



Hindu American Community Policy Platform 2022

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

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. 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.

By some estimates, close to 250,000 Indian Americans are waiting for family sponsored green cards. 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. These green card backlogs also put the dependents of these high skilled

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workers in legal limbo, with children on H-4 visas risking deportation if greencards are not secured in a timely manner.

Hindu Americans value family reunion and strengthening the economy, which is why they support the creation of a new nonimmigrant category that allows US citizens and permanent residents to have family members visit temporarily for important occasions.

* The Hindu American Foundation **supports** [H.R. 3215/S.1635 the Temporary Family Visitation Act \(TFVA\)](#) of 2021 currently pending in Congress.

* The Hindu American Foundation **supports** [H.R.3648 Equal Access to Green Cards for Legal Employment \(EAGLE\) Act](#) of 2021 currently pending in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Hindu American Foundation **supports** [S.3721 Resolving Extended Limbo for Immigrant Employees and Families \(RELIEF\) Act](#) of 2021 currently pending in the U.S. Senate.

* The Hindu American Foundation **supports** [H.R.4331 America's Children's Act](#) of 2021 currently pending in the U.S. House of Representatives.

* The Hindu American Foundation **supports** [H.R.6 American Dream and Promise Act](#) of 2021 currently pending in the U.S. Senate.

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

The public presentation of Hinduism and thus issues of importance to the Hindu American community has been misrepresented 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** [NY A.6846/NY S.5710](#) establishing Diwali as a public holiday, and [NY A.7062/NY S.5709](#), establishing Diwali as a holiday in New York City public schools.

*The Hindu American Foundation **opposes** language in legislation that incorrectly defines the swastika as a hate symbol of Nazi Germany without explaining its 4,000+ years of continued use as an auspicious symbol in religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism.

3. 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.2383 and S.1086, The National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality Act** of 2021 (No HATE Act) and other similar legislation at the federal and state level.*

* *The Hindu American Foundation **supports HR.350 Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act** of 2021 alongside the Leadership Conference's coalition of Hate Crimes Task Force organizations .*

4. Caste and Non-Discrimination Policies That Don't Target Hindu Americans:

Hindu Americans vehemently condemn any and all forms of discrimination, including caste discrimination, and we believe non-discrimination policies should be neutral without targeteting any single community. Although Hindu Americans do not dispute the existence of caste discrimination nor condone it in any form, adding "caste" to protected class policies is inherently discriminatory. According to US law, all protected classes must be "facially neutral," meaning the protected class is so broad it does not bring to mind a small subset of the population, like *gender, race, or ancestry*; caste has associations with people of South Asian ancestry, therefore its inclusion as a protected class, while well-intended, is unconstitutional. Furthermore, its addition reinforces negative stereotypes about Hindus and people of South Asian ancestry, leading to increased bullying and suspicious treatment in both the schools and the workplace. US law would not permit similar legislation that unfairly targeted and only applied to Arab Americans, Chinese Americans, or African Americans based on inter-community differences, such as clan, tribe, region, etc.

Luckily, the US has a long history of fiercely defending individuals against discrimination, including on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, and ancestry. These facially-neutral classes already encompass caste. Therefore, Hindu Americans believe cases of discrimination, including caste discrimination, should be prosecuted under existing US laws protecting all from discrimination, regardless of heritage.

FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

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

Of grave concern to Hindu Americans is the devastating persecution of Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh. 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.

PAKISTAN

Abductions, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages

In Pakistan, Hindus are a dwindling minority who face rampant discrimination, predatory proselytization, child abduction, forced conversions, forced marriages, rape, forced separation from family, and sex trafficking. In 2021 the Hindu American Foundation launched an advocacy campaign to [Save Pakistan's Stolen Girls](#) and raise awareness to the horrific plight of young victims. Hindu Americans want to see [elected officials take a stand by making statements in support of victims](#) and passing a congressional resolution condemning kidnappings, forced conversions and forced marriages of minors in Pakistan.

Blasphemy Laws

Blasphemy laws in Pakistan violate international norms of religious freedom. The harsh death penalties these draconian laws command often embolden violent mobs to commit extrajudicial killings in the name of blasphemy. Between 1987-2022, 1,865 individuals have been charged under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, and at least 129 individuals were killed by extrajudicial mob justice for blasphemy. Hindu Americans oppose blasphemy laws as they contradict our core belief that all religions are true. Hindu Americans would like to see their [elected officials call for the release of blasphemy prisoners of conscience](#) and [re-introduce a congressional resolution](#) from the 116th Congress calling for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws.

** The Hindu American Foundation **supports** the reintroduction of [a congressional resolution calling for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws](#).*

Terrorism and Regional Security

Hindu Americans view [Pakistan's status as a Major Non-NATO Ally](#) as antithetical to regional stability in South Asia and American national security interests and would like to see the U.S. hold Pakistan accountable for its decades of financing and harboring terrorists, propping up the Taliban, and actively working against democratic norms.

** The Hindu American Foundation **opposes** Pakistan's ["country of particular concern" waiver](#) under the [International Religious Freedom Act](#).*

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* The Hindu American Foundation **supports** revoking Pakistan's status as a Major Non-NATO ally.

* The Hindu American Foundation **supports** a Congressional review to determine if Pakistan meets the criteria as a state-sponsor of terrorism

* The Hindu American Foundation **supports** [H.R.6993 Stopping Pakistani Terror Act](#) of 2021.

BANGLADESH

Ongoing Religious Persecution

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 in Bangladesh live in fear as second-class citizens.

1971 Bengali Hindu Genocide

Hindu Americans seek [formal recognition from elected officials](#) of the [1971 Bengali Hindu genocide](#), which targeted Hindus and slaughtered more than three million people.

2. 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.

The Hindu American community also wants to ensure that democracy, democratic institutions, the rule of law and interfaith relations are improved and strengthened in both India and America. As the world's two largest democracies, Hindu Americans see a strong U.S.-India relationship as critical to stability in South Asia.

3. 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

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and 35A of the Indian constitution. This positive development allowed for the bifurcation and granting of Union Territory status to the new entities of 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.

Other Core Issues

Healthy Food and Transparent Food Labels: Expand access to healthy, plant-based nourishment and enforce honest labeling to ensure food labeled vegetarian does not contain any animal by-products

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.