



RSS

ORIGINS, ACTIVITIES GLOBAL THREAT

A PRIMER ON A GROWING THREAT

INDIAN AMERICAN MUSLIM COUNCIL



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A NOTE ON SOURCING

This briefing draws on findings by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Congressional Research Service, United Nations special procedures and treaty bodies, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Genocide Watch, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Early Warning Project, and Indian and international news organizations.

Underlined text throughout is hyperlinked to the underlying source. Every URL is also reproduced in full in the source list at the end, so the briefing remains usable in print. Characterizations attributed to the bodies above are theirs.

AT A GLANCE

Stated goal	The transformation of India into a Hindu Rashtra — a Hindu nation — under the ideology of Hindutva.
Founding ideology	M.S. Golwalkar, its longest-serving chief, wrote in 1939 that non-Hindus must live “ wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges... not even citizen’s rights, ” and praised Nazi Germany’s purging of Jews as “ race pride at its highest. ” The RSS withdrew the text in 2006 without repudiating its framework.
Organization	83,000–89,000 branches (<i>shakhas</i>) and an estimated 4–6 million members, in a centralized hierarchy with daily drill, uniforms and ideological instruction.
Banned by the state	Three times — in 1948, 1975 and 1992. The first followed the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, who had been associated with the RSS; the third followed the Babri Masjid demolition and some 2,000 deaths in riots.
Legal status	Unregistered as a society, trust or company: no membership register, no public accounts, anonymous cash funding. Standard due-diligence cannot be applied.
Mass violence	Gujarat, 2002: more than 1,000 people, overwhelmingly Muslims, were killed. Human Rights Watch found the VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS “directly responsible”, with state complicity; Genocide Watch classifies the massacres as genocidal.
Genocide risk	Genocide Watch classifies the RSS offshoot Bajrang Dal as a militia operating at the “organization” stage of genocide in India. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Early Warning Project ranks India fourth of 168 countries at risk of a new mass killing.
Hate speech	1,318 hate speech events documented in India in 2025; 98% targeted Muslims. RSS affiliates were “central drivers” and organizers of these events.
US federal finding	In March 2026 USCIRF recommended targeted sanctions on the RSS by name — asset freezes and entry bans into the United States — citing “responsibility and tolerance of severe violations of religious freedom.”
Presence in the US	HSS USA, a registered 501(c)(3), runs some 267 shakhas across 33 states; roughly 1,600 RSS branches operate outside India.

1 Who the RSS Is

- The **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)** was founded in 1925 and marked its centenary in October 2025. **Mohan Bhagwat** has led it as *Sarsanghchalak* (supreme leader) since 2009, having been a full-time functionary since 1975. The leader is not elected but nominated by his predecessor.
- Its stated goal is the transformation of India into a **Hindu Rashtra** — a Hindu nation — under the ideology of Hindutva. The [Congressional Research Service](#) describes it as a “hardline Hindu nationalist” organization.
- **M.S. Golwalkar**, its longest-serving chief, wrote in 1939 that non-Hindus must live “wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges... not even citizen’s rights,” and [praised Nazi Germany’s](#) purging of Jews as “race pride at its highest.” The RSS withdrew the text in 2006 without repudiating its framework.
- It is **enormous**: roughly [83,000–89,000 daily branches](#) (*shakhas*) and an estimated 4–6 million members, organized in a centralized hierarchy with daily drill, uniforms and ideological instruction.
- It is also **legally invisible**. The RSS is [not registered](#) as a society, trust or company, keeps no membership register, files no public accounts, and funds itself through anonymous cash offerings. Standard due-diligence checks cannot be applied to it.
- **It operates through affiliates**. The RSS sits atop some three dozen organizations — the BJP in politics, the VHP and Bajrang Dal in street mobilization, ABVP among students, Vidya Bharati in schools — staffed at senior levels by RSS functionaries.

2 Official Findings and International Scrutiny

- **USCIRF, March 2026:** The bipartisan US federal commission [recommended targeted sanctions on the RSS by name](#) — the first time it has done so — citing “responsibility and tolerance of severe violations of religious freedom,” and specifying **asset freezes and entry bans into the United States**. It also recommended designating India a Country of Particular Concern for the seventh consecutive year.

- **USCIRF, November 2025:** [Reported](#) that the RSS “has been involved in acts of extreme violence and intolerance against members of minority groups for decades,” and described its mission as building a Hindu state excluding Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and other minorities. It identifies the ruling BJP as the RSS’s political wing, the two “intertwined.”
- **Genocide Watch** classifies the RSS offshoot Bajrang Dal as a militia operating at the “organization” stage of genocide in India. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s [Early Warning Project](#) ranks India **fourth of 168 countries** at risk of a new mass killing.
- **United Nations:** In 2025, four [UN Special Procedures mandate-holders](#) raised concerns over hundreds of killings of Muslims since 2014. UN experts have separately warned of [anti-Muslim hate speech and incitement](#) and [discriminatory measures affecting Muslim religious rights](#). The [UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) has flagged arbitrary deprivation of nationality, forced evictions and attacks by organized groups against Muslims in Assam.
- **Canada, August 2026:** Two MPs [asked their government](#) to declare Bhagwat inadmissible over “his history of hate speech, advocacy of violence against religious minorities, targeted intimidation of critics,” and to ban the RSS. More than 40 Canadian civil society, labor and faith organizations wrote separately seeking denial of entry.

3 The Current Picture: 2024-2026

Violence against Christians

2025 was the [fifth consecutive record year](#):

- The Evangelical Fellowship of India verified [747 incidents](#) in 2025, against 640 in 2024 and 147 in 2014 — a fivefold rise in a decade. Attacks included [mob assaults on worshippers](#) and a [wave of Christmas violence](#).
- **Impunity runs near-total.** Of nearly 580 incidents in one 2025 dataset, only 45 complaints were filed against perpetrators — a [93% impunity rate](#) — while **230 cases were filed against Christians**, 155 under anti-conversion laws, with 800+ jailed. At least **110 Christians remained imprisoned** under those laws in January 2026.

Violence against Muslims

The South Asia Justice Campaign's India Persecution Tracker recorded [44 Muslims killed in the first seven months of 2026](#). It recorded [27 Muslims killed by Hindu extremists](#) in 2025, and more than 3,000 Muslim homes, businesses and religious structures demolished so far in 2026. The [Indian American Muslim Council](#) documents coordination between BJP governments, police and RSS groups in anti-minority violence.

Hate speech

The [Centre for the Study of Organized Hate](#) documented **1,318 hate speech events in 2025**, 98% targeted Muslims, and 162 events targeted Christians. RSS affiliates were “central drivers” and organizers of these hate events.

4 Track Record of Violence

- **Banned three times** by the Indian state [in 1948, 1975 and 1992](#). The first ban followed the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, who had been associated with the RSS. The 1992 ban followed the Babri Masjid demolition, after which some 2,000 people died in riots.
- **Gujarat, 2002:** More than 1,000 people, overwhelmingly Muslims, were killed. Human Rights Watch found the VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS [“directly responsible”](#) and documented state complicity. [Genocide Watch](#) classifies the massacres as genocidal.
- **Anti-Christian violence:** HRW identified the RSS and its offshoots as [“most responsible”](#) for violence against Christians, and [Amnesty International](#) has documented its role in anti-Christian violence and incitement. In 1999 a Bajrang Dal activist burned Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons alive; in 2008 mobs in [Kandhamal](#) killed around 100 Christians, destroyed 300 churches and displaced tens of thousands.
- **Terror plots:** Three men with RSS backgrounds — including a serving member — were [convicted in 2017](#) of the 2007 bombing of the Ajmer Sharif Sufi shrine, which killed three pilgrims. RSS-linked figures were prosecuted in a wider series of bombings of Muslim religious sites between 2006 and 2008, though most of those cases ended in acquittals that victims' families continue to appeal.

5 Relationship with the Indian State

- The BJP is the RSS's political wing. **Prime Minister Modi is a lifelong RSS functionary**, as are numerous cabinet ministers and chief ministers. In July 2024 the government [lifted a 58-year ban](#) on civil servants participating in RSS activities.
- **Citizenship:** In Assam, hundreds of thousands of Muslims have been excluded from the citizenship register and [declared "foreigners,"](#) exposing them to detention and expulsion.
- **Voting rights:** The "Special Intensive Revision" of electoral rolls has removed millions of voters, prompting [UN Special Rapporteurs](#) to warn of discriminatory disenfranchisement of minorities.
- **Civil society:** [Sweeping FCRA changes](#) took effect in 2026, [condemned by Amnesty International](#). A pending bill would let the government seize church assets; Congressman **Riley Moore** [called it](#) "a clear attack against Christians."
- State-level anti-conversion and cow-slaughter laws, and 2025 amendments to the Waqf Act governing Muslim endowments, follow the Sangh Parivar's long-stated program.

6 Footprint in the United States

- The RSS does not operate under its own name abroad. Its overseas vehicle is the **Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)**, active in dozens of countries with roughly **1,600 branches outside India**.
- In the US, **HSS USA is a registered 501(c)(3) running some [267 shakhas across 33 states](#)**, concentrated in California, Texas and New Jersey. Its own website acknowledges inspiration from the RSS, and its officers attend RSS training camps in India.
- [Related US entities](#) include **Sewa International USA**, the **Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America**, **Ekal Vidyalaya**, and the **Overseas Friends of the BJP-USA**, [registered as a foreign agent](#) under FARA.

7 The August 2026 US Tour

- Bhagwat visits the **United States, Canada and the United Kingdom from 25 August 2026**, with a “Universal Oneness Celebrations” event at Madison Square Garden on 29 August organized by [American Hindus for Engagement and Dialogue](#).
- Indian coverage describes his messaging as shifting from political nationalism to “pluralism” and “oneness,” packaged for American audiences. RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale, who toured the US, UK and Germany in April, [said the trips were meant](#) to “dispel certain misgivings and misconceptions about the RSS.”
- This is a [campaign to rehabilitate the RSS’s image abroad](#), mounted as a US federal commission recommends sanctions and entry bans against it, and as violence against minorities in India hits record levels.

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