

## Shooting the Messenger

### What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- There has been a spree of mob lynching in recent times, due to alleged rumours that were spread through the messaging application “WhatsApp”.

\n

- But pinning the blame solely on WhatsApp for the violence is diversionary tactic to not address the larger malice that is plaguing our society.

\n

\n\n

### What is wrong with the current public narrative?

\n\n

\n

- **Post Truths** - In the age of social media, authenticated news is losing steam and is getting submerged within a mesh of online false propaganda.

\n

- It is easy to get swept in this wave of sensational social media forwards, which draw neat narratives which ignore factual complexity.

\n

- Rumours on WhatsApp that child kidnappers are roaming around have led to mob lynching at various places recently, killing about 20 people.

\n

- This has opened a debate on the growing use of technology by the “ignorant” masses and the responsibilities of a technology platform.

\n

- **The Blame** - Whatsapp does indeed have to do more for curtailing rumours on its platform and weeding out fake news.

\n

- But the public opinion, which is largely accusing Whatsapp, seems oblivious of the government’s responsibility to ensure the safety of all.

\n

- This also distracts us from paying attention to our current polarising political discourse, which is causing the social divide within the society.

\n

- The long overdue police reforms is another aspect is missing the public eye.

\n

\n\n

## What are the aspects that need attention?

\n\n

\n

- While technology is indeed an enabler for the faster dispersal of rumours, it is only a trigger and the undercurrent lies elsewhere.

\n

- **Data** - Government maintains no central data on public lynching - thereby making it hard to decipher clear trends, if any.

\n

- There is also no plan to start such a data collection in the near future and there is no specific legal framework to deal with lynching offences.

\n

- In the absence of official data or a substantive law, media briefing by the police become the principal source to build a public narrative.

\n

- For its part, police narratives have been largely simplistic and lacking in substantive data on the incident.

\n

- **Social Tensions** - Rumours of child kidnappers is the commonly stated reason, which has caused most of the recent lynching incidences.

\n

- But there seems to have been no realistic analysis on the profile of the victims who were trashed on mere suspicion, which in itself is a revealing tell tale.

\n

- Most victims were “nomadic tribes and people from religious minorities”, a trend that reflects our pre-existing social tensions and discriminatory outlook.

\n

- The “political vulnerability (lack of state support) and the ostensible cultural distinction” of the victim from the mob is likely to have precipitated the crime.

\n

- **Organised Assault** - Some scholars who’ve studies riots (which often involves public lynching), term them to be “organised political productions”.

\n

- Hence, as an extension lynching is not mere street madness, but there is an element of organization on the lines of some identity to establish dominance.

\n

- In this context, the current spree of lynching can’t be seen in isolation from

the previous ones that involved rampage by “Gau Rakshaks” (cattle brigade).

\n

- Notably, a fact-finding report titled “Lynching without end”, documented 24 instances of lynching and vigilante violence between 2014 and 2017.

\n

- The report finds that, the incidences led to the murder of 34 persons, and that 94% of these incidences were organised and 91% were cow related.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu**

\n\n

\n

