



IPS INSIGHTS

Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

Mob Lynching in India, 2014–2024: Patterns, Drivers and Institutional Responses

Dr. Waleed Rasool ¹

Introduction

For decades, India has projected itself to the world as a secular state, which is sometimes wrapped in the cloth of Gandhian practice of 'ahimsa'. With this, Indian political leaders have tried to project their country as a melting pot for different communities, including Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. For this, they have utilized print and digital media to portray the soft image of India to the global audiences. However, despite projecting an image of communal harmony, the available data tell a different story.

In recent years, Indian society has been exposed to a flurry of communal violence incidents, mainly aimed at minority Muslims. Although India's historical record of communal harmony does not always present an encouraging picture of Indian societal fabric – as is obvious from the demolition of the Babri Mosque or the Gujarat Massacre – but the recent state-encouraged environment unveils the true image of Indian society. In the current religiously-charged Indian society, Muslims are regularly becoming victims of mob lynching and communal discrimination at the hands of Hindu majority population as well as BJP-backed state institutions.

To expose this abhorrence, a report, titled: Mob Lynching in India, A Record: 2014–2024, has been compiled by Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan. The report provides reliable and validated primary data for examining mob lynching in India beyond individual incidents of violence, particularly in the post-2014 period when the present BJP came to power for the first time. According to the primary data, the publication documents 1,743 cases over a decade and explores the circumstances of mob violence, the identities of victims, Indian institutional responses and the wider social and political environment in India.²

The report uncovers a disturbing aspect of state patronage to such incidents, as most of the reported cases took place in the BJP-controlled constituencies, wherein the lynching incidents are even recorded and shared on social media platforms. Moreover, the state institutions, such as police and judiciary, are found complicit in extending safety to the perpetrators instead of punishing them.

From humanitarian and human rights perspectives, the phenomenon can be analyzed through eight interrelated aspects:

1) Ideological polarization,

¹ Senior IPS Associate

² MZafarul-Islam Khan, Mob Lynching in India (A Record—2014–2024) (New Delhi: Pharos Media & Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2026), <https://pharosmedia.com/books/product/9788172211578/>

- 2) Identity-based mobilization,
- 3) Political patronage,
- 4) Vigilantism,
- 5) Institutional weaknesses,
- 6) Media narratives,
- 7) Social exclusion and
- 8) Erosion of the rule of law in India, particularly against the Muslim minority.

The central analytical question is not simply why Hindu mobs commit violence. Rather, how Indian allegations, collective identities, institutional responses and perceived impunity may interact to enable violence and sustain insecurity against Muslims in India. This shall be of serious concern for those who believe in humanity and the rule of law and the right to life as a fundamental and non-derivative human right.

Eight Major Factors that Contribute to Mob Lynching

Factor 1: Religious Polarization and Identity-Based Mobilization

Religious polarization is a prominent factor in the account of the data unveiled. The report noted that Muslims were frequently targeted in India during the incidents associated with cow protection, beef consumption and cattle theft.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** Religious identity can become a basis for defining a threat to the majority community.
- **Conflict Dynamic:** An allegation against an individual may be transformed into hostility towards a wider religious group.
- **Social Consequence:** Repeated identity-based violence can intensify mistrust, insecurity and communal segregation.

From a humanitarian perspective, this can be examined through othering, in-group and out-group distinctions, and the construction of perceived collective threats.

Factor 2: Political Mobilization and State Patronage

The report highlighted that BJP political support, public legitimization or patronage may contribute to the persistence of lynching.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** Political narratives can legitimize or normalize particular forms of identity-based mobilization.
- **Conflict Dynamic:** Vigilante actors may perceive a lower risk of accountability when they believe their actions are socially or politically tolerated.
- **Political Consequence:** Violence can become connected to broader struggles over citizenship, identity, electoral mobilization and access to state protection.

Their primary data established findings about every case in the report. Political patronage further requires case-specific evidence, including statements, institutional records and judicial findings, which is very hard to make available under duress.

Factor 3: Vigilantism and the Privatization of Coercive Power

The reported cases involve mobs assuming the authority to punish Muslims based on allegations, cow slaughter, inter-caste relationships and witchcraft.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** Individuals or groups substitute their own judgment for lawful investigation and judicial determination.
- **Conflict Dynamic:** Collective action can create a sense of impunity and reinforce the perception that violence is an acceptable means of enforcing social norms.
- **Institutional Consequence:** The state's exclusive responsibility to enforce criminal law is challenged when non-state actors exercise coercive power.

This represents a shift from legally regulated

enforcement towards informal, extrajudicial punishment by the majority Hindus.

Factor 4: India's Weak Institutional Accountability and the Rule of Law

The data raised concerns about police responses, prolonged trials, witness difficulties and the implementation of judicial directions.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** Delayed investigations, inadequate protection of witnesses or inconsistent enforcement may weaken confidence in legal remedies and are a major challenge.
- **Conflict Dynamic:** Perceived impunity can reduce deterrence and undermine trust in state institutions.
- **Human Rights Consequence:** Victims and their families may face prolonged insecurity, while affected communities may lose confidence in equal protection under the law.

The Supreme Court's directions, mentioned in the account, are particularly relevant to examining the responsibilities of public authorities in preventing and responding to mob violence, but they are not implemented, as the majority of Hindus are in office. The Supreme Court of India has expressly held that vigilantism and lynching are unlawful and has prescribed preventive, remedial and punitive measures to address mob violence.³

Factor 5: Media Narratives and Digital Amplification

The data highlighted that sections of the media ignored some incidents, misrepresented others or framed them in ways that could deepen social divisions. The circulation of videos of lynching was also discussed.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** Selective reporting and inflammatory narratives

can reinforce stereotypes or shape public perceptions of particular communities.

- **Conflict Dynamic:** Recording and circulating violence may extend intimidation beyond the immediate location of an incident.
- **Social Consequence:** Digital dissemination can potentially normalize violence, spread fear and deepen polarization.

At the same time, independent journalism, verified reporting and digital documentation can preserve evidence, expose abuses and support accountability.

Factor 6: Social Exclusion and Collective Intimidation

Harsh Mander and Apoorvan highlighted the wider psychological and social consequences of lynching, particularly the fear that violence may generate among communities associated with victims.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** Violence against an individual can communicate a threat to others who share their identity.
- **Conflict Dynamic:** Fear may discourage affected people from participating in public spaces, economic activity and civic life.
- **Social Consequence:** Repeated intimidation can contribute to alienation, social fragmentation and weakened intercommunity relationships.

This can be examined as collective intimidation, where the consequences of violence extend beyond the direct victim.

Factor 7: Historical Memory, Impunity and Normalization

The report's documentation initiative and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and 2002 Gujarat violence place contemporary lynching within

³ Tehseen S. Poonawalla v. Union of India, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 754 of 2016, Supreme Court of India, judgment of July 17, 2018, 2018 INSC 617. The Court held that vigilantism and lynching cannot be permitted and issued preventive, remedial and punitive directions. See also National Digital Library of India, "Tehseen S. Poonawalla Vs. Union of India and Others," accessed October 6, 2026, https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/lw_document/supreme_court_india/supreme_court/2514

a wider historical discussion of communal violence in India.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** When past violence is inadequately investigated, documented or addressed, public confidence in accountability may weaken.
- **Conflict Dynamic:** Unresolved grievances and perceived selective justice can reinforce distrust between communities and institutions.
- **Historical Consequence:** Failure to preserve evidence and testimonies may reduce the ability of future generations to examine patterns of violence.

The existence of a substantial incident record also creates an opportunity to examine differences in context, perpetrators, scale, methods and institutional responses across cases.⁴

Factor 8: Socio-Cultural Prejudice and the Erosion Of Constitutional Norms

The discussion also points to social attitudes that can legitimize punishment without evidence or due process, including prejudice related to religion, caste and social practices.

- **Underlying Mechanism:** Pre-existing stereotypes and discriminatory social norms can make some victims more vulnerable to collective violence.
- **Conflict Dynamic:** When group loyalty overrides individual rights, collective accusations can replace legal standards.
- **Constitutional Consequence:** The principles of equality, dignity, due process and equal protection may be undermined.

This factor highlights the importance of examining both perpetrators' behavior and the broader social environment in which violence occurs.

Conclusion:

The BJP regime backs mob lynching of Muslim minority in India, and it can be

examined as an interconnected process rather than as the outcome of a single cause, with BJP and its sister organizations' support. The eight factors indicate that mob lynching of Muslims in India cannot be understood as isolated acts of violence, but as a phenomenon shaped by interrelated religious, political, institutional, media, and socio-cultural conditions. Religious polarization and identity-based mobilization can contribute to the targeting of Muslims, particularly in cases involving allegations related to cattle, beef consumption, inter-caste relationships, and other social practices. Vigilantism enables mobs to impose collective punishment outside lawful procedures, while institutional weaknesses, inadequate accountability, and perceived impunity can weaken protection for victims and their families. Political narratives and perceived tolerance of such violence may further influence this environment, although claims of direct political patronage require case-specific evidence.

The consequences extend beyond individual Muslim victims. Media narratives, digital circulation of violent incidents, social exclusion, collective intimidation, historical experiences of communal violence, and socio-cultural prejudice can deepen insecurity and reinforce communal divisions. These interconnected factors raise concerns regarding Muslims' protection of life, dignity, equality, due process, and equal protection under the law.

Article 21 of the Constitution of India protects life and personal liberty, while Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protects the inherent right to life and Article 2(1) requires Covenant rights to be ensured without discrimination, including on the basis of religion. The Supreme Court of India has also held that lynching and vigilantism undermine the rule of law and issued preventive, remedial, and punitive directions against mob violence.

Addressing violence against Muslims in India, therefore, requires effective implementation

⁴ Zafarul-Islam Khan, ed., *Mob Lynching in India (A Record—2014–2024)* (New Delhi: Pharos Media & Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2026), <https://pharosmedia.com/books/product/9788172211578/>

of the law, accountability for perpetrators, protection of victims and witnesses, responsible media practices, preservation of evidence, and sustained efforts to prevent religious prejudice and communal violence. There is a necessity, particularly by civil society and other sane elements in India and

the global community at large to take note of the conditions of Muslim minority in the country. This is a duty not only in the light of Indian constitution or the international law, but also a moral call aimed at protecting basic human rights.

