

Report 2023

# Hate Speech Events in India



# About

India Hate Lab (IHL) is a Washington D.C. based research group run by a dedicated team of journalists, academicians, and researchers. Its objective is to document, study, and analyze hate speech, disinformation, and conspiracy theories that target India's religious minorities, both in the digital realm and in offline spaces.

Through our in-depth quantitative and qualitative research, we aim to unravel the underlying causes and consequences of online hate on social media platforms and offline hate speech events for India's 250 million minorities.

Our comprehensive analysis and reporting strive to bring forth insights that empower informed discussions, policy advocacy, academic research, media reporting, and community-driven initiatives to combat hate.



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# Executive Summary

In 2023, India Hate Lab (IHL) documented 668 hate speech events targeting Muslims. Similarly, IHL recorded 255 of the events in the first half of 2023, while the number rose to 413 events in the second half of the year, a 62% increase.

- 498 (75%) of the events took place in Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled states, union territories (administered by the BJP-led central government), and the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi (police and public order comes under purview of the BJP-led central government).
- Among the top eight states with the most hate speech events, six were ruled by the BJP throughout the year. The other two states held legislative elections in 2023 and were ruled by the BJP for part of the year.
- 239 (36%) of the events included a direct call of violence against Muslims. 77% of these dangerous speeches were delivered in states and territories ruled/governed by the BJP.
- The Vishwa Hindu Parishad-Bajrang Dal, affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), was responsible for 216 (32%) events, making it the top organizer of hate speech events. Overall, 307 (46%) of hate speech events were organized by entities that are part of the broader Sangh Parivar (RSS family).
- Our report has found rapid growth of new Hindu nationalist groups and actors engaging in hate speech.
- BJP leaders were involved in delivering hate speeches at 100 (15%) of the events. BJP legislator T Raja Singh spoke at 23 events, including 14 dangerous speeches with calls to violence against Muslims.
- In BJP-ruled states, around 11% of events featured BJP leaders, whereas in non-BJP-ruled states, this figure rose to 28%.
- Maharashtra (118), Uttar Pradesh (104), and Madhya Pradesh (65) ranked top among states for hate speech events. These three BJP-ruled states collectively accounted for 43% of the total hate speech events recorded.

- Hate speech events peaked between August and November, coinciding with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-Bajrang Dal Shaurya Jagran rallies and state legislative elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Chhattisgarh. Approximately 318 hate speech events, or 48% of the total, took place during this period.
- 420 (63%) of the events included references to conspiracy theories, primarily involving love jihad<sup>1</sup>, land jihad, halal jihad, and population jihad.<sup>2</sup>
- 169 (25%) events featured speeches calling for targeting Muslim places of worship.
- Out of 193 events that took place between October 7 (the day Hamas attacked Israel and the beginning of Israel's ongoing war on Gaza) and December 31, 2023, 41 (21%) mentioned the Israel-Gaza war to stoke hatred towards Indian Muslims.
- Hindu religious leaders delivered hate speeches at 93 (14%) of the events.
- Rohingya refugees were targeted in speeches at 38 (4%) of the events.
- 176 (26%) events were held in the five states (Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana) that conducted legislative elections in 2023.
- 186 (28%) events took place in states that are slated for elections in 2024. The majority of these events were held in Maharashtra.
- Hindu far-right influencer Kajal Hindustani, chief of Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad (AHP) Pravin Togadia, and chief of Hindu Rashtra Sena, Dhananjay Desai are the top three sources of hate speech.
- BJP legislator T Raja Singh, Pravin Togadia, and Kajal Hindustani are the top three sources of dangerous speech.

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अब्दुल, असलम की  
क्या पहचान  
लड़की, बकरी एक समान

*Image Credit: Rana Ayyub*  
During an anti-love jihad, land jihad rally organized by Sakal Hindu Samaj in Mumbai, Maharashtra, on February 26, 2023, an elderly Hindu man is seen holding a placard with the text: "For Abdul and Aslam (reference for Muslims), girls and cattle are the same."



# 1 | Introduction

This report seeks to document and analyze verified instances of in-person hate speech events in India in 2023, including mass gatherings of different kinds, such as political rallies, religious parades, marches, and demonstrations. These gatherings are sometimes organized in the context of political elections and religious festivals and sometimes they are deliberately organized with the objective of harassing Muslims.

The majority of these speeches are targeted at India's religious minorities, in particular Muslims. Social media, and the media in general, play a key role in the amplification and dissemination of hate speech in India.

**India** is characterized by abundant cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. The importance of understanding the impact of hate speech in this context should not be underestimated. Hate speech might have a dramatic effect on social harmony, individual well-being, and the democratic fabric of a nation, with a disproportionate impact on minorities and marginalized communities. Researchers agree that exposure to hate speech may be associated with political radicalization<sup>3</sup> and political violence (**see section 4**).

Hate speech has historically been understood to be an important causal factor in driving severe atrocities towards communities, including massacres and genocides.<sup>4</sup> It plays a critical role in incubating hatred towards a group, effectively building in-group solidarity and demonizing out-groups while also acting as a means of intimidation. Collective hatred for the out-group by targeted dehumanization may effectively legitimize violence towards them by portraying them as an aggressive threat.<sup>5</sup>

Often characterized as just extremists "venting" or "being crazy," hate speech must thus be understood as a sophisticated and often well-coordinated strategy that effectively deploys language as a symbolic justification for past and future violence, with often far-reaching and destructive impacts on the social fabric of a nation.<sup>6</sup> In addition to demonizing particular minority groups, a vituperative culture of hate speech deeply impacts the nature of public and political life, contributing to a climate in which all minority groups, dissenters, and government critics are at risk. Hate speech that faces no consequences but is rather rewarded becomes a form of political capital, severely eroding the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Overall, the efforts to tackle hate speech and disinformation in India remain largely inadequate. Article 19(1) of the Indian Constitution provides for freedom of speech and expression, but also provides for reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) on grounds of public order, decency, or morality. While there are provisions in India that prohibit forms of hate speech– e.g., the Indian Penal Code’s Section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, etc.) and Section 295A (outraging religious feelings), or the Information Technology Act, 2000– hate speech is not defined in any law. Consequently, there have been instances where state governments have employed vague interpretations of hate speech to establish legislation against freedom of speech, aimed at penalizing or suppressing protesters or journalists.<sup>7</sup>

This report documents a total of 668 hate speech events in 18 states, three union territories (regions governed by the central government), and the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, whose police and public order comes under the purview of the central government. Hate speech peaked in October with 91 events, right before elections were held in the states of Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Mizoram.

The definition of hate speech and the methodology are discussed in **section 2**.

**Section 3** explicates geographical variations in the spread of hate speech events, explaining trends and patterns between the main organizers and varied categories of these events. The report then discusses the emergence and proliferation of new hate speech actors and the implications of hate speech for society, with a particular focus on the perpetuation of violence with impunity. More specifically, we present the case studies of violence in the states of Haryana and Maharashtra.

Our analysis suggests that the violence, which began in the city of Nuh and resulted in seven deaths, followed several inflammatory hate speech events by far-right leaders in the months leading up to the riots. The event highlights the dangers of inaction against hate speech, as the impunity given to far-right speakers enabled them to inflame violence in the state.

We conclude by highlighting key findings, setting the stage for the important election year of 2024 and emphasizing the need for robust accountability mechanisms and capacity building within civil society.



## 2 | Methodology

To classify any speech at an event or rally as hate speech event, we apply the United Nations framework, which characterizes hate speech as:



***Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.***<sup>8</sup>



While the concept of "hate speech" lacks a unanimous consensus with regard to its fundamental elements, this definition is used by other organizations and scholars<sup>9</sup> to study hate speech. In the Indian context, using this definition, hate speech can manifest itself in multiple forms. It can include direct calls to violence; calls for a social and economic boycott of religious minorities; support and justification for violent cow vigilantism, where religious minorities, particularly Muslims, are targeted; calls to exclude religious minorities from bureaucracy and the propagation of various anti-Muslim conspiracy theories like love jihad, land jihad, halal jihad, population Jihad, and others.

In this report, we classify dangerous speech<sup>10</sup> as a subtype of hate speech.<sup>11</sup> Dangerous speech is meant to persuade "one group of people to [...] condone violence against [...] another group" and thus puts the justification and promotion of violence in the center of attention.<sup>12</sup> The Dangerous Speech Project defines dangerous speech as a form of expression "that can increase the risk that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group."<sup>13</sup> We consider dangerous speech a particular and distinct category of hate speech. Dangerous speech involves a definite call to violence. Other kinds of speech may not include this call to violence but may still qualify as hate speech, as per the UN definition.

India Hate Lab uses various methods to track, document, and verify events and rallies, where hate speech against religious minorities, particularly Muslims are delivered. In collaboration with Hindutva Watch, we track the daily online activity of Hindu far-right groups, their national, regional and local leaders, members, and supporters, along with political parties and their leaders on social media platforms. We employ data scraping techniques, including the use of keywords and phrases in multiple regional languages on Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, X (formerly

known as Twitter), and Telegram, to find videos and live streams of hate speech events and rallies. The data scraping is followed by verification processes, confirming the authenticity of the videos, their precise location, and the date on which they were recorded and cross-referencing information from at least two other sources.

Additionally, we draw upon credible reporting from established news organizations to compile a database of comprehensive data. Each video of a hate speech event undergoes the process of state, organization, and speaker mapping, followed by a comprehensive narrative analysis of speeches to examine the content to code events under 12 different categories.

These categories include the use of conspiracy theories (love jihad, land jihad, economic jihad, Halal Jihad, Mazar Jihad, Spit Jihad, Population Jihad, UPSC Jihad, Fertilizer Jihad);<sup>14</sup> calls for violence; calls to arms; calls for social or economic boycott; speeches targeting places of worship; speeches targeting Rohingya refugees living in India; speeches targeting Muslim women; speeches delivered by BJP leaders; speeches delivered by Hindu religious leaders; mention of the Israel-Gaza war to demonize Indian Muslims, and whether the events took place in states where state elections were held in 2023 or scheduled in 2024.

It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Some hate speech events can involve both the propagation of anti-Muslim conspiracy theories as well as a direct call for violence.

Despite comprehensive data generation, this dataset is not a complete account of hate speech events in India. The complexity of detecting hate speech presents challenges. While there are many incidents for which no digital imprint exists or where the video footage is unverifiable, tracking online documentation of in-person hate speech events allows for the reduction of biases or errors that might arise through third-party interpretation when using expert surveys or newspaper articles as the main source.

Furthermore, the detection of subtle and implicit hate speech messages constitute a challenge. To improve hate speech reporting, IHL has created a new self-reporting system in multiple languages, which is available on its website. The data discussed in this report is a preliminary attempt at providing a glimpse into the nature and geographic spread of anti-Muslim hate speech events in India.

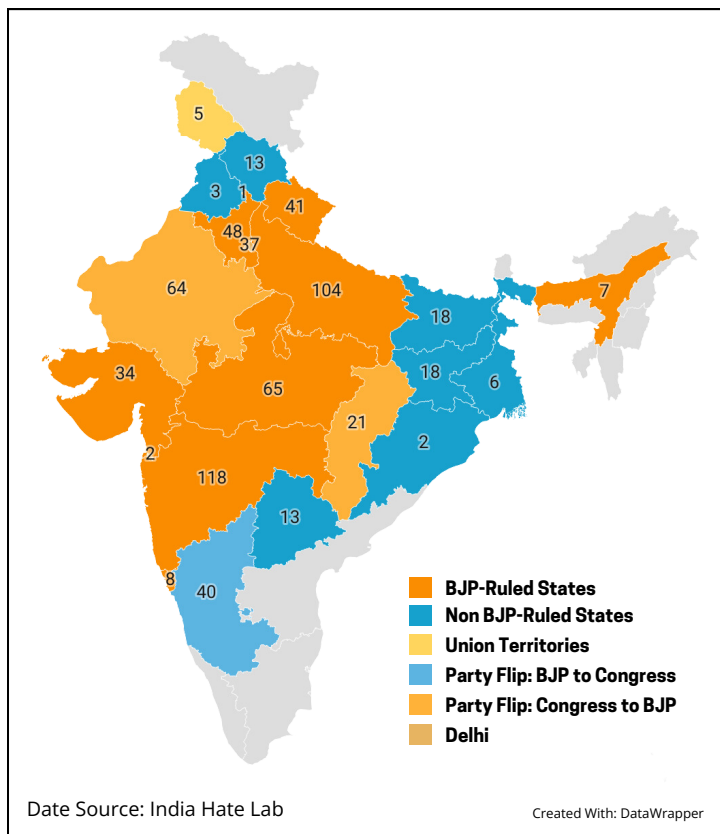
In light of the challenges presented, we acknowledge that our work is an ongoing iterative and reflexive effort. While our study provides valuable insights, it is crucial to recognize the dynamic nature of the issue and the need for continuous adaptation and improvement.

# 3 | Hate Speech Trends in India

## 3.1 Breakdown of Hate Speech Events by State/Union Territory

Hate speech events were geographically widespread across the entire country. We documented a total of 668 hate speech events in 18 states, three union territories, and the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. However, the majority of hate speech events were concentrated in northern, central, and western India.

FIGURE 1: MAPPING HATE SPEECH EVENTS ACROSS INDIA



In particular, the state of Maharashtra was the worst affected, with about 118 events (18%) taking place in the state, even though it only constitutes about 9.3% of India’s population. Pune district has been particularly affected by the increase in hate speech events, with 19 events taking place in the city over the course of 2023. It is clear that Maharashtra has been a state of particular concern for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In June 2022, following a division within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government—a coalition comprising Shiv Sena, Indian National Congress, Nationalist Congress Party, and other smaller parties—the BJP allied with a faction of the Shiv Sena to seize power. As the state election approaches in 2024, there appears to be an intentional effort to create polarization in the state. An analysis by the Indian news portal Article 14 found that this increase in hate speech has coincided with a spike in communal tensions and violence in the state, further providing suggestive evidence of the link between hate speech, polarization, and violence.<sup>15</sup>

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.



During the course of the year, Adityanath has peddled several conspiracy theories about religious minorities, particularly the notion of "love jihad"<sup>16</sup> which falsely claims that Muslim men are luring Hindu women into marriage on false pretenses, in an attempt to convert them to Islam and help bring about Muslim dominance over Hindus in India.

A similarly concerning trend was observed in the relatively small state of Haryana, which witnessed about 48 hate speech events, forming about 7.2% of all hate speech events in our dataset, while only constituting about 2% of the Indian population. This is likely a result of Hindu far-right groups stoking tensions in the region, which eventually culminated in a mass outbreak of violence in and around Nuh, a Muslim-majority district in the state. The violence, which started in the town of Nuh, resulted in seven deaths and more than 70 injuries, including the brutal murder of a Muslim cleric in Gurugram, a financial and technology hub near New Delhi.<sup>17</sup> As documented in our case study, the violence coincided with a significant increase in hate speech events, both before and after the violence.

The state of Uttarakhand was also a particular target for far-right groups, with about 6% of all hate speech events in the country taking place in the state, even as it only constitutes about 0.83% of India's population. These events were particularly common in the state capital of Dehradun, which saw eight hate speech events over the course of the year.

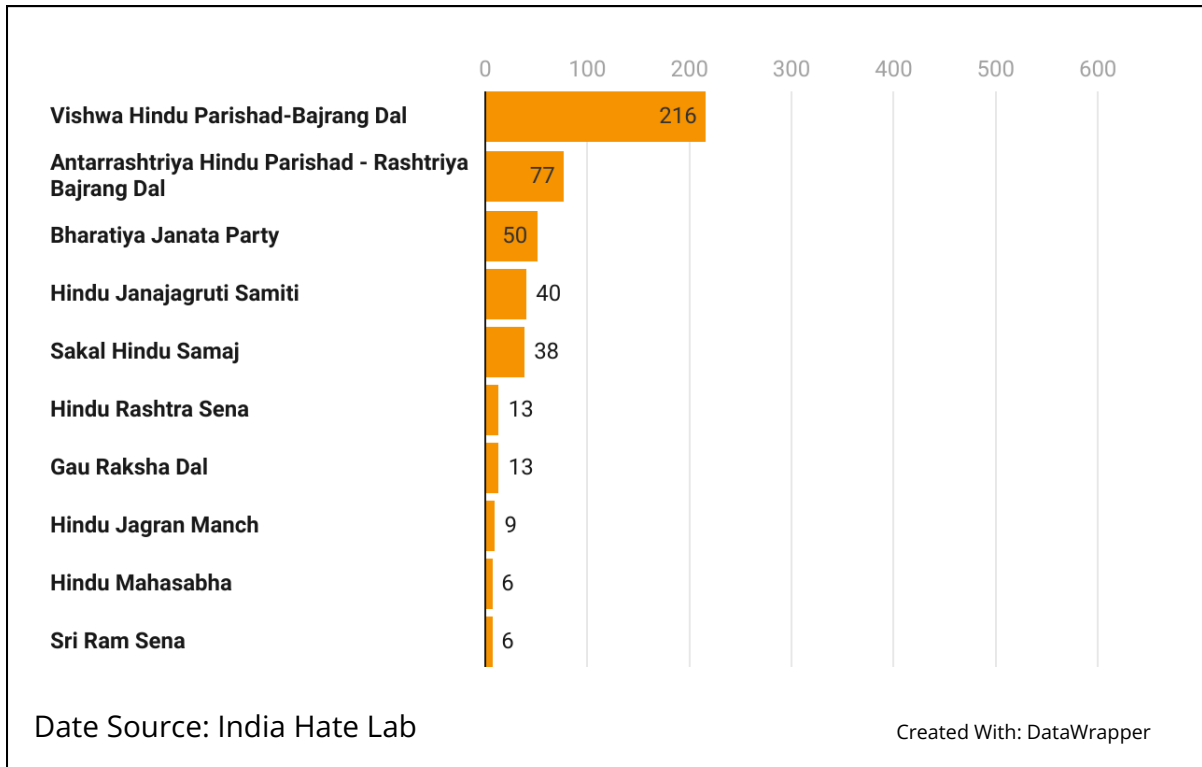
This included a religious event on November 7, where Dharendra Kumar Shastri, a religious preacher, gave a speech in which he said that the construction of mosques would not be allowed in Uttarakhand, adding that Hindus should not accept the presence of another religion in India.<sup>18</sup> This hate speech was delivered in the presence of Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami. Such hate speech events, combined with other forms of bigotry against Muslims, have reportedly contributed to an exodus of Muslims from some parts of the state.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2 Organizers of Hate Speech

In terms of the organizations responsible for such hate speech events, about 216 (32%) of events in our database were organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, **see Figure 2**.

The VHP is a militant religious organization with an extensive history of involvement in anti-minority violence in India.<sup>20</sup> The Bajrang Dal is the youth wing of the VHP, and has a similar history of anti-Muslim violence. Both organizations have taken part in some of the most horrific violent episodes in recent Indian history, including attacks against Christians in the late 1990s, the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, and more recent cow vigilante lynchings of marginalized groups.<sup>21</sup> For our purposes, we refer to them as a single entity because the Bajrang Dal is the VHP's youth wing and both organizations have recently been organizing events jointly.

**FIGURE 2: TOP 10 ORGANIZERS OF HATE SPEECH EVENTS**



Both organizations are part of the Sangh Parivar (RSS family), an umbrella term for several Hindu nationalist groups, led by the paramilitary group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and consisting of dozens of organizations including the BJP, which serves as its political wing.<sup>22</sup>

The VHP and the Bajrang Dal provide the BJP with plausible deniability about its role in promoting hate speech. The loose structure of affiliation of entities under the Hindu far-right umbrella or family enables this. Nonetheless, when the opposition Congress party proposed a ban on all extremist militant groups, including the Bajrang Dal, in the state of Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself fiercely defended the organization.<sup>23</sup>

The second most frequent organizer of hate speech events was the Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad (AHP) - Rashtriya Bajrang Dal (RBD), led by Pravin Togadia, the former head of the VHP. Togadia is believed to have fallen out with Modi and the broader Sangh Parivar. The AHP has emerged as a leading organizer of hate speech events, with Togadia himself playing a leading role in delivering hate speeches. In January 2023, Togadia held an event in Uttarakhand state where he called for a change to the Indian constitution to exclude Muslims from the bureaucracy, the police, and the judiciary.<sup>24</sup>

The BJP itself was responsible for organizing about 50 hate speech events, often in the context of election rallies.

Overall, organizations directly associated with the Sangh Parivar, including the VHP-Bajrang Dal, the BJP, the Sakal Hindu Samaj (SHS) and the Hindu Jagran Vedike were responsible for 307 events, forming about 46% of all hate speech events in 2023.

The Sakal Hindu Samaj, a coalition of various Hindu far-right groups, organized 38 hate speech events in 2023, predominantly in Maharashtra. Branded as the "Hindu Jan Aakrosh Morcha" (people's anger rally), these gatherings featured extensive hate speeches targeting Muslims.

During a Jan Aakrosh Morcha held by Sakal Hindu Samaj in Chandwad City, Nashik on September 3, far-right social media influencer Harsha Thakur promoted various anti-Muslim conspiracy theories and advocated violence, while another speaker used anti-Muslim slurs and called for boycotting Muslim teachers, bus drivers, and shopkeepers.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) has also held 40 events, primarily in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Goa. Between June 16 and June 22, the organization held an "All India Hindu Rashtra Convention" in Panaji, Goa. The event was explicitly organized around the issue of making India a "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu nation).<sup>26</sup> During the convention, Ranjit Savarkar, the grandson of Hindu nationalist ideologue Veer Savarkar, called for the economic boycott of Muslims

and promoted conspiracy theories about "economic warfare" and "Halal food." He also suggested<sup>27</sup> that Muslims could not be nationalists.

During the convention, BJP leader Kapil Mishra, notorious for previous hate speech events, engaged in the promotion of fear-inducing narratives. In that same speech, he also spread conspiracy theories about Halal products.<sup>28</sup>

Another recent trend has been the growth of organizations explicitly dedicated to cow vigilantism, such as the Gau Raksha Dal (Cow Protection Group), which regularly engage in hate speech. The organization held 13 hate speech events, mostly orchestrated by its Haryana wing over the course of 2023.

On August 2, a rally organized by Gau Raksha Dal Haryana President Acharya Yogendra Maharaj included slogans like:

BB

***Jab Mulle kate jayenge, Ram Ram chilayenge (When Mulle [derogatory term for Muslims] would be chopped, they would cry Ram Ram [Hindu deity]).***<sup>29</sup>

DD

Similarly, on October 2, in the town of Julana in Haryana, Maharaj told young cow vigilantes "to stop cow slaughter, even if we have to repeat Nasir-Junaid (murder of two Muslim men by cow vigilantes in February 2023 in Haryana's Bhiwani) 200 times, still we won't step back."<sup>30</sup>



### 3.3 Breakdown of Hate Speech Events by Party in Power

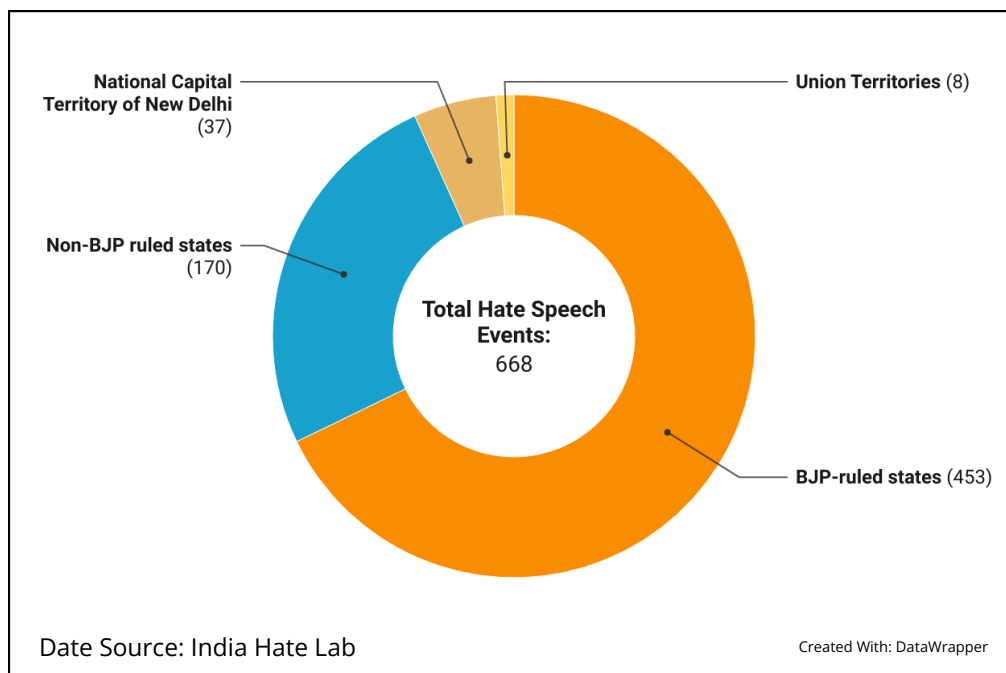
Our analysis suggests that hate speech events were more likely to take place in BJP-ruled states. Since law and order and the police fall within the control of the state government in India, this is the primary legal entity that can enforce laws against hate speech. It has also been observed that police in BJP-ruled states provide both tacit and explicit support to Hindu nationalist groups,<sup>31</sup> see Figure 3.

A total of 453 (68%) hate speech events occurred in BJP-ruled states. Additionally, eight events took place in three union territories—Jammu and Kashmir, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu—while 37 events occurred in the National

Capital Territory of Delhi. While union territories are directly governed by the central government, the responsibility for police and law and order in the NCT of Delhi also falls under the jurisdiction of the BJP-led central government.

States like Maharashtra (118), Uttar Pradesh (104), Madhya Pradesh (65), Rajasthan (64), Haryana (48), Uttarakhand (41), Karnataka (40), Gujarat (31), Chhattisgarh (21), and Bihar (18) were the top 10 for the highest number of hate speech events. Six of these states were governed by the BJP throughout the entire year. The only exceptions were Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, where state

**FIGURE 3: HATE SPEECH EVENTS BY PARTY IN POWER**



*\*Union Territories are administrated by the central government.  
NCT of Delhi's police and public order comes under the purview of central government.*

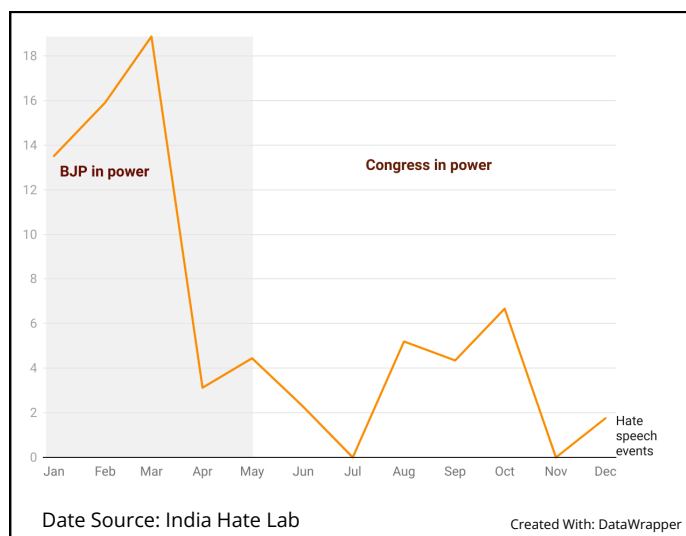
elections took place in 2023 (the BJP lost Karnataka in May and won Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh in December). Bihar was ruled by a coalition of opposition parties, Janata Dal (United) and Rashtriya Janata Dal. In January 2024, JD(U) joined BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

While some of the trends observed may be attributed to state support for Hindu nationalist ideology and the impunity granted to Hindu far-right groups and actors within these states, it does indicate that BJP-ruled states are more prone to hate speech events compared to states governed by other political parties. In fact, multiple legislators and ministers from BJP-ruled states like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have frequently attended hate speech events and propagated hate speech themselves.<sup>32</sup>

In March 2023, while hearing a petition seeking contempt proceedings against the Maharashtra police and administration for not acting against hate speech events, the Supreme Court made scathing observations about state complicity in enabling hate speech: "[Hate speech] is happening because the State is impotent, State is powerless, State doesn't act in time."<sup>33</sup>

In non-BJP ruled states, there at least appears to have been some effort to clamp down on hate speech incidents. For instance, the Congress government in Karnataka has made a concerted effort to address hate speech. The government has announced the creation of an "Information Disorder Tackling Unit," with fact-checking and data analytics teams that will use their expertise to track misinformation and hate speech online.<sup>34</sup> While there are potential free speech concerns with such a move, it does indicate some intent on the part of the state government to tackle the pernicious problem of hate speech. In comparison, in its last days in power, the BJP government in the state had dropped 385 criminal cases, including 182 cases related to hate speech, communal violence, and cow vigilantism.<sup>35</sup> The beneficiaries of this move included some of the BJP's own legislators.

**FIGURE 4: HATE SPEECH EVENTS IN KARNATAKA IN 2023**



Despite experiencing a surge in hate speech events during the BJP's tenure before the May elections, Karnataka has witnessed a gradual decline in such events ever since the Congress government came to power, **see Figure 4.**

While the state averaged about 5.75 hate speech events per month in the first five months of the year, IHL documented around three hate speech events per month between June and December, a drop coinciding with the change in government in May.

### 3.4 Monthly Breakdown of Hate Speech Events

Throughout 2023, hate speech events averaged one event per day nationally in the lowest months, such as April, while months like October, witnessed three events per day

on average. In comparison to the first half, the second half witnessed a significant surge in hate speech events.

The first peak of hate speech events in August-September coincided with the aforementioned violence in Nuh district of Haryana state, where several Hindu far-right groups organized hate speech events across various states in North India.

The VHP and the Bajrang Dal, in particular, conducted several anti-Muslim rallies during this time period. This trend escalated in October and November, with the VHP announcing multiple Shaurya Jagran rallies nationwide, coinciding with legislative elections in the multiple Indian states.

**FIGURE 5: HATE SPEECH EVENTS BY MONTH IN 2023**



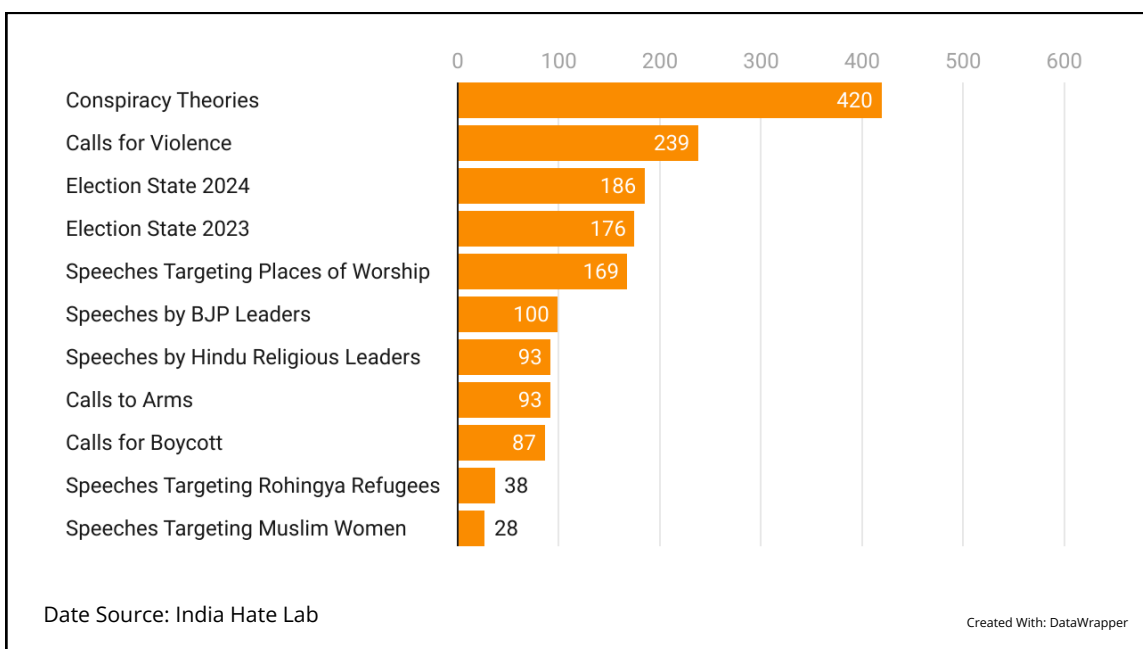


### 3.5 Decoding Hate Speech Events

To further understand the nature and trends associated with hate speech events, we categorize them into different groups. As outlined in the methodology section, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Some events may involve both the propagation of anti-Muslim conspiracy theories and direct calls for violence.

BJP MLA T Raja Singh and other BJP leaders promoting the conspiracy theory.<sup>36</sup> This is despite the fact that Shah’s own ministry has acknowledged that no cases of "love jihad" have been reported by any central agencies.<sup>37</sup> Speakers often referenced an Indian version of the Great Replacement theory, based on the false claim

**FIGURE 6: HATE SPEECH EVENTS BY CATEGORIES**



Our analysis reveals that about 420 (63%) of the 668 hate speech events included references to conspiracy theories. The primary conspiracy theories that were referenced by speakers included love jihad. The BJP has made "tackling" love jihad a major part of its electoral platform, with senior leaders like Union Home Minister Amit Shah,

that the Muslim population will overtake the Hindu population in the country.<sup>38</sup> Such speeches also tend to suggest that Muslims are nefariously working to establish an Islamic state in India, often implying that violence is the only way to prevent such an outcome in future.<sup>39</sup>

During a December 11 speech delivered in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, Hindu religious leader Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati falsely claimed that Muslims were rapidly growing in number for the purpose of installing a prime minister of their religion in the near future.<sup>40</sup> He then asserted that all Hindus would be left with no choice but to convert, live abroad, or reside in refugee camps as a result. This is just one of many examples of fear-mongering documented by IHL.

Even more concerning, 239 (36%) of the recorded hate speech events featured explicit calls of violence against Muslims. Hereafter, we categorize these as "dangerous speeches." Examples include a November 12 Bajrang Dal rally in Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh, where participants chanted, "Jab Katue [anti-Muslim slur] kate Jayenge, Ram Ram Chilayenge (when Mulle (a derogatory term for Muslims) would be chopped, they would cry Ram Ram)."<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, hate speech often includes slogans like "Desh ke gaddaron ko, Goli maro salon ko (shoot the traitors of our country)," popularized by the current Union Cabinet Minister for Sports and Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Anurag Thakur.<sup>42</sup> On several occasions, speakers frequently invoked the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, suggesting it as a "model" for national implementation.<sup>43</sup> Prime Minister Modi, who was then the Chief Minister of Gujarat has been accused of complicity in the pogrom.<sup>44</sup>

Cow vigilantism has also been utilized as a pretext for advocating brutal violence against Muslims.<sup>45</sup> According to a 2017 IndiaSpend report, 97% of cow vigilante attacks between 2010 and 2017 were reported after May 2014 when Modi assumed power.<sup>46</sup>

Another Human Rights Watch (HRW) report in 2019 revealed that at least 44 people, including 36 Muslims, were killed between May 2015 and December 2018 in such attacks. As Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at HRW, stated in that report, "calls for cow protection may have started out as a way to attract Hindu votes, but it has transformed into a free pass for mobs to violently attack and kill minority group members."<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, speeches in 169 events (25%) of the dataset referenced Muslim places of worship, alleging they were built after demolishing temples. The BJP and other far-right groups have made such appeals a central aspect of their political strategy since the 1990s, when a violent campaign led by the BJP and broader Sangh Parivar culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a historic mosque in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. These claims gained prominence in 2023 as the BJP government prepared to inaugurate a Hindu temple at the Babri mosque site in January 2024.<sup>48</sup>

The run-up to the massive inauguration, led by Modi himself, coincided with increased hate speech events targeting places of worship.

While there were 50 such events in the first half of 2023 (between January and June), this number rose to 119 in the second half of the year. Notably, these events focused on two mosques in Uttar Pradesh: the Gyanvapi mosque in Mathura and the Shahi Idgah mosque in Varanasi. Both sites have been frequent targets of Hindu far-right leaders since the 1992 demolition, with supporters often proclaiming, "Ayodhya toh bas jhanki hai, Kashi-Mathura baki hai (Ayodhya is a preview, Varanasi and Mathura remain)."<sup>49</sup>

Recently, far-right leaders have expanded their targeting beyond these two mosques, calling for the widespread conversion of mosques into temples. On January 21, VHP leader Ishwar Lal called for the conversion of 30,000 mosques into temples in Lohawat, Rajasthan.<sup>50</sup> On June 28, a Bajrang Dal leader went a step further in Sehore, Madhya Pradesh, calling for the conversion of mosques to Bajrang Dal offices.<sup>51</sup>

On September 29, Suresh Chavhanke, owner and chairman of far-right TV channel Sudarshan News, called for the replacement of 40,000 mosques with temples at an event in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.<sup>52</sup> On November 1, during an election rally in Tijara, Rajasthan, BJP leader Sandeep Dayma called for the removal of mosques and gurdwaras.<sup>53</sup> Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, was present at the rally and was seen clapping after Dayma's remarks.

Another alarming trend involves the targeting of Muslim women at hate speech events, with 28 instances recorded throughout the year.

In particular, far-right leaders have often taunted Muslim women, suggesting that they should marry Hindu men instead.<sup>54</sup> In an October speech in Bhilwara, Rajasthan, BJP legislator T Raja Singh openly called for violence against this group, proclaiming:



***If they [Muslims] take one Hindu girl, we'll take 10 of theirs.***<sup>55</sup>



Furthermore, our analysis indicates that there were several calls to arms, where far-right leaders exhorted Hindus to "arm" themselves or procure weapons, sometimes directly distributing tridents and swords for this purpose.

For instance, the Bajrang Dal held multiple "trishul distribution" events, in which participants were provided with sharp tridents.<sup>56</sup> Approximately 93 speeches (14%) featured calls to arms. Another concerning trend is the concerted efforts by far-right speakers to advocate for the ostracization of Muslims from various aspects of daily life, including social, economic, and political spheres.

A disturbing total of 87 events (13%) featured calls to boycott the Muslim community. For instance, BJP legislator T Raja Singh has repeatedly called for an economic boycott of Muslims.<sup>57</sup> Other far-right leaders have sought to repeal constitutional rights to equality or called for the exclusion of Muslims from important state institutions, such as the bureaucracy or the police.<sup>58</sup>

Academic research has suggested that the BJP often uses communal tensions before election campaigns in order to polarize society on religious lines.<sup>59</sup> Our data found that about 26% of hate speech events took place in states that held legislative elections in 2023. States such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Karnataka, all of which conducted elections in 2023, witnessed disproportionately high numbers of hate speech events, with all four ranking among the top ten states for such incidents.

In Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana—each of which held elections in November—there was a significant surge in hate speech events as the elections drew near. While these states witnessed 47 hate speech events in the first half of the year, the count escalated to about 116 hate speech events in the second half.

In Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh state, there was a consistent stream of hate gatherings, spanning from March to November. Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, witnessed a similar trend, with four hate speech events recorded in November alone, leading up to the state elections on November 25, 2023. A total of 186 (28%) events occurred in states where legislative elections are slated for 2024.

Overall, 54% of hate speech events took place in states where legislative elections were held in 2023 or are slated for 2024.

### 3.6 Decoding Hate Speech Events in BJP vs Non-BJP Ruled States

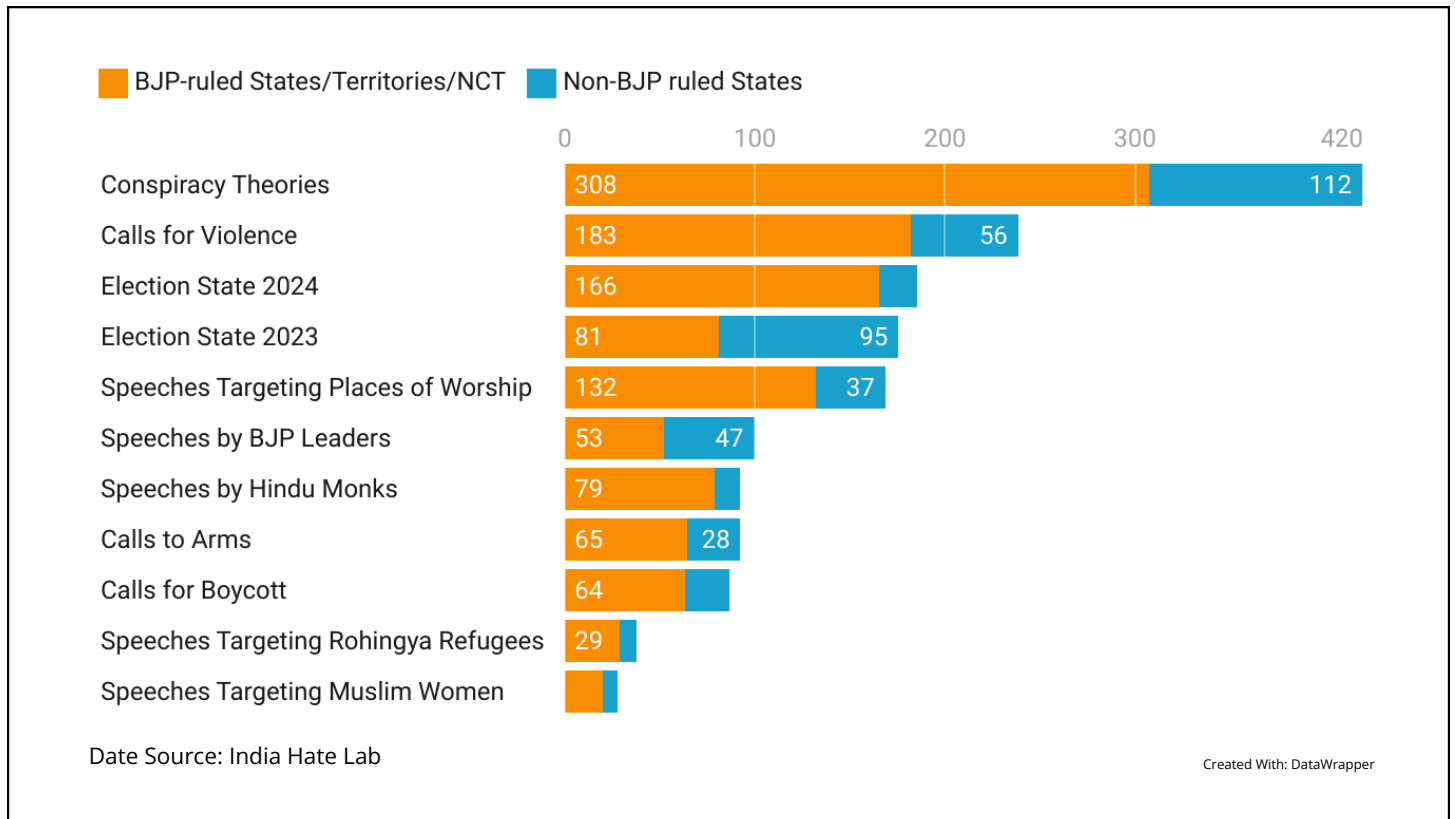
In addition to the significant quantitative differences observed between hate speech events in BJP-ruled states and non-BJP ruled states, our data indicates qualitative distinctions as well.

There were stark differences in content of hate speech between BJP-ruled states (including centrally administered territories) and non-BJP ruled states. In particular, instances of dangerous speeches were more prevalent in BJP-ruled states. Approximately 77% of all events involving direct calls to violence occurred in these states including the union territories and NCT of Delhi.

Similarly, about 78% of all hate speech events targeting places of worship were recorded in BJP-ruled states, **see Figure 7**.

Interestingly, hate speech events were more likely to involve BJP leaders in non-BJP ruled states. Only around 10.6% of events in BJP-ruled states included BJP leaders, whereas this figure rose to about 27.6% in non-BJP ruled states, suggesting that BJP is more likely to partake in hate speech when attempting to make inroads in non-BJP ruled states. In particular, BJP leaders delivered hate speeches during their election campaigns in the opposition-ruled states of Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.<sup>60</sup>

**FIGURE 7: HATE SPEECH EVENTS BY CATEGORIES: BJP VS NON-BJP**



### 3.7 Merchants of Hate

Our analysis of the individuals most actively involved in delivering hate speeches reveals a pervasive network of far-right influencers, leaders of far-right groups, and members of the BJP. Just five speakers were responsible for 146 hate speech events or 22% of all hate speech events documented by IHL.

A significant number of 100 hate speech events (15%) prominently featured leaders affiliated with the BJP. We also found the involvement of Hindu religious leaders in propagating hate speech.

Approximately 93 events (14%) in the dataset featured hate speeches delivered by religious figures with a substantial following.

BJP legislators T Raja Singh and Nitesh Rane, AHP Chief Pravin Togadia, far-right influencer Kajal Shingala, Sudarshan News owner Suresh Chavhanke, Hindu religious leaders Yati Narsinghanand, Kalicharan Maharaj, Sadhvi Saraswati Mishra are the top eight speakers responsible for most hate speeches.



### 3.7.1 Speakers Responsible for Most Hate Speeches

Our data reveals that the most frequent purveyor of hate speech is Kajal Shingala, alias Kajal Hindustani, from Gujarat. Unlike many other far-right figures, Kajal does not have a singular affiliation with an organization; instead, she operates as a "freelancer," participating in events organized by various far-right groups.

Shingala has garnered notoriety for propagating the conspiracy theory of Love Jihad. She appears to enjoy official support, evidenced by her being followed by Prime Minister Modi on X, formerly known as Twitter and sharing a stage with multiple BJP leaders.<sup>61</sup> On December 24, Shingala delivered hate speech in Kalol, Gujarat, where she called for an economic boycott of non-Hindus.<sup>62</sup> Union Home Minister Amit Shah also delivered a keynote speech at the same event.

Ranking second on this list is the chief of Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad (AHP), Pravin Togadia, who has a long history of such speeches. The Indian Home Ministry in 2013 revealed that Togadia had the most individual cases of hate speech registered against him in the country at that time.<sup>63</sup>

A decade later, the former VHP president has been no less prolific in his propagation of anti-Muslim hate, as he repeatedly threatened violence against Muslims, spread an Indian version of the Great Replacement Conspiracy theory, and directly called for the targeting of mosques.<sup>64</sup>

Dhananjay Desai, the chief of the Maharashtra-based Hindu Rashtra Sena (HRS), ranked third among the top hate mongers. Desai was accused of involvement

FIGURE 8: TOP 5 SOURCES OF HATE SPEECH

|   | Name                                  | Affiliation                            | Events |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------|
| 1 | Kajal Shingala alias Kajal Hindustani | Hindu Far-right Influencer             | 35     |
| 2 | Pravin Togadia                        | Chief of Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad | 32     |
| 3 | Dhananjay Desai                       | Chief of Hindu Rashtra Sena            | 31     |
| 4 | Suresh Chavhanke                      | Chairman of Sudarshan News             | 25     |
| 5 | T Raja Singh                          | BJP legislator from Telangana          | 23     |

Date Source: India Hate Lab Created With: DataWrapper

in the murder of Mohsin Shaikh, a 24-year-old Muslim techie who was killed in communal clashes in Pune, Maharashtra.<sup>65</sup> Although Desai was eventually acquitted, questions have been raised regarding the integrity of the judicial process, given that several witnesses went missing or chose to withdraw their statements in the case.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, Desai capitalized on his notoriety to become a prominent far-right orator, frequently participating in and organizing hate speech events in the state of Maharashtra. Desai has consistently fueled anti-Muslim sentiments and advocated for violence against Muslims.<sup>67</sup>

Another prominent proponent of hate speech is Suresh Chavhanke, the chairman of Sudarshan News, who has participated in 25

hate speech events. Chavhanke has frequently targeted Muslim women in his speeches, and called for the economic boycott of Muslims.<sup>68</sup> Despite the channel's founder propagating hate, Sudarshan News continues to receive government advertisements as a source of revenue.<sup>69</sup>

The fifth-most frequent purveyor of hate speech was T Raja Singh, the BJP legislator from Telangana. Singh was supposedly "expelled" from the BJP in 2022 when he made derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>70</sup> His suspension was revoked in October 2023, on the eve of elections in his native Telangana state, where he was re-elected as a legislator.

### 3.7.2 Dangerous Speech

In 2023, T Raja Singh was responsible for some of the most dangerous hate speech events, explicitly calling for violence against Muslims in each of them.

In his speeches, Singh openly advocated for the killing of "love jihadis" (a derogatory reference for Muslims).<sup>71</sup> During an event in Hyderabad Telangana, in March, Singh openly

threatened violence against Muslims, stating:



***You are half cut (circumcised), we will cut you fully.***<sup>72</sup>



At another event in Adilabad, Telangana, on June 4, he encouraged the crowd to "tie every love jihadi upside down and beat them if they enter your village."<sup>73</sup>

**FIGURE 9: TOP CONTRIBUTORS TO DANGEROUS SPEECH**

|   | Name                         | Affiliation                         | ▼ Events |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|
| 1 | T Raja Singh                 | BJP Legislator from Telangana       | 14       |
| 2 | Pravin Togadia               | Chief Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad | 10       |
| 3 | Kajal Shingala               | Hindu Far-right Influencer          | 9        |
| 4 | Suresh Chavhanke             | Chief of Sudarshan News             | 9        |
| 5 | Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati | Religious Leader                    | 7        |
| 6 | Kalicharan Maharaj           | Religious Leader                    | 5        |
| 7 | Sadhvi Saraswati Mishra      | Religious Leader                    | 5        |
| 8 | Nitesh Rane                  | BJP Legislator from Maharashtra     | 4        |

Date Source: India Hate Lab Created With: DataWrapper

### 3.7.3 BJP Leaders & Hate Speech

Among BJP leaders, T Raja Singh and Himanta Biswa Sarma, chief minister of the state of Assam, and Nitesh Rane, a BJP legislator from Maharashtra, were responsible for most hate speeches. As the top executive in a state with a population exceeding 30 million people, Himanta holds significant influence.

Sarma, appointed as a "star campaigner" by the BJP, has often used his bully pulpit to target Muslims during elections.<sup>74</sup> He frequently weaponizes Indian history to target Muslims. For instance, in an election speech in Bhatpara, Chhattisgarh, Sarma asked voters to choose between "Babur and Ram", comparing Babur, the first Mughal emperor to the Hindu mythological figure of Ram.<sup>75</sup>

The intent of these speeches is to imply that they are "outsiders" or in some way, alien to India. Sarma often boasts about closing Muslim seminaries and demolishing Muslim properties in his home state.<sup>76</sup> At a November 27 election rally in Ibrahimpatnam, Telangana, Sarma declared to the crowd that his party does not need the Muslim vote.

He has also been known to propagate conspiracy theories about love jihad and has even introduced the concept of "fertilizer jihad", insinuating that Muslims in his state are responsible for the excessive use of fertilizers as a part of a nefarious plot to harm other residents in the state.<sup>77</sup>

**FIGURE 10: TOP 5 BJP LEADERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HATE SPEECH**

|   | Name                | Position                        | Events |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | T Raja Singh        | BJP Legislator from Telangana   | 23     |
| 2 | Himanta Biswa Sarma | BJP Chief Minister of Assam     | 16     |
| 3 | Nitesh Rane         | BJP Legislator from Maharashtra | 6      |
| 4 | Abhay Singh         | BJP Leader from Jharkhand       | 5      |
| 5 | Jai Bhagwan Goyal   | BJP Leader from New Delhi       | 5      |

Date Source: India Hate Lab Created With: DataWrapper

### 3.7.4 Religious Leaders & Hate Speech

Hindu religious leaders were responsible for delivering hate speeches at 93 events. One of the most notorious figures, Kalicharan Maharaj, a self-styled spiritual leader, was responsible for 13 instances of hate speech in 2023. Maharaj has actively promoted conspiracy theories about the Muslim population (including Rohingya refugees), described Muslims as "terrorists" and "traitors" and advocated for the use of violence against Muslims.<sup>78</sup>

Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati, another religious leader notorious for hate speech, delivered 13 hate speeches. In December 2021, he co-organized the infamous Dharma Sansad or Religious Parliament event in Haridwar, Uttarakhand, where calls for the genocide of Muslims were given.<sup>79</sup> In 2023, Narsinghanand continued his pattern of hate speech, exploiting disinformation from the Israel-Gaza war to incite violence against Muslims at multiple events.<sup>80</sup>

**FIGURE 11: TOP RELIGIOUS LEADERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HATE SPEECH**

|    | Name                         | Affiliation                         | Events |
|----|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 1  | Kalicharan Maharaj           | Self-styled spiritual leader        | 13     |
| 2  | Yati Narsinghanand Saraswati | Head of Dasna Devi temple           | 13     |
| 3  | Swami Sachchidanand          | Religious preacher                  | 8      |
| 4  | Sadhvi Saraswati Mishra      | Religious preacher                  | 6      |
| 5  | Swami Darshan Bharti         | Devbhoomi Raksha Abhiyan Sangathan  | 5      |
| 6  | Dhirendra Shastri            | Religious preacher                  | 4      |
| 7  | Swami Prabodhanand Giri      | President of Hindu Raksha Sena      | 3      |
| 8  | Swami Anand Swaroop          | Chairman of Shankaracharya Parishad | 2      |
| 9  | Jagadguru Paramhans Acharya  | Priest                              | 2      |
| 10 | Bharatanand Saraswati        | Priest                              | 2      |

Date Source: India Hate Lab Created With: DataWrapper



### 3.8 Rohingya Refugees & Hate Speech

Our data highlights the persistent targeting of Rohingya Muslim refugees residing in India, documenting 38 such events. On July 31, Dhananjay Desai, president of the Hindu Rashtra Sena, delivered a speech in Phulambri, Maharashtra, wherein he praised the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar.<sup>81</sup>

Similarly, on May 18, Kapil Khanna, the VHP New Delhi president, issued threats asserting that Rohingya refugees would not be allowed to live in Delhi.<sup>82</sup> During a rally in Delhi on August 2, speakers demonized Rohingya refugees, disseminating disinformation about the perceived "privileges" accorded to them in India.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, the Indian government has been criticized for violating customary international law in its treatment of Rohingya refugees, with some being deported back to Myanmar, where they face a high risk of persecution.<sup>84</sup>

In a July 9 speech in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, Sudarshan News Chairman Suresh Chavhanke promoted disinformation about refugees living in India, greatly exaggerating their numbers. He claimed there were 400,000 Rohingya refugees, while official United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures indicate only about 16,000 certified refugees in the country.<sup>85</sup> Even official government statistics suggest there are only 40,000 such refugees in India.<sup>86</sup>

During a November 15 pre-election event in Janjgir-Champa, Chhattisgarh, Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke in a deeply prejudiced manner about Rohingya refugees, boasting about the Modi government's efforts to expel them from India.<sup>87 88</sup> Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has also repeatedly targeted Rohingya refugees in his speeches.<sup>89</sup>

# 4 | Israel-Gaza War & Hate Speech

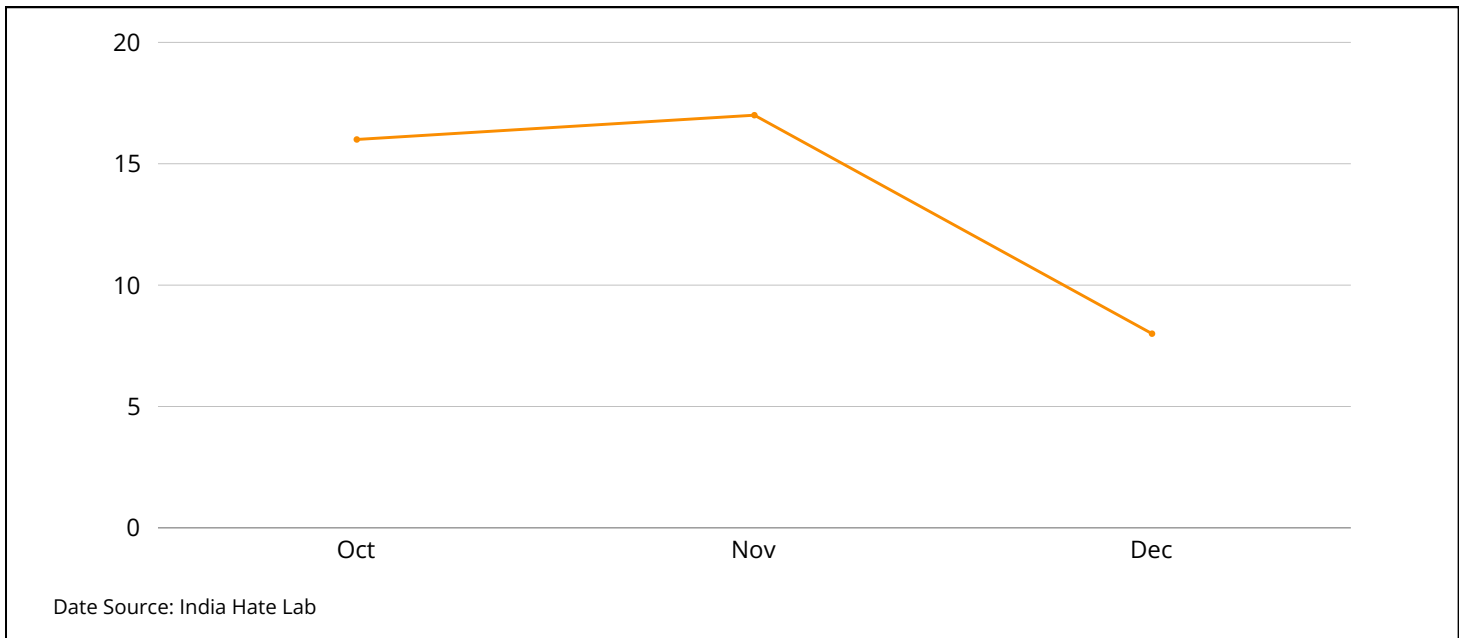
Out of 193 hate speech events held between October 7 (the day Hamas attacked Israel and the beginning of Israel's ongoing war on Gaza) and December 31, at least 41 (21%) events used the war to fuel fear and animosity towards Indian Muslims.

The use of the war to peddle anti-Muslim hate peaked in November, with references during 17 events recorded by IHL. 32 out of the 41 events (78%) took place in BJP-ruled states and union territories. The predominant narrative surrounding the war aimed to stoke fear about Indian Muslims, with far-right leaders insinuating that Muslims were inherently violent and therefore posed a threat to Hindus.<sup>90</sup> For instance, on October 29 in Patna, Bihar, religious leader Yati

Narsinghanand Saraswati delivered a hate speech, where he spread disinformation that Hamas fighters had played "football" with the heads of Israeli victims, and used reports of alleged sexual violence to imply that similar atrocities would befall Hindus in India unless they took up arms against Muslims.<sup>91</sup>

Earlier on October 14, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) General Secretary Surendra Jain during a speech shared unverified reports about "beheaded babies," demanding that Israel should not stop until it has demolished this "jihadi mentality that has infected the entire world."<sup>92</sup> In an October 20 speech, VHP leader Ishwar Lal used the attacks to assert that this was the "character" of all Muslims.<sup>93</sup>

**FIGURE 12: HATE SPEECH EVENTS MENTIONING ISRAEL-GAZA WAR (OCT - DEC)**



Similarly in a November 10 speech, BJP leader Kapil Mishra said, "What Israel faced is what we have been facing for 1400 years."<sup>94</sup>

AHP chief Pravin Togadia went one step further at a November 20 event in Rohtak, Haryana, stating, "Today it is Israel's turn. That same Palestine is rising in our villages and our streets. Saving our prosperity, our women, from them is a big challenge for us."<sup>95</sup>

He added that if the Muslim population's growth was not stopped, then no Hindu would be safe. A few days later, at a November 28 event in Jalalabad, Uttar Pradesh, Togadia contended that Hindus would never be safe while co-existing with Muslims, warning that there is no "Iron Dome"<sup>96</sup> in India to save Hindus.<sup>97</sup>

Hindu far-right leaders have also repeatedly praised Israel for its policies against Palestinians and advocated for similar actions against Muslims in India.

**In a December 11 speech in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, Narsinghanand suggested that Israel should be a "role model" for dealing with Muslims in India.**<sup>98</sup>

At an event on December 24, Avinash Dharamadhikari, a former member of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), India's elite bureaucratic service, used the war to whip up hate against Indian Muslims and described Islam as a "curse" to humanity, while calling for a war against Muslims.<sup>99</sup>

# 5 | Hate Speech and Violence

The proliferation of hate speech in India is particularly concerning given its clear connection to the upsurge in communal violence against minorities. Incidents of hateful rhetoric are rarely the outpouring of emotion they are often framed to be. Much like riots and other incidents of communal violence, incidents of hate speech are not spontaneous events but rather planned and often calibrated strategies that are often employed towards the mobilization of armed violence.<sup>100</sup>

The symbiotic relationship between hate speech and violence in India is an age-old one, with the political scientist Paul Brass suggesting that perpetrators of hate speech could be best understood as "fire tenders of violence."<sup>101</sup> Brass also famously contended that provocative slogans and hate speech are often a lightning rod for the far-right to activate institutionalized riot systems to take action against minority groups.

While the spirit of Brass' assertions remains pertinent, our findings suggest that the link between violence and hate speech has further evolved, taking on more sophisticated manifestations. The widespread use of social media and digital communications has allowed for a daily drip feed of continuous hate speech, consumable in bite form or collectively as a "hate binge." This has also

enabled a shift away from more diffused forms of public violence such as institutionalized riot systems to the institutionalization and routinization of lower-level, everyday public violence. Simply put, large-scale riots have been augmented by daily beatings and lynchings that are increasingly being accepted and legitimized as routine politics, a process aided by the steady drip of hate speech that frames minority groups as a civilizational threat.

The synergy between hate speech and violence is probably best understood through the conceptual framework provided by Professor Cherian George's theory of hate spin. According to George, hate spin refers to a premeditated tactic in which hateful rhetoric is employed by entrepreneurs of hate – actors who manipulate societal divisions for political gain by employing injustice frames which enable them to simultaneously give and take offence. These actors thus actively engage in hate speech while also engaging in performative righteous outrage.

This effectively enables them to portray themselves as victims while concurrently demonizing minority groups, thereby legitimizing and rationalizing violent acts against them.

Hate spin can perhaps be best understood as consisting of three broad strategies. The first is the use of injustice frames, evident through the purposeful propagation of a multitude of conspiracy theories alleging the presence of various jihads allegedly launched by the Muslim community to undermine and overtake the majority Hindu community in various spheres of political, social, and economic life. Perhaps the most evident example of this has been the diffusion of love jihad that alleges a vast conspiracy in which Muslim men seduce and marry Hindu women for the targeted purpose of religious conversion.

Unpacking the various incidents of love jihad themed hate speech in our study, it is evidently a carefully crafted and articulated myth aimed at casting Muslim men as an existential threat to Hindu society. This is a longstanding sectarian trope. Such careful framing takes us to the second strategy of hate spin with violent mobilization.

As we observe below with our case study on Haryana, hate speech played a critical role in mobilizing mob violence against Muslims towards the end of July and August. The calibrated tactic of both taking and giving offence enables entrepreneurial hate-spinners like Sudarshan News Chairman Suresh Chavhanke to incite and then justify (or vice-versa) violence against Muslims. Closely linked to the strategies of framing and mobilization is the third strategy of provocation, which is aimed at eliciting a

response from Muslim groups, which in turn is used to justify intensified waves of hate spin and violence. For instance, as documented in our half-yearly report, hate speech and provocative slogans during the March celebrations of the Hindu festival of Ram Navami played a role in instigating violence against Muslims across several Indian towns. By intentionally engaging in provocative behavior, far-right groups can initiate violence, while still maintaining their self-proclaimed victimhood.

Using the framework of hate spin, we can understand how the surge in hate speech in India is clearly linked to the proliferation of communal violence against minority groups. Through the strategic triad of framing, mobilization, and provocation, Hindu nationalist groups have been able to effectively instigate violence across India in 2023.

## 5.1 Case Study 1: Haryana

This link between hate speech and violence is best exemplified by the brutal violence that broke out in northern India on July 31, 2023.<sup>102</sup> The riots, which started in Nuh, a Muslim-majority district in Haryana, were not spontaneous or organic. Instead, they were the result of a concerted effort by Hindu nationalist groups, over several months, to instigate violence in the region.

Based on our analysis, there were at least 17 hate speech events organized in the state



between January and July 2023, out of which seven took place within the 60 km radius of Nuh. In one event organized by Gau Raksha Dal leader Bittu Bajrangi on March 26 in the city of Faridabad, 60 km from Nuh, Hindu religious leader Jagadguru Paramhansa called for an economic boycott and genocidal violence against Muslims.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, in Gurugram, about 47 km from Nuh, the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) held a rally a month earlier on February 19 in support of a Bajrang Dal and Gau Raksha Dal leader Monu Manesar, one of the accused in the brutal murder of two Muslim men, Junaid and Nasir.<sup>104</sup>

On February 22 and February 23, a "Mahapanchayat" gathering was held in support of Manesar. At the event on February 22, held in Manesar (about 48 km from Nuh), one speaker proclaimed that "to protect cows, we won't hesitate even if we have to kill someone." The February 23 event, held in Hathin and Palwal (about 35 km from Nuh), also targeted Muslims.<sup>105</sup>

"If you don't change, be prepared for how Hanuman (a deity in Hinduism) destroyed Lanka," a speaker said, referring to Nuh. This reference to the Ramayana, one of Hinduism's primary epics, evokes the story of Hanuman, as the loyal lieutenant of Ram, the epic's hero, burnt Lanka, the abode of the villainous Ravana. Essentially, the speech entailed a direct threat to violence, framing Muslims as evil and Nuh as the home of that

evil. On his public social media pages, Manesar often bragged about his exploits, filming himself assaulting Muslims and even posting evidence of shootings carried out by him.

We have documented 18 incidents of Gau Raksha Dal's involvement in cow vigilante violence, targeting mostly Muslim drivers, across various parts of Haryana between January and July 2023.

The flurry of hate speeches reached a crescendo on July 31, when a Hindu nationalist procession took place in the area. During the procession, there were several instances of hate speech, including lewd remarks against Muslims.<sup>106</sup> VHP General Secretary Surendra Jain was present in the district and delivered an inflammatory speech against Muslims at the Nuh's Nalhar Mahadev Mandir (destination of procession). Jain said:



***We have to change the character of Mewat. Mewat is not the land of cow killers, Hindu killers, ISI agents [Pakistan's spy agency], Rohingya/Bangladeshi infiltrators, or those who convert Hindus.***<sup>107</sup>



Controversy also arose over the prospective participation of Manesar in the procession. However, the hate speech by Jain and others successfully fueled the violence.

As the violence broke out, Bajrang Dal leader Neeraj Vats went live on Facebook and asked his supporters to attack Muslims in other parts of the state.<sup>108</sup> Listening to such calls, Hindu far-right organizations held dozens of rallies across northern India, demonizing Muslims.<sup>109</sup> On next day, a Bajrang Dal rally in the town of Bhiwani, Haryana included the slogan "Jab Mulle kaate jaayenge, Ram Ram Chillaayenge (When Mulle [derogatory term for Muslims] would be chopped off, they would cry Ram Ram)." <sup>110</sup>

Within a week of the July 31 violence, there were calls to "shoot the traitors (referred to Muslims)" in at least six different towns. On August 3, a rally in Assandh, Haryana included the slogan: "Allah-Ullah kehn nhi dena, ek bhi Mulla rehen nhi dena (Rough translation: We won't let them say Allah, and we won't let Muslims live)." <sup>111</sup>

In the technology hub of Gurugram, a suburb of the national capital, Hindu nationalist mobs killed a Muslim cleric, burnt down a whole variety of Muslim establishments, and forced migrant Muslim families to leave their homes and livelihoods. <sup>112</sup>

## 5.2 Case Study 2: Maharashtra

Haryana was not the only state affected by hate speech which spilled over into violence. Predictably, Maharashtra, amidst a surge in hate speech events, witnessed numerous incidents of communal tension and violence,

inflicting considerable harm upon the Muslim community.

An investigation by the news website Article 14 uncovered that between January 1 and October 1, 2023, Maharashtra bore witness to 41 communal flare-ups.<sup>113</sup> Within the same time range, IHL documented 91 hate speech events across 27 out of 36 districts in Maharashtra. Mumbai and Kolhapur district, which ranked among top five in hate speech events, were also the ones to witness most incidents of communal tension and violence in the state.

During this timeframe, IHL recorded six hate speech events and nine communal incidents in Mumbai, and five hate speech events and six communal incidents in Kolhapur. Throughout the year, events featuring inflammatory rhetoric and other forms of hate assemblies precipitated violence within the state.

For example, as detailed in the Article 14 report, communal tensions in Mumbai's Malvani neighborhood had been festering over years, exacerbated by hate speeches from BJP leaders in 2021 and 2022. On January 29, 2023, during a Sakal Hindu Samaj rally in Mumbai, hateful slogans targeting Muslims were chanted, accompanied by demands for boycotting Muslim businesses and advocating for legislation against "love jihad."<sup>114</sup> BJP legislator T Raja Singh delivered a dangerous speech, calling for violence against Muslims. He suggested that a true Hindu should be one that kills, describing the future as a "time for war."<sup>115</sup>

At the same rally, far-right leader Sakshi Gaikwad told the crowd that:



***Muslims are like sacrificial lambs, waiting to be sacrificed.***



Over 10,000 individuals attended this event, including Prasad Lad, the vice president of the Maharashtra BJP unit, and BJP MLA and Mumbai BJP president Ashish Shelar. This culminated in a provocative procession by far-right groups in the area on March 30, during the festival of Ram Navami.

Video evidence suggests that processionists yelled provocative slogans like "Matrubhoomi ki raksha karne, Hum talwar uthayenge." [To protect our motherland, We will pick up swords, no doubt.]<sup>116</sup> The footage reviewed by Article 14 also shows Hindu processionists throwing sticks, shoes, and stones, resulting in violence. When the police filed a First Investigation Report (FIR) in the case, it only charged Muslims, including those who tried to control the violence.

The role of hate speech in inflaming communal tensions and violence is further exemplified in Kolhapur. On January 9, Dhananjay Desai, president of the Hindu Rashtra Sena, delivered a hate speech in Chandgad, Kolhapur, proclaiming an ongoing "religious war" and branding Muslims as "traitors."<sup>117</sup> On June 4, Desai delivered another hate speech in Ichalkaranji, Kolhapur, indulging in fear-mongering by claiming that, "These people [Muslims] are actively trying to

break India. India is purely only for Hindus."<sup>118</sup> He further called on the people to "make large sacrifices for establishing a Hindu rashtra. You have to be ready to kill and be killed."

On June 6, Banda Sakhunke, a local Bajrang Dal leader, incited Hindus in response to a Muslim teenager's Instagram post glorifying Mughal king Aurangzeb, subsequently calling for a general strike.<sup>119</sup> The following day, riots erupted in Kolhapur, as a far-right mob of around 5,000 Hindus ransacked Muslim-owned shops, vehicles, and homes during the purported "strike."<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, an analysis by the human rights organization Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) revealed a correlation between violent communal incidents and hate speech events involving Sudarshan News Chairman Suresh Chavhanke.<sup>121</sup> For instance, the town of Aurangabad, Maharashtra, was the site of significant Hindu far-right mobilization in the month of March. On March 19, Chavhanke called for the economic boycott of Muslims at an event organized by the Sakal Hindu Samaj.<sup>122</sup>

At the same event, BJP MLA T Raja Singh called for mass violence against Muslims.<sup>123</sup> Eleven days later, heeding their calls, Hindu youths during the festival of Ram Navami raised provocative slogans in the Muslim-dominated Kiradpura area, resulting in violence.<sup>124</sup> More than 500 people were involved in the clashes, which resulted in significant arson and property damage in the area.<sup>125</sup>

# 6 | New Actors: Entrepreneurs of Hate

The discussion on hate spin, hate speech, and violence lends itself to another observable trend over the last decade, namely the rapid growth of new Hindu nationalist groups and actors engaging in hate speech. Writing in 2015, Edward Anderson coined the term neo-Hindutva to refer to new groups emerging at the fringes of the Hindu Nationalist movement, affiliated and inspired by the Sangh Parivar and its constituent parts, but often operating with relative autonomy.<sup>126</sup>

The emergence of these new actors has been characterized by a strategic expansion in the movement's repertoires of contention, focused on increasing visibility and asserting legitimacy, thereby broadening their windows of opportunity. These new entities often exhibit more extreme ideological stances than the older Hindu far-right organizations and their methods of mobilizing support are more aggressive and confrontational, often engaging in processes of competitive escalation to outbid one another.<sup>127</sup> This often involves merging newer technological means such as digital campaigns and viral messaging with more traditional strategies like organizing mass rallies and symbolic acts of mass defiance.

It is therefore essential to employ the lens of opportunity to truly comprehend the

mechanisms through which these neo-Hindutva actors have arisen and entrenched themselves within India's increasingly polarized public sphere. The calibrated employment of hate spin by these entrepreneurs of hate involve innovation and content development at the grassroots level where ideas can be conceptualized, tested, and developed for maximum potency. Championing well-established conspiracy theories like love jihad or developing new jihads enable these groups to carve out niche spaces while also forging alliances with like-minded groups for emerging opportunities within the socio-political landscape.

These collaborations are not just ideological but often extend to sharing resources and strategies. A key example of this has been the rising prominence of the Sakal Hindu Samaj in Maharashtra. The SHS, a broad coalition of Hindu far-right organizations, including the more established outfits like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, Hindu Janjagruti Samiti, Durga Vahini, and Sanatan Sanstha as well as rapidly rising groups such as the Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad, Vishwa Shriram Sena and Shri Ram Pratishthan Hindustan, is creating space for new outfits seeking their own space in the saffron sun while also sharing experience and strategies within a cooperative ecosystem.<sup>128</sup>

While much of this entrepreneurship is targeted at mobilization for the purposes of potential co-optation by political elites within the Hindu nationalist ecosystem, these groups and the conspiracy theories they champion also possess the ability to influence political elites, pushing the Hindu nationalist movement towards more fringe and extreme positions than they would previously have been comfortable taking.

The aforementioned SHS has been at the forefront of organizing mass rallies and events in Maharashtra (38 events in 2023), most of which have engaged in perpetuation of conspiracy theories and extensive hate and dangerous speeches against Muslims.

An investigation into the SHS by the Indian news website The Quint has cast light on how a collective banner lacking obvious leadership ensures increased mobilization capacity and the employment of flexible strategies while also making it harder for law enforcement to finger the organization culpable for the rallies and activism perpetrated by the SHS.<sup>129</sup> SHS rallies have been attended and publicly supported by key functionaries from the BJP and the Shiv Sena, including state ministers and MLAs, lending legitimacy to both the hate speech laden events and the groups and leaders speaking at them.

This includes Shiv Sena MLAs such as Pradeep Jaswal and Maharashtra Cabinet Ministers Sandipan Bhumare and Atul Save as well as BJP MLAs such as T. Raja Singh, Geeta Jain, Nitesh Rane, and Shivendra Raje Bhosale amongst others.<sup>130</sup>

While the VHP and the Bajrang Dal have continued to be the forerunners in organizing hate speech events (216) in the past year, their predominance has been challenged by a familiar face.

Pravin Togadia, the former VHP president who has since founded the identical Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad (AHP) and Rashtriya Bajrang Dal (RBD), was not only the second most prolific purveyor of hate speech, but the AHP and RBD also organized the second largest number of hate speech events (77)—ahead of even the BJP and the SHS among other organizations.

In a classic case of old wine in a new bottle, Togadia has reimagined the VHP and Bajrang Dal without the direct control of the Sangh. This has enabled these groups to take even more extreme positions, while also criticizing the sitting government for not taking the Hindu nationalist agenda far enough, a position Togadia was often sanctioned for taking up as President of the VHP.<sup>131</sup>

Our findings and the case studies in our report suggest that within India's increasingly polarized public sphere, new entrepreneurs of hate are emerging, collaborating with established and other new outfits, pushing the agenda of minority hate while also challenging the status quo, seeking to outbid one another and carve out new niche spaces by taking increasingly extreme positions.



Our two case studies on Haryana and Maharashtra, as well as our broader discussion on hate speech and violence and the role of "entrepreneurs of hate," reflect the impunity granted to Hindu nationalist groups to propagate hate speech and suggest that there are clear links between the proliferation of hate speech and communal violence in India. We highlight this as a space that demands further investigation.

# 7 | Conclusion

In conclusion, our analysis of hate speech events in 2023 has uncovered alarming trends that suggest a persistent and potentially escalating development of hate speech. The normalization of hate speech has been central to the Hindu far-right project of transforming India into a de facto Hindu nation. A form of symbolic violence itself, it has also enabled physical violence, disenfranchisement, and destruction aimed at Indian Muslims as well as other Indian religious and caste minorities. Other targets of hate speech include critics of the state, political dissenters, and public figures critical of the Modi government.

The 2024 elections will mark a critical year for hate speech in India. We do not expect to see a decline in hate speech events in the near future. We foresee that the 2024 elections will precipitate a sharp rise in hate speech, as exertion of influence on election results during campaigns by spreading hate speech, conspiracy theories, and disinformation is nowadays a common strategy. The increase in tracked events during state elections in 2023 was not an isolated incident but indicative of a larger trend, observed during the 2019 national elections which saw a sharp rise in hate speech events across the country.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, state assembly election campaigns in 2021 and 2022 were witness to the continued prevalence of hate speech in political discourse.<sup>133</sup>

This emphasizes the urgent need for continuous observation and critical study over the coming year.

While our report identifies a considerable spike in hate speech events revolving around elections, it is critical to note that the spread of hate speech in India's public sphere is not confined to electoral politics and the ballot box anymore. Hate speech is pervasive throughout Indian society, utilized not merely for political mobilization but also to effectively radicalize and indoctrinate the Hindu community against minority groups.

The relentless, almost everyday nature of hate speech has facilitated its banalization, making it part of the socio-political sphere in India. This serves to legitimize hate speech, making it a very dangerous trend that demands intervention from a broad range of actors to ensure accountability.

Accountability actors—parliamentary and judicial oversight (horizontal accountability), pressures from civil society and the media (diagonal accountability), or electoral competition between parties and within parties (vertical accountability) – play a key role in countering hate speech through various channels and halting democratic erosion. Strengthening horizontal accountability mechanisms involves a more active civil society that enables both a greater

transfer of information to the populace as well as more effective means of countering disinformation and hate speech.<sup>134</sup>

We thus emphasize the necessity of capacity building. Reinforcement of civil society responses to hate speech and potentially evoked violence can create an amplification of positive voices and a network of counter-hate speech actors applying strategic response mechanisms.<sup>135</sup> Countering online hate speech might involve the direct response to hateful messages, for example through reporting hate speech, counterspeech, amplifying positive voices, and countering misinformation and disinformation. Countering hate speech in (dialogual) in-person engagement can include "naming and shaming" of (high-profile) hate speakers or countering mis- and disinformation.<sup>136</sup>

A more robust civil society thus prevents political elites from hegemonizing the public sphere and makes vertical mechanisms increasingly potent.<sup>137</sup> To effectively address hate speech, we recommend a multi-pronged approach involving counter-hate speech actors, reinforcing the role of civil society and media, and the need for effective and robust intervention by the judiciary.

# 8 | End Notes

1. The term "jihad" is used in this context as a pejorative trope in anti-Muslim rhetoric. Historically, jihad is a complex Islamic concept (often translated as "striving" or "struggling") that refers to efforts to uphold one's faith. However, in the context of Islamophobic narratives, it is distorted to propagate a conspiratorial view of Muslims engaging in activities that are perceived as threatening to non-Muslim communities. Such jihad-related conspiracies are often used to falsely portray Muslims as engaging in subversive or demographic activities.
2. The [Great Displacement Theory](#) goes back to the French author Renaud Camus and can be categorized under [far-right ideologies](#). The theory states that the native (majority) population is systematically replaced by immigrants or minority groups, often as part of a deliberate plan. [In the Indian context, this ideology is discussed under the term "population jihad"](#).
3. Soral, Wiktor, James Liu, and Michał Bilewicz. 2021. "Media of Contempt: Social Media Consumption Predicts Normative Acceptance of Anti-Muslim Hate Speech and Islamoprejudice". *International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCV)* 14 (March):1-13. <https://doi.org/10.4119/ijcv-3774>.
4. Cherian George, *Hate Spin: The Manufacture of Religious Offense and Its Threat to Democracy* (The MIT Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262035309.001.0001>.
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6. George, *Hate Spin*, 16.
7. Punyajoy Saha et al., "'Short Is the Road That Leads from Fear to Hate': Fear Speech in Indian WhatsApp Groups," in *Proceedings of the Web Conference 2021, WWW '21* (New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2021), 1110-21, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3442381.3450137>. Page 3.
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9. For example, Mithun Das et al., "HateCheckHIn: Evaluating Hindi Hate Speech Detection Models" (arXiv, April 30, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2205.00328>.
10. You may find more data on dangerous speech in section 3.
11. Here, we follow the suggestions by Punyajoy Saha et al., "'Short Is the Road That Leads from Fear to Hate': Fear Speech in Indian WhatsApp Groups," in *Proceedings of the Web Conference 2021, WWW '21* (New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2021), 1110-21, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3442381.3450137>. Page 3 and Ishita Sharma, "Contextualising Hate Speech: A Study of India And Malaysia," *Journal of International Studies* 15 (2019): 133-44, <https://doi.org/10.32890/jis2019.15.9.S>. Benesch, "Dangerous Speech," in *Challenges and Perspectives of Hate Speech Research*, ed. C Strippel et al., n.d., 185-97. <https://doi.org/10.48541/dcr.v12.11>. on the other hand treats the two as different, while relying on the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. However, the U.N. definition of hate speech has a wider scope and therefore comprises both.
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