tamil militant from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) took his life, and those of 14 others (Times of India, 2019). Even before the assassination, Rajiv Gandhi's Indian National Congress (INC) party was expected to win more seats than the Bhartiya Janta Party (BBC, 1991). The party did in fact emerge as the largest single party in the elections that were carried out in June, just a few weeks after the attack on Gandhi. However, the win was not monumental enough to afford the INC a clear majority in the lower house (Andersen, 1991).

At the time of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the political characteristics of the Indian National Congress indicate that it would qualify as a dynastic and personalized political party. The justification for qualifying the party as dynastic is that at the time of the assassination, the party was under the general leadership of the members of the Nehru/Gandhi family. The assumption of dynastic rule is further supported by the fact that the party's working committee unanimously voted for Sonia Gandhi to take over the presidency, even though she turned down the offer (Andersen 1991, 981). Nevertheless the de facto control and legitimacy of the INC still stemmed from the Nehru/Gandhi family, qualifying it as a dynastic party.

Similarly, the INC in the beginning of the 1990s, lacked an agenda that defined the party more so than the leadership that helped it gain prominence. The lack of an agenda in the 1990s contrasts with the strong nationalist movement that the party was leading at the time of India's independence in the late 1940s. Over the years, as the political family behind the INC gained experience and recognition and India's footing at the international stage was solidified, the narrative of the nationalist struggle lost its appeal. The clearest indication of the lack of a

programmatic agenda for the INC in the 1990s, is in its comparison to the other political parties that it was contesting elections against at the time. The Janata Dal and Bharatiya Janata parties were operating on conservative agendas at the time (with the latter assuming Hindu Nationalist undertones) and the two Communist parties defined themselves by their leftist economic and social principles (Crossette 1989). The Congress on the other hand has been categorized as a center-left party with secularism and economic reform on its agenda. However, such a program was not radical enough to stand out as the defining factor for the party's recognition in comparison to the leadership of the party which was well recognized and trusted by the public with the legacy that it had established over the years. Furthermore, reports indicate that Rajiv Gandhi held on to power within his own party, he was "unwilling to let strong competitors rise in his own organization... All party decisions were made in New Delhi, and party organizations around the country weakened," (Ceossette, 1991). As such, I would characterize the Congress as personalized around Rajiv Gandhi as opposed to programmatic at the time of the attack.

Based on these characteristics of the political party, the outcomes that I would expect according to my theory would produce an aggressive, and public facing but united response to the assassination. The immediate public reaction to the assassination involved riots throughout the Indian state of Tamil Nadu where Gandhi was attacked (Ahmad, 2015). However, the reaction that I am measuring in the outcome is one associated with the political party. Even in that case, Sonia Gandhi adopted an aggressive stance against the incumbent government of Chandra Shekhar (Ahmad, 2015). In her testimony for the Jain Commission, she went on record to state that the lack of security for her husband was 'virtually an open invitation to liquidate him... The dilution of security was politically motivated, carried out with the intention of increasing his threat perception of reducing his level of mass contact' (Ahmad, 2015). Since this response involves an accusation

levied at an opposition party by a member of a dynastic political family, it would indicate an aggressive as opposed to non-aggressive reaction to the assassination.

Since the assassination attempt on Rajiv Gandhi was successful, the party had to assign the presidency to someone else. Since the party was dynastic at the time of the attack, the predicted outcome is that the response by the party with regards to succession would be united. Several factors point to this outcome, first was the unanimous vote by the party's working committee for Rajiv Gandhi's widow Sonia Gandhi to take the position. Then even when she refused the offer, the committee turned to P. V. Narasimha Rao who is a neutral figure and was acceptable to the various factions in the party (Fineman, 1991). Aside from the presidency, Rao was also chosen as the leader after the Congress Party assembled the government. Furthermore, while there was an attempt by Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar to challenge Rao, it was short-lived and Pawar withdrew his claim announcing, "We have forgotten our differences and elected our leader unanimously," (Fineman, 1991). Not only that, but Pawar was also integrated in the government as defense minister which indicates a united front (Andersen 1991, 982). Finally, once the rest of the government was formed key positions went to neutral figures who avoided factional fighting (Andersen 1991, 982).

Rajiv Gandhi's assassination sparked both a public facing response and an institutionally focused response. However, his party was more heavily focused on the public than it was on finding the perpetrators of the attack in the first three months of the assassination. There are several factors that indicate a more public facing response by the INC. The timing of the assassination, immediately prior to a national election, makes it so that the Congress party is forced to engage the public in the affairs of the party to gain their sympathy for their votes. Furthermore, several ritualistic practices such as the funeral demanded the party's attention. Thousands of Congress

workers and party members staged demonstrations and waved black flags outside the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) where the body was taken from the airport, Rajiv Gandhi's official residence, and at Teen Murti House to protest the assassination (Ahluwalia and Ahluwalia 1991, 70). During the funeral, several Congress workers and supporters chanted slogans of "Rajiv Gandhi amar rahe," (Ahluwalia and Ahluwalia 1991, 73). Furthermore, Congress leaders also entered the cremation site and made an appearance at the funeral, including Narasimha Rao (Ahluwalia and Ahluwalia 1991, 78).

On the other hand, the investigation was largely being handled by the Chandrasekhar government, which was in power at the time and created a special investigation team for the assassination under the CBI led by D. R. Karthikeyan (The Sankara Nethralaya Academy, 2022). The Congress party was not involved in the investigation until after it had formed the government. Even then, the commission that had formed only released its final report by June 1992. This report was initially rejected by the Narasimha Rao government and then its recommendations were ignored by the Congress government (India Today, 2013). Therefore, the party more heavily relied on a public facing approach as opposed to an institutionally focused one.

Other cases of assassinations that mirror this one and offer the same outcomes as are expected for a dynastic and personalized party according to the theory, include Benazir Bhutto's case from the Pakistan People's Party, Nawaz Sharif's case from the Pakistan Muslim League, and Abdus Samad Khan Achakzai's case from the Pakhtunkhwa National Awami Party.

Imran Khan and the Personalized Break Away from Dynastic Pakistani Politics

On November 3rd, 2022, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan was giving a speech in Wazirabad, Pakistan when he was shot in his lower leg (Saifi and Mogul 2022). Khan's supporters deemed the attack an assassination attempt (Saifi and Mogul 2022). This recent

shooting of the leader from the political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was just the latest in a long line of high-profile political attacks in the country (Reuters 2022). Imran Khan has also claimed that there was a second assassination attempt against him on March 18th, 2023, (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, March 2023).

Based on the political characteristics of the PTI at the time of the attack, it would be characterized as a non-dynastic but personalized political party. During the 2018 elections, Imran Khan was lauded for breaking the dynastic hold on Pakistani politics (Bloomberg, 2018). One of his main competitors at the time was Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz which is led by the Sharif brothers (Pakistan Muslim League N, 2020). Another prominent party that was contesting the same elections in Pakistan was the Pakistan People's Party which is led by the Bhutto family (Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians, 2023). Imran Khan on the other hand has not involved his family members in the top leadership of his party, instead he attracted many prominent politicians who were looking to change the electoral climate of the country to make it more inclusive.

Nevertheless, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf would be characterized as a personalized political party as it was founded by and is centered on the individual, Imran Khan. In the first election that his party contested in 2002, it won a single seat in Mianwali which Imran Khan was contesting himself (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, 2023). Even now, the agenda of the party is to fight against the stronghold that dynastic parties have maintained on the country's elected leadership, however the legitimacy of the party stems from the faith that the public has in Imran Khan himself. As such, the predicted outcomes in reaction to his assassination attempt based on the theory crafted earlier in the article, would be aggressive, and public facing. Since in this case, the assassination attempt was not successful there is no question of succession as such the question of a united as opposed to divided response in the party's new leadership does not arise.

After the assassination attempt on November 3rd, Imran Khan accused members of the establishment of orchestrating the plot to kill him (Saifi, 2022). In an interview with the CNN, which is available on the political party's active YouTube channel, Khan claims to have announced that he was aware of this plot on the 24th of September (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, 2022). The background and evidence that he offers for the accusation, is that Maryam Nawaz (a member of PML-N) and the Information Minister of Pakistan accused him of blasphemy (Tahir, 2022). According to Khan, the accusation of blasphemy was part of a larger set-up to pin the eventual assassination on a religious fanatic (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, 2022). These accusations clearly constitute blaming the opposing political party which is a characteristic of an aggressive response. Furthermore, the leader vowed to resume his protest march to Islamabad after recovering from his assassination attempt (Shahzad and Buhkari, 2022).

While Khan has called for an independent commission to be set up to investigate the attempt on his life through institutional channels, he is taking a more public facing approach in reaction to the attempt. This is evidenced by the heightened media production of interviews and events surrounding the assassination. The YouTube channel of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has video recordings of the leader's interviews with CNN as well as TRT World and interviews of other prominent members from the party such as Secretary General Asad Umar and President PTI Sindh Ali Zaidi (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, 2022). The party also produced original footage on the March attempt and the surgery that Imran Khan underwent after the first attempt on his life. (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, 2023). In addition to these videos, members of the party have taken to Instagram and Twitter to encourage the public to take to the streets to protest the attack.

As such the reaction of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has followed the predicted outcomes on account of both an aggressive and a public facing approach. However, the assassination was

not successful, thereby not triggering the question of succession of power. Similar cases to that of Imran Khan include the assassination of Deendayal Upadhyaya from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh party in India, the attempt on Juniu Richard Jayewardene from the United National Party in Sri Lanka, and the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani from the United National Front in Afghanistan.

Abdul Gani Lone and the Programmatic Dynasty

On May 22nd, 2002, Abdul Gani Lone, a moderate Kashmiri separatist leader was assassinated at Srinagar's well-known Martyrs Cemetery by two men who were dressed in police uniforms (Bearak, 2002). The killing was used as fodder for heightening tensions by both the Pakistani and Indian governments who were engaged in violent crossfire in the region (Bearak, 2002). Abdul Gani Lone was the founder and president of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference (JKPC) Party and a senior leader of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) (Chandran, 2002). The United States Secretary of State, Colin L. Powell released a statement at the time of Mr.Lone's death acknowledging Lone's role in furthering the vision of a peaceful and democratically represented Kashmir (Powell, 2002).

Based on the characteristics of his political party at the time of his death, Mr.Lone's party would be categorized as a dynastic but programmatic party. The dynastic element of the party is made obvious by the transition of power that followed Abdul Gani Lone's death. After his demise Sajad Gani Lone, his son, took on the leadership of the party as President (Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference, 2023). This indicates that the leadership of the party is being kept within the family. However, the party simultaneously had a very strong programmatic agenda, which is to further the Kashmiri identity through self-representation and democratic engagement (Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference, 2023).

The combination of dynastic and programmatic characteristics indicates that the response to the assassination should have been non-aggressive, institutionally focused and that the party would remain united after the assassination of its leader. As the assumption of leadership by Sajad Lone depicts, the transition of power was in fact peaceful and the party and its members maintained a united front against the attackers, recognizing the sacrifice that Lone made for the people of Kashmir (Rising Kashmir, 2022). Furthermore, no factions formed within the party after Abdul Gani Lone's death.

As far as the approach to the assassination case goes, Sajad Lone expressed his displeasure that his father's case was never solved and the perpetrators of the crime against his father were not caught (Khan, 2023). Despite the lack of law enforcement support, an institutionally focused response was clearly preferred by the party's leadership. In assigning blame, Sajad Lone made some accusations against Pakistan initially (Phadnis, 2014). However, these were withdrawn at a later point indicating a deliberate party strategy of a non-aggressive approach to the assassination (Phadnis, 2014).

As such, the reaction of the party eventually constituted the expected results, which were non-aggressive and institutionally focused but while putting up a united front. Other cases that resemble that of Abdul Gani Lone, are those of Vijaya Kumaratunga from the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, and Ranasinghe Premadasa from the United National Party in Sri Lanka.

Harchand Singh Longowal and a Non-dynastic Programmatic Party

Harchand Singh Longowal who was the Sikh leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal party, was assassinated on August 21, 1985, by Sikh gunmen (Roy, 1985). This attack came just days after Longowal signed an agreement with the central government that gave them more agency in New Delhi (Roy, 1985). The party is non-dynastic as the top leadership at the time was not linked to

any one family. Furthermore, the party had a strong programmatic agenda of Sikh representation. Given these political characteristics, the predicted reaction to the assassination of Longowal should be divided across different party members, non-aggressive, and institutionally focused.

After the assassination the party was taken over by, the relatively moderate, Surjit Singh Barnala who became Chief Minister instead of Prakash Singh Badal (Mahajan, 2023). Instead of assuming a position within the party, Badal led an internal protest against Barnala because Badal and his supporters felt that they could not support Operation Black Thunder to flush out radicals from the Golden Temple in 1986 (Mahajan, 2023). Barnala was collaborating with Rajiv Gandhi's government, which was promoting Operation Black Thunder (Mahajan, 2023). Since senior party leadership disagreed on collaborating with the Center, there were internal schisms resulting in a division within the party.

This division also materialized in the reaction that party members had to the assassination. As his reputation predicted, Badal offered an aggressive reaction to the assassination accusing Arjun Singh, the then Governor of Punjab, of betraying Longowal (The Tribune, 2023). However, the official party reaction led by Surjit Singh Barnala was not aggressive. Barnala choose to continue in Longowal's footsteps and maintain a collaborative relationship with the national government leadership, this included policy collaboration and avoided placing the blame for Longowal's death on anyone be it in Punjab or the Center (Mahajan, 2023).

Finally, the party did not make a big deal of Longowal's death by adopting a public facing approach since there was not a lot of media presence and coverage of the assassination. However, there was an understanding that Longowal was leaving behind a legacy of peace and his death reignited a desire for maintaining peace in Punjab (Singh and Thukral, 2014). Instead, the

assassination was dealt with by law enforcement agencies who conducted their investigation and arrested two of Longowal's killers (Los Angeles Times, 1985).

As such the case follows a somewhat predicted trajectory of a non-aggressive, institutionally focused, but divided response. Other cases that resemble Longowal's include the assassination of Bharatiya Janata Party's Mohinder Paul, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal's Kumaraswamy Nandagopan, and Tehreek-e-Jafaria Pakistan's Allama Hassan Turabi to name a few.

Future Research

The literature on political assassinations is developing to focus more on systematic analyses of the targets, and consequences of the attacks. However, importantly these analyses still do not account for differentiations in the reactions of political parties whose leaders are targeted. Furthermore, the literature currently does not differentiate between failed and successful assassination attempts. The present study fills this gap and offers a new theoretical discussion of the political characteristics of parties and the reactions that the parties are likely to have to assassinations based on their unique characteristics. The findings indicate that the predicted outcomes for each party categorization are mostly accurate except for divided reactions by prominent political party members to assassinations, which are rare if at all present among of the four combinations of the political characteristics of parties.

The current investigation is looking at the intermediate stage of the process adopted after a political assassination i.e., the strategies that political parties adopt to maximize their support. The consequences of these strategies remain under explored and can be investigated in future research. Furthermore, the variables that are used in the paper for both the independent and

dependent variables could be changed. For instance, different party characteristics could be used such as the internal political dynamics of parties, or different features of the organizational structure. In the current study this is no variation along lines of gender as all the case studies involve male politicians. Future research could check for variation in outcomes based on differences in the gender of the politician.

Another shortcoming of the present study is that it does not account for whether the data presented is statistically significant. As such, I am not able to prove or test the theory. Furthermore, there are not enough cases analyzed in the study to allow for a high level of confidence in the data. Future research could expand the sample size and conduct t-tests for statistical significance. Based on the findings of the t-tests, future work could also explore the factors behind any statistically significant differences, if any are identified. The theory, as it currently stands, does not account for other factors that could affect the strategies that political parties adopt. Other explanations for party behavior could include the timing of elections, national political crises or economic downturns, external events such as natural disasters or pandemics, and international dynamics with other countries that may be at play.

There is a version of this paper that could be written with a different stakeholder in mind, as of right now the stakeholder is senior party leadership. However, the family of the targeted politician, the public, and different branches of the government could also be studied. Other articles could expand the research to include targets who are not at the highest level of government. For instance, individuals who are federal ministers or bureaucrats. Furthermore, the current study is limited to South Asia. However, I would argue that the theory is applicable beyond the region. Additionally, other types of regimes, such as military dictatorships could also be included. Finally, some of the deaths of prominent party leaders happened under periods of military dictatorship

whereas others happened during periods of democracy. Future research could isolate this difference to study how the regime type influences reactions that political parties have to failed and successful assassination attempts.

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