



## **ISLAMOPHOBIA IN ASIA:** *A Comparative Study of China, Myanmar, and India*

The past two decades have witnessed a dramatic global rise in [Islamophobic attitudes and anti-Muslim violence](#) in Asia and around the world. From hate speech on social media to illegal detention and torture under the pretext of countering violent extremism, Muslims are facing an unprecedented assault on their human rights, religious freedoms, and even their very existence. Among the countries that have exhibited the most overt genocidal violence against Muslims in recent years, three blatant examples can be found in Asia. This study seeks to better understand these developments by examining the case studies of [China, Myanmar, and India](#). China and Myanmar are actively committing genocide against the Uyghur and Rohingya communities, respectively. India is moving towards the brink of genocide against its Muslim population at an alarming rate.

### **Key Findings**

1. The feeling of Islam being an alien and foreign religion that is incompatible with the beliefs of the majority underlies Islamophobia narratives in each country. The more alien their religion seems, the less Muslims are seen as citizens and human beings in the eyes of broader society. Majoritarianism of this kind helps fuel Islamophobia.
2. The Global War on Terror has become an easy justification used by the state in all three countries to mask their own hatred towards Muslims. However, the problems lying at the heart of all these Islamophobic campaigns are historically and territorially entrenched within the political and social fabric of each country. The targeting of innocent, unarmed Muslim civilians cannot ever be justified as counter-terrorism operations.
3. Population control is an important part of the genocidal campaigns underway in China and Myanmar. To bring down the reproductive capacity of a group is an intentional attempt to destroy in part a religious group. It is genocide.
4. Resettlement of the majority population in Muslim-dominated areas by the government is a recurring feature in all three countries. Chinese authorities are offering incentives to Han Chinese citizens to set up businesses and residences in East Turkistan. A similar pattern has been seen in Myanmar's Rakhine State, where the government has lured Buddhist citizens to settle on land abandoned by fleeing Rohingya residents. The revocation of Kashmir's special status will also allow non-Kashmiri Indian citizens to buy land and settle in Kashmir. It is intended to reverse the displacement of over 100,000 Hindu Kashmiri Pandits in the 1990's.

### **Recommendations**

1. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues should investigate China, Myanmar, and India's discrimination against Muslims and report to the U.N. Human Rights Council. Frequent reports on Islamophobia in the three countries have been published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights but little action has come of this.
2. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter must carry out rigorous training programmes for employees to make them better equipped to deal with hate content against Muslims. They must invest in employing many more moderates who speak local languages and are familiar with the specific contexts of each country.
3. The U.S. along with the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Canada placed sanctions on Chinese officials in March 2021 to punish them for human rights abuses. This kind of multilateral effort must be sustained to pressure China to end the Uyghur genocide.
4. In response to the Rohingya crisis, the U.S., E.U., and U.N. have devoted considerable funds for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Now that there is a military government in power in Myanmar, they should invest in foreign aid for Myanmar's civil society. The military junta in power today committed the Rohingya genocide. Trials of the Myanmar military leadership should be seen as a necessary step to address the Rohingya crisis.
5. The U.S. should recognize the Islamophobic nature of India's current leadership and reconsider its relations with India accordingly. The U.S. and the E.U. should impose targeted Magnitsky sanctions against officials responsible for anti-Muslim policies in China, Myanmar, and India. The U.S. has thus far refused to publicly criticise the Indian government. The U.S. should strongly and publicly oppose the Islamophobic policies of the Indian government.



### Methodology

This report is based on detailed interviews with individuals and human rights organizations working for Rohingya, Uyghur, and Indian Muslim organizations. Interviews were conducted online and in person by Genocide Watch between June 2021 and July 2022. The participants were human rights specialists working with a rights organization for Rohingyas; survivors of the Rohingya genocide currently based in a refugee camp in Bangladesh; Uyghur survivors and human rights specialists on the Uyghur genocide currently based in the United States; and human rights specialists working with organizations that advocate for religious minorities in India.

None of the interviewers or interviewees received any form of compensation. All participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the study and the ways that the information they shared might be used. Informed consent was obtained from each participant following explanation of the purpose of the interviews. In the interest of the security of people who spoke to Genocide Watch, the names of interviewees and other identifying information are not revealed in this Genocide Watch report.

### Islamophobia In China: The Uyghur Genocide

Han are the majority ethnic group of China that comprises more than 90 percent of the population. The Muslim population of China, estimated to be around 20 million, includes a variety of ethnic groups. Islamophobia in China manifests itself in two ways: First, Islamophobia across the country that targets all Muslim groups, including the [Hui, Uyghurs, Khalkhas, Kazakhs, and Uzbeks](#), who are discriminated against based on the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) atheist ideology that discourages all religious practices; and second, specific state-sponsored genocide targeting Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

The Hui have not been subjected to the same severe persecution as the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Some scholars surmise that this greater tolerance might be due to the greater assimilation of Hui into Han culture. The Hui have undergone a gradual [Sinicization of their Islamic beliefs](#).

Anti-Muslim sentiments and actions have long existed in China, but since 2014 the CCP has subjected the Uyghur community to large scale [state-sponsored repression](#). [Uyghurs](#) are an ethnic minority residing in the northwest region of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. They are a Turkic ethnic group whose language and culture bear a strong resemblance to other Turkic Muslim cultures. Uyghurs face religious discrimination and racial othering, which allows the government to label them as outsiders.

Xinjiang has become a mass surveillance state, with the government forcing Uyghurs into so-called "re-education facilities" that are actually [concentration camps](#). China has illegally detained more than one million Uyghurs in these mass internment camps. In the camps, they are subjected to indoctrination, torture, sexual abuse, and forced labour.

The Uyghur population outside the internment camps is subject to strict surveillance, and their freedom of movement has been severely curtailed. Uyghurs are followed and video-recorded in their everyday activities, with individuals identified by facial recognition and artificial intelligence. Uyghur families are forced to live with Han Chinese spies in their own households. "Radical activities," which include praying in a mosque, possessing a Quran, growing a long beard, and eating halal, are punished.

The Chinese government contends that its actions in Xinjiang are designed to combat religious extremism and separatism. Under the pretext of eliminating terrorism, the Chinese authorities have subjected religious worship to continuous surveillance. They have banned the use of the Uyghur language in education and relocated Uyghur children to boarding schools where they are taught solely in Mandarin Chinese. This forcible transfer of children directly violates Article 2(e) of the Genocide Convention.

There is overwhelming evidence to support the claim that China is committing genocide against Uyghurs. Among the acts of genocide against Uyghurs are the [mass sterilization and forced birth prevention](#) policies in Xinjiang, a violation of Article 2(d) of the Genocide Convention. In 2018, the region had the highest number of forced intrauterine device (IUD) placements in China. Another act of genocide is the forced removal of Uyghur children to Mandarin Chinese boarding schools. This forcible transfer of children directly violates Article 2(e) of the Genocide Convention.

The goal is not only to destroy Uyghurs physically through the prevention of births and transfer of their children but also to destroy Uyghurs as a culturally distinct people.



### ***Note on Genocide Denial by Professors William Schabas and Jeffrey Sachs***

Professors William Schabas and Jeffrey Sachs and a few other commentators deny that the Chinese government's attempt to destroy the Uyghur people constitutes genocide because China has not relied primarily on mass killing. However, Schabas and Sachs and other deniers adopt a truncated and incomplete definition of genocide, inconsistent with the explicit language of the Genocide Convention. Such denial is especially astonishing coming from Schabas, who wrote an influential treatise, The Genocide Convention in International Law.

The Genocide Convention prohibits more than mass killing. It outlaws "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group"; "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part;" "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;" and "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." China has committed every prohibited act of genocide listed in the Genocide Convention.

### **Notes**

*Genocide Watch talked to Uyghur representatives based in the U.S. to better understand what is going on inside China and what role anti-Muslim sentiments play in the Uyghur genocide.*

#### **Religion versus Communism:**

For the Chinese communist government, Islam is a foreign religion. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) does not consider Islam or Christianity to be part of Chinese culture. In fact, the Chinese communist party is officially atheist and is highly intolerant of all religions, including Islam. The Chinese Communist Party considers religion poisonous and the antithesis of everything communism stands for. Marxists and Maoists say that "religion is the opiate of the people." This animus towards religion is deeply ingrained from childhood in the primary school curriculum, which brainwashes students into believing that religion is an anti-socialist, regressive ideology. Teachings against religion form the dominant discourse in Chinese education, media, and politics. Because of the CCP's heavy propaganda, most Chinese do not believe in religion and regard those who do believe with suspicion and disgust.

*"Communism is the best thing; only communism can save you." This is what they taught me in school. - quote from a Chinese student.*

*"It was very difficult, as I belonged to a religious Uyghur family and when I went to school, from a very young age they were teaching something entirely different from what I was taught at home. Uyghur people are kind and religious people find it tough to comply with this ideology of the Chinese government. This non-compliance with their communist ideology is one reason for the persecution of our community." - quote from a Uyghur interviewee.*

#### **Islamophobia, The Global War on Terror and the Uyghur Genocide:**

The 9/11 attacks in the U.S. marked the beginning of the Chinese crackdown on Uyghurs as a Muslim group. The "War on Terror" became a pretext for repressing Uyghurs as Muslims. The Chinese government equated Uyghur religious practices with terrorism and criminalized the practices. Many normal religious activities have been legally criminalized, which legitimizes persecution of Uyghurs.

*"Something as basic as giving Muslim names like Ayesha or Mohammad to new-born children have been banned."*

Islamophobia has been an excuse for the government's discriminatory policies in Xinjiang. However, the discrimination runs deeper. Ethnicity is the crucial factor. In addition to practising a different faith, Uyghurs are also ethnically, linguistically, and racially different from the Han Chinese majority population. Another key factor is the political rift created by the nationalist separatist movement for East Turkistan, which the Uyghurs claim is their homeland that has been forcibly occupied by China.

The policies of the Chinese government are inherently in contradiction with Islamic values. Uyghur families are monitored by atheist Chinese officials to restrict any religious activity in the household. Male Han officials live literally embedded with Uyghur families. The male members of many families are in detention centres, and it is the women of the family who are left



behind to be monitored by male officers who forcibly live in Uyghur households. This humiliating invasion of Uyghur peoples' privacy is also an insult to their Islamic doctrines about relationships within the family. There are widespread allegations of rape within such relationships.

The Chinese government's claim that it is countering terrorist activities is a mirror image of what the Chinese state itself is really doing. It is the government that is the terrorist force: invading peoples' homes, holding Uyghurs in concentration camps, kidnapping Uyghur children, and forcing Uyghurs into slave labor. Violence against innocent and unarmed citizens is what defines terrorism. The Chinese government is terrified by the Uyghurs. It even prohibits shops from selling nail cutters, knives, or anything that could possibly be used as a weapon by Uyghurs.

### **Internment Camps:**

The concentration camps today teach that Xi Jinping is the only god. The officers in internment camps make claims such as the following:

*There is no God. Xi Jinping is the god. If there is a god, why does he not come and save you from these concentration camps, why does he not save you when we torture you, beat you, rape you? Xi Jinping, on the other hand, can come here and tell us to stop and save you.*

### **Han Chinese Nationalism:**

Chinese nationalism is what allows the CCP and its ideology to thrive. The idea of a Chinese nation consisting of only Han Chinese people with no "foreigners" is appealing to the nationalism of Han Chinese people. To strengthen feelings of Chinese nationalism, the entire non-Chinese world, especially the West, is portrayed as evil.

The CCP constantly compares China with the U.S. and contends that one day China will surpass it as a global power. International criticism of China's policies in Xinjiang is also rejected by the government on the grounds that western powers are jealous of China's development.

In China there are no alternative, independent media. Ordinary Chinese find it impossible to travel to other countries that are not approved by the CCP. There are no free social media, so the Chinese people have no option but to accept whatever disinformation the government feeds them. Those who try to reveal the truth are arrested and confined in detention centres. Many journalists and writers are in jail simply because they have criticized the government and tried to expose its abuses. The majority of the Han population believes the government and is convinced that repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang is necessary for Chinese national security.

### **The Erasure of Uyghur culture:**

Those who have not been detained in camps are not allowed to pray or to live an ordinary life following their customs and beliefs. There is a slow-motion genocide underway of the Uyghur ethnic and religious group, with a calculated and vicious erasure of the Uyghur culture.

The government is offering incentives to Han Chinese people to settle in East Turkistan and establish businesses there. These resettlement plans aim to challenge the Uyghurs' legitimate claim to their homeland. Chinese policies are a naked attempt to change the demographic character of Xinjiang. The Han Chinese government is carrying out a similar demographic invasion of Tibet. In both cases, the goal of Chinese policy is colonization.



### *Islamophobia in Myanmar: The Rohingya Genocide*

In Myanmar, Muslims account for five percent of the population. [Rohingya](#) are a predominantly Muslim ethnic group that mostly resides in western Myanmar's Rakhine State. In 1982, Burma stripped the Rohingya of their national citizenship. Since then, they have been one of the most persecuted ethnic minorities in the world. They first faced massive genocidal massacres in 2012. Genocide Watch declared a Genocide Emergency for the Rohingya in 2012, the first international human rights NGO to do so. As Genocide Watch predicted, the Myanmar Army launched a full-scale genocide against the Rohingya in August 2017, which drove more than a million Rohingya to flee Myanmar into neighboring Bangladesh. Since then, the Rohingya have also been persecuted as refugees in Bangladesh, India, and other neighboring countries.

The Rohingya have their own language and culture, making them ethnically, linguistically, and religiously distinct from Myanmar's majority Bamar Buddhist population. Islamophobia has been a strong driver behind the anti-Muslim genocide in Myanmar. Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, is most responsible for the genocide against the Rohingya. The Tatmadaw have been joined in their massacres by Rakhine Buddhist militias who also live in Rakhine state.

Myanmar's military rulers contend that the Rohingya are [illegal settlers](#) who arrived during the colonial period, a narrative contradicted by documented historical evidence proving that the Rohingya have been one of the indigenous ethnic groups of Myanmar since at least the 1700s.

The ethnic Bamar government and military junta in Burma (Myanmar) have an exclusionary policy classifying Rohingya as "foreign Bengalis." Under Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, only people belonging to one of 135 national ethnic groups recognized by the state are accorded citizenship. Rohingya are not on the list. Without citizenship, Rohingya lack any civil rights.

Discrimination against Rohingya has been institutionalized through the imposition of [severe restrictions](#) on marriage, family planning, employment, education, religious practices, and freedom of movement. This discrimination led to several waves of migration from Myanmar to neighbouring countries, especially Bangladesh, in 1978, 2012, and 2016, totalling over 400,000 refugees.

In August 2017, the Myanmar Army's [massive attack](#) on the Rohingya turned into an intentionally genocidal campaign that resulted in the forced deportation in under three months of over 700,000 additional Rohingya, who fled and sought asylum in Bangladesh.

In August 2017, Myanmar pre-positioned tens of thousands of troops on the borders of Rakhine State in preparation for a "clearance operation" against the Rohingya population. The Tatmadaw began the "clearance operation" on August 24, 2017 immediately after The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked 30 police and army posts, killing twenty police. Using these attacks as a pretext, the Myanmar Army invaded Rakhine State, claiming they were fighting a "counter-insurgency." The fact that the Tatmadaw had pre-positioned thousands of troops belies Myanmar's claim that its "clearance operation" was a response to the ARSA attacks on 30 police posts.

In fact, the Tatmadaw executed a planned genocide. Supported by Rakhine Buddhist militias, the military burned down over 400 Rohingya villages, raped thousands of Rohingya women in the initial days of their attack, and murdered every Rohingya in sight. According to Doctors Without Borders, more than 6,700 Rohingya were killed in the first month of attacks. Other estimates place the total Rohingya killed at over 10,000. Myanmar used these genocidal massacres to terrorize 700,000 Rohingya into fleeing into Bangladesh.

Most refugees currently live in Bangladesh in crowded camps with limited resources. The Kutupalong refugee camps near [Cox's Bazar](#) in Bangladesh house nearly a million refugees and constitute the world's largest refugee camp complex. Other Rohingya refugees fled to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia. Some six hundred thousand Rohingya remain internally displaced within Myanmar, where they continue to suffer from discrimination and constant attacks.

On February 1, 2021, the Tatmadaw carried out a coup d'état that overthrew the elected National League for Democracy government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Aung Suu Kyi was an apologist for the Tatmadaw's genocide against the Rohingya. Nevertheless, the junta placed her under arrest on trumped up charges and convicted and sentenced her to years in prison. Since the coup, the junta has murdered over 7000 Burmese protesters. The Tatmadaw's reimposition of a military dictatorship means that the situation of the Rohingya Muslims is likely to get much worse.





### ***Note on Genocide Denial by Professor William Schabas in the International Court of Justice***

In his defence of Myanmar in the *Gambia v. Myanmar* case at the International Court of Justice, legal scholar William Schabas denied that Myanmar committed genocide against the Rohingya because Myanmar's intention was "ethnic cleansing," not destruction of the Rohingya group as such. Schabas' misinterpretation of the Genocide Convention treats genocide and "ethnic cleansing" as mutually exclusive intents.

Schabas' mistaken interpretation of specific intent was adopted by the International Court of Justice in its *Bosnia v Serbia* and *Croatia v Serbia* judgments. In those judgments, the ICJ held that if any other intent can be inferred from a state's actions besides the destruction of a protected group, the intent cannot conclusively be proven to be genocide.

This "only intent" or "single intent" test to prove "specific intent" to commit genocide is not only wrong to prove genocide. It is wrong to prove criminal intent for any crime. When a murderer intends to kill, his intent is not negated if he also has the intent to rob his victim. There are always multiple "intents" behind a genocidal campaign. Having more than one intent does not negate the specific intent to commit genocide. If such an "only intent" or single intent test were applied, even the Holocaust could not be proven to be genocide. Schabas also denies many other clear historical and ongoing cases of genocide, including the Ukrainian Holodomor, the Bangladesh Genocide, the Cambodian Genocide, and China's genocide against the Uyghurs.

### ***Notes***

*Human rights specialists spoke to Genocide Watch about the terrible conditions of Muslims in Myanmar, especially the Rohingya in Rakhine state. Most of the claims made by these experts have been corroborated by interviewees who spoke to Genocide Watch from a refugee camp in Bangladesh.*

The Rohingya are facing genocide, but other Muslim ethnic groups around the country are suffering widespread discrimination and persecution as well. Freedom of religion is severely limited, and mosques have been shut down around the country.

The Rohingya are a minority in Rakhine state; Rakhine Buddhists form the majority group. Rohingya are not only Muslim, but are believed to look different from the majority population. Because they commonly possess distinguishable physical and cultural traits, it is easy for the police to identify and target Rohingya at checkpoints.

Kaman Muslims, another ethnic Muslim group, are among the 135 officially recognized national ethnic communities in Myanmar. Despite being one of seven Rakhine sub-groups and the only Muslim group among the 135 recognized ethnic groups by Myanmar, Kaman Muslims also face institutional discrimination and suffered many deaths during the genocidal campaigns of 2017.

### **Myanmar laws that create conditions for genocide:**

National Verification Cards (NVCs) – The NVC has been an important administrative tool used to dispossess Rohingya Muslims of their fundamental rights. The cards categorize the Rohingya as foreigners, stripping them of any chance to obtain citizenship. Rohingya people who have tried to refuse National Verification Cards have been tortured by officials in order to make them accept them.

These coercive procedures increased before the genocide of 2017, a fact that is in direct contradiction with the claims by the Myanmar government that the NVC process started in response to the Rakhine State crisis. Genocide Watch's interviewees confirmed that their family members were forced to accept the NVC, which classified them as "Illegal Bengalis."

The 1982 Burmese citizenship laws rendered the Rohingya stateless. Until 1982, the Rohingya were known as Arakanese. The Burma Citizenship Law deleted the term "Arakanese" from the list of eight indigenous groups and replaced the term with "Rakhine," a word that denotes only the Buddhist community in Arakan State.

Rohingya couples need to report their relationship to the state and have to remove any religious ornaments in order to get married. This process takes somewhere between six months and one year, and they also have to pay a fine to register their marriages.



Travel restrictions are severe against Muslim communities. Rohingya need official documents and permits for traveling from one township to another, even within Rakhine State. Those found traveling without a permit are jailed for years, including children as young as five.

**Buddhist monks incite anti-Muslim hatred and violence:**

Buddhist monks have played a central role in inciting violence against Muslims in Myanmar for decades. They give incendiary speeches full of anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim statements in front of large Buddhist audiences. Buddhist monks often refer to Muslims as “Kalar,” a derogatory term for Muslims and foreigners, and compare the Rohingya to ghosts and ogres that need to be removed from the country. Monks portray Islam as opposed to Buddhism. Many monks hold a narrow, exclusionary vision of Buddhist nationalism. Bamar Buddhist monks incited genocidal massacres of Rohingyas.

Myanmar’s Buddhist and Muslim communities have been residentially separated by the Myanmar government in Sittwe and Maungdaw. In urban centers like Yangon and Mandalay, **polarization** of Buddhist and Muslim populations is slowly changing because Buddhist and Muslim youth now mingle with each other more than they did in the past.

**Social media spread hate and incitements to genocide:**

Facebook played a key role in spreading malicious hate speech in Myanmar, making it easy for the military to circulate incitements to genocide. The Tatmadaw has a special unit to spread hate speech and propaganda on Facebook.

Facebook has become the dominant source of news and social discussion in Myanmar. It has quickly become the alternative to traditional news media. People who read Facebook often cannot differentiate between real news and propaganda.

The Burmese language media were equally responsible for creating an atmosphere of antipathy toward Muslims. They identified the Rohingya as “Bengali” “foreigners” throughout the genocide. This “othering” desensitized the general citizenry to the plight of the Rohingya, entrenching the belief that they are illegal Bengali foreigners.

**Islamist militancy was a pretext for disguising the Tatmadaw genocide as "counter-insurgency":**

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a tiny Rohingya militant group, has been involved in terrorist activities, including attacks on 30 police posts in August 2017. The Myanmar government cites these attacks as the justification for the Tatmadaw’s genocidal massacres in August 2017.

Some experts contend that ARSA is actually sponsored and funded by the Myanmar government to engage in terrorist activities so that the government can justify its attacks on Rohingya civilians. The police arrest Rohingya leaders and imprison them. Those charged with terrorism are forced to accept national verification cards before going to prison. The cards identify them as “Illegal Bengalis”, not as “Rohingya,” a **symbolization** name that is still forbidden by the Myanmar junta.

**The NASAKA – An oppressive state authority:**

Myanmar’s border security force, formerly called and still sometimes referred to as the NASAKA, or “Border Immigration Headquarters,” has a heavy presence in the Muslim-dominated western region, including Rakhine State. It is an inter-agency force comprised of immigration, police, intelligence, and customs officers. It is tasked with securing the Burmese border. It is a state authority funded by the government that has been used to control and repress the Rohingya in Rakhine state.

The NASAKA agency is responsible for enforcing discriminatory policies against the Rohingya – including travel restrictions, marriage restrictions, and the recently reactivated “two child” limit. It has also imposed forced labour and has extorted bribes for basic government services. The charges of NASAKA extortion were corroborated by our interviewee in Bangladesh. He told Genocide Watch that NASAKA officials extorted hefty bribes in exchange for not shutting down his business in Rakhine and for not evicting him from his land.

Rakhine State’s population is strictly monitored. To keep a check on population growth, NASAKA officials take photographs of each Rohingya family in Rakhine every six months. Families have to report each death immediately or else they are fined by NASAKA. If visitors come into the Rakhine state, the head of the household must declare them to be guests or else everyone in the household can be arrested. During family list registrations, Muslims are humiliated by being asked to remove prayer hats or facial coverings.



### *Islamophobia In India: The Hindutva Project*

In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), promote an exclusionary ideology called Hindutva. The Hindutva ideology contends that India must become a Hindu nation, a “Hindu Rashtra,” in which non-Hindus will be second class citizens. BJP leaders espouse [Islamophobia as a key doctrinal tenet](#) of [Hindutva](#).

Partition at independence in 1947 drove Hindu-Muslim hatred into a double genocidal frenzy and cost hundreds of thousands of lives. The hatred and genocide were rooted in deep animosity that has existed since the time of Mughal rule. Pakistan became an Islamic republic in 1947. But India under Nehru and the Congress Party made India a secular state with constitutional freedom of religion.

While religious fault lines continued in post-independence India, the period up to the 1990s was one of relative calm. As the Sangh Parivar (RSS), comprised of several Hindu nationalist parties rose to political prominence, so did instances of mass violence against Muslims. The BJP is the electoral representative of the Sangh Parivar. After Narendra Modi’s BJP victory in the election of 2014, communal fissures have widened like cracks along like a geological fault line.

[Lynching](#) has become the most common atrocity crime against Muslims. Lynchings of Muslims are increasingly deemed acceptable by extremist Hindutva leaders. Hindu mobs and right-wing militant groups beat up and kill Muslims in broad daylight. Perpetrators of such violence not only go unpunished but are even given rewards by community leaders and BJP leaders themselves. Muslims live in constant fear of [violence, harassment, and bullying](#) in north Indian states that are increasingly turning into a “Hindu Rashtra.”

Kashmir has been a contested state between India and Pakistan since 1947. It is divided between the nations. Kashmir has been a hotbed of activities by Kashmiri separatists and pro-Pakistani militants. In the 1990s Kashmiri Muslim militants drove over 100,000 Kashmiri Hindu Pandits out of Kashmir. The Modi government uses this as a pretext to demonize the entire Muslim population of Kashmir and accuse Kashmiri Muslims of engaging in terrorist activities.

In August 2019, Modi’s Central government revoked the Special Autonomous Status of India Administered Jammu and Kashmir provided by Article 370 of the Constitution of India. India currently has over 600,000 troops in Kashmir. The Indian Army and police have tortured, raped, and killed Kashmiri citizens with impunity.

[The Citizenship Amendment Act](#) grants refugees from neighboring countries preferential access to Indian citizenship based on their religion. It excludes Muslims. This act, coupled with the nationwide verification process to identify “illegal migrants,” threatens the citizenship rights of millions of Indian Muslims, especially in [Assam](#).

Laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) are used to detain Muslim students, activists, and others who speak up for Muslims. The BJP’s propaganda includes the perpetuation of Islamophobic conspiracy theories such as “[Love Jihad](#),” which claims that Muslim men lure Hindu women to marry them to convert them to Islam. Hindutva thugs attack Hindu-Muslim couples, sometimes murdering them. Police file cases against them. The police, in most cases, support Hindu assailants and charge couples under anti-conversion laws. Men and women in interfaith relationships live in mortal fear of their lives.

The media has become a tool for the government to vilify Muslims by spreading disinformation, holding highly provocative debates by religious fanatics, and depicting harmful stereotypes of Muslims. A government promoted film, “The Kashmir Files” is promoting anti-Muslim hatred.

In December 2021 in Haridwar, Hindutva leaders openly called for arming Hindus to murder Muslims. There has been a drastic rise in Islamophobic hate speech on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. Inflammatory posts made on social media have, in many cases, translated into actual violence. [Normalization of anti-Muslim violence](#) is a disturbing early warning sign of an approaching genocide.

Genocide Watch has issued several Genocide Emergency Alerts for India since 2019. The Alerts warn that if concerted efforts do not stop genocidal processes, India could descend into genocide.





### *Notes*

*Genocide Watch spoke to human rights experts from U.S.-based human rights organizations about the rise of Indian Islamophobia and the Hindutva campaign to turn India into a "Hindu Rashtra."*

#### **Roots of Indian Islamophobia:**

Sporadic instances of inter-religious conflict have always existed in India, but the roots of modern Islamophobia can be traced back to the lead up to Partition in 1947. Over the course of a century of colonial rule, British authorities, as part of their divide-and-rule strategy, constructed a Hindu-Muslim binary opposition, casting the two groups as distinct and opposed political and national communities.

Partition with its genocidal massacres sowed seeds of bitterness as both sides blamed the other for the extreme violence and suffering even though there were many perpetrators from both communities. Many Muslims migrated to the newly created Pakistan, but many also decided to remain in India. In the aftermath of these events, Islamophobia became centred around the idea of who "belongs" to India, and who is an Indian citizen.

Hindu nationalism was also quick to rise following Partition. Muslims who remained in India were accused of not being Indian enough. India's Muslims were portrayed as hiding disloyalty towards India. Extremist Hindus came to believe that they are the "true" Indians, with a more inherent connection to the land. Hindu nationalism has swelled under the BJP, based on the goal of a "Hindu Rashtra."

To push this religious nationalism, Hindutva extremists portray Muslims as enemies of India, traitors, and potential terrorists that the entire country must stand against. Islam and Muslims are the "others" that true Indians must destroy. Religious division serves as a unifier of Hindus. Fear of Muslims is a strong attractor for votes and political power. In today's India, Islamophobic narratives dominate media discourse. The BJP knows that structural issues like poverty and hunger affect all groups, but Muslims have become a scapegoat to blame for the BJP's failures.

Anti-Muslim sentiments in India arise not only from religious hostility but also from an imagined idea of Indian identity and history. An example is the current government program to change names of cities named after historical Muslim rulers, such as Aurangzeb. Muslim rulers are portrayed as foreign oppressors, whose names must be eradicated from Indian history.

#### **Global War on Terror:**

India has been deeply affected by terrorism in the past few decades, including deadly Islamist attacks on major buildings, assassinations, and murders of political candidates and journalists. The Indian public and political leaders support the Global War on Terror. However, Muslims in India face a much higher likelihood of being arrested on charges of terrorism than Hindus, usually without any proof. Police persecution of Muslims has become acceptable and normalized.

"In reality, the 'Global War on Terror' is actually a 'Global War on Islam'."

The Hindutva project has particularly benefited from the Global War on Terror for two reasons. First, the Indian state has found opportunities to accuse Pakistan of supporting terrorism, sometimes with justification, as in the terrorist attack in Mumbai. Second, Indian Muslims are often suspected of secretly supporting Pakistan. Extremist Hindu groups refer to Muslims as Pakistanis even though Muslims have lived in India for hundreds of years. There are in fact more Muslims in India (over 200 million) than in Pakistan. Pakistan and Indian Muslims have become scapegoats for the failures of Indian leadership.

#### **Anti-Muslim laws and policies:**

**The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)** was passed ostensibly for the benefit of refugees from neighbouring countries. However, its benefits are denied to Muslims from those countries. The law represents blatant discrimination as it grants citizenship in a way that explicitly separates Muslim refugees from non-Muslim refugees. Muslims from neighbouring countries, such as the Shias and Ahmadiyyas from Pakistan and Rohingya from Myanmar, have sought refuge in India, but the CAA has excluded them from such protections.

The CAA is even more problematic in conjunction with the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)**. The NRC requires all citizens to present documents to prove that they were Indians before 1971. It was aimed to exclude millions of Muslims who came to Assam to escape the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971. Refugees from that genocide cannot prove they were Indian



citizens before 1971. Under the NRC, over two million Muslims from Bangladesh have been classified as deportable “foreigners.” Both Muslims and Hindus often lack documents to prove their citizenship. But differential application of the law has meant that Hindus are never classified as “foreigners,” whereas Muslims often are.

The **revocation of Article 370**, which had given special status to Kashmir, has further served as an important piece of legislation aimed at depriving the Muslim-majority region of Kashmir of a political voice and ending the few remaining civil liberties Kashmiri citizens enjoy. In addition to these policies, there have been other laws that do not explicitly remove the rights of Indian Muslims but that slowly erode their cultural rights. In Assam, a law was enacted that anybody within a ten-kilometre radius of a Hindu village cannot slaughter a goat. This decision came exactly ten days before the Muslim festival of Eid al Adah, in which goats are traditionally slaughtered. “Now when an ardent BJP supporter sees a Muslim man 9.8 kilometres away from a Hindu village slaughtering an animal on Eid al Adah and no police is around, he decides to take law and order into his hands because the state can’t police such policies.”

### Dehumanization:

There is an entire political, social, and ideological ecosystem that factors in the root causes of violence. Sometimes we only focus on its physical aspects, but there are many other forms of violence. Language is also a potent weapon.

“Violence doesn’t start from sticks and stones. Violence starts from language, especially in a country like India where language of the leaders is extremely violent.”

Whether it is Home Minister Amit Shah describing Bangladeshi migrants as “termites” or senior BJP leader Anurag Thakur making statements like “*Goli maar salon ko*” (*Shoot the bloody traitors*), this sort of public incitement to violence by political leaders can quickly lead to violence. **Dehumanization** is an important stage in the genocidal process wherein leaders replace the name of a community with another label and encourage the general populace to use dehumanizing language too. This process helps to deny a community’s existence and strips entire groups of their historical ties to a place and their present identities.

### Role of social media and traditional media:

Social media has been an excellent platform for connecting people around the world. But it has also been a platform for hate groups to propagate hate speech. Vitriolic voices on the fringes who, until the advent of social media, had no platform to disseminate hateful content, can now disseminate hatred to hundreds of thousands of followers. Wars of words ensue between increasingly vocal and polarized voices on the political extremes.

Moderates in the middle are vilified. “If you’re not with us, you’re against us,” becomes the exclusionary ideology to silence the people who can best stop members of their own groups from fomenting violence. Extremists occupy more and more of the political debate. Many people feel forced to choose between extremists from their own group and the “enemy.” This process of **polarization** in which society becomes divided has occurred not only in India but in other countries affected by populism worldwide. The political right in India has succeeded in creating an entire vocabulary (*pseudosecular, anti-national, tukde gang, Khalistani, Pakistani*) which has become extremely popular on social media.

Social media, in general, is ill-equipped to deal with malicious content, but WhatsApp especially has no fact-checking mechanism. WhatsApp lacks any hate speech monitors at all, making it the most notorious platform that spreads anti-Muslim messages like wildfire. Videos showing young Muslim men being beaten up are circulated without fear of consequences. The highest level of the Indian state has effectively blessed Hindu mobs and vigilante groups to carry out attacks against Muslims without any consequences. The most disturbing part is that people know there is a large audience for this kind of incitement to violence. Every lynching has witnesses to film it and spread it across social media. The BJP has been able to capitalize on social media hate speech. The BJP even has its own IT Cell that churns out hateful rhetoric constantly.

Traditional media have also contributed to Islamophobia. Many owners of newspapers, radio, and television support the Modi government and share the BJP’s Islamophobia. Print media, including many revered newspapers, have resorted to writing hateful content to maintain their popularity with their readership. The Modi government is actively hostile towards the opposition press. The BJP has complete disregard for press freedom and honest independent journalism. Most of India’s broadcast channels serve as mouthpieces for the Modi government and have significantly lowered their journalistic standards.