

NARENDRA MODI

IMPACT: Narendra Damodardas Modi is the current Prime Minister of India. He was the Chief Minister of Gujarat during the deadly 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in the state, and throughout his political career, he has promoted Hindu nationalist views. Under his leadership, India has experienced a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate speech, increasing polarization and violence in society, growing restrictions on the media, and the growth of Hindu nationalist groups. Critics and human rights experts have warned that under Modi's leadership, democracy in India is under threat.

- Narendra Damodardas Modi, the current Prime Minister of India, was born in Vadnagar in 1950. **At the age of 8, he joined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing paramilitary organization founded by Dr. K.B Hedgewar in 1925 that seeks to make India a Hindu-only nation.** He permanently joined the RSS in the late 1960s as an assistant to the prant pracharak (leader), Lakshmanrao Inamdar. **When L.K Advani became the head of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), he enlisted Modi as the organization secretary for the Gujarat branch in 1987.** As the organizing secretary, Modi expanded the party's electoral base across Gujarat.
- **Throughout his career, Modi has promoted and supported Hindu nationalist views.** Modi's idea of patriotism is in tandem with the RSS tenets of wedding India and Hindu culture - viewing it as a punyabhoomi (sacred land) and matri bhoomi (motherland). Under Modi's leadership, India has experienced a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate speech, increasing polarization and violence in society, growing restrictions on the media, and the growth of Hindu nationalist groups.
- In the **1980s and 1990s, Modi played a pivotal role in advancing Hindu nationalism, rising from the position of prant pracharak to chief RSS organizer in Gujarat.** During this time, he coordinated activities between various groups within the Sangh Parivaar, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). **Modi actively participated in campaigns promoting the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the site of the Mughal-era Babri Masjid.** He was notably involved in organizing processions, reinforcing the Hindu community's strength and advocating for the reclamation of the Ram Janmabhoomi (Lord Rama's birthplace).
- Modi's association with the Rath Yatra, which called for the construction of the Ram Mandir, solidified his role as an "architect and planner" of the movement. The yatra, supported by the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, laid the groundwork for the eventual demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 by 150,000 kar sevaks (religious volunteers). The aftermath witnessed widespread communal violence, resulting in over 2,000 lives lost, predominantly among the Muslim community. Chants during the demolition, such as "ab to bhagwa lehrayega pure Pakistan par" (now the saffron will fly all over Pakistan) and "mandir wahi banega" (the temple will be built at the same spot as Lord Ram's birthplace), underscored the communal and Hindu nationalist zeal of the event.
- The **2002 Gujarat Pogroms took place during Modi's first year as Chief Minister of the state.** On February 27, 2002, a section of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims and volunteers caught on fire in Godhra. The individuals were on their way to a religious pilgrimage between Ayodhya and Ahmedabad. The incident killed 59 Hindu pilgrims. In 2006, the Banerjee Commission, instituted by the Ministry of Railways, characterized the fire as an accident. However, in 2008, the Nanavati-Mehta commission, appointed by the state government, concluded that the burning was a pre-planned arson committed by a Muslim mob.
- On **February 27, 2002, there was a reported late-night meeting with senior police officers at Modi's residence. Sanjiv Bhatt, one of the senior officers with the Gujarat Intelligence Bureau, alleged that Modi believed Muslims should be "taught a lesson" and that Hindus had the right to "vent their anger."** On February 28th, 2002, in response to the Godhra fire, "Hindu mobs set out blaming Muslims for the deaths of the pilgrims, resulting in a spiral of violence. The mobs went on a rampage of rapes, looting, and murder, targeting any Muslim that they came across." Gulberg Society in Chamanpura was targeted by a mob of Hindu nationalists who demanded the surrender of Congress Party's Ehsan Jafri, a Muslim member of parliament. Eyewitnesses reported that Jafri surrendered to

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the mob, pleading for the safety of his family and the predominantly Muslim neighborhood. Subsequently, the mob dragged him away, dismembered him, and set his body on fire. **The mob reportedly killed “around seventy women, children and men who had taken shelter with Jafri.”** In a press conference on February 28, Modi claimed that Jafri firing a gun was “pivotal” to inciting the mob that slaughtered him and his family.

- **The violence lasted three days and was described as a series of pogroms that targeted Muslims in Gujarat.** 16 out of Gujarat’s 24 districts witnessed armed mobs, numbering between 2,000 and 10,000 individuals in various locations. **The official government figures state that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed. However, other sources estimate that nearly 2,000 individuals were killed, with the majority being Muslim and nearly 150,000 people were displaced.** The British inquiry on the Gujarat Pogrom concluded that the violence against Muslims had “all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing” and that Modi “was directly responsible”.
- At the **February 28 press conference**, Modi also stated, “**With the entire population of Gujarat very angry at what happened in Godhra much worse was expected.**” In March 2002, Modi explained the pogroms using Newton’s third law of motion - ‘every action has an equal and opposite reaction’. Instead of providing aid for Muslims who were displaced, Modi stated that “relief camps are actually child-making factories. Those who keep on multiplying the population should be taught a lesson.”
- Modi’s seniority in the BJP and at the national level rose through his three successive terms as the Chief Minister of Gujarat. **In 2013 Modi was selected as the Prime Ministerial candidate for the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP won the election and held 282 out of 543 of the seats and Modi became the Prime Minister of India.** Under Modi’s leadership, the Indian government has passed a number of discriminatory measures that have impacted the lives of minority communities in the country, predominantly Indian Muslims. During the 2014 election, Modi supported the party’s stance on passing cow protection legislation. Modi alleged that subsidies were provided to slaughterhouses, fearing a “pink revolution”. Cow slaughter is controversial in India because of cows’ sacred status in Hinduism. **In 2017, Modi’s government imposed a ban on the sale of cows for slaughter, a long-standing tenet of the RSS. After the decision was struck down by the Supreme Court, BJP spokespersons highlighted that the law may or may not be adopted by states.**
- Between 2015 and 2018, Human Rights Watch reported 36 cases of Muslims being murdered by cow vigilantes, known as gau rakshaks, on suspicion of carrying beef. These incidents, commonly referred to as ‘cow lynchings,’ were frequently recorded and shared on social media, showcasing brutal assaults on Muslim individuals, accompanied by forced chants of “Jai Shree Ram” which translates to “hail Lord Ram” by Hindu nationalist groups. Hindu chants have been frequently used by Hindu nationalist groups as a rallying cry. Despite clear evidence and public awareness of the perpetrators, law enforcement seldom took action against the vigilantes. In some instances, they were even rewarded. A notable case occurred in Jharkhand in July 2018 when Jayant Sinha, a BJP minister, garlanded eight Hindu nationalists accused of lynching a Muslim man for allegedly carrying beef. In an interview in 2017, Modi acknowledged lynchings, but asked citizens not to politicize them, asking if they only began after 2014: “How did it start, who started it, I would not like to add to such discussions.”
- In 2019, Modi ran for reelection. After the election win, Modi’s deputy, Amit Shah, said “We are capable of delivering any message we want to the public—whether sweet or sour, true or fake.” **In Modi’s second term, he has used his position as the leader of the country to increasingly suppress journalism and the media, especially those voices critical of his government. In 2019, the BJP amended the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) (1967), giving “authorities the ability to designate any individual as ‘terrorist’ and detain them without producing any incriminating evidence.”** Individuals arrested under the UAPA act can be held in custody for months, and even years, without being found guilty. **The amendment has been utilized to silence journalists, Muslim activists, civil society groups, media outlets, or any critics of Modi’s government. Amnesty International**

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has stated that Modi's government "used repressive laws to silence critics by curbing freedom of expression both offline and online".

- The **BJP, under Modi, has used the media as a tool to not only boost their influence and curb opposition but also spread Islamophobic messaging.** The **BJP's digital campaigns, often through third parties, include creating and distributing false posts that frame Muslims as violent**, arguing that only a vote for the party could bring justice to India. In a September 2023 Washington Post [article](#), journalist Gerry Shih explored these digital campaigns and noted that the BJP uses social media, especially WhatsApp, during elections as a "tool to fan polarization and stoke violence".
- Under Modi's tenure, the government has passed several discriminatory measures impacting minority communities, namely Indian Muslims. For instance, **since Modi's government has come to power, the demand to ban halal meat has gained momentum.** This movement has been supported by the BJP leaders who believe that it is part of the "[Economic Jihad](#)". Some states such as Uttar Pradesh have even legally penalized companies that issue halal certification as a part of its violent "[crackdown against halal items](#)".
- On **August 6, 2019, the Indian government revoked the special status provided to the region of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution.** In its December 2023 report, [Amnesty International](#), which has documented the continued repression of rights in Jammu & Kashmir since the change in status of the region, "called for the Indian government to end the use of unlawful measures and unjust barriers impeding the exercise of various human rights in the region." According to the 2011 census, **Muslims make up 68.31% of the total population in Kashmir.** In June 2020, Al Jazeera reported that **following the revocation of special status, "Up to 25,000 people have been granted domicile certificates in Indian-administered Kashmir...raising fears of the beginning of demographic changes"** amongst the local population. A resident told [Al Jazeera](#) that the recent move by the Indian government signals "the beginning of Kashmir becoming another Palestine".
- In **December 2019, the Indian government amended the [Citizenship Amendment Act \(CAA\)](#), providing a fast track for non-Muslim migrants to be naturalized.** The United States Commission on Religious Freedom [noted](#) that this move has caused "fears that this law is part of an effort to create a religious test for Indian citizenship and could lead to the widespread disenfranchisement of Indian Muslims." Along with the CAA, the [National Register of Citizens \(NRC\)](#) Act was passed to register all legal citizens of India and inclusion in the NRC is based on verifying an "individual's citizenship prior to March 25, 1971". Both policies passed under Modi were [criticized](#) for discriminating against Indian Muslims.
- In **February 2020, New Delhi experienced a weekend of violence sparked after a BJP politician targeted demonstrators who had been protesting for months against the government's CAA law.** On February 20, 2020, Kapil Mishra, a BJP MLA from New Delhi threatened to remove an anti-CAA protest at Jafraabad by [force](#) if the police did not act. His [speech](#) allegedly served as a trigger for the mob violence that ensued, targeting Muslims in Northeast Delhi. **At least 53 individuals were killed, primarily Muslims, and 2,000 were displaced.** A March 2020 [Guardian](#) piece described it as "the worst religious conflict to engulf the capital in decades," and featured an interview with a retired police officer who stated that Delhi police were involved in the violence. The officer stated, "They not only openly sided with the Hindu mobs attacking Muslims but also used brutal force against them." In a video that went viral on social media, officers of the Delhi Police were seen beating up Muslim youth while forcing them to [sing](#) the national anthem.
- In **July 2020, the Delhi Minorities Commission's fact-finding [report](#) described the violence as a pogrom.** The Commission also noted that the Chargesheet filed by the Delhi Police, which comes under Amit Shah's Home Ministry, primarily leveled charges against Muslims. **During this incident of anti-Muslim [violence](#), PM Modi remained [silent](#).** **After three days of mob violence, he called for**

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“peace and brotherhood” amongst the people. Authorities used the UAPA amendments to arrest 800 individuals in the days following the violence, the majority of them being Muslim youth, while BJP leaders and Hindu nationalist mobs were not charged. A Delhi High Court judge, Justice S. Muralidhar, was transferred by the BJP headed Law Ministry, after condemning the Delhi Police’s failure to charge BJP leaders with hate speech.

- **In 2019, Modi visited the United States to address his supporters. Attended by 50,000 Indian Americans, the Howdy Modi rally signified popular support for Modi outside of India.** Modi invited then-US President Donald Trump and shared his support for the American president ahead of the 2020 US election by calling Trump “a friend of India, a great American president.” In late February 2020, just days after the Delhi pogrom, Donald Trump visited India on an official visit titled “Namaste India” under Modi’s government. When asked about the deadly protest during his visit, Trump said he was “satisfied” with Modi’s work with religious freedom in India.
- **Under Modi’s governance, there has been a proliferation of conspiracy theories. One that has gained prominence through social media and has also resulted in legislation, is the theory of “Love Jihad.”** This right-wing conspiracy theory promoted by Hindu nationalists claims that Muslim men are trapping Hindu women into marriage and forcibly converting them to Islam. **Under Modi’s leadership, a number of states have introduced legislation prohibiting conversion upon marriage, and these laws have often been used to arrest Muslim men and target interfaith couples.** Similarly, another conspiracy theory that was used to target Muslims was “Corona Jihad,” which came about during the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, the BJP government blamed the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary group, for a spike in COVID-19 cases, fueling the “Corona Jihad” conspiracy theory. BJP officials stoked fears, with some comparing Jamaat members to terrorists. A viral video showed a BJP MLA advising against buying from Muslim vendors. BJP Information Technology cell head, Amit Malviya, linked anti-CAA-NRC protests and COVID-19, calling it an “Islamic insurrection.”
- Following the deadly 2002 anti-Muslim Gujarat pogroms, several Western governments took action against Modi, given he was the Chief Minister of the state at the time of the violence. In **2002, the UK imposed a domestic boycott and a de facto travel ban on Modi and in 2005, the US formally revoked a visa for Modi under the law that targets government officials who violate religious freedom.** These actions were revoked by the UK and the US in 2012 and 2014 respectively when Modi ran for Prime Minister as diplomatic ties were restored.
- **Human rights organizations and activists have called attention to the deteriorating situation in India under Modi’s government.** In March 2021, US-based nonprofit, **Freedom House downgraded India’s status of democracy from “free” to “partly free” due to ongoing acts of discrimination against the nation’s Muslim population since Modi came into power.** In February 2021, Human Rights Watch accused Modi's government of adopting “laws and policies that systematically discriminate against Muslims and stigmatize critics of the government”. Additionally, in January 2022, Genocide Watch's Gregory Stanton warned of a potential genocide against Muslims in India, citing concerning signs. Stanton claims that if a genocide were to occur, “it won’t be committed by the state, but by mobs organized by RSS and BJP militants who will lead it.” **In a conversation with The Bridge Initiative in March 2023, US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar expressed concern over rising Islamophobia in India, highlighting Modi’s silence on hate crimes. Many journalists and academics have criticized Modi for his silence, which has been interpreted as tacit approval when it comes to rising Islamophobia in the country.**
- Under **Modi’s leadership, the Indian government has engaged in efforts that appear to be aimed at erasing or minimizing the presence of Islamic history in the country.** These include renaming of Muslim-sounding towns and purging educational textbooks of Islamic history. In October 2018, Al Jazeera published an article which claimed **Modi’s curriculum reform and similar acts of renaming Muslim towns are aimed at removing important milestones Muslim rulers have contributed to and instead present India as a historically Hindu land.** A 2023 piece in the Guardian found that school textbooks were “revised to remove chapters on the history of the Mughals,

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the Muslim rulers who controlled much of India between the 16th and 19th centuries,” as well as “remove references to Mahatma Gandhi’s opposition to Hindu nationalism.” [Hindu nationalists](#) hold a special disdain for the Mughals, [whose](#) “presence in Indian history threatens the idea of a homogenous Hindu past — and thereby, the idea of India as Hindu.” **Apoorvannand, a Hindi professor at Delhi University, described the Modi government’s efforts to amend textbooks as a “[war on history](#)”.**

- **Arundhati Roy, a prominent Indian political author, has raised concerns about the irreversible [damage to democracy in India under Prime Minister Modi’s leadership](#).** She has stated that Modi is “[stoking hatred](#)” against the country’s largest minorities, particularly pointing to his perceived silence on violence against Indian Muslims, which some interpret as tacit support for Hindu vigilante groups engaging in such attacks.
- Modi’s government has also faced criticism from various advocacy organizations and activists. In 2020, [Michelle Bachelet](#), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed regret over the shrinking space for human rights defenders and NGOs in India claiming that “vaguely defined laws are increasingly being used to stifle these voices”. Notably, stringent laws such as the [Foreign Contribution Regulations Act \(FCRA\)](#) have been used to freeze bank accounts, forcing organizations like Amnesty International to shut down their offices in India. These laws not only constrain the activities of NGOs but also impose restrictions on foreign funding, raising concerns about the broader implications for civil society in the country.