



## Hindu American Community Policy Platform 2020

### Background:

The Hindu community in America is an ethnically diverse community of over 3 million. While the majority of Hindus are of Indian origin, there are also vibrant communities of Caribbean, African, European, Hispanic, and East and Southeast Asian descent.

Elected officials from both parties have a history of strong friendships within the Hindu American community and with India. Hindu Americans look to their elected officials and want to see American leaders protecting religious liberty and civil rights, stopping and preventing hate crimes, and fighting for immigration reform consistent with the values of the Hindu American community.

Lastly, Hindu Americans enjoy the bond between the world's two largest democracies, India and the United States. Hindu Americans want to see a strengthened U.S.-India relationship at all levels, including a mutual platform of furthering peace in South Asia, ending the scourge of terrorism, and championing religious pluralism and mutual respect in both countries.

Below please find the main issues of concern to the Hindu American community, broken down into three categories: Domestic Policy, Foreign Policy and Core Issues.

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## DOMESTIC POLICY PRIORITIES

The Hindu American Foundation believes that America should pursue a visionary agenda, consonant with our shared Hindu and American values and ideals, that will provide **equal opportunity** and **equal rights**, work in the **pursuit of justice**, and **reward those who positively contribute** to our economy and society in various ways. The issues below have been identified as priority concerns for the Hindu American community.

### **1. Hate Crimes, Hinduphobia, and Anti-Hindu Violence:**

Since the FBI began including anti-Hindu hate crimes as a separate category in 2015, the agency has recorded the highest incidence of hate crimes against Hindu and Indian Americans in history over the last three years. From the murder of Srinivas Kuchibotla to Hindu temples vandalized and defaced, the United States is witnessing a rise in attacks against Hindu Americans and other minority communities.

Hindu Americans want leaders who reject xenophobia, prejudice, hatred and intolerance, who will unite Americans to reduce racial tensions, and who will make communities safer.



**\* The Hindu American Foundation supports H.R. 3545 and S. 2043, the National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality Act of 2019 (No HATE Act) and other similar state level legislation.**

## **2. Portrayal of Hinduism in the Media and Public Education:**

The public presentation of Hinduism and thus issues of importance to the Hindu American community has been misportrayed and inaccurately presented to the American people for decades. Making matters worse, American children in public schools, many of which are Hindu, read biased, incomplete, and false narratives about Hinduism and India, some of which are based on colonial and racist constructs of India, Hinduism, and Hindu culture. Early age exposure to inaccurate information can have a lasting effect on Americans and it can lead to bullying, prejudice, discrimination, and in some cases, hate crimes.

Accordingly, it's critical to have positive and accurate portrayals of Hinduism and Hindu Americans in schools, the media, and in the public sphere.

**\* The Hindu American Foundation supports New York City Council Resolution 146 which calls on Mayor Bill De Blasio to instruct the New York City Department of Education to establish Diwali as an official holiday for New York City public school students.**

**\* The Hindu American Foundation opposes New York Assembly Bill A8545 as written. A8545 seeks to define the swastika as a symbol of Nazi Germany and therefore a symbol of hate, without explaining the historical origins and its use today as a symbol in various religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism.**

## **3. Smart Immigration & Green Card Reform**

For over a decade, the Hindu American community has sought much-needed fairness and reform in U.S. immigration policy. From refugee asylum to religious worker visas to the decades-long green card backlog, Hindu Americans rightfully demand major reforms to America's broken immigration system.

Hindu Americans want leaders who will end the decade-long waitlist for permanent residency. It has been proven that legal immigration actually enhances growth and employment in communities seeing the largest influx of immigrants. Immigrants spur economic and labor market growth and innovation, creating thousands of jobs. Due to these caps, high skilled workers from India, many of whom are Hindu, wait a disproportionately longer amount of time for a green card, compared to equally-qualified workers from other nations.

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By some estimates, close to 250,000 Indian Americans are waiting for family sponsored green cards, comprising the second largest group to be affected by the President's recent Executive Order.

Specifically, Hindu Americans support measures contained in the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act which would:

- Eliminate the discriminatory 'per country' cap for employment-based immigrant visas so all workers are treated equally;
- This provision would be implemented over a 3-year phase-in period: during year one, no more than 85 percent of employment-based visas may be allocated to India or China; in years two and three, no more than 90 percent of employment-based visas may be allocated to India or China;
- Also during this period, a safety provision would prevent visas from going unused;
- Ensure that immigrants who have an approved employment-based visa petition prior to the bill's date of enactment don't lose their place in line; and
- Raise the 'per country' cap for family-sponsored immigrant visas from 7 percent to 15 percent.

**\* The Hindu American Foundation supports S. 386, the Fairness for High Skilled Immigrants Act, currently pending in the U.S. Senate.**

**\* The Hindu American Foundation supports H.R.2895/S.948 the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act, currently pending in Congress.**

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## **FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES**

### **1. Persecution of Hindus in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh & Around the World**

Of grave concern to Hindu Americans is the devastating persecution of Hindus in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. In countries like **Pakistan, Hindus are a dwindling minority who face rampant discrimination, predatory proselytization, child kidnappings & forced conversions of minors.**

Afghan Hindus and Sikhs face an existential crisis in Afghanistan where ISIS-backed fighters recently attacked a Sikh gurdwara in Kabul, forcing most of the remaining Hindus and Sikhs to flee to India for refuge. **Hindu Americans support raising the annual global refugee admissions cap to 125,000 and seek to raise it over time commensurate with our responsibility, our values, and the unprecedented global need.**



**\* The Hindu American Foundation supports an amendment to the Lautenberg-Specter Amendment in the annual appropriations legislation that would grant Priority 2 refugee status to religious minorities in Afghanistan.**

Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh have faced widespread violence and discrimination at the hands of both the government and non-state actors, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, since the country's founding in 1971. From attacks on temples to seizure of Hindu owned lands to kidnappings and forced conversions of young girls to large scale violence, Hindus live in fear as second-class citizens.

These states in South Asia, which give preference to their Muslim citizens and have incorporated elements of Islamic law into their legal systems and institutions need to do more to ensure religious freedom and citizenship rights of its Hindu minorities.

Hence the need for **India's Citizenship Amendment Act**, which was legally adopted by a majority vote of both houses of India's Parliament. It **provides full citizenship and amnesty** for refugee minority groups who illegally crossed the border into India from neighboring countries where Islam is the official state religion, where minorities are persecuted, and for whom no other country has offered assistance.

## **2. Indian Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K)**

The Union Territory of **Jammu and Kashmir is and has always been an integral and legal part of India** and U.S. elected officials should approach this issue in such a context. The people of J&K face a daily threat of Pakistan sponsored Islamist terrorism. **Terrorism is the number one killer in Kashmir** – more people have died in J&K, regardless of religious identity, in a terrorist attack than for any other reason.

In 2019, Indian legislators ushered in a historic and welcome reform with the support of most of India's elected leaders, who joined together from across party lines to repeal the discriminatory articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution. This positive development allowed for the bifurcation and granting of Union Territory status to the new states J&K and Ladakh, which removed local discriminatory laws and now provided equal protection under federal law to all the people of the new states. Moreover, this fulfilled a long standing demand of the people of Ladakh (Buddhists, Shia Muslims, and Hindus), who have advocated for a separate union territory for years.

**\* The Hindu American Foundation supports adoption of H. Res. 408, a resolution condemning the terrorist attack in India that killed 41 Indian Central Reserve Police and that recognizes Kashmiri Pandit 'Exodus Day' and their right to return to their ancestral homeland.**

**\* The Hindu American Foundation strongly opposes H. Res. 745, an anti-India and anti-Hindu resolution that wrongly condemns India for taking life-saving steps following the repeal of the**



**discriminatory Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution on August 5, 2019 and which fails to mention the indigenous Hindu population of the Kashmir Valley.**

### **3. U.S.-India Relations**

**The U.S.-India relationship has the potential to be the most consequential partnership for the U.S. in the 21st century.** 90% of Hindu Americans trace their ancestry to India, and seek a secure and vibrant country that is home to their sacred geography of historic and important temples, gurudwaras, churches, and mosques.

Hindu Americans want leaders who will elevate India, the only secular democracy in the region, to a non-NATO partnership status, a level currently enjoyed only by Israel and Saudi Arabia. Hindu Americans want to see a joint U.S.-India zero-tolerance approach to terrorism and to increase cooperation in the global war on terror. Increased U.S. security assistance is also warranted given India's need to regularly defend itself from Pakistan-based cross border terrorism that has gone unchecked by the international community for decades.

The Hindu American community also wants to ensure that democracy, democratic institutions, and the rule of law is improved and strengthened in both India and America.

**\* The Hindu American Foundation supports H.R.2123, the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership.**

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## **Other Core Issues**

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** Thousands of Hindu Americans are currently serving on the front lines in the battle against COVID19. These are physicians, nurses, surgeons, pharmacists, and other front line workers. Hindu American relief and service organizations are also contributing to the effort to fight COVID19 through donation drives that have raised millions of dollars and much needed supplies, equipment, and resources that have been delivered to hospitals and clinics throughout the U.S.

Hindu Americans want our government to take decisive action to address the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis and restore science, trust, and credibility to our response. We want to see more healthcare choices, reduced health care costs, and a health care system that's easier to navigate. We believe every American should have access to free COVID-19 testing, treatment, and ultimately a vaccine.

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Hindu Americans want to see a comprehensive plan laid out by our elected officials that would ensure that working families, small businesses, and essential workers get the relief and protection they deserve.

**Climate Change and Clean Energy:** Hindu Americans support a clean energy revolution to address the grave threat of climate change and we believe that America should lead the world in setting environmental standards to address climate change.

**Women’s Rights:** Expand on the Violence Against Women Act to end violence against women and protect women’s civil rights.

**LGBTQ+ Rights:** Provide the moral leadership to champion equal rights for all LGBTQ+ people and fight to ensure our laws and institutions protect and enforce their rights.

**Gun Violence:** Pursue constitutional, common-sense gun safety policies to end our gun violence epidemic.

**American Leadership & Shared Values:** Present dignified, moral American leadership at home and abroad, take steps to strengthen American democracy and our core alliances, while reinvigorating and empowering a coalition of democracies around the globe in addressing the most urgent global challenges. The Hindu American community believes in *Satya* (truth), *Ahimsa* (non-violence), and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (“The world is one family”). These values inform the causes that are important to Hindu Americans, and Hindu Americans are naturally attracted to leaders who reflect these values.