



Journalist Fellowship Paper

How to cover hate crimes and violence when government sources fail

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Introduction

I come from a sector of journalism where accurate data and accountability is considered sacred: I have worked in financial reporting for more than a decade, covering capital markets, banking and insurance. I never envisaged doing anything else, but the dramatic political changes my home country has undergone under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP-led government have made it impossible to look the other way.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in India, which has been tracking and publishing the country's crime statistics since the 1980s, [stopped tracking](#) religious killings and farmer suicides in 2017.¹ This leaves no way of checking on whether either of these is trending upwards, although the frequency of reports in the media would suggest, anecdotally, that they are.

An attempt was made in 2017 by *Hindustan Times* to start a hate tracker to document victims, but under government pressure the tracker was taken down.² Editor Bobby Ghosh was asked to step down. A similar fate met the Hate Tracker created by online website IndiaSpend, and its editor Samar Halarnkar also resigned.³

In my fellowship project at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, I worked under the guidance of communication researcher Dr Sílvia Majó-Vázquez to take in key lessons about how journalists can reliably step in to gather, clean and publish data when the government fails to do so.

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<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ncrb-leaves-out-data-on-lynchings-khap-and-religious-killings-6081188/>

² The Wire. 2021. After Editor's Exit, Hindustan Times Pulls Down Controversial 'Hate Tracker'. [online] Available at: <<https://thewire.in/media/hindustan-times-hate-tracker>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

³ Staff, S., 2021. FactChecker pulls down hate crime database, IndiaSpend editor Samar Halarnkar resigns. [online] Scroll.in. Available at:

<<https://scroll.in/latest/937076/factchecker-pulls-down-hate-crime-watch-database-sister-websites-editor-resigns>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

I wanted to document hate crimes in India because I believe they are linked to increasingly extreme Hindutva ideology (Hindu nationalism or exceptionalism) that has fueled Bharatiya Janata Party, or Indian People's Party (BJP) politics in the 2020s.

To do so, I first defined what would count as a hate crime: criminal acts committed with a bias motive in relation to a group characteristic of the victim such as race, ethnic background, religion, gender, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation. Then I scoured English language media for reports of hate crimes between January 1, 2014 and December 31, 2020, copying links and noting details about each attack into a spreadsheet.

I excluded riots, because I did not have the time or resources to catalogue these fully. I excluded social media reports, because I didn't have the resources to independently verify them. Finally, I excluded regional-language news outlets because I didn't have the resources to accurately translate all of them.

The result is a Google Sheet with 212 incidents of hate crime reported in English-language media. Wherever possible, I have catalogued details such as the date, type of violence, gender, caste, and socio-economic details of victims and perpetrators, as well as their religion, politics, and the police response.

I then analysed the data for patterns and trends, which I present in the fourth chapter. Finally, I gathered lessons learned during the process which I hope may be of use to others hoping to independently gather and analyse data in countries where the government either withholds information or cannot be relied on to report accurately.

This data, I hope, will give both Indians and outsiders a better understanding of what is happening in India. I also hope it will contribute towards justice for these victims.

A brief history of Hindutva ideology

Emerging from the context of the Indian experience during the colonial era, and formalised by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Society, RSS) in the 1920s and 30s, Hindutva could still be described as a fringe ideology in the 1940s.

Indian kids like me, born in the politically turbulent 1980s, were taught early on to be wary of this sort of nationalism, with lessons on how the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by RSS member Nathuram Godhse, and how the organisation was banned thrice by the Indian government for extremist activities.

In 1984, the BJP was only able to gain two seats in India's Parliament but in 1989 party leaders decided to [formally adopt Hindutva](#) as its political-ideological doctrine.⁴ By 1991, the BJP had managed to gain 120 seats in Parliament to become the leading opposition party. Their success was fueled through the promotion of [Hindutva](#) ideals centering around the Ayodhya issue.⁵

Ayodhya, a city held to be the birthplace of Lord Ram in Hindu theology, was also host to the 15th century mosque Babri Masjid.⁶ There is a consensus among historians and political observers that the 1991 BJP victory could largely be attributed to the actions of strongman BJP leader L K Advani, who led thousands of Hindus in a political rally (Rath Yatra) across North India to Ayodhya and made provocative speeches about the destruction of the mosque.⁷

⁴ RAMAKRISHNAN, V., 2004. The Hindutva road. [online] Available at: <<https://frontline.thehindu.com/politics/article30225920.ece>> [Accessed 21 December 2021].

⁵ Gupta, M., 2017. BJP Foundation Day: Party's rise to power from 2 MPs in 1984 to 282 in 2014. [online] India Today. Available at: <<https://www.indiatoday.in/fyi/story/bjp-foundation-day-modi-vajpayee-1984-congress-969890-2017-04-06>> [Accessed 21 December 2021].

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<https://www.indiatoday.in/fyi/story/bjp-foundation-day-modi-vajpayee-1984-congress-969890-2017-04-06>

⁷ Ghosh, P., n.d. BJP and the evolution of Hindu nationalism

Two years later, [more than 2,000 Indians lost their lives](#) in the Hindu-Muslim riots that followed the demolition of the mosque, and the BJP reaped solid electoral dividends.⁸

Here, it is worth noting that secular sentiment prevailed at the time: Indians could not stomach voting for Advani in a position of leadership after he had been associated with such a violent episode, so Atal Bihari Vajpayee was appointed as a more palatable choice.⁹

The same was not true during Narendra Modi's 2014 Prime Ministerial bid: the man who was chief minister of Gujarat when the state witnessed the 2002 genocide was considered an acceptable candidate.¹⁰

There were headlines at the time labelling Modi everything from a "mass murderer" to "a modern day Nero" in 2002.¹¹ Countries like the U.S. put Modi on their no-fly lists. Just over a decade later, when it became clear to the world that it was highly likely that Modi might become the PM of the world's biggest democracy, the U.S. quietly took him off the no-fly list, and sought to ease his political rehabilitation on the world stage. The same media that had dubbed him a "mass-murderer" and "dictator", were calling him a "visionary, strongman, pro-business, pro-development".¹²

Business and development were not strengths I reported as a financial journalist; instead I reported on the battering the economy took following the implementation of Modi's financial policies, like the 2016 demonetisation and 2019 tax regime change for goods and services (GST).¹³ When the government outlawed more than 80% of India's cash in

⁸ Team, B., 2021. Court disputes to riots:A brief timeline of Babri Masjid-Ram temple dispute. [online] Business-standard.com. Available at: <https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/court-disputes-to-riots-a-brief-timeline-of-babri-masjid-ram-temple-dispute-120080500182_1.html> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

⁹ The Indian Express. 2021. Why Vajpayee was indispensable for Jan Sangh, BJP. [online] Available at: <<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/why-atal-bihari-vajpayee-was-indispensable-for-jan-sangh-bjp-5310872/>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

¹⁰ Ayyub, R., n.d. Gujarat files: Anatomy of a Cover-up.

¹¹ India Today. 2021. Throwback: Narendra Modi on India Today covers. [online] Available at: <<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/photo/narendra-modi-on-india-today-covers-368942-2012-12-21/3>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

¹² 2021. [online] Available at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/06/from-pariah-to-capitol-hill-narendra-modis-extraordinary-rise/>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

¹³ The Economic Times. 2018. India's economic growth held back due to note ban, GST: Raghuram Rajan. [online] Available at:

circulation overnight as part of his demonetisation policy, it brought extreme hardship to India's poorest, who relied heavily on cash.¹⁴

It was also around this time that the BJP attempted to extend laws prohibiting the slaughter and sale of beef.¹⁵ And while demonetisation affected many poor Indians, the Cattle laws affected primarily Muslims and Dalits.

Amidst these tensions, on June 22, 2017, a 15-year-old boy was publicly lynched and the media pointed to beef politics as the instigation for the attack. Junaid Khan was stabbed to death on a public train near India's capital Delhi for carrying a parcel of biriyani that his killers thought contained beef.¹⁶

“Lynching” was something I associated with white supremacists in the United States – it was something I thought might happen in Indiana, not India. The media coverage honed in on the horror that this had happened in broad daylight – in a compartment filled with more than 100 people, where dozens filmed on their mobile phones instead of intervening.¹⁷

To me, it felt as if a new India emerged after that day: with more reports of the lynching and rape of Muslims and Dalits surfacing in the media daily. Going by the coverage, there definitely seemed to be an increase in violence.¹⁸ But no data was forthcoming.¹⁹

<<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/indias-economic-growth-held-back-due-to-demonetisation-gst-rahuram-rajan/articleshow/66567451.cms>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

¹⁴ Deccan Chronicle. 2018. Temporary impact of demonetisation, GST dissipating: Arvind Subramanian. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/290118/economic-survey-2017-18-arvind-subramanian-chief-economic-adviser-gst.html>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

¹⁵ Article-14.com. 2021. The Dark Chronology Of India's Cow-Slaughter Laws — Article 14. [online] Available at: <<https://www.article-14.com/post/the-dark-chronology-of-india-s-cow-slaughter-laws>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

¹⁶ The Indian Express. 2021. A boy called Junaid. [online] Available at:

<<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/faridabad-lynching-train-beef-ban-a-boy-called-junaid-4731198/>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

¹⁷ The Wire. 2021. Junaid's Lynching and the Making of a 'New India' Beyond Recognition. [online] Available at: <<https://thewire.in/society/junaid-s-lynching-and-the-making-of-a-new-india-beyond-recognition>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

¹⁸ Daniyal, S., 2021. The Modi Years: What has fuelled rising mob violence in India?. [online] Scroll.in. Available at:

<<https://scroll.in/article/912533/the-modi-years-what-has-fuelled-rising-mob-violence-in-india>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

¹⁹ The Indian Express. 2021. NCRB leaves out data on lynchings, khap and religious killings. [online] Available at:

<<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ncrb-leaves-out-data-on-lynchings-khap-and-religious-killings-6081188/>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

What is a hate crime?

There is no universally agreed definition of what a hate crime is, but the OSCE/ODIHR refers to “criminal acts committed with a biased motive”. Bias, in this instance, is in relation to a group characteristic of the victim such as race, ethnic background, religion, gender, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation.²⁰

Under the Indian Penal Code, there are provisions for punishing “incitement to hatred”, but no specific definition of a hate crime. One exception is the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act), 1989, which criminalises violence against Dalits and Adivasi/indigenous groups.²¹

In the absence of legislation, India’s Supreme Court stepped in with several rulings in 2017 and 2018, resulting in “guidance” to prevent lynchings and mob violence. The July 2018 order of *Tehseen S. Poonawalla v Union of India & Others* sets out guidelines for preventing, remedying and punishing lynching and mob justice. It also recommended the enactment of an anti-lynching legislation. But as Professor Mohsin Alam Bhat, Associate Professor and Executive-Director of the Center for Public Interest Law at the Jindal Global Law School, has noted: “the fate of the Guidelines remains mixed at best”.²²

Indian police have very wide discretion to apply the law as they interpret it. “There are cases where the police either refuse to apply law or misapply it altogether,” according to Dr Bhat.

Perhaps embarrassingly, the first clear legal indication that hate crimes in India were being taken seriously came from outside the state: in January 2020, an Indian was admitted as a refugee in Canada.²³ He was a Muslim beef trader who had been attacked in

²⁰ Jennifer Scheppe | Kar-wai Tong (Reviewing editor) (2021) What is a hate crime?, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7:1, DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2021.1902643

²¹ Perry, J. The migration and integration of the hate crime approach in India. *Jindal Global Law Review* 11, 7–32 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41020-020-00111-8>

²² Bhat, M.M.A., Bajaj, V. & Kumar, S.A. The crime vanishes: Mob lynching, hate crime, and police discretion in India. *Jindal Global Law Review* 11, 33–59 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41020-020-00115-4>

²³ Story, C., 2021. Attacked in 2014, city beef trader secures refugee status in Canada. [online] *Mumbai Mirror*. Available at:

2014 by right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) members. His admission to Canada was in part due to the fact that the growing religious intolerance in India has been garnering global attention.

For the purposes of this project, I have documented as “hate crimes” any crimes that have resulted in death, physical assault, damage to property, bullying, harassment, verbal abuse or insults, online harassment, and physical abuse. I focused on individuals who were targeted because of an identifying characteristic related to their religion, caste or gender. And, to make best use of my time, I relied solely on English-language media reports, and excluded social media and regional language reports, which I did not have the time or resources to independently verify.

<<https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/cover-story/attacked-in-2014-city-beef-trader-secures-refugee-status-in-canada/articleshow/73147048.cms>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

Patterns Of violence

The result of my data gathering was a pool of 212 incidents of hate crime that took place in India between 2014 and 2020. The database is by no means complete or exhaustive.

There were larger events that unfolded during this time period – like the Delhi Riots and Citizenship law protests.²⁴ I excluded incidents recorded during the riots because this project did not have the scope to incorporate exhaustive information from larger mobs and riots. Nevertheless, this database is an illustration for readers of the type of crimes victims were facing and still are facing in the country.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power on May 16, 2014. The media began reporting incidents of cow vigilantism and sectarian violence within months of his appointment.²⁵ Among the first victims under the new regime was Mohsin Sadiq Shaikh, a 24-year-old IT worker in Pune who was lynched by a mob while returning home from prayers at the mosque in July 2015. He was wearing a white skullcap that made him identifiable as a Muslim.²⁶ Shaikh was killed by members of the Hindu Rashtra Sena, a right-wing affiliate of the regionalist party Shiv Sena in the state of Maharashtra.²⁷

In July 2016, another case captured widespread attention: four Dalit men were chained to a car, stripped and beaten with iron rods and sticks, and stabbed by cow protection vigilantes in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district.²⁸

²⁴ 2021. [online] Available at:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/why-indias-citizenship-law-is-so-contentious/2019/12/17/35d75996-2042-11ea-b034-de7dc2b5199b_story.html> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

²⁵ 2021. 97% cow-related attacks after PM Modi came to power in 2014. [online] Available at:

<https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/97-cow-related-attacks-after-pm-modi-came-to-power-in-2014-117062800204_1.html> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

²⁶ Firstpost. 2021. Mohsin Shaikh murder: Lynch mobs have become emboldened since BJP came to power, says victim's father-India News , Firstpost. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.firstpost.com/india/mohsin-shaikh-murder-case-lynch-mobs-have-become-emboldened-since-narendra-modi-came-to-power-claims-victims-father-4780951.html>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

²⁷ Goyal, P., 2021. Who killed Sadiq Shaikh?. [online] NewsLaundry. Available at:

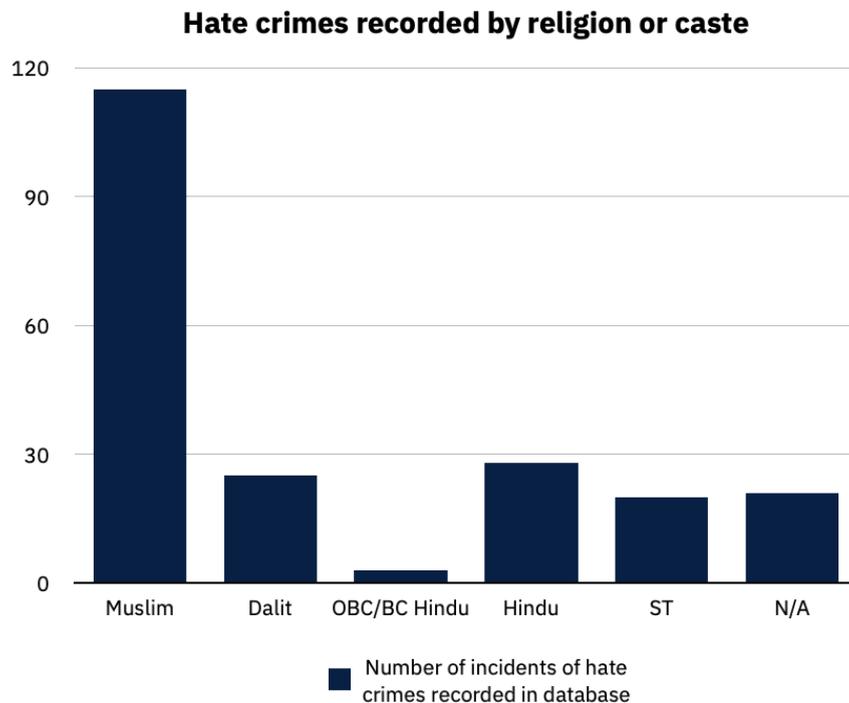
<<https://www.newsLaundry.com/2018/12/21/who-killed-sadiq-shaikh-father-mohsin-shaikh-hindu-rashtra-sena>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

²⁸ India Today. 2021. WATCH: 4 youths stripped, tied and hit with belts by Sena leader-led cow vigilantes. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/shiv-sena-assaults-4-dalits-transporting-dead-cow-gujarat-328790-2016-07-12>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

On May 26, 2017, the government tried to impose a ban on the sale and purchase of cattle for slaughter.²⁹ While the Supreme Court of India suspended the ban in July 2017 – giving relief to beef and leather industries – it added fuel to a climate of hate and mistrust, with violent implications.³⁰

As it is evident in the database, some victims of earlier hate crimes were targeted more than once: in the case of the four Dalits, they were beaten again in May 2018 over their decision to convert from Hinduism to Buddhism.³¹ Below, I have visualised the main descriptive statistics from the database.



Based on the cases recorded, religion plays a role. My data found the majority of attacks were on Muslims and Dalits. A few backward caste (BC) and other backward caste (OBC)

²⁹ India Today. 2021. Bovine card. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/the-big-story/story/20170619-bovine-cow-beef-ban-bjp-nda-tamil-nadu-iit-madras-kerala-west-bengal-986550-2017-06-09>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

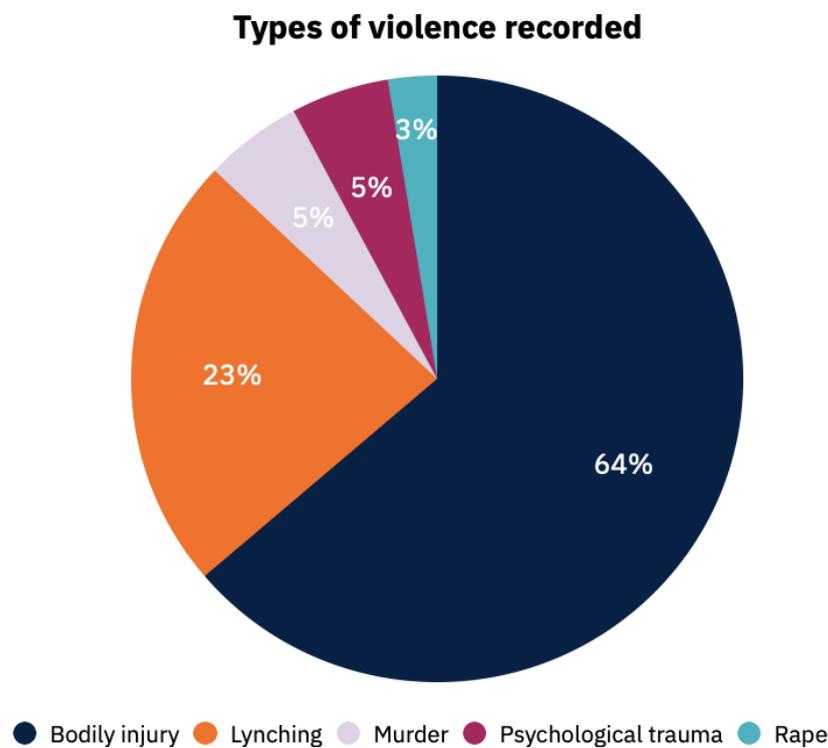
³⁰ BBC News. 2021. India Supreme Court suspends cattle slaughter ban. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40565457>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

³¹ Staff, S., 2021. Gujarat: Una Dalit family assaulted for skinning a cow in 2016 converts to Buddhism. [online] Scroll.in. Available at:

<<https://scroll.in/latest/877335/gujarat-assaulted-for-skinning-a-cow-in-2016-four-dalit-men-in-una-convert-to-buddhism>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

Hindus were subjected to violence – many involved in the cattle trade. In the case of Scheduled Tribes (ST), many of the victims were Christians. Some Hindus who were victims were also police officers trying to keep the peace.

A particularly gruesome aspect of this project was categorising the nature of each hate crime, and the resulting injuries or deaths (summarised in the figure below). Of the 212 cases, 29.7% (63) were killed, while one is missing. I also categorised by type of violence: murder, psychological trauma (including suicide), bodily harm, custodial torture, and sexual assault.

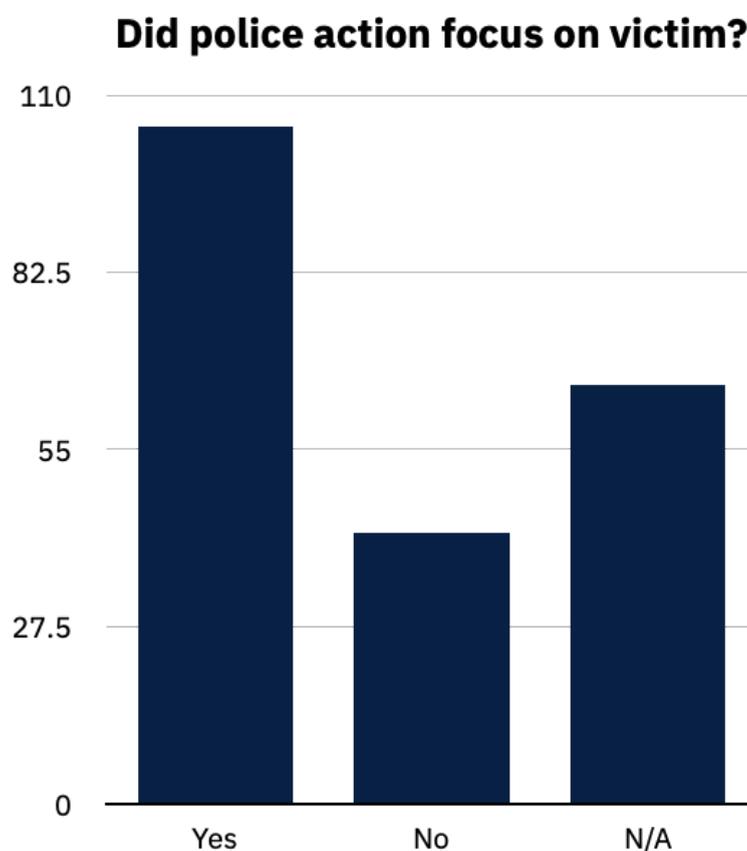


The response by police to these crimes has, at times, been problematic. In the case of 15-year-old Junaid, whose lynching I mentioned earlier, police reporting to the scene thought it was worth examining whether his biryani was indeed beef and sent it for forensic analysis.³²

³² Kumar, A., 2021. The lynching that changed India. [online] Aljazeera.com. Available at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/10/5/the-lynching-that-changed-india>> [Accessed 20 December 2021]

This sort of victim-blaming action can be seen in other cases in the database too, with charges and investigation tactics playing down the nature of the violence. Police recorded cases of the courts deemed sexual assault as “eve-teasing”, and cases the courts deemed murder as “road accidents”.

Using the reports in my database, I calculated how frequently reports of the police investigation indicated that they were more focused on the victim’s actions than the perpetrator’s. In 71% of cases where this information was available, reports indicated that police investigations had focused on the victim’s behaviour. (See chart below.)

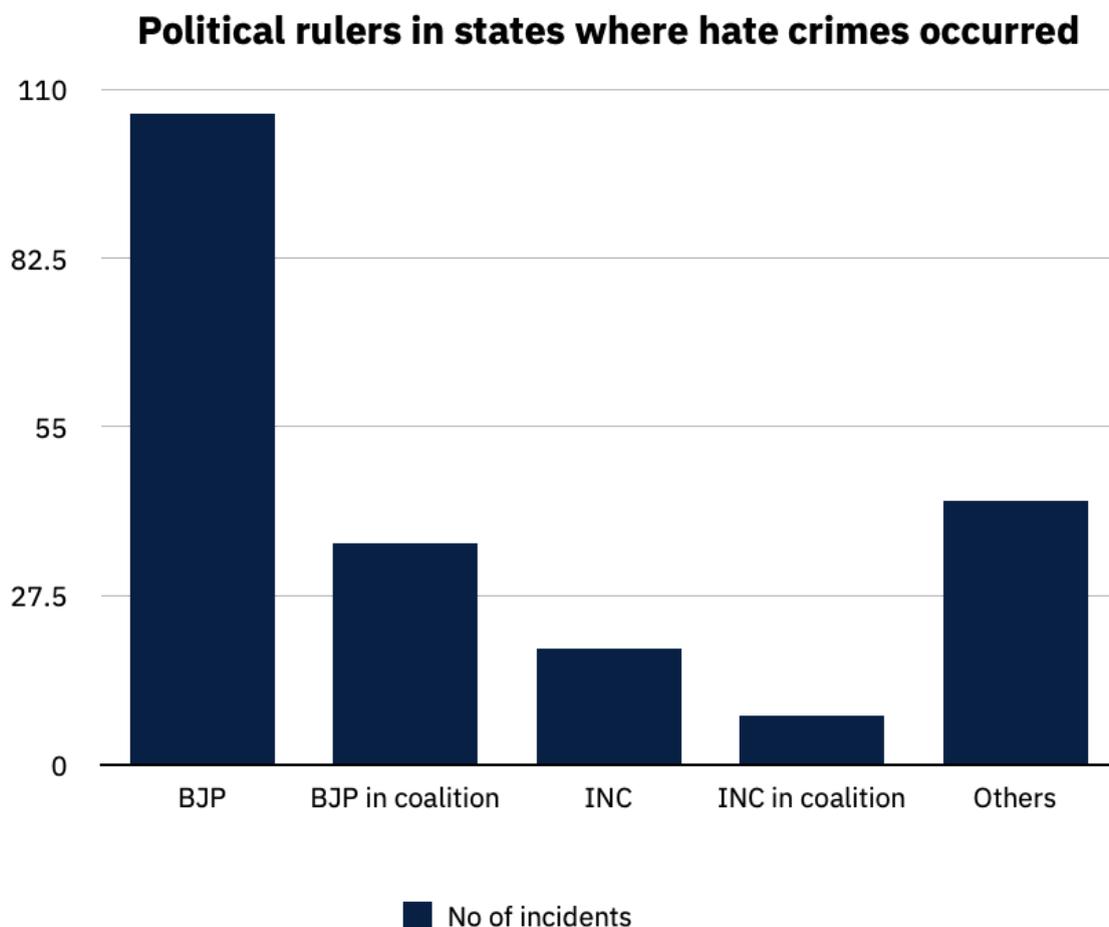


When it came to the gender of the victim, about 84.5% of victims were male and 15.5% victims female. There were troubling patterns to be seen in the stories of female victims: by and large, they were sexually assaulted for their identity – Muslim, Dalit or BC Hindu. Some female victims were also physically and verbally abused for engaging in “love jihad”, an Islamophobic conspiracy theory that Muslim men are targeting Hindu women for marriage in order to convert them.

I analysed the religion of perpetrators, too. Again, data was only available in 88 cases, and should not be considered representative. But of the 88 cases, 84.1% of perpetrators were Hindu – more than the percentage of Hindus in the Indian population (79.8% according to Population by Religious Communities of Census 2011). The remaining 16% of perpetrators were Sikh (2.3%), Muslim (3.4%), and Adivasis (10.2%).

Power dynamics play an important role in hate crimes, and who is in the literal seat of political power can either embolden perpetrators and target individuals for victimisation. For each incident, I recorded the state it occurred in, and which party was in power locally in each state.

For the sake of simplicity, these classifications were simplified as BJP, the BJP in coalition with allied parties, INC (Indian National Congress or Congress Party), INC in coalition with allied parties, and Other.



I also gathered data about the political affiliations of the perpetrators. This information was only available in 30 of the 212 cases. It is therefore not representative of the sample, but indicative of which organisations were associated with such incidents when the information was available.

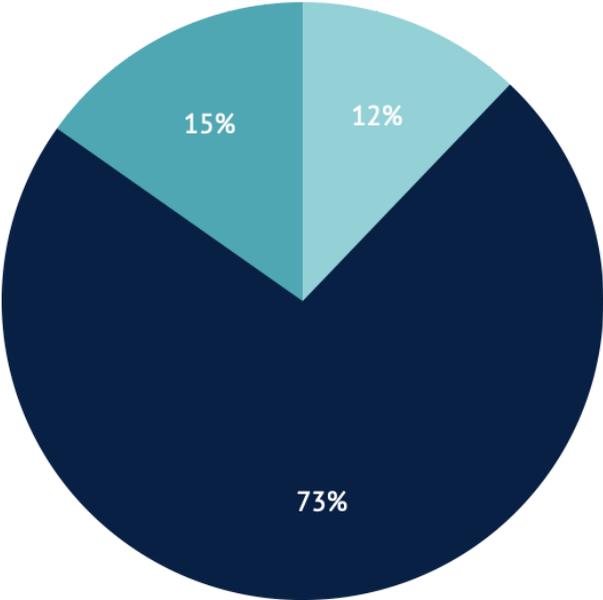
Political affiliation of perpetrator	Description of politics	Number of perpetrators
VHP	Right-wing, Hindu nationalism	7
Shiv Sena	Right-wing Marathi regionalist and ultranationalist	7
Bajrang Dal	Militant youth wing of Vishva Hindu Parishad	7
BJP, allies	Right-wing, historically Hindu nationalist	4
Sangh Parivar	Collection of Hindu nationalist organisations, including BJP	3
Hindu Rashtra Sena	Indian Hindu activist group	1
RSS	Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organisation	1
Hindu Munnani	Right-wing, Hindu nationalist organisation set up by RSS in Tamil Nadu	1
Communist Party of India (Naxalites)	Designated a terrorist organisation in India under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act since 2009	1

Lastly, I included a column for multimedia evidence of the crimes shared on social media to track whether the sense of increased violence might be due to amplification on social media. Of the 212 incidents, only 33 of the crimes were recorded and posted on social media.

The vast majority of footage of the hate crimes was captured and shared by the perpetrators themselves. I didn't expect the number of videos shot by perpetrators and circulating on social media to outnumber the number of videos shot by the victim and

victim's family. I realised the perpetrators were documenting their crime as they were quite convinced about the righteousness of their actions and their belief that they would get away with it.

Who filmed video of the attack?



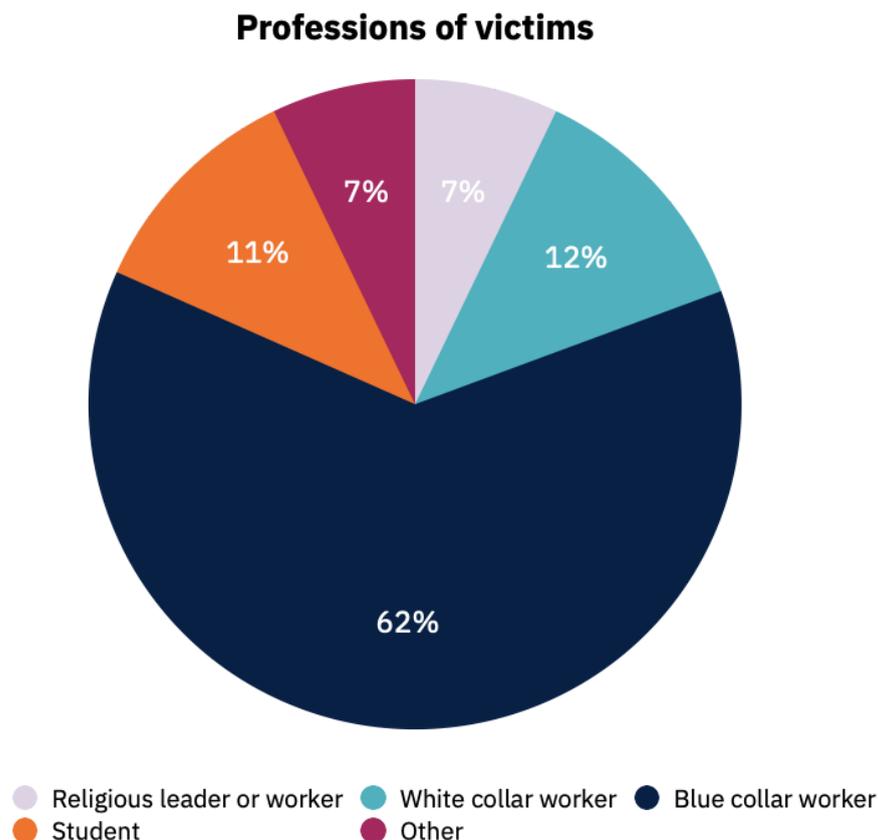
● Victim/victims family ● Perpetrator ● Bystanders

Lessons in building your own database

If you are planning to create your own database to plug a gap in official reporting, but don't have the luxury of working with a communications researcher like Dr Majó-Vázquez, I have gathered some helpful lessons from my time working with her.

1. Make sure your data sheet is workable

In the beginning, I was very keen on adding every detail about each case. For example, when documenting the profession of the victim, I would specify whether the person was a meat seller, IT worker, a farmer or a student. This resulted in nearly 40 categories of work, which didn't give a sense of the socio-economic class or motivations of the victim. With Dr Majó-Vázquez's help, I narrowed down the professions of the victims to just five variables: blue collar worker, white collar worker, student, religious workers and other. This let me create a clearer picture of who was most likely to be targeted in a hate crime.



2. Beware of typos

It sounds like a small issue, but one or two typos can make a worksheet unsearchable. For example, under region, Uttar Pradesh spelled as “Utar Pradesh” meant that it would pull up as a different state while trying to filter search results. Copy editing is dull work, but it meant that I and others could easily analyse the data.

3. Delete columns that do not have enough data

Initially, I had columns for documenting ethnicity of victim, sexual orientation and the number of passive observers of the crime. In the case of the first field, the information became so repetitive as to be redundant. I realised that the nationality of the vast majority in the attacks was Indian, and that filtering for this information would not be of use. In the case of the second two fields, the information was available so rarely that the columns were no longer useful, because the available data would not be representative. Focus on the data that is available within your set.

4. The need for footnotes

While it makes sense in a database to refer to the Vishva Hindu Parishad as the VHP or the Information Technology Act, 2000, as the IT Act, I often had to explain my acronyms and shorthand to others. Use a separate sheet or the Comments tool to store footnotes about acronyms or links to explainers. This adds clarity so that anyone using the dataset will understand, without “breaking” your filters or cluttering your data set.

5. Prepare for preconceived ideas to be challenged

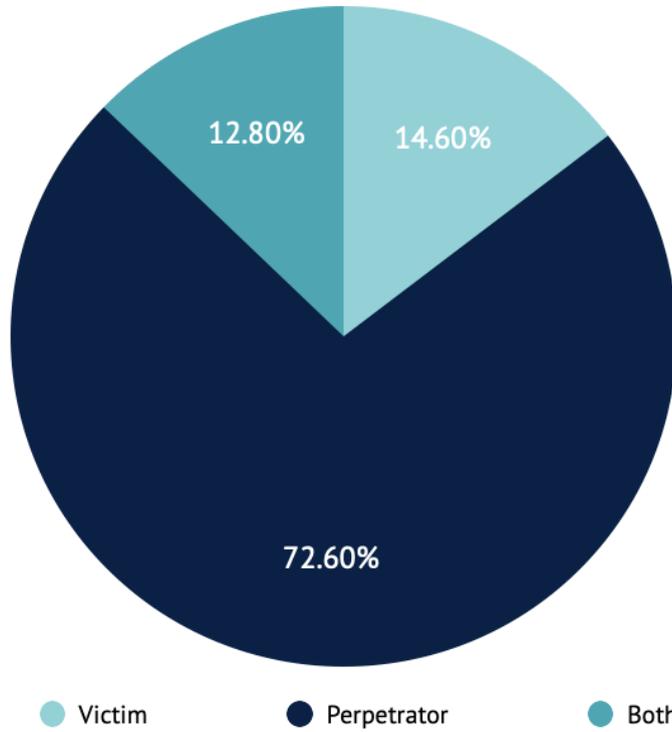
Your database could surprise you out of preconceived notions, but you cannot exclude or include data to confirm your own preconceptions without rendering your work useless.

6. The value of brevity

In a database, I realised some of the easiest searches happen with columns that are in the Yes/No format. For instance, did the police file a First Information Report (FIR, the equivalent of a police complaint): yes, or no? Did the police file an FIR against the victim or the perpetrator? By inputting the answers to such questions, I was able to see some

unexpected results, for example: police filed FIRs against both the victim and perpetrator in 13% of cases.

Who did police file an FIR against?



Conclusion

The list of information that India's current government withholds from the public keeps getting longer. I can envision independent journalist teams collecting data on topics like how many health workers have been infected with COVID-19, the number of Anganwadi child-care social workers who left their jobs during the pandemic, the number of school dropouts, the closure of small- and medium-sized enterprises, the number of attacks on Right to Information activists, and many other stories that require careful monitoring and data that may not be forthcoming from official sources.

My hope is that this paper helps journalists think about how they define the questions they want to answer, how they collect the data and how they report on it.

Work on the hate crimes tracker is by no means complete: I intend to take it online after the publication of this paper and invite other journalists to gather and catalogue information. It currently only includes reports from English-language outlets, and could be dramatically expanded if we were to include regional language reports too.

The risk to quality of information in crowd-sourced projects like these lies in deduplication of entries, authentication of the reports, and implicit bias in the interpretation of results. With full awareness of those risks – and the security risks to those who try to keep tallies – I believe it is still worth trying.