

India's Regional Conflicts: A Threat to Stability

An Analysis of the Mandsaur Agrarian Crisis



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“Social Risk heightens social tensions, erodes caste hierarchies, foments unrest, and undermines India’s stability.”

Problem

[Social Risk](#) poses a real and immediate threat to India’s formal and informal political, economic and social structures. Mandsaur’s agrarian crisis, [Bastar’s Naxalite-Maoist insurgency](#), Kaveri river protests, [Delhi’s Jat water riots](#), and the Gorkhaland separation movement illustrate a few of India’s diverse regional conflicts, each fueled by their own unique Social Risk factors. India’s regional conflicts will continue to increase in frequency and magnitude as citizens across the country question traditional beliefs, challenge existing social structures, and demand greater services, accountability, and transparency from government institutions.

Mandsaur’s agrarian crisis provides an example of how Social Risk fuels unrest in one of India’s regional conflicts. It also demonstrates the ways in which unaddressed social tensions, amplified by social media lead to violence. Unequal distribution of farmers’ average monthly income—in light of record agricultural growth, misallocation of resources, and frustration over the gap between federal and state governments’ coordination of farmer subsidies create a nexus of threats responsible for the ongoing crisis. However, a more in-depth examination reveals how underlying Social Risk factors, including perceived attacks on identity, social media’s erosion of caste structures, and negative perceptions of authority, increase social tensions and incite violence. Moreover, the de-centralized nature of protests by young farmers who use social media (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) to initiate and provoke spontaneous protests amplify Social Risk factors and further increase instability in the region.

Key Findings

- Social Risk presents an immediate and persistent threat to India’s stability
- Social Risk factors creates a volatile environment prone to increased levels of social unrest and violence
- Perceived attacks on individual and group identity amplify feelings of shame and humiliation, which ignite social tensions
- Communications technologies and digital and social media (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook) erode traditional caste structures
- Lack of understanding among stakeholders (i.e. farmers, government officials and law enforcement) has polarized negative sentiment and beliefs
- Competition between political parties vying for public support furthers the divide between authorities and protesters

“Social Media empowers individuals, amplifies social tensions, and erodes traditional caste structures.”

Case Study: Mandsaur Protests

ENODO conducted a case study using topic modeling to pinpoint the underlying social tensions that fueled protests associated with the Mandsaur agrarian crisis and that contribute to India’s broader security challenges. ENODO examined a dataset comprised of over 10,000 Tweets, 3,500 Facebook posts, and 135 online news articles, from the 6th to the 12th of June, 2017. Twitter data contained information extracted from tweets that included at least one of the following hashtags in either English or Hindi: #Mandsaur, #MadhyaPradesh, #FarmersAgitation, #ScindiaWithFarmers, and #Modi_Government. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the Twitter topics collected for this study.

Data Collection	
Twitter Accounts	@JM_Scindia
	@OfficeofRG
	@INCIndia
	@ChouhanShivraj
Hashtags	#Mandsaur
	#MadhyaPradesh
	#FarmersAgitation
	#ScindiaWithFarmers
	#Modi_Government
	#Farmer_Murderer_BJP
	#UpvasFixing

Figure 1

ENODO’s population-centric analysis examined key topics, themes, and narratives (i.e. how grievances are discussed on-line). It identified how Social Risk factors such as perceived attacks on individual identity, social media’s disruption of the caste system, the disconnect between authorities and the population, and party politics form the basis of grievances and instigate Mandsaur’s protests. It also demonstrates how Social Risk factors negatively impact individual and collective identities and propagate the divide between authorities and citizens, which threaten broader social values.

Social Risk Factors

Attack on Identity: Population-centric analysis revealed that financial insecurity negatively impacted farmers’ self-worth causing them to express grievances online and through protests. The analysis also revealed that farmers’ inability to pay off loans was perceived as a direct threat to their identity and status as the head of the household—a role traditionally held by males. Findings indicate that emotionally charged words associated with “दरद” or “pain,” and “शर्म” or “shame” emerged exclusively from Hindi tweets. Farmers expressed feelings associated with humiliation on Twitter—an online setting—because Indian cultural norms dissuade them from openly expressing emotions in more public domains.



“Social Risk factors are the critical components that lead to violence and magnify broader security challenges.”

Disruption of Caste Structures: The seamless and instantaneous dissemination of ideas via social media directly challenges historical social structures, which include rigid caste hierarchies across different groups, regions, and even states. Social media platforms give individuals a voice, which they were previously not able to express. This enables them to spread ideas among and beyond their immediate social groups, create movements, and mobilize segments of societies. The emergence of young farmers coordinating protests using WhatsApp is one example. With one hand on the tractor wheel and the other on the phone ready to tweet, farmers expressed grievances and mobilized their peers without a centralized power structure to coordinate activities.

Polarization of Beliefs: Social tensions are exacerbated by farmers’ and local authorities’ lack of understanding of one another’s perceptions and sentiments. Each side’s beliefs are increasingly polarized against the other. This is illustrated in online protest narratives that include: (1) federal and state governments are at “war with farmers,” (2) police are responding to farmers’ distress not as grievances but as an insurgency, (3) farmers are perceived as “anti-nationals”, (4) farmers question Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Chouhan’s “authenticity” and leadership, and (5) government officials’ demonstrations of solidarity through fasting are considered fake by farmers (which even spurred the creation of its own hashtag #upvasfixing). Negative perceptions and narratives deepen the growing divide and are even being viewed as personal attacks on individual rights and beliefs.

Party Politics: Competition between political parties vying for public support further exacerbates the rift between authority and farmers. The region's two rival political parties—the Indian People’s Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC)—use the crisis and social media to disseminate narratives that support their political agendas. Unfortunately, these narratives often reinforce farmer’s negative sentiment and fail to address their underlying grievances. Narratives trending with the hashtag #Farmer_Murderers_BJP focused on the inability by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Chauhan’s BJP party to implement a coordinated resolution, while narratives trending with the hashtag #ScindiaWithFarmers support the opposition party leader Mr. Jyotiraditya Scindia and his alliance with the Kisan Union (the farmers’ union in Madhya Pradesh). Social media posts from both party accounts illustrate the self-promotion centered on party leaders rather than identifying proactive strategies to engage farmers and help resolve the Mandsaur crisis.

Findings from ENODO’s Mandsaur case study demonstrate how Social Risk factors animate existing grievances and underlying social tensions. Social Risk factors are the critical components that trigger beliefs and behavior, which ultimately lead to violence and magnify broader security challenges. Social Risk factors associated with the Mandsaur protests emerged from perceived



“Authorities are ill-equipped to manage Social Risk or incorporate population-centric analysis into their planning.”

attacks on the farmer identity and traditional family values tied with the inability to support the family. These threats to identity were then amplified by social media, increasing the polarity between authorities and citizens, and party politics, which further deepened the divide. Figure 2 illustrates how this process manifested within Mandsaur’s agrarian population, forcing them to resort to hunger strikes, suicides, and violent protests to express their grievances and frustrations.

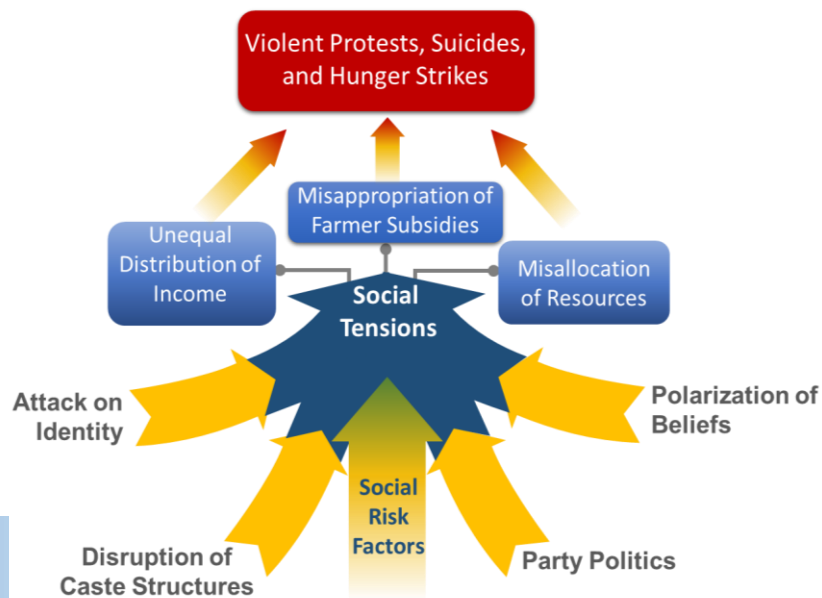


Figure 2

Understanding Social Risk factors provides a roadmap for authorities. It enables them to recognize, manage, and mitigate regional conflicts through a population-centric approach. This approach pinpoints the underlying grievances associated with unrest, uncovers public sentiment and narratives associated with key topics, and creates mitigation strategies to reduce social tensions that threaten India’s stability. Strategic application of ENODO’s Social Risk approach can also be applied to broader topics including caste-based land distribution, imbalanced water allocation, mismanaged loan waivers, and extortion by money lenders. By addressing the root causes of Social Risk, authorities can more effectively manage larger social issues and prevent downturns in rural economic growth, rural-to-urban migration, and food insecurity.

Conclusion

Regional conflicts fueled by Social Risk factors create an unstable environment that heighten social tensions, erode trust within India’s diverse population, and stimulate civil unrest and violence. Public and private sector institutions are ill-equipped to manage Social Risk or incorporate population-centric analysis into their planning or current public engagement strategies. Moreover, the lack of a coherent social media engagement strategy to address underlying grievances, leaves the Madhya Pradesh government exposed and unable to mitigate the ongoing crisis. Moreover, regional conflicts like the Mandsaur agrarian crisis, weaken the BJP ruling party and Prime Minister Modi’s national reform policies. Without a coordinated intervention strategy that incorporates Social Risk factors, protests, unrest, and violence will continue to divide Indian society across ethnic, religious, and caste lines, derail economic development, and negatively impact India’s stability.





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