

LM

Critical Reasoning

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Respite may still elude a beleaguered community

In November 1888, Lord Dufferin (1826-1902) wrote, 'Muslims of British India, a nation of 50 million reigned supreme from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin'. In contemporary India, the Muslim demographic has swelled to more than fourfold since Lord Dufferin's era. It now surpasses the combined populations of Britain and France. Despite this, Indian Muslims find themselves standing helplessly at the heart of a violent triangle marked by lynching, bulldozer justice, and riots under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime, particularly since 2014. Notably, a majority of Muslims have collectively exhaled in relief at the outcome of the 2024 general election. The BJP has been deprived of a majority of its own, a departure from the verdicts of the 2014 and 2019 general elections. Consequently, India has reverted to a coalition era.

A mix of optimism and scepticism

Some view India's reversion to a coalition era as a glimmer of hope for the rejuvenation of its beleaguered secular polity. There is optimism that regional parties could act as a check on the propaganda machinery of the Hindutva right and its anti-Muslim biases, potentially curbing the Narendra Modi government's pursuit of discriminatory policies against Muslims. However, in my assessment, placing faith in the transformative potential of the new Modi regime may be overly optimistic. This scepticism is fuelled by the historical alignment of coalition leaders such as Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United) and N. Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party with majoritarianism, given their involvement in BJP-led governments since the mid-1990s.

Furthermore, the BJP's electoral setback in 2024 should not be misconstrued as an ideological defeat. While the election outcome may convey a message against majoritarianism, it is improbable that the BJP will internalise this lesson, as ideological parties are often more inclined to preach rather than learn.

The 2024 election campaign orchestrated by



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Scrutiny of the 2024 election campaign and representation in the 18th Lok Sabha shows a targeting of and a discrimination against the Muslim community

the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, stands out as the epitome of Islamophobia, compared to the previous elections in 2014 and 2019. In India's electoral history, this has been the most Islamophobic campaign since the first general election in 1951-52. Mr. Modi's predecessor and the former Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, even released a statement condemning Mr. Modi's campaign in 2024, accusing him of 'lowering the dignity of public discourse, and the gravity of office of Prime Minister with hate speeches'. But it was too late and too little.

No Muslim representation

On June 9, Narendra Modi was sworn in as India's Prime Minister for the third consecutive term; the over 70-member cabinet comprises members from the BJP and other parties within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition and is conspicuously devoid of any Muslim representation. The prerequisite for a Muslim presence in the cabinet hinges on the election of a Muslim Member of Parliament under the BJP banner. Yet, the party's track record speaks volumes as it fielded only one Muslim candidate in Kerala out of its 441 candidates in the general election. He lost.

This deliberate exclusion of Muslim candidates from the national and State elections has become a well-entrenched norm within the BJP, leading to the formation of governments devoid of Muslim representation at the central and State levels, as seen in States such as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. With India's Muslim population hovering around 15% of India's population, this glaring absence of representation amounts to a grave denial of its rightful place in the political landscape.

In July 2022, Mr. Modi announced in Hyderabad, at the BJP's national executive meeting, his concerns for the Pasmanda community – Muslims of Hindu heritage. However, beyond mere rhetoric in speeches and interviews, he has failed to make any substantial interventions in this regard. For a meaningful

start, the BJP could have fielded Pasmanda Muslim candidates in the 2024 election. Yet, this initiative did not materialise. The new Parliament comprises 24 Muslim Members of Parliament, primarily from non-BJP parties affiliated with the Opposition coalition known as the INDIA bloc. This development has led to a further dilution of Muslim representation, significantly weakening the political voice of the community, especially during a period marked by escalating violence and discrimination. While representation lies at the core of any democratic system, its denial echoes the significance of the renowned political maxim, 'taxation without representation' from the American Revolution. Evidently, this deliberate endeavour to exclude Muslims from the upper echelons of the governing power structure must be viewed as a sophisticated attempt to colonise the community.

Under scrutiny

For Hindutva Right organisations, Muslims are perceived as a problem, a threat, and even an internal enemy. The majoritarianism, inspired by the Hindutva ideology, scrutinises every aspect of Muslim life – from the *Azaan* (Muslim prayer) to their dietary preferences (such as beef), attire such as the *burqa/hijab*, places of religious instruction such as *madrassas*, and the legal standing of religious establishments such as *dargahs* or *masjids*, among others. However, the Hindutva far Right's apprehensions regarding these matters stem from a broader objective of de-Islamising India.

Interpreting the interventions by Hindutva right regimes on these fronts solely as violations of minority rights would present a skewed perspective of their ideological agenda, which aims at establishing a majoritarian Hindu *Rashtra* (Hindu state). Hence, Prime Minister Modi's Islamophobic campaign in 2024 was likely orchestrated not only for electoral gains but also to cultivate a conducive atmosphere for the Hindu *Rashtra* by delineating Muslims as the undesirable 'Other' and unworthy of equal rights.

Question -1)

Statement: Narendra Modi's electoral campaign in 2024 was noted as the most Islamophobic in India's history.

Question: Which of the following conclusions can be drawn from this statement?

- A. The 2024 election outcome was a clear rejection of Islamophobic rhetoric.
- B. Modi's campaign strategy aimed to increase voter turnout among Muslims.
- C. Modi's electoral tactics focused on fostering unity among diverse religious communities.
- D. The opposition parties endorsed Modi's campaign approach.

Question -2)

Statement: The BJP-led governments have consistently excluded Muslim representation from key political positions.

Question: Which of the following statements, if true, would most weaken the argument presented in the passage?

- A. The BJP claims it selects candidates based solely on merit and not religious affiliation.
- B. Other political parties in India have also struggled to achieve diverse representation.
- C. Muslim voters have historically supported BJP candidates in regions with large Muslim populations.
- D. A significant number of BJP candidates elected in 2024 are from minority communities other than Muslims.

Question -3)

Statement: Lord Dufferin's historical perspective highlights the extensive political influence Muslims once held in British India.

Question: Which of the following scenarios, if true, would most challenge the optimism expressed regarding India's political future in the passage?

- A. The BJP forms a coalition with a predominantly Muslim party in a key state.
- B. India's economy experiences rapid growth under the new coalition government.
- C. Regional parties, including those with anti-Muslim biases, gain significant electoral support.
- D. A prominent BJP leader publicly advocates for inclusive policies towards minority communities.

Question -4)

Statement: Coalition governments have historically aligned with BJP-led majoritarianism in Indian politics.

Question: Which of the following, if true, would most support the skepticism towards the transformative potential of coalition governments mentioned in the passage?

- A. Regional parties in the new coalition government have a history of opposing BJP's majoritarian policies.
- B. The coalition government announces plans to introduce legislation protecting minority rights.
- C. Several opposition parties have formed an alliance to counter BJP's influence in national politics.
- D. Key leaders of the coalition have previously supported BJP-led governments despite majoritarian policies.

Question -5)

Statement: The BJP's electoral setback in 2024 does not signify an ideological defeat.

Question: Which of the following statements, if true, would most strongly support the argument presented in the passage?

- A. Several BJP candidates who campaigned on anti-Muslim platforms lost in the 2024 elections.
- B. Opposition parties have united to form a strong coalition aimed at countering BJP's influence.
- C. BJP leaders have publicly acknowledged the need for inclusive policies towards minority communities.
- D. Despite electoral losses, the BJP remains the largest single party in terms of parliamentary seats.

Question -6)

Statement: The BJP's exclusion of Muslim candidates from its electoral lineup is a deliberate strategy.

Question: Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the argument that the BJP's strategy is detrimental to India's political landscape?

- A. The number of BJP voters who identify as Muslim has increased over the past decade.
- B. Muslim representation in Parliament is essential for passing legislation protecting minority rights.
- C. BJP-led states with Muslim representation have lower rates of religious violence.
- D. The BJP's electoral strategy has led to increased polarization among religious communities.

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