

Global Safety and Security Forecast

# 2024 elections in India

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



India is likely to experience an increase in localized civil unrest ahead of general elections in April-May 2024.



Communal (religious/ethnic) violence poses the most significant threat to **Airbnb** employees and travelers, followed by inter party election-related clashes and insurgency.



## GENERAL ELECTION RECAP



**2019:** In 2019, West Bengal experienced violent clashes between the BJP and rival political activists in Calcutta and other districts. Meanwhile, jihadist and leftist insurgents increased attacks in Jammu-Kashmir, Maharashtra, and Chhattisgarh. Violent protests typically peak on the first day of each voting phase.



**2014:** In 2014, states experiencing insurgencies witnessed increased violence, while anti-Muslim violence occurred in Assam amid heightened BJP rhetoric.

## Airbnb impact

### Notable concerns:

- The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will leverage polarizing religious rhetoric in an effort to win votes, raising the risk of communal violence and harassment targeting religious minorities.
- The potential for violence and harassment targeting religious minorities is elevated in states where the BJP governs or seeks to take control.
- Political activists may also fight with rival parties in battleground cities and states.
- Insurgent violence can increase in an effort to delegitimize and undermine elections.
- BJP activists have increasingly organized boycotts and online harassment against disfavored foreign corporations.

## Mitigating factors

### Concerns are partly offset by other considerations:

- Violence is unlikely to be more severe than 2014 and 2019 election cycles.
- Communal violence is more likely to manifest in smaller cities, working class neighborhoods or suburbs.
- Major bouts of communal violence remain uncommon despite widespread tensions.
- Verbal harassment of religious minorities is more likely than physical violence.
- Election-related clashes will primarily occur between rival party activists, party offices, or polling stations.
- Insurgent violence is unlikely to spill out of traditional conflict areas or impact major cities.
- BJP boycotts and harassment primarily focus on issues related to Pakistan or Islam.

## NATIONAL OVERVIEW

### Categories of concern

- Election violence in India generally stems from increased insurgent activity, clashes between rival parties, or increased communal unrest related to religious/ethnic differences.
- Insurgency-related election violence is concentrated in conflict-prone states, while communal unrest can spill across state borders.

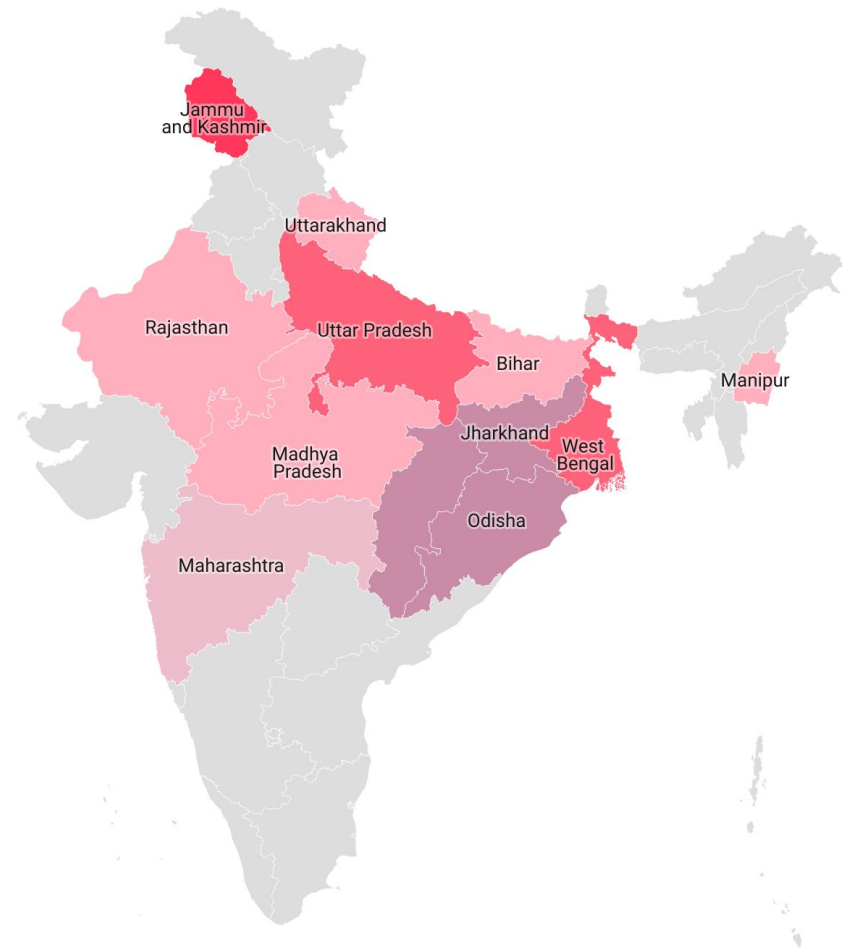
### Vulnerable states

- Violent Islamist extremist activity is concentrated in Jammu-Kashmir.
- Naxalite (leftist) insurgents operate in rural areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha.
- Clashes between rival political parties are more likely in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra (particularly Mumbai, where two factions of a local party are in conflict).
- Rival party violence will primarily impact rival party activists, candidates, party offices, and polling station.
- States at heightened risk from communal violence include Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Manipur.
- Communal violence primarily occurs in smaller cities/towns or working class neighborhoods in larger cities.

## ELECTION VIOLENCE IN INDIA

### VALUE

■ Jihadist Insurgency 
 ■ Communal and election violence 
 ■ Communal violence 
 ■ Election violence 
 ■ Leftist insurgency



Map data: © OSM • Created with Datawrapper



## IMPACT TO AIRBNB

### Employees

Election-related violence is unlikely to impact the vast majority of **Airbnb** employees in India.

However, employees can reduce their risk profile by monitoring local news, refraining from travel to higher-risk areas, avoiding political rallies, and refraining from social media posts on controversial topics.

Employees displaying visible symbols/garments associated with Christianity or Islam are advised to avoid all religious processions and events associated with the BJP and other Hindu nationalist groups.

### Company

**Airbnb** is unlikely to be directly targeted by physical security or reputational risks associated with the 2024 elections.

However, internal and external communications should exercise significant caution in addressing topics such as Kashmir, Islam, Hinduism, communal unrest, the BJP, or Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as BJP activists have organized protests and boycotts against foreign corporations when provoked.

# DELHI AND GURUGRAM

## Delhi

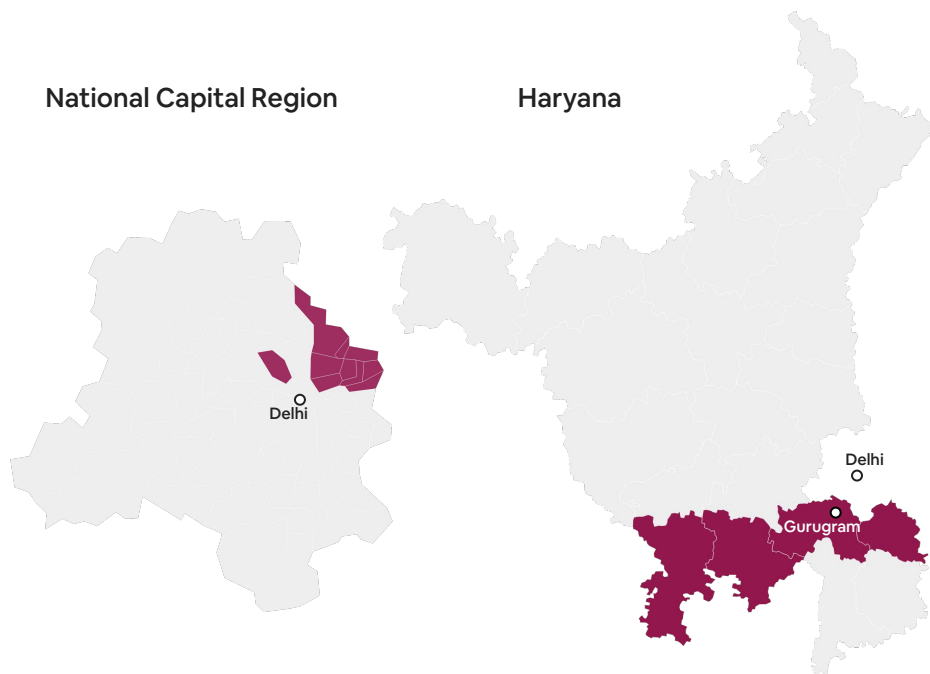
The BJP may seek to play up communal issues in an effort to win power in the National Capital Region (NCR). Additionally, communal tensions from adjacent states can spill into Delhi. Past communal unrest has concentrated in Muslim majority or religiously mixed areas of north-east Delhi, e.g., Maujpur, Jaffrabad, Chand Bagh, Kardam-puri, Mustafabad, Gokalpuri, Shiv Vihar, and Khajuri Khas.

## Gurugram

Recent unrest in Nuh and Gurugram districts suggests that the BJP may attempt to consolidate Hindu votes by aggravating communal tensions in southern Haryana, particularly in Gurugram, Rewari, Mahendragarh, and Faridabad districts. Such unrest will likely remain confined to religiously mixed, working class neighborhoods and shopping areas, rather than upscale commercial districts.

National Capital Region

Haryana



MAP KEY: DISTRICTS OF CONCERN

● Low ● High

# GOLDEN TRIANGLE

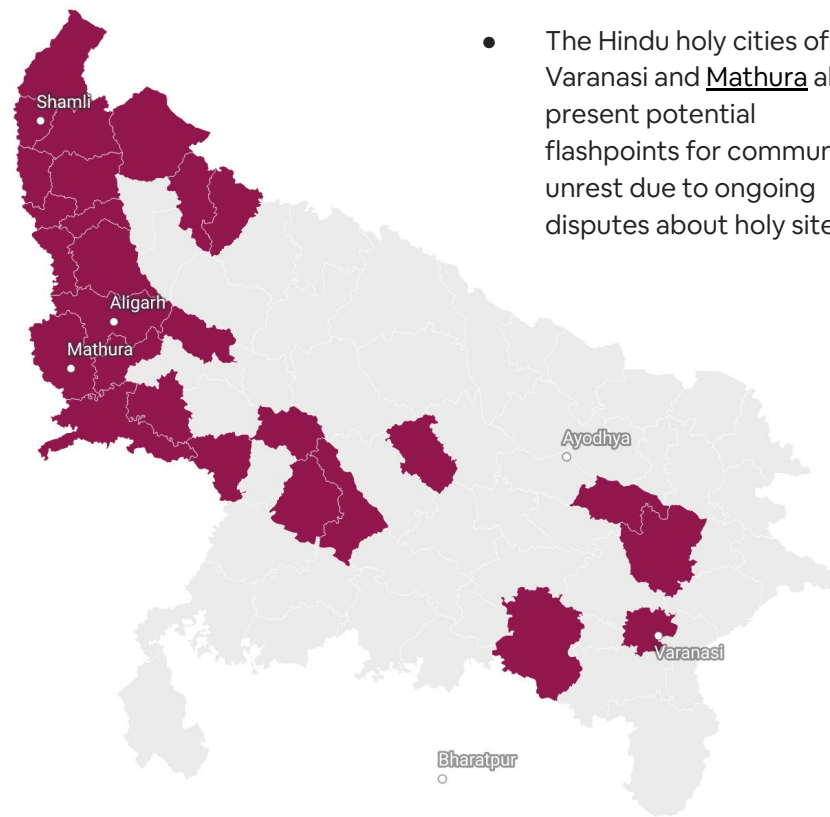
## Rajasthan

Outside of Delhi, the BJP may seek to amplify communal tensions in other areas adjacent to Golden Triangle tourist sites. In Rajasthan (where the BJP is seeking to regain power), communal unrest is a concern in Alwar, Bharatpur, Jodhpur, and Bhilwara.

## Uttar Pradesh

Senior BJP politicians have begun to emphasize controversial religious issues in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the 2024 elections.

- Areas vulnerable to communal unrest have historically included western districts such as Muzaffarnagar, Shamli, and Aligarh.
- The Hindu holy cities of Varanasi and Mathura also present potential flashpoints for communal unrest due to ongoing disputes about holy sites.



# BENGALURU

## City

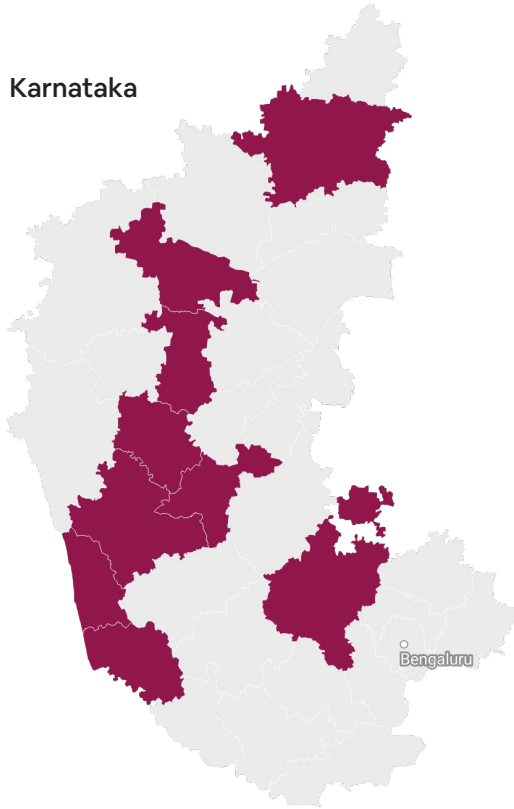
Large-scale communal violence is uncommon in Bengaluru, aside from unrest in the DJ Halli and KG Halli areas in 2020 over an allegedly blasphemous social media post regarding the Prophet Muhammad.

## Karnataka

The BJP has a strong vote bank in Karnataka's coastal and northern districts, resulting in sporadic communal violence. However, the BJP's attempts to harness communal tensions failed to help it retain power in Karnataka's 2023 state Elections.

- Shivamogga and Bagalkot districts historically had the highest levels of communal unrest in Karnataka. However, unrest may decline following the recent change of state government.

## Karnataka



MAP KEY: DISTRICTS OF CONCERN

● Low ● High



# LIKELY IMPACTS

## Telecommunications

During periods of significant communal unrest, the Indian government will frequently shut down access to messaging services, social media platforms, and fixed line and/or mobile Internet. Outages usually occur at the district level for several days, but can occur at the state level for extended periods in conflict-prone areas like Jammu-Kashmir and Manipur.

## Transportation

Activists may stage protests on major roads during periods of communal tension, disrupting traffic. Areas experiencing communal violence are also vulnerable to train and taxi service disruptions.

# GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

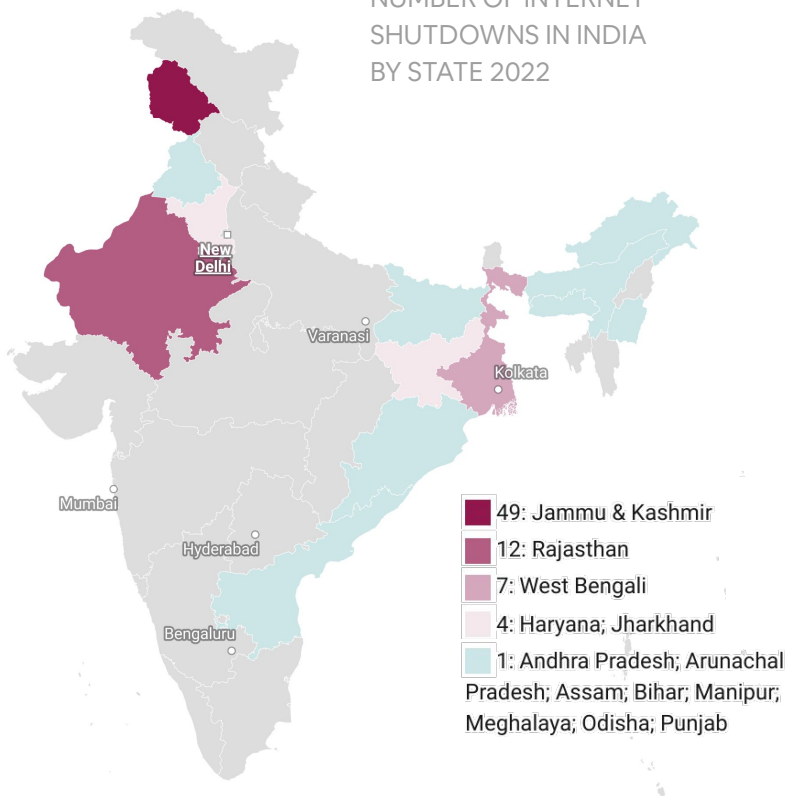
## Riot control

In order to suppress communal unrest, Indian authorities will use tear gas and baton charges. Authorities also frequently restrict freedom of assembly and mobile Internet access at the district level.

## Discrimination

Both police and government officials in BJP-ruled states have bulldozed the homes of Muslim residents in Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh following communal unrest, while also conducting discriminatory mass arrests. However, such actions generally occur in informal working class.

MAP KEY:  
NUMBER OF INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN INDIA BY STATE 2022





## KEY DATES

Severe weather and power outages pose a potential risk to events in October:

### Religious festivals

Major Hindu and Muslim religious celebrations are frequently a trigger for communal violence, particularly when Hindu nationalists attempt to march through Muslim areas.

- Hindu celebrations occurring around the 2024 elections include: Ram Navami, Hanuman Jayanti, and Holi.
- Muslim celebrations during the same period include Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr.

### Elections

The Election Commission of India has not announced the 2024 general election dates as of August 2023, although the dates will likely occur in April-May and span multiple phases. In addition, major state elections will likely occur in 2024, including Haryana and Maharashtra (where Gurugram and Mumbai are located, respectively).



## APPENDIX

### Drivers (appendix 1)

The BJP's key motives for fomenting communal violence are discussed below, along with likely themes ahead of the 2024 elections.

#### BJP motivations

The BJP has historically used communal unrest to consolidate votes from upper and lower caste Hindus. This also serves to weaken rival parties which have historically combined support from lower caste Hindus and Muslims. Suggestions that the BJP foments communal unrest primarily as a tactic to win power are questionable amid recent unrest in Haryana and Manipur.

#### Issues for 2024

Prime Minister Modi has promoted the adoption of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), which would eliminate personal laws for Muslims and Christians. The BJP state government in Uttarakhand subsequently passed its own UCC in February 2024.

The BJP will also seek to stoke communal sentiments by highlighting the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya in January 2024, and by disputing the provenance of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and Shahi Eidgah mosque in Mathura. Destruction of mosques and Muslim schools has accelerated since the Ram Mandir inauguration, sparking unrest. . The opposition Congress Party will seek to split the BJP's Hindu voter base by appealing to caste issues.

### Riot causes (appendix 2)

Although localized communal tensions are common during Indian elections, large-scale communal riots and violence are rare and are generally caused by specific triggering events.

#### Common triggers

The following triggers often presage major riots:

- The passage of particularly controversial legislation at the state or national level
- BJP yatras (processions) in communally sensitive areas, particularly during holidays or when figures accused of past communal violence are involved
- Attacks or murders targeting prominent BJP leaders, Hindu nationalist activists, or Hindu/Muslim clergy
- Derogatory statement on religious figures or beliefs, particularly when expressed by BJP leaders or spokesmen.
- Controversial court decision on a case with major religious implications
- Destruction, desecration, or removal of key religious shrines or other religious sites