



# How Do Indian Americans View India? Results From the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey

Sumitra Badrinathan | Devesh Kapur | Milan Vaishnav

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## Summary

Since coming to power in 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made outreach to the far-flung Indian diaspora a signature element of his government's foreign policy. Modi's courtship of the diaspora has been especially notable in the United States, where the Indian American population has swelled to more than 4 million and has become the second-largest immigrant group in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

In two separate, large rallies on U.S. soil—in 2014 and 2019—Modi sought to highlight the achievements of the diaspora, outlining the many ways in which they can support India's interests from afar while underscoring their increasingly substantial economic, political, and social influence in the United States.

These high-octane gatherings, however, naturally lead to a series of questions: How do Indians in America regard India, and how do they remain connected to developments there? What are their attitudes toward Indian politics and changes underway in their ancestral homeland? And what role, if any, do they envision for the United States in engaging with India?

Despite the growing media attention showered on the Indian diaspora and the Indian government's enhanced outreach, many of these questions remain unanswered. This study seeks to remedy this gap. The analysis is based on a nationally representative online survey of 1,200 Indian American adult residents—the Indian American Attitudes Survey (IAAS)—conducted between September 1 and September 20, 2020, in partnership with the research and analytics firm YouGov. The survey has an overall margin of error of +/- 2.8 percent.

The data show that Indians, by and large, remain deeply connected to their homeland. But the intensity of this connection and the precise channels through which it operates vary greatly across the Indian American population. Indian Americans hold mixed opinions on the present trajectory of Indian democracy. While a bare majority appear largely supportive of Modi and his government, a significant minority is not. While Indian Americans tend to have more conservative opinions on policy issues in India than on those in the United States, they are less pro-Modi compared to Indians living in India and less conservative in their views.

On foreign policy, Indian Americans endorse efforts to deepen ties between Washington and New Delhi and share broadly negative views of China. However, they are more split on how far the two countries should go in confronting China.

This study is the second in a series on the social, political, and foreign policy attitudes of Indian Americans. The major findings are briefly summarized below.

- **Indians who are not U.S. citizens overwhelmingly welcome the prospect of citizenship.** Twenty-three percent of IAAS respondents reside in the United States but are not U.S. citizens. However, 80 percent of them indicate that they would like to become naturalized U.S. citizens if afforded the opportunity.
- **Indian Americans enjoy diverse connections to India.** One in two Indian Americans feels personally connected to India. This connection—strongest among members of the community born outside of the United States—manifests itself through personal, cultural, and political links.
- **Indian Americans are divided about India’s current trajectory.** Respondents are nearly evenly split as to whether India is currently on the right track or headed down the wrong track. Indian Americans are especially concerned about the challenges government corruption and slowing economic growth pose to India’s future.
- **The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the most popular political party among Indian Americans.** One-third of respondents favor the ruling BJP while just 12 percent identify with the Congress Party. However, two in five Indian Americans do not identify with an Indian political party—suggesting an arms-length relationship to everyday politics in India.
- **Indian Americans hold broadly favorable views of Modi.** Nearly half of all Indian Americans approve of Modi’s performance as prime minister. This support is greatest among Republicans, Hindus, people in the engineering profession, those not born in the United States, and those who hail from North and West India.
- **Indian Americans’ policy views are more liberal on issues affecting the United States and more conservative on issues affecting India.** Regarding contentious issues such as the equal protection of religious minorities, immigration, and affirmative action, Indian Americans hold relatively more conservative views of Indian policies than of U.S. policies.

- **Indian Americans heavily rely on online sources for news about India.** Fifty-four percent of respondents report using online sources to follow news about India. YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp are among their most popular social media platforms. Although Indian Americans heavily rely on social media, they do not view it as particularly trustworthy relative to traditional news sources.
- **Indian Americans are broadly supportive of the U.S.-India relationship.** A plurality of Indian Americans believes that current levels of U.S. support for India are adequate, while a large majority hold unfavorable opinions of China. However, Indian Americans are divided about U.S. efforts to strengthen India's military as a check against China. Foreign-born Indian Americans and those who identify as Republicans are more supportive of U.S. efforts to support India militarily than their U.S.-born and Democratic counterparts.

## Introduction

In September 2019, approximately 50,000 cheering members of the Indian diaspora packed into NRG Stadium, home of the National Football League's Houston Texans, to hear a rare address from a foreign leader on U.S. soil.<sup>2</sup>

On this day, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted the second of two large public rallies in the United States since coming to power in a landmark election in May 2014. The first came that year, when the Indian leader attracted 18,000 Indian Americans to New York City's Madison Square Garden in a gathering that more closely resembled a postelection victory party.<sup>3</sup> But the 2019 event in Houston was exceptional in a singular way.

While Modi's New York celebration mobilized dozens of members of Congress, a governor, and a handful of senators to appear alongside him, Modi's Texas event caught the attention of U.S. President Donald Trump, who co-headlined the event.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the large number of supporters at the two events, outside these venues there were also small groups of protesters, reflecting the political divisions in India within the Indian American community.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond mere pageantry, these massive rallies signaled the political coming-of-age of an Indian diaspora in the United States whose numbers had swelled to over 4 million by 2018. Indeed, two-thirds of the Indian population in the United States arrived in the country after 2000.<sup>6</sup>

The rallies also reflected the burgeoning U.S.-India partnership, which has enjoyed steady progress since the turn of the twenty-first century and has touched on areas as diverse as climate change, defense, and space exploration.

While an explicit recognition of the need to leverage the soft power of the Indian diaspora had emerged under Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in the early 2000s, the gatherings signified the particular importance that the Modi government has placed on the Indian diaspora as a force multiplier of India's foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> The United States has a long record of diaspora groups—including, for example, Armenian, Jewish, Irish, and Polish immigrants—engaging their homelands of origin. While more recent, the engagement of Indian immigrants is broadly similar, representing an important conduit for financial flows, talent, and human capital, as well as political and diplomatic support.

But the attention showered on the diaspora also raises important, unanswered questions about how exactly Indians in America view their country of origin, the political changes underway in their homeland, and the trajectory of Indian democracy. Empirically speaking, relatively little is known about Indian Americans' attitudes toward India largely due to a lack of systematic data collection.

This study aims to remedy this gap by harnessing new empirical data that can help characterize the views of Indian Americans toward India. Its findings are based on a nationally representative online survey of 1,200 Indian American residents in the United States—the 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey (IAAS)—conducted between September 1 and September 20, 2020, in partnership with YouGov. The survey, drawing on both citizens and non-citizens in the United States, was conducted online using YouGov's proprietary panel of 1.8 million Americans and has an overall margin of error of +/- 2.8 percent.

Specifically, this study addresses seven questions concerning Indian Americans' views of India:

1. How do the bonds of kinship and citizenship shape Indian Americans' connections to India?
2. What personal and cultural outlets do Indian Americans pursue in order to remain engaged with India?
3. How do Indian Americans assess the state of democracy in India?
4. How closely do Indian Americans follow politics in India, and what are their political leanings and partisan identities in India?
5. How do Indian Americans view contentious policy debates in India? Do Indian Americans exhibit similar views on comparable policy issues in India and the United States?
6. What sources do Indian Americans rely on to remain informed about news and politics in India?
7. How do Indian Americans view U.S.-India relations and U.S. efforts to lend diplomatic support to India?

This study is the second in a series of empirical reports on the Indian American community. The first, released in September 2020, explored the political attitudes and preferences of Indian Americans heading into the November 2020 U.S. presidential election.<sup>8</sup> The third and final study will explore the social realities of Indians in America.

## Survey Overview

Indian Americans are the second-largest immigrant group in the United States.<sup>9</sup> According to data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS)—which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau—there are 4.2 million people of Indian origin residing in the United States. Although a large proportion of Indian Americans in the United States are not U.S. citizens (38 percent), roughly 2.6 million are U.S. citizens (1.4 million are naturalized citizens and 1.2 million were born in the United States).

The data for this study are based on an original online survey—the IAAS—of 1,200 Indian American U.S. residents conducted by the polling firm YouGov between September 1 and September 20, 2020. The IAAS sample includes both citizens and non-U.S. citizens; the former category accounts for 77 percent of the survey respondents. Table 1 provides a demographic profile of the IAAS sample in comparison to the Indian American sample in the 2018 ACS.

TABLE 1  
**Demographics of the Indian American Attitudes Survey (IAAS)  
 and American Community Survey (ACS)**

	IAAS 2020	ACS 2018
<b>Has U.S. citizenship</b>	77%	62%
<b>Median age (years)</b>	35 years	34 years
<b>Is married</b>	65%	73%
<b>Ages 25 years or older with a college degree</b>	79%	76%
<b>Median household annual income</b>	\$80,000–\$99,000	\$120,000

**SOURCE:** Authors' analysis of data from the IAAS and ACS 2018.

YouGov recruited respondents from its proprietary panel comprised of 1.8 million U.S. residents. For the IAAS, only adult respondents (ages eighteen and above) who identified as Indian American or a person of (Asian) Indian origin were able to participate in the survey. YouGov employs a sophisticated sample matching procedure to ensure that the respondent pool is representative of the Indian American community in the United States, using data from the ACS as a target sample frame. All the analyses in this study employ sampling weights to ensure representativeness.<sup>10</sup>

The overall margin of error for the IAAS is +/- 2.8 percent. This margin of error is calculated at the 95 percent confidence interval. Further methodological details can be found in Appendix A, along with a state-wise map of survey respondents.

The survey instrument contains 157 questions organized across six modules: basic demographics; immigration, citizenship, and family background; presidential campaigns and voting; U.S. politics and foreign policy; culture and social behavior; and Indian politics. Respondents were allowed to skip questions save for important demographic questions that determined the nature of other survey items. For complete survey topline results, please visit Appendix C online.

## Key Findings

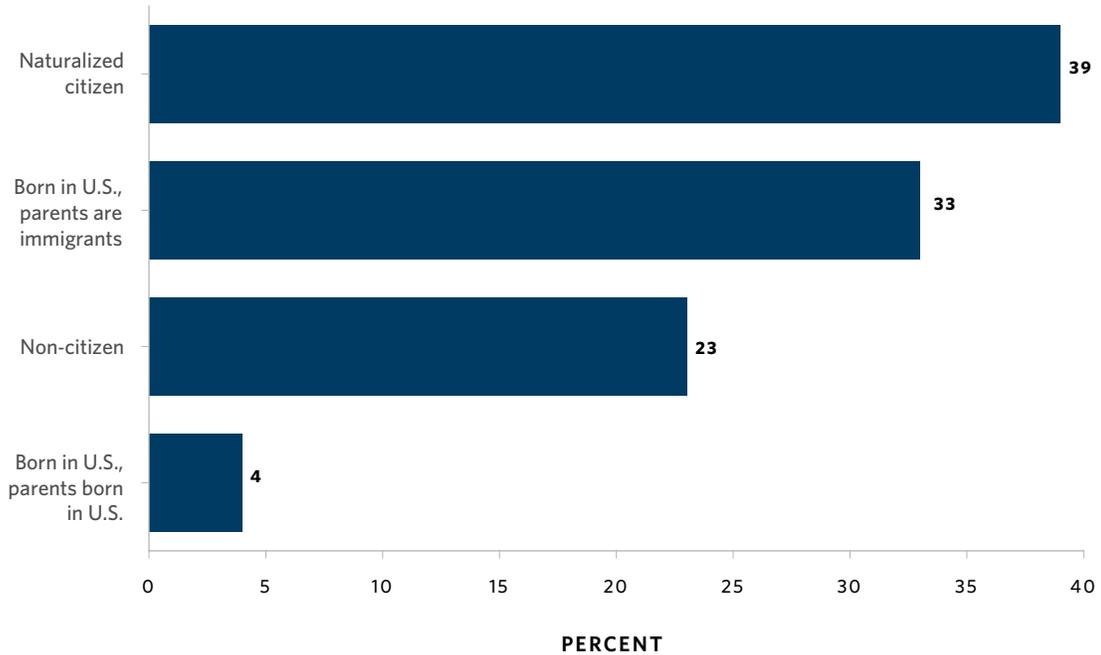
### Bonds of Kinship and Citizenship

This section examines the formal bonds of citizenship that connect people of Indian origin residing in the United States with India.

Thirty-nine percent of IAAS respondents—the modal category—are naturalized U.S. citizens (see figure 1). Thirty-three percent of respondents belong to the second generation: they were born in the United States to immigrant parents. A tiny fraction—just 4 percent—were born in the United States to parents who were also born in the United States, making them members of the third generation. Taken together, nearly 77 percent of the IAAS sample are U.S. citizens. The remaining 23 percent of the sample consists of non-U.S. citizens; of this group, 88 percent retain Indian citizenship.

FIGURE 1  
**Citizenship Status**

*% of respondents . . .*



**N** = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

The survey asked non-citizens in the sample if they would like to remain in the United States and become U.S. citizens if given the opportunity. An overwhelming majority (80 percent) indicated that they would like to do so. Because the Indian Constitution does not permit dual citizenship, such a move would imply forfeiting one's Indian citizenship in order to take up a U.S. passport.

Although dual citizenship is expressly prohibited under Indian law, in 2005 the Indian government introduced the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) designation for persons of Indian origin. This classification provides foreign citizens of Indian origin visa-free entry into the country and grants

them the ability to live and work in India on a permanent basis. Among members of the diaspora who are not Indian citizens, possession of an OCI card (which requires a lengthy application) is arguably a signifier of the strength of one's connection to India.

Overall, 42 percent of IAAS respondents without Indian citizenship report having an OCI card, while 54 percent and 5 percent report not having a card or being unsure of their OCI status, respectively. This compares with the roughly 50 percent of Indian American U.S. citizens who possess an OCI card as of early 2020, according to official Indian government data (there were 1.3 million OCI card holders in the United States out of 2.6 million Indian American U.S. citizens).<sup>11</sup> However, the share of Indian Americans who take advantage of OCI status varies enormously across demographic subgroups.

For example, 53 percent of Hindus report possessing an OCI card, compared to 45 percent of Christians and 25 percent of Muslims of Indian origin.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Indian Americans born outside of the United States are more likely to hold OCI status: 47 percent of Indian Americans born outside of the country report having an OCI card, compared to 38 percent of those born in the United States.

### **Dimensions of Connectivity**

Formal ties of citizenship—or quasi-citizenship in the case of OCI card holders—are one metric for assessing the ties that bind Indian Americans with their ancestral homeland. This section explores an alternate measure—connectivity—across two dimensions: personal and cultural.

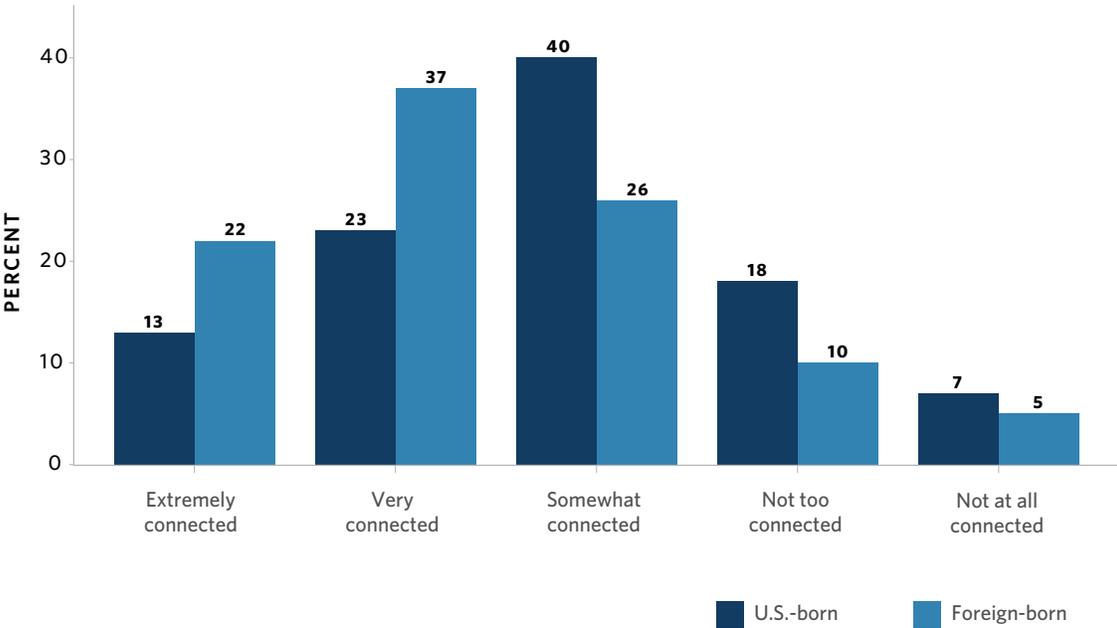
*Personal connectivity*

The survey asked respondents how connected they personally feel with India. Eighteen percent report that they feel extremely connected, while another 32 percent state that they feel very connected to India. Thirty-one percent place themselves in the middle of the spectrum, stating they feel somewhat connected. On the opposite end of the spectrum, 13 percent say that they are not too connected, and around 6 percent report that they are not at all connected to India.

There is notable variation in how Indian Americans responded to this general measure of personal connectivity depending on their place of birth. As figure 2 demonstrates, Indian Americans born outside of the United States are more likely to report a strong connection to India compared to those born in the United States.

FIGURE 2  
**Overall Connectivity With India**

*How connected do you personally feel with India?*



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

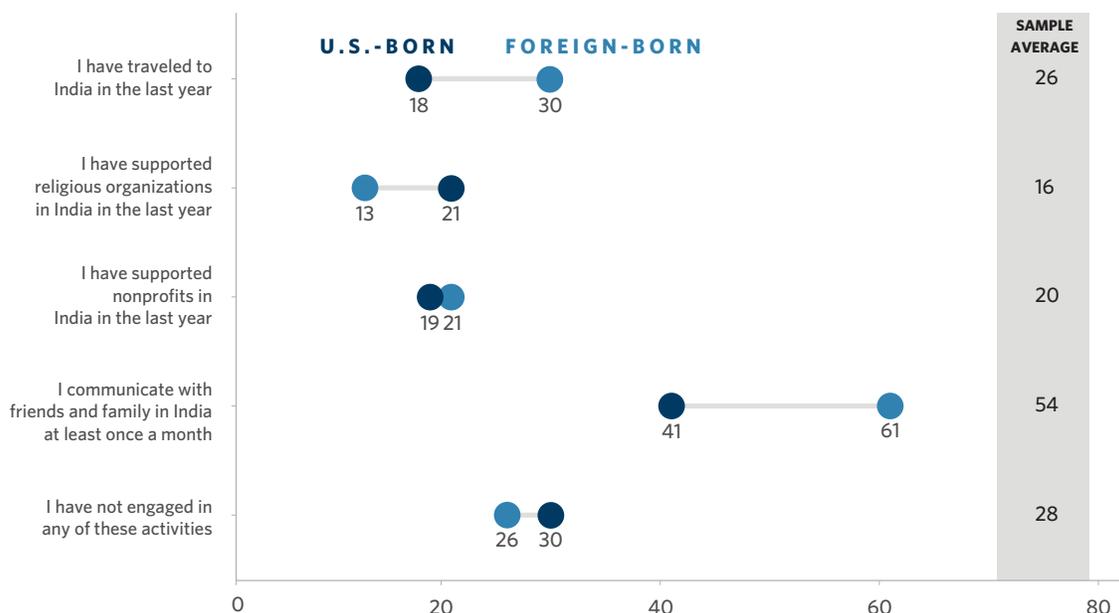
SOURCE: 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

Fifty-nine percent of foreign-born Indian Americans report feeling either extremely or very connected to India, compared to 36 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans. U.S.-born Indian Americans, on the other hand, are more inclined to state that they are somewhat connected to India (40 percent for U.S.-born versus 26 percent for foreign-born). Twenty-five percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans report feeling not too or not at all connected, compared to just 15 percent of naturalized Indian Americans.<sup>13</sup>

Moving beyond subjective feelings of connectivity, the survey asked respondents about their engagement across four specific dimensions of personal connectivity: travel to India, support for religious organizations in India, support for nonprofit organizations in India, and communication with friends and family in India. Figure 3 contains their responses, once again distinguishing between U.S.- and foreign-born Indian Americans.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Dimensions of Personal Connectivity**

*Have you engaged in any of the following activities?*



**N** = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

In all categories but one, foreign-born Indian Americans are more likely to report personal engagement than their U.S.-born counterparts. Thirty percent of foreign-born Indian Americans report traveling to India in the past one year, compared to 18 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of communicating with friends and family in India, 61 percent of foreign-born Indian Americans report doing so at least once a month, compared to 41 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans.

On the remaining two dimensions of personal connectivity, the survey highlights slightly dissonant patterns. U.S.-born Indian Americans are more likely to report supporting religious organizations in India (21 percent) compared to foreign-born Indian Americans (13 percent). Across Indian Americans of different faiths, Hindus (20 percent) and Christians (19 percent) are the most likely to report religious giving in the past year. Muslim respondents and those of other faiths report a lower likelihood of giving (each group at around 15 percent).

Meanwhile, when it comes to supporting secular nonprofit organizations in India, the proportions are roughly equivalent when disaggregating by place of birth. Twenty-one percent of foreign-born and 19 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans report engaging in such activity in the past year—an insignificant difference. Overall, a slightly higher share of Indian Americans (20 percent) support secular nonprofit organizations rather than religious organizations (16 percent) in India, although the intensity of support is unclear.

Notably, a large section of respondents—30 percent of U.S.-born and 26 percent of foreign-born Indian Americans—acknowledge not engaging in any of the aforementioned activities.

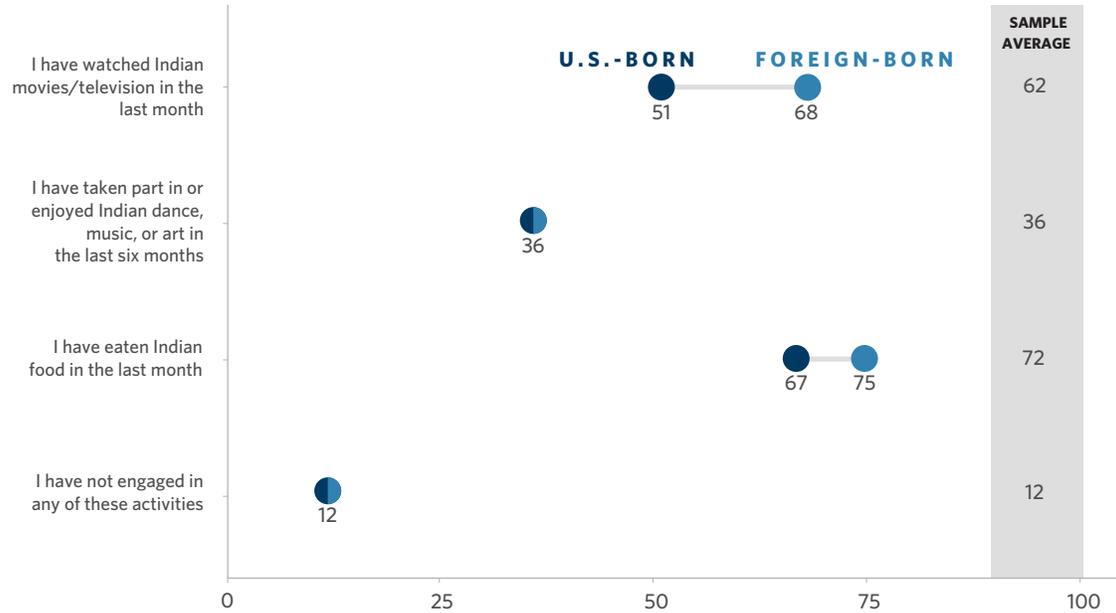
### *Cultural connectivity*

The survey also explores cultural aspects of connectivity with India (see figure 4). A majority of Indian Americans report watching Indian movies or television shows in the past month, with foreign-born respondents reporting slightly higher numbers than those born in the United States (68 percent versus 51 percent). When it comes to culinary habits, Indian cuisine is a popular choice regardless of place of birth. Three-quarters of foreign-born and two-thirds of U.S.-born Indian Americans say they have eaten Indian food in the last month.

On the third measure of cultural connectivity—participating in or viewing Indian dance, music, or art—the proportions of U.S.-born and foreign-born Indian Americans partaking in these pursuits are identical: 36 percent of each group report engagement with the arts in the last six months.

FIGURE 4  
**Dimensions of Cultural Connectivity**

*Have you engaged in any of the following activities?*



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

SOURCE: 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

Relative to measures of personal connectivity, there are comparatively few respondents who report not engaging in any of these cultural practices. Just 12 percent of respondents report not engaging in Indian cultural activities (the proportion does not vary by place of birth). It is notable that levels of cultural connectivity are considerably larger than those of personal connectivity.

### India's Trajectory

Before delving into the partisan attitudes and preferences of Indian Americans in regards to politics in India, this section summarizes respondents' macro-perspectives on India's trajectory.

#### *Is India on the right track?*

In response to a question about whether things in India are going in the right or wrong direction, respondents appear deeply divided. Thirty-six percent of Indian Americans report that India is currently on the right track, while 39 percent believe it is on the wrong track. Twenty-five percent of

respondents expressed no opinion. By comparison, 67 percent of IAAS respondents report that the United States is on the wrong track, while just 33 percent believe it is on the right track. These data reflect attitudes as of September 2020, before the results of the November U.S. presidential election were known.

The views of IAAS respondents on India's trajectory are markedly more pessimistic than the views of the Indian population as a whole. According to a June-July 2020 Ipsos survey, 60 percent of Indians reported that India was on the right track.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, Indian Americans' assessment of the United States is roughly on par with other survey data. The same Ipsos survey found that 72 percent of Americans believed the country was headed down the wrong track, as do a similar number (67 percent) of IAAS respondents.<sup>16</sup>

There is variation in respondents' assessments based on place of birth (see figure 5). A somewhat larger share (39 percent) of foreign-born Indian Americans believe that India is on the right track, compared to 32 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans. The pattern reverses when it comes to negative evaluations of India's current direction: 44 of U.S.-born Indian Americans believe the country is on the wrong track, compared to 36 percent of foreign-born Indian Americans. Roughly 25 percent of respondents expressed no opinion. In net terms, while 3 percent of foreign-born Indian Americans believe that India is on the right track, 12 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans believe the country is on the wrong-track.

#### *Extent of support for India*

When eliciting attitudes toward a country, it can be difficult to disentangle people's views toward the government from their attitudes toward the country as a whole. To address this, the IAAS asked respondents to self-identify with one of four categories: generally pro-India and supportive of the Indian government's policies, generally pro-India but also critical of *some* of the Indian government's policies, generally pro-India but also critical of *many* of the Indian government's policies, and generally not pro-India.

Seventeen percent of respondents identify as pro-India and pro-government (see figure 6). However, the largest share (35 percent) of respondents identifies as pro-India but critical of *some* of the government's policies. Twenty-three percent go one step further and identify as pro-India but critical of *many* of the government's policies.<sup>17</sup> Seven percent of IAAS respondents state that they are generally not pro-India. About one in five (18 percent) expressed no opinion.

FIGURE 5  
**India's Direction**

*Do you feel things in India are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?*

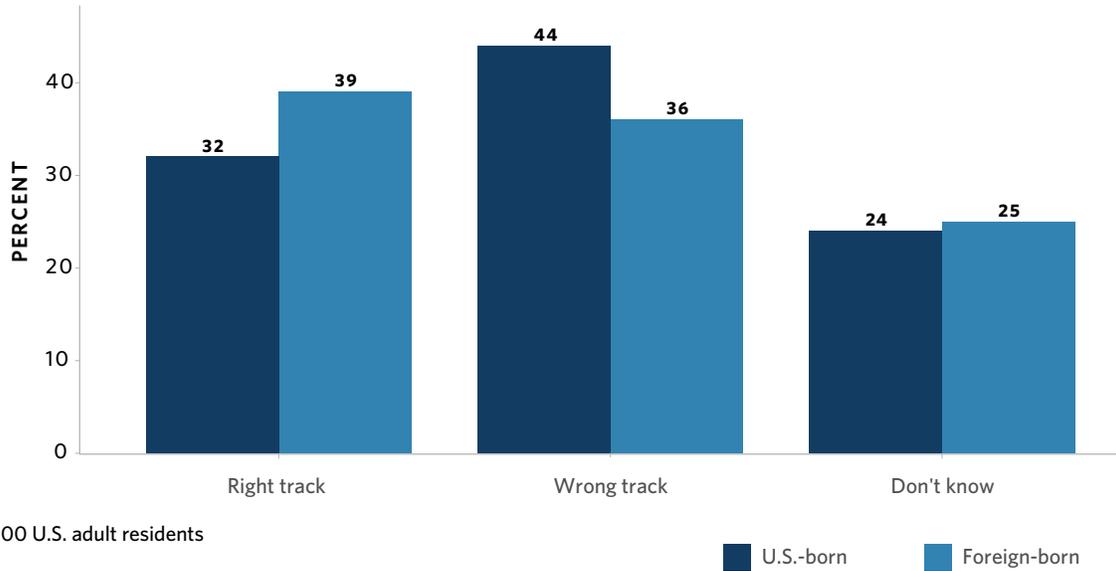


FIGURE 6  
**Extent of Support for India**

*Which of the following best describes you?*

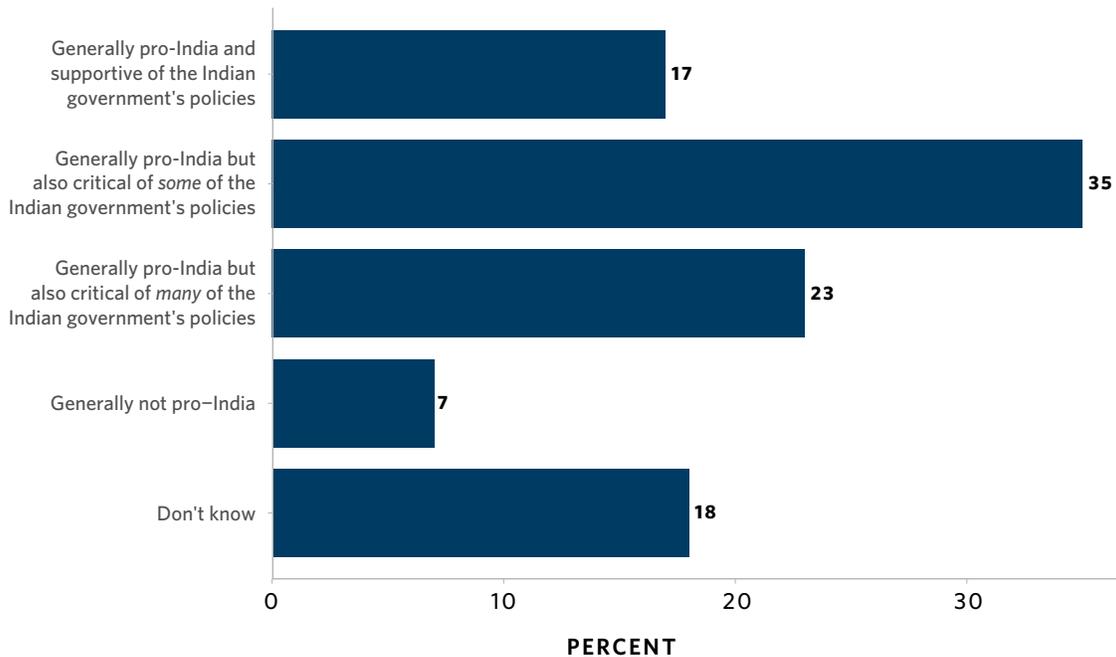
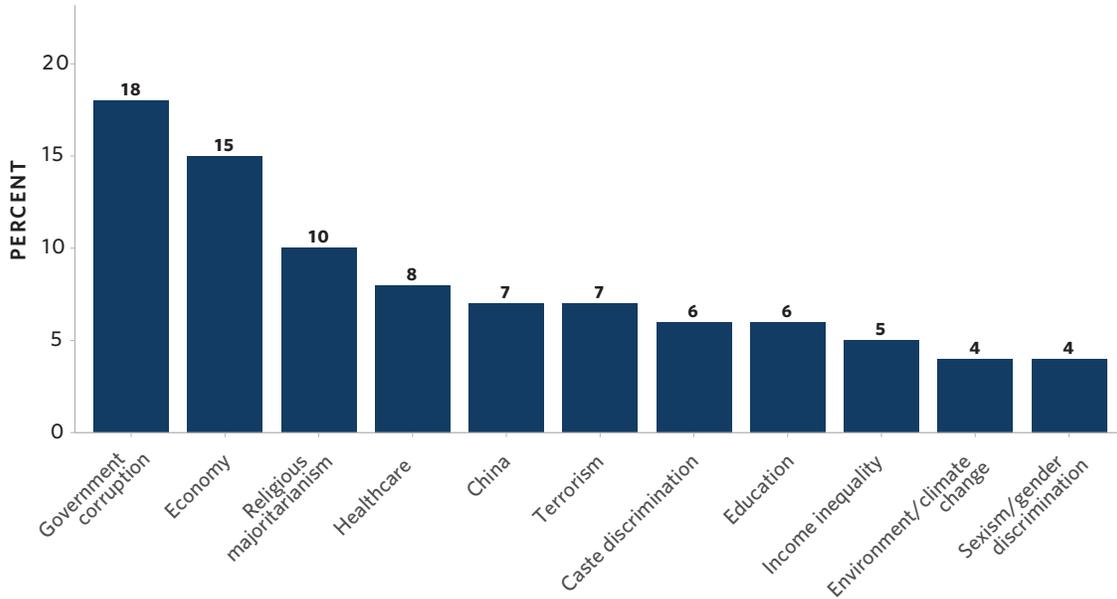


FIGURE 7

## Top Issues Facing India

*What is the top challenge facing India today?*



**N** = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Figure excludes respondents who selected “I don’t have an opinion on any of these issues.”

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

### *India’s top challenges*

The survey also asked respondents their opinion on the top three challenges India faces today. Figure 7 presents the distribution of issues ranked as India’s foremost challenge (that is, the issue they rank as number one). Eighteen percent of respondents think that government corruption is India’s most pressing challenge, followed by the economy (15 percent). Another 10 percent of respondents cite religious majoritarianism as the country’s most important challenge.

When one looks at respondents’ rankings of India’s top three challenges, it is noteworthy just how much resonance government corruption and the economy have among Indian Americans (see table 2). These two issues are among the three most popular responses across the board: corruption, in particular, is the most popular challenge identified in respondents’ rankings. Foreign policy issues—exemplified by China and terrorism—are found in either the middle or bottom tier of the rankings.

TABLE 2  
**Top Three Challenges Facing India Today, Ranked**

#1 issue	%	#2 issue	%	#3 issue	%
Government corruption	18	Government corruption	12	Government corruption	14
Economy	15	Caste discrimination	11	Economy	12
Religious majoritarianism	10	Economy	11	Income inequality	11
Healthcare	8	Healthcare	9	Caste discrimination	9
China	7	China	8	Healthcare	9
Terrorism	7	Income inequality	8	Education	7
Caste discrimination	6	Religious majoritarianism	8	Religious majoritarianism	7
Education	6	Terrorism	8	Sexism/gender discrimination	7
Income inequality	5	Environment/ climate change	6	Environment/ climate change	6
Environment/ climate change	4	Education	5	Terrorism	6
Sexism/gender discrimination	4	Sexism/gender discrimination	5	China	5

**N** = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Table excludes respondents who selected “I don’t have an opinion on any of these issues.”

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

## Views on Indian Politics

The October 2020 IAAS study on Indian Americans’ political attitudes demonstrated that nearly three-quarters of respondents intended to vote for Democratic candidate Joe Biden in the November U.S. presidential election.<sup>18</sup> While other studies have previously highlighted Indian Americans’ affinity toward the Democratic Party, it appears that no study to date has documented the partisan preferences of Indian Americans vis-à-vis Indian politics.<sup>19</sup> This section summarizes several key findings of the IAAS in this regard.

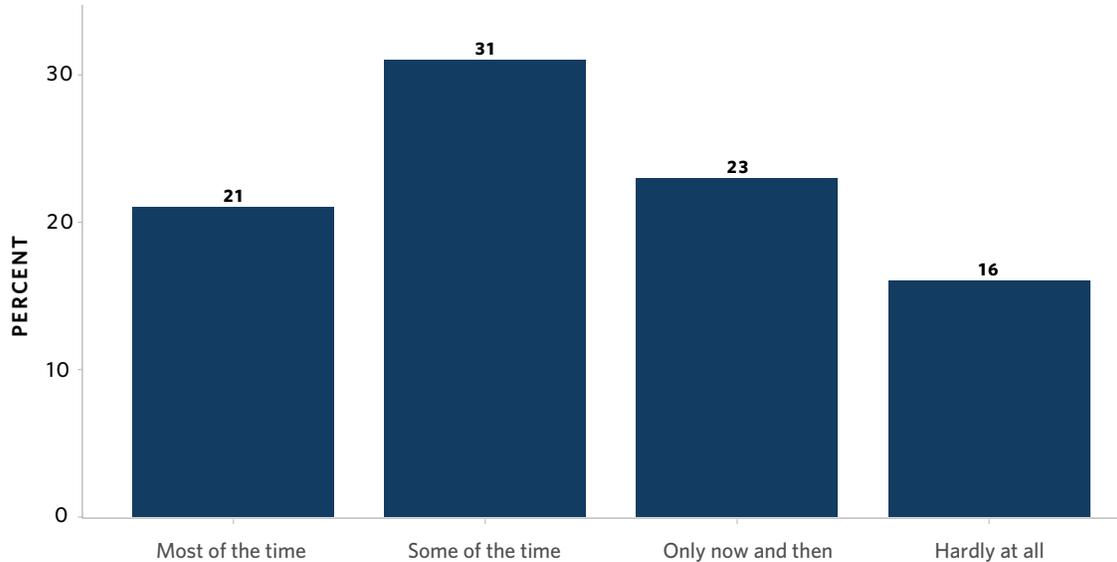
### Political connectivity

Broadly speaking, the survey shows that respondents' awareness of government and public affairs in India varies significantly (see figure 8). Twenty-one percent of respondents report following what is going on in government and public affairs in India most of the time, while 31 percent—the single largest category—report doing so some of the time. Twenty-three percent of respondents follow political developments in India only now and then, while another 16 percent report following public affairs hardly at all. Roughly 10 percent of the sample report not knowing exactly where they fall on this spectrum.

Not surprisingly, Indian Americans born outside of the United States report slightly higher engagement with issues concerning government and public affairs in India, while those born in the United States are modestly more detached.

FIGURE 8  
**Awareness of Indian Politics**

*Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs in India . . . ?*



**N** = 1,199 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Figure excludes respondents who selected "Don't know." Sample excludes respondents who skipped the question.

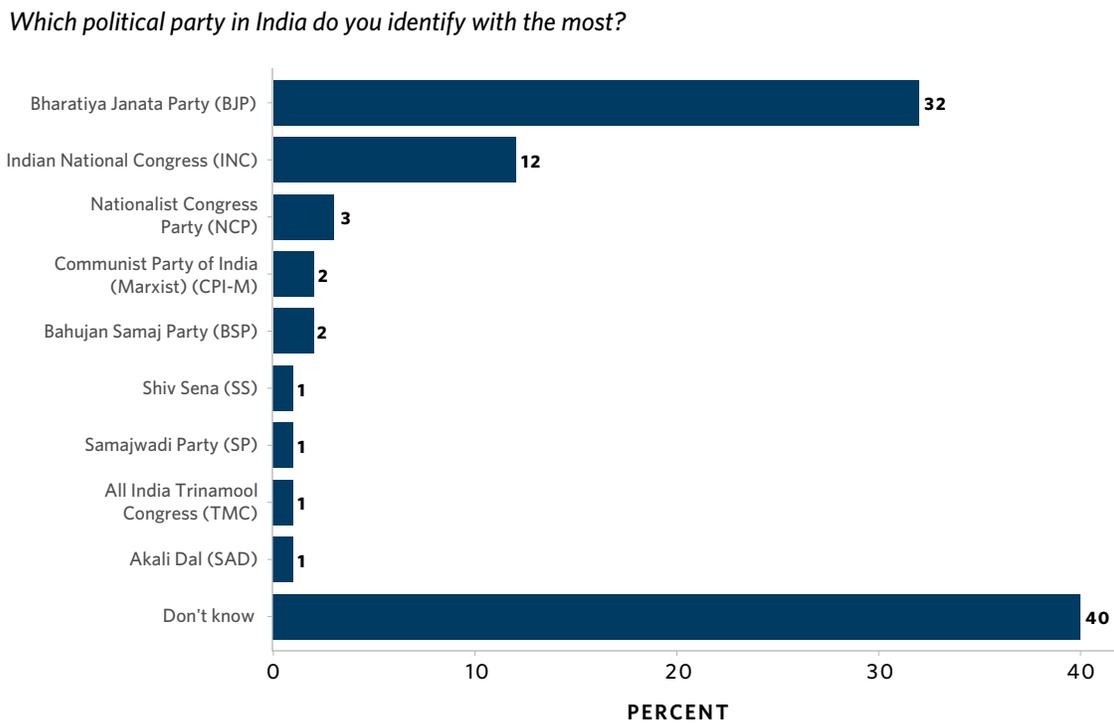
**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

### Partisan identity

The survey asked respondents which political party in India they most closely identify with (see figure 9). Forty percent of Indian Americans replied “don’t know” to this question, suggesting that many respondents maintain a distance from the tumult of Indian politics.

With this caveat in mind, 32 percent of respondents state that they identify most closely with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India’s ruling party. Just 12 percent of respondents identify with the Congress Party, the next most popular party, which serves as the principal opposition party in India today. Other opposition parties receive low levels of support when considered individually. Taken together, however, 28 percent of respondents identify with a party other than the BJP. Since many (but not all) of these are parties are opposed to the BJP, this suggests that Indian American support for the party is broadly aligned, albeit to a lesser degree, with the BJP’s vote share in the 2019 Indian general election (37 percent).<sup>20</sup>

FIGURE 9  
**Partisan Identity**



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Figure excludes respondents who selected “other.”

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

### Approval of Modi

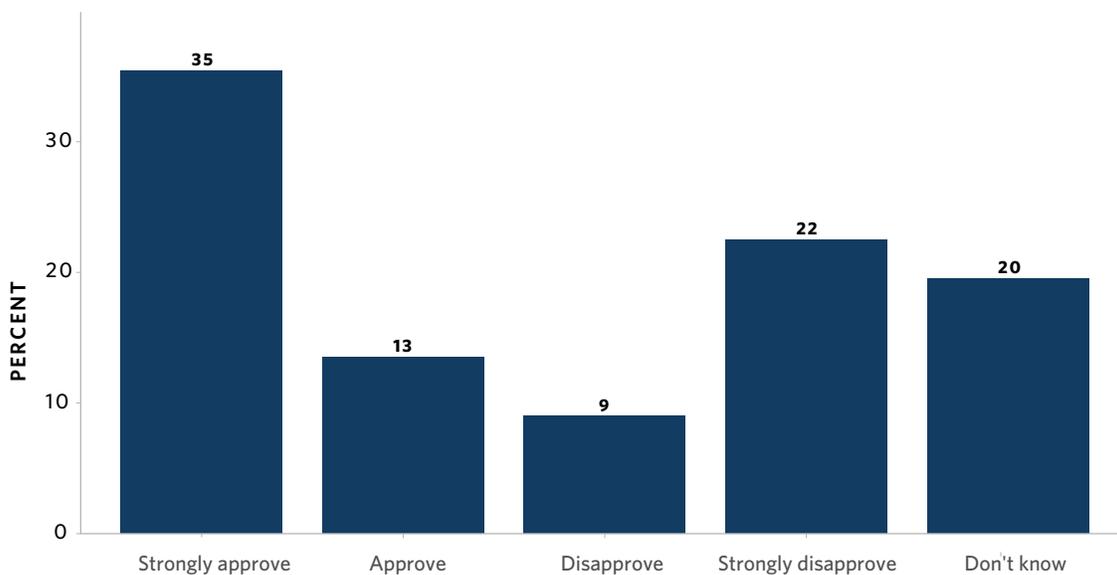
The survey asked respondents if they approve or disapprove of Modi's performance to date (see figure 10). Forty-nine percent of Indian Americans favorably rate Modi's performance thus far (35 percent strongly approve and 13 percent approve). On the opposite end of the spectrum, 22 percent strongly disapprove of Modi's performance and 9 percent disapprove. A considerable number (one in five respondents) expressed no opinion.

Given the religious polarization in India surrounding Modi's performance and the BJP's avowedly pro-Hindu orientation, it is helpful to disaggregate respondents' approval rating by their religious identity (see figure 11). For ease of interpretation, in the figure, the four response categories have been collapsed into a binary measure of approval/disapproval.

The religious divide is striking. Almost seven in ten Hindus approve of Modi's performance, while just one in five Muslims do the same. Indian American Christians are almost evenly divided: 35 percent disapprove, 34 percent approve, and 30 percent did not express an opinion. Twenty-three percent of respondents without a religious affiliation and 38 percent from other faiths approve of

FIGURE 10  
**Modi's Job Approval**

*Do you approve or disapprove of the way Narendra Modi is handling his job as prime minister?*



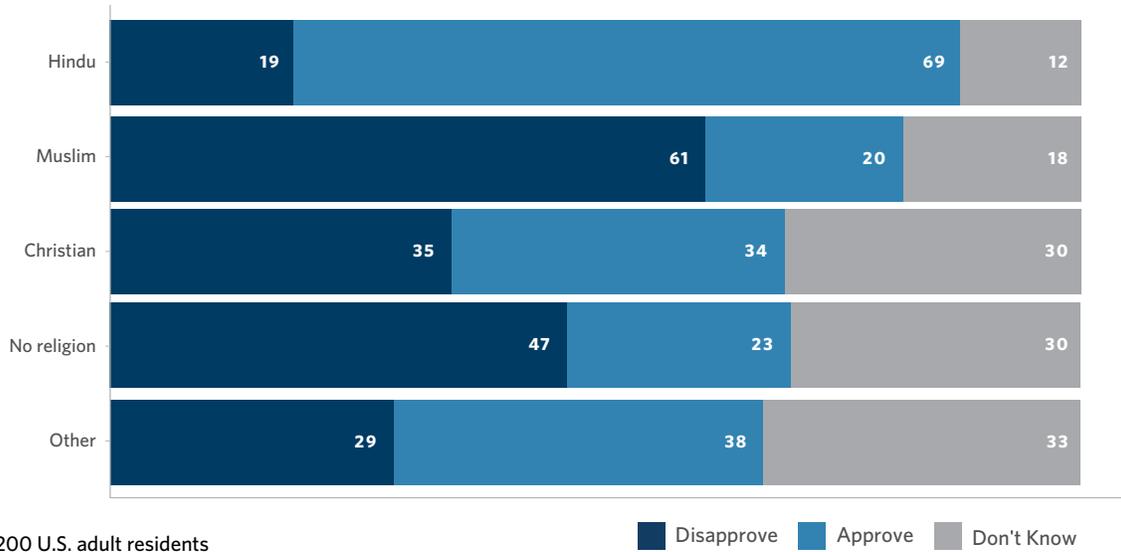
**N** = 1,182 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Sample excludes respondents who skipped the question.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

FIGURE 11  
**Religion and Modi's Job Approval**

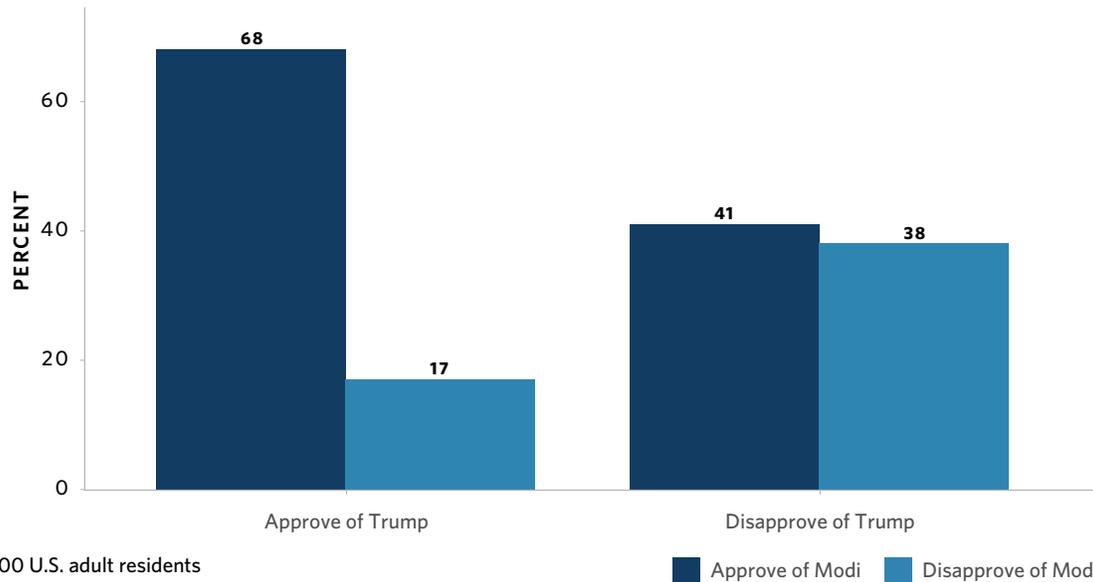
*Do you approve or disapprove of the way Narendra Modi is handling his job as prime minister?*



**NOTE:** "No religion" includes respondents who identify as atheist, agnostic, "nothing in particular," or "anti-religion"; "other" includes respondents who do not identify as Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or "no religion."

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

FIGURE 12  
**Modi's and Trump's Job Approval**



**NOTE:** Figures excludes respondents who selected "don't know" for Modi's job approval.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

Modi's performance, respectively. The share of "don't knows" is the smallest for Hindus and Muslims compared to other religious categories, suggesting that views among respondents of these two faiths are the most consolidated.

To what extent do Indian Americans' preferences in U.S. politics line up with their views on Indian politics? For instance, there is a commonly held belief that support for Trump and Modi are closely intertwined. For one, both leaders are often lumped together as new populist strongmen willing to break the mold.<sup>21</sup> In addition, several commentators speculated that Trump's embrace of Modi and his government's furtherance of U.S.-India ties might convince Modi supporters in America to lend their support to Trump and the Republican Party in the 2020 U.S. election.<sup>22</sup>

However, the IAAS data do not support this notion (see figure 12).

Leaving aside respondents who expressed no opinion, it is true that respondents who approve of Trump also generally approve of Modi. As the figure demonstrates, 68 percent of respondents who approve of Trump also approve of Modi, while just 17 percent disapprove of Modi.

However, on the other hand, respondents who disapprove of Trump are very divided in their assessments of Modi. Forty-one percent approve of Modi's performance, while 38 percent disapprove of Modi. Given that Indian Americans heavily favor the Democratic Party, their disapproval of Trump is to be expected. But this disapproval does not mechanically extend to Modi.

#### *Views toward prominent Indian leaders and organizations*

To gauge support for prominent political leaders and organizations in India, the survey employed a tool pioneered by the American National Election Studies (ANES). For many years now, the ANES has included a "feeling thermometer" question whereby respondents are asked to rate political parties or individual leaders on a scale of zero to one hundred. Ratings between zero and forty-nine mean that respondents do not feel favorable toward the person or do not care for the person or entity, a rating of fifty means that respondents are indifferent toward them, and ratings between fifty-one and one hundred mean that respondents feel favorable and warm toward them.

The IAAS study applies this question to Indian political groups and figures. After determining whether respondents were familiar with the individuals or organizations in question, the survey asked respondents to rate them on the aforementioned scale.

Overall, there is significant variation in respondents' familiarity with the five individuals/organizations the survey asked about. Seventy percent of respondents are familiar with the BJP and Modi, while around 60 percent are familiar with the Congress Party and its vice president, Rahul Gandhi.

Just 41 percent are aware of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the nominally apolitical organization that is the BJP’s ideological wellspring. Fourteen percent of respondents report not being familiar with any of these five names. Familiarity is correlated with place of birth: respondents born in the United States are much less likely to be familiar with the individuals and organizations in question than their foreign-born counterparts. For instance, while more than 80 percent of foreign-born respondents report familiarity with both the BJP and Modi, just around 50 percent of U.S.-born respondents report the same.

The results of the feeling thermometer question exhibit interesting variation (the relative sample sizes for each individual or organization are noted along the x-axis of figure 13). The mean thermometer rating for the BJP is fifty-seven, nearly identical to Modi at fifty-eight. By contrast, in India, Modi is typically rated much more favorably than his party. All other names receive ratings below fifty, which means that respondents do not view them warmly, on average. The RSS enjoys a mean rating just below the midpoint at forty-six. Notably, the Congress Party rates below the RSS at forty-four, and Rahul Gandhi receives the lowest rating of all at thirty-eight.<sup>23</sup>

FIGURE 13  
**Assessment of Key Indian Organizations and Leaders**



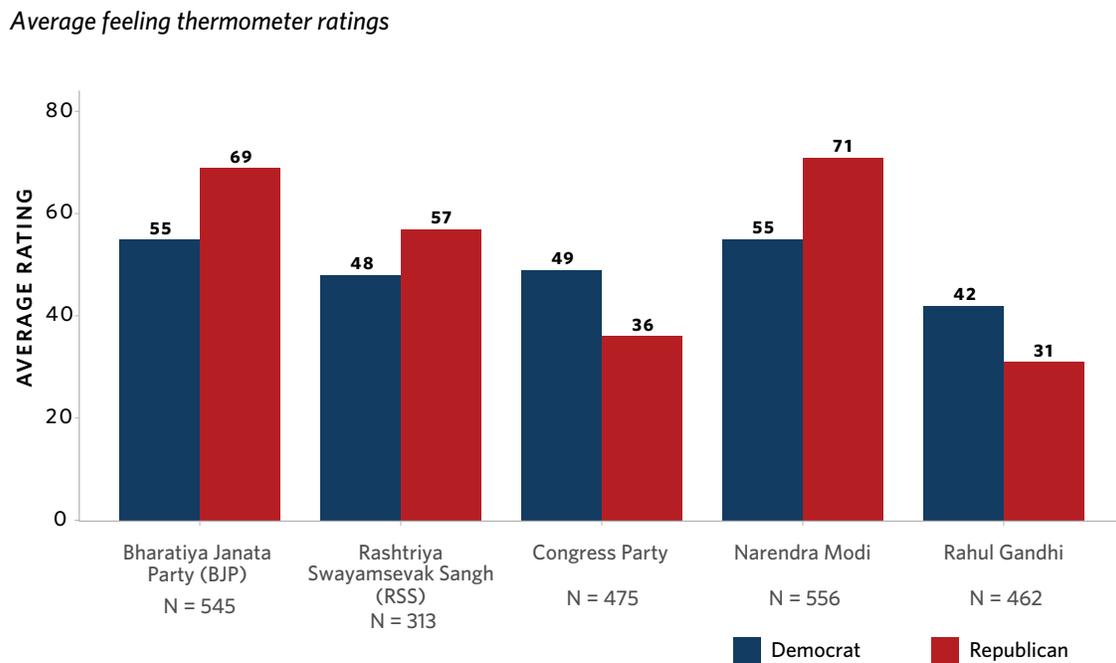
**NOTE:** Measured on a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 = least favorable, 100 = most favorable, and 50 = indifferent.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

How do these numbers compare to respondents' ratings of U.S. politicians and political parties? Indian Americans harbor positive feelings toward the Democratic Party and its leaders: both Biden and the Democratic Party earn a mean rating of sixty-four, while Vice President-elect Kamala Harris earns a 63. Thus, these actors are rated more favorably than either the BJP or Modi, but the gaps are not wide. The mean rating for the Republican Party is forty-two, while IAAS respondents give Trump a thirty-seven. These numbers are roughly in line with respondents' evaluations of the Congress Party and Rahul Gandhi.

Indian Americans who identify as Democrats or Republicans do differ in their evaluations of Indian political leaders and organizations. Respondents who identify with the Republican Party grant much higher ratings to the BJP, Modi, and the RSS (see figure 14). The divergence in respondents'

FIGURE 14  
**Assessment of Key Indian Organizations and Leaders, by Partisan Identity in the United States**



**NOTE:** Figure excludes respondents who do not identify as Democrat or Republican; measured on a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 = least favorable, 100 = most favorable, and 50 = indifferent.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

evaluation of Modi is especially large: Republicans give Modi a mean rating of seventy-one, while Democrats give him a fifty-five. Conversely, respondents who identify as Democrats give higher ratings to the Congress Party and Rahul Gandhi, although the gaps are much smaller.

Note that irrespective of party affiliation, respondents rate Modi, the BJP, and the RSS on the warmer end of the spectrum (mean ratings close to fifty and above). So while Republicans are more favorably disposed to these actors, it is not accurate to conclude that Democrats harbor *unfavorable* views. When it comes to the Congress Party and Gandhi, however, both Democrats and Republicans are relatively bearish: even the mean ratings for them among Democratic respondents does not rise above fifty.

### *Who is a Modi supporter?*

Conventional wisdom suggests that the typical Modi supporter in the United States is male, older, Republican-leaning, Hindu, and hails from Gujarat or other regions of India where the BJP is traditionally dominant.<sup>24</sup> The analyses above reveal that Modi's support is indeed greater among self-identified Republicans and Hindu Indian Americans. But how does support for Modi correlate with other subgroups?

Using the rich demographic data the survey collected on respondents, figure 15 sketches out the defining characteristics of Modi supporters in America. To separate supporters from nonsupporters, the figure compares the characteristics of respondents who approve of the job Modi is doing with those who disapprove.

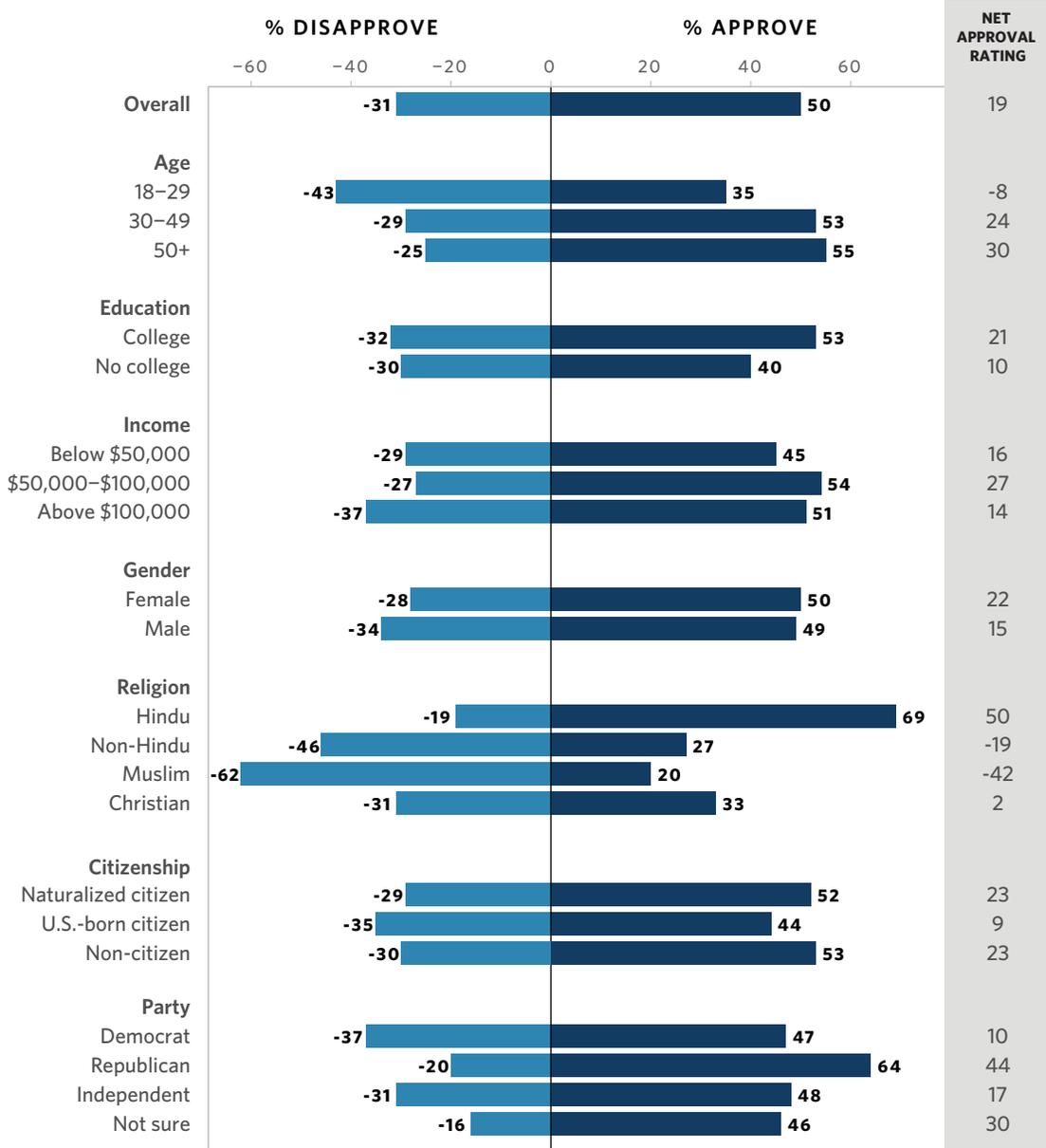
There are four major takeaways from this analysis. First, Modi's popularity across most of the major demographic groups is striking. Visually, the dark blue bars to the right (indicating approval) are systematically larger than the light blue bars on the left (indicating disapproval). For clarity, the gray column on the right indicates each group's net approval rating.

Second, older Indian Americans tend to be more favorably disposed toward Modi. His approval is highest among those above the age of fifty (55 percent), but it is nearly as high among thirty- to forty-nine-year-olds (53 percent). Among the youngest respondents (between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine), a greater share disapproves (43 percent) than approves (35 percent) of Modi's performance. However, there is no clear gender disparity: men and women approve of Modi in nearly equal proportions (49 and 50 percent, respectively).<sup>25</sup> Modi is also more popular among respondents with a college degree (53 percent) compared to those without, or currently in pursuit of, a college degree (40 percent).<sup>26</sup>

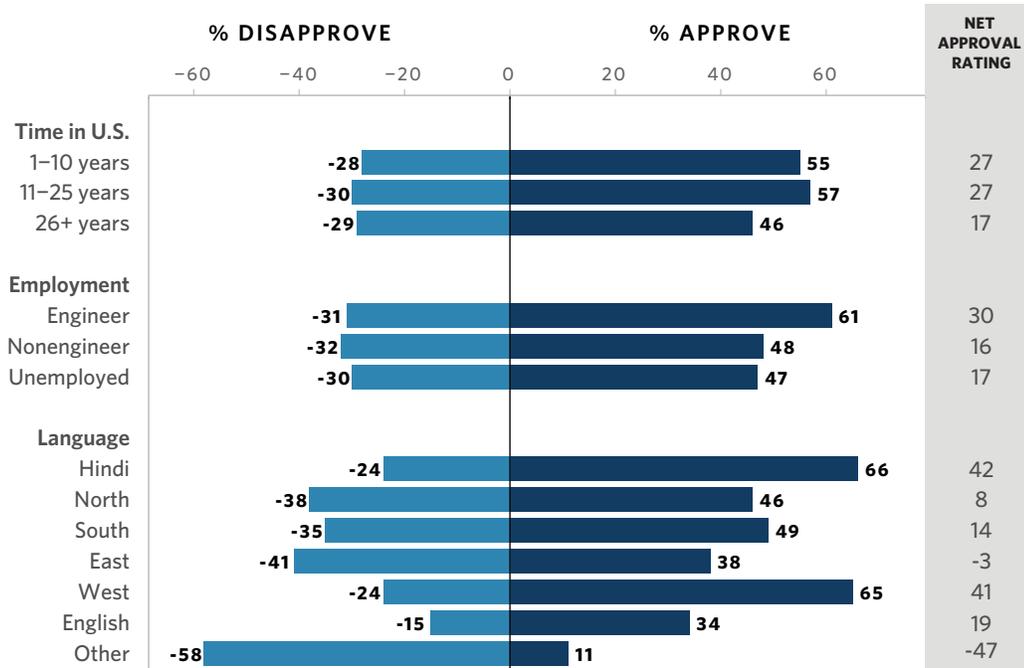
FIGURE 15

**Who Is a Modi Supporter?**

*Do you approve or disapprove of the way Narendra Modi is handling his job as prime minister?*



*Do you approve or disapprove of the way Narendra Modi is handling his job as prime minister?*



**N** = 1,200 U.S. adult residents (sample sizes vary for individual demographics)

**NOTE:** Figure excludes respondents who selected "don't know" for Modi's job approval; language groups refer to linguistic region of origin; "engineer" category includes computer scientist and architect.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

Third, Modi fares better among non-U.S. citizens, naturalized citizens, and immigrants who are more recent arrivals. Fifty-three percent of non-citizens and 52 percent of naturalized Indian Americans approve of Modi compared to 44 percent of U.S.-born citizens. Interestingly, Modi's approval is lowest among Indian Americans who have been in the country the longest. For respondents who have been in the United States for more than twenty-six years, Modi's approval stands at 46 percent. For those who have lived in the United States between eleven and twenty-five years, it stands more than 10 percentage points higher (57 percent); and for those here a decade or less, it stands at 55 percent. The relationship between duration of stay in the United States and support for Modi could be either due to informational or selection effects. More recent arrivals are likely to be more plugged into the Indian political scene. At the same time, those who came to the United States earlier likely hailed from an Indian middle class forged in a polity dominated by the Congress Party, while recent migrants arrived during a time of BJP political dominance.

Fourth, there are also striking patterns when analyzing the data by occupation and region of origin. Indian Americans employed as engineers (the category also includes architects and computer scientists) are more supportive of Modi than nonengineers: 61 percent of engineers approve of Modi compared to 48 percent of nonengineers and 47 percent of those without a job. This is not simply a byproduct of educational attainment: at every level of education, engineers express greater levels of support for Modi than nonengineers.<sup>27</sup> In terms of region of origin, the analysis uses a respondent's "mother tongue" as a proxy.<sup>28</sup> Modi's support is greatest among those who speak Hindi or the languages of Western India (Gujarati and Marathi) at 66 and 65 percent, respectively. Conversely, it is lowest among those from Eastern India (speaking languages such as Assamese, Bengali, or Odia) at 38 percent and those from primarily English-speaking families at 34 percent.

The selection effects inherent in immigration raise the question of whether Indian immigrants in the United States are more pro-Modi than Indians living in India. According to a Morning Consult daily tracker poll conducted in India concurrently with our survey, 75 percent of Indians approved of Modi's performance, while just 20 percent disapproved.<sup>29</sup> That is, Modi's net favorability was a whopping 55 percent among Indians, compared to 19 percent among Indian Americans—a three-fold difference.

### **Contentious Policy Debates**

Conventional wisdom reflected in much of the commentary on the diaspora's political leanings underscores the diaspora's simultaneous support for the left-of-center Democratic Party in the United States and the right-of-center BJP in India.<sup>30</sup> This raises the empirical question of whether such a contrast actually exists: Could the same person have divergent views on the same issues when considered in different contexts? Or do respondents' policy attitudes remain stable across countries and contexts?

If political views are universal, then Indian Americans should exhibit similar responses to similar questions in both the United States and India. If, however, views are contextual, then Indian Americans might hold more liberal views about policy in the United States and simultaneously more conservative views on policy in India. But even in that case, there is an additional question: liberal or conservative relative to whom?

Answering these questions poses the methodological challenge of comparing markedly different political contexts. Simply comparing respondents' support for political parties in India and the United States does little to shed light on these questions, as such comparisons mask the nuances of policy issues that parties in both countries stand for. The IAAS attempted to overcome this challenge by asking respondents about contentious policy issues that are the subject of ongoing debates in both the United States and India.

While the survey could have probed respondents on numerous policy issues, the researchers selected five issues in India that closely mirror ongoing policy debates in the United States so as to make comparative analyses possible. The survey first asked respondents whether they support or oppose the following five policy issues of contemporary salience in India:

- The BJP's proposal for an all-India National Register of Citizens (NRC) to document all legal citizens of India so that illegal migrants can be identified and deported<sup>31</sup>
- The passage of the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act, which creates an expedited path to citizenship for migrants from neighboring countries who illegally entered India by 2014, provided they belong to non-Muslim religions<sup>32</sup>
- The decision by police and law enforcement in some cities to use rubber bullets, tear gas, and physical force against peaceful protesters opposing recent citizenship laws who are occupying public spaces (such as roads or highways)<sup>33</sup>
- Government efforts to use defamation and sedition laws to silence reporters critical of the Modi administration<sup>34</sup>
- The consideration of the caste identity of applicants as a factor in Indian university admissions to improve the representation of Dalits/Scheduled Castes<sup>35</sup>

Figure 16 displays the share of respondents who strongly oppose, somewhat oppose, somewhat support, or strongly support each of these propositions. Among Indian Americans, a majority either strongly or somewhat support two initiatives: an all-India NRC and the 2019 Citizenship Amend-

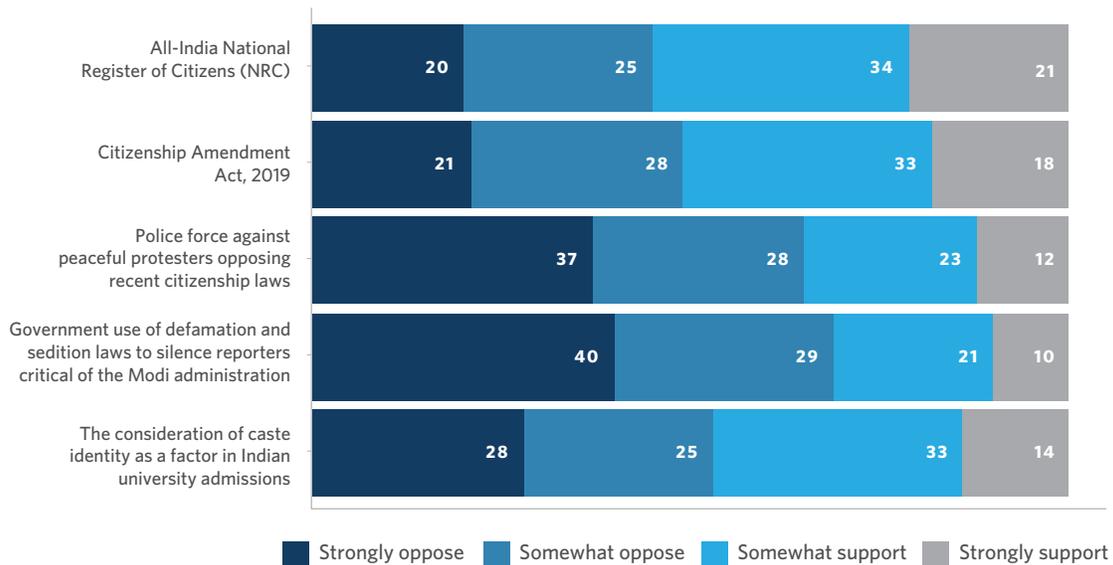
ment Act. Fifty-five percent support the former, and 51 percent support the latter.

However, respondents are more opposed than not to two other issues: the use of police force against peaceful protesters (65 percent oppose) and government crackdowns on the media (69 percent oppose). On the fifth issue of caste-based affirmative action in higher education admissions, the community is divided—with 47 percent supporting this measure and 53 percent opposing it.

Next, the survey asked respondents two sets of additional questions on similar policy issues in the United States and in a generic context (with no country-specific application). The specific wording of the three sets of questions is contained in Appendix B. Thus, the study has three sets of attitudinal

FIGURE 16  
**Positions on Contemporary Debates in India**

*% of respondents who support or oppose . . .*



**N** = 1,199 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Sample excludes respondents who skipped the question.

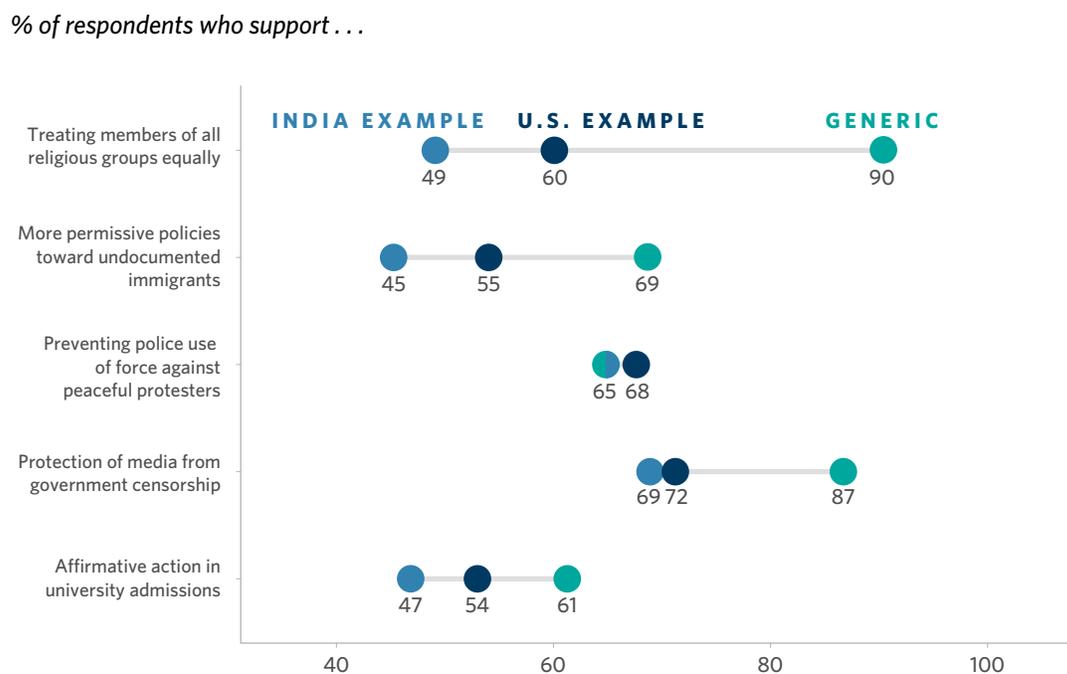
**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

data with which it can construct a comparison: general principles or norms, their application in an Indian context, and their application in a U.S. context.

Figure 17 integrates these three data points for each of the five issues to explore how views of Indian Americans diverge across contexts. Regarding the question of whether Indian Americans are more liberal in the United States and more conservative in India, the answer is a tentative yes.

On the issue of the equal treatment of people belonging to different religious faiths, 90 percent of Indian Americans support this notion in a general context. But only 60 percent support the proposition in the U.S. context (by expressing opposition to Trump’s 2017 “Muslim ban”), while 49 percent

**FIGURE 17**  
**Are Indian Americans Liberal in the United States and Conservative in India?**



**N** = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

support the proposition in India (by expressing opposition to the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act). It bears mention, of course, that the “Muslim ban” sought to restrict the entry of individuals traveling to the United States from a specified set of countries, while the Citizenship Amendment Act pertains to individuals residing in India who have emigrated from a neighboring country.

On the question of illegal immigration, 69 percent of Indian Americans support the idea of more permissive policies toward undocumented immigrants in general. In the U.S. context, however, a smaller share (55 percent) support less stringent deportation actions. In the Indian context, just 45 percent support more permissive policies (by expressing opposition to the proposed all-India NRC).

There is no such divergence on the issue of the use of police force against peaceful protesters. Sixty-five percent of respondents support restrained police action in a generic context—which is identical to the share in the Indian context. In the U.S. example, 68 percent support the exercise of police restraint when it comes to those peacefully protesting racial injustice.

Regarding protecting the media from government censorship or retribution, 87 percent of respondents are in favor of the notion in general, while 72 percent are in favor in the United States and 69 percent are in favor in India.

Finally, there is the question of affirmative action in university admissions. Sixty-one percent support the notion in a general context, but the data suggest lower levels of support in the United States (54 percent) and in India (47 percent).

One interesting question that arises is how the views of Indian Americans compare to those of the U.S. or Indian populations as a whole. This is a difficult question to address given the paucity of comparable data and the idiosyncrasies of survey question wording. With those caveats in mind, table 3 offers suggestive comparisons on two issues: the protection of the media from government censorship and the equal treatment of religious minorities. The table includes responses from the IAAS—as well as comparable survey data from the United States and India—that might capture general public opinion in those two countries as a whole.

On the subject of media freedoms, the share of the U.S. population saying that this is important is significantly larger than the share of Indian Americans. In fact, this proportion is greater even than that of IAAS respondents who are generally in favor of a free media. When it comes to the compari-

TABLE 3  
**Place of Birth: U.S. Population Versus Asian Indians**

a) Protection of the media from government censorship

	IAAS—Generic	IAAS—U.S.	Pew—U.S.	IAAS—India	Pew—India
Important	87%	72%	95%	69%	63%
Unimportant	13%	28%	4%	31%	15%
Don't know/No response	-	-	2%	-	21%

**NOTE:** Response options are inverted where needed for comparability. The specific wording of the Pew question is as follows: “How important is it to have the following things in our country? The media can report the news without censorship.” See Appendix B for details on the IAAS question.

**SOURCE:** IAAS; Richard Wike and Shannon Schumacher, *Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2020).

b) Equal treatment of religious minorities

	IAAS—Generic	IAAS—U.S.	Pew—U.S.	IAAS—India	Lokniti—India
Support	90%	60%	48%	49%	33%
Oppose	10%	40%	49%	51%	35%
Don't know/No response	-	-	-	-	33%

**NOTE:** Response options are inverted where needed for comparability. The specific wording of the Pew question is as follows: “As I read some proposed policies of President Donald Trump, please tell me if you approve or disapprove of each one: introduce tighter restrictions on those entering the U.S. from some majority-Muslim countries.” See Appendix B for details on the IAAS question.

**SOURCE:** IAAS; Pew Research Center, “Topline Questionnaire: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey”; Lokniti-CSDS, “NES 2019 Prepoll Survey Findings,” [https://www.lokniti.org/media/PDF-upload/1570173782\\_98991600\\_download\\_report.pdf](https://www.lokniti.org/media/PDF-upload/1570173782_98991600_download_report.pdf).

son with the Indian population, the positions are reversed: Indian American respondents express greater support for media freedoms than the average Indian respondent in a 2019 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, although the share who believe a free media is important is not too dissimilar in the IAAS and Pew survey.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, one must keep in mind that 21 percent of Indian respondents to the 2019 Pew survey expressed no opinion.

Regarding the equal treatment of religious minorities, 90 percent of IAAS respondents are in favor in a general context, but fewer are supportive in the U.S. and Indian contexts. Sixty percent of IAAS respondents favor the equal treatment of minorities in the context of immigration compared to 48 percent of American respondents in a 2017 Pew survey.<sup>37</sup> The comparison with Indian public opinion is complicated once more by the responses to a 2019 Lokniti-CSDS survey question on the Citizenship Amendment Act.<sup>38</sup> While it appears that a larger share of Indian Americans oppose making immigration decisions on the basis of religion than do Indian respondents in the Lokniti-CSDS survey, if one were to remove the “don’t know” responses the proportions would remain roughly the same.

This brief comparison suggests that one must be careful in making inferences about Indian American public opinion because much depends on the issue at stake and the identity of the comparator.

### *Democracy and majoritarianism*

The IAAS also asked respondents about larger questions of democracy and ethnic majoritarianism in both India and the United States. For example, the survey asked whether India/the United States should rely on a democratic form of government or a leader with a strong hand to solve its problems. This is a reasonable proxy measure for popular support for democratic governance.

A slim majority of respondents believe that democracy is preferable over a strong leader in India (52 percent) and in the United States (56 percent). However, while popular assessments of democracy might not differ, there is a significant divergence of views on the question of majoritarianism in the two countries. In recent years, the rise of the BJP and the corresponding ideology of Hindu nationalism have raised concerns about the sanctity of minority rights in India.<sup>39</sup> Analysts have expressed similar concerns in the United States thanks to the rise of white nationalism in recent years, fueled in part by Trump’s 2016 election.<sup>40</sup>

Fifty-three percent of Indian American respondents agree that Hindu majoritarianism is a threat to minorities in an Indian democracy. By comparison, in the U.S. context, a much higher share of respondents (73 percent) view white supremacy as a threat to minorities in a U.S. democracy.

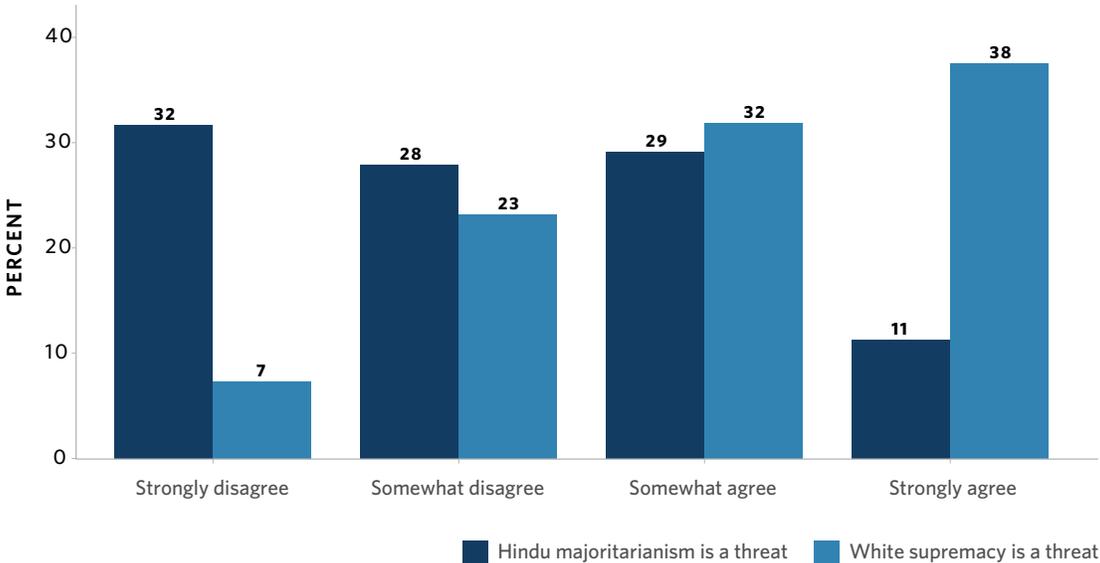
Indian Americans, in other words, believe that white supremacy is a greater threat to minorities in the United States, a country where they are a minority, than Hindu majoritarianism is to minorities in India, a country where Hindus (the most common faith of Indian Americans) are in the majority.

Of course, not all Indian Americans belong to the Hindu faith. Analyzing differences in responses by religious faith is instructive: 70 percent of Hindus agree or strongly agree that white supremacy is a threat to minorities in the United States, compared to 79 percent of non-Hindus. Regarding Hindu majoritarianism in India, however, the data point to a much sharper divide: only 40 percent of Hindus agree that Hindu majoritarianism is a threat to minorities, compared to 67 percent of non-Hindus.

In other words, Hindus and non-Hindus agree (the latter more so) that white supremacy is a threat in the United States but significantly diverge on the threat posed by Hindu majoritarianism in India. Indeed, figure 18 demonstrates the differential attitudes of Hindu respondents with respect to majoritarianism, both in the United States and in India.

FIGURE 18  
**Hindus on Majoritarianism**

*Are white supremacy in the United States and Hindu majoritarianism in India threats?*



N = 632 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Sample includes only respondents who identified as Hindu.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

## News and Politics in India

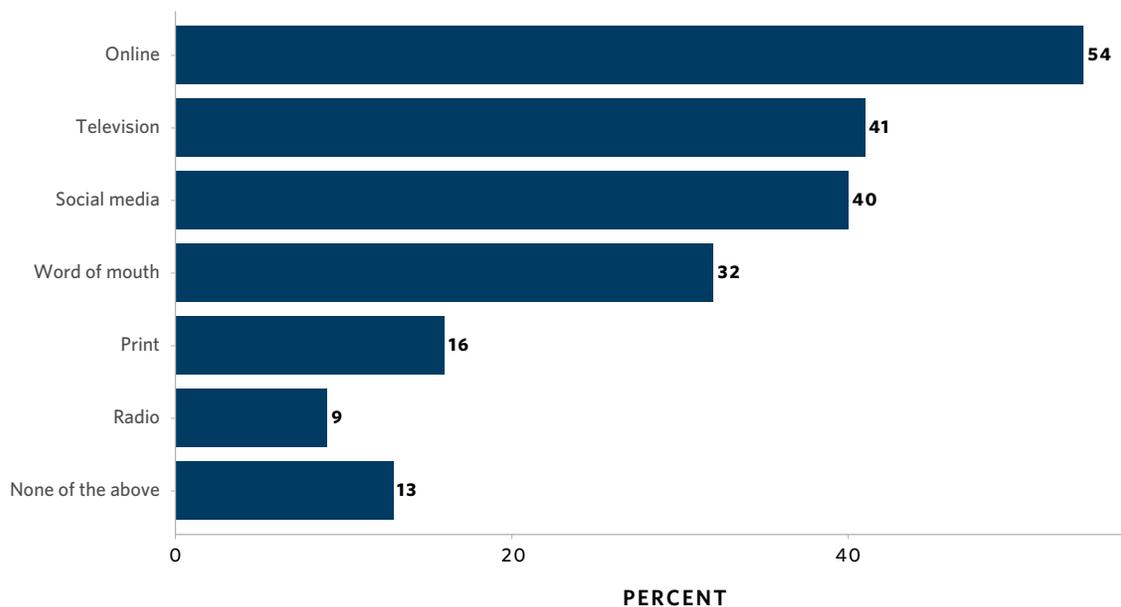
This section explores how Indian Americans track news and politics in India. Given that 57 percent of respondents state that they follow what is going on in government and public affairs some or most of the time, this begs the question of how exactly they stay informed about the country's politics.

The survey asked respondents which of six common sources they have used (in the last week) in order to access news about India (see figure 19). The most common response is online sources (54 percent), closely followed by television (41 percent) and social media (40 percent). Nearly one-third (32 percent) report relying on word of mouth as a method of tracking news in India. Sixteen percent state that they rely on print sources, while only 9 percent report using radio. Thirteen percent of respondents do not rely on any of the six sources.

The survey also asked respondents to identify which social media platforms they use to access news about India (see figure 20). Three social media platforms cluster near the top: YouTube (41 percent),

FIGURE 19  
**Sources of Information About News and Politics in India**

*Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news about India?*



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

SOURCE: 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

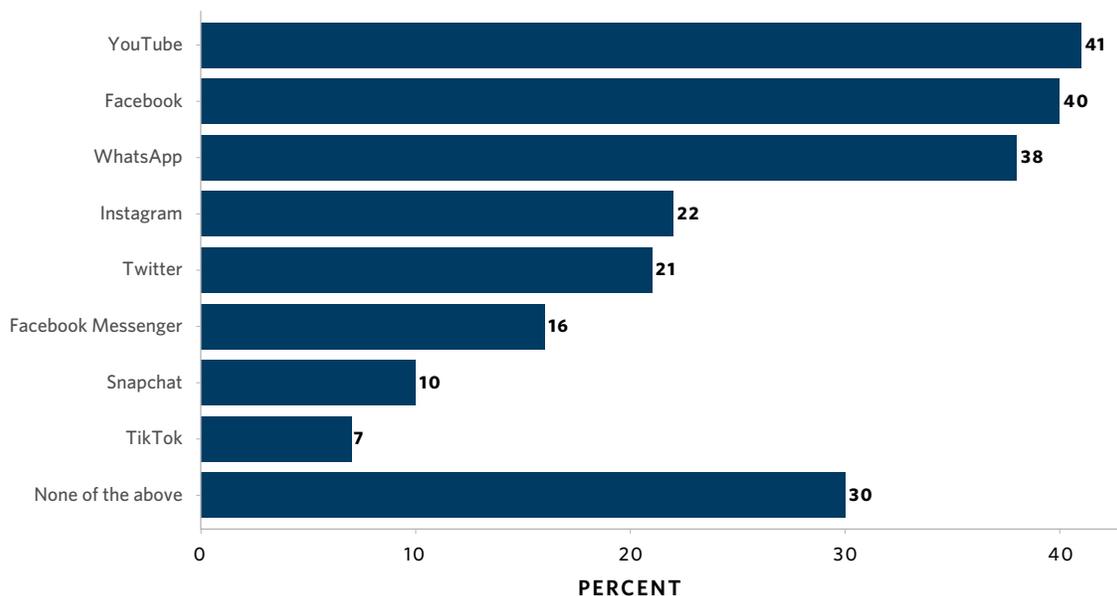
Facebook (40 percent), and WhatsApp (38 percent). Other social media sources lag further behind: 22 percent report getting news from Instagram, while 21 percent report relying on Twitter. Bringing up the rear is Facebook Messenger (16 percent), Snapchat (10 percent), and TikTok (7 percent). Nearly one in three Indian Americans (30 percent) say that they have not used any of these platforms to access news about India in the week prior to taking the survey.

In terms of the traditional media sources, the IAAS probed respondents on their familiarity with eight popular sources of news and information about India. The survey asked respondents about their familiarity with various news outlets in the context of coverage of India specifically, not the news in general.

The most popular news source about India among Indian Americans is the *Times of India*, one of India’s most widely read English-language daily newspapers: 52 percent state they are familiar with the source. Forty-one percent of respondents are familiar with the BBC’s and CNN’s coverage of India, while 34 percent are familiar with the Indian news network NDTV. Thirty percent are famil-

FIGURE 20  
**Reliance on Social Media for News and Politics in India**

*Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news about India?*



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

SOURCE: 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

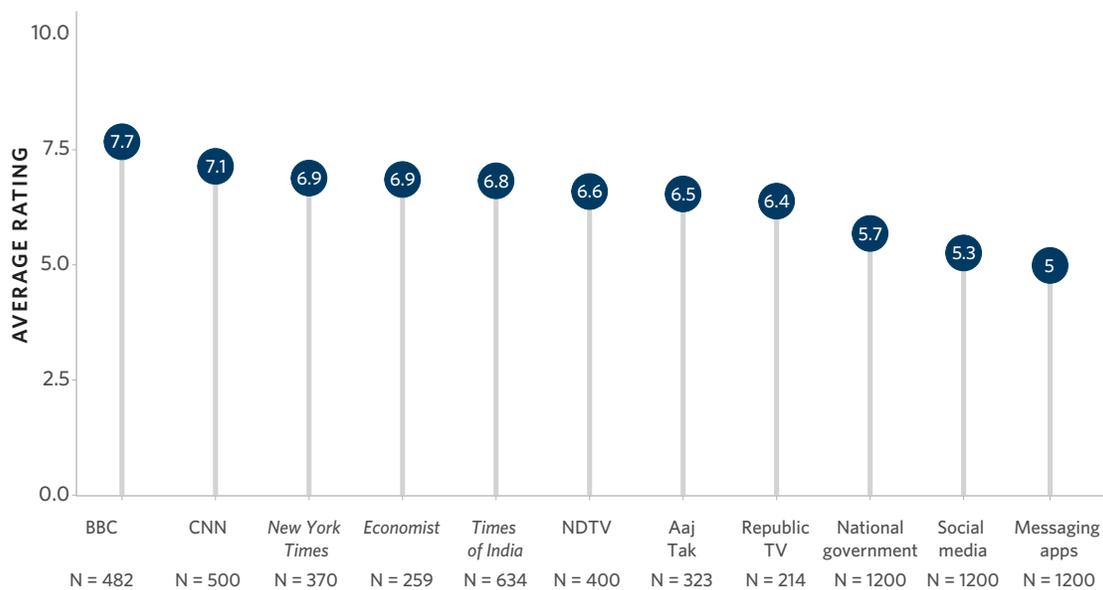
iar with the *New York Times's* coverage of India, 28 percent are familiar with Hindi television channel Aaj Tak, 21 percent are familiar with the *Economist*, and only 18 percent are familiar with the news network Republic, which earns some of the highest prime time news ratings in India. Slightly less than 17 percent of respondents report not being familiar with any of these sources insofar as news about India is concerned.

The survey then asked respondents to rate on a scale of one to ten the trustworthiness of the news outlets they are familiar with—in addition to three other common sources of news: the Indian government, social media, and messaging apps. As with the feeling thermometer question, the sample sizes vary for the outlet in question and are noted along the x-axis (see figure 21).

Among Indian Americans, the BBC emerges as the most trusted source for news about India, with a mean rating of 7.7. The BBC is closely followed by CNN (7.1). The *New York Times*, *Economist*, *Times of India*, NDTV, Aaj Tak, and Republic TV all earn ratings between 6.9 and 6.4. Interestingly, the three least trustworthy sources are the Indian government (5.7), social media (5.3), and messaging apps (5.0).

FIGURE 21  
**Trust in Sources for News and Politics in India**

*On a scale of 1–10, how trustworthy are the following sources of news and information about politics and current affairs in India?*



**NOTE:** Respondents were asked for their opinion only on sources that they indicated they were familiar with.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

## Foreign Policy

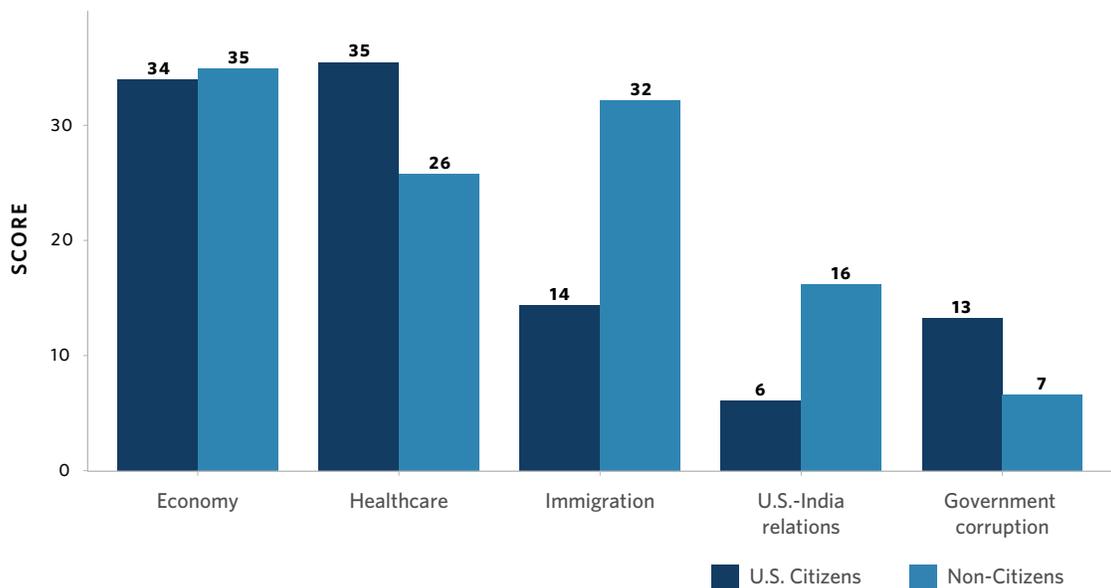
The October 2020 IAAS study on Indian American political attitudes in the United States highlighted the fact that foreign policy did not appear to be a pressing U.S. election issue for the vast majority of Indian Americans. Just 3 percent of respondents indicated that U.S.-India relations was the single biggest election issue for them heading into the November presidential contest.

However, that analysis relied exclusively on the responses of 936 U.S. citizens in the IAAS sample. Figure 22 re-analyzes respondents' views on the most pressing election-time issues using the full sample of 1,200 respondents but disaggregates citizen and non-citizen responses. The figure displays a weighted average of a subset of respondents' answers of their top three issues in order to provide an aggregate score for each issue.

There is one similarity and a handful of notable differences in the responses of citizens and non-citizens. All respondents—irrespective of citizenship status—rank the economy as their issue of greatest concern.

FIGURE 22  
**Top Issues in American Politics**

*Which of the following are the most important issues for you personally?*



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

**NOTE:** Issue importance score based on a weighted average of respondents' three top issues.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

On other issues, however, there is divergence. U.S. citizens are more likely than non-citizens to emphasize healthcare (a score of thirty-five versus a score of twenty-six) and government corruption (a score of thirteen versus a score of seven). Conversely, non-citizens place greater importance on immigration by a wide margin (a score of thirty-two versus a score of fourteen). This makes intuitive sense given that non-citizens are subject to the whims of the U.S. immigration system in a way that U.S. citizens are not. Furthermore, non-citizens place a much higher priority on U.S.-India relations than citizens do: non-citizens are more likely to rate U.S.-India relations as a top issue when compared to citizens (a score of sixteen versus a score of six).

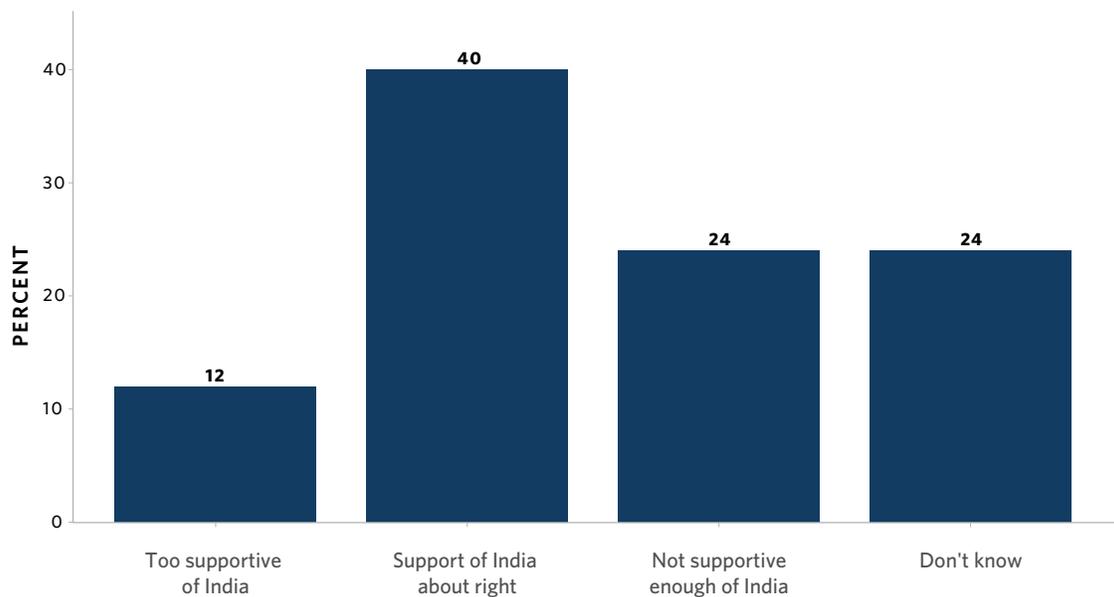
Regarding the issue of U.S.-India relations, the survey asked respondents to evaluate the adequacy of existing U.S. support for India. Respondents were asked to select one of three options: the United States is too supportive of India, U.S. support of India is just about right, and the United States is not supportive enough of India. Respondents were also presented with a “don’t know” option if they did not have a firm view (see figure 23).

Forty percent of respondents—the modal category—believe that U.S. support for India is just about right. Only 12 percent believe that the United States is too supportive of India, but twice as many

FIGURE 23

### U.S. Support for India

*Now thinking about the relationship between the United States and India, is the U.S. . . . ?*



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

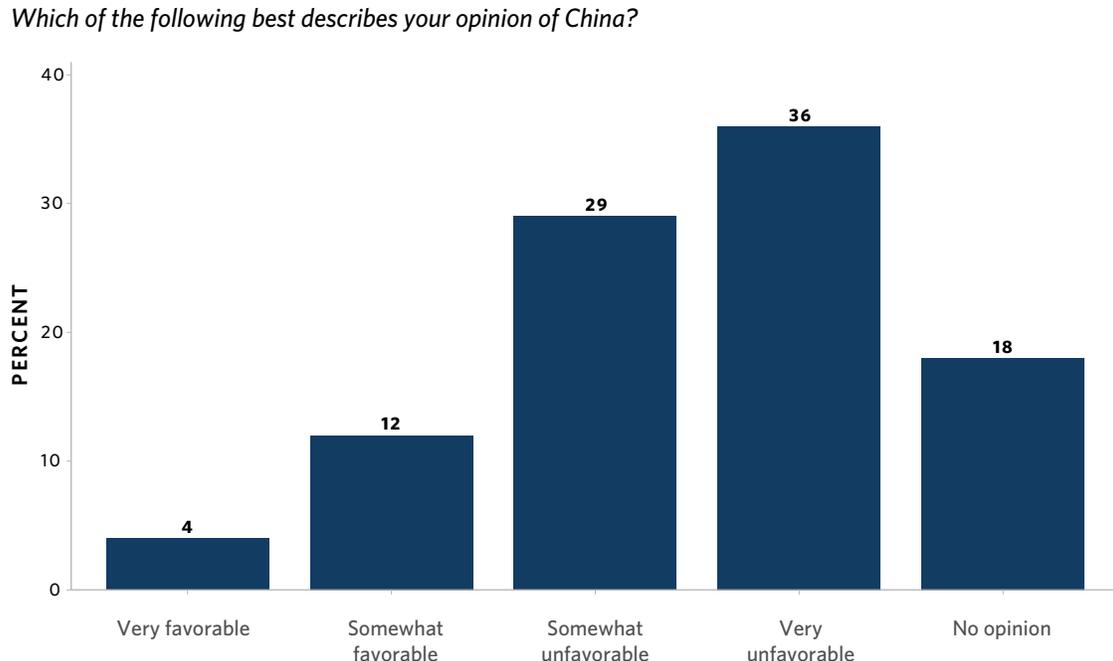
SOURCE: 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

respondents (24 percent) believe that the United States is not supportive enough of India. Nearly one-quarter of all respondents (24 percent) expressed no opinion.

Discussions of U.S. policy toward India are often closely intertwined with debates over how both the United States and India relate to another major Asian—and increasingly global—power, China. Nearly two-thirds of Indian Americans hold unfavorable views toward India’s neighbor (see figure 24). Thirty-six percent hold a very unfavorable opinion of China, while 29 percent possess a somewhat unfavorable opinion. This compares with 42 percent of Americans who held a very unfavorable opinion of China in 2020 and 31 percent who expressed a somewhat unfavorable opinion.<sup>41</sup> On the opposite end of the spectrum, just 12 percent of Indian Americans hold a somewhat favorable view of China, with a meager 4 percent espousing a very favorable opinion. Eighteen percent expressed no opinion.

Views on China break down in interesting ways. Foreign-born Indian Americans hold slightly more negative views of China: 67 percent have a somewhat or very unfavorable opinion of China, compared to 62 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans. The latter, in turn, are more likely to have a

FIGURE 24  
**China's Favorability**



N = 1,200 U.S. adult residents

SOURCE: 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

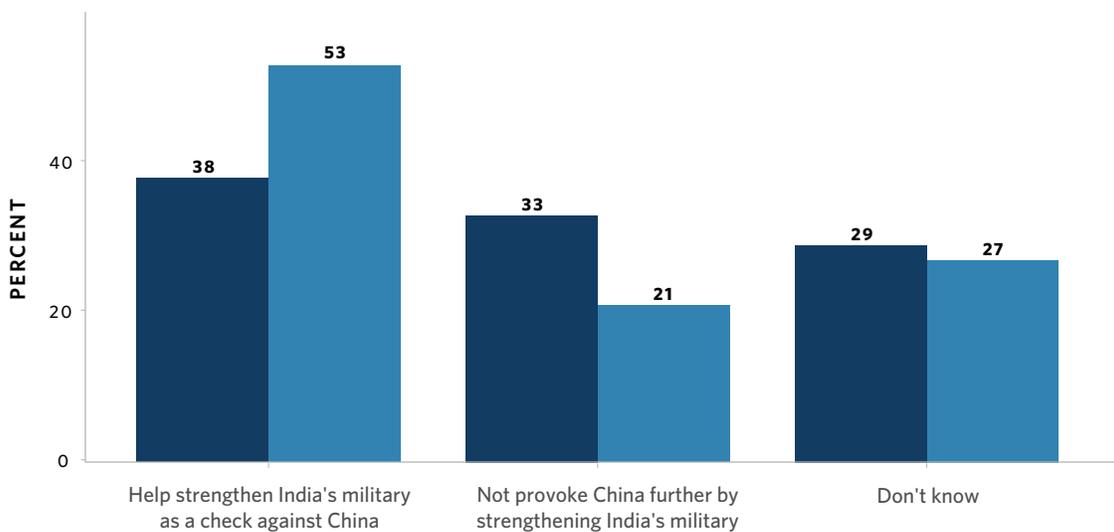
somewhat or very favorable opinion of China: 21 percent for U.S.-born respondents versus 14 percent for foreign-born respondents.

The survey asked respondents one question that explicitly incorporates views on the U.S.-China-India triangle: should the United States help strengthen India's military as a check against China or instead refrain from provoking China further by practicing restraint? Foreign-born respondents hold more hawkish views: 53 percent of them believe the United States should strengthen India militarily even if it alienates China, compared to 38 percent of U.S.-born Indian Americans (see figure 25). Conversely, 33 percent of U.S.-born respondents do not want to provoke China by aiding India, while only 21 percent of foreign-born respondents share this concern. A large percentage of respondents expressed no opinion (almost three out of ten across both categories).

When it comes to views on China, partisan differences are readily apparent. Democrats are much more wary of potentially antagonizing China. Sixty-nine percent of Republican respondents would like to see the United States strengthen India militarily as a check on China, while just 41 percent of Democrats feel the same way. Democrats are more likely to say that they do not want the United States to provoke China or to profess no opinion (the latter by a two-to-one margin).

FIGURE 25  
**Managing U.S.-China-India Relations**

*Do you think the United States should . . . ?*



N = 1,199 U.S. adult residents

■ U.S.-born ■ Foreign-born

**NOTE:** Sample excludes respondents who skipped the question.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

## Conclusion

Outreach to the Indian diaspora has been a cornerstone of the Modi government's foreign policy. Recently, the Indian external affairs minister remarked that India's relations with its diaspora communities had been "transformed by the very unique bonding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has established" with them.<sup>42</sup> While the massive crowds that gathered at Madison Square Garden in New York City and at the "Howdy, Modi!" rally in Houston, Texas, suggest that much of the Indian American diaspora is supportive of policy changes ushered in by the present government, the community is hardly a monolith. A significant minority of Indian Americans is concerned with political and social changes underway in India.

People of Indian origin residing in the United States enjoy a diverse array of connections to India—bonds that span family and social networks, culture, and politics. Perhaps not surprisingly, these connections are strongest among Indian Americans born in India (or outside of the United States, more generally). Indian Americans are concerned about India's future trajectory, but while many are supportive of Modi and the BJP, the IAAS makes clear that this support is by no means uniform across demographic groups.

The IAAS demonstrates that there are clear inter-generational differences when it comes to attitudes toward political and social changes underway in India. As with other immigrant communities, the nature of hyphenated identities varies by generation. When first-generation immigrants become naturalized U.S. citizens or permanent residents, they emphasize the Indian element of their Indian American identity.

In contrast, their children—members of the second generation—place a relatively greater emphasis on the American dimension of their identity. Therefore, the diaspora that the Indian government has come to know is not static; Indian Americans born and raised in the United States exhibit different sensibilities both with respect to politics in India as well as politics closer to home. They are less engaged with India and more U.S.-focused than their parents' generation.

Finally, some of the divisions that animate Indian politics and society also manifest within the diaspora. In particular, Hindu Indian Americans hold very different views on domestic politics and policy in India compared to their non-Hindu counterparts, on average. These divisions, combined with generational and partisan differences, foreshadow a more fractured Indian American community in the years to come.

## Appendix A: Methodology

Respondents for this survey were recruited from an existing panel administered by YouGov. YouGov maintains a proprietary, double opt-in survey panel comprised of 1.8 million U.S. residents who have agreed to participate in YouGov’s surveys.

### Online Panel Surveys

Online panels are not the same as traditional, probability-based surveys. However, thanks to the decline in response rates, the rise of the internet and smartphone penetration, and the evolution in statistical techniques, nonprobability panels—such as the one YouGov employs—have quickly become the norm in survey research.<sup>43</sup> For instance, the *Economist* partnered with YouGov to track political attitudes around the November 2020 U.S. presidential election using a customized panel.<sup>44</sup>

### Respondent Selection and Sampling Design

The data for this survey are based on a unique survey of 1,200 adults of Indian origin conducted between September 1 and September 20, 2020. To provide an accurate picture of the Indian American community as a whole, the full sample contains both U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens. Given the fact that the majority of younger Indian Americans below age twenty-seven are born in the United States while the opposite is true of those above age twenty-seven, YouGov oversampled younger Indian Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven to ensure that the study’s analyses can make inferences about generational differences within the Indian American community.

### Sample Matching

To produce the final data set, respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, and education. The main sample was matched to a frame corresponding to all adult Indian Americans, and the oversample was matched to a frame corresponding to Indian Americans ages eighteen to twenty-seven. Both frames were constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2018 ACS one-year sample. Within strata, matches were selected by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the ACS public use file).

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frames using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frames were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frames. The propensity score function included age, gender, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frames and post-stratified according to these deciles.<sup>45</sup>

Sampling weights were then post-stratified on 2016 presidential vote choice, as well as a three-way stratification of gender, age (four categories), and education (four categories), to produce the final weight.

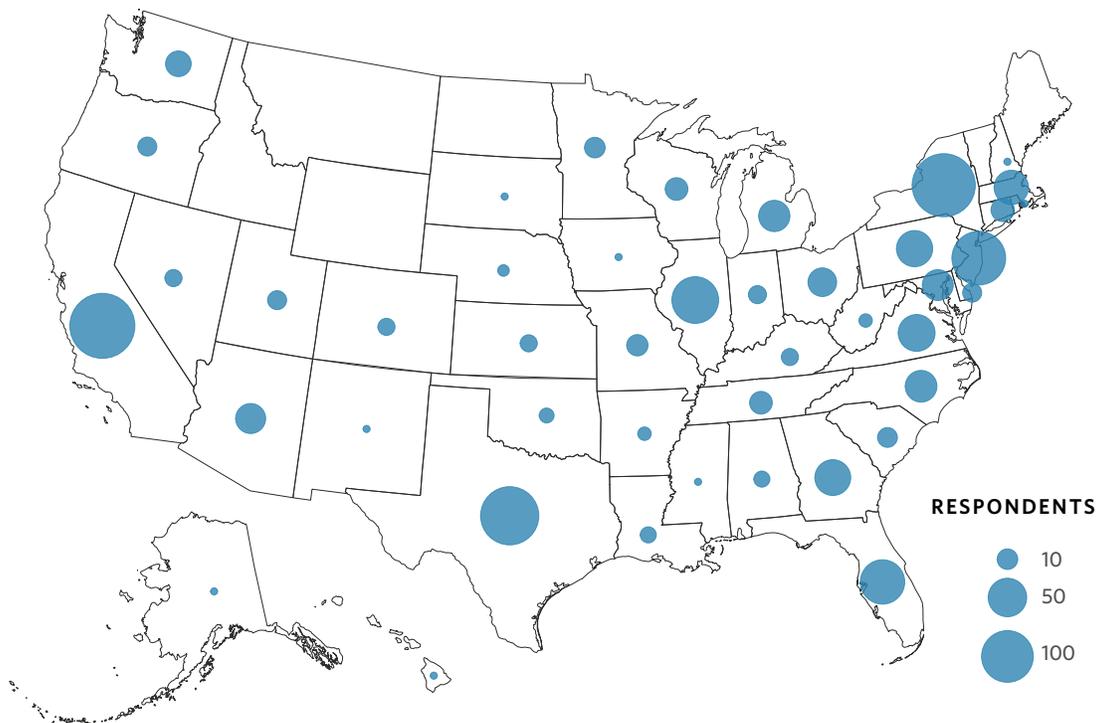
### Data Analysis and Sources of Error

All of the analyses in this study were conducted using the statistical software R and employ sample weights to ensure representativeness.

The margin of error for the full sample of 1,200 respondents is +/- 2.8 percent. This margin of error is calculated at the 95 percent confidence interval.

Figure 26 provides the geographic distribution of survey respondents by state of residence.

FIGURE 26  
**Geographic Distribution of IAAS Respondents**



**NOTE:** The size of the bubbles for each state corresponds to the sample size from that state.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Indian American Attitudes Survey.

## Appendix B: Measuring Policy Attitudes

To elicit respondents' views on contentious policy debates of the day, the survey asked respondents whether they support or oppose a set of five policy issues of contemporary salience. The survey asked questions about these five issues in three distinct ways.

First, the survey asked respondents about their positions on these five issues in the abstract, devoid of any case-specific content. These questions related to press freedom, immigration, affirmative action, treatment of religious minorities, and the right to peacefully protest. The specific question wording can be found in the "Abstract" column of table 4. Below each question, there is an indication of which response is considered to be the more liberal position.

Second, the survey asked respondents about the application of these generic principles in the context of the United States, using examples from the latter case. The specific wording of these U.S.-oriented questions can be found in the "United States" column.

Finally, the survey asked respondents about their views toward these same policy issues in the context of India, using recent examples from Indian debates. These questions can be found in the "India" column.

As the table indicates, in certain cases support for the proposition indicates a more liberal position while in others it indicates a more conservative position. In these instances, the response options are inverted in order to align the orientation of the questions.

For instance, on the question of immigration, support for the abstract principle indicates a more liberal view, while it connotes a more conservative position in the country-specific examples. Figure 17 presents the percentage of respondents who support "providing undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship." This reflects the share of respondents who support providing undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship in the abstract but who *oppose* the enhanced deportation actions of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency or oppose a nationwide NRC in the Indian case. A similar adjustment was performed regarding the question on religious minorities.

Finally, all questions except one were framed in the context of respondents' support for, or opposition to, a specific proposition. The outlier was the abstract question on the importance of press freedoms. Responses were intuitively recoded such that "important" is equivalent to "support."

In all cases, the strongly support and somewhat support categories are condensed as "support," while the strongly oppose and somewhat oppose categories are condensed as "oppose."

TABLE 4  
**Comparing Policy Preferences Across Settings**

Abstract	United States	India
<p>How important is it that the media can report the news without state or government censorship?</p> <p>Important = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: White House efforts to revoke press credentials of reporters who are critical of the Trump administration.</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: Government efforts to use defamation and sedition laws to silence reporters critical of the Modi administration.</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>
<p>Thinking about immigration, would you support or oppose providing undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship?</p> <p>Support = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: Enhanced efforts by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials to identify and deport illegal immigrants through border apprehensions and unannounced raids.</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: The proposal for an all-India National Register of Citizens (NRC) to document all legal citizens of India so that illegal migrants can be identified and deported.</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>
<p>Do you support or oppose the consideration of race or ethnic identity as a factor in university admissions to improve the representation of historically disadvantaged groups?</p> <p>Support = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: The consideration of the racial identity of applicants as a factor in U.S. university admissions to improve the representation of African Americans.</p> <p>Support = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: The consideration of the caste identity of applicants as a factor in Indian university admissions to improve the representation of Dalits/Scheduled Castes.</p> <p>Support = liberal</p>
<p>Do you support or oppose this statement: It is important for religious minorities to be treated the same way as the religious majority in a country.</p> <p>Support = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: The 2017 presidential executive order to institute a travel ban for citizens from several predominantly Muslim countries.</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, which creates an expedited path to citizenship for migrants from neighboring countries who illegally entered India by 2014, provided they belong to non-Muslim religions.</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>
<p>Do you support or oppose the use of force (such as tear gas, rubber bullets, physical force) by the police against peaceful protesters who are occupying public spaces (such as roads or highways)?</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: The decision by police and law enforcement in some cities to use rubber bullets, tear gas, and physical force against peaceful Black Lives Matter protesters who are occupying public spaces (such as roads or highways).</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>	<p>Do you support/oppose: The decision by police and law enforcement in some cities to use rubber bullets, tear gas, and physical force against peaceful protesters who are opposing recent citizenship laws and occupying public spaces (such as roads or highways).</p> <p>Oppose = liberal</p>

## **Appendix C: Survey Topline**

For complete survey topline results, please visit [Appendix C online](#).

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## Notes

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- 9 Hanna and Batalova, “Indian Immigrants in the United States.”
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- 11 These data come from the response of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs to a parliamentary question. See “Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 3695,” Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs, March 17, 2020, <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2020-pdfs/ls-17032020/3695.pdf>.
- 12 In terms of the demographic breakdown of the IAAS sample, 54 percent of respondents are Hindus, 13 percent are Muslims, 10 percent are Christians, 8 percent belong to other faiths, and 16 percent do not identify with any religion.
- 13 It is worth noting that Indian Americans who belong to religious minorities also report feeling less connected to India than Hindu Indian Americans. Twenty-eight percent of non-Hindus report feeling either not too connected or not at all connected to India, compared to 18 percent of Hindu Indian Americans.
- 14 It is likely that reported travel to India is lower than normal due to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 15 Interestingly, 40 percent of Ipsos respondents believed that India was on the wrong track, which is close to the proportion of IAAS respondents feeling similarly. Thus, the difference in the overall assessment could stem from the large share of IAAS respondents who do not have an opinion on the question. See Ipsos, “What Worries the World?” July 2020, <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-07/www-july2020-global-summary-final.pdf>.
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- 25 However, Modi’s “net favorability”—the percentage who approve of his performance minus the percentage who disapprove—is higher among women than men (22 percent versus 15 percent, respectively).
- 26 Notably, approximately 30 percent of respondents without a college degree (this category includes respondents currently in college but who have not yet completed their degree) expressed no opinion on Modi’s performance in office.
- 27 This supports the hypothesis, articulated by some commentators and scholars, that support for Modi is greatest among those in the information technology and computer science fields. See Soumya Shankar, “India’s Liberal Expats Are Modi’s Biggest Fans,” *Foreign Policy*, May 7, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/07/indias-liberal-expats-are-modis-biggest-fans/>.
- 28 For the purposes of establishing respondents’ region of origin, the analysis groups together languages by the region of India in which they are predominantly spoken, treating Hindi and English as their own categories. “West” includes Gujarati and Marathi; “South” includes Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu; “East” includes Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Manipuri, Nepali, and Santali; and “North” includes Dogri, Kashmiri, Punjabi, and Sindhi. There is also a residual category of “Other,” which includes Sanskrit, Urdu, and “Other” responses. Respondents who did not identify a mother tongue are coded as missing for the purpose of this variable.
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