

Does Modi's Re-Election Threaten India's Muslims? Religion is Poisoning Indian Politics

The re-election of India's Hindu right-wing government threatens minorities, and the international community must protect them.

By [Azaz Zaman](#)

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Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Religion](#)

India's general elections were the most wide-ranging and [possibly most](#) expensive election campaign in the nation's history. More than [2,000 parties](#) and over 8,000 candidates contested 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament, and some 900 million registered voters [cast their votes](#). Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged victorious to seal his re-election with a [majority](#) of 303 seats.

However, Modi's return to power has brought distress for some minorities, including India's 200 million Muslims. With an increase in hate crimes against Indian Muslims, "some fear the world's largest democracy is becoming dangerously intolerant" under the Hindu nationalist government, [reports](#) the BBC's Rajini Vaidyanathan.

Religion Is Poisoning Indian Politics

Using [religion](#) as a way to win is a global phenomenon. For instance, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Republicans in the US all use religion in politics. Politicians appeal to religious emotions to gain support. Indeed, Modi is a great example of that practice and he has dramatically reshaped the politics of India.

Ever since he was first elected in 2014, Modi has tried to appease his party's hard-line [Hindu base](#) while pursuing his goals of development and economic growth. He has humored Hindu extremists like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) organization that created his party. Modi himself was an RSS preacher before he became an active BJP politician. While the prime minister has not condoned violence against Indian Muslims, he has not publicly criticized [anti-Muslim actions](#) by Hindu extremists.

Hindutva, a form of Hindu nationalism, is where the problem lies. As a term and ideology, it was popularized by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar first in 1923. It forms the basis of the RSS, as well as the Vishva Hindu Parishad and Hindu Sena groups. As a far-right, ethno-nationalist ideology, Hindutva uses religion as a way to [justify](#) violence "against Dalits, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Ravidassias and Buddhists."

Over the past five years, the Hindutva movement has gained momentum under the Modi government. According to Human Rights Watch, [vigilante groups](#) calling for the protection of cows have killed [dozens of people](#). Most of them are Muslims who were murdered for allegedly slaughtering cows. Many Hindus believe cows are sacred and killing them is a sin. Therefore, some extremists have targeted those who kill the animal.

These attacks are a symptom of the rise of violent Hindu nationalism under Modi. With a BJP government in office, some have seen this as encouragement to embark on vigilantism against cattle traders. Even “lower-caste Hindus previously known as ‘untouchables’ have faced violence from hard-line Hindu nationalists,” [reports](#) Swati Gupta.

Hindu Extremism Must be Reined in

Paul Marshal, a senior fellow at the Center for Religious Freedom, [says](#) that while international focus has been on Islamic terrorism, it has largely ignored Hindu extremism and its record of violence. Saffron terror is a real phenomenon and is supported by members of the BJP. It is rarely scrutinized in the West because Hinduism is stereotyped as a gentle and non-violent faith. It is personified by the image of Mahatma Gandhi.

This allows the RSS and the BJP to take advantage of the attention that the West gives to Islamist violence, enabling Hindu extremism to slip under the radar. In fact, the actions of Hindu extremists are perturbing and nerve-wracking. In India, religious extremism and hatred are now deeply entrenched.

Under Modi, anti-Muslim “bigotry has been normalised in the democratic process,” [says](#) journalist Neyaz Farooquee. After re-election, the BJP might double down on its policies, making life more difficult for Indian Muslims and other groups. Therefore, the international community must take urgent measures to ensure the ruling party does not persecute minorities.

The United Nations, along with other major powers, should put pressure on India to protect minority rights as per its constitution. India must curb the RSS and other extremist Hindu groups. It must prevent communal riots and human rights violations.

In 2018, the BJP government “harassed and at times prosecuted activists, lawyers, human rights defenders and journalists for criticizing authorities,” according to [Human Rights Watch](#). This must stop. Instead, Prime Minister Modi must work to create a balanced, peaceful and tolerant environment for all minorities in India.

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