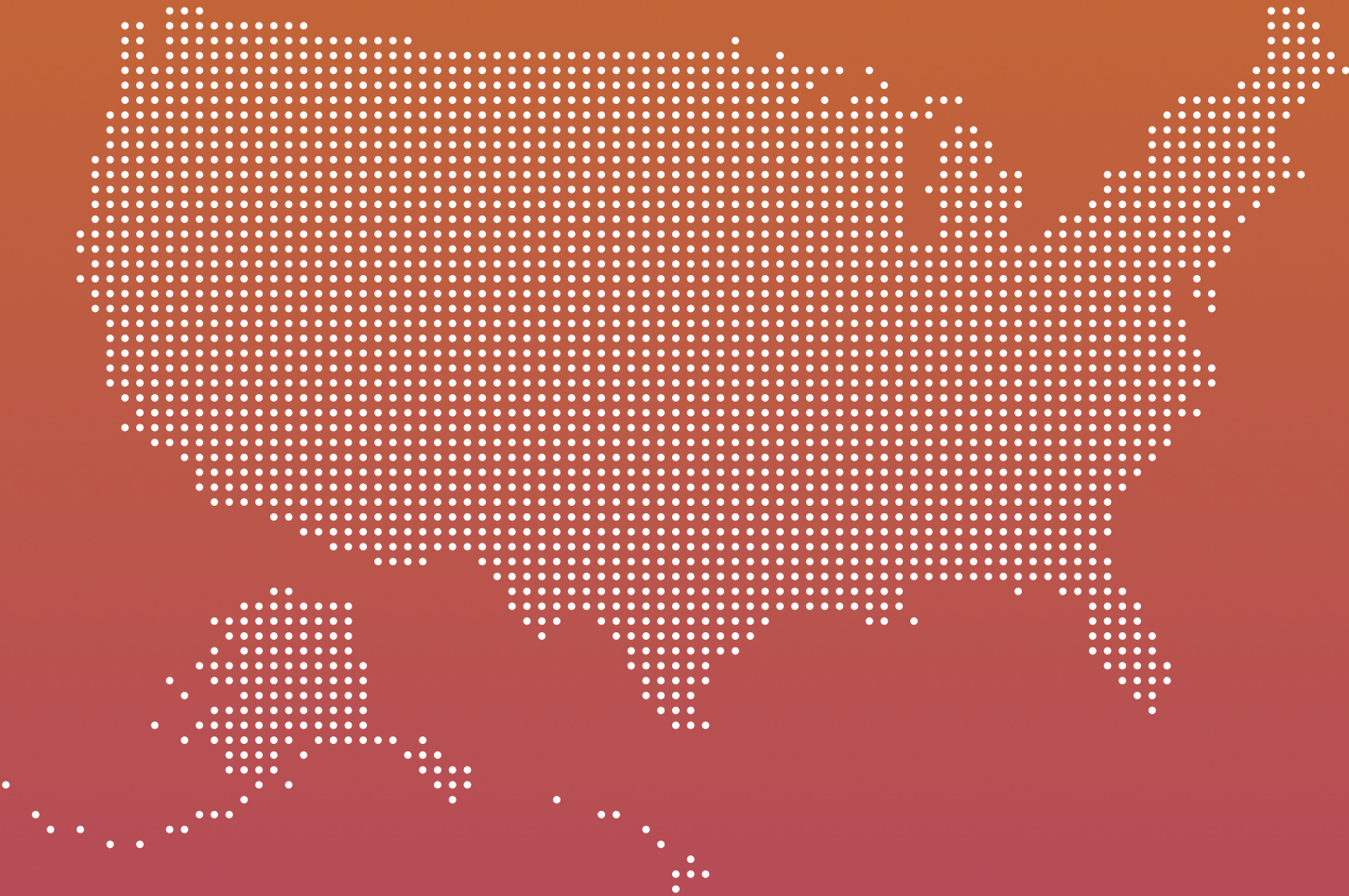# The Detrimental Effects of Hindu Nationalism on Indian American Muslims

**Indian American Muslim Council**
2024 Report

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2024, the Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) and Re-Think Media conducted a community survey of 950 Indian American Muslims to assess their perceptions of Hindu nationalism and its impact on their lives in the United States. The findings of this survey provide a stark illustration of the growing influence of Hindu nationalism within the Indian diaspora and its detrimental effects on social cohesion, professional relationships, and individual well-being.

## *Key findings*

- **Widespread discrimination and exclusion:** A significant majority of respondents reported experiencing harassment, discrimination, or prejudice from Hindu friends or social contacts over the past decade. Discrimination was also prominent in professional settings, with a majority of respondents experiencing biased treatment from Hindu colleagues.

- **Social division and erosion of trust:** The rise of Hindu nationalism has caused a noticeable deterioration in relationships between Indian American Muslims and Hindus in the U.S. Many respondents expressed feelings of mistrust and social isolation, noting that they no longer feel included in Indian American cultural and social events. This exclusion has worsened since the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, with a whopping 80% of respondents stating they feel less comfortable in Indian American spaces.

- **Impact of social media:** Digital platforms have become hotspots for discrimination, with 48% of respondents reporting harassment on social media, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. Respondents described these experiences as emotionally exhausting, contributing to feelings of isolation and hostility.

- **Mental and emotional toll:** The cumulative impact of discrimination has taken a significant toll on the mental and emotional well-being of Indian American Muslims. Respondents reported feelings of isolation, fear, and emotional fatigue, with particular concern for how this hostile environment affects younger generations.

Threat to democracy and religious minorities: An overwhelming 94% of respondents strongly agreed that Hindu nationalism poses a threat to religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, in both India and the U.S. Additionally, 86% of respondents see Hindu nationalism as a threat to democracy in the United States, with concerns about the infiltration of Hindu nationalist ideology into U.S. politics and academia.

## *Introduction*

Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC)  and ReThink Media conducted a survey in spring 2024 exploring Indian American Muslims' perceptions of Hindu nationalism, particularly its impact on their experiences in the United States. Hindu nationalism, a political ideology advocating for the supremacy of Hindus in India, has significantly influenced the Indian diaspora, leading to heightened religious polarization and tensions within the U.S. Indian community.

The survey, which gathered responses from 950 Indian American Muslims, reveals a widespread awareness of Hindu nationalism and its adverse effects on their lives. The results highlight that a clear majority of respondents have faced religious discrimination or harassment from Hindu contacts in the US over the past decade. Many respondents report a growing sense of exclusion from Indian American cultural and social events.

The data suggests that Hindu nationalism not only threatens religious minorities in India but also poses a significant risk to democracy and social cohesion within the Indian diaspora in the United States. The findings emphasize the need for en-

hanced community dialogue, education, and policy interventions to address the growing divide and ensure the inclusion and safety of Indian American Muslims. This report underscores the global repercussions of Hindu nationalism, extending its influence beyond India's borders and affecting the diaspora's social and professional environments.

## Background

Hindutva, also known as Hindu supremacy or Hindu nationalism, is a far-right ethno-nationalist political ideology that believes in the supremacy of Hindus over all other Indians, especially Muslims and Christians, and seeks to legitimize discrimination and violence against non-Hindu Indians.[1] In keeping with its goal to establish a Hindu nation, it asserts that India should be a Hindu state and theocracy rather than a secular democracy, in which the interests and values of Hindus should dominate all areas of society.[2]

The ideology emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modeling itself off European fascist movements of the 1930s, including Nazism.[3] These influences can be seen in the writings of one of Hindutva's founding ideologues, M.S. Golwalkar, who wrote that "The foreign races in [India] must either adopt Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture." If minorities wanted to stay, he added, they must be "wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizens' rights."[4]

The ideology is closely associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary volunteer organization, and the ruling political party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). These (and other) groups promote Hindutva as a central element of their political agenda, which has led to policies perceived as favoring Hindus over other religious communities.

---

[1]  https://bridge.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Hindutva-in-Britain.pdf
[2]  https://www.hindutvaharassmentfieldmanual.org/defininghindutva
[3]  https://www.hindutvaharassmentfieldmanual.org/defininghindutva
[4]  https://thewire.in/communalism/hindutva-and-the-question-of-who-owns-india

Hindutva ideology has been linked to right-wing extremism and has faced criticism for promoting violent intolerance towards minorities such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Dalit (lower-caste) communities. It has been associated with inter-communal civil violence and efforts to reshape India's secular identity.[5],[6]

Hindu nationalism in India, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP, has had significant repercussions for its Muslim citizens, both within India and among the Indian diasporic communities around the world. Muslims are regularly targeted by supporters of Hindu nationalism, resulting in normalized calls for mass violence throughout India.[7] Further, the BJP has changed the legal frameworks of the country to potentially disenfranchise its Muslim citizens via the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC).[8] Hindu nationalists in both the US and India have also become key players in amplifying global Islamophobia, whether by amplifying disinformation to drive anti-Muslim sentiment, spreading hate speech, or collaborating with other far-right movements - including American white supremacists - to disseminate anti-Muslim propaganda.[9],[10]

Islamophobia is a targeted fear-mongering of Muslims that leads to the racialization of and discrimination against Muslims and those perceived as Muslim in all strata of society. It is a structural prejudice, drawing on centuries of thought and practice within and outside Europe, and embedded in imperial and colonial history. It perpetuates widespread misunderstandings of Islamic practices, beliefs, and values. It posits Muslims as inherently "other" to Western or European societies, and as such, open to discrimination and social violence. Within the US, the tragic events of September 11, 2001, led to sustained racial and Islamophobic violence as well as increased surveillance and profiling of Muslim communities and dis-

---

[5]   https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/20/what-is-hindu-nationalism-and-who-are-the-rss

[6]   https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hindutva

[7]   https://indiahatelab.com/2024/02/25/hate-speech-events-in-india-2023-annual-report/

[8]   https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/12/why-is-indias-citizenship-amendment-act-so-controversial

[9]   https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/16/analysis-why-is-so-much-anti-palestinian-disinformation-coming-from-india

[10]  https://www.wearesavera.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Global-VHPs-Trail-of-Violence-v2.pdf

criminatory immigration policies. Recent survey results have demonstrated little material improvement in the understanding of Muslim communities in US.[11] A recent initiative from the White House seeks to raise awareness regarding Islamophobia across the nation.[12]

To assess Indian American Muslims' perceptions of Hindu nationalism and its impact on their lives, the Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) and ReThink Media fielded a survey of Indian American Muslims from March 13, 2024 to July 25, 2024, with both quantitative and qualitative responses. The results of the survey are as follows.

---

[11] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/09/01/muslims-are-a-growing-presence-in-u-s-but-still-face-negative-views-from-the-public/

[12] https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/06/16/fact-sheet-biden-%E2%81%A-0harris-administration-takes-action-to-counter-islamophobia/

# DATA AND ANALYSIS

## *Demographics*[13]

IAMC collected 1,050 responses using snowball sampling. After removing respondents who were under 18 and those who reported they were not Muslim or of Indian origin, 950 responses remained.[14]

Most respondents (81%) identified as male. A large majority of respondents (71%) were 45 or older. Further, most respondents (67%) had a graduate degree.
The top five states of residence were Texas (16%), California (13%), New Jersey (12%), Illinois (12%), and Georgia (8%).

87% said they had lived in the US for more than 10 years; 8% said 5-10 years, and 5% said less than 10 years. A majority of respondents (72%) are immigrants who are naturalized US citizens. 20% are non-citizen immigrants and 6% were born in the US.

## *Findings*

The survey findings detailed below offer valuable insights into the experiences of Indian American Muslims regarding Hindu nationalism and its impact on their lives in the United States. These findings reveal widespread discrimination, social exclusion, and the influence of Hindutva ideology, both in social and professional settings.

Nearly all respondents (99%) were familiar with Hindu nationalism, indicating a high level of awareness within this community. Religion also plays a significant role in their lives, with 92% describing it as "very important," and only 1% considering it "not too important."

---

[13] See Appendix for detailed demographic information.
[14] Not all questions were required; these findings exclude non-responses.

Respondents demonstrated a strong connection to Indian public affairs, with 61% reporting that they closely follow government and political developments in India. Another 30% said they do so occasionally, illustrating an engaged diaspora community.

However, the sense of belonging and inclusion within the broader Indian American community reveals a more complex picture. While many respondents reported feeling connected to the community, a large portion also noted that the rise of Hindu nationalism has strained relationships, particularly in social and cultural spaces. These tensions highlight the growing divide between Indian American Muslims and other members of the Indian diaspora, fueled by the influence of Hindu nationalism.

## Belonging & Inclusion

### *A fragmented community experience*

Despite a majority of respondents indicating a sense of belonging to the broader Indian American community, a more nuanced picture emerges when exploring their experiences in cultural and social spaces within this community. This disparity reflects a deep divide, particularly as it relates to Hindu nationalism's growing influence in the United States.

Most respondents said they feel included in the Indian American community in the US.

*Do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Indian/Indian American community in the United States.*

Agree, strongly — 48%
Agree, somewhat — 28%
Neither agree nor disagree — 13%
Disagree, somewhat — 7%
Disagree, strongly — 4%
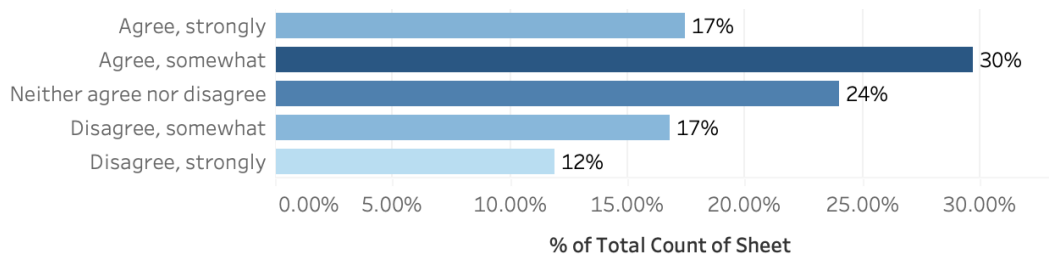
% of Total Count of Sheet
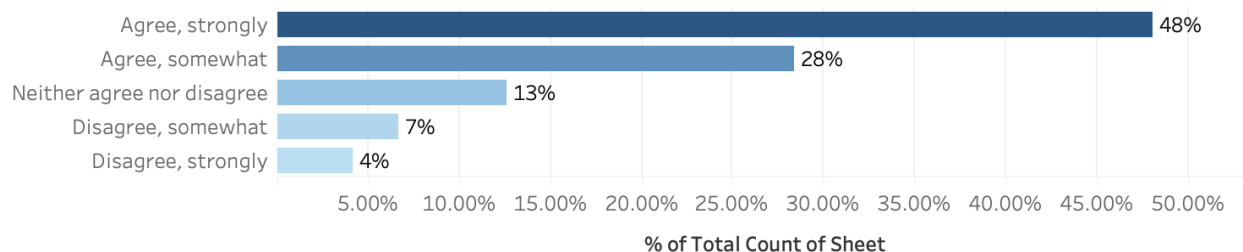
When asked specifically about Indian/Indian American spaces and events, however, respondents were more split.

*I feel included in Indian/Indian American **cultural events** in the United States.*

Agree, strongly — 17%
Agree, somewhat — 30%
Neither agree nor disagree — 24%
Disagree, somewhat — 17%
Disagree, strongly — 12%

% of Total Count of Sheet

*I feel included in Indian/Indian American **social events** in the United States.*

Agree, strongly — 16%
Agree, somewhat — 31%
Neither agree nor disagree — 24%
Disagree, somewhat — 18%
Disagree, strongly — 12%

% of Total Count of Sheet
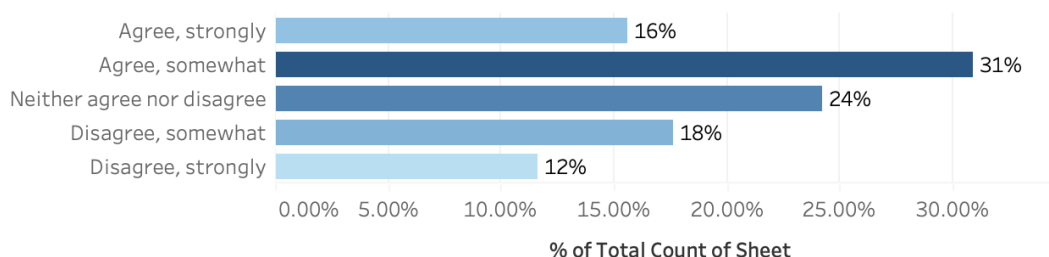
While many Indian American Muslims maintain connections to the Indian American community as a whole, their inclusion in specific cultural and social spaces is increasingly fraught. A staggering 80% of respondents noted that they feel less comfortable in Indian American cultural spaces since the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, and 10% said their feelings remain unchanged. Not a single respondent reported feeling more comfortable. This data speaks to the corrosive effects of Hindu nationalism on social cohesion within the diaspora.

*Since Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in India in 2014, do you feel more comfortable, less comfortable, or about the same in Indian and Indian American cultural and social events/spaces in the United States?*
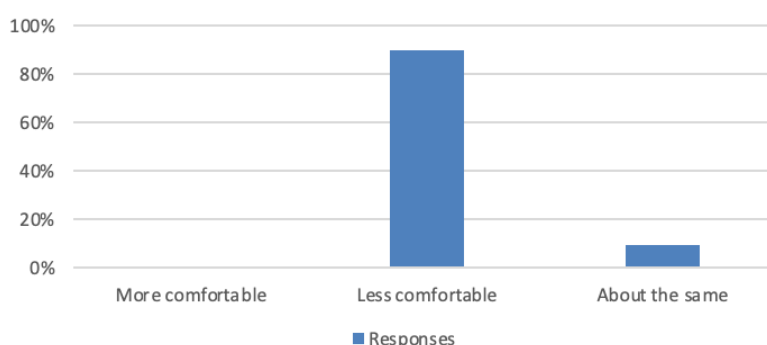


### *Erosion of social cohesion and growing mistrust*

The rupture in inter-community relationships is not limited to acquaintances or casual connections.

Noting a deterioration in relationships between Hindu and Muslim communities, one respondent said, "Hindu nationalism has certainly affected me, my family, and my community... the same people whom we used to feel connected and comfortable with have changed their behavior towards us."

Another lamented, "I have lost good, old friends to Islamophobia and hatred brewed by the BJP government." Similarly, one respondent noted that they "used to engage with our neighbors, but now there's a sense of mistrust and separation." Yet another said "[Hindu nationalism] has led to isolating ourselves from [the] broader Hindu community."

# Prejudice & Discrimination

## *Social and professional settings*

A significant share of respondents reported experiencing harassment, discrimination, or prejudice from *Hindu friends* or *social contacts* in the past decade. When asked specifically about the *frequency* of these experiences, 15% of respondents reported that they had *regularly* faced discrimination or harassment from Hindu friends or social contacts; 33% said they had experienced this *occasionally*, and 33% said *rarely*.

This discrimination was not confined to casual interactions but also extended to professional settings, where 70% reported experiencing similar treatment from Hindu colleagues. The experiences ranged from social exclusion to direct harassment.

*In the past ten years, how often, if at all, have you experienced harassment, discrimination, or prejudice based on your religion from Hindu friends or social contacts in the United States?*
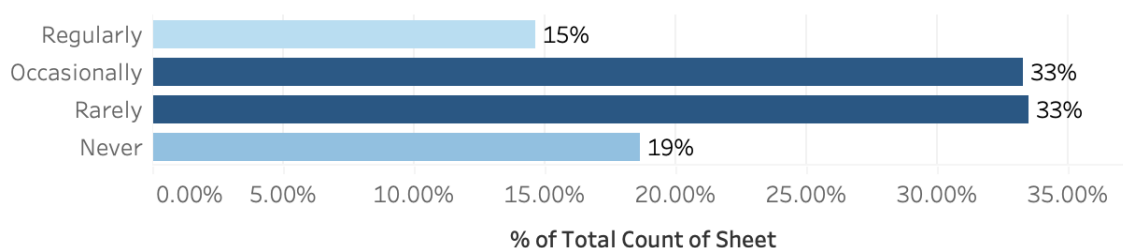
Many respondents shared personal stories of subtle but damaging discrimination in social contexts. One respondent explained, "My son is not included in his Hindu peers' activities at school." Others spoke of exclusion from neighborhood gatherings or cultural events. These experiences highlight how deeply Hindu nationalism has penetrated the social fabric, leading to the marginalization of Muslims in what were once inclusive Indian American spaces.

In professional environments, the stories were similarly troubling. Several respondents mentioned being passed over for promotions, laid off from jobs, or excluded from professional networks dominated by Hindus. 37% of respondents reported that in the past 10 years they had regularly or occasionally experienced some harassment, discrimination, or prejudice based on their religion from *Hindu colleagues* in the US.

*In the past ten years, how often, if at all, have you experienced harassment, discrimination, or prejudice based on your religion from Hindu colleagues or professional contacts in the United States?*
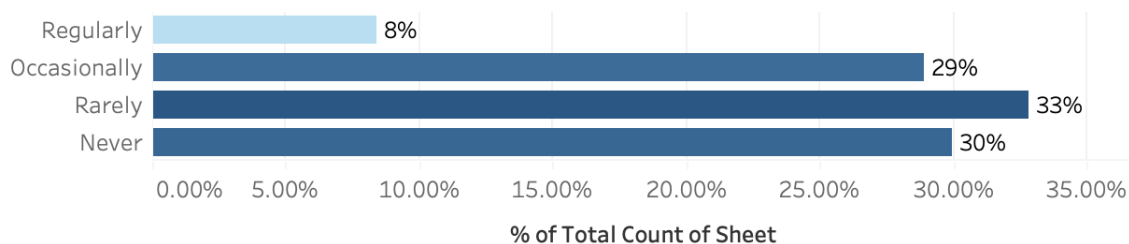


One respondent shared that they were "laid off work twice by hindu managers on partial basis of religion." Another noted, "I hear many cases of discrimination, especially when it comes to hiring in the IT field. This area is dominated by Hindus and most of their activities are going unchecked. They … are openly discriminating Muslim candidates."

## Contexts of discrimination

A more detailed investigation into the specific situations in which respondents face this discrimination reveals that it occurs across multiple settings, including both virtual and in-person interactions, underscoring the pervasive nature of this issue.

Respondents were asked to indicate the specific situations in which they had experienced religious-based discrimination. Social media emerged as a significant source of harassment, with 48% of respondents reporting negative encounters on platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. Similarly, 43% indicated that messaging apps were a common venue for discriminatory behavior, including the spread of Islamophobic content and derogatory messages.

In addition to online spaces, discrimination was also prevalent in more personal environments. Respondents reported exclusion from social events, neighborhood gatherings, and professional settings, where they faced prejudice from colleagues and peers. A substantial 70% reported discrimination in the workplace, with several citing instances of being passed over for promotions, laid off, or intentionally excluded from professional networks dominated by Hindus.

The wide range of contexts in which discrimination occurs highlights the deep impact of Hindu nationalism on Indian American Muslims, permeating both social and professional aspects of their lives.

*Please indicate the situations in which you experienced harassment or discrimination in recent years from Hindu contacts — whether social or professional — based on your religion. (Select all that apply.)*
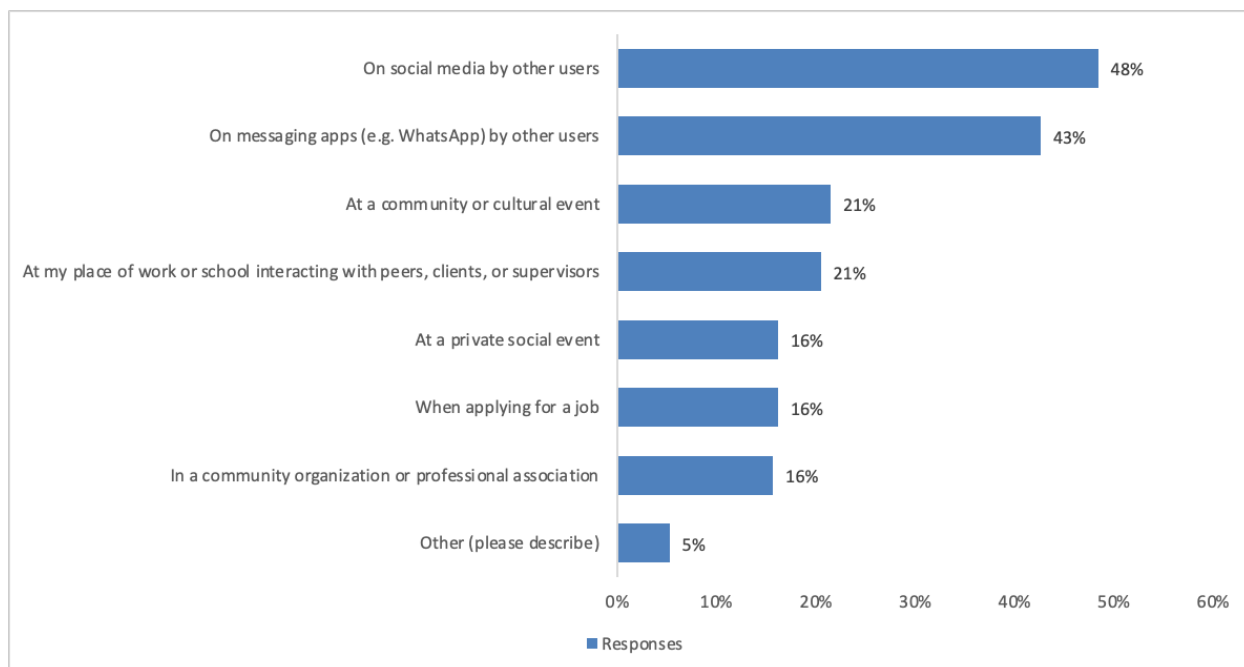
## The role of social media in fostering discrimination

As shown in the data above, a significant number of respondents reported experiencing harassment on social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and other networks. In descriptions of these incidents, harassment ranged from Islamophobic comments, spreading of misinformation, and derogatory messages, to more organized trolling by Hindutva supporters.

When asked specifically about the *frequency* of their experiences with harassment on social media or messaging apps, nearly 30% of respondents reported that they had *regularly* faced discrimination or harassment on these platforms; about 40% said they had experienced this *occasionally*, and 21% said *rarely*.

*In recent years, how often, if at all, have you personally experienced harassment or discrimination on social media platforms or messaging apps related to Hindu nationalism (also called Hindu supremacy or Hindutva)?*
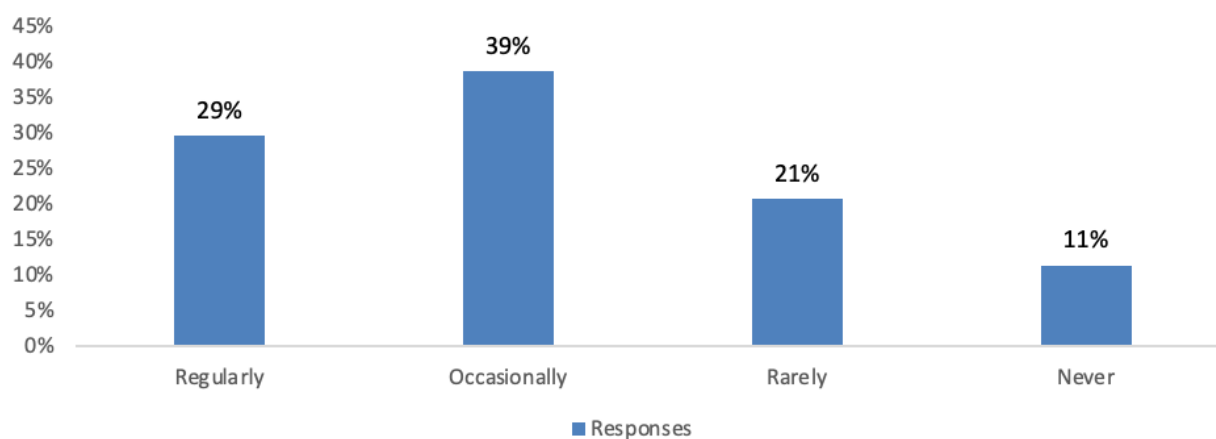
The tenor of these interactions appears to be quite hostile; respondents reported being the target of Islamophobic comments, misinformation, and organized trolling by Hindutva supporters. One person described these experiences as "emotionally exhausting," adding, "The Islamophobia on social media is relentless." Some respondents singled out specific platforms, with several noting hateful comments posted on Facebook and Instagram, while another reported that "many posts on Reddit are grossly discriminatory or Islamophobic."

This form of harassment has a far-reaching impact, as social media is often a key space for both personal and professional engagement. The prevalence of hate speech and discriminatory behavior in these virtual environments reinforces feelings of isolation and hostility among Indian American Muslims.

## *Mental and emotional toll*

The cumulative impact of this discrimination is taking a significant toll on the mental and emotional well-being of Indian American Muslims. Several respondents expressed feelings of isolation, fear, and emotional fatigue as a result of the prejudice they face. One respondent shared, "Emotionally, I am devastated by the government['s] actions in India."

This mental burden is particularly concerning for the younger generation. Parents expressed worry about how their children are growing up in this toxic environment, fearing for their well-being in a world increasingly hostile to their identity. One respondent asked, "How are kids supposed to grow up in this toxic world?"

## Broader Effects of Hindu nationalism

Respondents expressed concern about the growing influence of Hindu nationalism in politics, both in India and in the U.S. 99% of respondents said they agree (94% of them strongly) that Hindu nationalism "is a threat to religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians *in India*."

Many respondents expressed significant fear for their safety and that of their families in India. One respondent shared, "I fear there will be another genocide for the minorities in India. All minorities are surely insecure there. " Another noted, "We are constantly worried about our family back home and whether they would be harassed at any point of time," while yet another said that Hindu nationalism "has impacted family in India in terms of where they are able to buy a place to live." Another respondent called Hindu nationalism "a growing trend/problem that if left unchecked will continue to threaten India pluralism at home and its minority communities in the diaspora."

As for Hindu nationalism's effects in the US, 90% agreed (73% of them strongly) that Hindu nationalism "is a threat to Muslims *in the United States*," and 86% agreed (69% strongly) that Hindu nationalism "is a threat to democracy in the United States."

As for how Hindu nationalism is affecting US politics and policy, one respondent wrote, "Hindu extremists are infiltrating the US government, State Government as elected representatives... they are dangerously infiltrating US universities as teaching staff and in admission committees." Another mentioned, "Hindutva

influences the way American Hindus vote here in America."

Some respondents expressed a need for action against Hindu nationalism in the US and beyond. One suggested, "The US government should evaluate RSS activities." Another recommended, "RSS, Sangh Parivar should be labeled as 'terrorist organizations.'"

Some respondents went further to link Hindu nationalism with other global extremist movements, both past and present. One stated, "Hindu nationalism globally is going hand in hand with Zionism to eradicate Islam and Muslims from the world." Another observed, "Just like Nazism, Hindutva is rooted as a supremacist ideology that tries to incite violence."

# DISCUSSION

The survey results underscore the profound impact that Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, is having on Indian American Muslims within the United States. The ideology, deeply intertwined with the political agenda of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the paramilitary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India, has not only reshaped India's secular identity but has also reverberated through the Indian diaspora. This is evident in the heightened religious polarization and increased instances of discrimination reported by Indian American Muslims.

The data reveals a stark reality: A significant majority of respondents have faced harassment, discrimination, and social exclusion, primarily from their Hindu peers and colleagues in the U.S. The rise of Hindu nationalism has led to a diminished sense of safety and inclusion among Indian American Muslims, particularly in spaces that were once culturally unifying. The fact that 82% of respondents have experienced religious-based prejudice in the past decade signals a disturbing trend of communal division that transcends borders.

The finding that an overwhelming majority of respondents agree that Hindu nationalism poses a threat not only to religious minorities in both India and the United States but also to democracy reflects a deep-seated fear that Hindu nationalism is fostering an environment of intolerance and undermining democratic values both in India and within the diaspora community in the U.S.

Social media platforms, which in theory serve as spaces for cross-cultural dialogue and connection, have instead become hotspots for Islamophobic harassment, further alienating Indian American Muslims from broader community engagement. The findings also highlight how these tensions spill over into professional settings, with a significant portion of respondents reporting workplace discrimination and bias.

These results suggest that Hindu nationalism's influence extends beyond India, fostering an environment in the U.S. where Indian American Muslims feel increasingly marginalized and unsafe. The prevalence of discrimination, both subtle and overt, underscores the need for more robust community dialogue, education, and policy interventions to address these issues. For Indian American Muslims, the implications of this growing divide are deeply personal, affecting their social, professional, and even familial interactions within the diaspora.

While this survey provides critical insights into the experiences of Indian American Muslims in the context of rising Hindu nationalism, further research could explore several related areas.

Implementing tracking surveys could help assess how these dynamics evolve over time, particularly in response to political changes in both India and the U.S. More research is also warranted to explore the psychological and social impacts of this discrimination on Indian Americans, including how exposure to Hindutva ideology affects their sense of identity and belonging.

Lastly, a deeper examination into the role of social media in spreading extremist ideologies, particularly Hindutva, could yield important insights into its contribution to religious polarization within diaspora communities. Given the prevalence of online harassment reported in this survey, understanding how platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Reddit amplify or mitigate hate speech is critical. Additionally, exploring how these digital spaces might be repurposed for constructive inter-community engagement could offer a path forward. This could include analyzing the effectiveness of online initiatives aimed at countering extremist narratives, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and facilitating dialogue between Hindu and Muslim communities. Identifying strategies to foster inclusive and respectful online environments may help reduce the spread of harmful ideologies and strengthen social cohesion in the diaspora.

These findings illustrate that the rise of Hindu nationalism in India is not only a domestic issue but a global one, with profound consequences for Indian American Muslims. It is clear that steps must be taken by advocates, policymakers, and employers to address the discrimination and social polarization identified in this report. Previous efforts in other sectors have shown that fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting inclusive community spaces, and combating online hate speech through education and awareness campaigns can help mitigate this polarization. Additionally, addressing the role of social media in spreading hate speech and pushing for stronger protections for religious minorities through policy reforms will be critical in mitigating the influence of Hindutva in the U.S. and beyond.

# APPENDIX: EXPANDED DEMOGRAPHICS

## *Age*

|  | Count | Percentage of Total |
|---|---|---|
| 18-34 | 47 | 8% |
| 35-44 | 128 | 21% |
| 45-64 | 322 | 53% |
| 65+ | 108 | 18% |

## *Gender*

|  | Count | Percentage of Total |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 489 | 81% |
| Female | 113 | 19% |
| Other | 3 | <1% |

## *Education*

|  | Count | Percentage of Total |
|---|---|---|
| High school or equivalent | 5 | <1% |
| Associate's degree | 13 | 2% |
| Bachelor's degree | 173 | 29% |
| Graduate degree | 401 | 66% |

## *State of Residence*

|  | Count |
|---|---|
| Alabama | 1 |
| Arizona | 2 |
| Arkansas | 1 |
| California | 79 |
| Connecticut | 5 |
| Delaware | 3 |
| District of Columbia (DC) | 2 |

| | |
|---|---:|
| Florida | 29 |
| Georgia | 46 |
| Illinois | 74 |
| Indiana | 3 |
| Kansas | 1 |
| Maryland | 28 |
| Massachusetts | 26 |
| Michigan | 28 |
| Minnesota | 7 |
| Missouri | 2 |
| New Jersey | 75 |
| New Mexico | 2 |
| New York | 9 |
| North Carolina | 23 |
| Ohio | 5 |
| Oregon | 2 |
| Other | 3 |
| Pennsylvania | 5 |
| Rhode Island | 1 |
| South Carolina | 2 |
| Tennessee | 5 |
| Texas | 96 |
| Virginia | 22 |
| Washington | 16 |
| Wisconsin | 2 |