REVIEW OF CRIME, PEACE AND SOCIETY
ISSN (O): 3079-6105, ISSN (P): 3079-6091
Vol. 3, No. 6, 2026, 369-384

# Populism and Muslim Rights in India: A Case Study of Modi Sarkar Hindutva Politics (2014-2023)

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**Abstract**

This research study investigates the relationship between populism, Muslim rights, and Hindutva politics under the Modi Sarkar government in India from 2014 to 2023. The upswing of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power has been marked by a distinct Hindu nationalist agenda, which has resulted in significant policy changes and social upheavals, particularly affecting India's Muslim population. Using a case study approach, this research aims to explore the effects of populist politics on minority rights and democratic values in India. By conducting an in-depth examination of policy documents, media sources, and interviews with relevant individuals, this research aims to offer a nuanced comprehension of the socio-political intricacies associated with Modi's Hindutva politics, and its repercussions on the Muslim community. This research provides valuable insights into the influence of populism on public policy formation and democratic governance in India, shedding light on its impact on minority rights and social cohesion. The findings enhance our understanding of these dynamics and their broader implications. The study analyses the execution of crucial policies, including the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Register of Citizens, and the Uniform Civil Code, critically assessing their ramifications on the citizenship rights and legal position of the Muslim community in India. This research seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on populism, nationalism, and democratic governance, with a particular focus on their intersection with religious identity in India.

**Article History**
Received 02 August 2026
Revised 15 August 2026
Accepted 10 August 2026
Published 11 September 2026

OPEN ACCESS

**Keywords**
Right-wing populism, Modi Sarkar, Hindutva politics, BJP, Muslim rights, Democracy, Secularism, Minority rights, Rhetoric, Identity politic

## Introduction

Populism is a political ideology that aims to resonate with the concerns and aspirations of the general population, positioning itself as a champion of their interests in contrast to the elite or established power structures. Populist leaders often use emotive and simplistic language to appeal to the masses, and they tend to adopt policies that promise to address their grievances, even if those policies are controversial or potentially harmful in the long term (Müller, 2016).

Populism in India is a broad term that encompasses a range of political ideologies and movements that seek to appeal to the interests and aspirations of common people. In recent

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times, populism in India has assumed a distinct right-wing nature, with the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Utilizing a variety of populist tactics, Modi has effectively rallied public backing for his policies and the party.

In recent times, populism in India has assumed a distinct right-wing nature, with the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Utilizing a variety of populist tactics, Modi has effectively rallied public backing for his policies and the party.

An important characteristic of right-wing populism in India is its utilization of emotive and simplistic rhetoric to resonate with the general public, often overshadowing nuanced policy discussions. This has resulted in a focus on issues such as national security, immigration, and cultural identity, which have been used to create a sense of us-versus-them between Hindus and Muslims (Verma, 2018).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has presented himself as a champion of economic growth and development, and he has promised to deliver better infrastructure, more jobs, and greater prosperity for all Indians. Nevertheless, Modi's brand of populism has been notable for its emphasis on Hindu nationalism and the propagation of Hindutva ideology. This has resulted in heightened polarization and tensions between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority in India. Consequently, these tendencies have given rise to several contentious policies, including the Citizenship Amendment Act, which has faced criticism for its perceived discrimination against Muslims, and the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, which has raised concerns regarding human rights violations in the region (Choudhary, 2020).

A significant element of the BJP's populism revolves around its emphasis on Hindu nationalism and the promotion of Hindutva ideology. This includes a strong focus on cultural and religious matters, such as the construction of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the implementation of a nationwide campaign for cow protection. These initiatives have found resonance among a substantial number of Hindus in India.

Another important aspect of BJP's populism is its use of emotional appeals and simple messaging to mobilize support. Modi's speeches, for example, often employ powerful rhetorical devices, such as storytelling and imagery, to create a sense of connection and shared identity with the masses.

BJP's populism has also utilized the power of social media and digital platforms to mobilize support and influence public opinion. These tools have been instrumental in disseminating the party's messaging, engaging with supporters, and shaping the narrative around its policies and leaders. The strategic use of social media has allowed the BJP to reach a wide audience, amplify its populist appeals, and connect directly with its supporters, thereby enhancing its political influence in the digital age.

**Role of Populism in Promoting Hindutva Ideology**

Populism has emerged as a significant driver in promoting Hindutva ideology and Hindu nationalism in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Hindutva politics have strategically employed populism to garner widespread backing for their pro-Hindu and anti-minority agenda. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders have positioned themselves as advocates for the Hindu community, leveraging the profound religious and cultural sentiments of Hindus in India. By appealing to the aspirations and concerns of the

Hindu majority, populism has been instrumental in mobilizing support for the BJP's ideology and policies.

Modi and other BJP leaders have used populist rhetoric to promote Hindutva ideology and to attack Muslims and other minority groups. They have propagated a narrative that portrays Muslims as a perceived threat to India's national security and as a group that allegedly seeks to undermine Hindu culture and values. They have also sought to rewrite history to emphasize the achievements of Hindu rulers and downplay the contributions of Muslims and other non-Hindu groups.

The employment of populism has fostered a sense of unity and solidarity within the Hindu community in India, contributing to the mobilization of support for the BJP and its pro-Hindu agenda.

The BJP has employed various campaign strategies to mobilize support for its Hindutva politics. One of the key strategies has been the creation of a strong nationalistic narrative that emphasizes the need to protect the Hindu community and the country's cultural and religious heritage. This narrative has been promoted through various means, including rallies, speeches, social media, and mass media.

Another key strategy has been the use of targeted messaging to appeal to specific segments of the population. For instance, the BJP has often used slogans and messages that appeal to the youth, such as "Digital India" and "Make in India". The party has also used messaging that emphasizes the importance of economic growth and development, such as "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" (Collective Effort, Inclusive Growth).

In addition, the BJP has also used polarizing rhetoric and tactics to mobilize support for Hindutva politics. This has included the demonization of minority communities, particularly Muslims, and the promotion of a strong anti-Pakistan stance. The party has also been accused of using fake news and propaganda to create an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, particularly on social media.

**BJP's Hindutva Agenda and Future Prospect of India**

The ascent of Hindutva populist politics and the BJP's assertive pursuit of its Hindu nationalist agenda have raised apprehensions regarding the future of democracy in India and the safeguarding of Muslim rights. The policies and actions of the BJP have engendered a growing sense of marginalization and discrimination among the Muslim community, constituting approximately 14% of the nation's population.

One of the primary anxieties revolves around the erosion of India's longstanding secular fabric, which has been a fundamental principle enshrined in the country's constitution since its independence. The BJP's emphasis on Hindu identity and its attempts to marginalize minority communities have led to accusations that the party is undermining the principles of democracy and secularism.

Another concern is the rise of communal violence, which has been fuelled by Hindutva populist politics. The BJP's tacit support for Hindu nationalist groups has emboldened them to engage in violent attacks against Muslims, including lynching and mob violence. As a result, Muslims have been experiencing a heightened sense of fear and insecurity, perceiving themselves as increasingly vulnerable and marginalized within the prevailing climate.

**Historical Background:**

**Rise of Hindutva Politics (1984-1992)**

From 1984 to 1992, India witnessed the emergence of Hindutva politics, which aimed to advance a Hindu nationalist agenda within the country (Jaffrelot C. , 2015).

During this period, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as a significant political entity, originating from the Hindu nationalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The BJP embraced Hindutva politics, advocating for a Hindu nationalist agenda and challenging the secular principles cherished in the Indian Constitution (Hansen, 1999).

The ascendancy of Hindutva politics was characterized by significant events, notably the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which aimed to construct a temple at the site of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. The movement gained momentum as it contended that the mosque was built on the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram, serving as a unifying factor for Hindu nationalists (Chandra K. , 2004).

During this period, there were instances of communal violence, such as the anti-Sikh riots in 1984 following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and the anti-Muslim riots in 1992 resulting the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Engineer, 1997).

The rise of Hindutva politics during this period was fuelled by a sense of cultural and religious identity among Hindus, as well as a growing sense of frustration with the perceived dominance of minority communities in Indian politics (Varshney, 2002).

**Babri Masjid Demolition and Aftermath (1992-2002)**

The demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, on December 6, 1992, was a pivotal event in Indian politics, symbolizing a significant milestone and a transformative moment in the nation's history (Engineer, The Babri Masjid Question, 1528-2003: 'A Matter of National Honour', 2003).

The Babri Masjid was a 16th-century mosque constructed by Mughal emperor Babur on a site that Hindus believed to be the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram. The contentious dispute surrounding the site had persisted for decades, with Hindu nationalist organizations advocating for the construction of a temple at the location. On December 6, 1992, a sizable gathering of Hindu activists, including members of the BJP and RSS, assembled at the site and demolished the mosque, leading to extensive violence and communal riots throughout the nation (Jaffrelot C. , The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s, 1996).

The Babri Masjid demolition led to a period of political instability in India, with the Congress government at the time facing criticism for its handling of the situation. The incident further underscored the increasing prominence of Hindu nationalism within Indian politics and raised concerns about communalism in a secular and democratic society. It brought to the forefront the challenges associated with maintaining a harmonious and inclusive society amidst rising religious tensions and divisive ideologies (Varshney, 2002).

In the repercussion of the Babri Masjid demolition, several inquiries were conducted to determine the events leading up to the demolition and to identify those responsible (Hasan, 1999). The Liberhan Commission was set up in 1992 to investigate the demolition and submitted its report in 2009, indicting several high-profile politicians and leaders for their role in the incident. The demolition of the Babri Masjid and its subsequent consequences have left a lasting imprint on Indian politics, influencing the political narrative and contributing to a deepening sense of religious polarization within the nation (Desai, 2003).

The period from 2004 to 2014, known as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) era, witnessed substantial political, economic, and social transformations in India. The UPA, a coalition government led by the Congress party, assumed power following the 2004 general elections (Singh, 2016). During its tenure, the UPA government implemented several significant policies that included the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the Right to Information Act (RTI), and the National Food Security Act (NFSA). These policies aimed to address issues related to rural employment, transparency in governance, and ensuring food security for the population (Chibber, 2014).

The UPA government also initiated several major economic reforms during its tenure, including the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) scheme. The UPA government also signed several important international agreements, including the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement and the Paris Climate Accord (Banerjee, 2013). However, the UPA government also faced several major challenges during its tenure, including allegations of corruption and a slowing economy. The 2G spectrum scam and the coal allocation scam were major corruption scandals that rocked the UPA government, leading to widespread public protests and criticism (Bhattacharya, 2014).

The UPA era also witnessed significant social and political movements, including the Anna Hazare-led anti-corruption movement and the Nirbhaya movement for women's safety. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, succeeded the UPA government in 2014 (Jha, 2015).

The Modi Sarkar Era (2014-2023) has been marked by significant political, social, and economic changes in India. In 2014, Narendra Modi assumed office as the Prime Minister of India, after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a remarkable victory in the general elections. The Modi government introduced several significant initiatives during its tenure, including the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign), Digital India, Make in India, and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (Financial Inclusion Program) (Roy, 2017).

The Modi government implemented several major economic reforms during its tenure, including the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the demonetization drive, and the enactment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). These reforms aimed to streamline taxation, curb black money, promote transparency, and enhance the efficiency of the banking and financial systems in India. The Modi government also launched several ambitious infrastructure projects, including the Sagarmala project and the Bharatmala project (Chakraborty, 2018).

The Modi government has faced criticism for its handling of issues such as the CAA, Article 370, the COVID-19 pandemic, and allegations of suppressing dissent and curtailing freedom of expression (Uchikawa, 2019).

The Modi government has undertaken various initiatives to enhance India's international standing, including the implementation of the Act East Policy, strengthening ties with the United States, and fostering improved relations with neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal. These efforts have aimed at expanding regional cooperation, promoting economic diplomacy, and advancing India's role on the global stage (Kumar, 2016). The Modi government's re-election in 2019 has further shaped India's political, social, and economic landscape through its policies and initiatives (Thakurta, 2018).

In recent years, India has witnessed the rise of populist politics with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its Hindutva agenda under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Despite facing criticism for its divisive policies and targeting of religious minorities especially Muslims, the BJP has managed to mobilize significant public support. This study aims to explore the factors contributing to the BJP's success in mobilizing public support for its Hindutva agenda and the implications of this phenomenon for the future of democracy and minority rights especially Muslims in India. In particular, this study examines the role of civil society organizations in promoting democratic values and protecting the rights of Muslims in response to the BJP's Hindutva agenda. The findings of this study contributes to a better understanding of the complex dynamics of populist politics and its impact on democracy and rights of Muslims in India.

The aim of this study is to assess "How has the BJP's populist politics and Hindutva ideology mobilised support for its Hindu Nationalist agenda, and what are the implications of future of democracy and the rights of minorities particularly Muslims?" in general, the effectiveness of the BJP's populist politics in garnering public backing for its Hindutva agenda in India during the tenure of the Modi government from 2014 to 2023. The study aims to understand the factors that have contributed to the BJP's success in mobilizing support for Hindutva ideology, and to examine the function of civil society organizations in fostering democratic principles and protecting the rights of marginalized communities especially Muslims in response to the BJP's Hindutva agenda. Additionally, the study seeks to assess the implications of Hindutva for the future of democracy particularly for the marginalization of Muslim rights in India.

This study is significant as it critically develops an argument on how right-wing populism in India under Modi's regime can endanger India's secular liberal democracy because of its exclusivist shades and in what way it is impacting and reconfiguring the diverse Indian society. Correspondingly, it also elucidates the trajectory of Hindutva inspired BJP's renaissance and dominance on the electoral politics, by inciting violence against the minorities. This concept of Hindu supremacy has not only vitalized the Hindu extremist elements but it has also created existential security threat to the minorities living in India especially Muslims.

This research thesis would also highlight these discriminatory policies of Modi's populist government and would help the international communities and Human rights organization to understand the severity of the situation so that measures can be initiated to stop this persecution of minorities before it leads to genocide.

This research aligns with the Theory of Populism, which posits that populism is a political strategy that aims to resonate with the concerns and interests of the general public.

Laclau argues that populism emerges as a political strategy when a charismatic leader or a political party constructs a "people" as an antagonistic force against an established elite. This theory helps in understanding how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) mobilizes popular support for Hindutva politics by presenting itself as the voice of the majority against perceived threats to the cultural and religious identity of Hindus.

Chantal Mouffe's Theory of Populist Democracy: Mouffe's theory emphasizes the importance of populism in revitalizing democracy by challenging the dominant political establishment and engaging the disenchanted masses. It highlights how the BJP's use of populism through Hindutva ideology can reshape the democratic landscape in India and impact the rights of minority groups, including Muslims.

Cas Mudde's Theory of Right-Wing Populism: Mudde's theory focuses specifically on right-wing populism and its characteristics. These theoretical frameworks provide lenses through which the role of populism can analysed particularly right-wing populism, in the context of Hindutva politics and its impact on Muslim rights in India.

The theoretical framework for this study draws on existing literature on populism and right-wing populism, as well as scholarship on Hindutva ideology and its effect on Indian politics and culture. The study analyses the ways in which Modi Sarkar's populist strategies have contributed to the resonance of Hindutva ideology, and how this has affected the rights and status of Muslim communities in India.

The primary data collection involved a variety of methods, including document analysis, in-depth analysis of the interviews of key stakeholders such as civil society leaders, academics, and policymakers, as well as focus analysis of group discussions with members of marginalized communities.

## BJP mobilised popular support for Hindutva politics against the Muslims

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India's governing party, has played a prominent role in championing Hindutva. In recent years, the BJP's populist politics, which emphasizes majoritarianism and the exclusion of minorities, has been successful in mobilizing public support for its Hindutva agenda. The BJP's success can be attributed to several factors, including the failure of previous governments to address issues such as corruption, unemployment, and economic stagnation (Jaffrelot, 1996). The BJP's success in mobilizing public support for its Hindutva agenda is attributed to a combination of factors.

1. One of the primary purposes for the BJP's success in mobilizing public support for its Hindutva agenda is the cultural and religious anxieties of many Hindus. The BJP has also used targeted campaigning to appeal to specific demographic groups.

2. The BJP has organized large-scale rallies and demonstrations, used catchy slogans and symbols, and made emotive appeals to people's sense of pride and patriotism.

3. The party's social media strategy, which focuses on targeted messaging and micro-targeting, has helped it reach out to specific demographic groups with tailored messages and campaigns (Varshney, 2019).

4. The BJP's control over key institutions of state power has been instrumental in furthering its Hindutva agenda.

5. The BJP has effectively employed a dual strategy of targeting both the urban and rural electorate.

6. In rural areas, the BJP has targeted farmers and rural communities by promoting pro-farmer policies and welfare schemes (Haider, 2019).

7. The BJP has been capable to exercise successful political alliances and coalitions to expand its support base and win elections. The BJP's emphasis on Hindutva has been a central part of the party's political manifesto. The BJP has also promoted majoritarianism, which privileges the majority community over minorities. The BJP has presented itself as a party of strong and decisive leadership. The BJP has been able to harness social media platforms to reach out to millions of voters and present its message directly to the people.

8. India has a long and complex history with various religious, cultural, and linguistic groups. After India gained independence in 1947, the leaders of the INC drafted the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India guarantees the principles of secular democracy and guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens regardless of their religion, caste, or gender. First, there is a sense of Hindu victimhood among some sections of the Hindu community. Second, the Hindutva movement provides a sense of identity and belonging to some units of the Hindu society. Third, the Hindutva movement provides a sense of empowerment to some sections of the Hindu community who feel that they have been marginalized in Indian society. Fourth, the Hindutva movement has gained political legitimacy in contemporary years. Fifth, social media has played a major role in the rise of Hindutva.

## India’s receding secular tradition

India's secular tradition refers to the country's commitment to maintaining a separation between religion and the country. The erosion of India's secular tradition can be linked to the 1980s when the BJP, advocating Hindutva, gained significant political influence. The BJP's ascension to power in 2014 with Narendra Modi as its leader brought about a significant shift in India's secular tradition. An instance illustrating the erosion of India's secular tradition is the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, which expedites citizenship for non-Muslims from neighbouring countries while excluding Muslims. The erosion of India's secular tradition has been accompanied by a rise in religious polarization and intolerance towards minority communities.

## Challenges to Secular Democratic Principles in Modi Regime

The Hindutva ideology has challenged the secular democratic principles laid down by Indian founding leaders.

One of the main challenges to secular democratic principles has been the issue of cow protection. Another challenge to secular democratic principles has been the issue of religious conversion. The Hindutva movement has expressed criticism towards Muslims and has raised concerns about the phenomenon known as "love jihad," which pertains to allegations of Muslim men marrying Hindu women with the intention of religious conversion (Jaffrelot,

2020). The Hindutva movement has also been critical of the reservation system in India. The Hindutva movement has also been critical of the special status given to Jammu and Kashmir.

India is currently in the grip of the Hindutva ideology, which has gained significant political power through the electoral victory of the BJP and its associates. The government has pursued a range of policies and practices that have been criticized for being anti-minority and divisive, and there has been a rise in communal violence and hate crimes against minorities in the country.

Under the BJP-led government, Modi Sarkar has pursued a range of policies and practices that have been criticized for being anti-minority and divisive, including the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, the introduction of a controversial citizenship law that excludes Muslims, and the targeting of NGOs and civil society groups critical of the government. One of the most visible manifestations of the Hindutva ideology has been the rise of communal violence and hate crimes against minorities in India.

The rise of the Hindutva ideology has also had a significant effect on Indian society and culture, as well as on Indian politics. The Hindutva ideology has also had implications for India's relationships with other countries.

The rise of Hindutva under the Modi regime has posed a serious threat to marginalized communities in India. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, a significant policy of the Modi government, has been viewed as targeting marginalized communities. The Modi government's abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 has also had a significant impact on the Muslim-majority state. Under the Modi government, there has been a surge in instances of communal violence and hate crimes targeting minorities in India. Dalits, who are traditionally considered to be at the lowest of the caste hierarchy, have also been targeted by the Hindutva movement. The rise of Hindutva has also had an effect on the cultural and social structure of Indian society.

## Implications of Hindutva for the future of democracy in secular India

The implications of Hindutva for the future of democracy and the protection of the rights of Muslims in India are complex and multifaceted. While it is clear that Hindutva promotes majoritarianism and seeks to impose a particular cultural identity on the entire nation, the extent to which this will impact democracy and minority rights in India remains to be seen.

Indian secular democracy is a complicated system that reflects the diverse cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage of India. The Indian Constitution, adopted on 26th January 1950, lays down the framework for Indian secular democracy (Varshney, 2019). The preamble of the Indian Constitution sets out the guiding principles of Indian secular democracy. The Indian Constitution upholds the principle of equality through the concept of "one person, one vote," ensuring that every citizen of India, irrespective of their religion, caste, or gender, possesses an equal voice in the governance of the nation.

Freedom and justice are another fundamental principles of Indian secular democracy, and the Constitution provides for both procedural and substantive justice. Fraternity, or the sense of

brotherhood and common purpose among citizens, is also a key principle of Indian secular democracy.

Majoritarianism and democracy are two different political philosophies that have important implications for the future of India. While democracy remains the preferred system of government, majoritarianism can pose a threat to minority rights and democratic institutions.

Democracy is government by the people, through direct or elected representation.

In contrast, majoritarianism is a political philosophy where the interests and values of the majority community are given priority over those of minority communities (Rudolph et al., 1987).

In India, majoritarianism is often associated with the ideology of Hindutva, which pursues to support Hindu nationalism and values over those of other religions and cultures. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), for example, have been criticized for being discriminatory against Muslim communities, while the BJP's political rhetoric has been accused of fuelling communal tensions and religious violence (Jaffrelot, 2020).

The upsurge of majoritarianism in India has also led to apprehensions about the loss of democratic institutions and principles.

Democratic values and Hindutva are two distinct ideologies that are often in conflict in the Indian context. One of the fundamental principles of democracy is the safeguard of personal rights and liberties.

Another challenge posed by Hindutva to democratic values is the erosion of secularism. Hindutva's emphasis on Hindu nationalism and cultural dominance has led to the exclusion of other marginalized communities, such as Dalits, Adivasis, and other religious minorities, from the mainstream discourse.

## Implementation of Hindutva doctrine by Modi

The implementation of the Hindutva doctrine by Modi and his government has been a key focus of their agenda since coming to power in 2014. The Modi government has promoted a notion of India as a Hindu nation, with Hindu nationalism being a core part of their ideology. The implementation of the Hindutva doctrine has resulted in the marginalization and exclusion of minority communities, particularly Muslims. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have been criticized for targeting Muslims and threatening their citizenship rights.

The Modi government has pursued to promote Hindu culture and education in schools and universities, with a particular focus on Sanskrit and Hindu mythology. The Modi government has been accused of supporting Hindu nationalist groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliated organizations. The implementation of the Hindutva doctrine has also led to increased polarization and division in Indian society, with the targeting of minority communities and the promotion of a particular religious ideology.

Hindutva has had an important effect on the rights and freedoms of minority communities, particularly Muslims, in India. One of the primary impacts of Hindutva on minority rights has been the rise of communal violence and hate crimes. Another impact of Hindutva on minority rights has been the erosion of secularism. Hindutva's emphasis on Hindu nationalism and cultural dominance has led to the exclusion of other marginalized communities, such as Dalits, Adivasis, and other religious minorities, from the mainstream discourse. Reports from human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have stressed how minority communities, particularly Muslims, have been marginalized in India. Human rights activists and organizations working for minority rights have been targeted by the state and Hindutva supporters. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) enacted in 2019 allows expedited citizenship for non-Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan escaping religious persecution. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is another policy that has been implemented by the BJP government. The government has proposed to implement the NRC nationwide, and this has raised concerns among minority communities, particularly Muslims, who fear that they will be targeted and excluded from the list.

Mob lynching of Muslims and other minority groups has also increased in recent years. According to a report by India Spend, at least 114 people were slaughtered in mob lynching incidents between 2015 to 2018, majority were Muslims. In 2015, a mob of people beat to death Mohammad Akhlaq, a Muslim man, on the suspicion that he had consumed beef. There have been various events of attacks on Christians in India in contemporary years, particularly in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh.

In March 2018, violence broke out during the Ram Navami celebrations in several parts of West Bengal.

In December 2019, students at Aligarh Muslim University were attacked by the police and members of the RSS. The protest was against the CAA and the policy’s use of force to quell the protests.

In February 2020, riots broke out in Delhi between Hindus and Muslims, resulting in the deaths of over 50 people, most of them were Muslims. The CAA, which was passed in 2019, has been criticized for being discriminatory against Muslims. The law grants citizenship to non-Muslims from neighboring countries, but exclude Muslims.

Hate speech by politicians and members of Hindutva organizations has also contributed to the rise of violence and vigilantism against Muslims. In many cases, these speeches have directly incited violence or encouraged attacks on Muslims. For example, in 2013, BJP MLA Sangeet Som gave a speech in which he accused Muslims of "celebrating" the killing of Hindus and urged Hindus to "take revenge." (The Wire, 2013)

Many of the perpetrators of religious violence and vigilantism associated with Hindutva have enjoyed impunity from prosecution or punishment. This has created an environment of fear and insecurity for Muslims and other minority groups. According to a report by Amnesty International, "impunity for hate crimes against religious minorities continued to be a worrying trend in India." (Amnesty International, 2020)

### Criticisms and controversies

Hindutva has been a controversial and divisive ideology in India, and it has faced criticism from various quarters.

Hindutva has been criticized for its rejection of secularism, which is a founding principle of the Indian Constitution. Critics argue that Hindutva seeks to establish a Hindu hegemony in India and marginalize other religious and ethnic groups (Chatterji, 2004). This has raised concerns about the erosion of India's secular fabric and its effect on the country's diverse population.

Amnesty International has documented several human rights abuses associated with Hindutva, including "discrimination, segregation, and violence against Dalits, Muslims, and other minority communities." (Amnesty International, 2020)

The international human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have criticized the Indian government's response to allegations of human rights abuses and religious violence which have been extensively reported in international media, containing The New York Times, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera.

The controversies surrounding Hindutva have also had an economic impact on India. The economic impact of Hindutva has been reported by several news outlets, including The Financial Times and The Economic Times.

Hindutva has been criticized for its role in polarizing Indian society along religious and ethnic lines. The role of Hindutva in polarizing Indian society has been discussed in academic literature, including a paper by Sumit Ganguly and Rahul Mukherji titled "The Rise of Hindu Nationalism and the Fragmentation of Indian Democracy." (Ganguly & Mukherji)

### Future prospects for the future of democracy

The outlook of democracy in India is a matter of concern. The BJP may continue to dominate Indian politics, and Hindutva may remain a dominant ideology. The rise of opposition parties that reject Hindutva and uphold democratic values could provide a counterbalance to the BJP's dominance.

There could be a realignment of political forces in India, with regional parties gaining greater influence and the BJP losing ground. Civil society organizations, activists, and human rights defenders could continue to play a vital role in pushing back against Hindutva and advocating for democratic values. The international community could put pressure on India to uphold democratic values and protect minority rights.

## Recommendations

In order to support inclusivity, protect Muslims and minority rights, and strengthen democracy in India, a number of recommendations can be made.

1. There is a need for more dialogue and understanding between different communities, including Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians in India.

2. Discrimination and hate speech against Muslims and other minority communities should be addressed through legal and policy measures.

3. India's human rights organisations should be strengthened to ensure that they are independent, effective, and accessible to all.

4. The government should ensure that Muslims are not targeted unfairly under rules such as the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens.

5. Muslims should be encouraged to participate in the political process and should be represented in all levels of government and public institutions, including the police and judiciary.

6. Civil society institutes can play an essential responsibility in fostering inclusivity, protecting human rights, and strengthening democracy, and support civil society activism, particularly among youth and women, and provide equal opportunities to all minorities in civic life.

7. The media should be free to report on issues related to minority rights and discrimination, without fear of reprisals.

8. India should engage more with the international society to promote human rights and democracy.

9. Education and awareness-raising can play an essential role in promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

10. The government should prioritize economic development and job creation in areas with significant Muslim populations.

11. The Indian government should ensure that the justice system is impartial, independent, and effective.

12. The Indian government should promote multiculturalism and cultural exchange programs to foster greater understanding and appreciation between different communities.

13. The government should address historical injustices and ensure that minority communities receive reparations for past wrongs.

14. Addressing underlying economic and social disparities, and structural discrimination of minorities can help to reduce tensions between different communities and promote greater inclusivity.

## Conclusion

The rise of Hindutva and the BJP's populist politics has significantly influenced India's political and social landscape, particularly the rights and freedoms of religious minorities. However, this political strategy has also generated concerns regarding majoritarianism, communal polarization, secularism, and the protection of minority rights, particularly those of Muslims.

The growing influence of Hindutva challenges India's constitutional commitment to secularism, pluralism, and equality.

At the same time, the continued popularity of the BJP and Hindutva demonstrates that their appeal cannot be explained solely through exclusionary politics.

Nevertheless, the long-term durability of BJP's ideological dominance remains uncertain. The central challenge is therefore not simply the popularity of Hindutva, but whether its political influence can coexist with the constitutional principles of equality, secularism, pluralism, and democratic accountability.

The future of Muslim rights in India will similarly depend on the willingness of political institutions and society to uphold equal citizenship and address the causes of communal tension. Protecting minority rights requires effective implementation of constitutional safeguards, impartial enforcement of the rule of law, accountability for violence and discrimination, and meaningful dialogue among different communities.

Ultimately, the rise of Hindutva presents an important challenge to India's pluralistic democratic framework. While the BJP's populist politics has demonstrated considerable electoral effectiveness, the sustainability of India's democracy will depend on whether political competition remains compatible with equal citizenship and institutional checks and balances.

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