

# Gujarat: How an exclusionary political pact is also a durable one

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*As the Indian state of Gujarat prepares to go to polls in December, most commentators agree that the chief minister Narendra Modi and his BJP party will be voted back to power yet again. Dr Neera Chandhoke argues that the electoral performance of the BJP government is based on a Hindu majoritarian political pact that sustains itself by excluding and marginalising the Muslim community. This exclusion, and its relationship with the majoritarian political pact, can best be understood by looking at the plight of victims of the 2002 pogrom and the resettlement colonies in Ahmedabad that they continue to inhabit. (Dr Chandhoke's working paper, "[Some Reflections on the Notion of an 'Inclusive Political Pact': A Perspective from Ahmedabad](#)", has been summarised here by Praveen Priyadarshi).*

Ahmedabad, the largest city of the state of Gujarat and one of the fastest growing cities in India, is also a divided city. The process of ethnic segregation started in 1969 when the first major Hindu- Muslim communal riots broke out in the city. By the 1980s, the ghettoisation process had intensified and in the 1990s only a few mixed neighbourhoods remained. Muslim-inhabited areas and some mixed neighbourhoods were systematically and brutally targeted during the communal violence of March 2002, the worst-affected areas being on either side of the railway track in old Ahmedabad. During the eruption of violence, settlements were burnt down, individuals were brutally tortured and murdered, and women were subjected to gang rape by mobs numbering in the thousands. An estimated 2,000 people were killed in the state of Gujarat, with half of these being murdered in Ahmedabad alone. A majority of those killed were Muslims.



The victims of violence were first herded into poorly funded and grossly inadequate relief camps and subsequently into resettlement colonies located in four pockets of the city: Juhapura, Ramol, Vatva and Dani Limda. The relief camps and resettlement colonies were mainly organised by Muslim organisations as the state government refused to recognise that there were any refugees who needed temporary shelter or permanent resettlement.

It is clear from the state's response to the plight of riot victims that the marginalisation of Muslims from city spaces and political discourse was systematic and deliberate, and not the result of mere indifference. Indeed, the state has been negligent at best and vicious at worst in terms of addressing victims' needs and grievances.

Six years after the pogrom, many of the relocated families were still awaiting their voter identity cards and Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards, which provide access to subsidised food and are crucial for those who need to participate in social protection schemes. In 2007, after a massive meeting of the internally displaced, the Election Commission took measures to ensure that the displaced were able to cast their votes in the state assembly elections that year. But state officials did not take any similar steps to alleviate the suffering of victims.

State officials' negligence is most evident in the matter of property rights: the status of the land upon which Muslim shanty towns have been constructed is legally uncertain because it is earmarked by the state government as agricultural land. Some Muslim organisations bought the land to settle the refugees, but the use of agricultural land to resettle displaced people can be contested by the government. The shaky status of the land has instilled dread among residents who fear that their temporary settlements can be easily mowed down by the bulldozers of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

City government officials have also failed to provide basic amenities such as drainage, internal roads or a potable water supply. Ironically, residents of New Fazal Nagar, one of the relocated colonies, were served a notice to pay 8,000 rupees as house tax even though their houses lie beyond the pale of the government and the Corporation.

Such spatial marginalisation is an important issue not only because of its socio-political and economic implications but also because it indicates how the Muslim community – constituting just below 10 per cent of the total state population – is marginalised from the dominant political pact in Gujarat. Moreover, it indicates how exclusion becomes an essential political adhesive in the making of a majoritarian political pact woven together on the basis of Hindutva ideology.

Research conducted under the aegis of Crisis States Programme in conflict-ridden and fragile states in Asia, Africa and Latin America investigates the conditions in which a post-conflict state is more likely to show resilience. State resilience, proposes James Putzel, depends crucially on (a) the inclusiveness of bargains struck among elites and (b) the extent to which state organisations, particularly those responsible for security and taxation, have established their presence throughout the country's territory. He suggests that along with effective state presence, the existence of a pact among political elites (which is presumably arrived at through processes of intensive bargaining) necessarily imparts to the state a certain modicum of stability, and provides what can be termed a 'holding together' mechanism. The condition is that the consensus should be inclusive. That is, the pact should reflect and codify the interests of most, if not all the elites. Once political elites enter into a political pact, and once the state acquires the capacity to hold society together through monopoly over security and tax administration, we can reasonably expect that the society in question will not be wracked by periodic crisis, which poses a threat to its very existence and reproduction.

However, problems arise when structures and processes prevent the formation of new political elites or systemically disempower certain groups. The net consequences of such exclusion are that the leaders of the group are simply not in a position to participate in the bargains that result in a political pact. Political pacts can be exclusionary not only because some groups are left out deliberately but also when they are not recognised as significant. Political pacts can also exclude because some groups have been systematically discriminated against and marginalised. A political pact can only be inclusive if a particular ethnic group has not been marginalised, rendered politically irrelevant, or simply not recognised as a worthy partner.

In Ahmedabad (and Gujarat as a whole) an important aspect of the elite pact is the thorough disempowerment and marginalisation of the Muslim community. At one point an important component of the trading economy and industrial working class, the Muslims of Ahmedabad today live in poverty and want, confined to desolate ghettos and resettlement colonies that simultaneously evoke hateful representations and supreme neglect. In these ghettos, Muslims are denied the basic rights of citizenship, relegated as they are to the spatial, economic and political margins of the city. Interestingly, with regards to Putzel's work, the case of Gujarat shows that even an exclusionary political pact can be relatively durable if the process of exclusion is institutionalised at a political moment prior to the moment of elite bargain. If political commentators have correctly predicted the results of upcoming state elections in

Gujarat, this argument will only be further reinforced.

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