

# YOGI ADITYANATH

**IMPACT:** Yogi Adityanath is a Hindu nationalist and the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. Described as a "militant monk," he has a history of anti-Muslim rhetoric and inflaming communal tensions. Under his leadership, UP has instituted several discriminatory measures targeting Muslim history and Muslims themselves, including a deadly crackdown on anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protesters. Under his direction, UP has passed a law criminalizing interfaith marriage and there has been an increase in violence against Muslims.

- Yogi Adityanath (born Ajay Singh Bisht) has been the **Chief Minister (CM) of Uttar Pradesh (UP) — India's most populous state with some 200 million people, about 20% of whom are Muslim — since March 2017**. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader is now the longest-serving CM of UP since 1960. The saffron-clad "Monk Who Became CM" (also the name of his biography) is **framed as the successor of current Prime Minister Narendra Modi**. He holds a Bachelor's of Science in Maths from Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna, Garhwal University. ***The Economic Times* reported, "He was actively involved with the RSS from a young age and also happened to be a full-timer in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad."**
- The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is an Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organization. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) is a right-wing all India student organization affiliated with the BJP and RSS. Members of the ABVP have targeted Muslims and enabled anti-Muslim conspiracy theories on university campuses across India.
- At the age of 21 he made the decision to renounce his family and pursue a spiritual path. He became a disciple of Mahant Avaidyanath, the then head priest of Gorakhnath Math, and this marked the beginning of his journey towards becoming Yogi Adityanath. Avaidyanath constituted Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yagya Samiti in 1984 to bring all Hindu organizations and sadhus associated with the movement on a single platform and organized a crucial mobilizing masses for demolition of Babri Masjid and construction of Ram Mandir. **In 1998, Adityanath started his political career as the youngest Lok Sabha [Lower House] Member of Parliament from Gorakhpur constituency, Uttar Pradesh.**
- In 2017, Scroll reported, "Eighteen years ago, on February 10, 1999, Bharatiya Janata Party MP Yogi Adityanath and his armed supporters tried to capture a graveyard in Muslim-dominated Panchrukhiya village in Maharajganj district of Uttar Pradesh. But the police acted swiftly, and they had to flee. On the way, however, they fired at a group of Samajwadi Party workers who had gathered on the main road close to the village for a routine demonstration against the then BJP government in the state. In the attack, at least four persons were injured." In 2019, The Allahabad High Court's special court for MPs and MLAs dismissed the 1999 case of murder of head constable Satya Prakash Yadav against the chief minister.
- In 2002 — **within weeks of the anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat that resulted in the deaths of over 2,000 people (primarily Muslims) — he formed his personal "anti-minority outfit" — the Hindu Yuva Vahini**. A 2017 piece in Scroll reported, "The region witnessed at least six major riots in the very first year since the group's formation." A 2017 piece in The Times of India notes that **Hindu Yuva Vahini volunteer members used "strong-arm tactics in riots, cow-protection drives, and in their attempts to curtail 'love jihad'."** A 2017 op-ed in the Caravan noted that "The constitution of the Yuva Vahini is a startling document for the brand of Hindutva it articulates, and the internal structure of the organization it showcases. It would be difficult to find any other high-level political leader in the country who has founded an organization that seeks a Hindu Rashtra as blatantly, and is structured like a mini-corporation. This fact is part of what makes Adityanath, now one of the most empowered individuals in the country, unique in the Hindu nationalist universe."

- **Adityanath has a history of making anti-Muslim and divisive statements**, including [“We have decided that if they convert one Hindu girl we will convert 100 Muslim.”](#) [“No place for others in areas with over 40% Muslim population,”](#) [“Those who want to avoid Yoga can leave India,”](#) and [“...Give us permission, we will install Gauri, Ganesh and Nandi in every mosque.”](#) Despite this, in 2017 the BJP appointed Adityanath to be Chief Minister (CM) of Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous state. **In March 2017, Vox reported, “The head of the world’s biggest democracy just appointed to a top government post a person who once publicly supported killing Muslims.”** Following the 2017 election, a piece in The Huffington Post reported that within days of the BJP win in the state, [one UP village put up posters asking Muslims to leave.](#) **In 2024, Washington DC-based research group India Hate Lab reported, “About 104 hate speech events were organized in the state of Uttar Pradesh alone.** The state, where over 38 million Muslims reside, is led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who has a prolific history of delivering hate-filled speeches.”
- **A 2017 piece in The Washington Post detailed Adityanath’s history of Islamophobia, describing him as a “controversial and deeply divisive figure for his militant, misogynistic and anti-Muslim rhetoric.”** **In 2019, he used “pathologizing language by describing India’s Muslim League party as a ‘virus,’** and [stated](#) that ‘anyone infected with the virus cannot survive.’ Further, in the lead up to the 2022 state elections, the Hindu monk [stated](#) the fight would be between ‘80 percent and 20 percent,’ referring to the state’s demographic split on religion.”
- In 2019, the BJP-led government passed the [Citizenship Amendment Act \(CAA\)](#), which made it easier for non-Muslim immigrants from neighboring countries to gain Indian citizenship. Widespread protests erupted across India and overseas in opposition to the CAA as critics stated the law [discriminates](#) against Muslims. **In response to the anti-CAA protests and sit-ins, Adityanath stated, “If they won’t understand words, they’ll understand bullets.” He also described anti-CAA protesters as terrorists and added that they should be fed “bullets not biryani.”** Under Adityanath’s leadership, the state cracked down on anti-CAA protesters. **A December 2019 piece in The Huffington Post found that at least 19 people had been killed due to police violence. When it came to those killed by the state, officials were attempting to “erase all traces of deaths caused by the state police,” by forcing “many families to conduct quick secretive funerals”.** The article [reported](#) that Adityanath [“justified the violence and has said his administration would take ‘revenge’ against those demonstrating against the act.”](#) A December 2019 [piece](#) in Al Jazeera further reported that in response to anti-CAA protests, UP state authorities “demanded millions of rupees from more than 200 people and threatened to confiscate their property as a penalty for damage done to public property.” The Supreme Court had to [intervene](#) and stop Adityanath’s government.
- **A February 2020 Guardian piece by Hannah Ellis-Peterson described Adityanath as an individual known for “preaching hate and violence against India’s Muslims.”** In January 2020, Adityanath [claimed](#) that the Muslim population in India had increased since Partition because the community received special rights. At a rally in Bihar, he [stated](#) the Muslim population “has gone up by seven to eight times” since 1947, and further claimed that anti-CAA protests were being fuelled by a “crooked Opposition.” In a **February 2020 interview with BBC Hindi, Adityanath stated “Muslims who chose to stay in India when it was partitioned following independence from Britain did the country ‘no favors’.**”
- Under **Adityanath’s tenure as CM of UP, the state has experienced an increase in lynchings of Muslims suspected of transporting or consuming beef.** In February 2019, Human Rights Watch [reported](#) that Hindu nationalist vigilante groups have engaged in lynchings of Muslims under the guise of cow protection. Additionally, **in 2020, UP was among the first to pass a law against “Love Jihad”, a widely debunked conspiracy theory promoted by Hindu nationalists in India to incite fear, animosity, and violence against the country’s 200 million Muslims.**
- **Since 2017, Adityanath’s government in UP has changed the names of several cities and railway stations in the state. During a May 2024 election rally, he called for renaming Akbarpur, named after the third Mughal emperor, stating that “The mere mention of Akbarpur often evokes hesitation. All of this will change. We must put an end to the signs of slavery and honour our heritage.”** **In 2018, UP’s Adityanath-led government changed the name of the historic city of Allahabad to Prayagraj.** An April 2019 piece in NPR [stated](#) that the BJP

government sought to swap “names that reflect Muslim heritage for Hinducentric ones. In doing so, they are revising the map of India and trying to rewrite its history.” **The piece described Adityanath as one of India’s “most vocal Hindu nationalists” who has a “reputation for inciting hatred against minorities, particularly Muslims.”** It found that in 2014, Adityanath told a rally, “We cannot let Muslim invaders from centuries ago define us today!”

- In a **June 2022 LA Times piece**, **Sheikh Saliq observed that “hating and disparaging Muslim rulers, particularly the Mughals, are distinctive to India’s Hindu nationalists.”** He interviewed Dr. Audrey Truschke, Professor of South Asian history at Rutgers University, who **noted** that the “demonization” of India’s Muslim kings is in “bad faith” and promotes “historical revisionism.”
- **Adityanath has been dubbed “Bulldozer baba,” for his use of bulldozers to target Muslim homes and businesses.** A 2022 **BBC piece noted** that bulldozers “have become a weapon in the hands of India’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government to destroy homes and livelihoods of the minority Muslim community,” especially in the state of UP. The piece stated that during Adityanath’s re-election campaign in 2022, his supporters came to a roadshow with “little yellow toy bulldozers.” Additionally, “bulldozers were parked at Mr Adityanath’s election rallies and after he won, the machines were paraded before the state assembly building in celebration.” In February 2024, **Al Jazeera reported** that “**Analysts say bulldozers have come to symbolize the oppression of Muslims in India, particularly after Yogi Adityanath – the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, known for his anti-Muslim bigotry – started the policy of destroying properties of those accused of crimes to dispense instant justice.** But legal experts say due process is the biggest casualty of this new phenomenon popular among the Hindu far right.”
- Two reports by Amnesty International – ‘[If you speak up, your house will be demolished’: Bulldozer Injustice in India](#)’ and ‘[Unearthing Accountability: JCB’s Role and Responsibility in Bulldozer Injustice in India](#)’ – document demolition of Muslim properties in at least five states (including UP). Human rights activist Harsh Mander **wrote** for Caravan, “In sending out bulldozers, authorities seem to be cynically unimpeded by the imperatives of constitutional rights and the rule of law. There is, after all, no law in any Indian statute book that empowers the state to destroy the properties of a person simply on the suspicion of committing a crime.”
- There have been a number of efforts under Adityanath’s government to disenfranchise Muslims in the state. **In March 2024, the Allahabad High Court in UP “effectively banned Islamic schools by striking down a law governing madrasas.” Along with madrasas, mosques have also been targeted by Adityanath’s government.** In 2021, a **100-year-old mosque** was demolished in Uttar Pradesh’s Barabanki district, while in 2023, a **16th-century mosque was razed** in Prayagraj city, under a road widening project. In January 2024, **Adityanath spoke after the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. The temple was built on the ruins of the Babri masjid, which was demolished by a mob of Hindu nationalists in 1992.** Adityanath **said** at the event that “Probably it is the first occasion when a majority had to struggle for so long to get their Lord a rightful place in his birthplace.” He also **said** that the temple was a “harmonious expression of our cultural conscience, marking a cultural renaissance in India. It is not merely a temple but the National Temple.”
- **Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised Adityanath, stating, “He is also my Chief Minister too. I am proud to have peers like him”.** Under PM Modi’s Hindu nationalist BJP rule, India’s media landscape faces **declining press freedom**. As per Committee Against Assault on Journalists’ (CAAJ) **report**, a total of 138 cases of persecution of journalists were registered in Uttar Pradesh from the time the CM took oath in 2017 and February 2022. **The Wire reported** “**Since the time Adityanath was sworn in as the chief minister in 2017 till the publication of the CAAJ report, a total of 12 journalists have been killed in the state, 48 physically assaulted, and 66 were booked under various charges or arrested. Twelve cases of intimidation, detention or spying have also been reported.**”
- **CM Adityanath has also engaged in spreading misinformation.** In September 2023, he **repeated the false claim**, “Not even a single riot occurred in the past six and a half years” under his leadership. This claim was debunked in

April 2023, as per the [report](#), “Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of reported riots under the Bharatiya Janata Party, with the National Crime Records Bureau documenting 35,040 cases between 2017 and 2021.” In March 2024, Adityanath claimed that UP was the first state where every district has a cyber police station. However, it was [fact-checked](#) and found that multiple States achieved this feat. **During the pandemic, Adityanath falsely claimed that there was no surge in the death rate.** Additionally, a 2021 piece in AltNews found that Adityanath’s [office engineered media reports](#) that misreported that [Johns Hopkins](#) and [Harvard University](#) lauded Adityanath’s management of COVID-19 pandemic in UP.

Bridge Initiative Factsheet