

The 'Hindutva Family' or 'Sangh Parivar'

AUDIO: Muslims warned of 'final battle' at Sangh Parivar meeting, MoS Katheria says 'we've to show our strength'



The CIA's World Factbook calls the RSS a 'nationalist' body; also on the list is the Hurriyat Conference under the separatist groups tag.

New Delhi: Sangh affiliates Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal have been classified as militant religious outfits in the recently updated World Factbook, published by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The groups most directly involved in the violence against Muslims include the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, VHP), the Bajrang Dal, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that heads the Gujarat state government. Collectively, they are known as the sangh parivar, or family of Hindu nationalist organizations.

A report by



Collective Against the Violation and Abuse of Civil and Human Rights

The RSS and its subsidiaries: The 'Hindutva Family' or 'Sangh Parivar'

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or simply RSS, is a far-right paramilitary Hindu nationalist organization. [According](#) to independent researcher and journalist Peter Friedrich, "The RSS is probably the world's oldest and largest **paramilitary group**. A secretive, unregistered organization, its size is unknown, but estimated at approximately six million Volunteers. It keeps no records and has **no bank accounts**. It is **uniformed, armed, and all-male**. Women are only allowed in the separate women's wing. It also has countless special-purpose subsidiary [organizations](#), some of the most important of which are:

- Bharatiya Janata Party (**BJP**), the political wing, founded in 1980.
- Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (**ABVP**), the student wing, founded in 1949.
- Vishwa Hindu Parishad (**VHP**), the religious wing, founded in 1964.
- **Bajrang Dal**, the VHP's youth wing, founded in 1984."

There are numerous other organizations affiliated to the RSS of varying degree of importance and various degree of connection RSS; some of which indulge in activities clearly criminal, including extreme violence, whereas some serve as think-tanks or propaganda institutions. All these organizations are now collectively called the 'Sangh Parivar' or 'Hindutva family'.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

BJP is now the ruling party in India. RSS, then known as Jansangh, was banned after it was linked to the [murder](#) of M. K. Gandhi in 1948. It was subsequently allowed to regroup under the condition that it confine its activities to the 'cultural' sphere. During the authoritarian rule of 'emergency' imposed by the then prime minister Indira Gandhi, the politically aspiring part of Jansangh merged with the Janata Party (which ultimately won the subsequent elections) – later broke away in '79 and regrouped as the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) in 1980. It is largely dominated by the RSS. In the present Modi government, **38 out of 53 BJP ministers have an RSS background**. In Modi's 2014 term, 41 out of 66 BJP ministers were from RSS. In fact, **the Parliament had ruled that the first time BJP MPs have to be given lessons (for two days) on the history of the party including the ideologies of the RSS.**

Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)

ABVP is the student wing of RSS. Though it insists that it has not links to BJP, most scholars consider it to be also the student

organization of both RSS and BJP. Several prominent BJP politicians made their debut in ABVP, including current Home Minister [Amit Shah](#). The ABVP's manifesto includes agendas such as educational and university reforms. It competes in student-body elections in colleges and universities. Students for Development (SFD) is an initiative by the ABVP. **ABVP has been linked to multiple [violent incidents](#) on university and college campuses, including the [2020 Jawaharlal Nehru University attack](#).**

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)

The VHP was founded in 1964 by two leaders of the RSS and remains largely affiliated to RSS. Its ostentatious goal is to unite all religions that historically originated in India, including Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism etc, under a broad Hindu umbrella. It is reported to have presence in [29 countries](#) outside of India. Hindu Students Council is a VHP-supported student body based in North America. **VHP has been implicated in various violent incidences including the 2002 Gujrat riots, the [demolition](#) of the Babri Masjid and various churches, and [violent 'cow protection' activities](#). One of its core activities is [encouraging, often coercing, conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism](#) (primary references can also be found [here](#)). In 2018 the CIA classified Vishwa Hindu Parishad as a [militant religious](#) organization.**

The Bajrang Dal

It forms the **youth wing of the VHP and has also been named by the CIA as a [religious militant](#) organization**. It is powerful in North and Central India where it runs 'akharas' (youth sports clubs often specializing in Martial Arts and sometimes offering boarding and lodging). In addition to orchestrating general [anti-Muslim](#) and sometimes [anti-Dalit \(lower castes\)](#) violence, Bajrang Dal has, perhaps more than any other RSS affiliate, concentrated in [anti-Christian violence](#) as well. It's the leader was found guilty of [burning alive Australian Christian missionary Graham Staines and his two children in 1999](#); Bajrang Dal has also been implicated in more recent **pogrom against Christians in Orissa that saw [100 people dead](#)**. Bajrang Dal has been active in the past two decades in many metropolitan cities as well as small towns as '[moral police](#)', often targeting courting couples. **Bajrang Dal has been described as Indian equivalent of Nazi Germany's Sturmabteilung¹.**

¹ Paul R. Brass (1997). Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence. Princeton University Press. p. 17. ISBN 0-691-02650-5

The Hindu Mahasabha

Founded in 1921, independently of the RSS, unlike all the other organisations mentioned here, the Hindu Mahasabha can be considered as a **sister organization** rather than a subsidiary of RSS. Many prominent past and present Hindutva personalities, including the murderer of M. K. Gandhi had or have dual affiliation of the Mahasabha and RSS. In the 1980s and 1990s BJP and Hindu Mahasabha increasingly joined forces over the issue of building a temple at the site of a standing 16th century mosque (Babri Masjid). This led to a dilution of identity for the Mahasabha. However, the powerful current chief minister of Uttar Pradesh come from the Mahasabha and though he joined BJP, he retains considerable independence from RSS. Hindu Mahasabha has been implicated in anti-Muslim and anti-Christian violence. Its leaders have called for [forcible sterilization](#) of non-Hindus.

Presence outside of India

RSS has extended its influence abroad, especially in USA, UK, Canada and Australia as well as many countries in Africa. Some of its organisations take on a different name abroad. The better-known ones are:

- **Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh (HSS):** literally, Hindu Volunteer Association overseas wing of RSS Documented at: [Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh](#).
- **Hindu Students Council**, Overseas Hindu Students' Wing, Mainly North America.
- **National Hindu Students' Forum**, Hindu student group in UK.
- **Sewa International**, UK based Charity –investigated for [misuse](#) of funds.
- **India Development and Relief Fund**, USA based charity - investigated for [misuse](#) of funds.
- **Rashtrereya bajrangdal {hanuman sena}**: Overseas branch of Bajrang Dal
- **VHP international**: international branches of VHP has [presence](#) world-wide, including in **Germany**, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.
- **Overseas friends of BJP**: Its UK branch was accused of interfering in UK [national elections](#).

In addition to these larger organizations, RSS has different dependent or affiliate bodies, some of which are officially related to RSS and some to which RSS strongly denies any ties. The different categories are enumerated below.

Charity organizations

RSS and its affiliates run a string of charity organizations that on one hand facilitate its outreach and recruitment, both

among the volunteers and among the beneficiaries, on the other hand this allows fund collection which was particularly important in the years before BJP came to power and could access state funds. Some of the more important names under which RSS runs these organizations are: [Seva Bharati](#), [Bharatiya Yuva Seva Sangh \(BYSS\)](#), [Lok Bharati](#), and [Deendayal Research Institute](#).

Schools, Educational and research institutes

These serve similar purpose as the charity organizations, to increase outreach and facilitate recruitment. They are also potent ground for grooming children for a later career in one of its organizations. Both charity work and educational work is of course also very good for propaganda. Some of the names under which they operate are *Bharat Sevashram*, *Hindu Milan Mandir*, *Ekal Vidyalayas*, and *Deendayal Research Institute*. Also, there are named direct subgroupings inside RSS: *Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal (BSM)* and *the Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas (SSUN)* and *Bharatiya Bhasha Manch (BBM)*.

Workers and farmers unions

The workers' and farmers' unions affiliated to the RSS are called [Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh](#) and [Bharatiya Kisan Sangh](#) respectively. Though many of their members may belong to another Hindutva organization, these unions themselves act mostly as legitimate trade-unions. They have occasionally joined hands with other trade-union bodies too and have spoken-out against certain policies of the government.

Extreme fringes

RSS has been called a “**mutating many headed snake**”. Indeed, there are many [outfits](#) that mushroom around **violent Hindu nationalist/Hindu upper caste supremacy ideas** that are sometimes loosely and sometimes strongly affiliated/connected to RSS. Some of the prominent ones are:

- *Sanatan Sanstha*: Its members have been accused of and arrested for multiple murders, including of prominent intellectuals like Gauri Lankesh, Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M. M. Kalburgi. Members have also been arrested for four bombings in Vashi, Thane, Panvel (all in 2007) and Goa (in 2009). Arms and drugs have been recovered from members.
- *Shri Ram Sena*: Based in Maharashtra, accused in the Malegaon bomb blast case, infamous for harassment of pub-goers and young unmarried couples, also implicated in vandalisation of art exhibitions deemed to be ‘anti-Hindu’. As recently as 01.08.2020, they have been [accused](#) of threatening dissidents.
- *Dharam Jagaran Samanvay Samiti*: ‘encourage’ and organize conversion of muslims and christiana to Hinduism (mainly UP, perhaps Bihar)

- *Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasbha*: Infamous for glorifying the murderer of M. K. Gandhi.
- *Rashtriya Hindu Andolan*: Based in Maharashtra, wants to remove 'secular' from Indian constitution
- *Rashtravadi Shiv Sena*: Wants to enforce boycott of everything to do with Pakistan
- *Shiv Sena Hindustan*: Infamous for blackening road signs in Delhi for roads bearing names of past Muslim rulers
- *Hindu Janajagruti Samiti* : cultural vigilantism specialising in boycott of films.
- *Rashtriya Yuva Hindu Vahini (Hindu Yuva Vhini)*: Based in UP, specialising in violent 'cow protection', violence against inter-faith marriages, and coercive Hindu reconversion. Acts as militia for the current Chief Minister.
- *Hindu Dharma Sena*: Specialising in anti-Christian propaganda and harassment.
- *Hindu Makkal Katchi*: Based in Tamil Nadu, cultural vigilantism, specifically books.

- *Hindu Rashtra Sena*: Based in Maharashtra, accused of miscellaneous violent deeds including murder.

Conclusion

RSS operates in almost every aspect of Indian life inside India, and also overseas. This is achieved via various daughter and sister organisations, and the collective of these organisations is called RSS Family, or 'Sangh Parivar'. This immense involvement (highlighted in this report) has led Arundhati Roy, a Booker prize winner writer turned activist to [call](#) RSS 'No longer a shadow state or a parallel state, it is the state'. The Sangh Parivar has since 1947 been linked to many major incidents of [anti-minority](#) violence all across India. It has even been allegedly involved with interference in elections in western countries like U.S. and U.K.

It is therefore important that western democracies take note of this before it is too late.

