

24 JAN
1950
RENAMED

STATE PROFILE · REPUBLIC OF INDIA

Uttar Pradesh

India's most populous state — from the Vedic heartland of the Gangetic plain to a \$350-billion economy racing toward a trillion-dollar target.

243M

POPULATION, 2026 EST.

₹29.8L cr

GSDP, 2024-25

75 / 18

DISTRICTS / DIVISIONS

#1

MOST POPULOUS SUB-NATIONAL JURISDICTION ON EARTH

Compiled July 2026 · Sources: Census of India, MoSPI/StatisticsTimes, NFHS-5, NITI Aayog, UP Economic Survey 2025-26, UPEIDA, UP Tourism

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At a Glance

Uttar Pradesh is a paradox written at continental scale: a state so populous that if it stood alone it would be the fifth-largest country on Earth, anchored in the Gangetic plain that has hosted more of India's civilizational history than any other tract of land, yet ranking near the bottom of India's states on per-capita income. It is where the Ramayana's Ayodhya, the Buddha's Sarnath, the Mughals' Agra, and the Nawabs' Lucknow all sit within a day's drive of each other — and where, in the same breath, 21st-century electronics factories in Noida and a nascent defence-manufacturing corridor are trying to out-run a demographic wave that keeps arriving faster than jobs can be created for it.

Lucknow

STATE CAPITAL

Kanpur

LARGEST CITY

24 Jan 1950

RENAMED UTTAR PRADESH

240,928 km²

AREA

₹29.8L crore

GSDP, 2024-25

243M+

WORLD'S MOST POPULOUS SUB-NATIONAL JURISDICTION

“Uttar Pradesh's population makes it not only India's most populous state but, were it an independent country, the world's fifth most populous nation — bigger than Brazil, and nearly the size of Nigeria.

— derived from Census of India 2011 and NCP 2011-2036 population projections

Snapshot. UP is governed as a single state within India's federal structure, with a bicameral legislature (Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad) seated in Lucknow and the Allahabad High Court (with a bench at Lucknow) as its apex judicial authority. It is organized into 18 administrative divisions and 75 districts — the most of any Indian state — a structure that has been redrawn repeatedly since Independence, most consequentially in 2000 when its Himalayan hill districts were carved off to form Uttarakhand. UP sends 80 members to the Lok Sabha, more than any other state, making it the single biggest prize in Indian national politics. It is known, in roughly equal measure, for being the religious and cultural heartland of Hindi-belt India (Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura, Prayagraj's Kumbh Mela), for the Mughal and Nawabi monuments that anchor its tourism economy (the Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri, Lucknow's Bara Imambara), for its sheer demographic and

electoral weight, and — less flatteringly — for a per-capita income that has long lagged the national average even as its aggregate GSDP ranks among India's largest three economies.

History

Few tracts of land anywhere have been continuously significant for as long as the Gangetic plain that forms Uttar Pradesh. Half of the sixteen Mahajanapadas of the Buddha's era sat within its present borders, and the region's ancient names — Kosala, Kashi, Kuru-Panchala, Shurasena — remain living religious geography today.

● c. 6000 BCE onward

Neolithic farming settlements appear across the Gangetic plain; Middle/Upper Palaeolithic artifacts in the region are dated to 21,000-31,000 years old, among the oldest evidence of human habitation in South Asia.

● c. 1500-600 BCE

The later-Vedic "Madhya Desh" takes shape here — home to the Kuru, Panchala, Kashi and Kosala peoples, and the Painted Grey Ware culture that marks South Asia's transition into the Iron Age.

● 6th century BCE

Eight of the sixteen great Mahajanapadas of the Buddha's lifetime — Kosala, Kashi, Kuru, Panchala, Shurasena (Mathura), Vatsa (Prayagraj), Malla (Kushinagar) and Chedi (Bundelkhand) — lie within modern UP's borders.

● c. 528 BCE

The Buddha delivers his first sermon at Sarnath, near Varanasi — the "Turning of the Wheel of Dharma" — and dies at Kushinagar around 483 BCE, making both towns among Buddhism's four holiest pilgrimage sites.

● 4th-5th century CE

Under the Mauryas and then the Gupta Golden Age, the plain around Prayag (Prayagraj) becomes a center of imperial power — dense Gupta-era inscriptions and coinage finds mark it as a political core, not merely a religious one.

● 606-647 CE

Harshavardhana rules a North Indian empire from his capital at Kannauj, stretching from Punjab and Gujarat to Bengal and Odisha — Kannauj's brief age as an imperial capital to rival Pataliputra.

● 1206 CE

Qutb-ud-din Aibak, having already taken Varanasi and Kannauj, establishes the Delhi Sultanate — beginning over three centuries of Sultanate rule across the Gangetic plain.

● **1526-1585 CE**

Babur founds the Mughal Empire; Agra becomes the imperial capital under Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and Akbar builds an entirely new planned capital at Fatehpur Sikri (1571-73) — abandoned within fifteen years for want of water, but preserved today as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

● **1724-1775 CE**

The Nawabs of Awadh build an independent kingdom from Faizabad and then Lucknow, ushering in a golden age of Indo-Islamic art, architecture, Urdu poetry and Awadhi cuisine that still defines Lucknow's identity.

● **1856-1858 CE**

The British annexation of Awadh (1856) helps trigger the 1857 Revolt, which erupts at Meerut on 10 May 1857 and spreads through Kanpur, Lucknow and Jhansi — where Rani Lakshmibai leads the resistance before her death in June 1858. Kanpur and Delhi fall back to British control within months, but fighting continues into 1858.

● **1902-1937**

The North-Western Provinces and Oudh are merged into the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (1902), shortened to "United Provinces" under the Government of India Act, 1935.

● **24 January 1950**

With India's new Constitution days from taking effect, the United Provinces — having absorbed the former princely states of Rampur, Benares and Tehri Garhwal — is renamed Uttar Pradesh.

● **9 November 2000**

Almost exactly fifty years after the renaming, UP's Kumaon and Garhwal hill divisions are carved off to form the new state of Uttarakhand, cutting the state from roughly 83 districts to 70 (since grown back to 75 through later subdivisions).

● **22 January 2024**

The Ram Mandir at Ayodhya is consecrated, triggering a tourism and infrastructure boom that has remade the town's economy within two years.

“Uttarakhand split from Uttar Pradesh on 9 November 2000 — precisely half a century, almost to the month, after the state itself was renamed Uttar Pradesh on 24 January 1950.

— Wikipedia, "Uttar Pradesh"; dates of Vedic-era events above follow traditional/textual chronology rather than fixed archaeological dating

Government, Politics & Administration

UP is one of only a handful of Indian states with a full bicameral legislature, and its 80 Lok Sabha seats make it the single largest bloc in Indian national politics — a scale of representation no other state approaches.

403 + 1

VIDHAN SABHA SEATS (ELECTED + 1 ANGLO-INDIAN NOMINEE)

100

VIDHAN PARISHAD (LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL) SEATS

80 / 31

LOK SABHA / RAJYA SABHA SEATS

160

SANCTIONED ALLAHABAD HIGH COURT JUDGES — INDIA'S LARGEST

58,757

GRAM PANCHAYATS

75

ZILA PANCHAYATS (ONE PER DISTRICT)

Structure. UP's Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) and Vidhan Parishad (Legislative Council) together make it one of only six Indian states retaining a bicameral legislature. The Governor, appointed by the President of India, is the constitutional head of state; the Chief Minister, who commands a majority in the Vidhan Sabha, holds executive authority. Judicially, the Allahabad High Court — founded 17 March 1866 as the High Court of Judicature for the North-Western Provinces at Agra, and relocated to Allahabad in 1875 — has a sanctioned strength of 160 judges, the largest of any High Court in India, and maintains a permanent bench at Lucknow to serve the state's western and central districts.

Panchayati Raj. Below the state government, UP runs a standard three-tier rural-governance structure: 75 zila panchayats (district councils, one per district), an intermediate tier of kshetra panchayats (block-level councils), and 58,757 gram panchayats at the village level — the largest panchayati raj network of any Indian state by sheer count, a direct function of UP's population. Urban governance runs in parallel through municipal corporations in the larger cities (Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Varanasi, Prayagraj, Meerut, Ghaziabad and others) and smaller municipal boards/nagar panchayats elsewhere.

Political weight. UP's 80 Lok Sabha seats — nearly 15% of the entire lower house — have made it the decisive battleground of almost every Indian general election since Independence; more Indian prime ministers have been elected from UP constituencies than from any other state. This weight cuts both ways: it gives UP outsized influence over national policy, but it also means the

state's own administrative capacity is stretched managing an electorate and bureaucracy of a scale most countries would recognize as their entire national government.

“The Allahabad High Court's sanctioned strength of 160 judges is the largest of any High Court in India — a direct consequence of governing a state whose population exceeds that of every country on Earth except China and India itself.

— Allahabad High Court; e-Committee, Supreme Court of India

Geography & Districts

Uttar Pradesh sits almost entirely within the Indo-Gangetic Plain — the Ganga entering near Bijnor and running southeast across the state as its central axis, joined by the Yamuna at the Sangam in Prayagraj. The Upper Ganga Plain (Meerut, Aligarh, Agra, Bareilly, Moradabad divisions) and Middle Ganga Plain (Lucknow, Ayodhya, Basti, Gorakhpur divisions) account for most of the state's alluvial expanse; a narrow Terai grassland belt runs along the Himalayan foothills in the north, while the far south breaks the pattern entirely — the dissected granite-gneiss Bundelkhand Upland (Jhansi, Lalitpur, Banda, Hamirpur, Mahoba, Chitrakoot) is semi-arid, drought-prone, and geologically unrelated to the plain around it. The Ganga (2,525 km overall), Yamuna, Ghaghara (Sarayu), Gomti, Rapti, Betwa and Chambal are the state's major rivers. Climate is humid subtropical with dry winters across most of the state, with a small semi-arid pocket in the far west; UP spans three of India's four seismic zones, with northern border districts in the more severe Zone IV.

7,680 km²

LARGEST DISTRICT (LAKHIMPUR
KHERI)

1,646 km²

SMALLEST DISTRICT (BHADOHI)

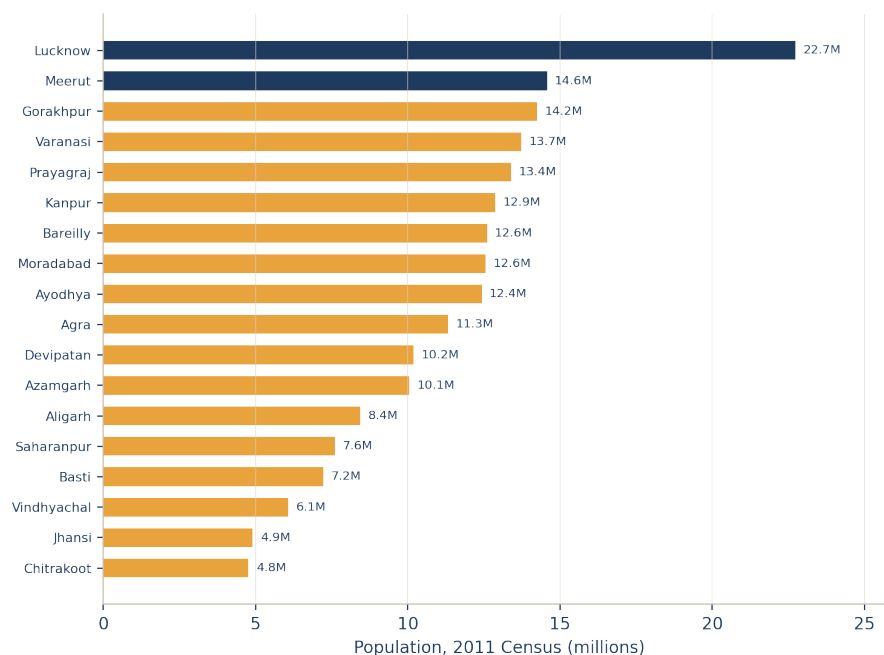
5.95M

MOST POPULOUS DISTRICT
(PRAYAGRAJ)

II-IV

SEISMIC ZONES SPANNED

Administrative structure. UP is organized into 18 divisions comprising 75 districts — more of each than any other Indian state. At Independence in 1947 the territory had just 49 districts across 10 divisions, a count that grew steadily as districts were subdivided through the late 20th century. The single biggest change came on 9 November 2000, when the Kumaon and Garhwal hill divisions (roughly 13 districts) were carved off to form Uttarakhand, cutting UP to 70 districts; a further round of splits between 2010 and 2011 — creating Amethi, Hapur, Shamli and Sambhal — brought the count to today's 75, unchanged since. A temporary 76th "district" was even declared for the Maha Kumbh Mela grounds at Prayagraj in late 2024, later re-merged after the festival concluded.



Population by administrative division, 2011 Census. Lucknow division (6 districts) is the most populous; Chitrakoot division, UP's poorest and most drought-prone region, the least.

All 75 districts by division (2011 Census population and area; figures reflect current district boundaries):

Division	District	Population	Area (km ²)
Agra	Agra	4,418,797	4,041
	Firozabad	2,498,156	2,407
	Mathura	2,547,184	3,340
	Mainpuri	1,868,529	2,760
Aligarh	Aligarh	3,673,889	3,788
	Etah	1,774,480	2,431
	Hathras	1,564,708	1,840
	Kasganj	1,436,719	1,955
Ayodhya	Ambedkar Nagar	2,397,888	2,350
	Amethi	2,050,133	2,329
	Ayodhya	2,470,996	2,522
	Barabanki	3,260,699	4,120
	Sultanpur	2,249,036	2,457
Azamgarh	Azamgarh	4,613,913	4,054

	Ballia	3,239,774	3,349
	Mau	2,205,968	1,713
Bareilly	Budaun	3,127,621	4,234
	Bareilly	4,448,359	2,688
	Pilibhit	2,031,007	3,686
	Shahjahanpur	3,006,538	4,388
Basti	Basti	2,464,464	4,561
	Sant Kabir Nagar	2,199,774	2,390
	Siddharthnagar	2,559,297	2,895
Chitrakoot	Banda	1,799,410	4,402
	Chitrakoot	991,730	3,216
	Hamirpur	1,104,285	4,021
	Mahoba	875,958	3,144
Devipatan	Bahraich	3,487,731	2,981
	Balrampur	2,148,665	4,408
	Gonda	3,433,919	4,003
	Shravasti	1,117,361	1,640
Gorakhpur	Deoria	3,100,946	2,540
	Gorakhpur	4,440,895	3,321
	Kushinagar	4,021,243	2,905
	Maharajganj	2,684,703	2,952
Jhansi	Jalaun	1,689,974	4,565
	Jhansi	1,998,603	5,024
	Lalitpur	1,221,592	5,039
Kanpur	Auraiya	1,379,545	2,016
	Etawah	1,581,810	2,311
	Farrukhabad	1,885,204	2,181
	Kannauj	1,656,616	2,093
	Kanpur Dehat	1,796,184	3,021
	Kanpur Nagar	4,581,268	3,155
Lucknow	Hardoi	4,092,845	5,986
	Lakhimpur Kheri	3,564,544	7,680
	Lucknow	4,589,838	2,528

	Raebareli	2,903,507	3,937
	Sitapur	4,483,992	5,743
	Unnao	3,108,367	4,558
Meerut	Baghpat	1,303,048	1,321
	Bulandshahr	3,499,171	4,441
	Gautam Buddha Nagar	1,648,115	1,282
	Ghaziabad	3,343,334	1,179
	Hapur	1,338,311	649
	Meerut	3,443,689	2,559
Moradabad	Amroha	1,840,221	2,249
	Bijnor	3,682,713	4,262
	Moradabad	3,126,507	2,233
	Rampur	2,335,819	2,367
	Sambhal	1,578,213	1,015
Prayagraj	Fatehpur	2,632,733	4,152
	Kaushambi	1,599,596	1,779
	Pratapgarh	3,209,141	3,717
	Prayagraj	5,954,391	5,482
Saharanpur	Muzaffarnagar	2,869,934	2,742
	Saharanpur	3,466,382	3,689
	Shamli	1,273,578	1,266
Varanasi	Chandauli	1,952,756	2,541
	Ghazipur	3,620,268	3,377
	Jaunpur	4,494,204	4,038
	Varanasi	3,676,841	1,535
Vindhyachal	Bhadohi	1,715,183	1,646
	Mirzapur	2,496,970	4,405
	Sonbhadra	1,862,559	6,905

Source: Census of India 2011, district-level table reorganized onto current (post-2011) district boundaries.

The 15 Most Significant Districts

L Lucknow — 4.59M • 2,528 km² • 1,816/km² • 77.3% literate

The state capital and seat of government, the Vidhan Sabha and the Allahabad High Court's Lucknow bench. Nawabi-era Awadhi heritage — chikankari embroidery, Bara Imambara, Rumi Darwaza — anchors a modern economy built on administration, education, aerospace/defence manufacturing (an HAL unit) and commerce.

K Kanpur Nagar — 4.58M • 3,155 km² • 1,452/km² • 79.7% literate

Historically "the Manchester of the East," built on 19th-century British military-supply demand for leather and textiles. Still contributes an outsized share of India's leather exports, though the tannery cluster has contracted sharply under pollution-control restrictions since 2017.

P Prayagraj — 5.95M • 5,482 km² • 1,086/km² • 74.4% literate

UP's most populous district, site of the Sangam and the Kumbh Mela (a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage), and seat of the Allahabad High Court, the state's highest judicial authority. Hosted the 2025 Maha Kumbh, by most accounts the largest human gathering ever recorded.

V Varanasi — 3.68M • 1,535 km² • 2,395/km² • 75.6% literate

Hinduism's holiest city on the Ganga's ghats, globally known for Banarasi silk brocades (a cluster employing roughly 30,000 weavers) and now a national tourism phenomenon — over 110 million visitor-arrivals in 2024 alone. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Lok Sabha constituency since 2014.

A Agra — 4.42M • 4,041 km² • 1,093/km² • 71.6% literate

Home to the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort (both UNESCO World Heritage Sites) and the former Mughal capital under Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The Taj alone draws 6-8 million visitors a year; leather and footwear manufacturing and iron foundries round out the district economy alongside agriculture (roughly 40% of residents still farm).

M Meerut — 3.44M · 2,559 km² · 1,346/km² · 72.8% literate

An NCR-adjacent industrial district and, alongside Jalandhar, one of only two major sports-goods manufacturing hubs in India. Also the flashpoint of the 1857 Rebellion; now linked to Delhi by the Namo Bharat rapid-rail corridor.

G Ghaziabad — 3.34M (post-split) · 1,179 km² · 2,836/km² · 78.1% literate

The core NCR industrial/manufacturing gateway bordering Delhi — among the state's most densely populated and most literate districts — but also one ranked among the most polluted urban areas on Earth.

N Gautam Buddh Nagar (Noida/Greater Noida) — 1.65M · 1,282 km² · 2,288/km² · 80.1% literate

UP's smallest population entry here but its most economically outsized: Noida-Greater Noida-YEIDA together contribute over 10% of UP's GSDP, host India's largest smartphone-manufacturing cluster, and its per-capita GDP (roughly ₹8.48 lakh) trails only Gurugram nationally among NCR districts.

B Bareilly — 4.45M · 2,688 km² · ~1,600/km² · ~59% literate

Historical capital of the Rohilkhand region; known as both "Zari Nagri" for its zari-zardozi embroidery trade and the "Furniture City of India," with a significant cotton and biscuit trade alongside.

Al Aligarh — 3.67M · 3,788 km² · 1,007/km² · 69.6% literate

Nationally synonymous with lock manufacturing (exported worldwide) and home to Aligarh Muslim University, a premier central university and historic center of Muslim intellectual and political life in India.

**Mo Moradabad — 3.13M (post-split) · 2,233 km² · 1,400/km² · 56.8%
literate**

"Peetal Nagri" (Brass City) — its brassware export cluster supplies more than 40% of India's total handicraft exports to over 80 countries, built on a 400-year sand-casting and hand-engraving tradition using local Ramganga river sand.

S Saharanpur — 3.47M · 3,689 km² · 940/km² · 70.5% literate

The "City of Wood Carving" — a nationally recognized ODOP craft cluster in shisham, mango and teak, exported internationally — alongside a significant paper industry.

Go Gorakhpur — 4.44M · 3,321 km² · 1,337/km² · 70.8% literate

Home to the Gorakhnath Temple, seat of the Nath monastic order and the political base of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, its head priest. A major North Eastern Railway hub with one of Asia's largest railway workshops.

J Jhansi — 2.00M · 5,024 km² · 398/km² · 75.1% literate

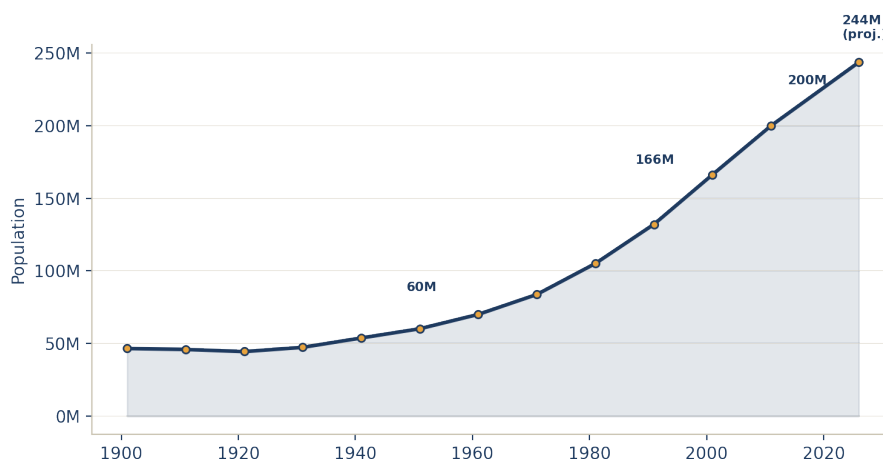
Historic gateway to Bundelkhand, its fort forever tied to Rani Lakshmibai's resistance in the 1857 Rebellion; today an administrative and agricultural-education hub anchoring one of UP's poorest, most drought-prone regions.

**Ay Ayodhya (formerly Faizabad) — 2.47M · 2,522 km² · 1,056/km² ·
~71% literate**

Site of the Ram Janmabhoomi and the Ram Mandir consecrated in January 2024, now UP's fastest-growing and politically most significant pilgrimage-tourism center, drawing major state infrastructure investment.

Population & Demographics

Uttar Pradesh has been India's most populous state at every Census since 1901. Its population actually fell between 1911 and 1931 (the 1921 dip coincides with the 1918-19 influenza pandemic and famine), then compounded upward through the 20th century, peaking in growth rate around 2001 and continuing to add tens of millions of people each decade since.



Decadal Census population, 1901-2011, with 2026 projection. Source: Census of India; Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Population Projection Report 2011-2036.

828/km²

DENSITY, 2011 (NATIONAL AVG. 382)

912

SEX RATIO, 2011 (NATIONAL AVG. 943)

67.7%

LITERACY, 2011 (M 77.3% / F 57.2%)

22.3% / 77.7%

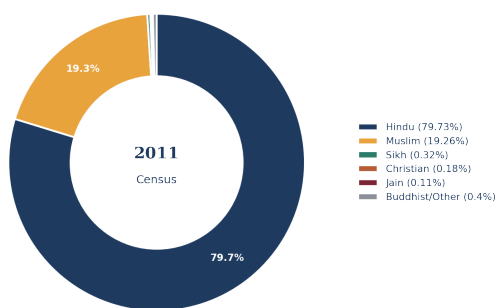
URBAN / RURAL SPLIT

20.7%

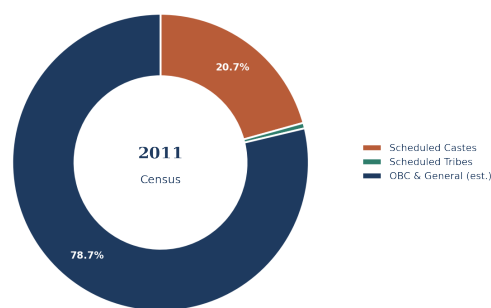
SCHEDULED CASTE POPULATION SHARE

2.4

TOTAL FERTILITY RATE (NFHS-5)



Religious composition, 2011 Census. UP's ~38.5 million Muslims are the largest Muslim population of any Indian state in absolute terms.



SC/ST are Census-enumerated categories; OBC has no official count since the 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census was never released — widely cited estimates put OBCs, with Yadavs the single largest group, at roughly 40-50% of the state.

Language. Hindi is the official language and mother tongue of roughly four in five residents, though this figure folds in several distinct regional tongues that the Census classifies as Hindi dialects: Awadhi (~3.8 million speakers, around Lucknow and Ayodhya), Bhojpuri (~25.5 million, across the eastern districts from Varanasi to Ballia), Braj (in the west, around Mathura and Agra) and Bundeli (in Bundelkhand). Urdu is co-official and UP holds India's largest absolute Urdu-speaking population — roughly 10.7 million people, a fifth of all Urdu speakers nationwide — though Urdu's share of the state's Muslim population has been declining as more residents register Hindi as their mother tongue on census forms.

A demographic story still being written. UP's health and nutrition indicators tell a story of dramatic but incomplete progress. Its maternal mortality ratio fell from 440 per 100,000 live births (2004-06) to a low of 141 (2020-22) — a two-thirds reduction — before ticking back up to 154 in the most recent bulletin, still roughly 1.8 times the national rate. Institutional deliveries rose from just 26% of births (2005-06) to 83% (2019-21), one of the fastest such transformations recorded in any large Indian state. Yet 40% of children under five remain stunted and 73 of UP's 75 districts still register anaemia at "public health concern" levels under WHO thresholds — a reminder that improving access to care has not yet fully translated into improved child health outcomes.

“Institutional deliveries in UP rocketed from just 26% of births in 2005-06 to 83% by 2019-21 — one of the fastest health-system transformations recorded in any large Indian state — yet two in five children under five are still stunted.

— NFHS-3, NFHS-4, NFHS-5; CEDA Ashoka GenderStats; NITI Aayog/IFPRI POSHAN State Nutrition Profile, March 2022

Culture, Festivals & Cuisine

UP's cultural calendar runs from the largest peaceful gathering of human beings on Earth to a village fair where women beat visiting men with sticks in joyful re-enactment of a Krishna legend — a range that reflects the state's status as both India's religious heartland and its most linguistically and culturally layered region.

Festivals. The Kumbh Mela rotates every 12 years among four sites, Prayagraj among them; UNESCO inscribed it in 2017 as the "largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on Earth." The Maha Kumbh — held once every 144 years — returned to Prayagraj in 2025, and the state government's own reporting put attendance above 66 crore (662 million) over 45 days, with roughly 8 crore on the single busiest day; independent commentators have questioned the precision of that count, but even conservative readings describe an event of unmatched scale. Ayodhya's Ram Mandir, consecrated 22 January 2024, has since anchored two Guinness World Records for its Deepotsav — over 26 lakh diyas lit simultaneously along the Saryu, and 1,121 devotees performing synchronized aarti together. Varanasi's Dev Deepawali lights roughly 10-25 lakh diyas across 84 ghats each Kartik Purnima, and the city's Dashashwamedh Ghat has run a nightly, seven-priest Ganga Aarti in its current choreographed form since 1991. Barsana and Nandgaon's "Lathmar Holi" re-enacts the legend of Krishna teasing Radha's gopis, who chased him off with sticks — women from Barsana beat visiting men from Nandgaon with lathis one day, and the ritual is reciprocated the next. Meerut's Nauchandi Mela, held every year but one since its founding, is built around a temple and a Muslim dargah sharing the same ground — a long-standing local symbol of Hindu-Muslim coexistence.

Performing arts. Kathak dance traces to temple storytellers (kathakars) and was reshaped under Mughal-court Persian influence; its Lucknow gharana was defined in the 19th century by Bindadin Maharaj and Kalka Prasad and carried into the modern era by their descendant Pandit Birju Maharaj. Nautanki, a 19th-century Braj-Awadhi-Bhojpuri folk theatre form centred on Hathras and Kanpur, produced its most celebrated performer in Gulab Bai (1926-1996), who founded her own touring company and received the Padma Shri in 1990. Ramlila — the dramatized performance of the Ramayana — was itself inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2008, with UNESCO specifically naming Ayodhya and the Ramnagar (Varanasi) tradition among its most representative forms; Ramnagar's version, dating to around 1830, is a unique 31-day performance, far longer than the 10-day format staged elsewhere in India.

Literature. Tulsidas composed the Ramcharitmanas in Awadhi at Varanasi from 1574 CE, deliberately choosing the vernacular over Sanskrit to make the Ramayana accessible to ordinary people — a choice that shaped Hindi devotional literature for the next four centuries. Munshi Premchand, born near Varanasi in 1880, became Hindi-Urdu fiction's foremost social realist, writing 14 novels and over 300 short stories. Lucknow's Nawabi court drew Delhi's leading Urdu poets after Mughal power declined — Mir Taqi Mir relocated under Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula's patronage in

1782 — and gave rise to a distinct, more ornate Lucknow ("Lakhnavi") school of Urdu verse, sustained through the institution of the mushaira (poetry gathering) and carried into the 20th century by poets like Josh Malihabadi.

Cuisine. Lucknow's Awadhi cuisine, built on Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula's court, is defined by dum pukht ("breath-cooking") — sealing ingredients in dough-lidded handis to slow-cook them, a technique popularly tied to the 1780s construction of the Bara Imambara. In October 2025, UNESCO named Lucknow a Creative City of Gastronomy, only India's second such designation after Hyderabad. Tunday Kababi, founded in Lucknow's Chowk in 1905, still serves galouti kebabs built around a reputedly 160-spice blend devised for a toothless Nawab. Varanasi's street food runs from tamatar chaat (found nowhere else) to malaiyo, a winter-only milk-foam dessert, alongside Banarasi paan, which received its own GI tag in March 2023. Mathura's khoya-based peda and Agra's ash-gourd petha round out the state's sweet tradition — though petha's popular Mughal-court origin story has no support in period cookbooks and is likely later folklore.

“In October 2025, UNESCO named Lucknow a Creative City of Gastronomy — only the second Indian city, after Hyderabad, to receive the designation.

— UNESCO Creative Cities Network

Education & Research Institutions

UP has more colleges than any other Indian state and hosts several of the country's oldest and most prestigious universities — a scale of higher-education infrastructure that sits, familiarly, alongside a literacy rate still trailing the national average.

8,375

COLLEGES — THE MOST OF ANY INDIAN STATE (AISHE 2021-22)

78.2%

LITERACY, PLFS 2023-24 EST. (NATIONAL AVG. 80.9%)

60-100+

UNIVERSITIES (COUNT VARIES BY METHODOLOGY)

1.33L+

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS UPGRADED UNDER OPERATION KAYAKALP

Premier institutions. Banaras Hindu University, founded in 1916 by Madan Mohan Malaviya with Annie Besant and the Kashi Naresh royal family, is India's first central university and — by most tellings, though exact enrollment figures vary between roughly 30,000 and 40,000+ students across sources — one of Asia's largest residential universities. Aligarh Muslim University traces to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (1875) and remains a premier centre of Muslim intellectual and political life in India. The University of Allahabad (1887), nicknamed the "Oxford of the East," is India's fourth-oldest modern university and has produced two Indian presidents and two prime ministers among its alumni. On the technical side, IIT Kanpur (1959) ran the Kanpur Indo-American Programme (1962-72) that made it the first Indian institute to teach computer science, in August 1963; IIT (BHU) Varanasi converted from a century-old engineering college into a full IIT in 2012. IIM Lucknow (1984) was India's fourth IIM and the first to open a satellite campus (Noida, 2005). On the medical side, King George's Medical University, Lucknow (1905) runs one of the world's largest university-affiliated hospitals at 4,250 beds, while the Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (1983) ranks 5th nationally among medical institutions in NIRF's 2025 rankings.

Literacy and access. UP's literacy rate stood at 67.68% at the 2011 Census; the most recent survey-based estimate (PLFS, July 2023-June 2024) puts it at 78.2% — still about 2.7 points below the national average of 80.9%, with a male-female gap (86.0% vs. 70.4%) wider than the national gap. With the 2021 Census postponed indefinitely, no updated decennial figure exists. The successor to the national Saakshar Bharat programme, ULLAS-Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram, has identified roughly 16.6 lakh non-literate adults in UP and mobilized about 1.87 lakh volunteers; roughly 4.5 lakh learners sat the programme's literacy assessment in March 2026.

Recent state initiatives. Operation Kayakalp, launched in June 2018, has upgraded roughly 1.26 lakh of UP's 1.33 lakh-plus government primary and upper-primary schools against 19 infrastructure parameters — safe buildings, toilets, drinking water, digital classrooms — monitored through the state's "Prerna" portal. On staffing, UP is running a three-phase recruitment drive targeting roughly 1.94 lakh new teachers by March 2026, following a 1.375-lakh-teacher hiring cycle completed in 2018; a long-running "69,000 Assistant Teacher" recruitment dispute has moved between the Allahabad High Court and the Supreme Court over selection-list fairness. New institutions continue to be added to the state's higher-education base — Guru Jambheshwar University, Moradabad received UGC recognition in March 2025, and new private universities were approved in Ayodhya and Unnao in 2024-25.

“Uttar Pradesh has more colleges — 8,375 — than any other Indian state, and is among the six states that together account for over half of India's total student enrollment.

— AISHE 2021-22, Ministry of Education

Cities & Urban Areas

UP remains predominantly rural — under a quarter of its population lives in cities — yet it contains some of India's most consequential urban economies, from Nawabi Lucknow to the electronics factories of Noida to the pilgrimage boomtowns of Ayodhya and Varanasi.

Lucknow — the Capital

2011 city population 2.82 million (urban agglomeration 2.90 million); current estimates put the metro near 4 million. The former seat of the Nawabs of Awadh, Lucknow's Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb (Hindu-Muslim syncretic culture) still defines its identity through chikankari embroidery, Awadhi cuisine, and monuments like the Bara Imambara. The modern economy spans state administration, education, aerospace/defence manufacturing, finance and IT.

Kanpur — the Largest City

2011 city population 2.77 million; district 4.58 million. Once "the Manchester of the East," built on 19th-century leather and textile manufacturing for British military supply. The leather sector has contracted sharply since 2017 — roughly 176 of 400 tanning units in the Jajmau cluster have shut amid pollution-control restrictions — yet Kanpur still accounts for a large share of India's leather exports and remains one of the state's top-four contributors to GSDP.

Noida & Greater Noida (Gautam Buddh Nagar)

Part of Delhi NCR and administratively split into Noida, Dadri and Jewar tehsils. India's largest smartphone-manufacturing cluster (Samsung, Dixon, Vivo, Oppo and suppliers to Xiaomi and Google) sits here alongside large campuses for TCS, Infosys, HCL, IBM, Accenture and Adobe. Samsung's Noida plant, expanded with roughly ₹4,900 crore of investment, is often cited as the world's largest single mobile-phone manufacturing facility. The district's per-capita GDP (~₹8.48 lakh) trails only Gurugram among NCR districts.

Ghaziabad

2011 city population 1.65 million; urban agglomeration 2.36 million. Known as the "Gateway to UP" from Delhi, with a steel, engineering and electronics manufacturing base that expanded as NCR integration pulled it into Delhi's economic orbit — UP's second-largest industrial hub after Kanpur, though also ranked among the world's most polluted urban areas.

Varanasi (Kashi/Banaras)

2011 city population 1.20 million. One of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities and Hinduism's holiest city on the Ganga, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Lok Sabha constituency since 2014. The ₹339-crore Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, opened December 2021, has driven a tourism surge — foreign arrivals alone rose from 2,566 (2021) to over 309,000 (2024) — and the city recorded more than 110 million total visitor-arrivals in 2024, the fastest growth of any Indian destination that year.

Agra

2011 city population 1.59 million. Former Mughal capital and home to the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort, both UNESCO World Heritage Sites; the Taj alone draws 6-8 million visitors annually. Leather and footwear manufacturing, iron foundries, and the surrounding potato belt (Agra district alone grows roughly 27% of the state's potato output) round out the economy alongside tourism.

Prayagraj (Allahabad)

2011 city population 1.17 million; district 5.95 million, UP's most populous. Seat of the Allahabad High Court since 1866 and once capital of the United Provinces — historically nicknamed the "Oxford of the East" for Allahabad University. Hosted the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela, which drew several hundred million pilgrim visits over 45 days by most estimates, widely described as the largest human gathering ever recorded.

Other notable cities. **Ayodhya** has been transformed by the January 2024 consecration of the Ram Mandir — annual visitor numbers rose from under 300,000 (2017) to over 164 million (2024), overtaking the Taj Mahal as UP's single most-visited destination and lifting local shopkeeper incomes roughly fivefold according to an IIM Lucknow study. **Gorakhpur** is the political base of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who heads the city's Gorakhnath Math, and a major eastern-UP railway hub. **Meerut** anchors India's sports-goods manufacturing alongside Jalandhar. **Bareilly** is known for zari-zardozi embroidery and furniture manufacturing; **Aligarh** supplies an estimated

three-quarters of India's locks and hosts Aligarh Muslim University; **Moradabad's** "Brass City" cluster exports handicrafts to more than 80 countries.

UP in the National Capital Region. Eight UP districts — Meerut, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddh Nagar, Bulandshahr, Baghpat, Hapur, Muzaffarnagar and Shamli — are part of Delhi NCR, together contributing to what is estimated as roughly 5.7% of India's entire GDP. Gautam Buddh Nagar is the standout performer.

NCR District/City	Per-capita GDP, 2024-25
Gurugram (Haryana, for comparison)	₹9.05 lakh
Gautam Buddh Nagar (Noida/Gr. Noida)	₹8.48 lakh
Faridabad (Haryana, for comparison)	₹5.81 lakh
Delhi (for comparison)	₹2.83 lakh

The Economy

Uttar Pradesh is India's third-largest state economy by GSDP, yet one of its poorest by per-capita income — a gap between aggregate scale and individual prosperity that shapes almost every policy conversation in the state.

₹29.78L cr

GSDP, 2024-25 (CURRENT PRICES)

8.99%

REAL GROWTH RATE, 2024-25

₹1.09L

PER-CAPITA INCOME, 2024-25

~53%

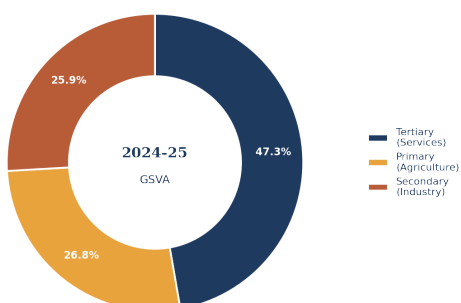
PER-CAPITA INCOME AS SHARE OF NATIONAL AVERAGE

~2.4%

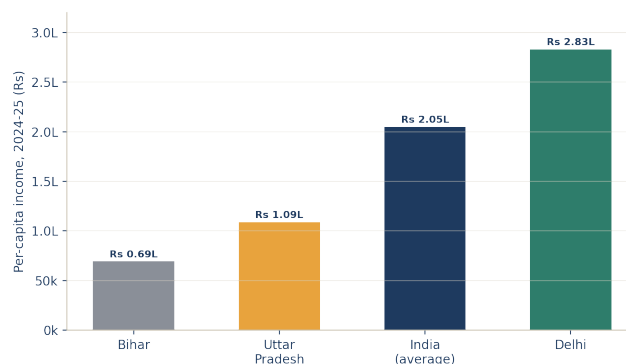
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (PLFS, USUAL STATUS)

32.7%

OUTSTANDING DEBT AS SHARE OF GSDP, 2024-25



Sectoral share of Gross State Value Added, 2024-25. Source: MoSPI/StatisticsTimes.



Per-capita income, 2024-25. UP trails the national average by roughly half, though it remains ahead of Bihar. Source: StatisticsTimes/MoSPI; NCR figures from Ch. 8.

The structural story. UP contributed 8.77% of national GDP in 2023-24 despite holding 17% of India's population — a gap between population share and economic share that is the single clearest way to understand the state's income problem. GSDP has grown briskly in nominal terms (from ₹17.45 lakh crore in 2019-20 to ₹29.78 lakh crore in 2024-25, surviving a pandemic-year contraction), and the state government has set a public target of a \$1 trillion economy, originally framed for 2027 and more recently discussed in official communications as achievable closer to 2028-30. Services now account for 47% of the economy, agriculture just under 27%, and industry just under 26% — a mix that has shifted only gradually toward services over the past decade.

Labour force participation shows a similarly large structural gap: male participation stands at 82.2% against just 32.1% for women, meaning roughly half of UP's working-age population remains largely outside the formal economy that GSDP growth is meant to benefit.

Fiscal position. UP's fiscal deficit for 2024-25 was targeted at 3.46% of GSDP (₹86,531 crore), close to the ceiling the central government permits states, while outstanding debt has risen to an estimated 32.7% of GSDP. The state has leaned heavily on flagship investment-attraction efforts to close its income gap: the February 2023 Global Investors Summit generated MoUs worth a headline ₹33.5 lakh crore, though independent commentary has questioned how much of that figure represents capital actually deployed rather than signed intent — a theme explored further in Chapter 16.

“Uttar Pradesh generates under 9% of India's GDP with 17% of its population — the single number that explains why the state's per-capita income remains roughly half the national average even as its aggregate economy ranks among India's largest three.

— MoSPI, via StatisticsTimes; NITI Aayog "Macro and Fiscal Landscape of the State of Uttar Pradesh," July 2025

Industries & What Drives Them

UP's industrial base runs from centuries-old craft clusters built on local materials and colonial-era demand, through a sugar and grain economy underwritten by Gangetic alluvial soil, to a newer generation of electronics and defence manufacturing being deliberately seeded along the state's expressway network.

1 Agriculture **LARGEST PRODUCER**

UP produced 63.85 million tonnes of foodgrains in FY2024 — India's largest foodgrain-producing state — and leads the country in wheat, sugarcane and potato individually. Potato output alone reached 20.1 million tonnes (33.5% of India's total), concentrated in the Agra-Firozabad-Mainpuri-Farrukhabad-Etawah belt where alluvial Ganga-Yamuna doab soil, dense canal irrigation and extensive cold-storage infrastructure combine. Sugarcane, wheat and rice together account for roughly 90% of the state's total agricultural output.

2 Sugar **AGRO-INDUSTRIAL**

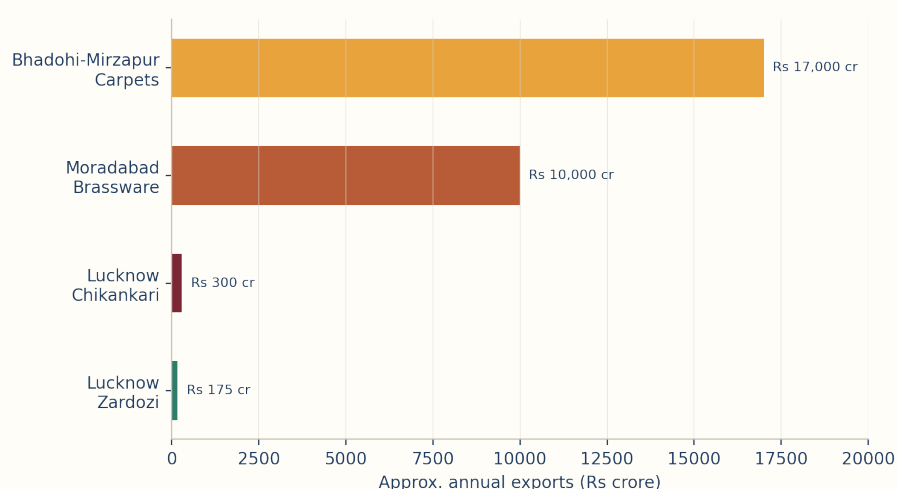
Built directly on the cane base above, UP is India's largest sugar producer — around 107 lakh tonnes in the 2021-22 season from 120 mills across 45 districts, crushing over 1,084 lakh tonnes of cane in 2022-23. The industry sustains an estimated 50 million cane-farming livelihoods and half a million mill workers, concentrated in the western and central cane belt (Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bijnor, Saharanpur). Chronic mill payment arrears to farmers remain the sector's most persistent friction point (see Chapter 13).

3 Leather (Kanpur) **LEGACY EXPORT HUB**

Kanpur's tanning industry traces to 19th-century British cantonment demand for boots, saddlery and harness. The Jajmau cluster's roughly 200-250 tanneries still account for a large share of India's leather exports, though pollution-control restrictions on the Ganga floodplain since 2017 have shrunk the operational tannery count by more than half, with industry groups citing annual losses of roughly ₹1,200 crore from forced closures.

4 Handicrafts & GI Crafts EXPORT POWERHOUSE

UP holds 77 Geographical Indication tags — more than any other Indian state, with Varanasi alone accounting for 32 — and the One District One Product scheme has deliberately mapped an ODOP cluster onto every one of the state's 75 districts. Moradabad's "Peetal Nagri" brassware cluster (a 400-year sand-casting tradition using local Ramganga river sand) supplies over 40% of India's handicraft-metalware exports to 80-plus countries. The Bhadohi-Mirzapur carpet belt, spanning nine districts, exports over ₹17,000 crore annually and supplies more than 60% of India's total carpet exports, though it now faces a 50% US tariff shock. Firozabad's 200-year-old glass-bangle cluster is the world's largest of its kind, directly employing 5-6 lakh people. Lucknow's chikankari (roughly 2 lakh artisans, ~70% women) and zardozi embroidery round out the state's craft economy.



Approximate annual export value by craft cluster. Sources: Council for Leather Exports; Drishti IAS; The Better India; Zeebiz.

5 Textiles & Handloom (Varanasi) HERITAGE CRAFT

Banarasi brocades and sarees, GI-registered in 2009, remain the signature product of a handloom cluster on which roughly 1.2 million people depend directly or indirectly across Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Chandauli, Bhadohi, Jaunpur and Azamgarh districts — though competition from power-loom and synthetic-sari production is steadily eroding the traditional handloom segment.

6 IT & Electronics (Noida) **EMERGING**

Noida-Greater Noida now accounts for more than 60% of India's mobile-phone manufacturing, anchored by Samsung's Noida plant (expanded with roughly ₹4,900 crore of investment to a claimed 120-million-unit annual capacity) alongside Dixon, Vivo, Oppo and suppliers to Xiaomi and Google. The Noida Special Economic Zone (established 1985) hosts over 200 multinational tenants, and a wave of hyperscale data-centre investment — Yotta, Adani, Microsoft and NTT among them — is layering a second growth sector onto the same corridor, driven by proximity to Delhi/NCR, expressway connectivity and the new Noida International Airport.

7 Defence Manufacturing **STRATEGIC / EMERGING**

The UP Defence Industrial Corridor, announced in the 2018-19 Union Budget, spans six nodes — Agra, Aligarh, Chitrakoot, Jhansi, Kanpur and Lucknow — chosen for their land availability, expressway access and (in Kanpur's case) existing ordnance-manufacturing legacy. Roughly ₹28,800-35,000 crore of investment had materialized by 2025-26 against nearly ₹40,000 crore in total proposals, anchored by BrahMos Aerospace's missile-production facility in Lucknow and Adani Defence Systems' ammunition facility in Kanpur; the state has since set a more ambitious target of tripling defence investment to ₹1 lakh crore.

8 Tourism **FASTEST GROWING**

Total tourist arrivals jumped 35% in a single year — from 48.0 crore (2023) to 64.9 crore (2024) — overwhelmingly driven by Ayodhya, whose visitor count rose from 5.76 crore to 16.44 crore following the January 2024 Ram Mandir consecration. Agra's Taj Mahal, Varanasi's ghats and temple corridor, and Prayagraj's Kumbh Mela remain the other anchor draws; the 2025 Maha Kumbh alone generated an estimated ₹25,000 crore or more in direct and indirect economic activity.

Transport & Connectivity

UP has built out the largest expressway network of any Indian state over the past decade — a deliberate strategy to compress a geographically vast, unevenly developed state into something closer to single-day travel time end to end.

3,200+ km

EXPRESSWAY NETWORK —
INDIA'S LARGEST BY STATE

594 km

GANGA EXPRESSWAY (MEERUT-
PRAYAGRAJ), UP'S LONGEST

23 km

LUCKNOW METRO (OPENED
2017)

2

METRO SYSTEMS OPERATING (LUCKNOW, KANPUR)

Expressways. The Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) now operates five major corridors: the Yamuna Expressway (165 km, Delhi-Agra), Agra-Lucknow Expressway (302 km), Purvanchal Expressway (341 km, Lucknow to Ghazipur, opening up the state's long-underserved east), Bundelkhand Expressway (296 km, connecting the drought-prone Bundelkhand region to the Agra-Lucknow corridor and onward to Delhi NCR) and the Ganga Expressway (594 km, Meerut to Prayagraj) — the state's longest, notable for a 3.5 km stretch built as an emergency IAF airstrip, tested with multiple aircraft in May 2025. A separate Lucknow-Kanpur Expressway (approximately 63 km) targets one of the state's busiest urban corridors directly.

Rail and metro. UP sits at the centre of India's rail network by sheer route density, with major junctions at Lucknow, Kanpur, Gorakhpur (home to one of Asia's largest railway workshops), Prayagraj and Varanasi. Urban rail has arrived more recently: the Lucknow Metro opened in 2017 (Red Line, roughly 23 km), followed by the Kanpur Metro in 2021 — both aimed at easing congestion in the state's two largest cities, with further extensions and new-city metro/rapid-transit proposals under study for Agra, Meerut and Varanasi.

Air. Noida International Airport at Jewar began commercial operations in 2026, adding a second major gateway to the Delhi-NCR region and specifically targeting the electronics and logistics traffic generated by the Noida manufacturing cluster (Chapter 10). Lucknow's Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport and Varanasi's Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport remain the state's busiest existing hubs, driven respectively by administrative/business travel and religious tourism; Ayodhya's Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, opened alongside the Ram Mandir consecration, has quickly become one of the state's fastest-growing airports by passenger growth,

while Kushinagar International Airport — intended to serve Buddhist-circuit pilgrims — has run well below capacity since opening in 2023, a reminder that not every aviation bet in the state's infrastructure push has paid off equally.

“UP's five UPEIDA expressways alone span over 1,700 km — and the Ganga Expressway's emergency airstrip, tested by Indian Air Force jets in 2025, doubles as a reminder that this infrastructure serves strategic as well as civilian purposes.

— UPEIDA; Swarajya; TollGuru Expressway Guide 2025

Environment, Wildlife & Biodiversity

UP's forest cover is thin for a state its size — a direct consequence of centuries of intensive Gangetic-plain agriculture — but its remaining forest fragments along the Nepal border form one of the most important tiger landscapes left in South Asia.

9.96%

FOREST & TREE COVER AS SHARE OF STATE AREA (WELL BELOW NATIONAL AVG. ~21.7%)

+559 km²

FOREST & TREE COVER GAIN, 2021-2023 — 2ND-LARGEST OF ANY STATE

1,284 km²

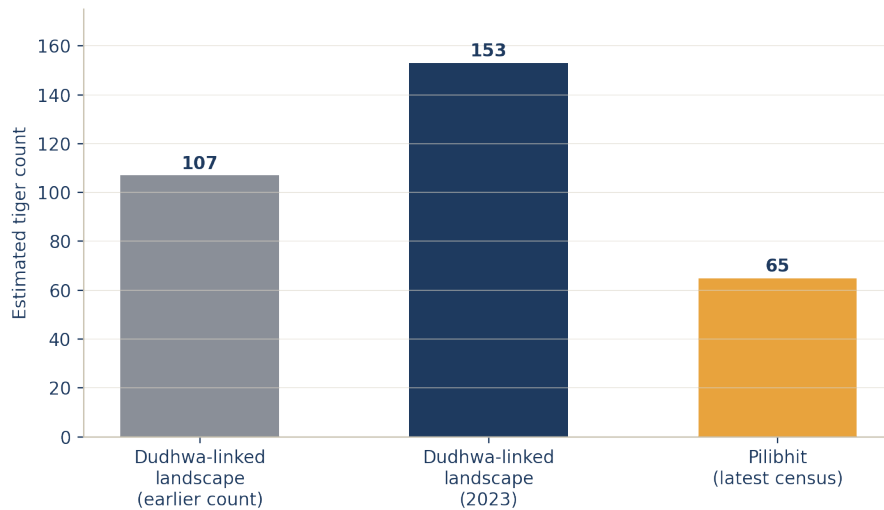
DUDHWA TIGER RESERVE AREA

1

TX2 AWARD WON BY PILIBHIT FOR DOUBLING ITS TIGER POPULATION

Forest cover. UP's total forest and tree cover reached 23,996 km² in the 2023 India State of Forest Report, up from 23,437 km² in 2021 — a gain of 559 km² that was the second-largest increase of any Indian state in that cycle, and one driven disproportionately by tree cover outside formally designated forest land (UP's outside-forest tree cover grew 3.72%, ahead of the 3.41% national average). Even so, forest and tree cover together account for under 10% of the state's geographical area, reflecting how thoroughly the Gangetic plain has been given over to cropland over the centuries; UP's ecological significance lies less in overall green cover than in a small number of high-value protected fragments along its northern border.

The Terai Arc and its tigers. Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, spanning Lakhimpur Kheri and Bahraich districts, combines Dudhwa National Park with the Kishanpur and Katarniaghat wildlife sanctuaries across 1,284 km² of sal forest and grassland. Recent counts put the wider Dudhwa-linked tiger population at roughly 153, up from 107 — about 43% growth — with Dudhwa itself now home to around 135 tigers. Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, notified in 2014 as part of the same Terai Arc Landscape that runs along the India-Nepal border, holds roughly 65 tigers across a reserve that is around 90% sal forest, and became the first tiger reserve in the world to receive the TX2 award for doubling its tiger population within a set target period. Wildlife Institute of India research identifies the combined Dudhwa-Pilibhit population as ecologically distinct — the only tiger population showing behavioural adaptations specific to the Terai grassland-and-forest mosaic, rather than the denser central-Indian forest type most Indian tiger reserves protect.



Tiger population growth, Dudhwa-linked landscape and Pilibhit Tiger Reserve. Sources: Deccan Herald; Wildlife Institute of India; Pilibhit Tiger Reserve.

Pressures. UP's forest fragments face the same structural pressure as its agricultural land: a dense, growing human population pressing against a fixed and already-small protected area base. Encroachment, fragmentation of wildlife corridors linking Dudhwa and Pilibhit to forests across the Nepal border, and man-animal conflict along the reserve boundaries (particularly involving tigers and leopards straying into adjoining farmland) remain the most persistent challenges, even as the state's tiger numbers have moved in a genuinely positive direction over the past decade.

“Pilibhit became the first tiger reserve anywhere in the world to win the international TX2 award for doubling its tiger population within a fixed target period — inside a state where forest cover is barely a tenth of the land area.

— Pilibhit Tiger Reserve; Wildlife Institute of India

Problems Facing Uttar Pradesh

UP's problems are largely those of scale: a population and economy so large that even well-designed programs take years to reach saturation, and where national rankings by rate can look respectable even when the state carries the largest absolute burden in the country.

1. Law and order and a contested "encounter" policy

Since March 2017, UP Police have conducted over 15,700 recorded "encounters," resulting in 256 deaths, more than 10,300 injuries and nearly 32,000 arrests. The state government cites steep declines in serious-offence categories (dacoity -70%, murder -29%, rape -52%) and an overall crime rate it describes as 28.5% below the national average. Independent observers note this partly reflects historic under-registration, and the Supreme Court has repeatedly sought affidavits from the state on encounter investigations since 2017; rights groups document a pattern of non-fatal "leg/knee" shootings disproportionately affecting Muslims and marginalized communities.

2. Crimes against women

UP recorded 65,743 FIRs for crimes against women in 2022 — the highest absolute count of any state — though its rate (58.6 per lakh population) sits below the national average of 66.4, reflecting the state's sheer population size rather than necessarily higher per-capita risk.

3. Per-capita income and poverty

At roughly ₹1.09 lakh, UP's 2024-25 per-capita income is about half the national figure and the second-lowest of any major state after Bihar. NITI Aayog's National MPI Progress Review found UP registered the largest absolute reduction in poor people of any state — 3.43 crore people lifted out of multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21 — yet the state still has the largest absolute number of multidimensionally poor citizens in the country.

4. Child malnutrition and health infrastructure gaps

NFHS-5 puts UP child stunting at 39.7%, among the highest of any large state, with severe wasting having actually risen from 6% to 7.7% between the last two survey rounds.

Infrastructure lags to match: the doctor-to-population ratio is roughly 1:2,363 against the WHO norm of 1:1,000, and the number of people served per government hospital bed rose from 181 in 2013 to 2,904 in 2017.

5. Education: literacy gap and teacher vacancies

UP's overall literacy rate (67.2%) sits more than five points below the national average, and its male-female literacy gap (roughly 27 points) is considerably wider than the national gap of under 17 points. Over 132,000 teaching posts — nearly 22% of all sanctioned positions — stood vacant as of a 2023 state assembly disclosure, with secondary-level lecturer vacancies reaching almost 42%.

6. Educated-youth unemployment and recruitment-exam integrity

Urban youth unemployment has run as high as 16-19% in recent quarters, worst among graduates and postgraduates facing a skills-jobs mismatch. Two 2024 scandals crystallized public frustration: the UP Police Constable exam (48 lakh candidates competing for 67,000 vacancies) and the UPPSC RO/ARO exam were both cancelled after paper-leak allegations, affecting millions of aspirants.

7. Air pollution

UP has 16 cities designated "non-attainment" under the National Clean Air Programme — the second-most of any state — including Ghaziabad, Noida, Kanpur, Lucknow, Agra and Varanasi. Ghaziabad's annual average PM_{2.5} runs around 93 µg/m³, roughly 18 times the WHO guideline, and UP towns have repeatedly featured among the most polluted urban areas measured anywhere in the world.

8. Agrarian distress: sugarcane arrears and groundwater depletion

Chronic delays in mill payments to sugarcane farmers remain a recurring flashpoint — of ₹1,11,674 crore owed for the 2023-24 season, roughly ₹1,275 crore still sat unpaid after settlement, and farmers have periodically protested arrears reaching into the thousands of crores. Separately, groundwater in nine western UP districts (including Ghaziabad, Agra and Gautam Buddh Nagar) is classified "over-exploited" by the Central Ground Water Board, with Ghaziabad's extraction rate reaching 128% of annual recharge and some blocks seeing water tables fall 10-20 cm a year.

Solutions & Policy Responses

Against each problem in the previous chapter, UP has attempted a named policy response — with results ranging from genuinely transformative to still-unproven.

1. "Zero tolerance" policing (2017-present)

Launched within days of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath taking office in March 2017: targeted operations against criminal syndicates, Gangster Act property seizures, and an encounter-driven enforcement strategy that the government credits with over 80,000 arrests and steep declines in serious crime categories. The approach remains under Supreme Court scrutiny over due-process compliance in specific encounter cases.

2. Anti-Romeo Squads and Mission Shakti

Formed within days of the 2017 government taking office, sub-inspector-led squads patrol colleges, cinemas and parks; between March 2017 and March 2024 they checked 3.9 crore individuals, warned 1.44 crore, and booked over 32,000. The government separately claims the country's highest conviction rate for crimes against women, though critics flag moral-policing concerns.

3. Welfare saturation and One District One Product (2018-present)

ODOP, mapping a signature product onto every one of UP's 75 districts, reports exports rising from ₹86,000 crore (2017-18) to ₹1.84 lakh crore currently, 1.31 lakh artisans trained and roughly 80 GI tags secured — a diversification push that NITI Aayog credits, alongside broader direct-benefit-transfer welfare schemes, for the state's outsized reduction in multidimensional poverty.

4. Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY rollout

UP has the largest AB-PMJAY beneficiary base of any state — roughly 5.13 crore Ayushman cards issued against 7.43 crore eligible individuals by December 2024 (about 87% coverage), and the highest number of empanelled hospitals in India (5,834). A September 2024 expansion extended ₹5-lakh cover to all citizens aged 70 and above regardless of income.

5. Mission Prerna / Nipun Bharat foundational-learning program

Covering 1.6 lakh basic-education schools, the program has coincided with the largest reading-skill gains of any state in the 2024 ASER survey: the share of government-school Standard 3 children able to read at Standard 2 level rose from 6% (2014) to 27.9% (2024), with similarly large gains in arithmetic — though a majority of children still fall short of grade-level benchmarks.

6. UP Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024

In force since 15 July 2024, replacing a weaker 1998 law: life imprisonment and fines up to ₹1 crore for organized paper-leak offences, cognizable/non-bailable status, and corporate liability for printers and exam vendors. On the jobs side, the 2023 Global Investors Summit and subsequent Ground-Breaking Ceremonies aim to create formal employment at a scale that could absorb graduate job-seekers directly.

7. National Clean Air Programme city action plans

UP's 16 non-attainment cities each operate a broadly standardized action plan targeting a 40% cut in PM10 by 2025-26. Independent modelling suggests Ghaziabad could achieve close to a 48% PM10 reduction if fully implemented, though a 2024 review found the national programme broadly behind schedule against its 2026 deadline.

8. Sugarcane Act enforcement and Atal Bhujal Yojana

The UP Sugarcane (Regulation of Supply and Purchase) Act, 1953 mandates mills pay farmers within 14 days or face 12% (profit-making mills) or 7% (loss-making mills) annual interest penalties, with the Allahabad High Court intervening where enforcement has lapsed. For groundwater, the centrally sponsored Atal Bhujal Yojana (2020) funds community-led management in over-exploited western-UP blocks, alongside state promotion of micro-irrigation and diversification away from water-intensive sugarcane and paddy.

What Uttar Pradesh Can Learn From Other States & Regions

UP's biggest structural problems — an agriculture-to-income gap, air pollution, weak health outcomes, uneven regional development, and recruitment-exam integrity — all have real-world precedents elsewhere that were measurably solved.

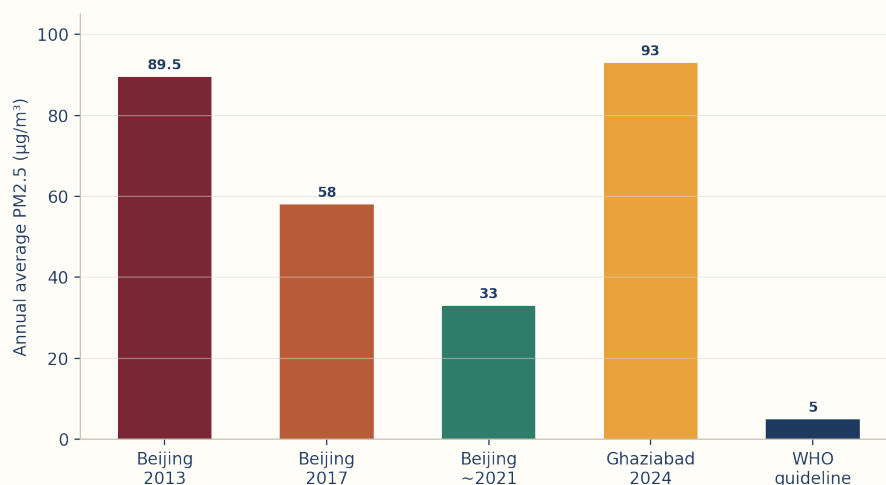
P Punjab & Haryana — irrigation and MSP procurement density

Punjab's Green Revolution-era wheat yield rose from about 1,236 kg/ha (1965-66) to over 5,000 kg/ha today, backed by dense mandi infrastructure (6.9 mandis per 1,000 km² vs. UP's much thinner network) and assured MSP procurement. Punjab's farm households now earn roughly ₹31,433/month against the ₹13,661 all-India average — more than double — even though UP outproduces Punjab in absolute foodgrain volume.

Lesson for UP: production leadership only converts to farmer income when matched by mandi density and assured procurement access — volume without market infrastructure leaves farmers dependent on lower private prices.

B Beijing — a legally binding, multi-year clean-air plan

Beijing's PM_{2.5} fell from 89.5 µg/m³ (2013) to 58 (2017) to roughly 33 (2021) — a cumulative cut of nearly two-thirds — through a national action plan that closed coal power stations, banned residential coal-burning, and enforced vehicle emissions standards. Ghaziabad's current annual average sits at roughly 93 µg/m³, close to Beijing's 2013 starting point.



Annual average PM_{2.5}, Beijing (2013/2017/~2021) vs. Ghaziabad (2024) vs. WHO guideline. Sources: Dialogue Earth; AQLI; IQAir World Air Quality Report 2024.

Lesson for UP: a sustained, legally binding multi-year plan targeting actual emission sources — not seasonal emergency measures — is what durably cuts PM_{2.5} in a comparably polluted region.

T Tamil Nadu — primary healthcare density

Tamil Nadu's maternal mortality ratio stands at 54 per 100,000 live births — one of only eight Indian states to already meet the 2030 SDG target of under 70 — against UP's 141-154, built on decades of investment in village health nurses, 24x7 primary health centres and institutional-delivery pushes that pre-date recent national programs.

Lesson for UP: primary-healthcare density, not headline hospital-building, drives the biggest measurable cuts in maternal mortality and child stunting.

G Gujarat — statutory single-window clearance

Gujarat's 2017 Single Window Clearance Act gave investors legally enforceable, time-bound approvals, layered onto Vibrant Gujarat summits held continuously since 2003; roughly 65% of MoUs signed across all summit editions have materialized, helping lift Gujarat's cumulative FDI to \$68.9 billion (2000-2024), the highest of any Indian state. UP's 2023 summit, by contrast, is a single flagship event still building its own audited track record.

Lesson for UP: a legally binding clearance statute plus two decades of repeated, audited summits — not one flagship event — is what converts MoUs into durable investment.

K South Korea & Vietnam — manufacturing value-chain upgrading

South Korea paired export incentives with deliberate upgrading from textiles to electronics from the 1960s onward, lifting manufacturing's GDP share from 14.3% (1962) to 30.3% (1987) and exports from \$122 million to \$703 billion. Vietnam's more recent, FDI-led electronics boom (Samsung alone invested \$14 billion by 2017) shows the limits of assembly-only growth: domestic Vietnamese firms remain stuck at 64% of foreign firms' technology frontier, unchanged since 2011.

Lesson for UP: attracting assembly-stage FDI, as Noida's electronics cluster is doing, is necessary but not sufficient — durable upgrading requires parallel investment in domestic R&D and supplier development, or UP risks Vietnam's high-volume, low-value-add trap.

C China — encrypted, biometric exam security

China's gaokao uses encrypted digital paper transmission, biometric entry checks and AI-based monitoring, backed by criminalized cheating since 2015 — no mass leak scandal has followed at the scale of India's 41 major exam leaks across 15 states in five years, which affected 1.4 crore job-seekers. UP's July 2024 ordinance addresses criminal penalties but not yet the technical delivery layer.

Lesson for UP: criminal penalties alone address deterrence — closing the leak problem at scale also requires encrypted digital delivery and biometric exam-centre security.

S South Korea — Saemaul Undong for regional inequality

Launched in 1970 to close a gap where rural income was just 60% of urban levels, Saemaul Undong combined government-seeded materials with mandatory village-level execution of roads, irrigation and electrification; average rural household income rose roughly sixfold within a decade. UP's own western districts generate 71.7% of state GSDP against Bundelkhand's 5.2% — a gap of similar shape.

Lesson for UP: a time-bound, government-seeded but community-executed rural infrastructure push — not fiscal transfers alone — is what closed Korea's urban-rural gap, and could narrow Bundelkhand's.

Future Growth & Potential

UP's growth strategy rests on converting its demographic scale into an economic asset before the window closes — a bet visible in every expressway, airport and investment summit the state has launched since 2017.

₹33.5L cr

INVESTMENT MOUS SIGNED,
UPGIS 2023

~₹15L cr

SELF-REPORTED INVESTMENT
IMPLEMENTED SINCE 2018

1

TRILLION-DOLLAR ECONOMY
TARGET (GOVT. GOAL, ~2028-30)

21.9 yrs

MEDIAN AGE (YOUNG, WORKING-AGE-HEAVY POPULATION)

Investment and infrastructure. The February 2023 Global Investors Summit drew 19,058 MoUs worth a headline ₹33.5 lakh crore, and the state's own Ground-Breaking Ceremony cycle claims roughly ₹15 lakh crore of that has moved to implementation since 2018 — though this is a self-reported, unaudited figure, and "ground-breaking" is not the same as commissioned or operational. The UP Defence Industrial Corridor's six nodes have drawn ₹28,800-35,000 crore in realized investment against a new, considerably more ambitious ₹1 lakh crore target. On infrastructure, the Purvanchal and Bundelkhand Expressways are complete, the 594 km Ganga Expressway opened in April 2026, and the Noida International Airport at Jewar began commercial operations in June 2026 — alongside the already-thriving Maharishi Valmiki International Airport at Ayodhya, though the cautionary counter-example of Kushinagar International Airport, largely idle since 2023, shows not every aviation bet has paid off. UP's renewable-energy program tells a similar story of ambition outrunning delivery: against a target of 22,000 MW of solar capacity by 2026-27, installed capacity was estimated at only around 2,653 MW as of 2025.

The demographic dividend — and its risks. UP's median age of 21.9 years and roughly 60% working-age population share make it, alongside Bihar, the state that will supply a disproportionate share of India's net new workforce over the coming decade. There are genuine signs of improvement: UP recorded the largest reading-skill gains of any state in the 2024 ASER survey, and urban youth unemployment has been falling. But the risks to realizing this dividend are concrete, not hypothetical. Roughly 70% of government-school Standard 3 children still cannot read at a Standard 2 level despite recent gains. Child anaemia actually worsened between the last two NFHS rounds, and two in five children under five remain stunted. And female labour-force participation, at just 32% against 82% for men, means roughly half of UP's young population

remains largely outside the formal economy that the state's investment push is meant to create. The infrastructure and investment pipeline above represents UP's explicit bet that it can convert its population weight into economic output before its workforce ages — the human-capital indicators suggest that bet is not yet won.

Notable Facts

- ✦ **The world's most populous sub-national jurisdiction.** With a 2026 estimated population above 243 million, UP is larger than Brazil and nearly the size of Nigeria, the world's sixth most populous country.

- ✦ **Half of the Buddha's world lay here.** Eight of the sixteen Mahajanapadas of 6th-century-BCE India — including Kosala, Kashi and Shurasena — sat within the borders of modern UP.

- ✦ **A state born exactly fifty years before it split.** UP was renamed from the United Provinces on 24 January 1950; Uttarakhand was carved out of it on 9 November 2000, almost exactly half a century later.

- ✦ **India's biggest political prize.** UP sends 80 members to the Lok Sabha — more than any other state — making it the single largest bloc in Indian national elections.

- ✦ **Ayodhya overtook the Taj Mahal.** Annual visitors to Ayodhya rose from under 300,000 in 2017 to more than 164 million in 2024, following the January 2024 Ram Mandir consecration — making it UP's most-visited destination, ahead of Agra.

- ✦ **The 2025 Maha Kumbh may be the largest gathering in human history.** Estimates of total pilgrim visits to the 45-day festival at Prayagraj range from roughly 400 million to over 660 million.

- ✦ **77 Geographical Indication tags — more than any other state.** From Moradabad brassware to Bhadohi carpets to Lucknow chikankari, UP is India's largest producer and exporter of GI-tagged handicrafts.

- ✦ **Noida makes more than half of India's phones.** The Noida-Greater Noida cluster accounts for over 60% of India's mobile-phone manufacturing, anchored by what is often cited as the world's largest single mobile-phone factory.

- ✦ **A trillion rupees short of its own solar target.** Against a stated goal of 22,000 MW of solar capacity by 2026-27, UP had installed only around 2,653 MW as of 2025 — a clear gap between ambition and delivery.

- ✦ **Rich state, poor citizens.** UP is India's third-largest state economy by GSDP, yet its per-capita income is roughly half the national average — a gap driven by population share (17% of India) far outrunning economic share (under 9% of GDP).

- ★ **India's fastest school-reading turnaround.** UP recorded the largest gains in Standard 3 reading proficiency of any Indian state between the 2018 and 2024 ASER surveys, even though most children still read below grade level.
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Sources used throughout this report: Census of India (2011 and historical decadal series); National Family Health Survey rounds 3, 4 and 5; NITI Aayog (National Multidimensional Poverty Index Progress Review 2023; State Nutrition Profile: Uttar Pradesh; Macro and Fiscal Landscape of the State of Uttar Pradesh, July 2025); Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) state GDP data via StatisticsTimes; PRS Legislative Research (Uttar Pradesh Budget Analysis, 2024-25 and 2025-26); National Crime Records Bureau (Crime in India, 2022); Sample Registration System Special Bulletins on Maternal Mortality; ASER Centre (Annual Status of Education Report, 2024); Central Ground Water Board; UP government portals (UPEIDA, Invest UP, UP Tourism, district administration websites); Council for Leather Exports; and contemporaneous news reporting from Business Standard, The Print, The Federal, Down To Earth and other outlets cited inline through the report. Investment-commitment figures (Global Investors Summit MoUs, Ground-Breaking Ceremony totals, Defence Corridor proposals) are self-reported by the state government and should be read as stated intent rather than independently audited outcomes; India's 2021 Census was postponed, so all population figures after 2011 are projections rather than enumerated counts; and several district-level statistics reflect boundaries redrawn after 2011 and may show minor rounding inconsistencies against the original Census tables.