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TERRORISM, COMMUNAL POLITICS AND ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHY: IS THERE A CAUSAL CONNECTION?

Empirical Analysis of Terrorist Incidents in Maharashtra

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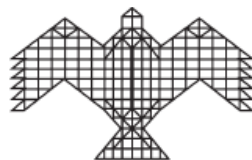
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INTRODUCTION

Is there a causal link between ethnic demography, communal violence, local politics and terrorism? What factors might prompt a terrorist to choose a target place? Why the states like Maharashtra and Mumbai in particular witnessed more terrorist attacks in India? It is a question which arises on observing the trend and pattern of terrorism in India, particularly when one state, say Maharashtra witnessed more number of terrorist attacks than other states.

While the underlying reason for Mumbai—and generally Maharashtra, being targeted due to its well established economic profile could be true, it would also be worthwhile to examine other factors to gain more clarity on the subject. If these were indeed the sole dictating factors for terrorists to choose their target sites, then why other places with similar profile weren't targeted? Apparently, just assuming that Mumbai is targeted because of its above mentioned credentials appears to conceal several layers of enquiry about two complex and strategically defined phenomena—mode of terrorist attack and the choice of target.

The literature¹ points out that generally terrorist prefer to attack 'soft targets' where there are large groups of people, that are symbolic and recognizable around the world and that will generate maximum media attention when attacked. The attacks on World Trade Centre in New York on 11th September 2001, London Underground on 7th July 2005 and the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai on 26th November 2008 are examples which reinforce the above mentioned assumptions. The terrorists' hope is that if the target meets these criteria, terror magnifiers like the media will help the attackers produce a psychological impact that goes far beyond the immediate attack site. The best-case scenario for the attackers is that this psychological impact will also produce an adverse economic impact against the targeted government at the same time leaving a message to target audience/victims. In a sense, it means while they want government machinery to suffer they could also go for place that has communal tension. Beyond that simple observation, however, there remain several

unexamined assumptions and unanswered questions which deserve greater analysis.

This study examines two distinct processes in selecting target (soft targets) of the terrorist: the one-time decision to begin attacking targets and then the continued attack against such targets. This analysis points to ethnic demography (places constituted with one dominant community), simmering communal tension (where social fabric was torn apart) and ideology (picking specific religion) as the decisive factor in choosing target, while organizational factors such as presence of hardliner and their network centrality are related to the number of incidents perpetrated.

This study uses a rationalist framework to explore why certain places/ states are chosen as particular target for the attack. Notably, one of the primary tasks of this study is to better understand why states like Maharashtra and in particular Mumbai were repeatedly under terrorist attacks. According to a study conducted at NIAS on the number of terrorist incidents between March 1993 to December 2010, nearly 70% of the attacks took place in the states of Maharashtra, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh alone.² This study attempts to find out the underlying reasons behind such frequent occurrence terrorist incidents in Maharashtra.

1.0. Terrorist target selection methods: A theoretical overview

Target selection by perpetrators of terrorist acts has been a study which has kept academicians, analysts, practitioners of security, and police personnel thinking for several years now. Notably, why specific locations are targeted by terrorists groups, and time at which these attacks occur, etc. are questions which remain largely unresolved and understudied. While the whole idea behind a terrorist act is to psychologically impact the civilian targets and the state, another dimension of a terrorist act is its unpredictability. By studying patterns of previous attacks, their timings, the site locations where such attacks have occurred and assessing its economic, demographic and political value, some understanding can be gained on the subject. However, making conclusive assessments would be an uphill task and challenging given the reliable data constraints. From studies, reports and newspaper

writings on the subject some broad understanding could be arrived to understand terrorist target selection methods.

The choices of targets are classified into five categories:

Economic: Terrorists and terrorist groups' primary aim in choosing economic targets are motivated by the fact that they want to disrupt the economic activities of the target state.³ Business houses, commercial establishments, and stock markets are symbols of economic infrastructure of any country.⁴ Disrupting their activities through the acts of violence can partially halt activities in these places, thereby inflicting economic loss.⁵ Secondly, when such centres of economic importance are attacked it also sends a signal to prospective investors from attempting such economic pursuits in the target country.⁶ Such an act leads to image degradation of that country as an investment destination and might in some cases lead to loss of possible foreign investments.⁷

Demographic: Target locations are often selected by terrorists groups keeping in mind certain communities inhabiting in the vicinity of a specific site.⁸ Here, the underlying rationale of such terrorist act is to create fear among such communities for their perceived religious or/and political stand.⁹ Sometimes terrorists groups also target such demographic hubs to create communal tensions and chaos. Several case studies have demonstrated that an act of terror by a group or individual is followed by communal tension in those particular areas. Sites of religious importance also get considered as soft targets by terrorist groups.¹⁰

Political: Terrorists groups often chose targets due to the political value it stands for. Sometimes constituencies of those political parties who often call for taking a more determined counter terrorism policy approach become targets of terrorists groups.

Military: Military infrastructure/camps/installations often are most common targets for terrorist groups. The military of any country is considered as an essential instrument of power through which a state exercises its authority to govern and enforce policies.¹¹ By targeting these instruments of power,¹² the terrorist groups and unlawful elements aim to challenge the state and its policies. In view of this factor,

the world over military establishments often is the most common targets of such unlawful groups.

Symbolism and philosophy: On the subject of target selection, one study observes that terrorist organisations chose targets on the basis of the proposed target's symbolic value and the ability to execute the attack.¹³ Additionally, the choice of target selection for an attack is generally driven by the fundamental beliefs and objective of the terrorist group. The nature of targets selected is largely contingent upon the terrorist organisation's tactical and strategic goal.¹⁴ For instance, it is observed that some targets are chosen given the target's exposure to greater casualty.¹⁵

1.1. Target categorization and capabilities

Targets can be classified into civilian and non-civilian categories. While the attacks on civilian targets can significantly alter the course of public opinion towards the existing policies of the government and could also lead to changes in political leadership¹⁶ sometime, on the other hand, attacks on non-civilian targets can lead to loss of morale among the forces and leadership, erode power capabilities and sometime the change of guard in political leadership.

Some studies have also points out that while terrorist groups intend to target site which carry high emotional value, however, the capabilities of the group also plays a role in determining the targets.¹⁷ Further, the study notes that targets such as public transportation systems often get selected given the easy access and escape it offers to the perpetrators at the same time with high number of casualties.

1.2. Objective and Sources for this Assessment

The study was undertaken in the hope of contributing further to the previous observations of NIAS study title "*Patterns in Terror Attacks in Urban and Semi-Urban India.*"¹⁸ The study of terrorism is constrained by numerous impediments to data-gathering. Merely defining terrorist attacks in India as the consequence of Babri Masjid demolition or the grand strategy of Pakistan based terror groups may prove notoriously piecemeal though they contributed for this menace to an extent. The

collection of data on political, socio-economic and demographic profile of the affected area is obviously necessitated for in-depth analysis and for drawing inference to go beyond clusters analyse.

Notably, the primary purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of what triggers the perpetrator to choose a symbolic/specific target and why it is chosen. The research questions are, therefore:

- Why there is an increase in terrorist attack in few particular states in India like Maharashtra?
- How do terrorists select their targets? Is there a causal linkage between terrorist incidents and local dynamics?
- Is the demographic, economic and political profile of particular localities spur terror groups to choose them as a 'soft' target?

1.3. Data Collection: Structure and Limitations

This study draws materials/data mostly from open source documents such as press reports, assessments by analysts, and a very limited government data such as census data, election commission results/data apart from few secondary literatures. One of the most problematic issues inherent in this study is that many – if not most – of the terrorist attacks that occurred across India have been attributed by media and authorities as the handiwork of organisations that are across the border to undermine India's stability and prosperity. Though it is possible that some of these attacks were planned as a vengeance for 1992 Babri Masjid or 2002 Gujarat riots by the Pakistan based terror groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), or its supported domestic groups like Indian Mujahideen (IM) or Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), but it is difficult to discern the role of the domestic populace who perceive that he or she is 'victimised' or 'dismayed with Indian system' in these attacks given the local dynamics and communal tensions.

Despite some documentation of local's handiwork in many of these incidents and discernible existence of considerable minority populations in the majority of the place where terror incidents took place, very little has been examined about the links

between communal politics, ethnic demography and terrorism, apart from some sporadic journalistic accounts. As such, evidently there is a significant gap in the terrorism research and that necessitate the present study. However, one of the major impediments in terrorism research is the paucity of reliable and comprehensive information that can be obtained through open-source accounts. This dearth of information renders it difficult to make assessments on such issues or to validate the assessment.

The scope of the current study is restricted to analysing terrorist events that took place in Maharashtra, from 1993 to 2012. Other attacks, including those perpetrated by Maoists and other groups in the state is beyond the scope of the study.

INDIA AND TERRORISM

2.0. An Overview

Terrorism in India is not new, though witnessed incidents in Kashmir and Punjab, etc. even before 1993, but what are unique now are the evolved characteristics and the enhanced operational capabilities of the terrorist outfits and their operatives. Surprisingly, India is ranked fourth, right behind Iraq which was followed by Pakistan and Afghanistan in the number of terrorist activities (excluding Jammu and Kashmir) despite the fact it is not a country in conflict.¹⁹ B. Raman attributes following three events for amplified terrorist incidents in India,²⁰ i.e. a) the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992.²¹ b) the incidents of communal violence thereafter across the country, particularly in Mumbai (Maharashtra), Gujarat, Karnataka, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Andhra Pradesh (where allegations of disproportionate use of force by the security establishment is reported)²² and finally, the riots in Gujarat in 2002.²³

Apparently, as per B. Raman, these events contributed for further radicalization among Muslim population and incidentally, communal violence were replaced by terrorist attacks in the country. The birth of SIMI (Students' Islamic Movement of India) and Al Umma, like radical outfits have in fact aided in organizing pre-meditated violence and attacks outside Jammu and Kashmir – making pan India – with the apparent support of groups across the border.

In short, it can be categorized by arguing that Babri Masjid demolition had contributed for raising Islamic fundamentalism in India, whereas Gujarat riots in 2002 instigated terrorist attacks in India. The Muslim community annoyed with the demolition of the Babri Masjid and their resentment stemmed from the perception that the Indian political and criminal justice system – police and the judiciary – is anti-Muslim. For instances, B Raman argues that the Indian Mujahideen is in a way a movement of reprisal terrorism to protest against alleged injustices and excesses against the members of the Muslim community.²⁴

MAHARASHTRA

3.0. State Profile - Overview

Maharashtra has emerged as an important progressive state with vital installations, places of economic and national importance, contributing significantly to the country's economy. Arable land, skilled labour, abundance of resources as well as its location makes it conducive for economic development. Maharashtra comprises of 35 districts and is divided into 6 revenue divisions.²⁵ Each region is unique in terms of geography, climate and culture, etc. Being the centre of all financial activities, presence of media houses, host of the flourishing entertainment industry (Bollywood), the state capital, Mumbai, enjoys the status of a global city.

3.1.1. Demographic profile

According to the Census 2011, the state of Maharashtra ranks second in terms of population size (11,23,72,972).²⁶ From the perspective of religion, the data shows that the state can be classified as a Hindu majority state (80.2 percent), however, it has a significant number of Muslims, Buddhists, Jains and Christians who comprise 10.6 percent, 6 percent, 1.3 percent and 1 percent respectively.²⁷

3.1.2. Economic profile

Maharashtra is one of the fastest growing states in India.²⁸ Mumbai, capital of the state is also considered as the financial capital of India and hosts the Reserve Bank of India, the country's premier fiscal policy making institution. Maharashtra also plays host to a large number of major corporate houses of the country.²⁹ The state of Maharashtra contributes 13% India's Gross domestic product (GDP).³⁰ The industrial and the services sector are major contributors to the state's revenues.³¹ Industrially, the state of Maharashtra has made rapid advances. Over the past few years, the state has witnessed growth of Information technology (IT) & Information Technology Enabled Service (ITES) companies in cities like Pune, Mumbai and Nasik.³²

3.1.3. Political profile

The politics of Maharashtra was largely dominated by the Indian National Congress (INC) till 1995, when the Shiv Sena and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) combine formed a coalition government in the state.³³ Later, the state congress leader Sharad Pawar in 1999 rebelled against central Congress leadership over the succession issue and formed his own political party named, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).³⁴ But in order to deny political power to the then Shiv Sena-BJP coalition, he formed a coalition government with the Indian National Congress at the centre and the state in 2004.³⁵ So far, the INC-NCP has successfully formed two successive governments in the state. And recently, in 2019, NCP and Shiv Sena through their political alliance formed the government at Maharashtra. This is partially due to the fact that the Shiv Sena and BJP could not overcome their internal differences.

Notably, Maharashtra is an extremely active political state, with the presence of a number of political parties. It has remained the headquarters for the RSS which is known for providing ideological support to the BJP. It also makes the state a politically vibrant since there are number of smaller political groups who may not be electorally influential but are very active.

MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS

4.0. Micro Level Analysis of Areas affected by Terrorism

Of all the terror attacks in post-Babri Masjid demolition period, Mumbai and Maharashtra in general has been a constant target. The following statistics (Table 1) shows the account of terrorist attacks in Maharashtra:

Table 1 - Terrorist incidents in Maharashtra

Date & Year of Incident	Place of incident	Type of Incident	No. of Bombs	No. Killed	Target
12 March 1993	Mumbai	Serial bombs	13	257 ³⁶	Commercial and Infrastructure
02 December 2002	Mumbai	Single	1	2 ³⁷	Public transport (bus)
06 December 2002	Mumbai	Single	1	NA	Public place/ restaurant
27 January 2003	Mumbai	Single	1	1 ³⁸	Public places
13 March 2003	Mumbai	Single	1	12 ³⁹	Public transportation (suburb train)
28 July 2003	Mumbai	Single	1	4 ⁴⁰	Public transport (bus)
25 August 2003	Mumbai	Serial bombs	2	52 ⁴¹	Public places
21 November 2003	Parbhani	Single	1	NA	Religious Place
27 August 2004	Jalna	Single	1	NA	Religious Place
11 July 2006	Mumbai	Serial bombs	7	209 ⁴²	Public transportation (suburb train)
08 September 2006	Malegaon	Single	1	37 ⁴³	Religious Place
29 September 2008	Malegaon	Single	1	6 ⁴⁴	Public Place
26 November 2008	Mumbai	Serial bombs	10	166 ⁴⁵	Multiple locations
13 February 2010	Pune	Single	1	17 ⁴⁶	Shop
13 July 2011	Mumbai	Serial bombs	3	23 ⁴⁷	Public/ Market places

The above statistics apparently reveal an important underlying picture on the analysis of terrorism in Maharashtra. All the major terrorist attacks in India and in

particular in Maharashtra have occurred after 1992. Notably, March 1993 has become the date of importance; to mark the start of terrorism calendar in urban India, incidentally began at Maharashtra. One argument is that the dejected Pakistan, losing of Kashmir and later East Pakistan coupled with its realization of complexity in winning India conventionally had taken advantage of the resentment amongst some Indian Muslim communities to create instability in the rest of India outside Jammu and Kashmir.⁴⁸ Without doubt, this initial impetus from the Pakistan perhaps had aided the dejected domestic Indian Muslims population to terrorism.

4.1. Targets-Time Configuration

The fact is that Maharashtra being the hub for commercial and industrial activities of the country and additionally, being also the headquarters for major media houses, any activity which disturbs the peace and harmony of the state catches the eye of the international attention. But is Mumbai or Maharashtra merely being as the financial hub of India is responsible for repeated attacks? Do the perpetrators use greater or lesser variation in choosing target and when to attack – i.e. the target-time design?

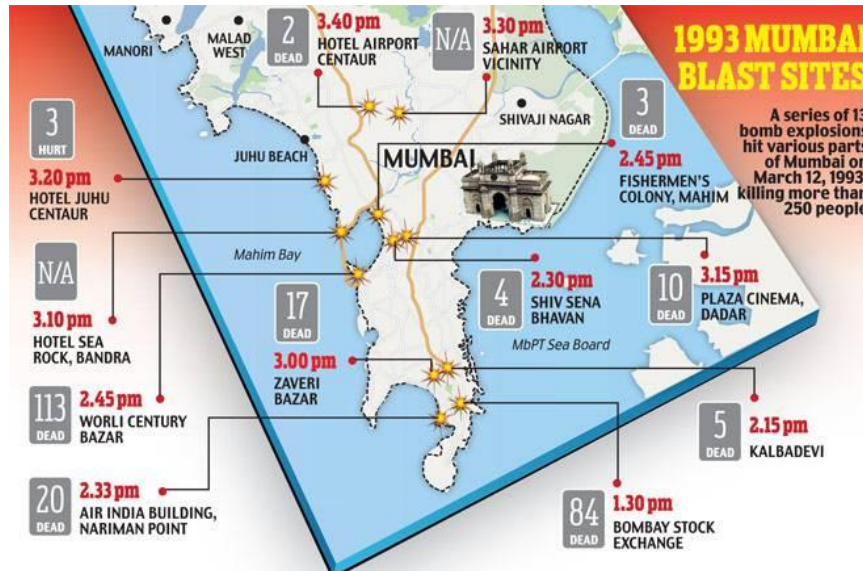
With the background of socio-economic, political and demographic data of Maharashtra, it would be essential to scrutiny the places of terrorist incidents – micro level analysis of the affected areas – for a better understanding in terms of the rationale of choice/target (place) and timing of the terrorist attack to understand the casual links between the terrorism, demography and communal politics.

a) 1993 Mumbai Serial blasts

Nearly 13 bomb explosions shook the city of Mumbai on 12th March 1993, killing about 273 people and injuring about 700. Fisherman's Colony in Mahim causeway, Zaveri Bazaar, Plaza Cinema, Century Bazaar, Katha Bazaar, Hotel Sea Rock, Sahar Airport, Air India Building, Hotel Juhu Centaur, Worli Bombay Stock Exchange Building, Passport Office are the targets of terrorist attack. Then on another blast at Matunga station on 29 October 1993, killing two and injuring over 40. These attacks are believed to have been carried out in retaliation to the Babri-Masjid demolition on

06 December 1992 and the ensuing communal riots that occurred in Mumbai between 6-12 December 1992.

Map 1: Targets of 1993 Bomb Blast



Source: *India Today*⁴⁹

It was the first planned terrorist attack in urban India and particular in Mumbai. According to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Dawood Ibrahim Kaksar, Tiger Memon and Mohammed Dossa (or known as 'D company') were reported to be the key conspirators of these attacks.⁵⁰ Consequently, for the first time it has been witnessed that a crime has been communalized through a terror act. In the post-Babri Masjid demolition, the Mumbai underworlds were purportedly divided along the religious lines. Dawood Ibrahim's underworld goons supposedly wanted to send a message to their Hindu rivals, as well as hope to establish their supremacy in Mumbai through these attacks.⁵¹ According to the Indian authorities, there is a possibility of external support from across the border in carrying out these attacks.⁵²

An analysis of the locations of the 1993 serial blasts reveals that the primary motive of the attackers was to target the centres holding economic and business significance for the Hindu community. Reportedly, during the 1993 riots, the Muslim community were believed to have been the major victims of the riots.⁵³ The locations chosen for bomb explosions by terrorists in the 1993 bomb blasts reveals that these were

selected keeping in mind their communal, political and economic importance. For instance, target areas such as Plaza theatre and Lucky Petrol Pump near the Shiv Sena Headquarters are classic examples.⁵⁴ Targets were carefully chosen by the perpetrators of the bomb blasts to paralyze the economic class of Hindus in Mumbai and probably to retaliate against members of a political party which had actively supported the cause of Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya.⁵⁵

In short, the analysis points out that the involvement of local D-company along with persisted communal tension since 1962 Jabalpur riots between Hindus and Muslims points out the links between local politics, communal tension and 1993 bombing.

b) Ghatkopar blasts (in BEST bus) of 2 December 2002

A bomb explosion took place in a BEST bus in the area of Ghatkopar on 02nd December 2002, killing two people and injuring 39 people.⁵⁶ From the perspective of location, it is interesting to note that the attack took place in Ghatkopar, an area of Mumbai which has significant presence of Gujarati community. BJP has traditionally received tremendous support from this area for several years now.⁵⁷ This makes the suburb of Ghatkopar a very natural choice for terrorists' to strike, given its demographic and political profile⁵⁸ as well the timing to coincide the anniversary of Babri Masjid demolition.

In the year 2012, the police arrested Siddiqui Taj Ul Islam Kazi, an accused in the Ghatkopar Bomb blast case of 2002.⁵⁹ Siddiqui Taj Ul Islam Kazi had assumed a fake name and was working in a software company in Hyderabad for 10 years.⁶⁰ The arrested person is also member of the banned organisation SIMI.⁶¹ Reportedly, the prosecution had alleged that the accused plotted the terrorist attack to avenge the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat.⁶² Confessions of terrorists arrested for different terrorism related cases have revealed that they were victims of communal violence and that was in a way motivated to go for the attack.⁶³ Thus, the Ghatkopar incident points out that there is a linkage between the ethnic demography (target place is Gujarati dominated area), internal local politics (BJP bastion) and the terrorist attack. In short, it demonstrates the choice of the target-timing configuration.

c) Mumbai Central Station Blast of 06 December 2002

An explosion occurred inside a restaurant – McDonald's outlet – in Mumbai Central Railway station injuring 25 people on 06th December 2002.⁶⁴ From the perspective of both timing and location, it is interesting to note that the choice of bomb explosion coincided with the 10th anniversary of Babri Masjid demolition, as well as the fact that the area of Mumbai Central Railway station is reported to be considered a minority dominated one.⁶⁵ And incidentally, McDonald outlets are being prominently visited by people from upper social strata. From this, it can be extrapolated that the perpetrators of the attack chose to trigger the explosion to probably stoke communal feelings in the neighbourhood.

d) Vile Parle blasts of 27 January 2003

A bomb explosion occurred in Vile Parle, an area in Western Mumbai, killing one and injuring 25 people.⁶⁶ Vile Parle, a suburb of Mumbai with a significant presence of Gujarati community, could have possibly been targeted owing to its demographic profile.⁶⁷ The landslide victory of Narendra Modi of BJP in December 2002 Gujarat assembly polls election too could possibly be a reason for the timing and choice of target.

e) Mulund Train Blasts of 13 March 2003

A bomb explosion occurred in Mulund station, inside a train bound for Karjat from CST killing 12 people.⁶⁸ It would be interesting to note here that this particular bomb blasts coincided with the 10th anniversary of the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts. Possibly, it could also be a test run for later 11 July 2006 attacks on Mumbai suburban trains.

The local demography analysis reveals that Mulund's population stands at 330,195 (according to 2001 census) and it has been dominated by Hindus, particularly Gujarati community.⁶⁹ Also, incidentally, Shiv Sena and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena are very active in the Mulund region. It may be infer that the area chosen by the perpetrators by again keeping in mind the local politics and communal situation prevailing in the city.

f) Ghatkopar bus Blast of 28 July 2003

A bomb explosion occurred inside a BEST bus in Ghatkopar, and it was considered to be one of the most powerful witnessed in the city and has reportedly claimed the lives of four and injuring many in the vicinity of the blast site.⁷⁰ It was the second blast in Ghatkopar. The area is densely populated and witnesses heavy vehicular traffic on Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg. According to the media reports, bomb was placed on one of the back seats of BEST bus number MH031240 commuting from Andheri to Ghakopar.⁷¹ And as per the Maharashtra Police, the modus operandi used for the attack was similar to the explosion carried out by terrorists during the bus attack in Ghatkopar on 02nd December 2002.⁷²

There is a considerable belief that this was the result of disturbing undercurrent of possible retribution against Mumbai's Gujarati community after the Gujarat riot. Notably, the frequency of minor communal conflicts may not have increased significantly after Gujarat riots, but seems divisions on communal lines have become deeper in Maharashtra, particularly, around places like Ghatkopar. Reportedly, in the words of the accused terrorist Umar, "Gujarat and the unabashed prejudice that followed was a breaking point."⁷³ He further noted that "if the government continues on this path, we will go to any extreme," he warns. "As they reach their peak, so will we."⁷⁴

In shorts, the "element of continuity" from the previous blasts was undeniable. Also, Ghatkopar has been disproportionately targeted and affected by sectarian violence too. Police sources had pointed out that the explosion was meant to create a panic (terror) during the run up of Kumbh Mela that was to be held at Nashik on 1st August 2003.⁷⁵

g) Mumbai blasts of 25 August 2003

On 25 August 2003, two bomb fitted cars exploded near the Gateway of India and the Zaveri Bazaar.⁷⁶ Examination of the two locations reveals that perhaps the terrorists selected these areas considering their economic and demographic importance. For instance, Gateway of India is a major tourist spot in Bombay, often

frequented by foreign tourists. Zaveri Bazaar is a major jewellery hub in the city of Mumbai and has a significant presence of traders belonging to the Gujarati community.⁷⁷

Two observable grounds can be noticed on the selection of this target and its timing. First, the accused Ashrat Ansari, Haneef Sayyed, and Fahmeeda confessed that they committed the terrorist attack as an emotional response to the Gujarat communal riots.⁷⁸ Second, from the choice of locations chosen by the terrorists, it seems that the attacks were largely aimed at giving twin blow to the economy of Mumbai as well as hurt the Gujarati community in the city.⁷⁹ Finally, occasion of India's Independence Day could be a ground for timing of the attack as terrorists are normally seeking opportunities to trigger terror strikes during such occasions of national importance.

h) Parbhani blasts of 21 November 2003

A bomb blast occurred in the Mohamadia mosque in Parbhani district of Maharashtra, injuring 31 people.⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the bomb blasts, a curfew was imposed by the city police.⁸¹ According to 2011 census data, Muslims constituted 25% of the Parbhani's population.⁸² The nearest major city is Aurangabad, which also has considerable amount of Muslims population. Both Parbhani and Aurangabad are communally sensitive cities. Later, it has been observed from the Malegaon blast (2006) investigations that some members from the Hindu right-wing terror cells were involved in the incident as a reaction to hardline Muslim group SIMI sponsored terrorism in Maharashtra.⁸³ However, all the four accused in 2003 Parbhani Masjid blast case were acquitted by Parbhani district court owing to lack of evidence in 2016.⁸⁴

i) Jalna blasts of 27 August 2004

On 27th August 2004, some unidentifiable people riding on motorcycle threw bombs on a crowd offering prayers inside the Kadriya mosque in Jalna, injuring five people.⁸⁵ Like in Parbhani, the bomb blasts were followed by armed clashes among people thereby compelling the local administration to impose curfew in the area.⁸⁶ As per the Census 2011 data, the population of Jalna district stands at 19,58,483.⁸⁷

Like the Parbhani blast, initial evidence from the investigation points to the role of Hindu right wing terror cells,⁸⁸ but the Jalna district and session's court acquitted all the seven accused due to lack of evidence in 2012.⁸⁹

j) Mumbai Suburban Railway Attack of 11 July 2006

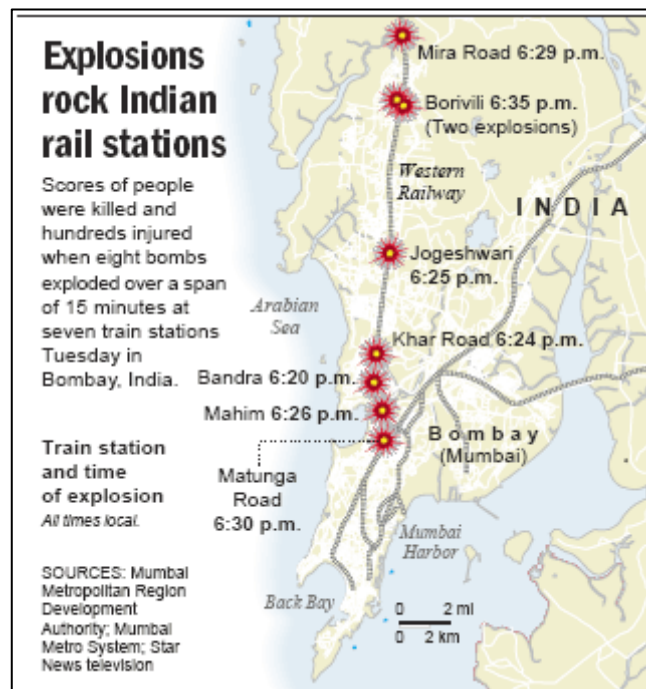
On 11th July 2006, a series of seven bomb explosions occurred in local trains of Mumbai within a span of 11 to 15 minutes, killing 209 people and injuring 800⁹⁰ (see table & Map below). Reportedly, it is suspected by the investigating agencies that this attack was similar to previous explosions carried out by terrorists in 1993, 2002 and 2003.⁹¹ The bombs were placed inside pressure cookers and kept in bag and were left to be detonated in the first class train compartments.⁹² From the placement of bombs inside the first class compartments on the trains, it could be inferred that the target of the perpetrators were the upper middle class of Mumbai. Coincidentally, the Mumbai train bombings also occurred on the same day of 11 July Srinagar bombings.⁹³

Table 2 - Location & the timing of Bomb Blast in Mumbai Suburban Rail, 2006

Blast location	Train	Coach type	Time
Khar Road	Travelling north from Churchgate	First Class	06.24 p.m.
Bandra	Fast Local Churchgate - Borivali	First Class	06.24 p.m.
Jogeshwari	Slow Local Churchgate - Borivali	First Class	06.25 p.m.
Mahim Junction	Fast Local Churchgate - Borivali	First Class	06.26 p.m.
Mira Road - Bhayandar	Travelling north from Churchgate	First Class	06.29 p.m.
Matunga Road	Fast Local Churchgate - Virar	First Class	06.30 p.m.
Borivali	Fast Local Churchgate - Virar	First Class	06.35 p.m.
		Total	11 minutes

Source: Compiled from various newspaper reports

Map 2 – Bomb Blast in 2006 Mumbai Suburban Rail



Source: NBCNEWS⁹⁴

It is worthwhile to ascertain the socio-economic, political and demographic details of each target place/suburb where the blasts took place.

(i) Khar Road :

Khar is considered to be one of the most important suburbs of Mumbai. It appears that the area has a sizeable presence of migrants from different states of India⁹⁵ Apart from Sikhs; Gujaratis are one of the most prominent communities in Khar.

(ii) Bandra:

Bandra is considered to be one of the most affluent and cosmopolitan suburbs of Mumbai and is inhabited by Christians, Muslims, Zoroastrians and Hindus.⁹⁶ The place is dotted by shopping malls, posh restaurants and buildings, where some are owned by the Gujarati community too. It is possible that the presence of an affluent, cosmopolitan crowd⁹⁷ could have possibly been an important factor for perpetrators of the attack to choose Bandra.

(iii) Jogeshwari:

This suburb of Mumbai witnessed some turbulence during the riots of 1993. Given the presence of a sizeable Maharashtrian population with Gujaratis, Shiv Sena has commanded good support in this suburb.⁹⁸ Additionally, it is reported that the famous Goddess Jogeshwari temple, which is considered to be a deity for some Gujarati Brahmins⁹⁹ is also located in this locality.

(iv) Mahim Junction:

The population of Mahim comprises of local Maharashtrians, Gujaratis, Marwaris, Muslims and Christians.¹⁰⁰ The place is well known for the Mahim Church and Mahim Darga. Given its profile of being a Shiv Sena stronghold,¹⁰¹ Mahim could have possibly been chosen by terrorists for the attack.

(v) Mira-Bhayandar

Mira bhayander is an important suburb in the city of Mumbai. Demographically, the suburb has a substantial presence of Gujarati,¹⁰² Marwari and North Indian population.

(vi) Matunga Road:

Matunga is considered to be one of the most prominent South Indian localities of Mumbai.¹⁰³ It is also host to several South Indian restaurants of the city

(vii) Borivali:

Borivali has a sizeable number of Gujarati populations. Moreover, given the fact that BJP has a considerable support base in this suburb, it could have possibly figured in the calculation of terrorists to strike here.

Four major rationales can be stated for the July 2006 attacks. One, it could be possibly a way of avenging the serious convictions of about 25 Muslims in Gujarat for the 2002 riots.¹⁰⁴ Two, the serial blast could be the possible consequences of renewed riots at Baroda in Gujarat which took place in May 2006 following the

demolition of *dargah* of Chishti Rashduddin.¹⁰⁵ Third, it to some extent coincided with the fourth anniversary of 29 July 2003 Ghatkopar Blast in BEST bus.

k) Malegaon blasts of 08 September 2006

The town of Malegaon has witnessed a series of bomb explosions as well as communal riots in 2006 and then in 2008. The first one took place on 08th September 2006, killing 37 people and injuring over 100 when a series of coordinated bomb explosions occurred in a Muslim cemetery, adjacent to Hamidia mosque in Bada Kabaristan area.¹⁰⁶ The bomb explosions took place in the aftermath of Friday prayers on the Shab e Bara'at holy day.¹⁰⁷ The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Swami Aseemanand in 2011 in connection with the 08 September 2006 Malegaon bombing.¹⁰⁸ Further, reports suggest that the NIA also arrested accused Mohan, who is believed to have taken part in the conspiracy and planted explosives in Malegaon.¹⁰⁹ It was reported that Swami Aseemanand confessed in front of magistrate and stated that a Hindu group was behind the bombings in Malegaon.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, another bomb blast took place on 29th September 2008, at Bhikhu Chowk in Malegaon, killing 6 and injuring 70.¹¹¹

According to reports, a probe by Anti Terrorism Squad of Maharashtra Police revealed the involvement of members of right wing organisation 'Abhinav Bharat.'¹¹² However, it must be noted that the charges against the accused in the Malegaon blasts case of 2008 were dropped on December 2017.¹¹³

The analyses of this Malegaon blasts based on available public information reveals that Malegaon (target) was chosen after careful consideration keeping in mind the dominance of Muslims population.¹¹⁴ The explosions on Shab e Bara'at holy day indicates the timing of the attack as possibly to avenge to Islamic terrorists attack on Mumbai.

l) Mumbai attack of 26 November 2008 (26/11)

The city of Mumbai witnessed one of the worst possible terrorist attacks in the history when the terrorists from across the border entered it through the sea route

and began shooting at pre-determined targets in the city¹¹⁵ on the night of 26 November 2008. It was reported about ten Pakistan-based terrorists were part of this terrorist attacks that killing 166 people and injuring over 300 people.¹¹⁶ From the reports, it is clear that the reconnaissance of each target was done by terrorists before striking. The targets were Hotel Taj, Hotel Oberoi and Trident, Leopold Cafe, Chabad House, CST station, and Cama Hospital.¹¹⁷

Evidently, Mumbai looks natural choice for the sea borne terrorist, given its tag of 'global city' and being in the west close to Pakistan coast. Besides, Mumbai might consider as a good choice for the operation as the perpetrators could get access easily and exit too on completion, if in case not caught or killed can quickly get into the waters to escape.

From the choice of targets, it is clear that the intention of terrorists was to create an international sensation. The two hotels mentioned here are known for hosting visiting foreign tourists in the city.¹¹⁸ Similarly, the Chabad House which houses Jewish religious representatives was chosen for its economic value.¹¹⁹ The indiscriminate firing pursued by the Pakistani terrorists' points to the fact that the aim was also to target a cross-section of population in the city and cripple the transportation infrastructure of the city.

It took the combined efforts of the National Security Guard, Mumbai Police, Army columns and Marine commandos to neutralize them. In the end, police captured lone terrorist Ajmal Kasab, killing other terrorist.¹²⁰

Unlike the other terror attacks from 1993 to 2011 that took place in Mumbai and Maharashtra, where the local groups involvement is evident with local agenda, the 26/11 attacks was choreographed by Pakistan based terrorist members with some elements of support from local militant groups with the agenda of targeting of commuter centre, business establishment, Westerners and Jewish community.

m) Pune German Bakery blasts of 13 February 2010

On 13th February 2010, a bomb blast occurred in German Bakery, a famous joint located in Koregaon park area of Pune, which killed 17 people including five foreigners.¹²¹ Perusal of reports suggests that German bakery is located in close proximity to the Jewish Chabad House and the Osho Ashram.¹²² Possible presence of foreigners in both Chabad House and Osho Ashram might have been an important rationale for terrorists to choose the German bakery as a target. And given the presence of Chabad house and the presence of foreigners, Osho Ashram was possibly chosen by the perpetrators of the attack.¹²³ Reports indicate that the little known terrorists groups such as namely Laskhar-e-Taiba Al Alami and the Mujahideen Islami Muslim Front have claimed responsibility for executing the explosion in German bakery.¹²⁴ From the perspective of timing of the attack, it could be inferred that it could also have been possibly planned as a response to the 1st anniversary of the filing of charge sheet against captured Pakistani terrorist, Ajmal Kasab in the court.¹²⁵

According to a report from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), the material used for making the explosive was a combination of RDX, ammonium nitrate and petroleum hydrocarbon oil (ANFO).¹²⁶ Reportedly, accused Mohsin Chowdhary resident of Manishanagar Complex in Kondhwa, Pune was a key conspirator of the attack.¹²⁷ And again reports suggest that Mohsin Chowdhary is also a close acquaintance of Iqbal Bhatkal.¹²⁸

n) Mumbai Bombings of 13 July 2011

On 13th of July 2011, the city of Mumbai witnessed bomb explosions at three different places, Zaveri Bazaar, Diamond House and Kabutarkhana, killing 23 and injuring 131.¹²⁹ From the perspective of locations of the attacks, it could yet again be inferred that the perpetrators of the attacks chose the targets keeping in mind their economic and demographic importance.¹³⁰ The first two targets i.e. Zaveri Bazaar and Diamond House are well known for their economic importance¹³¹ and the presence of Gujarati traders. The third target, i.e. Kabutarkhana area in Dadar, which

in addition to being a crowded place is also an area where Hindus are believed to come to feed the pigeons.¹³² From the perspective of timing of the attack, it could be inferred that the date coincided with the fifth anniversary of attacks in Mumbai suburban trains of 11th July 2006¹³³ and with the Kashmir Martyr' Day, which was observed on 13th of July.¹³⁴

KEY OBSERVATIONS

5.0. Key Observations

The demolition of Babri Masjid may be the origin of terrorist incidents away from Kashmir in urban India, but 1993 Mumbai terrorist incidents were mainly said to be based on “business and communal objective” of the Bombay underworld dons. However, the terror attacks after 2000 particularly from December 2002 blasts in Mumbai were apparently launched with new intent i.e. ‘attack against Hindus, particularly revenge against Gujaratis’ for the said anti-Muslim riots at Gujarat.¹³⁵

Interestingly, terrorist had chosen Mumbai and Maharashtra in general than Gujarat for their revenge against Gujaratis. Understandably, it may be due to two factors. One, evidently Maharashtra had the presence of strong terror network including banned SIMI and underworld crime groups. The presence of banned organization like the SIMI provided significant logistic for the perpetrator. Two, the periodic communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the state added zeal for the perpetrators to choose it, as Maharashtra is communally a very sensitive, particularly the places like Bhivandi, Aurangabad and Malegaon, etc. are communally sensitive towns at all times.

Three, the inflammatory speech of Shiva Sena coupled with the presence of affluent Gujarati people who controls many business establishments in Mumbai and Maharashtra¹³⁶ in general perhaps invited attention of the terrorist groups. It has also been claimed that the Mumbai serial blasts was direct fallout of the Gujarat riots of 2002.¹³⁷ In Mumbai, Gujaratis are the second largest linguistic community; and command significant influence over the city’s business and economic activities.¹³⁸

While target selection is based on the demographic, economic, and political factors, in case of timing of these attacks, it may be noted that the attack dates often coincide with anniversaries of significant developments or communal events in the country. For instance, the terrorist attacks that Mumbai witnessed in the year 2002 coincided with the 10th anniversary of the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992.¹³⁹ Similarly, some attacks which occurred in Mulund on 14th March 2003 coincided with the 10th

anniversary of the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts.¹⁴⁰ Equally, the bomb blasts that took place in Mumbai in the year 2011 coincided with the fifth-year anniversary of the July 2006 Mumbai suburban train bombing attacks.¹⁴¹

In some cases, certain attacks were also timed as an immediate reaction to important developments in political, religious or policy developments. For instance, the German bakery bomb blasts of 2010 coincided with the filing of chargesheet against Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab.¹⁴²

In short, it can be inferred that terrorist incidents in Maharashtra can be classified into three category, one, post-Babri Masjid effect, two, consequence of Gujarat riots and third, the reactionary violence of hardline Hindu groups against the hardline Muslim group sponsored terrorism. Equally, the analysis points out that there seems to be clear connection between ethnic demography, and communal violence and local politics. The choices of target place selection are apparently based on above factors and timing too seems deliberated one.

Incidentally, terrorism related incidents in Maharashtra have dramatically decreased since 2012 even though some other part of India's hinterland had witnessed a few incidents. Although it needs further study to find out exactly what brought this change, at the surface level it appears perhaps combination of multiple reasons for the decline. They are: one, the increased focus and investigation of Maharashtra Counter Terrorism Police and NIA on the earlier events perhaps have averted the further plans of the perpetrators in the state. Two, the killing and arrest of many of the known terrorist elements like Bhatkal Brothers and others in the country could lead to the decline. Finally, in the post-26/11, the amount of embarrassment Pakistan has faced globally may have forced its terrorist groups to avoid further operations in India's hinterland like Maharashtra coupled with the international sanctions and black listing of terrorist by the United Nations could be the another reasons.

INFERENCE

6.0. Inference

The examination of all terrorism related incidents in Maharashtra indicates that perpetrators have chosen the sites for their attacks based on its economic value, perceived political importance, demographic sensitivities and, ease of operation and exit. As far as the timing of the incidents are concerned most of them revolved around certain political and security events in the country.

Economic Factor: On the economic front it may be noted here that from 2005-2006, India's economy witnessed a substantial growth rate.¹⁴³ Within India's growth story, the state of Maharashtra and the city of Mumbai has historically occupied an important position.¹⁴⁴ The terrorist attacks on Mumbai's suburban trains were probably chosen to cripple the economy and portray India as an unsafe destination for investments. The repeated attacks on Mumbai's suburban train system in 2006, 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the 2011 serial blasts in Mumbai seems validates this interpretation.¹⁴⁵ For instance, news reports suggest that incidentally only the first class compartments of Mumbai suburban trains were targeted by terrorists during the Mumbai train bombings of 2006.¹⁴⁶ Equally, Zaveri Bazaar, an area where diamond businessmen of the city conduct their transactions has been repeatedly targeted.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, in the case of 26/11 Mumbai attacks, barring the attacks on Jewish Chabad House and Cama Hospital, all the other locations of attacks held economic significance.

Political Significance: In some cases, terrorists groups have chosen targets which were perceived to be strongholds of those political parties which had insisted on taking a firm view towards counter terrorism or known for inflammatory speech. Some of the targeted sites of the 1993 Mumbai blasts indicated their political importance¹⁴⁸ what was perceived may be by the perpetrators as constituencies of a political party which had actively voiced its support in favour of the demolition of Babri Masjid. The analysis of the location of the targets in Mumbai shows that

targets were chosen keeping in mind the political constituencies of parties that supported the demolition.¹⁴⁹

Some targets also carry an international component. For instance, it is argued that one plausible reason for the 26/11 Mumbai attacks was possibly meant to derail the gradually improving bilateral relations between India and Pakistan¹⁵⁰ or India's global standing. Similarly, in some cases, areas like the Jewish Chabad House which was targeted by terrorists during the 26/11 attacks probably in a way harming the improving bilateral relations between India and Israel.¹⁵¹ Another interpretation could also be that terrorist groups wanted to send a message to Israel to stop their cooperation with India on security and counter-terrorism issues.¹⁵² India's political and security relations with Israel had witnessed a positive momentum since the last 15 years.¹⁵³

Tourism: Some targets also seem to have been chosen for their profile of being hubs for local and foreign tourists.¹⁵⁴ For instance, the Leopold cafe and the Gateway of India in Mumbai and German bakery in Pune are very popular spots among foreigners.¹⁵⁵ The underlying rationale for choosing these sites may be to portray a negative and unsafe image about India among the foreigners. Also, the study demonstrates that the choice of targets between 1993 to 2006 were largely keeping Indian component, while post 2006 incidents shows the international component in selection of the targets. For instance, the 2008 Mumbai attacks wherein hotels with substantial foreigners' presence was the target, and similarly, Chabad House in Mumbai,¹⁵⁶ the bomb explosion in Gateway of India in 2011, and the German bakery blasts of 2010, etc. prove that target selection of the terrorist was also aimed at visiting foreigners in the country.¹⁵⁷

Demography and religion: In some cases, sites were also chosen by terrorists keeping in mind their demographic and religious importance. In case of Maharashtra, several such attack sites seem to have been chosen based on their demographic or religious importance. For instance, most attacks which took place in Maharashtra in the year 2002-2003, were influenced due to demographic or political factors, such as demolition of Babri Masjid.¹⁵⁸ Many targeted locations had a history

of political and communal tensions, which also shows that the target selection methods in some incidents, the terror suspects who were arrested for the series of bombings in Maharashtra confessed that their decision to embrace the path of terrorism was influenced by the communal tensions like Godhra riots. From these it could be inferred that the choice of location for such attacks were also possibly influenced by these events. The terrorist groups seem to have often targeted areas perceived to be hubs of Gujarati community¹⁵⁹ such as Ghatkopar, Vile Parle, Zaveri Bazar, as a revenge for the riots that took place in Gujarat.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Kabutarkhana which was built and frequented by Gujarati Jains is another example of a site chose by terrorist groups for its demographic importance.¹⁶¹

The communal violence, from time to time, since British rule “although the number of incidents may vary,”¹⁶² the intensity and nature of this violence have become more organised and paved way for terrorist incidents. Incidentally, these are said to be the result of state’s apathy towards minority communities to an extent as perceived by the perpetrators who have stated the state’s indifferences towards their community in the previous communal violence have given them an impetus to go for terrorist attacks. Perhaps, most terrorist acts are carried out in a locality or a region where the minority community is perceived to be “victimised” or at the locality where some undercurrent communal uneasiness prevails.

Ease of operation and ease of exit: The mixed proposition of religious groups/communities in the Mumbai city in particular and the Maharashtra state in general seems to be a blessing for the perpetrators as it aids in finding the safe shelter and logistics before and after the incident. Two, their local underground network or contacts can carried out easily what they want with the abundant availability of funds with the Mumbai underground network which adds incentive to their mission. Besides, the fact is that Maharashtra is contiguous to the region in neighbouring Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh where the Islamic and Hindu hardline outfits are known to have a strong presence is of considerable significance in terms of ease of exit and go undetected.

In short, perpetrators seem to have done rationally costs and benefits calculation while selecting targets as they have chosen targets that have witnessed some communal skirmish at the local level or dominated by specific communities like Gujarati. Also, the inference from the analysis illustrates that terror groups choose targets strategically to maximize their political influence or to neutralise the opponent power, largely determined by the political institutions set in place and at the same time gives them concealing ground.

While target selection is based on the demographic, economic, and political factors, in case of timing of these attacks, it may be noted that the attack dates often coincide with anniversaries of significant developments in the country. The timings of attacks are mostly dictated by the important anniversaries of significant communal events in the country. For instance, the terrorist attacks that Mumbai witnessed in the year 2002 coincided with the 10th anniversary of the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992.¹⁶³ Similarly, some attacks which occurred in Mulund on 14th March 2003 coincided with the 10th anniversary of the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, the bomb blasts that took place in Mumbai in the year 2011 coincided with the fifth-year anniversary of the July 2006 Mumbai suburban train bombing attacks.¹⁶⁵

In some cases, certain attacks were also timed as an immediate reaction to important developments in terms of political, religious or policy developments. For instance, the German bakery bomb blasts of 2010 coincided with the filing of chargesheet against Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab.¹⁶⁶

Finally, some important trends are noticeable in the post-Babri period. One, the transition of communal violence to communal terrorism is the first evident as the communal riots that occurred before the Babri Masjid issue was not planned. The post-Babri Masjid scenario has changed the facets of communal violence in India; spontaneous violence has been overtaken by planned terrorism.¹⁶⁷ Maharashtra, which was known for underworld groups, has become a safe haven for terrorists, and reportedly they have started operating from there.

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Abstract: Is there a causal link between ethnic demography, communal violence, local politics and terrorism? What factors might prompt a terrorist to choose a target place? Why the states like Maharashtra and Mumbai in particular witnessed more terrorist attacks in India? It is a question which arises on observing the trend and pattern of terrorism in India, particularly when one state, say Maharashtra witnessed more number of terrorist attacks than other states. While the underlying reason for Mumbai—and generally Maharashtra, being targeted due to its well established economic profile could be true, it would also be worthwhile to examine other factors to gain more clarity on the subject.

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