

# India's Economy And The Beef Ban: How Has The 2017 Beef In India Impacted The Local Economy?

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## Abstract

*The 2017 Beef Ban in India, enacted under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, sought to protect cows based on religious sentiments and claims of promoting agricultural productivity and cultural unity. However, the ban's implications extend far beyond its stated goals, significantly disrupting India's economy. This paper evaluates the ban's impacts across key areas, including agriculture, the meat and leather industries, dairy production, and public health.*

*Farmers experienced financial strain as cows transitioned from dual-purpose assets to liabilities, exacerbating rural poverty. The meat trade suffered revenue losses and layoffs, with India falling in global beef export rankings. Similarly, the leather industry has suffered from reduced supply, export losses, and rising unemployment, particularly affecting marginalized communities. Dairy production has stagnated as cattle rearing decreased, causing milk prices to rise. Public health has worsened for lower-income populations, as the loss of beef as an affordable protein source has contributed to malnutrition and anaemia. The environment and society have been affected by loose, unproductive cattle.*

*Drawing from a synthesis of secondary sources, this study highlights the broad economic and social ramifications of the Beef Ban, providing critical insights for policymakers regarding the unintended consequences of religiously motivated economic reforms.*

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## I. Introduction

In 2017, India decided to remove beef from slaughter markets, suspending its sale and purchase, issuing a notification, under the number G.S.R. 494(E), through the Gazette of India. The Bharatiya Janata Party, and Ministry of Environment of the Government passed this revolutionary and controversial legislature under Prevention of Cruelty to Animal (Regulation of Livestock Markets) statues, justifying the specific protection of cows through the Hindu belief that they are sacred. The ban provoked numerous debates and captured media attention - many argued that India should have remained neutral to beef as a secular country, while others argued that this would make the majority feel comfortable. Large groups contested the ban, claiming lower-income populations depend on beef and India is “killing the country’s largest economy of the poor”.<sup>1</sup> Conversations surrounding whether the ban protects the lives of animals or subjects’ unproductive cattle to irrelevance and mistreatment continue. Since 2017, the ban has conspicuously disrupted economic activity for Farmers, the Meat trade and numerous related industries have suffered losses.

Following the heated debates surrounding this topic, this research aimed to summarise the impact of the ban, synthesising arguments for and against the legislation, to conclude the nature of its effects for the Indian economy. Thus, informing policy makers and the wider public on how the 2017 Beef Ban in India impacted the domestic economy.

## Legislative background

India's most prominent religion is Hinduism at almost 80%,<sup>2</sup> of its population. Traditionally, the cow is considered a sacred animal in Hinduism, being closely associated with divine figures, beneficence, and motherly love. To devote Hindus therefore, meat and especially beef is often considered forbidden to consume. Following

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Mahapatra, “How India Is Killing the Country’s Largest Economy of the Poor,” Down To Earth, May 29, 2017, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/agriculture/how-india-is-killing-the-country-s-largest-economy-of-the-poor-57964>.

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Kramer, “Population Growth and Religious Composition,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, September 21, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/09/21/population-growth-and-religious-composition/>.

this belief, there have been a series of demonstrations in favour of cow protection laws, which intensified after India's independence. India has also historically implemented many partial protection laws.

However, in 2014 the pro-Hindu BJP government came to power and the beef restrictions were strengthened. In May 2017, the Indian government implemented a nationwide ban on the sale of cattle for slaughter, introduced under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960. The ban specifically targeted the sale of cattle at livestock markets and fairs for slaughter-related purposes, with severe punishments for violation including fines and imprisonment.

The BJP government justified this legislation with the claim that it would promote cultural cohesion, identity and foster a sense of unity among Hindus while also protecting animal welfare. There were also purported benefits for the economy, where the government explained that ensuring a stable population of cattle would benefit agricultural productivity, milk availability and vegetarian sources of protein may be healthier and more hygienic.<sup>3</sup>

Still, some states like Kerala, Goa, West Bengal, and India's northeastern states, where beef consumption was more common, continue to have more lenient regulations. This ban was also specific to cow meat, and barring a few states (such as Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh) and union territories (such as Chandigarh) buffalo slaughter is generally permitted. The laws regarding cattle slaughter vary significantly by state, so in some regions, beef was still permitted under certain conditions, though the new rules made it harder to acquire cattle for this purpose.

Although it's important to clarify that India already had long standing restrictions on cow slaughter in many states even before the 2017 regulations, cow slaughter effectively ended in 2017 due to the ban. Though there continue to be disparities in the ban's legislation across states, its implementation has affected the lives of India's citizens.

## II. Methodology

This research aims to evaluate the impact of the ban based on secondary sources, including existing research studies, case studies, interviews and articles. The impact of the beef ban will be measured across four critical areas: the cost to farmers and employment; to associated industries (the meat trade, dairy industry, leather industry); the health costs; environmental cost and the social cost. Key data has been drawn from articles, news reports, case-study focused research papers and government published reports. This paper is limited in its ability to conduct a cost-benefit analyses, due to the abstract and subjective nature of assessed sub-variables, however it provides an overall image of the severity by which economic variables were affected.

## III. Impacts

### Farmers

A most significant impact of the closure of beef sales was its impact on India's farmers, who relied heavily on income from cattle especially during periods of drought or crop failure.

India's livestock sector is substantial, contributing over 4% to India's total GDP and over 27% to agricultural GDP and,<sup>4</sup> according to India's 2012 livestock census, the sector consisted of approximately 190.9 million cows and bulls and 108.7 million water buffaloes.<sup>5</sup> The sheer volume and contribution of cattle highlights their significance in rural economies.

For farmers, cows used to serve as dual investments, first providing dairy, and then meat. Farmers could sell old, unproductive cattle and earn a secondary income stream. Bulls and bullocks were sold for approximately ₹20,000-50,000 after a period of productive use.<sup>6</sup> However, reports following the ban indicate 20-30% declines in cattle prices that have persisted and further decreased since.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Finology, "Is Beef Banned in India?," blog.finology.in, September 9, 2022, <https://blog.finology.in/Legal-news/is-beef-banned-in-india>.

<sup>4</sup> Mohsin Khan, "Impact of Beef Ban on Economy and Meat Processing Industry of India : A Complete Value Chain Analysis," *Management Studies and Economic Systems* 2, no. 4 (March 2016): 325–34, <https://doi.org/10.12816/0035639>.

<sup>5</sup> India Today, "From the India Today Archives (2015) | the Politics of Beef, Ban and Bloodshed," India Today, March 2, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/from-the-india-today-archives-2015-the-politics-of-beef-ban-and-bloodshed-2341767-2023-03-02>.

<sup>6</sup> Anam Khan et al., "Beef Ban in India: A Multi-Dimensional Issue," April 2020, <https://doi.org/10.5530/jppcm.2020.1.1>.

<sup>7</sup> Aparna Tripathi, "BEEF BAN:- EFFECT on INDIAN FARMERS," Indian National Bar Association (Indian Bar Association), accessed August 28, 2024, <https://www.indianbarassociation.org/beef-ban-effect-on-indian-farmers/>.

The ban on beef has turned cows from valuable assets into economic liabilities,<sup>8</sup> and although many farmers have emphasised livestock ownership of other animals, the efficiency of the cow's simultaneous milk-production and beef provision was lost. Hence jeopardising a relatively stable contributor to farmers' volatile incomes and contributing to the rural-urban poverty gap.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, since cows live double the age they produce milk, farmers will have to spend more on feed, and care at an estimated (INR) 7500 a month per unproductive cattle.<sup>8</sup> Further, as the demand for fodder by farmers increases, it is likely to be grown more, taking away land from other agricultural products and pushing their prices up - thus significantly distorting the agricultural sector economics with crops like maize, alfalfa, and sorghum grown at the cost of rice, wheat pulses and cash crops like sugarcane or cotton.<sup>10</sup> In fact, India's livestock productivity following the ban was estimated to be lower than the global average primarily due to the deficiency of feed and fodder.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from the loss of direct income, the ban also affected employment in related sectors. With many economic agents, including traders, butchers, retailers, restaurants, beef processors and exporters losing income.<sup>12</sup> Hence creating structural unemployment and affecting numerous industries - which placed further economic strains on local communities.

### **Meat trade**

First, the closure of the cattle industry led to a substantial loss of revenue, employment and income, with the meat industry alone employing 2.2 million people in India,<sup>13</sup> and ancillary industries even more.<sup>14</sup> Besides, with slaughterhouses losing their supply - of which an estimated 90% of their beef came from these now-banned markets, they were rendered inefficient and meat processors effectively closed down.<sup>15</sup>

India has suffered a significant loss of export led income and growth, due to the supply chain disruptions. Beef contributed substantially to the GDP and India was, according to the US Department of Agriculture, second largest exporter of buffalo beef world-wide, with India's exports having grown from approximately US\$0.55 billion in the 2008-09 fiscal year to approximately US\$5.5 billion during the 2016 fiscal year - at a compounded annual growth rate of 29 percent.

Although India was the world's largest exporter overall of beef as of 2014,<sup>16</sup> by 2024 it dropped to the 3rd largest.<sup>17</sup> This reflects the cost of the ban on India's wealth and growth. The ban has had a lasting impact on

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<sup>8</sup> Murali Krishnan, "Cattle Sale Ban Leads to Beef Fests," dw.com (Deutsche Welle, May 31, 2017), <https://www.dw.com/en/cattle-sale-ban-leads-to-beef-fests-in-india/a-39057791>.

<sup>9</sup> Vikas Rawal, "On Economic Implications of Restrictions on Cow Slaughter," Peoplesdemocracy.in (Peoples Democracy, July 2017), [https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2017/07/16\\_pd/economic-implications-restrictions-cow-slaughter](https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2017/07/16_pd/economic-implications-restrictions-cow-slaughter).

<sup>10</sup> Kirit S Parikh, "The Assault on Dairy: Why an Effective Ban on Cow Slaughter May Soon Banish the Cow Itself," Times of India Voices (Times of India, April 9, 2017), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/the-assault-on-dairy-why-an-effective-ban-on-cow-slaughter-may-soon-banish-the-cow-itself/>.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Mahapatra, "How India Is Killing the Country's Largest Economy of the Poor," Down To Earth (Down To Earth, May 29, 2017), <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/agriculture/how-india-is-killing-the-country-s-largest-economy-of-the-poor-57964>.

<sup>12</sup> Vijay Pereira et al., "Cui Bono? Cow Slaughter Ban and Its Impact on Business and Society in India," *Organization*, May 6, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505084241247451>.

<sup>13</sup> Brajendar K Parashar, M Tariq Khan, and Gulam Jeelani, "UP Slaughterhouses: All about the Rs 15,000-Cr Industry That Employs 25 Lakh People," Hindustan Times, March 27, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/up-s-slaughterhouses-a-rs-15-000-crore-industry-that-provides-livelihood-to-25-lakh-people/story-7ZLE81JFynBFWzRGZFVLfK.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Reuters, "Financial Express," *Financialexpress.com* (Financial Express, May 29, 2017), <https://www.financialexpress.com/policy/economy-cattle-trade-ban-to-halt-beef-exports-lead-to-job-losses-691540/>.

<sup>15</sup> Bradley Dunseith, "Beef Ban in India: Repercussions for Meat, Leather, and Dairy Industries," *India Briefing News* (India Briefing, June 13, 2017), <https://www.india-briefing.com/news/beef-ban-india-meat-leather-dairy-industries-14421.html/>.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, "India Emerges as Major Beef Exporter," *Usda.gov*, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=79039>.

<sup>17</sup> David Miller, "World Beef Trade," *iowafarmbureau.com*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.iowafarmbureau.com/Article/World-Beef-Trade>.

India's exports, forcing reliance on buffalo meat and restricting the potential volume of exports and subsequent profit.

### **Associated Industries:**

#### **Leather industry**

Furthermore, the leather industry, which depends on a steady supply of cattle, was also vulnerable to the supply disruptions. Valued at around US\$12 billion, India's leather industry was a critical supplier to "international brands like Armani, Prada and Zara".<sup>18</sup> An estimated 40% of Agra was dependent on the industry<sup>19</sup>, alongside many more regions like Karnataka, where the beef industry is valued at Rs 500 crore and employs nearly 40 lakh families. In recognition of this, the Prime Minister's 2014 "Make it India" initiative targeted the growth of the leather industry but was cut off by the 2017 ban which prohibits bovine from being "sold or flayed for leather" stating they must be incinerated instead.

The ban has therefore shifted the international market's perceptions of India's climate, with many retailers shifting towards countries like Bangladesh and orders decreasing by about 60%. China especially flooded the market with cheaper exports, making India's supply uncompetitive. Consequently, prices for leather have plummeted, with reports indicating that the cost of leather sheets has dropped from ₹50 per foot in 2014 to ₹22 per foot in 2024, many small businesses have closed and structural unemployment has rocketed with reports indicating even remaining workers suffered from 50% wage cuts in the ban's aftermath.<sup>20</sup>

India's leather exports therefore saw negative growth by 9.86% in 2017 immediately after the ban, and further, lasting falls since. Meanwhile manufacturers have turned towards imports of finished leather, which has been rising by 15-20% annually, as a substitute, indicating the damage done to India's GDP.<sup>21</sup> This threatens local economies, while increasing dependency on foreign countries.

This has markedly decreased employment. In one locality in Bangalore (D.J. Halli) the number of skin-curing units dropped from 250 to just 10-15 after the beef ban was passed. Because the industry employed significant portions of marginalised communities, including dalits and muslims, slaughterhouses that once employed 5000 workers decreasing employment to 150-200,<sup>22</sup> has had many long-term impacts in exacerbating poverty and social instability.

Similar effects have been felt across India, with 75,000 workers in regions like Vellore (India's "leather hub") losing their jobs due to layoffs in tanneries and allied industries. These sectors once employed approximately 1.5 lakh workers, many of whom were women.<sup>23</sup> Although a significant portion of the reduced business is accounted for by increasing consumer trends against leather and animal-derived products, demonetisation impacting cash driven retailers, pollution control regulation and GST (goods and service taxes), it is clear that beef politics have intensified losses.

Thus, exemplifying the damage done by the ban to the leather industry and employment, one of India's prominent economies. Indicating that the repercussions extend beyond the meat trade and affect a vast number of families dependent on related industries.

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<sup>18</sup> Bradley Dunseith, "Beef Ban in India: Repercussions for Meat, Leather, and Dairy Industries," India Briefing News (India Briefing, June 13, 2017), <https://www.india-briefing.com/news/beef-ban-india-meat-leather-dairy-industries-14421.html/>.

<sup>19</sup> Tommy Wilkes, "Cattle Slaughter Ban Ripples through India's Leather Industry," mint, June 14, 2017, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/3duNgW1a0MFb29HI412UJL/Cattle-slaughter-ban-ripples-through-Indias-leather-industr.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Suchetana Ray and Dhruvo Jyoti, "Leather to Meat, How BJP's Beef Crackdown Is Devastating Dalits and Muslims," Hindustan Times, June 24, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/hanging-out-to-dry-indian-leather-and-meat-industry-in-deep-shock/story-bOsVY4INdAAkg3Ag92mTAM.html>.

<sup>21</sup> IANS, "Slaughterhouse Ban to Hit Leather Goods Industry, Impact Make in India," business-standard.com (Business Standard, April 1, 2017), [https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/slaughterhouse-ban-to-hit-leather-goods-industry-impact-make-in-india-117040100264\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/slaughterhouse-ban-to-hit-leather-goods-industry-impact-make-in-india-117040100264_1.html).

<sup>22</sup> Anusha Ravi Sood, "'We're Finished': Farmers, Traders Say Karnataka Cattle Slaughter Law Brought Year of Misery," ThePrint (theprint, January 10, 2022), <https://theprint.in/india/were-finished-farmers-traders-say-karnataka-cattle-slaughter-law-brought-year-of-misery/796924/>.

<sup>23</sup> R Sivakumar, "75,000 Workers Lose Jobs as Vellore's Leather Industry Goes into Layoff Mode," The New Indian Express, July 27, 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2020/Jul/27/75000-workers-lose-jobs-as-vellores-leather-industry-goes-into-layoff-mode-2175554.html>.

### **Dairy industry**

Similarly, the loss of the dual investment potential of cows discouraged farmers from rearing cattle which they cannot monetize effectively. Aside from the negative impacts on equity, since farmers are already low-income earners now suffering from increased financial pressure, this threatened many small-scale dairy farms.

Many farmers chose to reduce their herd sizes, adversely affecting India's milk supply. Although India has been the highest milk producer and ranks first position in the world contributing 25% of global milk production,<sup>24</sup> this ban risked its position. This can also be linked to the increased milk prices, where the average retail price of milk has increased by nearly 19% between 2021-23, due to the supply constraints and rising operational costs for farmers.<sup>25</sup>

Despite immediate drops in the growth of the Dairy industry, external developments in technology, and disease medication for livestock have supplemented decreased growth. Hence, while the ban initially posed many challenges for farmers who only sold cattle when they became unproductive and therefore did not create more milk output when cattle could not be sold, recent developments have at least partially overcome the losses from the ban.

Yet, the dairy industry's growth seems to have plateaued and is now decreasing at 5.77% in FY2022,<sup>26</sup> 3.83% in 2022-2023 and 3.78% in 2023-2024.<sup>27</sup> Thereby suggesting decentivising long-term effects for farmers producing dairy.

### **Nutritional cost**

In addition to the cost of dairy and other agricultural goods, rural communities lost a source of cheap and nutritious meat, which incurred severe health costs. Note that although most Indians are Hindus, many Hindus consumed beef before the ban, making these health costs far-reaching.

Many families, especially lower income groups relied on beef as an affordable source of protein, rich with iron. The loss of this source has led to bitter costs in maternal nutrition, causing poor foetal development. One study found that in the neonatal mortality rate increased by 5 per 1000 live births among previously beef-consuming communities following the ban<sup>28</sup>. Another described how the ban could "reduce women's haemoglobin and increase the incidence of severe anaemia by as much as 27 percent".<sup>29</sup> And many - how the ban of beef provokes increasing malnutrition in children, which makes them vulnerable to infectious diseases and accounts for more than half of under 5 mortality<sup>30</sup>. These studies are especially crucial as Indian diets are not typically strong in iron, with wheat and rice that typically make-up meals limiting the absorption of iron.

Therefore, the ban has seriously damaged health outcomes, especially in rural communities, which is crucial as reports by the World Bank explain how prior to the ban, India already struggled with the highest number of malnourished children. This is not only associated with decreasing living standards and economic well-being but has broader economic implications on labour force productivity and development - potentially leading to a 6% loss in India's real GDP per capita.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Invest India, "Dairy Industry in India - Growth, FDI, Companies, Exports," [www.investindia.gov.in](http://www.investindia.gov.in), 2024, <https://www.investindia.gov.in/sector/animal-husbandry-and-dairying/dairy>.

<sup>25</sup> Darshan Devaiah BP, "Not Just Beef-Eaters, Karnataka's Anti-Cattle Slaughter Bill Will Hit Farmers, Tanners and More," *The Indian Express*, December 20, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/bangalore/not-just-beef-eaters-karnatakas-anti-cattle-slaughter-bill-will-hit-farmers-tanners-and-more-7111398/>.

<sup>26</sup> PIB Delhi, "Year End Review 2023: Achievement of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying)," [Pib.gov.in](http://pib.gov.in), December 20, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1988609>.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying, "Release of Basic Animal Husbandry Statistics 2024 on the Occasion of National Milk Day 2024," [Pib.gov.in](http://pib.gov.in), November 26, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2077745>.

<sup>28</sup> Min Kim, "Sacred Cows: The Impact of Slaughter Bans on Neonatal Mortality in India \*," December 3, 2021, [https://www.econ.iastate.edu/files/inline-files/min\\_jmp-1.pdf](https://www.econ.iastate.edu/files/inline-files/min_jmp-1.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Aparajita Dasgupta, Farhan Majid, and Wafa Hakim Orman, "The Nutritional Cost of Beef Bans in India," *Journal of Development Economics* 163 (June 2023): 103104, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2023.103104>.

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF, "Malnutrition in Children - UNICEF Data," UNICEF, May 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition/malnutrition>.

<sup>31</sup> Aparajita Dasgupta, Muhammad Farhan Majid, and Wafa Hakim Orman, "The Nutritional Cost of Beef Bans in India," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, March 29, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4129350>.

Furthermore, traders fear rises in illegal trade and poor quality, or risky meat caused by the formation of parallel markets and unlicensed, underground sellers.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the nutritional cost of the ban extends beyond immediate dietary costs but poses long-term health risks for vulnerable populations. Thus, suggesting that the bans, while aimed at promoting bovine welfare, has negative consequences on human health.

### **Animal welfare and other costs to society**

In order to avoid the aforementioned costs of caring for unproductive cattle, many farmers have resorted to leaving them loose to care for themselves, as stated by a farmer in an interview, "People quietly abandon their unproductive cows in the night".<sup>33</sup> Especially as unproductive cattle no longer play a role in ploughing fields or creating fertilisers, but have been replaced by technology and chemical fertilisers. As acknowledged by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, stray cattle populations have therefore increased with an estimated 40 million unproductive cattle at the risk of being abandoned, whereas previously there were 5 million. The number of stray cattle has risen each year the beef legislature has tightened, and after the ban has skyrocketed, with several external impacts.

Although the government has responded by trying to establish cow shelters (gaushalas) pouring 41 million dollars into 5000 shelters it is not enough to compensate for the cattle population. Besides, financial aid offered to farmers to maintain cattle has also been insufficient.

Hence the number of cattle on India's roads has had severe impacts on traffic congestion - thus increasing the waste of fuel, increasing emissions and reducing efficiency. Aside from higher travel time, this has also caused numerous accidents. In Haryana alone, between 2018 and 2022, stray cattle were involved in 3,383 road accidents, leading to over 900 fatalities. Note that they have also facilitated the transmission of zoonotic diseases, such as lumpy skin disease, bacterial infections (brucellosis), anthrax, plague, tuberculous, spotted fever and rabies and more as assessed by the WHO.

Further, there have been extensive reports on crop damage caused by stray cattle. A study described how 97.5% of respondents reported 60-65% loss of crop and forage resources.<sup>34</sup> Not only does this incur environmental costs, degrading land quality by increasing soil compaction and erosion, but it has severe long-term impacts on agricultural productivity and causes psychological stress to farmers. The constant fight against cattle and loss of crop yields has been a reported cause of many farmer suicides, especially as farmers felt powerless defending their crops against cows due to high penalties and punishments when cows were beaten or killed.

Additionally, enteric fermentation as part of digestion in cattle produces mass amounts of methane, with a single cow being able to emit approximately 220 pounds (about 100 kg) of methane annually.<sup>35</sup> Although not quantified, it therefore follows that stray cattle contribute substantial amounts of greenhouse gases, exacerbating the climate crisis and global warming and further damaging the environment.

Finally, most stray cattle have suffered immensely before death. Many mainstream media sources have described cattle eating plastic from garbage dumps, starving to death, dying of thirst or heat - all of which cause slow and painful deaths. This brings to question the success of the ban in protecting animal welfare, wherein it may arguably be more humane to kill the animals, than let them die on the roads.

### **Political and religious implications**

Despite the policy aiming to promote social cohesion, among Hindus, it fuelled division. By eroding the rights of individual states and forcing Muslims, Christians, Jews and more to follow a Hindu belief, many claim that the ban has threatened India's secularism. Besides, many Dalits, who have historical roots in caste discrimination being the lowest cast, where they have traditionally been assigned roles related to animal slaughter and skinning, suffered disproportionately following the ban, losing employment. In fact, many Dalits relied on

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<sup>32</sup> Poulomi Banerjee, "Meat of the Matter: How Beef Ban Affects Leather, Exports and Chemical Industry," Hindustan Times, March 22, 2015, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/meat-of-the-matter-how-beef-ban-affects-leather-exports-and-chemical-industry/story-q6qLCPfV2hpijG0xSHQNGJ.html.q6qLCPfV2hpijG0xSHQNGJ.html>

<sup>33</sup> Business Insider, "India Loves Its Cows. But with 5 Million Strays, That's Becoming a Problem," South China Morning Post, April 18, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3217392/india-loves-its-cows-5-million-strays-thats-becoming-problem>.

<sup>34</sup> Mahendra Singh, "Challenges of Stray Cattle on Integrated Crop-Forage Resources in India," Uknowledge (Department of Agronomy: College of Agriculture, G B Pant University of Agriculture & Technology), accessed November 30, 2024, <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6653&context=igc>.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Quinton, "Cows and Climate Change," UC Davis, June 27, 2019, <https://www.ucdavis.edu/food/news/making-cattle-more-sustainable>.

beef which was half the cost of chicken, and it was a meat essential to impoverished lower-caste Hindus alongside other religions, due to its affordability and nutrition.<sup>36</sup>

Hence, by criminalising beef, the government has intensified cultural and religious tensions, with many claiming it prompted the Islamic community's marginalisation (India's second largest religious group) and difficulties for many Dalits.<sup>37</sup> It has been used as a political tool to polarise Hindus and Muslims, leading to vast communal violence and undermining India's secular fabric. In

<sup>38</sup>Widespread reports of Cow Vigilante Groups, enacting violence on anyone accused of eating beef or hurting cows have been a source of immense concern. Encouraged by the ban, and policies like UP's requirement for locals, "to report any dead cows to the local authorities. Any deaths that raise suspicion require a postmortem."

Not only has this caused fear among Muslims and Dalits, particularly in rural areas, but resulted in numerous murders and serious injury. For instance, the BBC reported in May 2023, a man describing how his friend was beaten to death by a group of Hindu men, who saw a cow tied in the back of his car, though he was just transporting the animal.<sup>39</sup>

This lynching, despite receiving media coverage, was only condemned by the Prime minister in August 2018<sup>40</sup>, but has not been strictly controlled and continues. Subsequently, the ban has fostered increased surveillance, discrimination and violence against these communities. Further, the ban has increased inequality, infringing on the food rights of many individuals, especially lower income groups, who relied on beef. Thus, amplifying issues of malnutrition and economic disparity.

Consequently, the ban incited social violence which may, over the long-term discourage cow ownership, and negatively impacted many marginalised communities, although earning political popularity for the BJP among Hindus.

#### **IV. Conclusion And Discussion**

India's 2017 ban on beef has been substantially controversial having far-reaching effects on the economy, society as well as health. The state justified the legislation on grounds of preserving cultural values, enhancing protection of animals in the country and ensuring unification of Hindus but its socio-economic impacts suggest considerable trade-offs.

Of the sectors evaluated, the most severe and most noticeable disruption caused to the economic disruption arose in the farmers' (and workers in ancillary industries) livelihood, particularly the meat trade and leather sectors. Farmers, already vulnerable to agricultural instability, faced heightened financial strain due to the diminished value of cattle, the loss of a critical income stream, and rising costs for fodder and unproductive livestock. The decline in cattle prices, rising costs of fodder, and loss of employment highlight how deeply the ban undermined rural livelihoods and broader economic stability. These effects were felt most in the leather industry as job cuts and low wages increased social injustice among the Dalits and Muslims. These factors not only deepened the income disparity between rural and urban women but also resulted in structural unemployment which fostered regional poverty.

The losses in the leather industry, which was integral to "Make in India" initiatives and suffered severe contractions in employment and global competitiveness, led to production and trade shifting to alternative markets like Bangladesh. As such, this loss in export of beef has decreased India's status as a global exporter thereby decreasing the huge value of inflow of foreign income. Together, these impacts underscored the interconnected nature of India's cattle-based industries and the sweeping effects of the ban.

In contrast, the dairy industry showcased a more nuanced narrative. While initially affected by reduced herd sizes and rising costs, the industry has partially recovered through external technological advancements and disease management. Nonetheless, its growth has slowed, signalling long-term caution about the effects of diminished incentives for cattle rearing.

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<sup>36</sup> Cherie Chung, "A Ban on Beef: Who Will Benefit?," Georgetown.edu, 2015, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/a-ban-on-beef-who-will-benefit>.

<sup>37</sup> Business Insider, "India Loves Its Cows. But with 5 Million Strays, That's Becoming a Problem," South China Morning Post, April 18, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3217392/india-loves-its-cows-5-million-strays-thats-becoming-problem>.

<sup>38</sup> Jayanth Deshmukh, "Beef Down: Implications of Beef Ban on Indian Communities," International Policy Digest, May 1, 2019, <https://intpolicydigest.org/beef-down-implications-of-beef-ban-on-indian-communities/>.

<sup>39</sup> BBC, "Deaths Raise Fresh Fears over Cow Vigilantism in India," *BBC News*, May 8, 2023, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-65229522>.

<sup>40</sup> Business Insider, "India Loves Its Cows. But with 5 Million Strays, That's Becoming a Problem," South China Morning Post, April 18, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3217392/india-loves-its-cows-5-million-strays-thats-becoming-problem>.

The ban's nutritional implications were similarly concerning, as it removed a vital, affordable protein source for low-income households. The loss of beef consumption has been linked to increased maternal anemia, child malnutrition, and rising neonatal mortality rates, exacerbating pre-existing public health challenges. The health costs, though less visible than the immediate losses in trade and employment, have long-term economic ramifications through reduced labour productivity and increased healthcare costs.

Paradoxically, while the ban aimed to protect cattle, it has led to unintended consequences for animal welfare. Many farmers, unable to afford the upkeep of unproductive cattle, have abandoned them, increasing the prevalence of stray animals while raising ethical and environmental concerns.

In evaluating the ban, it is evident that its benefits, primarily cultural cohesion and potential animal welfare improvements, come at a high cost. The ban has strained India's secular fabric, disrupted key industries, and deepened social and economic inequalities. Moreover, the emergence of black markets and unregulated slaughter practices undermines the ban's original intent, raising questions about its long-term feasibility.

To mitigate these effects, policymakers must explore alternative solutions that balance cultural sensitivities with economic realities. Possible interventions could include subsidies for cattle maintenance, targeted social welfare programs for affected communities, and investments in alternative protein sources. Additionally, a more nuanced, state-specific approach to cattle legislation may better accommodate India's diverse cultural and economic landscape.

In conclusion, while the 2017 beef ban sought to align with cultural values and promote animal welfare, its broader implications highlight the complexities of imposing such sweeping policies in a socioeconomically diverse nation. Moving forward, it is crucial to address these unintended consequences to ensure a more equitable and sustainable future for all stakeholders.

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