

Not just Modi: Guide to communal riots before 2002 and after

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From political discourse and media obsessions, a Martian landing in India would conclude that Gujarat 2002 was possibly the only communal conflagration to happen in independent India. Sometimes, BJP spokespersons, when pushed to the ropes in media interactions, try to inject Delhi 1984. But 2002 is the pre-dominant theme.

A related obsession is to show that one man – [Narendra Modi](#) – is responsible for it all, when common sense tells us that a communal riot, even when it is organised by one community, happens between two communities.

More often than not, rioting and attacks involve the direct or indirect collusion of political parties in provoking attacks, but in the case of 1984, it was Congress party members who led mobs in attacks on the Sikh community in retaliation for the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her body guards. 1984 thus does not fall into the category of communal riots between communities, and was in fact a direct attack by political party cadres on one community

However, now that the 2014 elections will make 2002 relevant again, it is as good a time as any to analyse all the riots India has witnessed since independence, and the 5 March issue of *Outlook* gives us a good bird's eye-view on the issue. It shows the Gujarat 2002 communal riots in perspective.

[Outlook notes](#) that there have been “58 major communal riots in 47 places since 1967. Ten in South India, 12 in East, 16 in West and 20 in North India. Since 1964, Ahmedabad has seen five major riots and Hyderabad four. The 1990s saw the most riots in the last five decades: 23. The 1970s saw seven riots, the 1980s 14; the 2000s have seen 13. Total toll: 12,828 (South 597, West 3,426, East 3,581 and North 5,224). In 1964, a wave of rioting in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Jamshedpur and Rourkela killed 2,500.” Riots with a toll of less than five were excluded; deaths due to communal bomb blasts were also excluded. (*Read the full Outlook story [here](#)*).

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Table 1: Who ruled the state when more than 100 people died in riots -1967 onwards

No	Year (1)	Place (2)	Lives Lost (3)	Ruling Party (4)	Who was Chief Minister (5)
1	1967	Hatia Ranchi	183	Jana Kranti Dal	M P Sinha
2	1969	Ahmedabad	512	Congress	Hitendra K Desai
3	1970	Jalgaon	100	Congress	Vasant Rao Naik
4	1979	Jamshedpur	120	Janata Party	Karpooori Thakur
5	1980	Moradabad	1,500	Congress	V P Singh
6	1983	Nellie, Assam	1,819	President Rule	-
7	1984	Bhiwandi	146	Congress	Vasantdada Patil
8	1985	Ahmedabad	300	Congress	M S Solanki
9	1989	Bhagalpur	1,161	Congress	S N Singh
10	1990	Delhi	100	Union Territory	-
11	1990	Hyderabad	365	Congress	Chenna Reddy
12	1990	Aligarh	150	Janata Dal	Mulayam S Yadav
13	1992	Surat	152	Congress+JD (G)+ JD	Chimanbhai Patel
14	1992	Kanpur	254	President Rule	-
15	1992	Bhopal	143	President Rule	-
16	1993	Mumbai	872	Congress	Sudhakar Rao Naik
17	2002	Gujarat	1,267	BJP	Narendra Modi

Of the 17 riots mentioned in **Table 1**, nine took place under Congress/Allies rule, three under President's Rule, four under other parties and one under BJP rule. President's rule includes Kanpur and Bhopal, which could be included under BJP rule because party state governments were dismissed in the aftermath of the events of 6 December 1992.

Prior to 2002, there were four riots in Ahmedabad with a toll of 912, and three riots in Surat and Vadodara with a toll of 197. One holds no brief for [Narendra Modi](#) but most intellectuals have failed to highlight the fact that Gujarat has a history of Hindu-Muslim riots. They also forget that about 30 percent of the 1,267 killed in the post-Godhra violence were from the majority community.

But barring Modi, no Chief Minister has ever been demonised for the communal riots that happened during their watch. As the data show, many, many parties and CMs have to be in the dock if Modi has to be held accountable for 2002.

A point worth pondering is what happened even before independence. In the aftermath of Gandhi's efforts at Hindu-Muslim unity during the Khilafat Movement, Babasaheb Ambedkar examined Hindu-Muslim relations between 1920 and 1940 in

his book, *Thoughts on Pakistan* (published 1941). Here are some excerpts from his listing:

“1920 – Moplah Rebellion was essentially a rebellion against the British government but Hindus were raped, converted and killed, foul outrages upon women.

1924 – riots at Kohat, where about 155 were killed, Hindus had to evacuate city.

1925-26 – antagonisms between Hindus-Muslims became widespread. Riots in Calcutta, United Provinces and Bombay Presidency.

40 riots took place during the 12 months ending 1/4/1927 resulting in the deaths of 197 and injuries to 1,598. In 1927, the Afridis and Shinwaris were called upon to expel all the Hindus living in the neighborhood of the Khyber Pass. The year 1937 was full of communal disturbances at Panipat, Punjab, Sind to name a few places”. (Read more excerpts from Ambedkar’s book [here](#)).

The point is not that riots ought to be seen as routine, but that there is a history of communal conflict that predates 2002, and there is a recent history that postdates 2002 as well. Assam 2012, [several riots in Uttar Pradesh](#) after the Samajwadi victory in the last elections, and today’s report on [rioting in Rajasthan](#) are part of the same story.

Why do riots occur? When anger gets accumulated in the minds of a community and society/government is unable to find a solution, political elements may provide the tipping point for a conflagration. A small incident could trigger violence, where the intent is to injure, destroy property and/or kill members of the other community. The intent behind terrorists exploding bombs in crowded places is similar. It also creates fear in the minds of all concerned. For example, the Mumbai train blasts of July 2006.

Unlike a riot, where the attackers are local and identifiable, those responsible for blasts are not visible, and might not even be local, but the message is loud and clear. Further, the reasons for blasts are mostly unknown to (or unacknowledged by) the common man. This makes it easier for any government to blame Pakistan after a bomb-blast even though every mission needs local support. In a deeper sense, riots and bomb blasts are similar.

Indian’s tryst with bomb blasts and terror attacks started with the 1993 Mumbai blasts, where convictions were recently confirmed by the Supreme Court. Some 1,446 Indians died and 4,333 were injured in blasts from 1993 to 6 March 2013. The figures exclude those killed in the Khalistani/Kashmiri terrorist movements and Ulfa violence in Assam. (To read details of each blast, click [here](#))

An analysis of who ruled the state when terror attacks took place is insightful is given in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Terror attacks/blasts since 1993 to date in which more than 25 lives were lostExcludes dead in the Khalistani/Kashmiri terrorist movements and ULFA violence**

Terror Attacks/Blasts since 1993 to date in which more than 25 lives lost*

No	Year	Place	Lives Lost	Ruling Party
1	1993	Mumbai	257	Congress
2	2003	Mumbai Taj/Zaveri Bazaar	52	Congress NCP
3	2006	Mumbai Trains	209	Congress NCP
4	2008	26/11/ Terror	186	Congress NCP
5	2002	Gandhinagar	25	BJP
6	2005	Delhi Paharganj	63	Congress
7	2006	Varanasi	28	Samajwadi Party
8	2006	Malegaon	38	Congress NCP
9	2007	Samjhauta Express	66	Congress
10	2007	Panipat	66	Congress
11	2007	Hyderabad	42	Congress
12	2008	Jaipur	63	BJP
13	2008	Ahmedabad	50	BJP
14	2008	Gauhati	84	Congress

Note that 10 of the 14 attacks took place under Congress/Allies rule and law and order is a state subject. No wonder, noted security expert B Raman [wrote in 2009](#), “there have been four acts of mass terrorism since 1981. All the four were carried out when the Congress was in power in New Delhi. There have been three instances of targeted attacks on foreigners since 1991 – two in Jammu and Kashmir and one in Mumbai. All the three were carried out when the Congress was in power. There have been seven acts of ISI-sponsored aircraft hijackings since 1971. Six of them were carried out when the Congress and one when the BJP was in power. There has been one instance of an Air India plane being blown up in mid-air killing over 250 persons. This took place when the Congress was in power.”

Around 52 percent of the 1,446 killed are in India’s terror capital, Mumbai. Has the Congress High Command or any Chief Minister of Maharashtra ever explained why they have not made Mumbai terror-resistant? The lackadaisical approach of the state government can be explained by the fact that the trial for the 2006 train blasts accused is still on nearly seven years after the event. Further, in February 2012, the Bombay High Court [upheld the death penalty](#) for three convicts in 2003 twin blasts case. What happened after that?

Be it riots or terror attacks, the Congress too has a lot of answering to do. Surely Narendra Modi must answer for 2002, but is he alone? Successive US Presidents must explain why the US supports regimes with a poor human rights record and why it attacked a country in a fraudulent search for weapons of mass destruction that never existed.

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