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Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation

Indians say it is important to respect all religions, but major religious groups see little in common and want to live separately

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How we did this

This study is Pew Research Center's most comprehensive, in-depth exploration of India to date. For this report, we surveyed 29,999 Indian adults (including 22,975 who identify as Hindu, 3,336 who identify as Muslim, 1,782 who identify as Sikh, 1,011 who identify as Christian, 719 who identify as Buddhist, 109 who identify as Jain and 67 who identify as belonging to another religion or as religiously unaffiliated). Interviews for this nationally representative survey were conducted face-to-face under the direction of RTI International from Nov. 17, 2019, to March 23, 2020.

To improve respondent comprehension of survey questions and to ensure all questions were culturally appropriate, Pew Research Center followed a multi-phase questionnaire development process that included expert review, focus groups, cognitive interviews, a pretest and a regional pilot survey before the national survey. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into 16 languages, independently verified by professional linguists with native proficiency in regional dialects.

Respondents were selected using a probability-based sample design that would allow for robust analysis of all major religious groups in India – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains – as well as all major regional zones. Data was weighted to account for the different probabilities of selection among respondents and to align with demographic benchmarks for the Indian adult population from the 2011 census. The survey is calculated to have covered 98% of Indians ages 18 and older and had an 86% national response rate.

For more information, see the [Methodology](#) for this report. The questions used in this analysis can be found [here](#).

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Fieldwork for the survey was conducted under the direction of RTI International.

While the analysis for this report was guided by our consultations with the advisers, Pew Research Center is solely responsible for the interpretation and reporting of the data.

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Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation

Indians say it is important to respect all religions, but major religious groups see little in common and want to live separately

More than 70 years after India became free from colonial rule, Indians generally feel their country has lived up to one of its post-independence ideals: a society where followers of many religions can live and practice freely.

India's massive population is diverse as well as devout. Not only do most of the world's Hindus, Jains and Sikhs live in India, but it also is home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations and to millions of Christians and Buddhists.

A major new Pew Research Center survey of religion across India, based on nearly 30,000 face-to-face interviews of adults conducted in 17 languages between late 2019 and early 2020 (before the [COVID-19 pandemic](#)), finds that Indians of all these religious backgrounds overwhelmingly say they are very free to practice their faiths.

Indians see religious tolerance as a central part of who they are as a nation. Across the major religious groups, most people say it is very important to respect all religions to be "truly Indian." And tolerance is a religious as well as civic value: Indians are united in the view that respecting *other* religions is a very important part of what it means to be a member of *their own* religious community.

India is majority Hindu, but religious minorities have sizable populations

India's adult population by religion (2011 census)

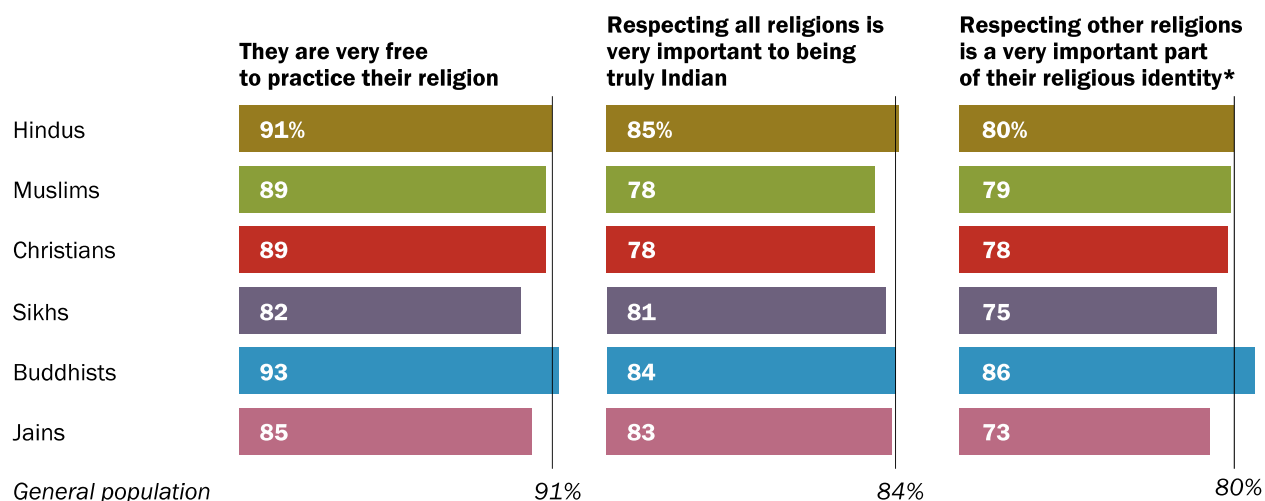
	% of adults	Number of adults
Hindus	81.0%	615,587,181
Muslims	12.9	97,689,555
Christians	2.4	18,512,051
Sikhs	1.9	14,416,821
Buddhists	0.7	5,653,119
Jains	0.4	3,299,660
Other religions	0.6	4,641,403

Note: Based on adults ages 18 and older, excluding the union territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.
Source: Census of India, 2011.
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Indians feel they have religious freedom, see respecting all religions as a core value

% of Indian adults who say ...



* Respondents were asked, "Is respecting other religions a very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important part of what being [Hindu/Muslim/etc.] means to you?" The very small share of respondents who do not identify with a religion were not asked this question.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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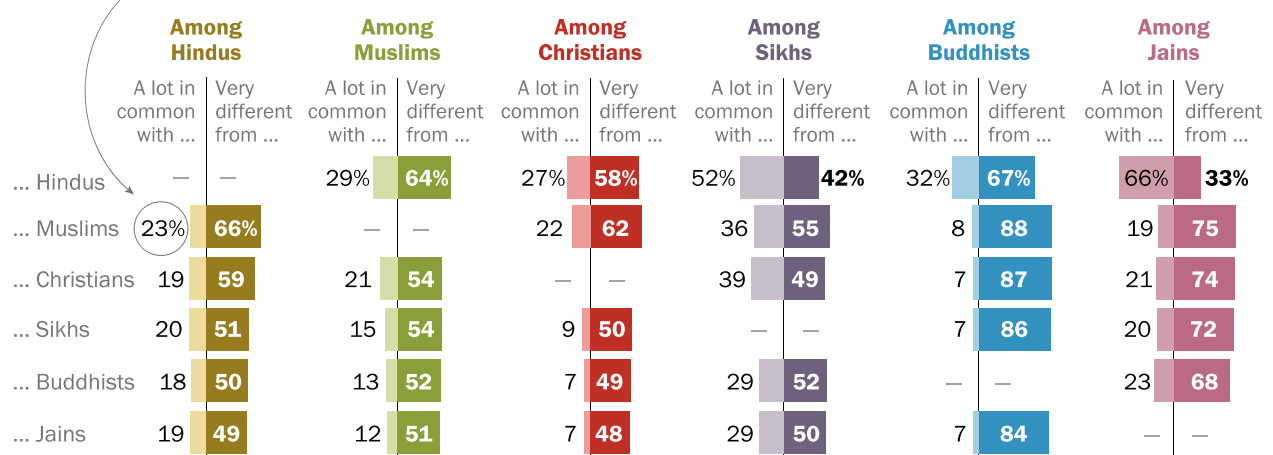
These shared values are accompanied by a number of beliefs that cross religious lines. Not only do a majority of Hindus in India (77%) believe in karma, but an identical percentage of Muslims do, too. A third of Christians in India (32%) – together with 81% of Hindus – say they believe in the purifying power of the Ganges River, a central belief in Hinduism. In Northern India, 12% of Hindus and 10% of Sikhs, along with 37% of Muslims, identify with Sufism, a mystical tradition most closely associated with Islam. And the vast majority of Indians of all major religious backgrounds say that respecting elders is very important to their faith.

Yet, despite sharing certain values and religious beliefs – as well as living in the same country, under the same constitution – members of India’s major religious communities often don’t feel they have much in common with one another. The majority of Hindus see themselves as very different from Muslims (66%), and most Muslims return the sentiment, saying they are very different from Hindus (64%). There are a few exceptions: Two-thirds of Jains and about half of Sikhs say they have a lot in common with Hindus. But generally, people in India’s major religious communities tend to see themselves as very different from others.

India’s religious groups generally see themselves as very different from each other

% of Indian adults who say they have a lot in common with/are very different from _____ in India

For example, **23%** of Hindus say Hindus and Muslims in India have a lot in common.



Note: Other/Neither/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

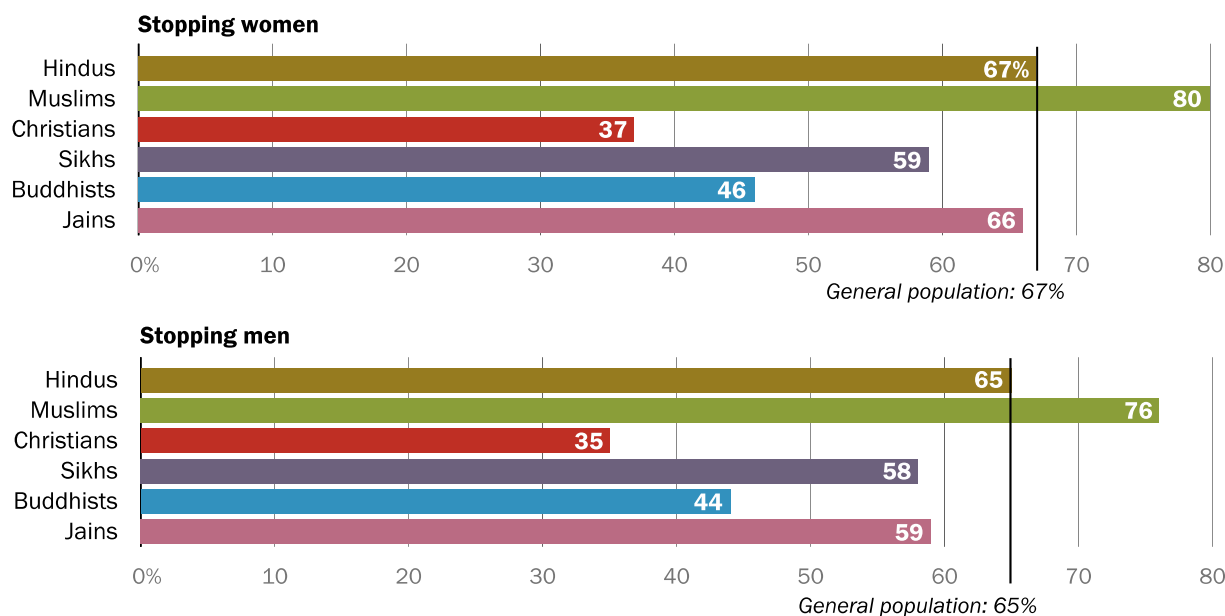
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This perception of difference is reflected in traditions and habits that maintain the separation of India's religious groups. For example, marriages across religious lines – and, relatedly, religious conversions – are exceedingly rare (see [Chapter 3](#)). Many Indians, across a range of religious groups, say it is very important to stop people in their community from marrying into other religious groups. Roughly two-thirds of Hindus in India want to prevent interreligious marriages of Hindu women (67%) or Hindu men (65%). Even larger shares of Muslims feel similarly: 80% say it is very important to stop Muslim women from marrying outside their religion, and 76% say it is very important to stop Muslim men from doing so.

Stopping religious intermarriage is a high priority for Hindus, Muslims and others in India

% of Indian adults who say it is very important to stop women/men in their community from marrying outside their religion



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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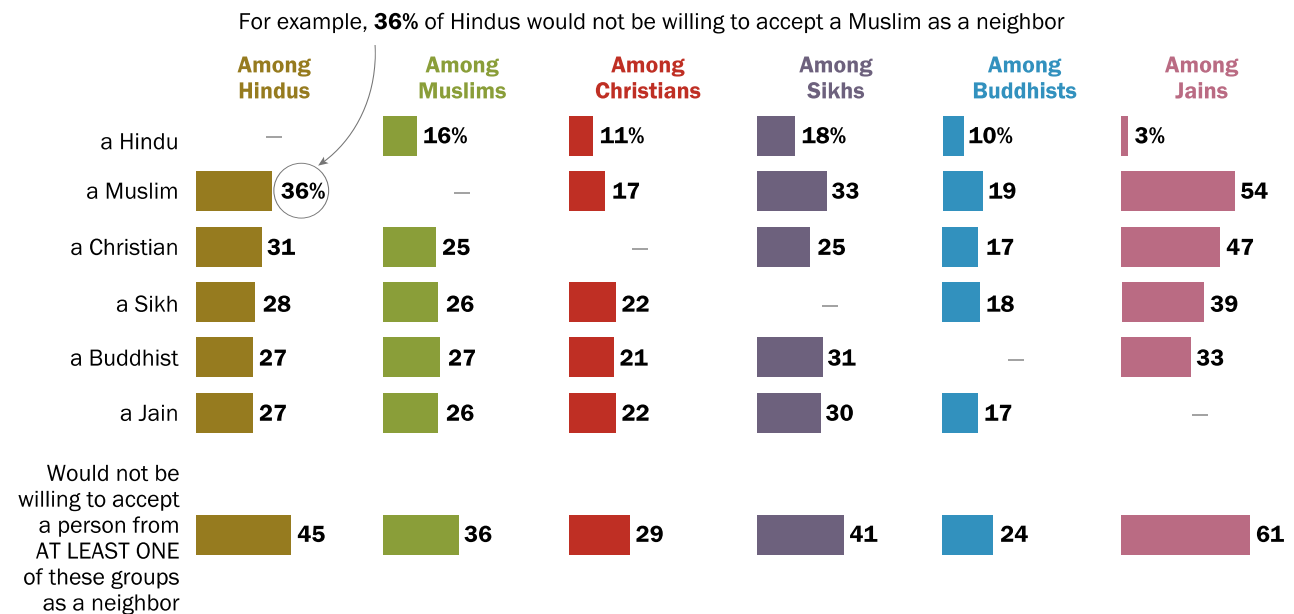
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Moreover, Indians generally stick to their own religious group when it comes to their friends. Hindus overwhelmingly say that most or all of their close friends are also Hindu. Of course, Hindus make up the majority of the population, and as a result of sheer numbers, may be more likely to interact with fellow Hindus than with people of other religions. But even among Sikhs and Jains, who each form a sliver of the national population, a large majority say their friends come mainly or entirely from their small religious community.

Fewer Indians go so far as to say that their neighborhoods should consist only of people from their own religious group. Still, many would prefer to keep people of certain religions out of their residential areas or villages. For example, many Hindus (45%) say they are fine with having neighbors of *all* other religions – be they Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist or Jain – but an identical share (45%) say they would *not* be willing to accept followers of at least one of these groups, including more than one-in-three Hindus (36%) who do not want a Muslim as a neighbor. Among Jains, a majority (61%) say they are unwilling to have neighbors from at least one of these groups, including 54% who would not accept a Muslim neighbor, although nearly all Jains (92%) say they would be willing to accept a Hindu neighbor.

Substantial minorities would not accept followers of other religions as neighbors

% of Indian adults who say they would NOT be willing to accept _____ as a neighbor



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Indians, then, simultaneously express enthusiasm for religious tolerance and a consistent preference for keeping their religious communities in segregated spheres – they live together separately. These two sentiments may seem paradoxical, but for many Indians they are not.

Indeed, many take both positions, saying it is important to be tolerant of others *and* expressing a desire to limit personal connections across religious lines. Indians who favor a religiously

segregated society also overwhelmingly emphasize religious tolerance as a core value. For example, among Hindus who say it is very important to stop the interreligious marriage of Hindu women, 82% also say that respecting other religions is very important to what it means to be Hindu. This figure is nearly identical to the 85% who strongly value religious tolerance among those who are not at all concerned with stopping interreligious marriage.

In other words, Indians' concept of religious tolerance does not necessarily involve the mixing of religious communities. While people in some countries may aspire to create a "melting pot" of different religious identities, many Indians seem to prefer a country more like a patchwork fabric, with clear lines between groups.

The dimensions of Hindu nationalism in India

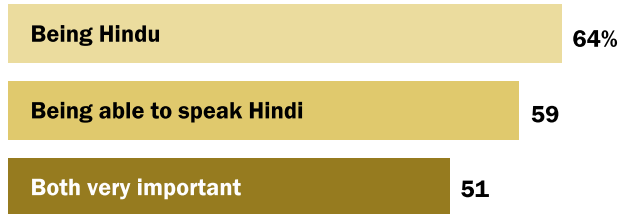
One of these religious fault lines – the relationship between India’s Hindu majority and the country’s smaller religious communities – has particular relevance in public life, especially in recent years under the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP is often [described as promoting a Hindu nationalist ideology](#).

The survey finds that Hindus tend to see their religious identity and Indian national identity as closely intertwined: Nearly two-thirds of Hindus (64%) say it is very important to be Hindu to be “truly” Indian.

Most Hindus (59%) also link Indian identity with being able to speak Hindi – one of dozens of languages that are widely spoken in India. And these two dimensions of national identity – being able to speak Hindi and being a Hindu – are closely connected. Among Hindus who say it is very important to *be Hindu* to be truly Indian, fully 80% also say it is very important to *speak Hindi* to be truly Indian.

Most Hindus in India say being Hindu, being able to speak Hindi are very important to be ‘truly’ Indian

% of Indian Hindus who say ____ is very important to be truly Indian



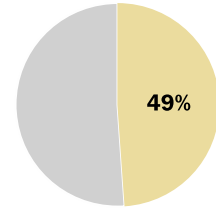
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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The BJP's appeal is greater among Hindus who closely associate their religious identity and the Hindi language with being "truly Indian." In the 2019 national elections, 60% of Hindu voters who think it is very important to be Hindu *and* to speak Hindi to be truly Indian cast their vote for the BJP, compared with only a third among Hindu voters who feel less strongly about both these aspects of national identity.

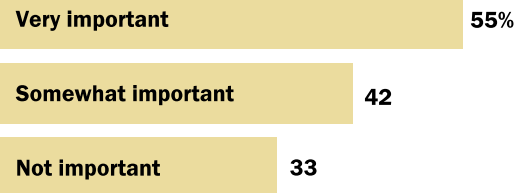
Support for BJP higher among Hindu voters who link being Hindu, speaking Hindi with Indian identity

Among those who say they voted, % of Indian Hindus who supported the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2019 elections

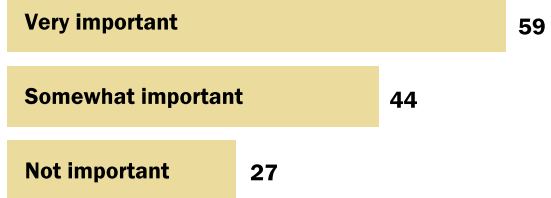


Support for BJP among Hindu voters who say it is ...

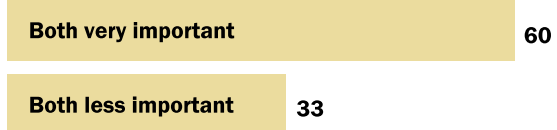
___ *to be Hindu to be truly Indian*



___ *to be able to speak Hindi to be truly Indian*



*Being Hindu **and** being able to speak Hindi are ___ to be truly Indian*



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Overall, among those who voted in the 2019 elections, three-in-ten Hindus take all three positions: saying it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian; saying the same about speaking Hindi; and casting their ballot for the BJP.

These views are considerably more common among Hindus in the largely Hindi-speaking Northern and Central regions of the country, where roughly half of all Hindu voters fall into this category, compared with just 5% in the South.

Among Hindus, large regional divides on views of national identity and politics

% of Indian Hindus who say ...

	Being Hindu very important to be truly Indian	Being able to speak Hindi very important to be truly Indian	Voted for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2019 election*	Voted for BJP and say it is very important to be Hindu and to speak Hindi to be truly Indian*
Total Hindus	64%	59%	49%	30%
North	69	71	68	47
Central	83	87	65	53
East	65	58	46	28
West	61	53	56	26
South	42	27	19	5
Northeast	39	39	73	19

* Based only on the large majority of Hindus who say they voted in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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How regions of India are defined in this report



Note: These regions reflect zonal council divisions. Population shares based on adults ages 18 and older and exclude the union territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep. Fieldwork could not be conducted in the Kashmir Valley due to security concerns. Fieldwork could not be conducted in Manipur or Sikkim due to the outbreak of COVID-19. No locations in Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, or Ladakh were selected for inclusion in the survey. Fieldwork was not conducted in Andaman and Nicobar Islands or Lakshadweep.

Source: Census of India, 2011.

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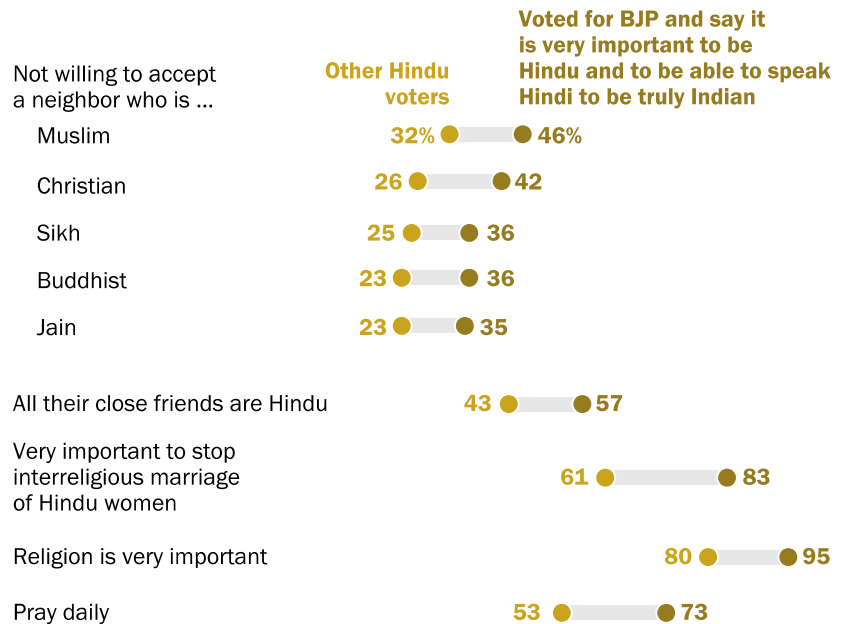
Whether Hindus who meet all three of these criteria qualify as “Hindu nationalists” may be debated, but they do express a heightened desire for maintaining clear lines between Hindus and other religious groups when it comes to whom they marry, who their friends are and whom they live among. For example, among Hindu BJP voters who link national identity with both religion and language, 83% say it is very important to stop Hindu women from marrying into another religion, compared with 61% among other Hindu voters.

This group also tends to be more religiously observant: 95% say religion is very important in their lives, and roughly three-quarters say they pray daily (73%). By

comparison, among other Hindu voters, a smaller majority (80%) say religion is very important in their lives, and about half (53%) pray daily.

Among Hindu voters in India, religious nationalism is accompanied by heightened desire for religious segregation, greater religious observance

Among Hindu voters who ...



Note: Based only on the large majority of Hindus who say they voted in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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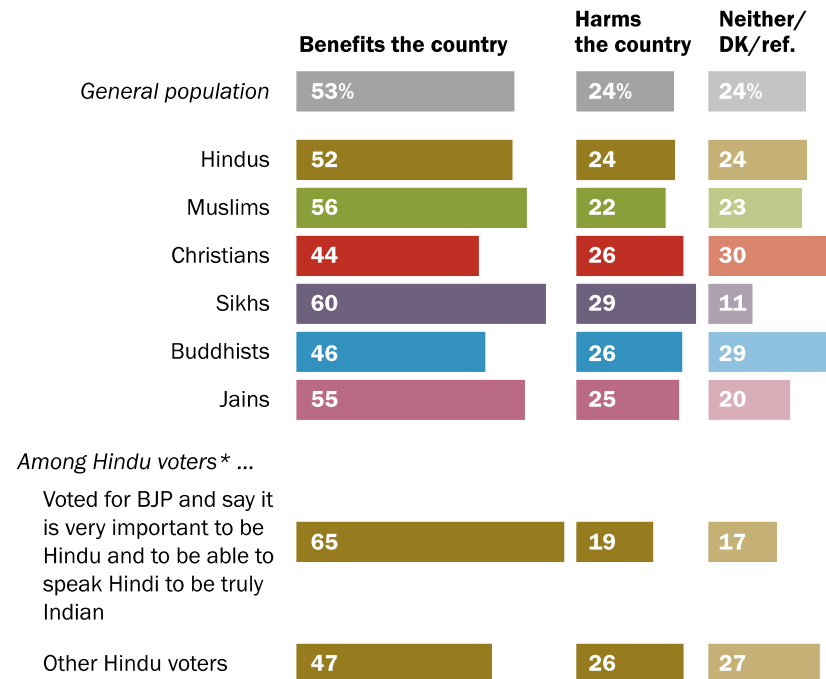
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Even though Hindu BJP voters who link national identity with religion and language are more inclined to support a religiously segregated India, they also are *more* likely than other Hindu voters to express positive opinions about India's religious diversity. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of this group – Hindus who say that being a Hindu and being able to speak Hindi are very important to be truly Indian *and* who voted for the BJP in 2019 – say religious diversity benefits India, compared with about half (47%) of other Hindu voters.

This finding suggests that for many Hindus, there is no contradiction between valuing religious diversity (at least in principle) and feeling that Hindus are somehow more authentically Indian than fellow citizens who follow other religions.

Hindus who see Hindu and Indian identity as closely tied express positive views about diversity

% of Indian adults who say religious diversity benefits/harms the country



Among Hindu voters* ...

Voted for BJP and say it is very important to be Hindu and to be able to speak Hindi to be truly Indian

Other Hindu voters

* Based only on the large majority of Hindus who say they voted in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Note: "Neither/DK/ref." indicates respondents who answered "neither benefits nor harms" or "don't know" or refused to give a response to the question.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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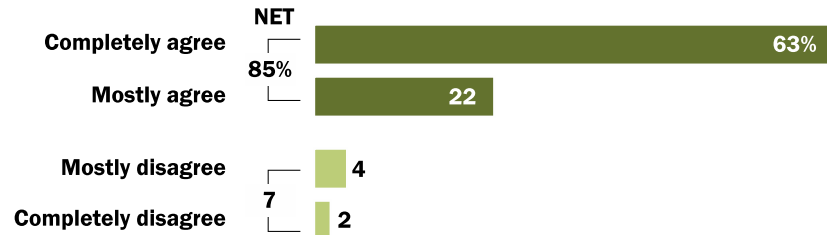
Among Indians overall, there is no overwhelming consensus on the benefits of religious diversity. On balance, more Indians see diversity as a benefit than view it as a liability for their country: Roughly half (53%) of Indian adults say India's religious diversity benefits the country, while about a quarter (24%) see diversity as harmful, with similar figures among both Hindus and Muslims. But 24% of Indians do not take a clear position either way – they say diversity neither benefits nor harms the country, or they decline to answer the question. (See [Chapter 2](#) for a discussion of attitudes toward diversity.)

India's Muslims express pride in being Indian while identifying communal tensions, desiring segregation

India's Muslim community, the second-largest religious group in the country, historically has had a complicated relationship with the Hindu majority. The two communities generally have lived peacefully side by side for centuries, but their shared history also is checkered by civil unrest and violence. Most recently, while the survey was being conducted, [demonstrations broke out in parts of New Delhi](#) and elsewhere over the government's [new citizenship law](#), which creates an expedited path to citizenship for immigrants from some neighboring countries – but not Muslims.

Vast majority of India's Muslims say Indian culture is superior

% of Indian Muslims who agree/disagree with the statement "Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others"



Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Today, India's Muslims almost unanimously say they are very proud to be Indian (95%), and they express great enthusiasm for Indian culture: 85% agree with the statement that "Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others."

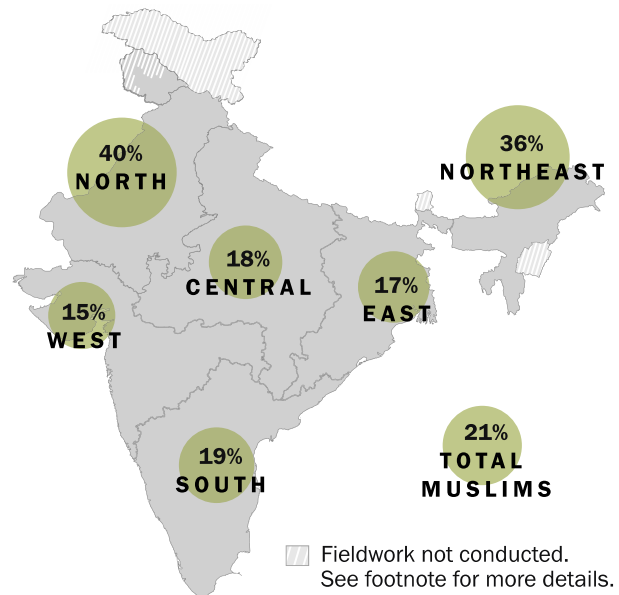
Relatively few Muslims say their community faces “a lot” of discrimination in India (24%). In fact, the share of Muslims who see widespread discrimination against their community is similar to the share of Hindus who say Hindus face widespread religious discrimination in India (21%). (See [Chapter 1](#) for a discussion of attitudes on religious discrimination.)

But personal experiences with discrimination among Muslims vary quite a bit regionally. Among Muslims in the North, 40% say they personally have faced religious discrimination in the last 12 months – much higher levels than reported in most other regions.

In addition, most Muslims across the country (65%), along with an identical share of Hindus (65%), see communal violence as a very big national problem. (See [Chapter 1](#) for a discussion of Indians’ attitudes toward national problems.)

Overall, one-in-five Muslims say they have personally faced religious discrimination recently, but views vary by region

% of Indian Muslims who say they have personally faced religious discrimination in the past 12 months



Note: Fieldwork could not be conducted in the Kashmir Valley due to security concerns. Fieldwork could not be conducted in Manipur or Sikkim due to the outbreak of COVID-19. No locations in Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, or Ladakh were selected for inclusion in the survey. Fieldwork was not conducted in Andaman and Nicobar Islands or Lakshadweep. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. “Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation”

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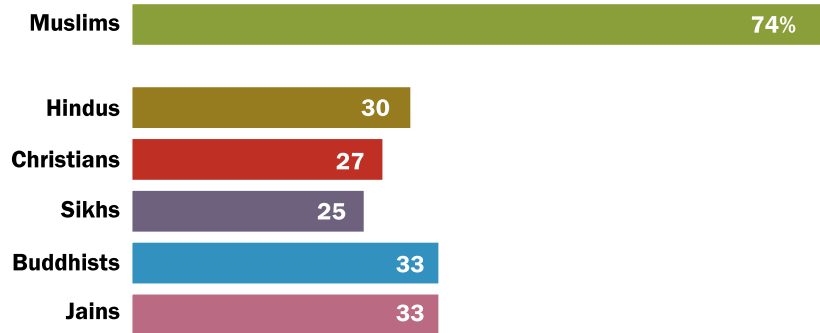
Like Hindus, Muslims prefer to live religiously segregated lives – not just when it comes to marriage and friendships, but also in some elements of public life. In particular, three-quarters of Muslims in India (74%) support having access to the existing system of Islamic courts, which handle family disputes (such as inheritance or divorce cases), in addition to the secular court system.

Muslims' desire for religious segregation does not preclude tolerance of other groups –

again similar to the pattern seen among Hindus. Indeed, a majority of Muslims who favor separate religious courts for their community say religious diversity benefits India (59%), compared with somewhat fewer of those who oppose religious courts for Muslims (50%).

Muslims in India support having access to their own religious courts

% of Indian adults who support allowing Muslims to go to their own religious courts to solve family disputes, such as inheritance or divorce cases



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Sidebar: Islamic courts in India

Since 1937, India's Muslims have had the option of resolving family and inheritance-related cases in officially recognized Islamic courts, known as dar-ul-qaza. These courts are overseen by religious magistrates known as qazi and [operate under Shariah principles](#). For example, while the rules of inheritance for most Indians are governed by the Indian Succession Act of 1925 and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 (amended in 2005), [Islamic inheritance practices](#) differ in some ways, including who can be considered an heir and how much of the deceased person's property they can inherit. India's inheritance laws also take into account the differing traditions of other religious communities, such as Hindus and Christians, but their cases are handled in secular courts. Only the Muslim community has the option of having cases tried by a separate system of family courts. The decisions of the religious courts, however, are [not legally binding](#), and the parties involved have the option of taking their case to secular courts if they are not satisfied with the decision of the religious court.

As of 2021, there are [roughly 70 dar-ul-qaza](#) in India. Most are in the states of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. Goa is the only state that does not recognize rulings by these courts, enforcing its own [uniform civil code](#) instead. Dar-ul-qaza are overseen by the [All India Muslim Personal Law Board](#).

While these courts can grant divorces among Muslims, they are prohibited from approving divorces initiated through the practice known as triple talaq, in which a Muslim man instantly divorces his wife by saying the Arabic/Urdu word “talaq” (meaning “divorce”) three times. This practice was deemed unconstitutional by the Indian Supreme Court in 2017 and formally outlawed by the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's Parliament, in 2019.¹

Recent debates have emerged around Islamic courts. Some Indians have expressed concern that the rise of dar-ul-qaza could undermine the Indian judiciary, because a subset of the population is not bound to the same laws as everyone else. Others have argued that the rulings of Islamic courts are particularly unfair to women, although the prohibition of triple talaq may temper some of these criticisms. In its [2019 political manifesto](#), the BJP proclaimed a desire to create a national Uniform Civil Code, saying it would increase gender equality.

Some Indian commentators have voiced opposition to Islamic courts along with more broadly negative sentiments against Muslims, describing the rising numbers of dar-ul-qaza as the [“Talibanization” of India](#), for example.

¹ Ahmed, Hilal. 2019. [“Siyasi Muslims: A story of political Islams in India.”](#)

On the other hand, Muslim scholars have defended the dar-ul-qaza, saying they expedite justice because family disputes that would otherwise clog India's courts can be handled separately, allowing the secular courts to focus their attention on other concerns.

Since 2018, the Hindu nationalist party Hindu Mahasabha (which does not hold any seats in Parliament) has tried to set up [Hindu religious courts](#), known as Hindutva courts, aiming to play a role similar to dar-ul-qaza, only for the majority Hindu community. None of these courts have been recognized by the Indian government, and their rulings are not considered legally binding.

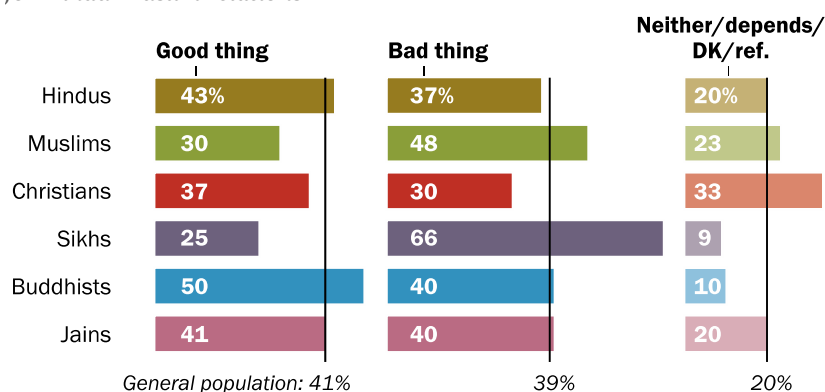
Muslims, Hindus diverge over legacy of Partition

The seminal event in the modern history of Hindu-Muslim relations in the region was the partition of the subcontinent into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan at the end of the British colonial period in 1947. Partition remains one of the largest movements of people across borders in recorded history, and in both countries the carving of new borders was accompanied by violence, rioting and looting.

More than seven decades later, the predominant view among Indian Muslims is that the partition of the subcontinent was “a bad thing” for Hindu-Muslim relations. Nearly half of Muslims say Partition hurt communal relations with Hindus (48%), while fewer say it was a good thing for Hindu-Muslim relations (30%). Among Muslims who prefer more religious segregation – that is, who say they would not accept a person of a different faith as a neighbor – an even higher share (60%) say Partition was a bad thing for Hindu-Muslim relations.

More Muslims than Hindus in India see partition of the subcontinent as a bad thing for communal relations

% of Indian adults who say the partition of India and Pakistan was a ____ for Hindu-Muslim relations



Note: “Neither/depends/DK/ref.” indicates respondents who answered “neither good nor bad,” “depends” or “don’t know” or refused to give a response to the question. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Sikhs, whose homeland of Punjab was split by Partition, are even more likely than Muslims to say Partition was a bad thing for Hindu-Muslim relations: Two-thirds of Sikhs (66%) take this position. And Sikhs ages 60 and older, whose parents most likely lived through Partition, are more inclined than younger Sikhs to say the partition of the country was bad for communal relations (74% vs. 64%).

While Sikhs and Muslims are more likely to say Partition was a bad thing than a good thing, Hindus lean in the opposite direction: 43% of Hindus say Partition was beneficial for Hindu-Muslim relations, while 37% see it as a bad thing.

These are among the key findings of a Pew Research Center survey conducted face-to-face nationally among 29,999 Indian adults. Local interviewers administered the survey between Nov. 17, 2019, and March 23, 2020, in 17 languages. The survey covered all states and union territories of India, with the exceptions of Manipur and Sikkim, where the rapidly developing COVID-19 situation prevented fieldwork from starting in the spring of 2020, and the remote territories of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep; these areas are home to about a quarter of 1% of the Indian population. The union territory of Jammu and Kashmir was covered by the survey, though no fieldwork was conducted in the Kashmir region itself due to security concerns.

This study, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation, is part of a larger effort by Pew Research Center to understand religious change and its impact on societies around the world. The Center previously has conducted religion-focused surveys across [sub-Saharan Africa](#); the Middle East-North Africa region and many other countries with [large Muslim populations](#); [Latin America](#); [Israel](#); [Central and Eastern Europe](#); [Western Europe](#); and the [United States](#).

The rest of this Overview covers attitudes on five broad topics: caste and discrimination; religious conversion; religious observances and beliefs; how people define their religious identity, including what kind of behavior is considered acceptable to be a Hindu or a Muslim; and the connection between economic development and religious observance.

Context for the survey

Interviews were conducted after the conclusion of the 2019 national parliamentary elections and after the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status under the Indian Constitution. In December 2019, protests against the country's new citizenship law broke out in several regions.

Fieldwork could not be conducted in the Kashmir Valley and a few districts elsewhere due to security concerns. These locations include some heavily Muslim areas, which is part of the reason why Muslims make up 11% of the survey's total sample, while India's adult population is roughly 13% Muslim, according to the most recent census data that is publicly available, from 2011. In addition, it is possible that in some other parts of the country, interreligious tensions over the new citizenship law may have slightly depressed participation in the survey by potential Muslim respondents.

Nevertheless, the survey's estimates of religious beliefs, behaviors and attitudes can be reported with a high degree of confidence for India's total population, because the number of people living in the excluded areas (Manipur, Sikkim, the Kashmir Valley and a few other districts) is not large enough to affect the overall results at the national level. About 98% of India's total population had a chance of being selected for this survey.

Greater caution is warranted when looking at India's Muslims separately, as a distinct population. The survey cannot speak to the experiences and views of Kashmiri Muslims. Still, the survey does represent the beliefs, behaviors and attitudes of around 95% of India's overall Muslim population.

Caste is another dividing line in Indian society, and not just among Hindus

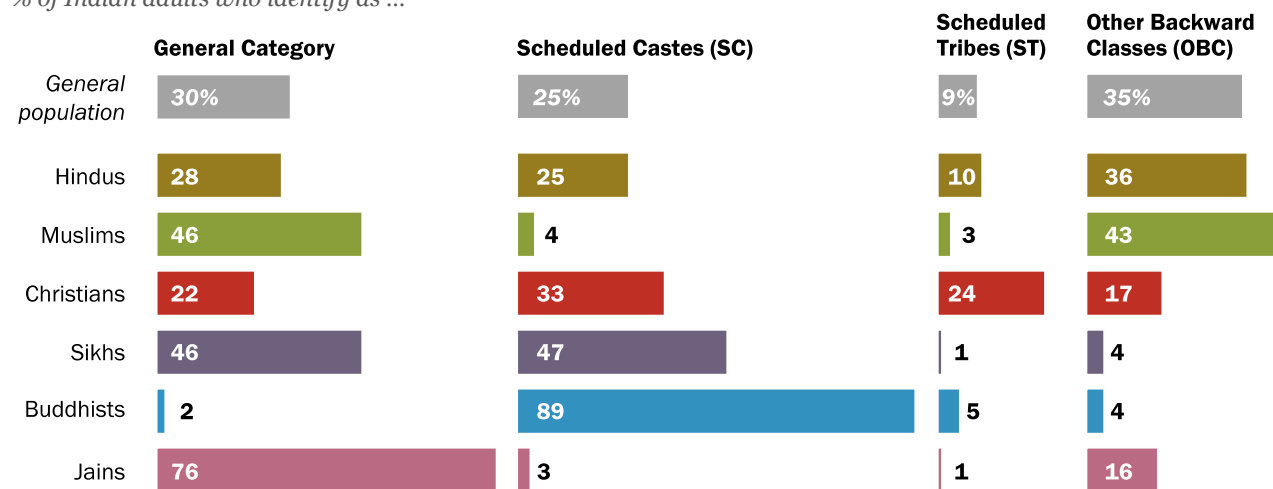
Religion is not the only fault line in Indian society. In some regions of the country, significant shares of people perceive widespread, caste-based discrimination.

The caste system is an ancient social hierarchy based on occupation and economic status. People are born into a particular caste and tend to keep many aspects of their social life within its boundaries, including whom they marry. Even though the system's origins are in [historical Hindu writings](#), today Indians nearly universally identify with a caste, regardless of whether they are Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist or Jain.

Overall, the majority of Indian adults say they are a member of a Scheduled Caste (SC) – often referred to as Dalits (25%) – Scheduled Tribe (ST) (9%) or Other Backward Class (OBC) (35%).²

Most Indians say they belong to a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class

% of Indian adults who identify as ...



Note: All survey respondents, regardless of religion, were asked, "Are you from a General Category, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class?" By contrast, in the 2011 census of India, only Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists could be enumerated as members of Scheduled Castes, while Scheduled Tribes could include followers of all religions. General Category and Other Backward Classes were not measured in the census. Other Backward Classes (OBC) includes a small share of people who volunteered they belong to Most Backward Classes (MBC). Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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² All survey respondents, regardless of religion, were asked, "Are you from a General Category, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class?" By contrast, in the 2011 census of India, only Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists could be enumerated as members of Scheduled Castes, while Scheduled Tribes could include followers of all religions. General Category and Other Backward Classes were not measured in the census. A detailed analysis of differences between 2011 census data on caste and survey data can be found [here](#).

Buddhists in India nearly universally identify themselves in these categories, including 89% who are Dalits (sometimes referred to by the pejorative term “untouchables”).

Members of SC/ST/OBC groups traditionally formed the lower social and economic rungs of Indian society, and historically they have [faced discrimination and unequal economic opportunities](#). The practice of untouchability in India ostracizes members of many of these communities, especially Dalits, although the [Indian Constitution](#) prohibits caste-based discrimination, including untouchability, and in recent decades the government has enacted economic advancement policies like [reserved seats in universities and government jobs](#) for Dalits, Scheduled Tribes and OBC communities.

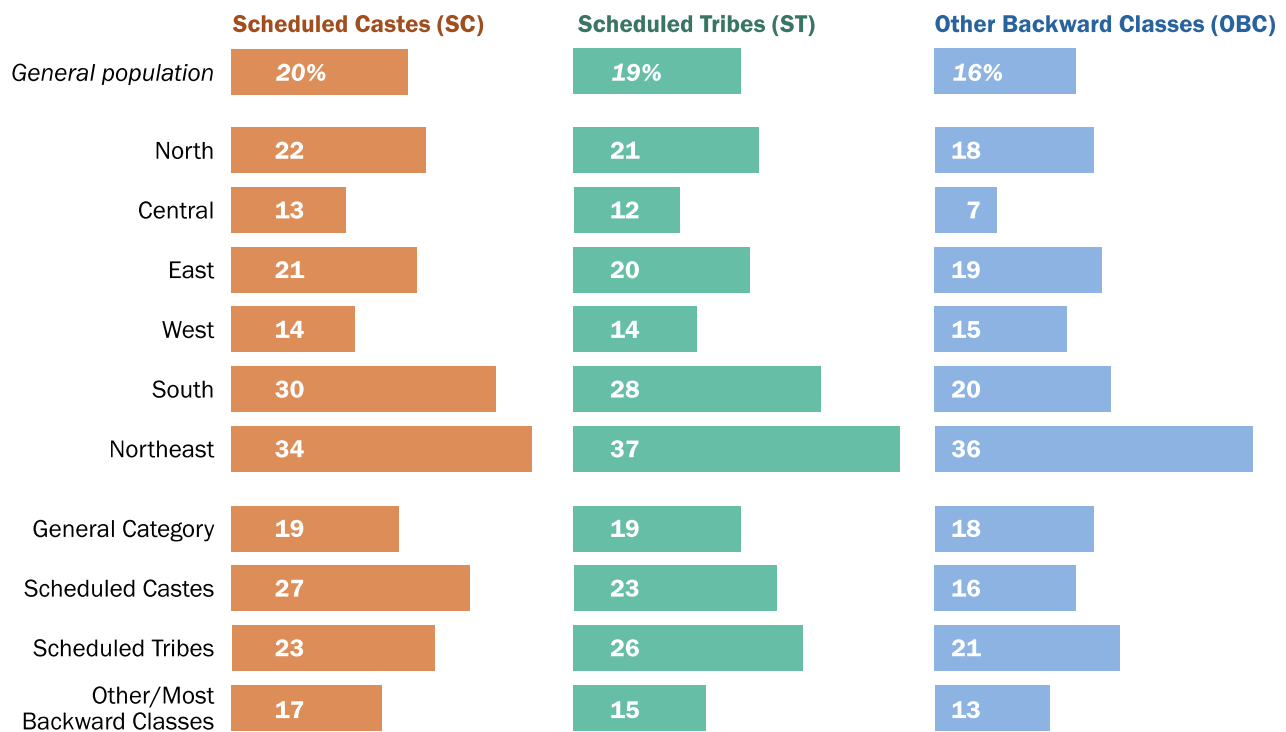
Roughly 30% of Indians do not belong to these protected groups and are classified as “General Category.” This includes higher castes such as Brahmins (4%), traditionally the priestly caste. Indeed, each broad category includes several sub-castes – sometimes hundreds – with their own social and economic hierarchies.

Three-quarters of Jains (76%) identify with General Category castes, as do 46% of both Muslims and Sikhs.

Caste-based discrimination, as well as the government's efforts to compensate for past discrimination, [are politically charged topics in India](#). But the survey finds that most Indians do not perceive widespread caste-based discrimination. Just one-in-five Indians say there is a lot of discrimination against members of SCs, while 19% say there is a lot of discrimination against STs and somewhat fewer (16%) see high levels of discrimination against OBCs. Members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are slightly more likely than others to perceive widespread discrimination against their two groups. Still, large majorities of people in these categories do *not* think they face a lot of discrimination.

Relatively few in India see widespread caste discrimination; perceptions vary by region

% of Indian adults who say there is a lot of discrimination against _____ in India today



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
 "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

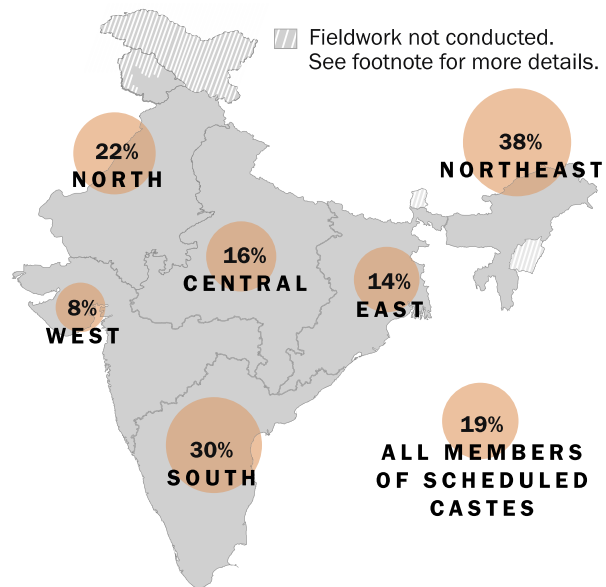
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These attitudes vary by region, however. Among Southern Indians, for example, 30% see widespread discrimination against Dalits, compared with 13% in the Central part of the country. And among the Dalit community in the South, even more (43%) say their community faces a lot of discrimination, compared with 27% among Southern Indians in the General Category who say the Dalit community faces widespread discrimination in India.

A higher share of Dalits in the South and Northeast than elsewhere in the country say they, personally, have faced discrimination in the last 12 months because of their caste: 30% of Dalits in the South say this, as do 38% in the Northeast.

In the South and Northeast, many Dalits say they have faced caste discrimination

Among members of Scheduled Castes (Dalits), % who say in the last 12 months they, personally, have faced discrimination because of their caste



Note: Fieldwork could not be conducted in the Kashmir Valley due to security concerns. Fieldwork could not be conducted in Manipur or Sikkim due to the outbreak of COVID-19. No locations in Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, or Ladakh were selected for inclusion in the survey. Fieldwork was not conducted in Andaman and Nicobar Islands or Lakshadweep. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Although caste discrimination may not be perceived as widespread nationally, caste remains a potent factor in Indian society. Most Indians from other castes say they would be willing to have someone belonging to a Scheduled Caste as a neighbor (72%). But a similarly large majority of Indians overall (70%) say that most or all of their close friends share their caste. And Indians tend to object to marriages across caste lines, much as they object to interreligious marriages.³

Overall, 64% of Indians say it is *very* important to stop women in their community from marrying into other castes, and about the same share (62%) say it is very important to stop men in their community from marrying into other castes. These figures vary only modestly across members of different castes. For example, nearly identical shares of Dalits and members of General Category castes say stopping inter-caste marriages is very important.

Majorities of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Jains consider stopping inter-caste marriage of both men and women a high priority. By comparison, fewer Buddhists and Christians say it is very important to stop such marriages – although for majorities of both groups, stopping people from marrying outside their caste is at least “somewhat” important.

People surveyed in India’s South and Northeast see greater caste discrimination in their communities, and they also raise fewer objections to inter-caste marriages than do Indians overall. Meanwhile, college-educated Indians are less likely than those with less education to say stopping inter-caste marriages is a high priority. But, even within the most highly educated group, roughly half say preventing such marriages is very important. (See [Chapter 4](#) for more analysis of Indians’ views on caste.)

Most Indians say it is very important to stop people from marrying outside their caste

% of Indian adults who say it is very important to stop _____ in their community from marrying into another caste

	Men	Women
General population	62%	64%
General Category	59	61
Scheduled Caste	59	60
Scheduled Tribe	66	68
Other/Most Backward Class	67	69
Hindus	63	64
Muslims	70	74
Christians	36	37
Sikhs	59	58
Buddhists	44	44
Jains	57	61
North	71	72
Central	82	83
East	62	64
West	66	67
South	35	37
Northeast	49	51
No formal education	69	71
Primary through secondary	60	62
College graduate	48	50

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019–March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. “Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation”

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³ According to the 2004 and 2009 [National Election Studies by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies](#) (CSDS), roughly half of Indians or more said that marriages of boys and girls from different castes should be *banned*. In 2004, a majority also said this about people from different religions.

Religious conversion in India

In recent years, conversion of people belonging to lower castes (including Dalits) away from Hinduism – a traditionally non-proselytizing religion – to proselytizing religions, especially Christianity, has been a [contentious political issue](#) in India. As of early 2021, nine states have [enacted laws against proselytism](#), and some previous surveys have shown that half of Indians support legal bans on religious conversions.⁴

This survey, though, finds that religious switching, or conversion, has a minimal impact on the overall size of India's religious groups. For example, according to the survey, 82% of Indians say they were raised Hindu, and a nearly identical share say they are currently Hindu, showing no net losses for the group through conversion to other religions. Other groups display similar levels of stability.

Changes in India's religious landscape over time are largely a result of differences in fertility rates among religious groups, not conversion.

Respondents were asked two separate questions to measure religious switching: "What is your present religion, if any?" and, later in the survey, "In what religion were you raised, if any?" Overall, 98% of respondents give the same answer to both these questions.

Religious groups show little change in size due to conversion

% of Indian adults who were/are ...

	Raised	Currently
Hindu	81.6%	81.7%
Muslim	11.2	11.2
Christian	2.3	2.6
Sikh	2.3	2.3
Buddhist	1.7	1.7
Jain	0.3	0.2
Other religions	0.5	0.2
No religion	0.1	0.0

Note: The small number of respondents who did not provide their current or childhood religion are included in the "other religions" category. Figures show one decimal place to capture granularity in changes to India's religious composition. Small differences between the religious composition of the survey and the census may occur due to the exclusion of the Kashmir Valley and certain other regions in the survey.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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⁴ In both the 2004 and 2009 [National Election Studies](#) (organized by CSDS), roughly half of Indians said that "There should be a legal ban on religious conversions."

An overall pattern of stability in the share of religious groups is accompanied by little net gain from movement into, or out of, most religious groups. Among Hindus, for instance, any conversion out of the group is matched by conversion into the group: 0.7% of respondents say they were raised Hindu but now identify as something else, and although Hindu texts and traditions do not agree on any formal process for conversion into the religion, roughly the same share (0.8%) say they were *not* raised Hindu but now identify as Hindu.⁵ Most of these new followers of Hinduism are married to Hindus.

Similarly, 0.3% of respondents have left Islam since childhood, matched by an identical share who say they were raised in other religions (or had no childhood religion) and have since become Muslim.

For Christians, however, there are some net gains from conversion: 0.4% of survey respondents are former Hindus who now identify as Christian, while 0.1% are former Christians.

Hindus gain as many people as they lose through religious switching

% of Indian adults who were ...

	Raised as something else but now identify as ____ (i.e., entering)	Raised ____ but now identify as something else (i.e., leaving)
Hindu	0.8%	0.7%
Muslim	0.3	0.3
Christian	0.4	0.1
Sikh	0.1	0.1
Buddhist	0.1	0.1
Jain	0.0	0.1
Other	0.0	0.3
No religion	0.0	0.1

Note: Figures show one decimal place to capture granularity in changes to India's religious composition. "Entering Hindu" includes a small proportion of respondents (0.2%) who gave an ambiguous response when asked their childhood religion, either "some other religion" or "don't know," but now identify as Hindu.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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⁵ This includes 0.2% of all Indian adults who now identify as Hindu but give an ambiguous response on how they were raised – either saying "some other religion" or saying they don't know their childhood religion.

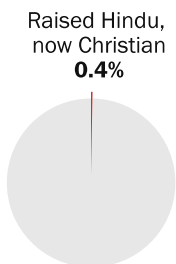
Three-quarters of India's Hindu converts to Christianity (74%) are concentrated in the Southern part of the country – the region with the largest Christian population. As a result, the Christian population of the South shows a slight increase within the lifetime of survey respondents: 6% of Southern Indians say they were raised Christian, while 7% say they are currently Christian.

Some Christian converts (16%) reside in the East as well (the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal); about two-thirds of all Christians in the East (64%) belong to Scheduled Tribes.

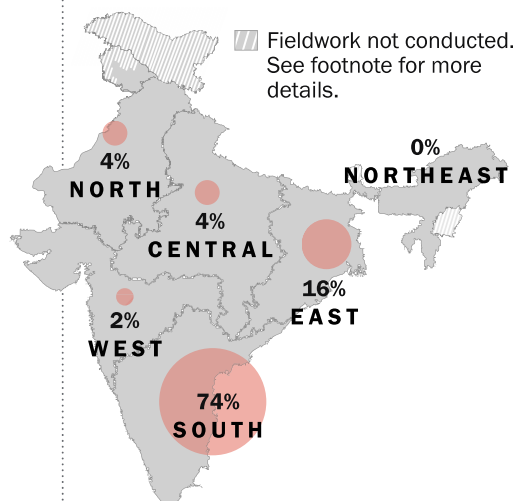
Nationally, the vast majority of former Hindus who are now Christian belong to Scheduled Castes (48%), Scheduled Tribes (14%) or Other Backward Classes (26%). And former Hindus are much more likely than the Indian population overall to say there is a lot of discrimination against lower castes in India. For example, nearly half of converts to Christianity (47%) say there is a lot of discrimination against Scheduled Castes in India, compared with 20% of the overall population who perceive this level of discrimination against Scheduled Castes. Still, relatively few converts say they, personally, have faced discrimination due to their caste in the last 12 months (12%).

Vast majority of Hindu converts to Christianity in India are concentrated in South

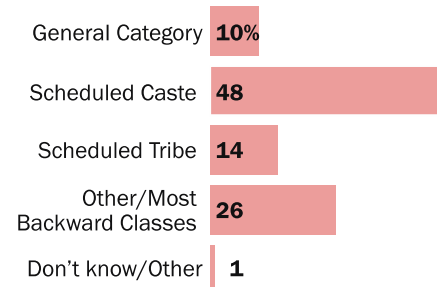
% of Indian adults who were raised Hindu, but now identify as Christian



Regional distribution of Hindu converts to Christianity



Caste distribution of Hindu converts to Christianity



Note: Fieldwork could not be conducted in the Kashmir Valley due to security concerns. Fieldwork could not be conducted in Manipur or Sikkim due to the outbreak of COVID-19. No locations in Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, or Ladakh were selected for inclusion in the survey. Fieldwork was not conducted in Andaman and Nicobar Islands or Lakshadweep.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

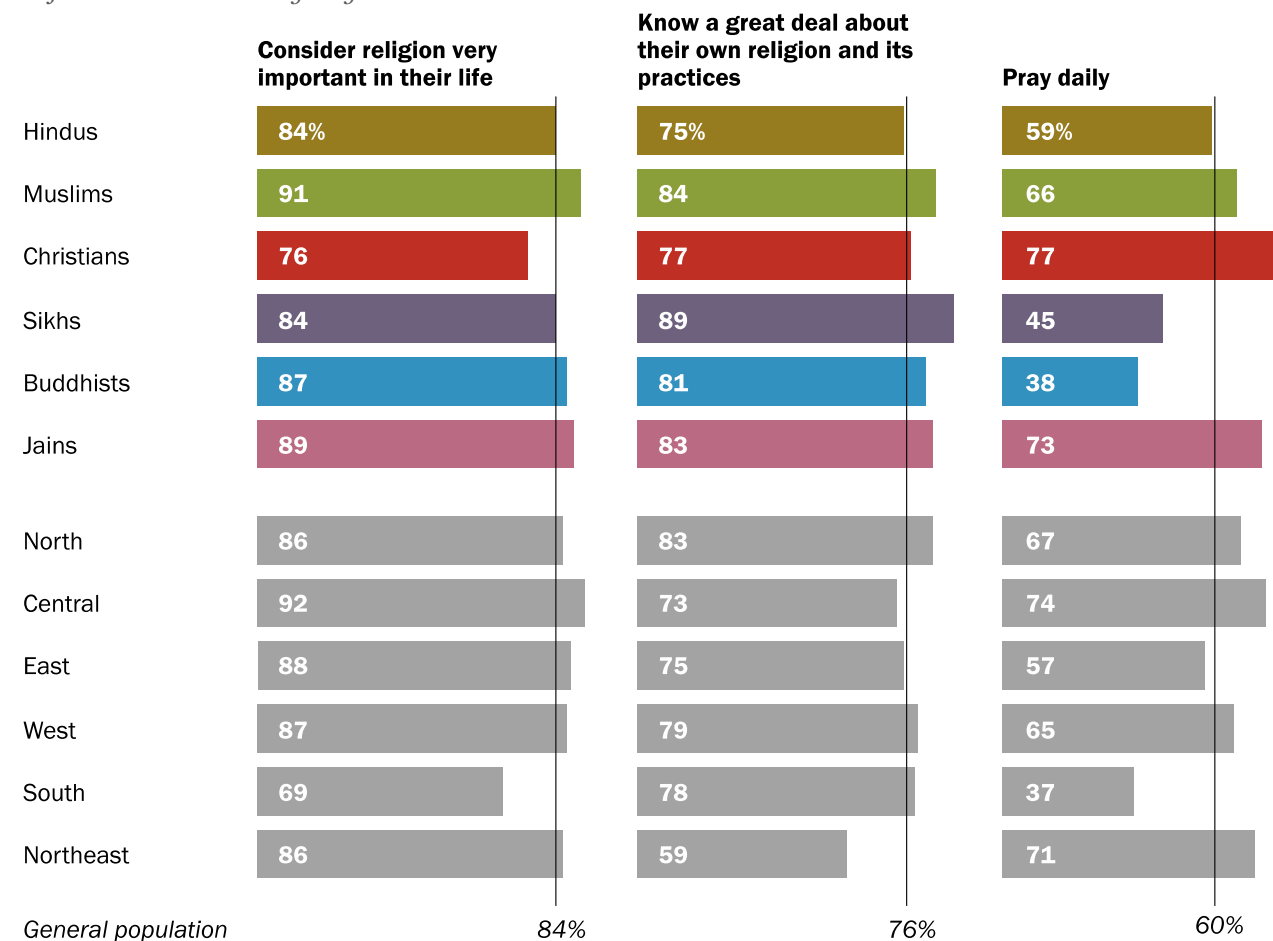
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Religion very important across India's religious groups

Though their specific practices and beliefs may vary, all of India's major religious communities are highly observant by standard measures. For instance, the vast majority of Indians, across all major faiths, say that religion is very important in their lives. And at least three-quarters of each major religion's followers say they know a great deal about their own religion and its practices. For example, 81% of Indian Buddhists claim a great deal of knowledge about the Buddhist religion and its practices.

Most Indians have a strong connection to their religion

% of Indian adults who say they ...



Note: Respondents were asked, "How much do you know about the [Hindu/Muslim/etc.] religion and its practices?"; the general population and regional figures for this question do not include those who do not identify with one of the six religions listed in this table.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indian Muslims are slightly more likely than Hindus to consider religion very important in their lives (91% vs. 84%). Muslims also are modestly more likely than Hindus to say they know a great deal about their own religion (84% vs. 75%).

Significant portions of each religious group also pray daily, with Christians among the most likely to do so (77%) – even though Christians are the least likely of the six groups to say religion is very important in their lives (76%). Most Hindus and Jains also pray daily (59% and 73%, respectively) and say they perform puja daily (57% and 81%), either at home or at a temple.⁶

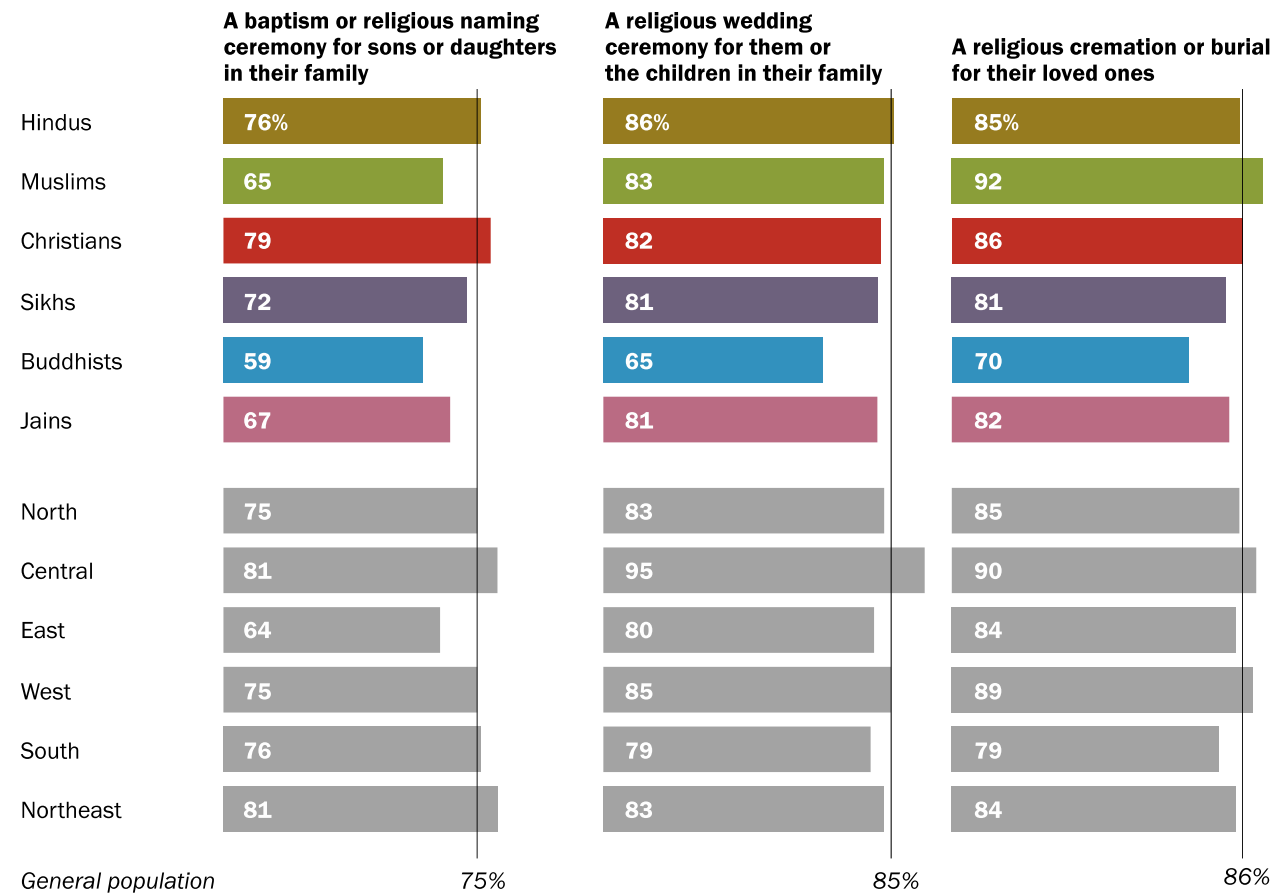
Generally, younger and older Indians, those with different educational backgrounds, and men and women are similar in their levels of religious observance. South Indians are the least likely to say religion is very important in their lives (69%), and the South is the only region where fewer than half of people report praying daily (37%). While Hindus, Muslims and Christians in the South are all less likely than their counterparts elsewhere in India to say religion is very important to them, the lower rate of prayer in the South is driven mainly by Hindus: Three-in-ten Southern Hindus report that they pray daily (30%), compared with roughly two-thirds (68%) of Hindus in the rest of the country (see [“People in the South differ from rest of the country in their views of religion, national identity”](#) below for further discussion of religious differences in Southern India).

The survey also asked about three rites of passage: religious ceremonies for birth (or infancy), marriage and death. Members of all of India’s major religious communities tend to see these rites as highly important. For example, the vast majority of Muslims (92%), Christians (86%) and Hindus (85%) say it is very important to have a religious burial or cremation for their loved ones.

⁶ Puja is a specific worship ritual that involves prayer along with rites like offering flowers and food, using vermillion, singing and chanting.

Indians say life's milestones should be marked by religious ceremonies

% of Indian adults who say it is very important to have ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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The survey also asked about practices specific to particular religions, such as whether people have received purification by bathing in holy bodies of water, like the Ganges River, a rite closely associated with Hinduism. About two-thirds of Hindus have done this (65%). Most Hindus also have holy basil (the tulsi plant) in their homes, as do most Jains (72% and 62%, respectively). And about three-quarters of Sikhs follow the Sikh practice of keeping their hair long (76%).

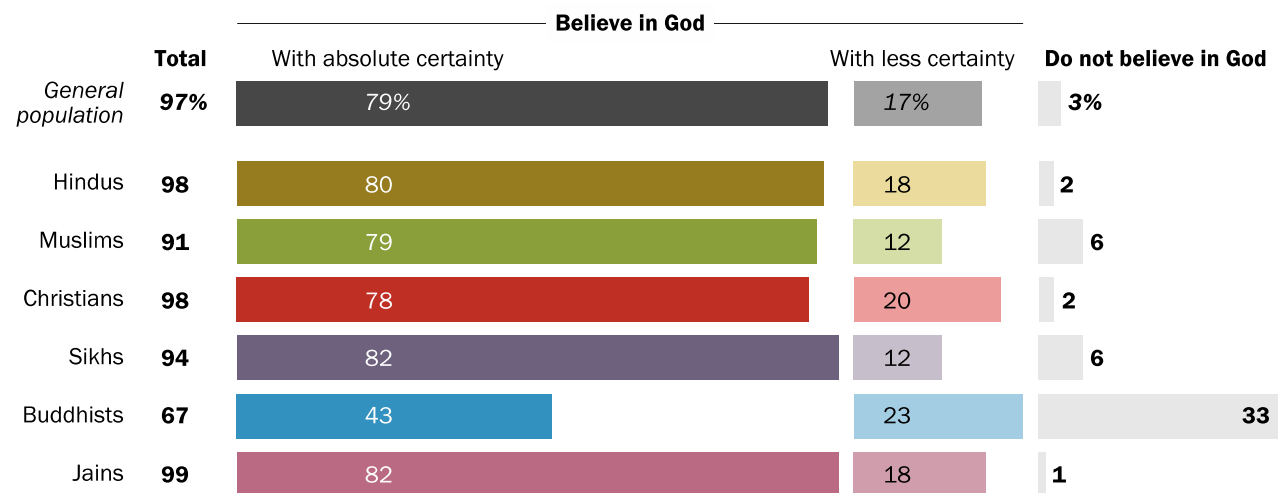
For more on religious practices across India's religious groups, see [Chapter 7](#).

Near-universal belief in God, but wide variation in how God is perceived

Nearly all Indians say they believe in God (97%), and roughly 80% of people in most religious groups say they are absolutely certain that God exists. The main exception is Buddhists, one-third of whom say they do not believe in God. Still, among Buddhists who do think there is a God, most say they are absolutely certain in this belief.

One-third of Indian Buddhists do not believe in God

% of Indian adults who say they ...



Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

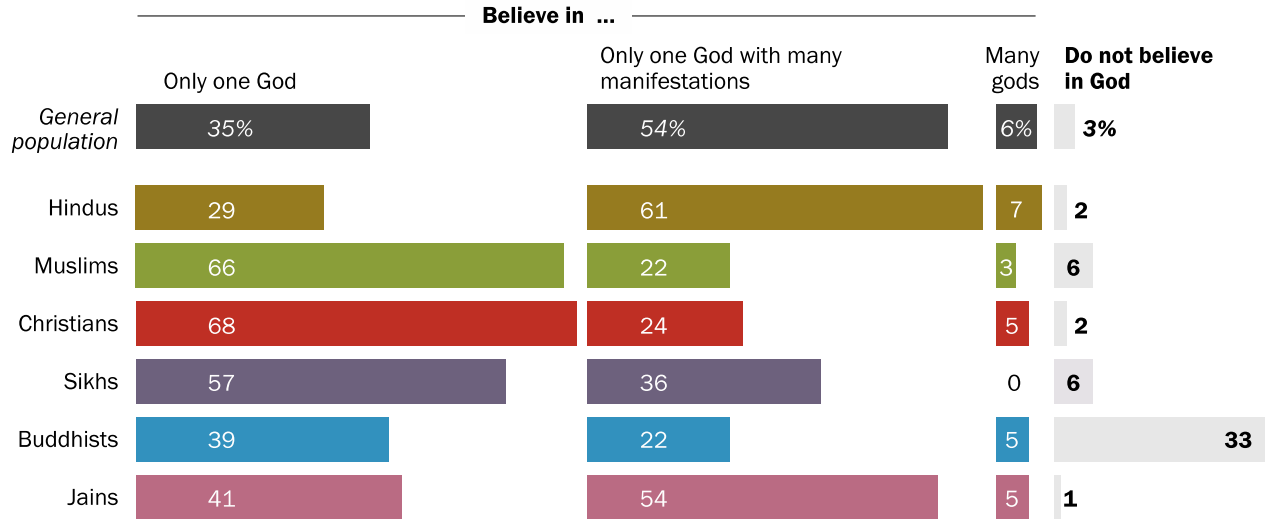
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While belief in God is close to universal in India, the survey finds a wide range of views about the type of deity or deities that Indians believe in. The prevailing view is that there is one God "with many manifestations" (54%). But about one-third of the public says simply: "There is only one God" (35%). Far fewer say there are many gods (6%).

Even though Hinduism is sometimes [referred to as a polytheistic religion](#), very few Hindus (7%) take the position that there are multiple gods. Instead, the most common position among Hindus (as well as among Jains) is that there is "only one God with many manifestations" (61% among Hindus and 54% among Jains).

In India, most Hindus and some members of other groups say there is one God with many manifestations

% of Indian adults who ...



Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Among Hindus, those who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than other Hindus to believe in one God with many manifestations (63% vs. 50%) and less likely to say there are many gods (6% vs. 12%).

By contrast, majorities of Muslims, Christians and Sikhs say there is only one God. And among Buddhists, the most common response is also a belief in one God. Among all these groups, however, about one-in-five or more say God has many manifestations, a position closer to their Hindu compatriots' concept of God.

Most Hindus feel close to multiple gods, but Shiva, Hanuman and Ganesha are most popular

Traditionally, many Hindus have a “personal god,” or *ishta devata*: A particular god or goddess with whom they feel a personal connection. The survey asked all Indian Hindus who say they believe in God which god they feel closest to – showing them 15 images of gods on a card as possible options – and the vast majority of Hindus selected more than one god or indicated that they have many personal gods (84%).⁷ This is true not only among Hindus who say they believe in many gods (90%) or in one God with many manifestations (87%), but also among those who say there is only one God (82%).

The god that Hindus most commonly feel close to is Shiva (44%). In addition, about one-third of Hindus feel close to Hanuman or Ganesha (35% and 32%, respectively).

There is great regional variation in how close India’s Hindus feel to some gods. For example, 46% of Hindus in India’s West feel close to Ganesha, but only 15% feel this way in the Northeast. And 46% of Hindus in the Northeast feel close to Krishna, while just 14% in the South say the same.

Feelings of closeness for Lord Ram are especially strong in the Central region (27%), which includes what Hindus claim is [his ancient birthplace](#), Ayodhya. The location in Ayodhya where many Hindus believe Ram was born has been a source of controversy: Hindu mobs demolished a mosque on the site in 1992, claiming that a Hindu temple originally existed there. In 2019, the [Indian Supreme Court ruled](#) that the demolished mosque had been built on top of a preexisting non-Islamic structure and that the land should be given to Hindus to build a temple, with another location in the area given to the Muslim community to build a new mosque. (For additional findings on belief in God, see [Chapter 12](#).)

⁷ Fifteen named deities were available for selection, though no answer options were read aloud. Respondents could select up to three of those 15 deities by naming them or selecting the corresponding image shown on a card. The answer option “another god” was available on the card or if any other deity name was volunteered by the respondent. Other possible answer options included “I do not have a god I feel closest to” and “I have many personal gods,” though neither was on the card. See the [questionnaire](#) or [topline](#) for the full list of gods offered.

More Hindus feel close to Shiva than any other deity

% of Indian Hindus who feel closest to ...



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

	1. Shiva	2. Hanuman	3. Ganesha	4. Lakshmi	5. Krishna	6. Kali	7. Lord Ram
Total Hindus	44%	35%	32%	28%	21%	20%	17%
North	41	43	41	27	28	20	20
Central	51	36	29	29	23	20	27
East	52	35	17	32	21	34	15
West	30	35	46	29	21	10	12
South	39	34	37	22	14	13	13
Northeast	44	12	15	28	46	18	5

Note: Respondents could select up to three responses shown as images on a card or verbally, so totals for some rows exceed 100%. In addition to the seven gods listed here, eight other gods were available for selection, as was "Another god." Other possible answer options included "I do not have a god I feel closest to" and "I have many personal gods," though neither was on the card. Don't know/Refused responses not shown. See the questionnaire or topline for details.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Sidebar: Despite economic advancement, few signs that importance of religion is declining

A prominent theory in the social sciences hypothesizes that as countries advance economically, their populations tend to become less religious, often leading to wider social change. Known as “[secularization theory](#),” it particularly reflects the experience of Western European countries from the end of World War II to the present.

Despite rapid economic growth, India’s population so far shows few, if any, signs of losing its religion. For instance, both the Indian census and the new survey find virtually no growth in the minuscule share of people who claim no religious identity. And religion is prominent in the lives of Indians regardless of their socioeconomic status. Generally, across the country, there is little difference in personal religious observance between urban and rural residents or between those who are college educated versus those who are not. Overwhelming shares among all these groups say that religion is very important in their lives, that they pray regularly and that they believe in God.

Indians show high levels of religious observance across socioeconomic levels

% of Indian adults who say they ...

	Believe in God	Pray daily	Consider religion very important in their life
General population	97%	60%	84%
No formal education	96	57	86
Primary through secondary	97	61	84
College graduate	96	61	80
Urban	96	60	81
Rural	97	60	86

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Nearly all religious groups show the same patterns. The biggest exception is Christians, among whom those with higher education and those who reside in urban areas show somewhat lower levels of observance. For example, among Christians who have a college degree, 59% say religion is very important in their life, compared with 78% among those who have less education.

The survey does show a slight decline in the perceived importance of religion during the lifetime of respondents, though the vast majority of Indians indicate that religion remains central to their lives, and this is true among both younger and older adults.

Nearly nine-in-ten Indian adults say religion was very important to their family when they were growing up (88%), while a slightly lower share say religion is very important to them now (84%). The pattern is identical when looking only at India's majority Hindu population. Among Muslims in India, the same shares say religion was very important to their family growing up and is very important to them now (91% each).

The states of Southern India (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Telangana) show the biggest downward trend in the perceived importance of religion over respondents' lifetimes: 76% of Indians who live in the South say religion was very important to their family growing up, compared with 69% who say religion is personally very important to them now. Slight declines in the importance of religion, by this measure, also are seen in the Western part of the country (Goa, Gujarat and Maharashtra) and in the North, although large majorities in all regions of the country say religion is very important in their lives today.

Overwhelming shares say religion was very important to their family growing up and is to them personally now

% of Indian adults who say religion was/is ...

	Very important to their family while growing up	Very important to them now personally	Diff.
General population	88%	84%	-3
Hindus	88	84	-4
Muslims	91	91	-1
Christians	77	76	-2
Sikhs	87	84	-2
Buddhists	90	87	-3
Jains	92	89	-4
Men	88	84	-4
Women	88	85	-3
Ages 18-24	87	82	-5
25-34	88	84	-3
35+	88	85	-3
Less than college	88	85	-3
College graduate	86	80	-6
General Category	89	85	-4
Lower castes	87	84	-3
North	90	86	-3
Central	93	92	-1
East	89	88	-1
West	92	87	-5
South	76	69	-8
Northeast	86	86	0

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Differences are calculated before rounding. Statistically significant differences are indicated in **bold**. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Across India's religious groups, widespread sharing of beliefs, practices, values

Despite a strong desire for religious segregation, India's religious groups share patriotic feelings, cultural values and some religious beliefs. For instance, overwhelming shares across India's religious communities say they are very proud to be Indian, and most agree that Indian culture is superior to others.

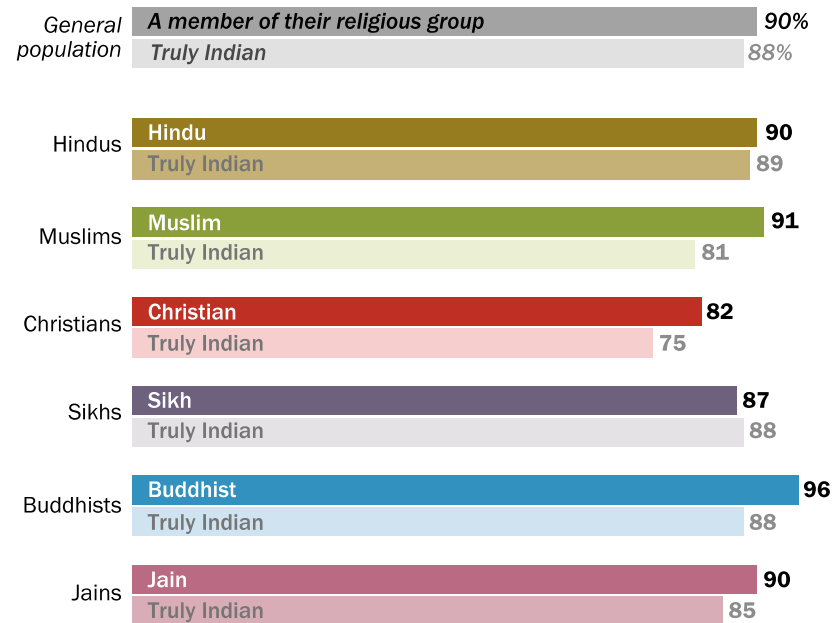
Similarly, Indians of different religious backgrounds hold elders in high respect. For instance, nine-in-ten or more Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Jains say that respecting elders is very important to what being a member of their religious group means to them (e.g., for Hindus, it's a very important part of their Hindu identity). Christians and Sikhs also overwhelmingly share this sentiment. And among all people surveyed in all six groups, three-quarters or more say that respecting elders is very important to being truly Indian.

Within all six religious groups, eight-in-ten or more also say that helping the poor and needy is a crucial part of their religious identity.

Beyond cultural parallels, many people mix traditions from multiple religions into their practices: As a result of living side by side for generations, India's minority groups often engage in practices that are more closely associated with Hindu traditions than their own. For instance, many Muslim,

Respecting elders a key shared religious, national value in India

% of Indian adults who say respecting elders is a **very** important part of what being _____ means to them



Note: Only people who identified with a religion were asked how important it is to respect elders to be a [Hindu/Muslim/etc.].

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

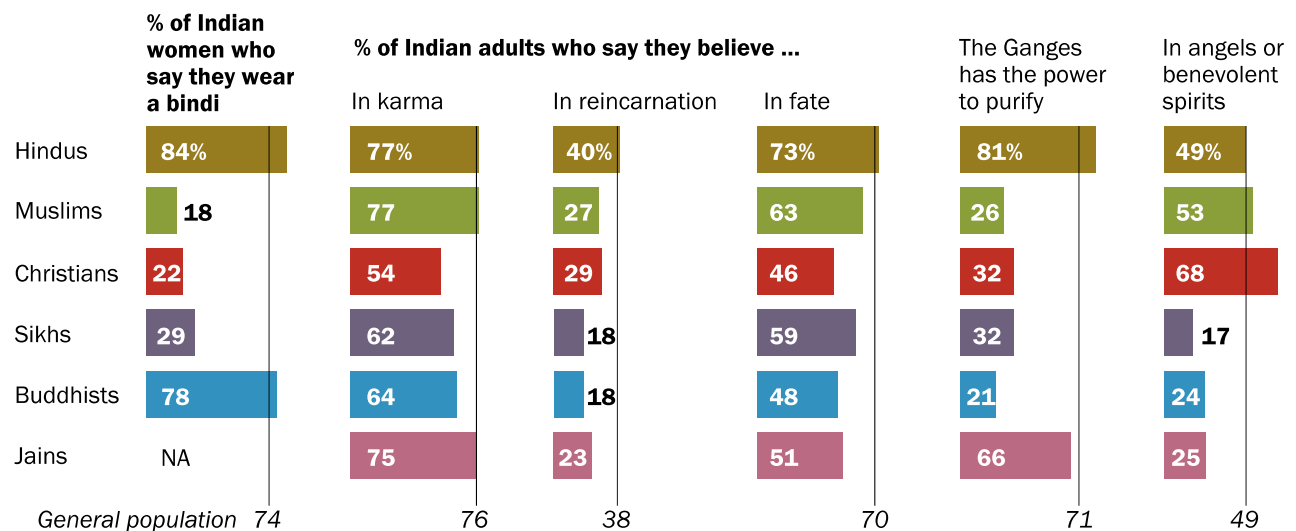
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Sikh and Christian women in India say they wear a bindi (a forehead marking, often worn by married women), even though putting on a bindi has Hindu origins.

Similarly, many people embrace beliefs not traditionally associated with their faith: Muslims in India are just as likely as Hindus to say they believe in karma (77% each), and 54% of Indian Christians share this view.⁸ Nearly three-in-ten Muslims and Christians say they believe in reincarnation (27% and 29%, respectively). While these may seem like theological contradictions, for many Indians, calling oneself a Muslim or a Christian does not preclude believing in karma or reincarnation – beliefs that do not have a traditional, doctrinal basis in Islam or Christianity.

Some religious beliefs and practices shared across religious groups in India



Note: NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019–March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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⁸ The religious [origins of karma](#) are debated by scholars, but the concept has deep roots in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.

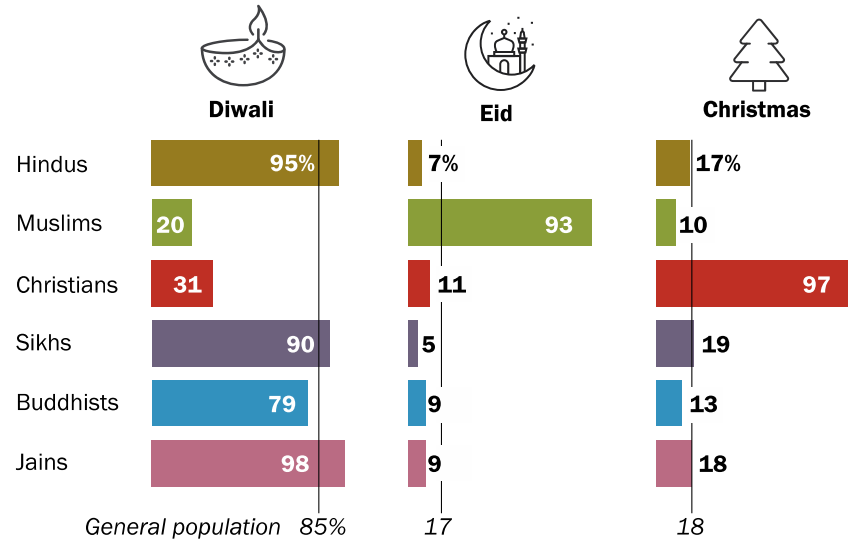
Most Muslims and Christians say they don't participate in celebrations of Diwali, the Indian festival of lights that is traditionally celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. But substantial minorities of Christians (31%) and Muslims (20%) report that they *do* celebrate Diwali. Celebrating Diwali is especially common among Muslims in the West, where 39% say they participate in the festival, and in the South (33%).

Not only do some followers of all these religions participate in a celebration (Diwali) that consumes most of the country

once a year, but some members of the majority Hindu community celebrate Muslim and Christian festivals, too: 7% of Indian Hindus say they celebrate the Muslim festival of Eid, and 17% celebrate Christmas.

Indians of many religions celebrate Diwali

% of Indian adults who say they participate in celebrations of ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Religious identity in India: Hindus divided on whether belief in God is required to be a Hindu, but most say eating beef is disqualifying

While there is some mixing of religious celebrations and traditions within India's diverse population, many Hindus do not approve of this. In fact, while 17% of the nation's Hindus say they participate in Christmas celebrations, about half of Hindus (52%) say that doing so disqualifies a person from being Hindu (compared with 35% who say a person *can* be Hindu if they celebrate Christmas). An even greater share of Hindus (63%) say a person cannot be Hindu if they celebrate the Islamic festival of Eid – a view that is more widely held in Northern, Central, Eastern and Northeastern India than the South or West.

Hindus are divided on whether beliefs and practices such as believing in God, praying and going to the temple are necessary to be a Hindu. But one behavior that a clear majority of Indian Hindus feel is incompatible with Hinduism is eating beef: 72% of Hindus in India say a person who eats beef cannot be a Hindu. That is even higher than the percentages of Hindus who say a person cannot be Hindu if they reject belief in God (49%), never go to a temple (48%) or never perform prayers (48%).

India's Hindus mostly say a person cannot be Hindu if they eat beef, celebrate Eid

% of Indian Hindus who say a person **cannot** be Hindu if they ...

	Eat beef	Celebrate Eid	Do NOT celebrate Hindu festivals	Celebrate Christmas	Do NOT believe in God	Never go to temple	Never perform prayers
Total Hindus	72%	63%	56%	52%	49%	48%	48%
North	83	71	70	56	52	53	54
Central	83	75	67	62	55	51	55
East	79	73	55	50	49	48	47
West	68	45	60	43	54	53	53
South	50	46	34	47	39	38	37
Northeast	74	69	49	58	42	38	40

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

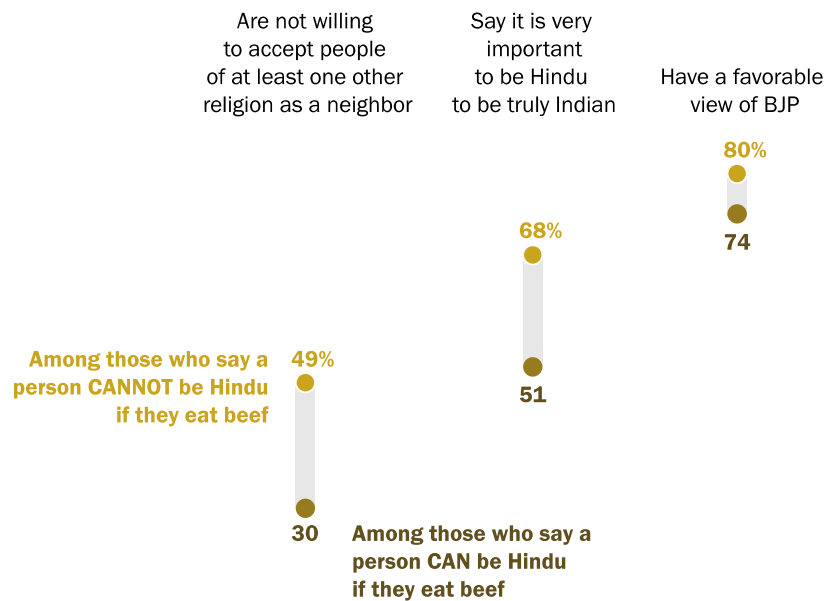
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Attitudes toward beef appear to be part of a regional and cultural divide among Hindus: Southern Indian Hindus are considerably less likely than others to disqualify beef eaters from being Hindu (50% vs. 83% in the Northern and Central parts of the country). And, at least in part, Hindus' views on beef and Hindu identity are linked with a preference for religious segregation and elements of Hindu nationalism. For example, Hindus who take a strong position against eating beef are more likely than others to say they would not accept followers of other religions as their neighbors (49% vs. 30%) and to say it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian (68% vs. 51%).

In India, Hindus' views toward beef consumption linked with attitudes toward segregation, nationalism

% of Indian Hindus who ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Relatedly, 44% of Hindus say they are vegetarians, and an additional 33% say they abstain from eating certain meats. Hindus traditionally view cows as sacred, and laws pertaining to cow slaughter have been a [recent flashpoint in India](#). At the same time, Hindus are not alone in linking beef consumption with religious identity: 82% of Sikhs and 85% of Jains surveyed say that a person who eats beef cannot be a member of their religious groups, either. A majority of Sikhs (59%) and fully 92% of Jains say they are vegetarians, including 67% of Jains who [do not eat root vegetables](#).⁹ (For more data on religion and dietary habits, see [Chapter 10](#).)

⁹ For an analysis of Jain theology on the concept of *jiva* (soul) see Chapple, Christopher K. 2014. "Life All Around: Soul in Jainism." In Biernacki, Loriliai and Philip Clayton, eds. "[Panentheism Across the World's Traditions](#)."

Sidebar: People in the South differ from rest of the country in their views of religion, national identity

The survey consistently finds that people in the South (the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, and the union territory of Puducherry) differ from Indians elsewhere in the country in their views on religion, politics and identity.

For example, by a variety of measures, people in the South are somewhat less religious than those in other regions – 69% say religion is very important in their lives, versus 92% in the Central part of the country. And 37% say they pray every day, compared with more than half of Indians in other regions. People in the South also are less segregated by religion or caste – whether that involves their friendship circles, the kind of neighbors they prefer or how they feel about intermarriage. (See [Chapter 3](#).)

Hindu nationalist sentiments also appear to have less of a foothold in the South. Among Hindus, those in the South (42%) are far less likely than those in Central states (83%) or the North (69%) to say being Hindu is very important to be truly Indian. And in the 2019 parliamentary elections, the BJP's lowest vote share came in the South. In the survey, just 19% of Hindus in the region say they voted for the BJP, compared with roughly two-thirds in the Northern (68%) and Central (65%) parts of the country who say they voted for the ruling party.

Culturally and politically, people in the South have [pushed back](#) against the BJP's restrictions on [cow slaughter](#) and efforts to [nationalize the Hindi language](#). These factors may contribute to the BJP's lower popularity in the South, where more people prefer regional parties or the Indian National Congress party.

These differences in attitudes and practices exist in a wider context of economic disparities between the South and other regions of the country. Over time, Southern states have seen stronger economic growth than the Northern and Central parts of the country. And [women](#) and [people belonging to lower castes](#) in the South have fared better economically than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. Even though three-in-ten people in the South say there is widespread caste discrimination in India, the region also has a [history of anti-caste movements](#). Indeed, [one author](#) has attributed the economic growth of the South largely to the flattening of caste hierarchies.

Muslim identity in India

Most Muslims in India say a person cannot be Muslim if they never pray or attend a mosque. Similarly, about six-in-ten say that celebrating Diwali or Christmas is incompatible with being a member of the Muslim community. At the same time, a substantial minority express a degree of open-mindedness on who can be a Muslim, with fully one-third (34%) saying a person can be Muslim even if they don't believe in God. (The survey finds that 6% of self-described Muslims in India say they do not believe in God; see "[Near-universal belief in God, but wide variation in how God is perceived](#)" above.)

Like Hindus, Muslims have dietary restrictions that resonate as powerful markers of identity. Three-quarters of Indian Muslims (77%) say that a person cannot be Muslim if they eat pork, which is even higher than the share who say a person cannot be Muslim if they do not believe in God (60%) or never attend mosque (61%).

Indian Muslims more likely to say eating pork is incompatible with Islam than not believing in God

*% of Indian Muslims who say a person **cannot** be Muslim if they ...*

	Eat pork	Never offer namaz (prayers)	Do NOT celebrate Muslim festivals	Never attend mosque	Do NOT believe in God	Celebrate Christmas	Celebrate Diwali
Total Muslims	77%	67%	64%	61%	60%	59%	58%
North	72	70	69	66	63	58	57
Central	92	80	86	70	74	74	71
East	76	64	55	57	52	59	63
West	71	80	78	76	68	48	41
South	63	41	36	43	48	52	45
Northeast	74	57	51	51	56	55	53

Note: Darker shades represent higher values.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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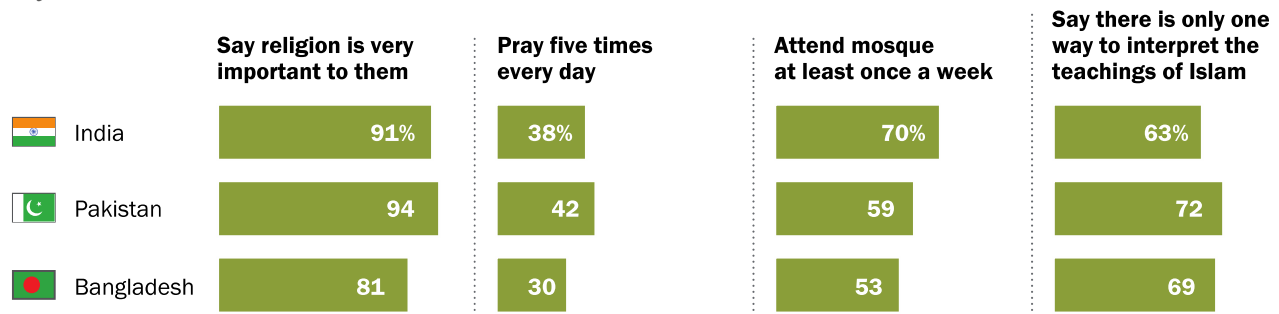
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Indian Muslims also report high levels of religious commitment by a host of conventional measures: 91% say religion is very important in their lives, two-thirds (66%) say they pray at least once a day, and seven-in-ten say they attend mosque at least once a week – with even higher attendance among Muslim men (93%).

By all these measures, Indian Muslims are broadly comparable to Muslims in the neighboring Muslim-majority countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, according to a [Pew Research Center survey](#) conducted in those countries in late 2011 and early 2012. In Pakistan, for example, 94% of Muslims said religion is [very important in their lives](#), while 81% of Bangladeshi Muslims said the same. Muslims in India are somewhat more likely than those elsewhere in South Asia to say they regularly worship at a mosque (70% in India vs. 59% in Pakistan and 53% in Bangladesh), with the difference mainly driven by the share of women who attend.

Indian Muslims are as religious as Muslims in neighboring countries, but fewer say there is just one correct way to interpret Islam

% of Muslim adults who ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. Data from Pakistan and Bangladesh from Pew Research Center surveys conducted Nov. 10, 2011-Feb. 5, 2012.

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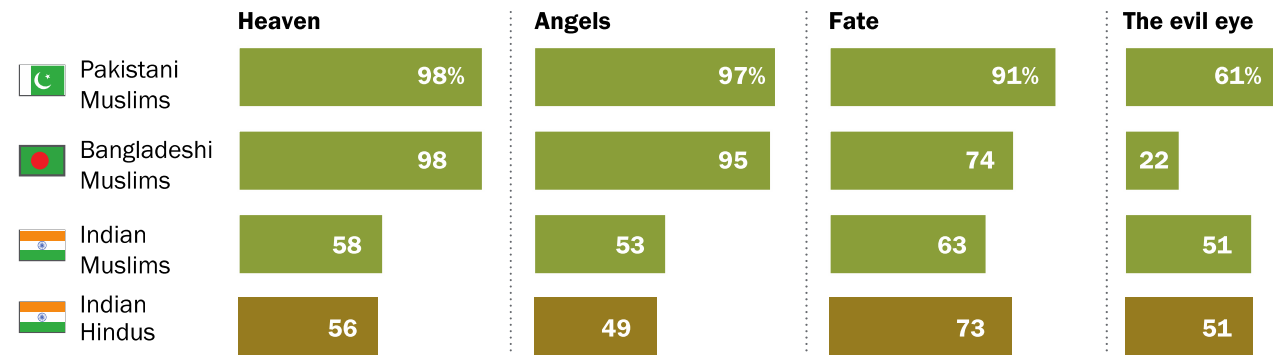
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At the same time, Muslims in India are slightly less likely to say there is “only one true” [interpretation of Islam](#) (72% in Pakistan, 69% in Bangladesh, 63% in India), as opposed to multiple interpretations.

When it comes to their religious beliefs, Indian Muslims in some ways resemble Indian Hindus more than they resemble Muslims in neighboring countries. For example, Muslims in Pakistan and Bangladesh almost universally say they believe in heaven and angels, but Indian Muslims seem more skeptical: 58% say they believe in heaven and 53% express belief in angels. Among Indian Hindus, similarly, 56% believe in heaven and 49% believe in angels.

Overall, Indian Muslims’ level of belief in heaven, angels resembles Indian Hindus more than other Muslims in South Asia

% who believe in ...



Note: Indian Muslims and Hindus were asked if they believe in “angels or benevolent spirits”; Muslims in Pakistan and Bangladesh were asked only if they believe in angels.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. Data from Pakistan and Bangladesh from Pew Research Center surveys conducted Nov. 10, 2011-Feb. 5, 2012.

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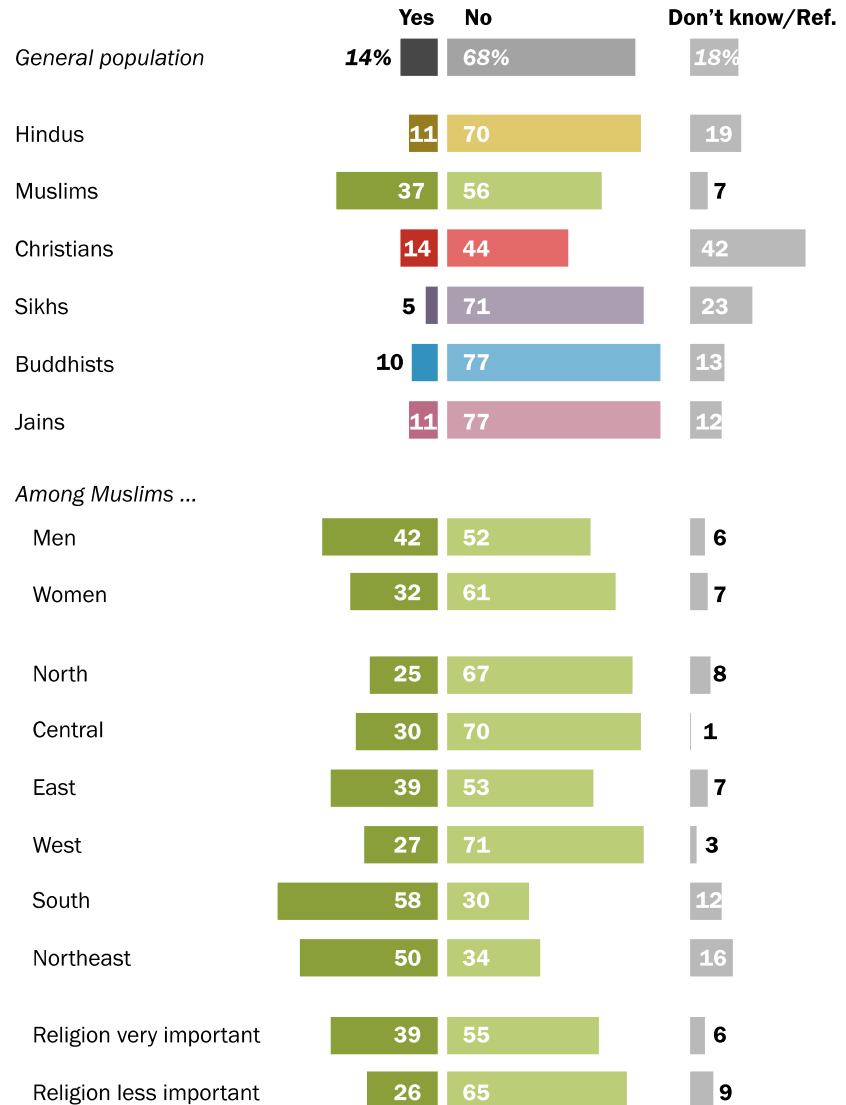
Majority of Muslim women in India oppose 'triple talaq' (Islamic divorce)

Many Indian Muslims historically have followed the Hanafi school of thought, which for centuries allowed men to divorce their wives by saying “talaq” (which translates as “divorce” in Arabic and Urdu) three times. Traditionally, there was [supposed to be a waiting period](#) and attempts at reconciliation in between each use of the word, and it was deeply frowned upon (though technically permissible) for a man to pronounce “talaq” three times quickly in a row. India’s Supreme Court ruled triple talaq unconstitutional in 2017, and it was [banned by legislation in 2019](#).

Most Indian Muslims (56%) say Muslim men should *not* be allowed to divorce this way. Still, 37% of Indian Muslims say they support triple talaq, with Muslim men (42%) more likely than Muslim women (32%) to take this position. A majority of Muslim women (61%) oppose triple talaq.

Most Indian Muslims oppose triple talaq

% of Indian adults who say Muslim men should be able to divorce their wives by saying ‘talaq’ three times



Note: “Don’t know/Ref.” indicates respondents who answered “don’t know” or refused to give a response to the question.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Highly religious Muslims – i.e., those who say religion is very important in their lives – also are more likely than other Muslims to say Muslim men should be able to divorce their wives simply by saying “talaq” three times (39% vs. 26%).

Triple talaq seems to have the most support among Muslims in the Southern and Northeastern regions of India, where half or more of Muslims say it should be legal (58% and 50%, respectively), although 12% of Muslims in the South and 16% in the Northeast do not take a position on the issue either way.

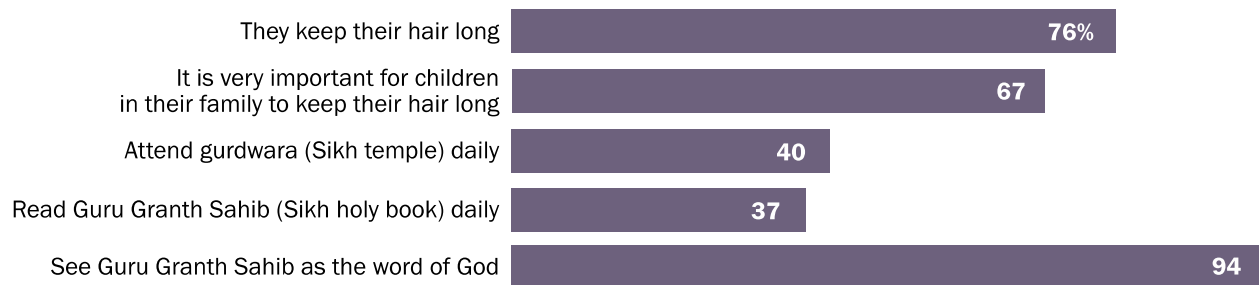
Sikhs are proud to be Punjabi and Indian

Sikhism is one of four major religions – along with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism – that originated on the Indian subcontinent. The Sikh religion emerged in Punjab in the 15th century, when Guru Nanak, who is revered as the founder of Sikhism, became the first in a succession of 10 gurus (teachers) in the religion.

Today, India's Sikhs remain concentrated in the state of Punjab. One feature of the Sikh religion is a distinctive sense of community, also known as “Khalsa” (which translates as “ones who are pure”). Observant Sikhs differentiate themselves from others in several ways, including keeping their hair uncut. Today, about three-quarters of Sikh men and women in India say they keep their hair long (76%), and two-thirds say it is very important to them that children in their families also keep their hair long (67%). (For more analysis of Sikhs' views on passing religious traditions on to their children, see [Chapter 8](#).)

Vast majority of Sikh adults in India say they keep their hair long

% of Indian Sikhs who say ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Sikhs are more likely than Indian adults overall to say they attend religious services every day – 40% of Sikhs say they go to the gurdwara (Sikh house of worship) daily. By comparison, 14% of Hindus say they go to a Hindu temple every day. Moreover, the vast majority of Sikhs (94%) regard their holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, as the word of God, and many (37%) say they read it, or listen to recitations of it, every day.

Sikhs in India also incorporate other religious traditions into their practice. Some Sikhs (9%) say they follow Sufi orders, which are linked with Islam, and about half (52%) say they have a lot in common with Hindus. Roughly one-in-five Indian Sikhs say they have prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a Hindu temple.

Sikh-Hindu relations were marked by violence in the 1970s and 1980s, when demands for a separate Sikh state covering the Punjab regions in both India and Pakistan (also known as the Khalistan movement) reached their apex. In 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards as revenge for Indian paramilitary forces storming the Sikh Golden Temple in pursuit of Sikh militants. Anti-Sikh riots ensued in Northern India, especially in the state of Punjab.

According to the Indian census, the vast majority of Sikhs in India (77%) still live in Punjab, where Sikhs make up 58% of the adult population. And 93% of Punjabi Sikhs say they are very proud to live in the state.

Sikhs also are overwhelmingly proud of their Indian identity. A near-universal share of Sikhs say they are very proud to be Indian (95%), and the vast majority (70%) say a person who disrespects India cannot be a Sikh. And like India's other religious groups, most Sikhs do not see evidence of widespread discrimination against their community – just 14% say Sikhs face a lot of discrimination in India, and 18% say they personally have faced religious discrimination in the last year.

At the same time, Sikhs are more likely than other religious communities to see communal violence as a very big problem in the country. Nearly eight-in-ten Sikhs (78%) rate communal violence as a major issue, compared with 65% of Hindus and Muslims.

The BJP has attempted to [financially compensate Sikhs](#) for some of the violence that occurred in 1984 after Indira Gandhi's assassination, but relatively few Sikh voters (19%) report having voted for the BJP in the 2019 parliamentary elections. The survey finds that 33% of Sikhs preferred the Indian National Congress Party – Gandhi's party.

India's Sikhs are nearly universally proud of their national, state identities

% of Indian Sikhs who say they are ...

Very proud to be residents of Punjab*	93%
Very proud to be Indian	95

*Among Sikh residents of Punjab. The vast majority of Indian Sikhs (77%) live in Punjab. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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1. Religious freedom, discrimination and communal relations

Indians generally see high levels of religious freedom in their country. Overwhelming majorities of people in each major religious group, as well as in the overall public, say they are “very free” to practice their religion. Smaller shares, though still majorities within each religious community, say people of other religions also are very free to practice their religion. Relatively few Indians – including members of religious minority communities – perceive religious discrimination as widespread.

At the same time, perceptions of discrimination vary a great deal by region. For example, Muslims in the Central region of the country are generally less likely than Muslims elsewhere to say there is a lot of religious discrimination in India. And Muslims in the North and Northeast are much more likely than Muslims in other regions to report that they, personally, have experienced recent discrimination.

Indians also widely consider communal violence to be an issue of national concern (along with other problems, such as unemployment and corruption). Most people across different religious backgrounds, education levels and age groups say communal violence is a very big problem in India.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 remains a subject of disagreement. Overall, the survey finds mixed views on whether the establishment of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan alleviated communal tensions or stoked them. On balance, Muslims tend to see Partition as a “bad thing” for Hindu-Muslim relations, while Hindus lean slightly toward viewing it as a “good thing.”

Most Indians say they and others are very free to practice their religion

The vast majority of Indians say they are very free today to practice their religion (91%), and all of India's major religious groups share this sentiment: Roughly nine-in-ten Buddhists (93%), Hindus (91%), Muslims (89%) and Christians (89%) say they are very free to practice their religion, as do 85% of Jains and 82% of Sikhs.

Broadly speaking, Indians are more likely to view *themselves* as having a high degree of religious freedom than to say that *people of other religions* are very free to practice their faiths. Still, 79% of the overall public – and about two-thirds or more of the members of each of the country's major religious communities – say that people belonging to other religions are very free to practice their faiths in India today.

Generally, these attitudes do not vary substantially among Indians of different ages, educational backgrounds or geographic regions. Indians in the Northeast are somewhat less likely than those elsewhere to see widespread religious freedom for people of other faiths – yet even in the Northeast, a solid majority (60%) say there is a high level of religious freedom for other religious communities in India.

Indians nearly universally say they are very free to practice their religion; fewer say people of other religions very free

% of Indian adults who say _____ are very free to practice their religion in India today

	They themselves	People of other religions
General population	91%	79%
Hindus	91	79
Muslims	89	80
Christians	89	75
Sikhs	82	65
Buddhists	93	83
Jains	85	74
Men	91	79
Women	91	78
Ages 18-34	91	79
35+	91	79
Less than college	91	79
College graduate	93	82
North	88	77
Central	95	83
East	91	75
West	90	84
South	88	77
Northeast	88	60

Note: Respondents were asked how free they are to practice their religion, and separately how free people of other religions are to practice their religion.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most people do not see evidence of widespread religious discrimination in India

Most people in India do not see a lot of religious discrimination against any of the country's six major religious groups. In general, Hindus, Muslims and Christians are slightly more likely to say there is a lot of discrimination against their own religious community than to say there is a lot of discrimination against people of other faiths. Still, no more than about one-quarter of the followers of any of the country's major faiths say they face widespread discrimination.

Relatively small shares across different age groups, educational backgrounds say there is a lot of religious discrimination in India

% of Indian adults who say there is a lot of discrimination against _____ in India today

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains
General population	20%	18%	10%	7%	7%	7%
Hindus	21	17	10	7	7	7
Muslims	16	24	8	6	6	6
Christians	14	16	18	6	6	5
Sikhs	17	21	16	14	12	11
Buddhists	21	20	11	10	18	8
Jains	21	18	13	8	3	12
Men	21	19	10	7	8	7
Women	20	17	10	7	7	7
Ages 18-34	20	18	10	7	7	7
35+	21	18	10	7	8	7
Less than college	21	18	10	7	8	7
College graduate	19	18	10	6	6	6

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Generally, Indians' opinions about religious discrimination do not vary substantially by gender, age or educational background. For example, among college graduates, 19% say there is a lot of discrimination against Hindus, compared with 21% among adults with less education.

Within religious groups as well, people of different ages, as well as both men and women, tend to have similar opinions on religious discrimination.

However, there are large regional variations in perceptions of religious discrimination. For example, among Muslims who live in the Central part of the country, just one-in-ten say there is widespread discrimination against Muslims in India, compared with about one-third of those who live in the North (35%) and Northeast (31%). (For more information on measures of religious discrimination in the Northeast, see [“In Northeast India, people perceive more religious discrimination”](#) below.)

Among Muslims, perceptions of discrimination against their community can vary somewhat based on their level of religious observance. For instance, about a quarter of Muslims across the country who pray daily say there is a lot of discrimination against Muslims (26%), compared with 19% of Muslims nationwide who pray less often. This difference by observance is pronounced in the North, where 39% of Muslims who pray every day say there is a lot of discrimination against Muslims in India, roughly twice the share among those in the same region who pray less often (20%).

Regional variations in Muslims' perception of discrimination

% of Indian Muslims who say there is a lot of discrimination against Muslims in India today

Total Muslims	24%
North	35
Central	10
East	27
West	24
South	29
Northeast	31
Pray daily	26
Pray less often	19

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Indians report no recent discrimination based on their religion

The survey also asked respondents about their personal experiences with discrimination. In all, 17% of Indians report facing recent discrimination based on their religion. Roughly one-in-five Muslims (21%) and 17% of Hindus say that in the last 12 months they themselves have faced discrimination because of their religion, as do 18% of Sikhs. By contrast, Christians are less likely to say they have felt discriminated against because of their religion (10%), and similar shares of Buddhists and Jains (13% each) fall into this category.

Nationally, men and women and people belonging to different age groups do not differ significantly from each other in their experiences with religious discrimination. People who have a college degree, however, are somewhat less likely than those with less formal schooling to say they have experienced religious discrimination in the past year.

Religious minorities generally no more likely than Hindus to report recent discrimination

% of Indian adults who say they have felt personally discriminated against in the last 12 months because of their religion

General population	17%
Hindus	17
Muslims	21
Christians	10
Sikhs	18
Buddhists	13
Jains	13
Men	17
Women	16
Ages 18-34	16
35+	17
Less than college	17
College graduate	11
North	22
Central	20
East	17
West	8
South	14
Northeast	33

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Within religious groups, experiences with discrimination vary based on region of residence and other factors. Among Muslims, for instance, 40% of those living in Northern India and 36% in the Northeast say they have faced recent religious discrimination, compared with no more than one-in-five in the Southern, Central, Eastern and Western regions.

Experiences with religious discrimination also are more common among Muslims who are more religious and those who report recent financial hardship (that is, they have not been able to afford food, housing or medical care for themselves or their families in the last year).

Muslims who have a favorable view of the Indian National Congress party (INC) are more likely than Muslims with an unfavorable view of the party to say they have experienced religious discrimination (26% vs. 15%). Among Northern Muslims, those who have a favorable view of the INC are much more likely than those who don't approve of the INC to say they have experienced discrimination (45% vs. 23%). (Muslims in the country, and especially Muslims in the North, tend to say they voted for the Congress party in the 2019 election. See [Chapter 6](#).)

Hindus with less education and those who have recently experienced poverty also are more likely to say they have experienced religious discrimination.

Muslims in North, Northeast most likely to say they have experienced religious discrimination

% of Indian Muslims who say they have felt personally discriminated against in the last 12 months because of their religion

Total Muslims	21%
North	40
Central	18
East	17
West	15
South	19
Northeast	36
Recent financial hardship	30
No financial hardship	14
Pray daily	23
Pray less often	16
Favorable view of INC*	26
Unfavorable view of INC	15

* Indian National Congress party.

Note: "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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In Northeast India, people perceive more religious discrimination

Less than 5% of India's population lives in the eight isolated states of the country's Northeastern region. This region broadly [lags behind](#) the country in economic development indicators. And this small segment of the population has a linguistic and religious makeup that differs drastically from the rest of the country.

According to the 2011 census of India, Hindus are still the majority religious group (58%), but they are less prevalent in the Northeast than elsewhere (81% nationally). The smaller proportion of Hindus there is offset by the highest shares of Christians (16% vs. 2% nationally) and Muslims (22% vs. 13% nationally) in any region. And based on the survey, the region also has a higher share of Scheduled Tribes than any other region in the country (25% vs. 9% nationally), and half of Scheduled Tribe members in the Northeast are Christians.

Indians in the Northeast are more likely than those elsewhere to perceive high levels of religious discrimination. For example, roughly four-in-ten in the region say there is a lot of discrimination against Muslims in India, about twice the share of North Indians who say the same thing (41% vs. 22%).

Much of the Northeast's perception of high religious discrimination is driven by Hindus in the region. A slim majority of Northeastern Hindus (55%) say there is widespread discrimination against Hindus in India, while almost as many (53%) say Muslims face a lot of discrimination. Substantial shares of Hindus in the Northeast say other religious communities also face such mistreatment.

Highest perceptions of discrimination in the Northeast

% of Indian adults who say there is a lot of discrimination against _____ in India today

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains
Northeast	46%	41%	36%	30%	30%	29%
North	20	22	11	9	9	11
Central	13	7	3	2	2	2
East	30	28	15	12	11	11
West	16	15	6	6	8	5
South	19	17	12	4	4	4

Among adults in the Northeast ...

Hindus	55	53	44	39	40	37
Muslims	40	31	25	20	21	19
Christians	15	10	20	7	7	8

Note: Adequate sample size is not available to analyze attitudes among other religious groups in the Northeast.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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The region's other religious communities are less likely to say there is religious discrimination in India. For example, while 44% of Northeastern Hindus say Christians face a lot of discrimination, only one-in-five Christians in the Northeast perceive this level of discrimination against their own group. By contrast, at the national level, Christians are more likely than Hindus to see a lot of discrimination against Christians (18% vs. 10%).

People in the Northeast also are more likely to report experiencing religious discrimination. While 17% of individuals nationally say they personally have felt religious discrimination in the last 12 months, one-third of those surveyed in the Northeast say they have had such an experience. Northeastern Hindus, in particular, are much more likely than Hindus elsewhere to report recent religious discrimination (37% vs. 17% nationally).

Most Indians see communal violence as a very big problem in the country

Most Indians (65%) say communal violence – a term broadly used to describe violence between religious groups – is a “very big problem” in their country (the term was not defined for respondents). This includes identical shares of Hindus and Muslims (65% each) who say this.

But even larger majorities identify several other national problems. Unemployment tops the list of national concerns, with 84% of Indians saying this is a very big problem. And roughly three-quarters of Indian adults see corruption (76%), crime (76%) and violence against women (75%) as very big national issues. (The survey was designed and mostly conducted before the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic.)

Indians across nearly every religious group, caste category and region consistently rank unemployment as the top national concern. Buddhists, who

Unemployment tops list of national concerns, but most in India see communal violence as a major issue

*% of Indian adults who say _____ is a **very** big problem in India*

	Unemployment	Corruption	Crime	Violence against women	Communal violence
General population	84%	76%	76%	75%	65%
Hindus	84	76	76	75	65
Muslims	86	77	76	74	65
Christians	83	80	83	83	64
Sikhs	93	85	86	83	78
Buddhists	86	77	74	63	56
Jains	80	89	74	77	66
Men	86	78	77	75	67
Women	83	74	76	75	63
Ages 18-34	85	77	77	76	66
35+	84	76	76	74	64
Less than college	84	76	76	75	65
College graduate	89	83	80	79	68
General Category	87	80	80	80	70
Lower castes	83	75	75	73	63
North	87	79	75	75	69
Central	83	71	71	68	61
East	84	71	75	77	66
West	83	75	73	67	59
South	86	86	86	87	70
Northeast	88	79	80	77	75
Urban	85	79	79	78	67
Rural	84	75	75	74	64
Religion very important	85	77	77	76	67
Religion less important	81	71	72	72	58

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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overwhelmingly belong to disadvantaged castes, widely rank unemployment as a major concern (86%), while just a slim majority see communal violence as a very big problem (56%).

Sikhs are more likely than other major religious groups in India to say communal violence is a major issue (78%). This concern is especially pronounced among college-educated Sikhs (87%).

Among Hindus, those who are more religious are more likely to see communal violence as a major issue: Fully 67% of Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives consider communal violence a major issue, compared with 58% among those who say religion is less important to them.

Indians in different regions of the country also differ in their concern about communal violence: Three-quarters of Indians in the Northeast say communal violence is a very big problem, compared with 59% in the West. Concerns about communal violence are widespread in the national capital of Delhi, where 78% of people say this is a major issue. During fieldwork for this study, major protests broke out in New Delhi (and elsewhere) following the BJP-led government's passing of a new bill, which creates an expedited path to citizenship for immigrants from some neighboring countries – but not Muslims.

Indians divided on the legacy of Partition for Hindu-Muslim relations

The end of Britain's colonial rule in India, in 1947, was accompanied by the separation of Hindu-majority India from Muslim-majority Pakistan and massive migration in both directions. Nearly three-quarters of a century later, Indians are divided over the legacy of Partition.

About four-in-ten (41%) say the partition of India and Pakistan was a good thing for Hindu-Muslim relations, while a similar share (39%) say it was a bad thing. The rest of the population (20%) does not provide a clear answer, saying Partition was neither a good thing nor a bad thing, that it depends, or that they don't know or cannot answer the question. There are no clear patterns by age, gender, education or party preference on opinions on this question.

Among Muslims, the predominant view is that Partition was a bad thing (48%) for Hindu-Muslim relations. Fewer see it as a good thing (30%). Hindus are more likely than Muslims to say Partition was a good thing for Hindu-Muslim relations (43%) and less likely to say it was a bad thing (37%).

Of the country's six major religious groups, Sikhs have the most negative view of the role Partition played in Hindu-Muslim relations: Nearly two-thirds (66%) say it was a bad thing.

Most Indian Sikhs live in Punjab, along the border with Pakistan. The broader Northern region (especially Punjab) was strongly impacted by the partition of the subcontinent, and Northern

Mixed views on whether Partition was a good or bad thing for Hindu-Muslim relations

% of Indian adults who say the partition of India and Pakistan was a _____ for Hindu-Muslim relations

	Good thing	Bad thing	Neither/depends/DK/ref.
General population	41%	39%	20%
Hindus	43	37	20
Muslims	30	48	23
Christians	37	30	33
Sikhs	25	66	9
Buddhists	50	40	10
Jains	41	40	20
Men	41	41	17
Women	40	36	23
Ages 18-34	42	39	19
35-64	40	39	21
65+	38	38	24
No formal education	41	36	24
Primary through secondary	41	40	19
College graduate	43	41	16
North	39	48	13
Central	39	46	16
East	31	42	27
West	46	36	18
South	50	26	23
Northeast	37	34	28

Note: "Neither/depends/DK/ref." indicates respondents who answered "neither good nor bad," "depends" or "don't know" or refused to give a response to the question. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indians as a whole lean toward the position that Partition was a bad thing for Hindu-Muslim relations (48%) rather than a good thing (39%).

The South is the furthest region from the borders affected by Partition, and Southern Indians are about twice as likely to say that Partition was good as to say that it was bad for Hindu-Muslim relations (50% vs. 26%).

Attitudes toward Partition also vary considerably by region within specific religious groups. Among Muslims in the North and West, most say Partition was a bad thing for Hindu-Muslim relations (55% of Muslims in both regions). In the Eastern and Central parts of the country as well, Muslim public opinion leans toward the view that Partition was a bad thing for communal relations. By contrast, Muslims in the South and Northeast tend to see Partition as good for Hindu-Muslim relations.

Among Hindus, meanwhile, those in the North are closely divided on the issue, with 44% saying Partition was a good thing and 42% saying it was a bad thing. But in the West and South, Hindus tend to see Partition as a good thing for communal relations.

Poorer Hindus – that is, those who say they have been unable to afford basic necessities like food, housing and medical care in the last year – tend to say Partition was a good thing. But opinions are more divided among Hindus who have not recently experienced poverty (39% say it was a good thing, while 40% say it was a bad thing). Muslims who have not experienced recent financial hardship, however, are especially likely to see Partition as a bad thing: Roughly half (51%) say Partition was a bad thing for Hindu-Muslim relations, while only about a quarter (24%) see it as a good thing.

Most Muslims in the North, West say Partition was a bad thing for Hindu-Muslim relations

% of Indian Muslims/Hindus who say the partition of India and Pakistan was a _____ for Hindu-Muslim relations

	Muslims		Hindus	
	Good thing	Bad thing	Good thing	Bad thing
North	28%	55%	44%	42%
Central	35	52	39	45
East	15	51	34	40
West	30	55	48	33
South	42	36	52	25
Northeast	47	27	38	41
Recent financial hardship	37	43	47	34
No financial hardship	24	51	39	40

Note: Neither good nor bad/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses not shown. "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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2. Diversity and pluralism

Indians are much more likely to view their country's religious diversity as an asset than as a liability. About half of Indians (53%) say religious diversity benefits the country, while 24% say it is harmful. The remainder (24%) don't take a position either way.

At the same time, Indians of different religious backgrounds don't see much in common with each other. For example, most Muslims say members of their religious community are very different from Hindus or Sikhs, and vice versa – most Hindus and Sikhs see themselves as very different from Muslims. With few exceptions, India's major religious groups perceive more differences than similarities between their communities.

By their own admission, Indians also don't know much about religions other than their own. While many Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists say they know at least something about the Hindu religion, fewer Hindus claim any knowledge about India's minority religions – even those, like Jainism or Sikhism, with some theological similarities to Hinduism.

India's religiously diverse population is, therefore, composed of religious communities who are not too familiar with each other's beliefs and practices, and who don't see much common ground among them. Yet, many Indians take a pluralistic, rather than exclusivist, attitude toward religious beliefs. The predominant opinion among Indian adults overall, as well as within most of the country's major religious groups, is that “many religions can be true,” rather than that theirs is “the one true religion.”

Many Indians also practice religion in a pluralistic way. For example, a substantial minority of Muslims, especially in some regions of the country, say they celebrate the festivals of Diwali and Holi, which are more commonly celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. Many Christians also say they celebrate Diwali and Holi, while some Hindus celebrate Christmas. In addition, some members of India's religious minority groups say they have prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a Hindu temple. And, for their part, one-in-five Hindus in the North say they have worshipped at a gurdwara (a Sikh house of worship), and some in the South say they have prayed at a church. (See [Chapter 7](#) and [Chapter 11](#) for additional analyses of shared beliefs and practices across religious groups.)

More Indians say religious diversity benefits their country than say it is harmful

Home to more than nine-in-ten of the world's Hindus, India also has one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, as well as millions of Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Christians.

Indians tend to see this religious diversity as benefiting their country. Roughly half say diversity benefits India (53%), while about one-quarter say diversity harms the country (24%). Generally, Indians of different ages, educational backgrounds and regions of residence tend to agree that diversity benefits the country.

However, a sizable minority (24%) does not take a clear position on the question, saying that diversity “neither benefits nor harms the country,” that they don't know, or declining to answer the question.

Majorities of Sikhs (60%), Muslims (56%) and Jains (55%) say religious diversity benefits India. Meanwhile, fewer than half of Buddhists (46%) and Christians (44%) take this position; about three-in-ten in both groups do not provide a clear answer either way.

The most religious Indians – that is, those who say religion is very important to their lives – are more likely than those who are less religious to say religious diversity is beneficial to the country (55% vs. 39%).

Many in India do not take a position on whether religious diversity is beneficial or harmful to their country

% of Indian adults who say India's religious diversity _____ their country

	Benefits	Harms	Neither/ DK/ref.
General population	53%	24%	24%
Hindus	52	24	24
Muslims	56	22	23
Christians	44	26	30
Sikhs	60	29	11
Buddhists	46	26	29
Jains	55	25	20
Men	54	25	20
Women	51	22	27
Ages 18-34	52	25	23
35+	53	23	24
Less than college	52	24	24
College graduate	55	25	19
North	68	18	14
Central	53	26	21
East	53	17	30
West	51	24	25
South	42	33	25
Northeast	64	11	25
Religion very important	55	23	22
Religion less important	39	29	31

Note: “DK/ref.” indicates respondents who answered “Don't know” or refused to give a response to the question. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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This difference between more and less religious people is largest among Hindus. Among Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives, most feel that diversity benefits the country (55%). But Hindus who say religion is less important in their lives are more evenly divided in their opinions: 37% say diversity benefits the country, 30% say diversity harms the country, and 33% don't take a position either way.

Among Hindus, a majority of those who have a favorable opinion of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) say religious diversity benefits the country (57%), compared with 45% among those who have an unfavorable opinion of the BJP.

Within the Indian population as a whole, attitudes about religious diversity also vary by region: Majorities in the North (68%) and Northeast (64%) think diversity benefits the country. The South is somewhat less positive: Southerners generally are less likely than those in other regions to say diversity benefits the country.

Hindus in the South are relatively unenthusiastic about the benefits of religious diversity: 42% say diversity benefits the country. And while roughly half of Southern Muslims (48%) say India's diversity helps the country, in the North (68%) and Northeast (75%), higher shares of Muslims see India's religious diversity as an asset.

Hindus who have a favorable view of the BJP say religious diversity benefits India

% of Indian Hindus who say India's religious diversity _____ their country

	Benefits	Harms	Neither/ DK/ref.
Total Hindus	52%	24%	24%
Religion very important	55	23	22
Religion less important	37	30	33
Favorable view of BJP	57	24	19
Unfavorable view of BJP	45	31	24

Note: "DK/ref." indicates respondents who answered "Don't know" or refused to give a response to the question. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Buddhists, Muslims and Christians see members of their own religion as very different from Hindus

Even though Indians tend to value their country's religious diversity, India's religious communities generally don't see much in common with one another. Across religious groups, large shares say that, based on what they know, members of their religious group are "very different" from followers of other religions. In fact, only 36% of all Indian adults say their group has "a lot in common" with even *one* of the five other major groups mentioned in the survey; the remainder (64%) either say they are very different from, or do not give a definite answer about, all five other groups.

For example, majorities among Indian Buddhists (67%), Muslims (64%) and Christians (58%) say they are very different from Hindus. Jains and Sikhs, on the other hand, tend to take the view that they have a lot in common with Hindus – 66% of Jains and 52% of Sikhs say this, the only two cases in which majorities or pluralities of one group say they have "a lot" in common with another group.

Most people in India's non-Muslim religious groups don't see much in common between the Muslim community and their own. Most Hindus (66%) say their group is very different from Muslims, as do nearly nine-in-ten Buddhists (88%). Sikhs are the most likely to say they have a lot in common with Muslims – 36% of Sikhs say this. Still, the majority view among Sikhs is that they are very different from Muslims (55%).

With few exceptions, Indians of different religious backgrounds don't see much in common with other religious groups in the country

% of Indian adults who say members of their religious group and _____ in India have a lot in common/are very different

For example, 64% of Muslims say Muslims in India are very different from Hindus

	HINDUS			MUSLIMS			CHRISTIANS		
	A lot in common with Hindus	Very different	Other/DK/ref.	A lot in common with Muslims	Very different	Other/DK/ref.	A lot in common with Christians	Very different	Other/DK/ref.
Among Hindus	--	--	--	23%	66%	11%	19%	59%	22%
Muslims	29%	64%	7%	--	--	--	21	54	24
Christians	27	58	15	22	62	16	--	--	--
Sikhs	52	42	6	36	55	9	39	49	12
Buddhists	32	67	2	8	88	4	7	87	6
Jains	66	33	1	19	75	6	21	74	6

	SIKHS			BUDDHISTS			JAINS		
	A lot in common with Sikhs	Very different	Other/DK/ref.	A lot in common with Buddhists	Very different	Other/DK/ref.	A lot in common with Jains	Very different	Other/DK/ref.
Among Hindus	20%	51%	29%	18%	50%	31%	19%	49%	32%
Muslims	15	54	31	13	52	36	12	51	37
Christians	9	50	40	7	49	45	7	48	45
Sikhs	--	--	--	29	52	19	29	50	21
Buddhists	7	86	8	--	--	--	7	84	9
Jains	20	72	9	23	68	9	--	--	--

Note: This question was asked only of those who identified with a religion. "DK/ref." indicates respondents who answered "Don't know" or refused to give a response to the question. "Other" responses include those who say "Other/Neither/Depends." Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Generally, Sikhs are more inclined than others to say they have a lot in common with all groups asked about in the survey. Nearly a quarter of Sikhs (23%) say they have a lot in common with *all* other religious groups, compared with just 11% of Hindus who see common ground with all five groups.

While many Sikhs see common ground with other groups, members of those groups generally are less likely to say they have a lot in common with Sikhs. For instance, 52% of Sikhs say they have a lot in common with Hindus, while just 20% of Hindus say the same about Sikhs. Members of some of these groups may be less familiar with the relatively small Sikh population that is also concentrated in the state of Punjab; about three-in-ten Hindus and Muslims and four-in-ten Christians say they “don’t know” or otherwise decline to answer the question about how much they have in common with Sikhs.

People in the North of India are more likely than those in other regions to say their religious group has a lot in common with other groups. This pattern holds true across multiple religious groups. People in the Western, Central and Northeastern regions, meanwhile, generally are less likely to see commonalities among religious groups.

More Sikhs than members of other religious groups see common ground among religious groups in India

% of Indian adults who say their religious group has a lot in common with ...

	None of the other religious groups (0 of 5)	Some of the other religious groups (1-2 of 5)	Most of the other religious groups (3-4 of 5)	All of the other religious groups (5 of 5)
General population	64%	19%	6%	11%
Hindus	65	18	6	11
Muslims	66	20	3	10
Christians	67	24	4	5
Sikhs	39	27	11	23
Buddhists	67	26	2	5
Jains	29	49	6	15
Men	62	20	6	12
Women	67	18	5	10
Ages 18-34	63	20	6	11
35+	66	18	5	11
No formal education	67	19	5	9
Primary through secondary	63	19	6	11
College graduate	60	19	7	13
North	44	22	11	23
Central	75	15	4	7
East	57	22	7	14
West	79	16	2	3
South	60	22	6	11
Northeast	77	17	3	3

Note: Respondents were asked, “From what you know, do you think [your own religious group] and [Hindus/Muslims/Christians/Sikhs/Buddhists/Jains] in India have a lot in common or are very different?” These questions were asked only of those who identified with a religion. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indians are highly knowledgeable about their own religion, less so about other religions

Most Indians say they know a lot about their own religion. And very high shares in each religious group say they know at least some about their own faith. For example, 92% of Hindus say they know “a great deal” or “some” about the Hindu religion and its practices, and nearly all Sikhs (95%) say the same about Sikhism.

Considerably fewer people say they know a great deal – or even some – about other religions. For example,

roughly a third of India’s Hindus (36%) say they know at least something about Islam, and even fewer say they know something about Christianity (28%). About one-in-five Hindus say they have at least some knowledge about Buddhism (21%), Sikhism (19%) or Jainism (18%), despite theological similarities between Hinduism and these three religions. Most Hindus say they know “not very much” or “nothing at all” about each of the other faiths.

Of course, the vast majority of Indians are Hindu, and it stands to reason that non-Hindus living in India would have at least some knowledge about Hinduism. Half of Muslims and most Jains (92%), Christians (66%), Sikhs (62%) and Buddhists (59%) say they know at least something about the Hindu religion and its practices.

Yet Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Muslims generally know less about one another’s religions. For example, just 26% of Sikhs say they know at least “some” about Islam, and only 13% of Muslims say they know something about the Sikh religion and its practices.

One exception is how much Christians know about Islam. Nearly half of Christians (47%) say they know either a lot or some about Islam. Far fewer Muslims (18%) say the same about Christianity.

Generally, Indians say they have limited knowledge about religions other than their own

% of Indian adults who say they know “a great deal” or “some” about ...

Among ...	Hinduism	Islam	Christianity	Sikhism	Buddhism	Jainism
Hindus	92%	36%	28%	19%	21%	18%
Muslims	50	95	18	13	14	12
Christians	66	47	89	15	16	13
Sikhs	62	26	33	95	20	20
Buddhists	59	25	15	12	93	11
Jains	92	25	27	26	25	90

Note: Respondents were asked how much they know about the “Hindu religion and its practices,” “Muslim religion and its practices,” etc.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019–March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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More Muslims in the South of the country than elsewhere say they know about other religions. For example, about half of Muslims in the South (53%) say they have at least some knowledge of Christianity, compared with 18% of Muslims nationally. And a large majority of Southern Muslims (76%) say they know at least something about Hinduism, including (27%) who say they know a lot about the country's majority religion. By comparison, half of Muslims nationally indicate they know at least something about Hinduism, and just 9% say they know a lot about the religion.

Among Hindus, those who are college educated are more likely to claim at least some knowledge about other religions. Hindus who live in the North of India are more likely than Hindus overall to say they know at least something about Sikhism (44% vs. 19% nationally), perhaps because many Sikhs are concentrated in the Northern state of Punjab. And Hindus from the South are much more likely than those elsewhere to say they have some knowledge of Islam (54% vs. 36% nationally) and Christianity (56% vs. 28% nationally).

Indians lean toward seeing truth in many religions

When asked which statement comes closest to their opinion – “My religion is the one true religion” or “Many religions can be true” – a sizable minority (42%) say theirs is the one true religion, while somewhat more (51%) take the view that many religions can be true.¹⁰

The predominant view among Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists is that there are many true religions. Muslims have the largest share who take the position that theirs is the one true religion (51%). Jains are about evenly divided on this question.

Gender and age make little difference in whether people believe their religion is the only true one. There is, however, a link between education and views on this question: College-educated Indians are more likely than others to say many religions can be true (59% vs. 50%). Also, people living in urban areas of the country are slightly more inclined to take this position than rural Indians (55% vs. 49%).

Generally, Indians who are more religiously observant are much more likely to take the view that theirs is the one true religion. Among Indians who say religion is very important in their lives, 45% say only their religion is true, compared with a quarter (24%) of Indians who say religion is less important in their lives. This pattern holds among both Hindus and Muslims; for example, 53% of Muslims who say religion is

Half of Indians say many religions can be true

% of Indian adults who say ...

	My religion is the one true religion	Many religions can be true
General population	42%	51%
Hindus	41	52
Muslims	51	42
Christians	35	48
Sikhs	36	55
Buddhists	39	52
Jains	46	45
Men	42	51
Women	41	50
Ages 18-34	41	51
35+	42	50
Less than college	42	50
College graduate	33	59
North	40	56
Central	55	42
East	41	53
West	44	50
South	26	57
Northeast	47	40
Urban	37	55
Rural	44	49
Religion very important	45	50
Religion less important	24	57

Note: Neither/Both equally/Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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¹⁰ A [national survey](#) fielded by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in 2019 found that 21% of Indians either fully or somewhat agree with the statement “Only my religion is correct, not of anyone else,” while a majority of Indians (57%) somewhat or fully disagree with it.

very important in their lives see Islam as the one true religion, compared with 35% among those who consider religion less important.

There are some partisan differences among Hindus on this question: Those who have a favorable view of the BJP are more likely than other Hindus to say Hinduism is the one true religion (45% vs. 32%).

Regionally, majorities of Indian adults in the North, East and South say many religions can be true. By contrast, those in the Central region are generally more likely to say their religion is the one true faith (55%).

Among Hindus in the North, a majority (57%) say many religions can be true. But among Northern Muslims, about the same share take the opposite view: 58% say Islam is the one true religion.

Most Hindus in the North and South say many religions can be true; fewer Muslims agree

% of Indian Hindus/Muslims who say many religions can be true

	Hindus	Muslims
Total adults	52%	42%
North	57	41
Central	42	39
East	54	45
West	51	39
South	59	47
Northeast	41	38

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Substantial shares of Buddhists, Sikhs say they have worshipped at religious venues other than their own

In an effort to understand whether Indians of various religious backgrounds mix religious practices, the survey asked people if they have *ever* prayed, meditated or performed a ritual in a house of worship other than the one associated with their own religion. For example, Sikhs were asked if they have ever prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a mosque, church, Hindu temple, Buddhist stupa or Sufi shrine. (For more discussion of religious beliefs and practices that many Indians have in common, see [Chapter 7](#) and [Chapter 11](#).)

The vast majority of Indians say they have not worshipped in religious sites belonging to other religions. But some have done so, especially in Hindu temples. For example, 38% of Buddhists say they have worshipped at a Hindu temple, as have about one-in-five Sikhs (22%) and Christians (20%). By comparison, fewer Muslims (8%) report having done so.

The distinction between Hindu and Jain temples is

often ambiguous, so it stands to reason that a majority of Jains (67%) say they have worshipped at a Hindu temple. Some Jains (14%) also have prayed at a Sikh gurdwara.

About one-in-ten Sikhs (11%) and Muslims (10%) say they have prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a Sufi shrine; Sufism tends to be most closely associated with a particular interpretation of Islam, although people of many faiths in India identify with Sufism (see [Chapter 5](#) for details).

Some non-Hindus say they have prayed, meditated or performed rituals at Hindu temples

% of Indian adults who say they have ever prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a ...

	Hindu temple	Mosque	Church	Gurdwara	Buddhist stupa	Sufi shrine
Hindus	–	6%	6%	7%	4%	3%
Muslims	8%	–	3	3	2	10
Christians	20	6	–	2	2	3
Sikhs	22	3	3	–	2	11
Buddhists	38	8	7	9	–	2
Jains	67	6	7	14	9	3

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Relatively small shares of Hindus say they have worshipped at sites associated with other faiths. But there is some regional variation in the shares of Hindus who have worshipped at non-Hindu venues. Most strikingly, in the North, fully one-in-five Hindus say they have worshipped at a gurdwara.

Indian Sikhs are concentrated in the North, in the state of Punjab, which also is the home of the famous gurdwara known as the [Golden Temple](#).

One-in-five Hindus in the North say they have prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a Sikh gurdwara

% of Indian Hindus who say they have ever prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a ...

	Mosque	Church	Gurdwara	Buddhist stupa	Sufi shrine
North	4%	3%	20%	2%	4%
Central	4	3	6	4	4
East	6	8	7	5	2
West	5	3	6	5	1
South	11	12	4	3	1
Northeast	4	5	6	4	1

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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In the South, where many of India's Christians are concentrated, about one-in-ten Hindus (12%) say they have prayed at a church, and roughly the same share (11%) say they have performed a ritual at a mosque.

However, substantial minorities say they have worshipped at one or more venues belonging to another religion. For example, nearly one-in-five Hindus (17%) say they have prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at one or more of the five non-Hindu types of houses of worship asked about in the survey. Among Sikhs, 31% say they have worshipped at a church, mosque, Hindu temple, Sufi shrine or Buddhist stupa (or at more than one of these places). And among Buddhists, more than four-in-ten (44%) report having such an experience.

Among Muslims, 18% say they have prayed at a house of worship other than a mosque, including those who have worshipped at a Sufi shrine. (Sufi shrines are most closely associated with Islam, though there is also [anti-Sufi sentiment among some Muslims](#) in parts of the world.) Excluding Sufi shrines, one-in-ten Muslims in India have worshipped at a church, Hindu temple, Sikh gurdwara or Buddhist stupa.

Overall, men and college-educated Indians are slightly more likely to say they have prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at one or more venues associated with another religion. For example, 10% of college-educated Hindus have prayed at a church, compared with 6% of those who have less education.

Substantial minorities of Indians have worshipped at venues belonging to other religions

% of Indian adults who say they have ever worshipped at other religions' houses of worship

	None	At least one
Hindus	83%	17%
Muslims	82	18
Christians	74	26
Sikhs	69	31
Buddhists	56	44
Jains	29	71

Note: Respondents were asked, "Have you ever prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at a [Hindu temple/mosque/church/gurdwara/Buddhist stupa/Sufi shrine]?" They were not asked about religious venues associated with their own religion (all groups were asked about Sufi shrines). The table shows the share of respondents in each group who have not worshipped at any house of worship associated with another religion vs. the share who have worshipped at one or more of these venues.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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One-in-five Muslims in India participate in celebrations of Diwali

Indians celebrate myriad festivals and national holidays, each with its own rituals and traditions. The survey asked Indians of all religious backgrounds whether they participate in celebrating one national holiday (Independence Day), a few religious festivals associated with various groups (Diwali, Holi, Christmas and Eid), and the Western holiday of Valentine's Day, which recently has gained some popularity in India.

One-in-five Indian Muslims, three-in-ten Christians say they celebrate Diwali

% of Indian adults who say they participate in celebrations of ...

	Independence Day	Diwali	Holi	Valentine's Day	Christmas	Eid
General population	87%	85%	78%	21%	18%	17%
Hindus	88	95	88	22	17	7
Muslims	82	20	16	14	10	93
Christians	79	31	25	27	97	11
Sikhs	77	90	87	26	19	5
Buddhists	86	79	70	20	13	9
Jains	90	98	93	31	18	9

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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As expected, most people celebrate festivals associated with their own religious tradition. Near-universal shares of Hindus (95%), Sikhs (90%) and Jains (98%) say they celebrate Diwali, as do about eight-in-ten Buddhists (79%). Muslims overwhelmingly say they participate in celebrations of Eid (93%), and virtually all Christians (97%) celebrate Christmas. In addition, the vast majority of Indians (87%), regardless of their religious background, commemorate the day India declared its independence from British rule, celebrated on Aug. 15.

But many Indians also celebrate festivals that are not traditionally associated with their respective religions. For example, substantial shares of Muslims (20%) and Christians (31%) in India say they participate in Diwali celebrations. Also, notable shares of both those religious communities (16% of Muslims and 25% of Christians) say they participate in celebrating Holi, the spring festival of color that is observed by most Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains.

Fewer Hindus (and other non-Muslims) celebrate the Muslim holiday of Eid. Among Hindus, 7% say they participate in celebrations of Eid, as do 11% of Christians. But celebrations of Christmas are relatively popular among non-Christians in India: Nearly one-in-five Hindus, Sikhs and Jains say they participate in Christmas festivities.

Hindus who are less religious are more likely to say they participate in celebrations of Christmas. These celebrations also are more common among Hindus in the South and among Hindus with a college education. For example, 23% of Hindus in the South say they celebrate Christmas, compared with about half as many in the Northeast (11%), even though both regions have a strong Christian presence. Christmas also is more commonly celebrated by urban than rural Hindus (23% vs. 14%).

Muslims vary regionally when it comes to celebrating Diwali and Holi. Among Muslims in the North, nearly a quarter (24%) say they celebrate Diwali, and 15% participate in Holi festivities. In Western India, even larger shares of Muslims say they participate in Diwali (39%) and Holi (31%) celebrations.

Diwali celebrations more common among Muslims in the West, South

% of Indian Muslims who say they participate in celebrations of ...

	Diwali	Holi	Christmas
Total Muslims	20%	16%	10%
North	24	15	12
Central	17	11	8
East	10	11	9
West	39	31	7
South	33	24	18
Northeast	11	6	8

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Moreover, fully one-in-five Indian adults (21%) say they celebrate Valentine's Day. Though it is historically associated with Western Christianity, Indian Christians celebrate Valentine's Day (27%) at about the same rate that they celebrate Diwali (31%) or Holi (25%). Christians also are about as likely as Sikhs (26%) to celebrate Valentine's Day.

Nationally, marking Valentine's Day tends to be more popular among young adults (35% among those ages 18 to 25), those who have a college education (40%) and those who live in urban areas (27%). It also is more commonly celebrated by people who do *not* consider religion very important in their lives (27%, vs. 20% among those who see religion as very important).

Even though some Hindu groups [have criticized Valentine's Day](#) as foreign to Indian culture and inappropriate for a socially conservative society, participation in the holiday is not politically divided. People who have a favorable opinion of the ruling party are no less likely than those who have an unfavorable view of the BJP to say they celebrate Valentine's Day (21% and 20%, respectively).

Valentine's Day more commonly celebrated by college-educated, urban Indians; partisanship makes little difference

% of Indian adults who say they participate in celebrations of Valentine's Day

General population	21%
Hindus	22
Muslims	14
Christians	27
Sikhs	26
Buddhists	20
Jains	31
Men	25
Women	18
Ages 18-25	35
26-34	26
35+	13
Less than college	19
College graduate	40
Urban	27
Rural	18
Favorable view of BJP	21
Unfavorable view of BJP	20

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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3. Religious segregation

Indians live religiously segregated lives. Most form friendship circles within their own religious community and marry someone of the same faith; interreligious marriages are very uncommon. Indeed, a majority of Indians say it is very important to stop both women and men in their community from marrying outside their religion.

Generally, Indians do not object to members of other religious groups living in their village or neighborhood. Still, a substantial share of Indian adults say they would be *unwilling* to accept members of certain other religions as neighbors.

These kinds of preferences for living separate lives vary by religion. While large shares of Hindus and Muslims say all their close friends share their religion, Christians and Buddhists tend to have slightly more mixed social circles and to attach less importance to stopping interreligious marriage.

Geography is also a factor. People in the South of India tend to be more religiously integrated and less opposed to interreligious marriages. For example, Hindus who live in the South are more likely than Hindus in other regions to say they would accept a Muslim or a Christian as a neighbor. The Central region of the country, by contrast, stands out as highly religiously segregated.

Views on religious segregation also are related to levels of education. In general, Indians with a college degree are more inclined to accept people of other faiths as neighbors, and less opposed to religious intermarriage, than are Indians who have less education.

Among Hindus in particular, attitudes toward interreligious marriages and neighborhoods are closely tied to views on politics and national identity. Hindus who strongly favor religious segregation – those who say that all their close friends are Hindu, that it is very important to stop Hindus from marrying outside the faith and that they would not accept people of some other faiths as neighbors – are much more likely than other Hindus to take the position that it is very important to be a Hindu to be “truly” Indian. They are also more likely to have voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Members of both large and small religious groups mostly keep friendships within religious lines

In India, a person's religion is typically also the religion of that person's close friends. A large majority of Indian adults say that either "all" (45%) or "most" (40%) of their close friends have the same religion they do. Relatively few adults (13%) have a more mixed friendship circle, saying that "some," "hardly any" or "none" of their friends share their faith.

Nearly half of Hindus (47%) say all of their close friends share their religious identity, and an additional 39% say most of their friends are fellow Hindus. But the country's religious minorities also have friendship circles consisting largely of people of their own religion. For example, the vast majority of Muslims (88%) say all or most of their friends are Muslim.

People belonging to smaller religious groups are less likely than Hindus and Muslims to say *all* their friends are of the same religion. Still, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains also tend to form friendships mostly within their group. For example, among Jains – who make up less than 0.5% of India's population – 72% say their close friends are entirely (28%) or mostly (45%) other Jains.

Generally, Indians who have a college degree and those who live in urban areas are more likely than others to have a mixed circle of friends. Religious observance is a factor as well: People who are more observant are more inclined to be friends only with people who share their religion. For example, among Indians who say religion is very important in their lives, nearly half (47%) say *all* their friends share their religion, compared with about a third (34%) who say this among those who are less religious.

Indians tend to form their friendships within their own religious community

% of Indian adults who say _____ of their close friends are the same religion as them

	All	Most	Some/hardly any/none
General population	45%	40%	13%
Hindus	47	39	13
Muslims	45	44	11
Christians	22	56	22
Sikhs	25	56	16
Buddhists	22	52	25
Jains	28	45	25
Men	42	44	13
Women	48	37	13
Ages 18-34	45	41	12
35+	45	40	14
Less than college	46	40	13
College graduate	34	51	15
North	40	48	10
Central	58	35	7
East	51	37	11
West	45	41	14
South	29	45	25
Northeast	52	39	7
Urban	38	45	16
Rural	49	38	12
Religion very important	47	40	12
Religion less important	34	47	18

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Men are somewhat more likely than women to have a religiously mixed friendship circle. But age makes little difference: Within the population as a whole, as well as within the major religious groups, younger adults are about as likely as older people to say all their close friends share their same religion.

Regionally, people in the South are less likely than those in other regions to say all their close friends share their religion (29%). Among Hindus in the South, 31% say all their close friends are also Hindu, compared with 47% of Hindus nationally who say their friendship circle is exclusively Hindu. An even lower share of Muslims in the region (19%) say all their friends are Muslims, while 45% of Muslims across the country say all their close friends are fellow Muslims.

Most Indians are willing to accept members of other religious communities as neighbors, but many express reservations

Majorities in India say, hypothetically, that they would be willing to accept members of other religious groups as neighbors.

For instance, large majorities of Muslims (78%) and members of other religious minority communities say they would be willing to live near a Hindu – which may be unsurprising given that Hindus make up a large majority of India’s population.

India’s minority communities generally say they would be willing to accept a Hindu as a neighbor

% of Indian adults who say they would be willing to accept _____ as a neighbor

Among ...	A Hindu	A Muslim	A Christian	A Sikh	A Buddhist	A Jain
Hindus	--	57%	59%	58%	59%	59%
Muslims	78%	--	62	59	55	54
Christians	81	75	--	64	64	63
Sikhs	75	59	65	--	56	56
Buddhists	89	78	79	78	--	79
Jains	92	38	46	55	58	--

Note: Respondents were not asked about having followers of their own religious tradition as neighbors (for example, Christians were not asked about having Christian neighbors).

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Among Hindus, most say they would be willing to live near a member of a religious minority, such as a Muslim (57%), a Christian (59%) or a Jain (59%). But many Hindus express reservations about such an arrangement. For example, 36% of Hindus say they would *not* be willing to live near a Muslim, and 31% say they would not want a Christian living in their neighborhood. Jains are even more likely to express such views: 54% would not accept a Muslim as a neighbor, and 47% say the same about Christians.

By contrast, Buddhists are most likely to voice acceptance of other religious groups. Roughly eight-in-ten Buddhists in India say they would be willing to accept a Muslim, Christian, Sikh or Jain as a neighbor, and even more (89%) say they would accept a Hindu.

In a few cases, considerable shares of people decline to answer these questions, possibly because of a lack of familiarity with particular religious groups. For example, 18% of Hindus in Southern India do not answer whether they would be willing to accept a Sikh as a neighbor, perhaps because Sikhs are largely concentrated in the North. Similarly, substantial shares of Muslims in several regions are unsure or don’t clearly say whether they would be willing to live next to a Jain; India’s Jains are most heavily concentrated in the West.

Generally, people who have more education are more likely to say they would accept people of other religions as neighbors. For example, 63% of Hindus with a college degree say they would be willing to accept a Muslim in their neighborhood, compared with 56% of those with less education. Among Hindus, those who live in urban areas of the country also express higher levels of tolerance in this respect.

Hindus who are more religiously observant tend to be somewhat *less* willing to accept a Muslim or a Christian in their neighborhoods. Among those who say religion is very important in their lives, 56% say they would be willing to accept a Muslim as a neighbor, compared with 62% of those who consider religion less important to them.

Politically, Hindus who voted for the BJP in the 2019 elections tend to be less willing to accept some religious minorities in their village or residential area. About half of Hindus who voted for the BJP say they would be willing to accept a Muslim (51%) or a Christian (53%) as neighbors, compared with higher shares of those who voted for other parties (64% and 67%, respectively). But there is little difference by partisanship among Hindus when it comes to whether they would be willing to accept a Sikh, Buddhist or Jain as a neighbor.

College-educated Hindus express greater willingness to accept a person of a different religion as a neighbor

% of Indian Hindus who say they would be willing to accept _____ as a neighbor

	A Muslim	A Christian	A Sikh	A Buddhist	A Jain
Total Hindus	57%	59%	58%	59%	59%
Men	59	62	61	62	61
Women	54	57	56	56	56
Ages 18-34	58	60	60	60	60
35+	57	59	58	58	58
Less than college	56	58	57	58	57
College graduate	63	67	69	71	70
North	56	62	75	69	77
Central	46	45	50	50	47
East	51	55	54	54	53
West	62	66	66	73	75
South	75	77	62	62	60
Northeast	34	31	30	32	27
Urban	64	70	68	69	70
Rural	54	55	54	54	53
Religion very important	56	58	59	59	59
Religion less important	62	67	59	61	59
Voted for the BJP in 2019*	51	53	56	56	57
Did not vote for the BJP*	64	67	62	62	61

* Based only on the large majority of Hindus who say they voted in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Hindus also vary regionally in their attitudes on accepting religious minorities. Hindus in the Central region tend to be less willing to accept a Muslim (46%) or a Christian (45%) as a neighbor. Meanwhile, far larger shares of Hindus in the South say they would be willing to have Muslims (75%) or Christians (77%) living nearby.

In general, Indians in the remote Northeastern region are less likely than people elsewhere to express a willingness to accept members of other faiths. For instance, about one-in-three Hindus in Northeastern India say they would be willing to live near a Muslim (34%) or a Christian (31%), compared with majorities of Hindus nationally who say they would be willing to live near a member of either religious group. Among Muslims and Christians in the region, about

half or fewer express willingness to live near a Hindu, or near each other. For example, roughly one-third (36%) of Muslims in the Northeast say they would accept a Christian neighbor, and 25% of Christians would accept a Muslim neighbor.

Notable shares in the Northeast also report that they “don’t know” or otherwise refused to answer the question, possibly due to unfamiliarity with some groups. For example, roughly one-in-five or more Muslims and Christians opt out of answering the question about Sikhs and Jains – groups that make up only a tiny share of the region’s population. For more on religious divisions in Northeastern India, see [Chapter 1](#).

In Northeast India, skepticism about accepting neighbors of other religions

% of Indian adults in the Northeast region who say they would be willing to accept _____ as a neighbor

	A Hindu	A Muslim	A Christian	A Sikh	A Buddhist	A Jain
All adults in the Northeast	45%	33%	33%	29%	29%	27%
Hindus	--	34	31	30	32	27
Muslims	52	--	36	29	28	27
Christians	26	25	--	22	21	22

Note: Respondents were not asked about having followers of their own religious tradition as neighbors (for example, Christians were not asked about having Christian neighbors).

Inadequate sample size available to report separately on the views of other religious groups in the Northeast.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indians generally marry within same religion

Very few Indians say they are married to someone who currently follows a different religion than their own. Indeed, nearly all married people (99%) report that their spouse shares their religion. This includes nearly universal shares of Hindus (99%), Muslims (98%), Christians (95%), Sikhs and Buddhists (97% each). (The survey did not include enough interviews with married Jains to report on the religion of their spouses.)

The survey also asked respondents whether their spouse was raised in their current religion, or whether their spouse was raised in a different religion and converted. Overall, the vast majority of people say their spouse currently has the same religion in which he or she was raised. Less than 1% of all Indian marriages are with spouses who were raised in a different religion (but may have since converted). (For a more detailed discussion of religious conversion, see “[Religious conversion in India](#)” in the report overview.)

Indians almost never marry across religious lines

% of married Indian adults whose spouse shares their religion

All married adults	99%
Hindus	99
Muslims	98
Christians	95
Sikhs	97
Buddhists	97
Jains	NA

Note: NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Jains strongly support stopping interreligious marriage

Not only are interreligious marriages rare in India, but in recent years, some couples marrying outside their communities have experienced severe consequences, including [being ostracized](#) and even killed by family members.

The survey asked Indians how important it is to stop men and women in their community from marrying into another religion. Overwhelming shares of Indians say it is at least “somewhat” important to stop people from entering into interreligious marriages, and most say it is “very” important to stop such marriages. (For an analysis of attitudes on stopping inter-caste marriage, see [Chapter 4](#).)

The Indian public prioritizes stopping the interreligious marriage of women and men at nearly equal rates. About two-thirds of Indians (65%) say it is very important to stop men from marrying into another religion, while roughly the same share (67%) say stopping interreligious marriage of women is a high priority.¹¹

Most Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Jains say it is very important to stop men and women in their community from marrying outside their religion. But considerably fewer Christians and Buddhists feel this way. Among Christians, 37% say it is very important to stop the interreligious marriage of women, and 35% say the same about

Most Indians say it is very important to stop interreligious marriage

*% of Indian adults who say it is **very** important to stop _____ in their community from marrying into another religion*

	Men	Women
General population	65%	67%
Hindus	65	67
Muslims	76	80
Christians	35	37
Sikhs	58	59
Buddhists	44	46
Jains	59	66
Men	64	67
Women	66	68
Ages 18-34	62	64
35+	68	70
Less than college	67	69
College graduate	51	54
North	71	74
Central	85	86
East	69	72
West	69	70
South	35	37
Northeast	53	56
Urban	55	57
Rural	70	72
Religion very important	70	72
Religion less important	39	41

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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¹¹ The Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi also has asked attitudes about interreligious marriage in its national surveys. In 2004, their survey found that a majority of [Indians support a ban on interreligious marriage](#).

men. Among Buddhists, 46% say stopping the interreligious marriage of women is a high priority, and 44% say this for men.

Highly religious Indians are especially likely to prioritize stopping interreligious marriage. For example, among adults who say religion is very important in their lives, a majority (70%) give high priority to stopping the interreligious marriage of men, compared with 39% of those who say religion is less important to them.

Nearly all religious groups show this gap in opinion. Among Muslims, for example, 82% of those who consider religion to be very important in their lives say stopping women in their community from marrying into other religions is very important, compared with 59% of Muslims for whom religion is less important.

In addition, Indians with lower levels of education are much more likely than college-educated Indians to prioritize stopping interreligious marriage. Among those who do not have a college education, roughly two-thirds (69%) say stopping the interreligious marriage of women is very important, compared with 54% among those with a college degree. This pattern is consistent across most religious groups.

Men and women are generally about equally likely to favor preventing people of both sexes from marrying outside of their religion. For example, 67% of men say it is very important to stop women in their community from marrying outside of their religion, while 68% of women express the same position.

However, attitudes about religious intermarriage vary greatly depending on where people live in the country. Rural Indians are more likely than those who live in urban environments to say it is very important to stop both men and women from marrying outside of their religion.

Education, importance of religion tied to views on interreligious marriage

*% of Indian _____ who say it is **very** important to stop women in their community from marrying into another religion*

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists
Total	67%	80%	37%	59%	46%
Less than college	69	80	39	59	48
College graduate	54	72	20	57	NA
Religion very important	72	82	41	63	49
Religion less important	41	59	23	38	29

Note: NA (not available) indicates sample size is not large enough to be analyzed separately. Jains are not shown because their sample sizes are inadequate for this analysis.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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And Indians who live in the Central region of the country are more inclined than people in other regions to say it is very important to stop people from marrying outside of their religion. Among Hindus in the Central region, for instance, 82% say stopping the interreligious marriage of Hindu women is very important, compared with 67% of Hindus nationally. Among Muslims in the region, nearly all (96%) see it as crucial to stop Muslim women from marrying outside the faith, versus 80% of Muslims nationally.

Southerners are much less likely to prioritize stopping interreligious marriage. Among both Hindus and Muslims, fewer people in the South than in other regions say it is very important to stop the interreligious marriage of men or women in their community.

Among Hindus, those who have a favorable view of the BJP are more likely than those who see the BJP unfavorably to prioritize stopping the interreligious marriage of men or women. A large majority (70%) of those who have a favorable view of the BJP say stopping Hindu men from intermarrying is very important, compared with just over half of those who have an unfavorable view of the ruling party (54%). Hindus show a similar gap in opinion by partisanship when it comes to interreligious marriage of Hindu women.

Among Hindus, those who favor BJP are more likely to see stopping interreligious marriage as a high priority

*% of Indian Hindus who say it is **very** important to stop Hindu _____ from marrying into another religion*

	Men	Women
Total Hindus	65%	67%
Favorable view of BJP	70	72
Unfavorable view of BJP	54	57

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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An index of religious segregation in India

How people form friendship circles, the importance they place on stopping interreligious marriages and their views on who they are willing to accept in their neighborhood can be combined into an index of religious segregation that ranges from 0 to 6.

The higher the score on the scale, the more the respondent prefers religious segregation. For instance, people who say all their friends belong to the same religion, that they consider it very important to stop interreligious marriage, and that they would object to having people of every other religion as a neighbor would score the highest on the scale (6).

Those who have a religiously mixed friend circle, don't think it is important to stop interreligious marriage and don't object to having people of any other religion as neighbors would score at the lowest level (0). In between is a spectrum of preferences about the extent to which people prefer to live religiously segregated lives. (For more details on how the scale is constructed, see [Appendix B](#).)

Few Indians score at the extreme ends of the scale, either scoring 0 (the lowest level of preference for religious segregation) or scoring 6 (the highest level of preference for religious segregation). For example, just 2% of Hindus score 0 and 13% score 6, which is comparable to the shares of Muslims who receive these scores on the index.

But half or more of Hindus (55%), Muslims (51%) and Jains (51%) rank toward the high end of the religious segregation scale, with a score of 4 or higher. Christians, Buddhists and Sikhs, meanwhile, tend to score lower, with majorities among all three groups at 3 or below.

Substantial shares among Hindus, Muslims and Jains score at higher end of religious segregation index

% of Indian adults who score _____ on the religious segregation scale

	0	1-3	4-5	6
Hindus	2%	43%	41%	13%
Muslims	2	46	39	12
Christians	8	67	22	3
Sikhs	3	57	33	7
Buddhists	6	71	21	3
Jains	9	40	34	17

Note: Higher scores on the index indicate a greater preference for living a religiously segregated life. The scale combines with equal weight responses to three sets of questions: whether people would be willing to accept those of other religions in their neighborhood (answering "no" to each group returns a higher score), how important it is to stop the interreligious marriage of men and women (saying "very important" to either increases the score) and the religious composition of people's friend circles (saying "all" their close friends share the same religion increases the score). For more details on how the index is constructed, see Appendix B. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Among Hindus, attitudes toward religious segregation are highly correlated with their views on religious and national identity. As Hindus' score on the religious segregation index rises, so does their likelihood of saying it is very important to be Hindu to be "truly" Indian. And those who prefer to live more segregated lives also are more likely to say that it is very important to be able to speak Hindi to be truly Indian, as well as that a person who eats beef cannot be Hindu.

Hindus who score high on the scale report having voted for the BJP at higher rates in the 2019 election, too.

Geographically, among Hindus, the Central region has the highest concentration of people who score a full 6 on the scale (23%). By comparison, just 4% of Hindus in the South score at the top of the scale.

Among Hindus, attitudes toward religious segregation closely tied to views on national identity, voting

% of Indian Hindus who ...

	Say being Hindu is very important to being Indian	Say speaking Hindi is very important to being Indian	Voted for BJP in 2019*	Say a person who eats beef cannot be Hindu
Total Hindus	64%	59%	49%	72%
6 – Most religiously segregated	83	75	64	87
5	71	68	57	80
4	72	67	53	75
3	60	56	47	70
2	49	43	36	64
1	37	32	29	51
0 – Least religiously segregated	28	26	26	42

* Based only on the large majority of Hindus who say they voted in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Note: Higher scores on the index indicate a greater preference for living a religiously segregated life. The scale combines with equal weight responses to three sets of questions: whether people would be willing to accept those of other religions in their neighborhood (answering "no" to each group returns a higher score), how important it is to stop the interreligious marriage of men and women (saying "very important" to either increases the score) and the religious composition of people's friend circles (saying "all" their close friends share the same religion increases the score).

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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4. Attitudes about caste

The caste system has existed in some form in India for at least 3,000 years. It is a social hierarchy passed down through families, and it can dictate the professions a person can work in as well as aspects of their social lives, including whom they can marry. While the caste system originally was for Hindus, nearly all Indians today identify with a caste, regardless of their religion.

The survey finds that three-in-ten Indians (30%) identify themselves as members of General Category castes, a broad grouping at the top of India's caste system that includes numerous hierarchies and sub-hierarchies. The highest caste within the General Category is Brahmin, historically the priests and other religious leaders who also served as educators. Just 4% of Indians today identify as Brahmin.

Most Indians say they are outside this General Category group, describing themselves as members of Scheduled Castes (often known as Dalits, or historically by the pejorative term “untouchables”), Scheduled Tribes or Other Backward Classes (including a small percentage who say they are part of Most Backward Classes).

Hindus mirror the general public in their caste composition. Meanwhile, an overwhelming majority of Buddhists say they are Dalits, while about three-quarters of Jains identify as members of General Category castes. Muslims and Sikhs – like Jains – are more likely than Hindus to belong to General Category castes. And about a quarter of Christians belong to Scheduled Tribes, a far larger share than among any other religious community.

Caste segregation remains prevalent in India. For example, a substantial share of Brahmins say they would not be willing to accept a person who belongs to a Scheduled Caste as a neighbor. But most Indians do not feel there is a lot of caste discrimination in the country, and two-thirds of those who identify with Scheduled Castes or Tribes say there is *not* widespread discrimination against their respective groups. This feeling may reflect personal experience: 82% of Indians say they have not personally faced discrimination based on their caste in the year prior to taking the survey.

Still, Indians conduct their social lives largely within caste hierarchies. A majority of Indians say that their close friends are mostly members of their own caste, including roughly one-quarter (24%) who say *all* their close friends are from their caste. And most people say it is *very* important to stop both men and women in their community from marrying into other castes, although this view varies widely by region. For example, roughly eight-in-ten Indians in the Central region

(82%) say it is very important to stop inter-caste marriages for men, compared with just 35% in the South who feel strongly about stopping such marriages.

India's religious groups vary in their caste composition

Most Indians (68%) identify themselves as members of lower castes, including 34% who are members of either Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Scheduled Tribes (STs) and 35% who are members of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or Most Backward Classes.¹² Three-in-ten Indians identify themselves as belonging to General Category castes, including 4% who say they are Brahmin, traditionally the priestly caste.¹³

Hindu caste distribution roughly mirrors that of the population overall, but other religions differ considerably. For example, a majority of Jains (76%) are members of General Category castes, while nearly nine-in-ten Buddhists (89%) are Dalits. Muslims disproportionately identify with non-Brahmin General Castes (46%) or Other/Most Backward Classes (43%).

Caste classification is in part based on economic hierarchy, which continues today to some extent. Highly educated Indians are more likely than those with less education to be in the General Category, while those with no education are most likely to identify as OBC.

But financial hardship *isn't* strongly correlated with caste identification. Respondents who say they were unable to afford food, housing or medical care at some point in the last year are only slightly more likely than others to say they are Scheduled Caste/Tribe (37% vs. 31%), and slightly less likely to say they are from General Category castes (27% vs. 33%).

The Central region of India stands out from other regions for having significantly more Indians who are members of Other Backward Classes or Most Backward Classes (51%) and the fewest from the General Category (17%). Within the Central region, a majority of the population in the state of Uttar Pradesh (57%) identifies as belonging to Other or Most Backward Classes.

¹² CORRECTION (August 2021): A previous version of this report contained an incorrect figure. The share of Indians who identify themselves as members of lower castes is 68%, not 69%.

¹³ All survey respondents, regardless of religion, were asked, "Are you from a General Category, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class?" By contrast, in the 2011 census of India, only Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists could be enumerated as members of Scheduled Castes, while Scheduled Tribes could include followers of all religions. General Category and Other Backward Classes were not measured in the census. A detailed analysis of differences between 2011 census data on caste and survey data can be found [here](#).

Most Indians say they are members of a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class; Jains are a notable exception

% of Indian adults who identify as ...

	Brahmin	Other General Category	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Other/Most Backward Class
General population	4%	26%	25%	9%	35%
Hindus	4	24	25	10	36
Muslims	0	46	4	3	43
Christians	0	22	33	24	17
Sikhs	1	45	47	1	4
Buddhists	0	2	89	5	4
Jains	0	76	3	1	16
Men	4	27	25	9	34
Women	4	26	24	9	35
Ages 18-34	4	25	25	10	35
35+	4	28	24	9	35
No formal education	2	19	27	10	39
Primary through secondary	3	29	24	9	33
College graduate	10	34	18	4	32
North	7	28	30	10	24
Central	5	12	26	5	51
East	3	30	22	13	30
West	2	36	23	14	24
South	2	30	25	3	39
Northeast	1	38	13	25	21
Urban	5	32	22	5	33
Rural	3	24	26	11	36
Recent financial hardship	3	24	27	10	35
No financial hardship	4	29	23	8	35

Note: Those who say their religion does not recognize a caste system, say they are not a member of a caste or did not answer are not shown. "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year. All survey respondents, regardless of religion, were asked, "Are you from a General Category, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class?" By contrast, in the 2011 census of India, only Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists could be enumerated as members of Scheduled Castes, while Scheduled Tribes could include followers of all religions. General Category and Other Backward Classes were not measured in the census.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indians in lower castes largely do not perceive widespread discrimination against their groups

When asked if there is or is not “a lot of discrimination” against Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in India, most people say there *isn’t* a lot of caste discrimination. Fewer than one-quarter of Indians say they see evidence of widespread discrimination against Scheduled Castes (20%), Scheduled Tribes (19%) or Other Backward Classes (16%).

Generally, people belonging to lower castes share the perception that there isn’t widespread caste discrimination in India. For instance, just 13% of those who identify with OBCs say there is a lot of discrimination against Backward Classes. Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes are slightly more likely than members of other castes to say there is a lot of caste discrimination against their groups – but, still, only about a quarter take this position.

Majority of Indians do not see widespread discrimination against Scheduled Castes and Tribes

% of Indian adults who say, in India today, there is a lot of discrimination against ...

	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Other Backward Classes
General population	20%	19%	16%
Hindus	21	20	16
Muslims	16	15	15
Christians	31	30	20
Sikhs	21	20	20
Buddhists	17	17	15
Jains	20	20	16
Men	21	20	17
Women	20	19	16
Ages 18-34	21	19	16
35+	20	20	16
Less than college	21	19	16
College graduate	19	19	15
Brahmin	17	17	15
Other General Category	19	19	19
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	26	23	17
Other/Most Backward Class	17	15	13
North	22	21	18
Central	13	12	7
East	21	20	19
West	14	14	15
South	30	28	20
Northeast	34	37	36
Recent financial hardship	25	24	19
No financial hardship	17	16	14
Religion very important	20	18	16
Religion less important	26	25	17

Note: “Recent financial hardship” includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Christians are more likely than other religious groups to say there is a lot of discrimination against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India: About three-in-ten Christians say each group faces widespread discrimination, compared with about one-in-five or fewer among Hindus and other groups.

At least three-in-ten Indians in the Northeast and the South say there is a lot of discrimination against Scheduled Castes, although similar shares in the Northeast decline to answer these questions. Just 13% in the Central region say Scheduled Castes face widespread discrimination, and 7% say the same about OBCs.

Highly religious Indians – that is, those who say religion is very important in their lives – tend to see less evidence of discrimination against Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Meanwhile, those who have experienced recent financial hardship are more inclined to see widespread caste discrimination.

Most Indians do not have recent experience with caste discrimination

Not only do most Indians say that lower castes do not experience a lot of discrimination, but a strong majority (82%) say they have not *personally* felt caste discrimination in the past 12 months. While members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes are slightly more likely than members of other castes to say they have personally faced caste-based discrimination, fewer than one-in-five (17%) say they have experienced this in the last 12 months.

But caste-based discrimination is more commonly reported in some parts of the country. In the Northeast, for example, 38% of respondents who belong to Scheduled Castes say they have experienced discrimination because of their caste in the last 12 months, compared with 14% among members of Scheduled Castes in Eastern India.

Jains, the vast majority of whom are members of General Category castes, are less likely than other religious groups to say they have personally faced caste discrimination (3%). Meanwhile, Indians who indicate they have faced recent financial hardship are more likely than those who have not faced such hardship to report caste discrimination in the last year (20% vs. 10%).

Relatively few Indians, including people in lower castes, say they experience caste discrimination

In the past 12 months, have you personally felt discriminated against because of your caste?

	Yes	No
General population	14%	82%
Hindus	15	82
Muslims	13	83
Christians	11	85
Sikhs	14	81
Buddhists	11	86
Jains	3	92
Men	15	82
Women	14	83
Ages 18-34	14	83
35+	14	82
Less than college	15	82
College graduate	10	87
Brahmin	13	84
Other General Category	12	83
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	17	79
Other/Most Backward Class	13	85
North	20	77
Central	15	83
East	13	81
West	6	92
South	17	80
Northeast	24	70
Recent financial hardship	20	77
No financial hardship	10	87

Note: Those who say their religion does not recognize a caste system, say they are not a member of a caste or did not answer are not shown. "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Indians OK with Scheduled Caste neighbors

The vast majority of Indian adults say they would be willing to accept members of Scheduled Castes as neighbors. (This question was asked only of people who did not identify as members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.)

Among those who received the question, large majorities of Christians (83%) and Sikhs (77%) say they would accept Dalit neighbors. But a substantial portion of Jains, most of whom identify as belonging to General Category castes, feel differently; about four-in-ten Jains (41%) say that they would *not* be willing to accept Dalits as neighbors. (Because more than nine-in-ten Buddhists say they are members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, not enough Buddhists were asked this question to allow for separate analysis of their answers.)

About three-in-ten Brahmins (29%) say they would not be willing to accept members of Scheduled Castes as neighbors.

In most regions, at least two-thirds of people express willingness to accept Scheduled Caste neighbors. The Northeast, however, stands out, with roughly equal shares saying they would (41%) or would not (39%) be willing to accept Dalits as neighbors, although this region also has the highest share of respondents – 20% – who gave an unclear answer or declined to answer the question.

Large shares of Indians who do not belong to Scheduled Castes/Tribes would accept a Dalit neighbor

Would you be willing to accept a Scheduled Caste as a neighbor?

	Yes	No
General population	72%	21%
Hindus	72	21
Muslims	69	20
Christians	83	11
Sikhs	77	19
Buddhists	NA	NA
Jains	55	41
Men	73	20
Women	71	22
Ages 18-34	72	20
35+	72	21
No formal education	68	24
Primary through secondary	74	19
College graduate	77	17
Brahmin	68	29
Other General Category	70	22
Other/Most Backward Class	74	19
North	78	19
Central	68	23
East	74	18
West	75	22
South	74	18
Northeast	41	39
Urban	78	16
Rural	69	23

Note: Members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were not asked this question. Other/Both/Neither/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses not shown. NA indicates adequate sample size is not available for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Indians who live in urban areas (78%) are more likely than rural Indians (69%) to say they would be willing to accept Scheduled Caste neighbors. And Indians with more education also are more likely to accept Dalit neighbors. Fully 77% of those with a college degree say they would be fine with neighbors from Scheduled Castes, while 68% of Indians with no formal education say the same.

Politically, those who have a favorable opinion of the BJP are somewhat less likely than those who have an unfavorable opinion of India's ruling party to say they would accept Dalits as neighbors, although there is widespread acceptance across both groups (71% vs. 77%).

Indians generally do not have many close friends in different castes

Indians may be comfortable living in the same neighborhoods as people of different castes, but they tend to make close friends within their own caste. About one-quarter (24%) of Indians say *all* their close friends belong to their caste, and 46% say *most* of their friends are from their caste.

About three-quarters of Muslims and Sikhs say that all or most of their friends share their caste (76% and 74%, respectively). Christians and Buddhists – who disproportionately belong to lower castes – tend to have somewhat more mixed friend circles. Nearly four-in-ten Buddhists (39%) and a third of Christians (34%) say “some,” “hardly any” or “none” of their close friends share their caste background.

Members of OBCs are also somewhat more likely than other castes to have a mixed friend circle. About one-third of OBCs (32%) say no more than “some” of their friends are members of their caste, compared with roughly one-quarter of all other castes who say this.

Women, Indian adults without a college education and those who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely to say that *all* their close friends are of the same caste as them. And, regionally, 45% of Indians in the Northeast say all their friends are part of their caste, while in the South, fewer than one-in-five (17%) say the same.

Seven-in-ten Indians say all or most of their close friends share their caste

% Indian adults who say _____ of their close friends are members of the same caste

	All 24%	Most 46%	Some/hardly any/none 28%
General population			
Hindus	24	45	29
Muslims	29	47	22
Christians	18	46	34
Sikhs	18	56	23
Buddhists	17	44	39
Jains	22	45	31
Men	22	47	29
Women	26	44	28
Ages 18-34	24	46	29
35+	25	45	28
Less than college	25	46	28
College graduate	17	45	36
Brahmin	23	49	27
Other General Category	28	45	26
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	25	47	27
Other/Most Backward Class	21	45	32
North	22	50	25
Central	24	53	23
East	31	41	25
West	24	46	30
South	17	40	41
Northeast	45	41	12
Religion very important	25	46	28
Religion less important	19	46	32

Note: Those who say they are not a member of a caste or did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Large shares of Indians say men, women should be stopped from marrying outside of their caste

As another measure of caste segregation, the survey asked respondents whether it is very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important to stop men and women in their community from marrying into another caste. Generally, Indians feel it is equally important to stop *both* men and women from marrying outside of their caste. Strong majorities of Indians say it is at least “somewhat” important to stop men (79%) and women (80%) from marrying into another caste, including at least six-in-ten who say it is “very” important to stop this from happening regardless of gender (62% for men and 64% for women).

Majorities of all the major caste groups say it is very important to prevent inter-caste marriages. Differences by religion are starker. While majorities of Hindus (64%) and Muslims (74%) say it is very important to prevent women from marrying across caste lines, fewer than half of Christians and Buddhists take that position.

Among Indians overall, those who say religion is very important in their lives are significantly more likely to feel it is necessary to stop members of their community from marrying into different castes. Two-thirds of Indian adults who say religion is very important to them (68%) also say it is very important to stop women from marrying into another caste; by contrast, among those who say religion is less important in their lives, 39% express the same view.

Regionally, in the Central part of the country, at least eight-in-ten adults say it is very important to stop both men and women from marrying members of different castes. By contrast, fewer people in the South (just over one-third) say stopping inter-caste marriage is a high priority. And those who live in rural areas of India are significantly more likely than urban dwellers to say it is very important to stop these marriages.

Most Indians say it is crucial to stop inter-caste marriages

*% of Indian adults who say it is **very** important to stop _____ from marrying into another caste*

	Men	Women
General population	62%	64%
Hindus	63	64
Muslims	70	74
Christians	36	37
Sikhs	59	58
Buddhists	44	44
Jains	57	61
Men	62	63
Women	63	65
Ages 18-25	58	59
26-34	60	62
35+	65	67
Less than college	64	65
College graduate	48	50
Brahmin	64	66
Other General Category	59	60
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	61	62
Other/Most Backward Class	67	69
North	71	72
Central	82	83
East	62	64
West	66	67
South	35	37
Northeast	49	51
Urban	52	53
Rural	67	69

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Older Indians and those without a college degree are more likely to oppose inter-caste marriage. And respondents with a favorable view of the BJP also are much more likely than others to oppose such marriages. For example, among Hindus, 69% of those who have a favorable view of BJP say it is very important to stop women in their community from marrying across caste lines, compared with 54% among those who have an unfavorable view of the party.

5. Religious identity

The vast majority of Indians identify with six major religious groups: Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. In this report, respondents are often categorized accordingly, based on their answers to a question about their *religious* identity. But the survey also finds that for most members of these six groups, these identities are not only about religion.

Indeed, Indians are split over whether being a member of their religious group (e.g., being Sikh or being Muslim) is mainly a matter of religion, mainly a matter of culture or ancestry, or some combination of religion and culture/ancestry. There is no clear consensus on this in any of the six religious groups. Among Hindus in India, for example, there is no single understanding of what it means to be a Hindu.

On the other hand, there is substantial agreement on some beliefs, practices and attributes that are very important to Indians' religious identities. For instance, overwhelming shares across groups see both secular behaviors – such as respecting elders, helping the poor and needy, and respecting India – and more overtly religious attributes, such as believing in God and praying, as crucial to what being a member of their group means to them. Indian Buddhists are the lone exception on some of these measures, with far fewer saying belief in God and prayer are central to being Buddhist.

The survey also approached the concept of religious identity and belonging from the other direction: In addition to what is very important to being Christian or Jain, for example, what is *disqualifying* for members of each group? A strong majority of followers say that people who do not abide by dietary restrictions prohibiting the consumption of beef (for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains) or pork (for Muslims) cannot be members of their community. But when it comes to whether a person can claim their religious identity even if they do not engage in the traditional religious practices of communal worship or prayer, there is less agreement.

The remainder of this chapter looks at these questions in greater detail. It also examines Indians' identification with subgroups or sects within each of the six major religions, as well as with Sufism.

Most Indians say being a member of their religious group is not only about religion

Nearly all Indian adults identify with a religious group, but for most of them – regardless of which group they are a part of – this identity is not just about religion.

Respondents were asked whether being a member of their religious group (e.g., being Hindu, Christian or Sikh) is mainly a matter of religion, ancestry or culture – or some combination of the three.

Overall, only around a quarter of Indian Hindus (26%) say being Hindu is *only* a matter of religion. A somewhat greater share (34%) believe it is solely a matter of ancestry and/or culture, and a similar portion (36%) believe Hinduism is a matter of religion *and* ancestry/culture.

Most Indians see their religious identity not only as a matter of religion, but also ancestry, culture

% of Indian adults who say being a member of their religion is mainly a matter of ...

	Only religion	Only ancestry/culture	Religion and ancestry/culture
Hindus	26%	34%	36%
Muslims	38	22	38
Christians	29	34	27
Sikhs	31	25	42
Buddhists	27	36	32
Jains	26	26	43

Note: Other/None of these/Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Respondents were asked if being [Hindu/Muslim/etc.] is mainly a matter of religion, ancestry or culture to them. They could choose one, two or all three options. "Only ancestry/culture" includes Indians who selected ancestry and/or culture. "Religion and ancestry/culture" includes Indians who selected both religion and at least one other option.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Muslims in India are more likely than Hindus to say their identity is only a matter of religion (38%) and less likely to view being Muslim exclusively as a matter of ancestry and/or culture (22%). Like Hindus, however, many say being Muslim is a combination of these things (38%).

Overall, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains are split on this question, with no more than about three-in-ten in any of these groups linking their identity solely with religion. For instance, among Jains, 26% say being Jain is only about religion; an identical share say it is only about ancestry and/or culture, and a plurality (43%) say it is some mixture of religion and ancestry/culture.

Among Indian Hindus, there are regional differences in views toward Hindu identity. Hindus in the South (12%) are less likely than others to say being Hindu is exclusively a matter of religion, while those in Eastern (38%) and Central (32%) India are most likely to link Hinduism solely with religion.

Still, across all regions, most Hindus say that to them, being Hindu is wrapped up with ancestry and/or culture in addition to (or instead of) religion. And in the South, roughly half (53%) say being Hindu is *only* a matter of ancestry and/or culture – and not mainly a matter of religion.

Overall, Hindus with higher religious commitment are slightly more likely to connect their religious identity exclusively with religion. Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than others to say that being Hindu is a matter only of religion (27% vs. 20%).

Hindus' views on religious identity vary by region

% of Indian Hindus who say being Hindu is mainly a matter of ...

	Only religion	Only ancestry/culture	Religion and ancestry/culture
Total Hindus	26%	34%	36%
Men	26	33	38
Women	25	35	35
Ages 18-34	26	34	37
35+	26	34	36
Less than college	26	34	36
College graduate	21	33	43
General Category	23	36	38
Lower castes	27	33	36
North	24	27	48
Central	32	27	38
East	38	27	29
West	18	33	45
South	12	53	31
Northeast	22	45	25
Religion very important	27	33	37
Religion less important	20	42	32

Note: Other/None of these/Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Respondents were asked if being Hindu is mainly a matter of religion, ancestry or culture to them. They could choose one, two or all three options. "Only ancestry/culture" includes Indians who selected ancestry and/or culture. "Religion and ancestry/culture" includes Indians who selected both religion and at least one other option. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Indian Muslims also express differing views on what it means to be Muslim depending on where they live. A majority of Muslims in the Central region (63%) say that to them, being Muslim is a matter only of religion, while significantly smaller shares of Muslims express this view in the rest of the country. In Southern India, for example, just 18% say being Muslim is a matter of religion alone, while the vast majority say their Muslim identity is tied up with ancestry and/or culture.

Muslims in lower castes are more likely to associate Muslim identity only with religion.

Most Indian Muslims associate being Muslim with religion, but many also see links with ancestry, culture

% of Indian Muslims who say being a Muslim is mainly a matter of ...

	Only religion	Only ancestry/culture	Religion and ancestry/culture
Total Muslims	38%	22%	38%
Men	39	20	39
Women	37	24	37
Ages 18-34	39	21	37
35+	37	22	38
Less than college	39	22	38
College graduate	36	21	42
General Category	31	25	43
Lower castes	46	18	34
North	40	22	36
Central	63	8	28
East	38	18	43
West	23	23	53
South	18	41	36
Northeast	29	38	28
Religion very important	39	21	38
Religion less important	32	28	36

Note: Other/None of these/Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Respondents were asked if being Muslim is mainly a matter of religion, ancestry or culture to them. They could choose one, two or all three options. "Only ancestry/culture" includes Indians who selected ancestry and/or culture. "Religion and ancestry/culture" includes Indians who selected both religion and at least one other option.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Common ground across major religious groups on what is essential to religious identity

The survey asked Indian adults how important each of seven attributes or behaviors is to their religious identity. Overall, Indians across all major religions generally say these seven traits are very important to what it means to them to be Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist or Jain.

For example, roughly eight-in-ten or more in all six groups say respecting elders, respecting India, helping the poor and needy, and being born into a family of their religion (e.g., being born into a Muslim family or being born into a Christian family) are all *very* important to their religious identity. And about seven-in-ten or more say respecting other religions is crucial to being a member of their own religious group, whether they are Hindu (80%), Muslim (79%) or something else.

Indeed, India's two largest religious groups look very similar on most of these questions: Hindus and Muslims agree that believing in God (88% and 90%, respectively), helping the poor and needy (85% and 83%) and respecting India (93% and 91%) are *very* important to their religious identity. The largest difference emerges in the groups' views on praying or offering namaz; Muslims are more likely than Hindus to say prayer is very important to being a member of their group (96% vs. 82%), although overwhelming shares of both religious groups view prayer as important.

Respecting India, respecting elders are shared values across all of India's major religious groups

*% of Indian adults who say _____ is **very** important to what being a member of their religious group (e.g., being Hindu) means to them*

	Respecting India	Respecting elders	Believing in God	Being born into a family of their religion	Helping the poor and needy	Praying/offering namaz	Respecting other religions
Hindus	93%	90%	88%	87%	85%	82%	80%
Muslims	91	91	90	91	83	96	79
Christians	89	82	90	79	81	87	78
Sikhs	87	87	85	87	86	86	75
Buddhists	96	96	51	89	85	57	86
Jains	89	90	85	88	83	84	73

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Buddhists in India stand out as much less likely to tie prayer – and also belief in God – to their Buddhist identity, reflecting the relatively low importance of these beliefs and practices in the Buddhist religion. While about eight-in-ten or more in each of India's other major religious groups

say believing in God and praying are very important to what it means to be a member of their religious group, far fewer Buddhists (51%) say believing in God is crucial to what being Buddhist means to them, and 57% say the same about praying.

These large differences between Buddhists and members of other religions do not exist across other behaviors or traits. If anything, Buddhists are slightly more likely than other groups to say that respecting elders, respecting India and respecting other religions are very important to being Buddhist.

Among Hindus and Muslims, there are large differences on some of these questions based on differing levels of religious commitment. Generally, Hindu and Muslim adults who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than other adults to say these seven traits are very important to their religious identity. For example, strongly committed Muslims are more likely than other Muslims to say believing in God is very important to being Muslim (91% vs. 78%). And while 92% of highly religious Hindus say being born into a Hindu family is crucial to what being Hindu means to them, fewer Hindus who are less religious (59%) feel the same way.

Hindu and Muslim opinion on identity varies by religious commitment

*% of Indian Hindus/Muslims who say _____ is **very** important to what being Hindu/Muslim means to them*

	Believing in God	Praying/ offering namaz	Helping the poor and needy	Respecting other religions	Being born into a family of their religion
Hindus	88%	82%	85%	80%	87%
Muslims	90	96	83	79	91
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>					
Religion very important	92	86	87	83	92
Religion less important	68	58	71	68	59
<i>Among Muslims ...</i>					
Religion very important	91	97	84	79	93
Religion less important	78	84	74	70	72

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Hindu and Muslim attitudes on these questions generally do not differ very much by demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education or caste.

India's religious groups vary on what disqualifies someone from their religion

In addition to asking what is important to their religious identity, the survey also asked Indians what would *disqualify* someone from being a member of their religious community.

There is a range of opinions across India's religious groups over whether someone can be a member of their religion if they do not partake in certain religious beliefs and practices. For example, about two-thirds of Jains (68%), Muslims (67%) and Sikhs (64%) say a person who never prays cannot be a member of their religious community. Meanwhile, a slim majority of Christians (55%), about half of Hindus (48%) and roughly a quarter of Buddhists (27%) say never praying would disqualify a person from their religion. Patterns are broadly similar when it comes to whether a person who does not believe in God, never goes to their house of worship or does not celebrate their religion's festivals can be a member of each community.

Indian religious groups disagree on whether religious beliefs, practices are required for those in their faith

*% of Indian adults who say a person **cannot** be a member of their religion (e.g., % of Hindus who say a person cannot be Hindu) if they ...*

	Do not celebrate their religion's festivals	Do not believe in God	Never go to temple/mosque/ church/gurdwara	Never perform prayers/offer namaz
Hindus	56%	49%	48%	48%
Muslims	64	60	61	67
Christians	45	59	55	55
Sikhs	69	64	59	64
Buddhists	45	23	21	27
Jains	76	67	63	68

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Within several religious groups, followers are more united in disapproval of behaviors that violate their religions' dietary laws or traditions. Most Hindus (72%), Sikhs (82%) and Jains (85%) say a person who eats beef cannot be a member of their group, while a similarly large majority of Muslims (77%) say a person cannot be Muslim if they eat pork.

Many Indians also say that celebrating holidays associated with other religions is disqualifying. For example, 63% of Hindus and Jains say a person cannot be a member of their group if that person celebrates the Islamic festival of Eid, and 70% of Sikhs view Eid celebrations as incompatible with Sikhism. About six-in-ten Muslims say a person cannot be Muslim if they celebrate Christmas (59%) or Diwali (58%). On the other hand, relatively few Sikhs (21%) and Buddhists (17%) view Diwali celebrations as disqualifying someone from their group.

Across many of these items, Buddhists again prove an exception. They are generally the most willing to accept someone as a fellow Buddhist under a variety of circumstances. For instance, a majority of Buddhists say a person *can* be Buddhist if they do not believe in God, do not pray and do not go to a temple, and that it's also acceptable to celebrate the festivals of other religions.

“Disrespecting India” is the only attribute mentioned in the survey that a majority of Buddhists (62%) see as incompatible with Buddhism. Roughly seven-in-ten Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and eight-in-ten Jains also say that someone who disrespects India cannot be a member of their faiths.

While large majorities of all six major religious groups in India view respecting elders as very important to their religious identity (see “[Common ground across major religious groups on what is essential to religious identity](#)” above), smaller shares say a person who disrespects elders should be excluded from their group.

Many Indians view dietary restrictions as crucial to religious group membership

*% of Indian adults who say a person **cannot** be a member of their religion (e.g., % of Hindus who say a person cannot be Hindu) if they ...*

	Eat beef/pork*	Disrespect India	Celebrate Eid	Celebrate Diwali	Celebrate Christmas	Disrespect elders
Hindus	72%	70%	63%	–	52%	45%
Muslims	77	70	–	58%	59	46
Christians	–	54	47	38	–	43
Sikhs	82	70	70	21	58	58
Buddhists	48	62	28	17	26	35
Jains	85	80	63	31	60	56

* Muslims were asked if a person can be Muslim if they eat pork. Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were asked a similar question about eating beef. Christians were not asked either of these dietary questions.

Note: People were not asked about celebrations associated with their own religion (e.g., Christians were not asked whether a person can be Christian if they celebrate Christmas).

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019–March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Hindus say eating beef, disrespecting India, celebrating Eid incompatible with being Hindu

While Hindus are roughly split over whether a person can be Hindu if they do not believe in God, never go to temple or never pray, there is more consensus that eating beef, disrespecting India or celebrating Eid disqualify someone from being Hindu.

There are wide regional differences among Hindus when it comes to views toward certain behaviors and their links with Hindu identity. For instance, Hindus in the West and South are less likely than those elsewhere to view eating beef or celebrating Eid as incompatible with being Hindu.

Differences also arise around religious commitment. Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than other Hindus to say several of these behaviors are disqualifying.

Most Hindus say eating beef is disqualifying from being Hindu, but fewer say Hindus must believe in God, go to temple

% of Indian Hindus who say a person **cannot** be Hindu if they ...

	Eat beef	Disrespect India	Celebrate Eid	Do not believe in God	Never go to temple
Total Hindus	72%	70%	63%	49%	48%
Men	72	71	62	49	48
Women	72	70	63	49	48
Ages 18-34	73	71	63	49	47
35+	71	70	62	50	48
Less than college	72	70	63	50	48
College graduate	72	72	60	45	42
General Category	70	69	56	47	45
Lower castes	73	71	65	50	49
Would be willing to accept people from ALL other religions as neighbors*	67	71	56	46	45
Would NOT be willing to accept people from AT LEAST ONE other religion as neighbors*	79	74	71	54	52
North	83	79	71	52	53
Central	83	75	75	55	51
East	79	72	73	49	48
West	68	77	45	54	53
South	50	57	46	39	38
Northeast	74	62	69	42	38
Religion very important	74	73	64	51	50
Religion less important	61	60	56	40	38

* Respondents were asked, "Would you be willing to accept a [Muslim/Christian/Sikh/Buddhist/Jain] as a neighbor?"

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Further, Hindus who are willing to accept followers of all other religions in their neighborhoods are less likely than others to say some of these behaviors disqualify a person from being a Hindu.

For instance, among Hindus who are willing to accept neighbors of all other major religions, 67% say a person cannot be Hindu if they eat beef, compared with 79% who say this among Hindus who are unwilling to accept a neighbor from at least one other religious group.

Muslims place stronger emphasis than Hindus on religious practices for identity

Muslims are generally more adamant than Hindus about the importance of religious belief and practice to Muslim identity. Most Muslims say a person cannot be Muslim if they do not believe in God (60%), never offer namaz (67%) or never go to mosque (61%). Yet they agree with Hindus on the importance of observing dietary restrictions and celebrating festivals to religious identity: Fully three-quarters of Muslims (77%) say someone who eats pork cannot be considered a Muslim, while about six-in-ten feel the same way about those who celebrate Diwali or Christmas.

Muslims who say religion is very important in their lives and those who say it is less important are equally likely to say eating pork is disqualifying in their religion (77% each). On the other hand, highly committed

Muslims are more likely than others to say that someone who never goes to mosque cannot be Muslim (62% vs. 51%). There also are some variations on these questions by region: For instance,

Large majority of Indian Muslims say a person cannot be Muslim if they eat pork, disrespect India

*% of Indian Muslims who say a person **cannot** be Muslim if they ...*

	Eat pork	Disrespect India	Never go to mosque	Do not believe in God	Celebrate Diwali
Total Muslims	77%	70%	61%	60%	58%
Men	76	70	61	59	58
Women	77	70	61	61	57
Ages 18-34	76	71	58	58	57
35+	77	70	64	62	59
Less than college	77	70	61	60	58
College graduate	83	66	64	67	49
General Category	74	66	57	55	54
Lower castes	80	75	65	65	62
Would be willing to accept people from ALL other religions as neighbors*	74	72	61	61	53
Would NOT be willing to accept people from AT LEAST ONE other religion as neighbors*	82	73	61	63	62
North	72	71	66	63	57
Central	92	82	70	74	71
East	76	65	57	52	63
West	71	77	76	68	41
South	63	60	43	48	45
Northeast	74	61	51	56	53
Religion very important	77	70	62	60	58
Religion less important	77	73	51	57	58

* Respondents were asked, "Would you be willing to accept a [Hindu/Christian/Sikh/Buddhist/Jain] as a neighbor?"

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Muslims in Central India are especially inclined to say a person who eats pork cannot be Muslim (92%).

Many Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists do not identify with a sect

The survey also asked respondents if they identify with a particular sect or denomination within their religion. For example, Hindus were asked if they identify as Vaishnavite, Shaivite, Shakta, some other sect or no sect in particular. The vast majority of Hindus say they either don't know their sect (51%) or that they don't identify with any sect (20%). The survey finds low levels of sect identity both among Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives and among those who consider religion less important, indicating the generally low salience of these sects to Hindus' religious lives today.

Sect identity is more common among other religious groups in India. For example, the predominant sect among Indian Muslims is Sunni Islam (55%), while 6% of Indian Muslims identify as Shia. Still, roughly a third of Indian Muslims say either that they have no sect (14%) or they don't know their Muslim sect (22%). Indeed, [previous Pew Research Center surveys](#) have found that substantial shares of Muslims in many countries do not provide a specific sect identity.

Many Buddhists in India also do not identify with a Buddhist order, saying instead they don't know their order (35%) or have "no order in particular" (13%). Most of the remainder identify with the Navayana Buddhist order: Roughly half of Indian Buddhists (48%) are Navayana, or "new vehicle," Buddhists. Navayana is a Buddhist order native to India and inspired by the writings of one of India's founding fathers, B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar was born a Hindu Dalit (the lowest rung of the socioeconomic hierarchy) and later converted to Buddhism. Today, nearly all of India's Buddhists belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or other lower classes (see [Chapter 4](#)).

Most Sikhs, Christians and Jains in India identify with particular sects, denominations or traditions. Among Christians, Catholicism is the predominant denomination (37%), but many

Religious sects in India

% of Indian adults who identify as ...

<i>Among Hindus ...</i>	
Shaivite	11%
Vaishnavite	9
Shakta	3
Other sects	6
Don't know/No sect	71

<i>Among Muslims ...</i>	
Sunni	55
Shia	6
Other sects	3
Don't know/No sect	36

<i>Among Christians ...</i>	
Catholic	37
Baptist	13
Other denominations	36
Don't know/No denomination	14

<i>Among Sikhs ...</i>	
Sahajdhari	45
Keshdhari	22
Amritdhari	13
Namdhari	7
Other sects	3
Don't know/No sect	10

<i>Among Buddhists ...</i>	
Navayana	48
Other orders	4
Don't know/No order	48

<i>Among Jains ...</i>	
Shwetambara	50
Digambara	31
Other traditions	1
Don't know/No tradition	18

Note: "Don't know" includes respondents who refused to answer the question.
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Protestant denominations, including Baptists (13%), have a presence in India as well.

Sufism has at least some followers in every major Indian religious group

Nationally, relatively few Indians (6%) identify as Sufi, a [mystical branch of Islam](#). But the survey makes clear that for many people, Sufi identity exists alongside another religious identity, and Sufi orders have at least some presence among members of every major religious group in India. For instance, 5% of Hindus, 11% of Muslims and 9% of Sikhs surveyed identify with Sufism, which came to India many centuries ago and subsequently incorporated elements of Hinduism.¹⁴

Sufis emphasize a connection with God through saints, often referred to as pirs. Sufi orders tend to follow a specific Sufi pir – for example, the Chistiyya Sufi order follows the ascetic, poet and philosopher Moinuddin Chishti, while the Qadriyya order is based on the writings and poetry of Abdul Qadir Gilani. Today, Indians of different religious backgrounds visit the tombs of Sufi pirs to offer their respects, and [Sufi poetry and music](#) play a role not only in religious life but [also in Indian popular culture](#).

Overall, Sufism is more popular in Northern India, where the movement has deep historical roots, than in other parts of the country. Among Muslims in the North (Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab and Rajasthan), 37% identify as Sufi, including 7% who identify with the Chistiyya order and 12% who identify with the Qadriyya order. Among Hindus in the North, 12% identify as Sufi (including 6% with the Chistiyya order), as do 10% of Sikhs in the region.

Sufism more popular among Muslims in North

% of Indian adults who identify with Sufism

General population	6%
Hindus	5
Muslims	11
Christians	7
Sikhs	9
Buddhists	2
Jains	12

In Northern India ...

Muslims	37
Hindus	12
Sikhs	10

Note: Adequate sample size is not available to analyze Christians, Buddhists and Jains in the North.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

See Methodology for details.

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¹⁴ The historical connections [between Hinduism and Sufism](#) are complex. The influence they have had on each other is said to go in both directions – just as some scholars show that Sufism incorporated elements of Hinduism, scholars also describe how Hinduism incorporated elements of Sufism.

6. Nationalism and politics

Indians nearly universally take great pride in their country. Fully 96% of Indian adults say they are *very* proud to be Indian, and similarly large percentages say they are very proud to be from their state and to be a member of their religious community.

While nearly everyone is proud to be Indian, there is somewhat less consensus on whether Indian culture stands out above all others. A majority of Indians (72%) completely agree with the statement that “Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others.” But while an especially large share of Indians in the Central region (81%) completely agree that Indian culture is superior, only a slim majority say this in the Northeast (59%).

There also are a range of views on what it means to be “truly Indian.” For instance, Indians widely agree that respecting India’s institutions and laws and respecting elders are very important to being truly Indian. But there is less unanimity about whether language and religion are tied up with Indian identity. In a country with 22 official languages and dozens of others, a slim majority (56%) say being able to speak Hindi is *very* important to being truly Indian. And a similar share of Indian adults (57%), including 64% of Hindus, say being Hindu is very important to being truly Indian.

India’s religious groups and supporters of the country’s different political parties disagree on questions of national identity. While 64% of Hindus say being a Hindu is very important to being truly Indian, far fewer Muslims (27%) stress Hinduism’s importance to being Indian. Politically, Indians with a favorable view of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are also much more likely than other Indians to say being Hindu is very important to Indian identity (65% vs. 45%). (See “[An index of religious segregation in India](#)” in Chapter 3 for additional analysis of the connection between national identity, voting patterns and religious segregation.)

Some attitudes about national identity are closely tied to religious observance. Nearly three-quarters of Indians who say religion is very important in their lives (74%), for example, say that having Indian ancestry is very important to being truly Indian, while only half of those who say religion is less important consider ancestry a central part of national identity.

Although India’s Constitution declares the country a democratic republic – and India is often called the world’s largest democracy – Indians express mixed attitudes when asked whether “a democratic government” or “a leader with a strong hand” would be better suited to solve the country’s problems. Slightly fewer than half of Indians surveyed (46%) indicate a preference for democracy, while a nearly identical share (48%) would prefer a leader with a strong hand. Support

for democracy versus a strong leader varies considerably by region. People in the Central part of the country are the least likely to lean toward democracy (33%), while support for a democratic form of government (instead of a leader with a strong hand) is considerably higher in the Northeast (61%), South (53%) and North (51%).

The survey also asked about two policy issues concerning Muslims in India: triple talaq and allowing Muslims to use their own religious courts. Muslims tend to support having their own religious courts (74% in favor), but most *oppose* Muslim men being allowed to divorce by saying “talaq” three times (56%).

Across India, high levels of pride in country, state and religion

Across the nation, nearly all Indian adults say that they are *very* proud not only to be Indian, but also to be residents of their respective states. This pattern is consistent across different religions, regions and age groups.

Survey respondents also were asked how proud they are to be a member of their particular religion (e.g., Sikhs were asked how proud they are to be Sikh). Again, roughly nine-in-ten or more among all major religions say they are very proud to be a member of their religious group.

Indians who say religion is very important in their lives are slightly more likely than others to be very proud of their national, state and religious identities, although these views are widespread regardless of how religious people are.

People in the South of the country are somewhat less likely than those in other regions to say they are very proud of their religious identity. For example, among Hindus in the South, 89% say they are very proud to be Hindu, compared with 98% in the Central region. Among Muslims in the South as well, fewer people than elsewhere say they are very proud to be Muslim (88% vs. 96% nationally).

Indians very proud of their country

% of Indian adults who say they are *very* proud to be ...

	Indian	A resident of their state	A member of their religion
General population	96%	95%	94%
Hindus	97	95	94
Muslims	95	95	96
Christians	90	92	91
Sikhs	95	94	95
Buddhists	97	97	97
Jains	98	97	95
Men	97	95	94
Women	96	94	95
Ages 18-34	97	95	94
35+	96	95	95
Less than college	96	95	94
College graduate	97	97	95
North	97	95	96
Central	98	98	98
East	94	92	94
West	98	96	97
South	95	93	88
Northeast	94	95	95
Religion very important	97	96	97
Religion less important	91	88	81

Note: Respondents were asked, "How proud are you to be a [Punjab/Himachal Pradesh/etc.] resident?" and separately, "How proud are you to be [Hindu/Muslim/etc.]?" Those who identified as "no religion" were asked, "How proud are you to be a person with no religion?"

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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To some extent, Indians' pride in their religious identities is tied to their views on keeping their own religious community separate from others. Those who say it is important to stop interreligious marriages of men and women are somewhat more likely to say that they are very

proud of their religious identity.¹⁵ Among Hindus, for example, 97% of those who say it is very important to stop the interreligious marriage of Hindu women also say they are very proud to be Hindu, compared with 90% among those who don't see stopping interreligious marriage as a top priority. Muslims show a similar pattern: Those who want to stop Muslims from marrying outside of Islam are more likely to say that they are very proud to be Muslim, although large majorities are very proud to be Muslim regardless of their stance on religious intermarriage.

¹⁵ The survey asked two separate questions: "How important is it to stop women in your community from marrying into another religion?" and "How important is it to stop men in your community from marrying into another religion?" (See [Chapter 3](#).) These variables were combined for analysis. A similar set of questions was asked about caste (see [Chapter 4](#)).

Large majorities say Indian culture is superior to others

For another perspective on national pride, the survey also asked respondents if they completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the statement “Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others.”

An overwhelming majority of Indians agree with the statement (90%), including 72% who *completely* agree. Three-quarters of Hindus and roughly the same share of Buddhists (73%) completely agree that Indian culture is superior to others. Among other religious minority groups, somewhat fewer people share this sentiment – about half of Christians (52%) completely agree Indian culture is superior, as do 63% of Muslims and 57% of Sikhs.

Those who say religion is very important in their lives are particularly likely to say Indian culture is superior.

Among Hindus, for example, a large majority of those who say religion is very important also completely agree that Indian culture is superior (79%), compared with just over half (54%) of those who consider religion less important in their lives. A similar pattern is seen among Muslims (64% vs. 48%).

Majorities across different religious and regional backgrounds view Indian culture as superior

% of Indian adults who agree/disagree with the statement “Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others”

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Mostly or completely disagree
General population	72%	18%	5%
Hindus	75	16	4
Muslims	63	22	7
Christians	52	26	11
Sikhs	57	24	9
Buddhists	73	21	5
Jains	64	29	4
Men	74	18	4
Women	71	17	5
Ages 18-34	73	18	5
35+	72	17	5
No formal education	69	18	5
Primary through secondary	74	17	5
College graduate	79	16	4
North	73	19	4
Central	81	12	2
East	67	18	5
West	78	17	3
South	65	22	8
Northeast	59	28	5
Religion very important	76	15	4
Religion less important	53	31	8
Favorable view of BJP	77	16	4
Unfavorable view of BJP	68	20	7

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Regionally, in the Central part of the country, 81% completely agree that Indian culture is superior, while about six-in-ten in the Northeast (59%) share the sentiment.

As education level increases, so does agreement with the statement. Among college graduates, for example, 79% completely agree that Indian culture is superior to others, compared with 69% of those without a formal education.

Politically, Indians who express a favorable view of the BJP also are more likely than those with an unfavorable view of India's ruling party to completely agree that Indian culture is superior (77% vs. 68%).

What constitutes ‘true’ Indian identity?

The survey also asked respondents how important a series of items are to being “truly Indian.” This series included both civic measures (respecting the country’s institutions and laws, knowing the history of India’s freedom struggle, supporting the national cricket team, respecting all religions, respecting elders, respecting the army and standing for the national anthem) and more nativist measures (Indian ancestry, speaking Hindi and being a Hindu).¹⁶

On the whole, Indians emphasize civic aspects of national identity over nativist ones. For example, while nearly nine-in-ten Indians (88%) say respecting elders is very important to being truly Indian – with little variation by religion, region, caste or age – only a slim majority (56%) say being able to speak Hindi is crucial.

Civic elements seen as key to Indian identity

% of Indian adults who say that it is *very* important to _____ in order to be truly Indian

	Stand for the national anthem	Respect elders	Respect the army	Respect all religions	Respect the country's institutions and laws
General population	88%	88%	85%	84%	82%
Hindus	90	89	86	85	83
Muslims	79	81	77	78	76
Christians	78	75	72	78	73
Sikhs	85	88	86	81	81
Buddhists	88	88	80	84	88
Jains	91	85	87	83	81
Men	89	88	86	85	83
Women	87	88	83	83	81
Ages 18-34	89	88	86	84	82
35+	87	88	84	84	82
Less than college	88	88	84	84	82
College graduate	91	89	87	86	86
General Category	87	86	83	84	82
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	89	88	85	83	82
Other/Most Backward Class	89	89	86	85	82
North	89	89	87	85	84
Central	91	94	91	87	83
East	83	82	79	77	76
West	92	92	88	88	89
South	89	86	80	86	83
Northeast	78	70	70	76	70
Religion very important	90	90	87	86	85
Religion less important	79	74	70	73	70
Favorable view of BJP	91	90	87	87	84
Unfavorable view of BJP	85	86	80	83	81

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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¹⁶ The distinction between civic measures and nativist measures of national identity is broadly based on factor analysis. Saying that being Hindu and that speaking Hindi are very important to true Indian identity are highly correlated with each other. Having Indian ancestry also is correlated with these variables, although not as closely. These concepts are defined as “nativist” based on research by [Brubaker \(1992\)](#), [Greenfield \(1992\)](#) and others.

At the same time, even though Indians live in a diverse multireligious and multilingual society, majorities link Indian identity with a particular religion and language, as well as with ancestry. A large majority (70%) say it is important to have Indian ancestry to be truly Indian. And 57% of Indian adults say it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian.

While most Hindus (64%) say it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian, considerably smaller shares of people in other religious communities link the Hindu religion with national identity. Still, 27% of Muslims and 20% of Christians say being Hindu is very important to being truly Indian.

Muslims who have lower levels of education are more likely to say it is important to be Hindu to be truly Indian. This view is also more common among Muslims who are religiously segregated. For example, among those who say all their friends are Muslim, 34% say it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian, compared with 22% among other Muslims.

Religious groups differ on whether ability to speak Hindi, being Hindu are important to be ‘truly Indian’

% of Indian adults who say that it is **very** important to _____ in order to be truly Indian

	Have Indian ancestry	Know the history of India's freedom struggle	Be a Hindu	Be able to speak Hindi	Support India's cricket team
General population	70%	69%	57%	56%	56%
Hindus	72	70	64	59	58
Muslims	61	62	27	47	50
Christians	55	59	20	28	42
Sikhs	62	73	21	27	48
Buddhists	50	63	30	43	49
Jains	60	66	44	54	62
Men	71	71	57	57	60
Women	69	67	57	54	53
Ages 18-34	70	69	57	56	60
35+	70	69	57	55	54
Less than college	70	69	58	56	56
College graduate	70	69	48	48	63
General Category	69	71	52	49	58
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	68	67	57	54	56
Other/Most Backward Class	72	69	62	64	56
North	76	74	57	62	64
Central	80	69	78	85	58
East	68	65	57	53	60
West	69	71	55	52	58
South	59	69	39	27	48
Northeast	54	60	33	40	42
Religion very important	74	72	62	60	60
Religion less important	50	53	32	31	40
Favorable view of BJP	74	73	65	64	58
Unfavorable view of BJP	64	64	45	45	53

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indians in the Central region are the most likely to link Hindu identity with Indian identity (78%), while Indians in the Northeast and South are the least likely to say that being Hindu is very important to being truly Indian (33% and 39%, respectively). Regional patterns also exist among Muslims: 40% of Muslims in the Central region say it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian, compared with 17% in the East.

Indians' views on the importance of speaking Hindi to national identity also vary by region. In regions where more Indians speak Hindi, more people view the language as intrinsic to national identity. Fully 85% of those in the Central region – where more than 99% of respondents list Hindi among the languages they speak – say that speaking Hindi is very important to being truly Indian, while only 27% of those in Southern India (a region where just 14% report speaking Hindi) take the same view.¹⁷ This regional pattern is once again true for both Hindus and Muslims.

Adults with lower levels of formal education are somewhat more likely than their college-educated counterparts to link being able to speak Hindi and being Hindu with true Indian identity. Relatedly, members of Other Backward Classes (including a small share of people who volunteered “Most Backward Class”) also are more likely than members of either General Categories or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to say speaking Hindi and being Hindu are very important to Indian identity. And Hindus who are more supportive of keeping religious groups segregated from each other – i.e., who support stopping Hindu men and women from marrying non-Hindus – are more likely to express these nativist views of national identity.

When it comes to politics, Hindus who have a favorable view of the BJP are more likely than those with unfavorable views of the ruling party to link being Hindu and speaking Hindi with national identity. For example, a majority of Hindus who have positive views of the BJP (66%) say speaking Hindi is very important to being truly Indian, compared with about half of those who have an unfavorable view of the ruling party (48%).

Half or more among all religious groups surveyed say having Indian ancestry is important to being truly Indian. Still, this attitude is most common among Hindus (72%), especially those who live in the Northern (82%) and Central (81%) parts of the country. Once again, Southern Hindus are less likely than Hindus in most other places to say having Indian ancestry is very important to being truly Indian (59%).

A slim majority of Indian adults (56%) say it is very important to support India's cricket team to be truly Indian. Majorities of Hindus (58%) and Jains (62%) support this view, but among other

¹⁷ Respondents were asked, “Including Indian languages and English, what languages do you speak?” They could list as many languages as they wanted. This question did not specifically ask about the respondent's primary language or “mother tongue.”

religious groups, the share who see a strong link between sports and national identity stands generally lower: Half of Muslims say it is very important to support the country's cricket team to be truly Indian.

Across all measures, nativist or otherwise, respondents who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely to say that all of these aspects are important to being truly Indian. For example, 90% of those who say religion is very important in their lives say it is crucial to respect elders to be truly Indian, compared with 74% among those who consider religion less important in their lives.

Large gaps between religious groups in 2019 election voting patterns

In the spring of 2019, India held a national election for its lower house of Parliament, the Lok Sabha. About two-thirds (67%) of the [eligible population voted in the election](#), ultimately giving the BJP a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha.

This survey asked respondents whom they voted for in 2019. While a plurality (44%) say they voted for the winning party, responses vary significantly by religious group. Nearly half of Hindu voters (49%) say they voted for the BJP, compared with significantly fewer people among minority religious groups with a large enough sample size of voters to analyze.

Indeed, the survey indicates that Indian National Congress (INC) – one of the main opposition parties to the BJP – was the top choice among Muslim (30%), Christian (30%) and Sikh (33%) voters in 2019. Buddhist voters were more evenly split, with 29% supporting the BJP and 24% supporting Congress. While the survey did not include enough Jain voters to report how they voted in this election, Jains appear to strongly embrace India’s ruling party: In response to a separate question, fully 70% of Jains say they feel closest to the BJP, regardless of whether they voted in the last election.

One-in-five Muslims (19%) did vote for the BJP, despite the party sometimes being described as promoting a Hindu nationalist agenda in its policies.¹⁸ Muslim voters who supported the BJP in the last election differ in multiple ways from those who did not. For example, Muslims without a college degree are more likely than college graduates to say they voted for the BJP, while the opposite pattern is true for Muslims who voted for the INC. Religious observance is also a significant factor: Muslim voters who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely to have voted for the BJP

About half of Hindus voted for the BJP in 2019

% of Indian voters who voted for ...

Among Hindus ...

BJP	49%
Congress	13

Among Muslims ...

Congress	30
BJP	19
AITC*	8

Among Christians ...

Congress	30
YSR Congress#	14
TRS**	12
BJP	10

Among Sikhs ...

Congress	33
BJP	19
SAD†	16

Among Buddhists ...

BJP	29
Congress	24
BSP‡	14

* Trinamool Congress/All India Trinamool Congress.

Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress.

** Telangana Rashtra Samithi.

† Shiromani Akali Dal.

‡ Bahujan Samaj Party.

Note: There were not enough interviews with Jain voters to analyze separately.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

See Methodology for details.

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¹⁸ The BJP's [2014 election manifesto](#) mentions as a priority lifting Muslims out of poverty, including a national madrasa modernization plan and preservation of the Urdu language. The [party's 2019 manifesto](#) continues to stress inclusive development with a particular focus on religious minorities, but no longer focuses on the promotion of the Urdu language or madrasa modernization, focusing instead on promoting the Sanskrit language and a commitment to building the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

than voters who say religion is less important (19% vs. 12%). Regionally, about four-in-ten Muslim voters in the Northeast (39%) say they voted BJP, compared with one-quarter or fewer in all other regions.

India has a multiparty system. According to [official statistics](#), there are seven national parties, more than 50 state or regional parties, and over 2,000 other unlisted political parties. Many voters in minority religions opted to vote for parties other than the BJP or Congress, the two largest national parties. For example, fully 14% of Buddhists say they voted for the [Bahujan Samaj Party](#) (BSP), a national party focused primarily on the welfare of lower castes and minority religions (89% of Buddhists are members of Scheduled Castes). Support for regional parties also is tied to religion. For example, 16% of Sikhs say they voted for [Shiromani Akali Dal](#) (SAD) in 2019. SAD is a regional party representing Punjabi interests; according to the census, 77% of India's Sikhs live in Punjab.

No consensus on whether democracy or strong leader best suited to lead India

Despite decades of elections and being lauded as the world's most populous democratic republic, support for democracy (as opposed to a more authoritarian form of government) is far from unanimous in India.

The survey asked which would be better suited to solve the country's problems: a "democratic form of government" or a "leader with a strong hand." Of course, it is possible for a leader who rules with a strong hand to be democratically elected, but by forcing a choice between these two options, the question sought to capture respondents' preferences for what type of government is best, on balance.

Slightly fewer than half of Indians say that the country should rely on a democratic form of government to solve the country's problems (46%). The other half say that it would be better for the country to have a leader with a strong hand (48%).

Pew Research Center's survey is not the only one that finds ambivalence among Indians about the efficacy of democracy. A 2019 survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) asked Indian adults whether they agree or disagree that "The country should be governed by a strong leader who does not have to bother about winning elections." Roughly six-in-ten Indians agreed with the statement. (See ["What other surveys on religion, democracy and pluralism in India show"](#) below for a discussion of this and other CSDS findings.)

Indians split on views of democracy

% of Indian adults who say the country should rely on a _____ to solve the country's problems

	Democratic form of government	Leader with a strong hand
General population	46%	48%
Hindus	45	50
Muslims	49	45
Christians	49	47
Sikhs	54	37
Buddhists	57	40
Jains	49	46
Men	47	49
Women	44	48
Ages 18-34	47	48
35+	45	48
Less than college	45	49
College graduate	51	47
General Category	51	44
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	44	49
Other/Most Backward Class	43	52
North	51	45
Central	33	60
East	53	37
West	47	49
South	46	51
Northeast	61	33
Voted BJP in 2019	42	53
Voted Congress	49	47

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Respondents were asked, "Some feel that we should rely on a democratic form of government to solve our country's problems. Others feel that we should rely on a leader with a strong hand to solve our country's problems. Which comes closer to your opinion?"

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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This ambivalence toward democracy exists to some degree among all the country's religious groups. In the Pew Research Center survey, among Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jains, there is no clear majority position on this question. Only among Buddhists (57%) and Sikhs (54%) do more than half of adults express a preference for a democratic form of government.

Regional differences are more stark. Fully six-in-ten Indians in the Central region say that a leader with a strong hand is best suited to solving India's problems, compared with only one-third who prefer a democratic form of government. The opposite is true in the Northeast, where about six-in-ten adults prefer democracy (61%). There also is a modest gap between urban and rural regions, with half of urban residents (50%) preferring democracy, compared with 44% of adults in rural districts.

Indian adults with a college degree are more likely than those with less education to prefer a democratic form of government (51% vs. 45%). And Indians who belong to General Category castes (51%) are more likely than those who belong to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (44%) or Other Backward Classes (43%) to favor democracy.

The 2019 Indian general election included more voters than any other election in human history. Despite this level of democratic participation, roughly half of those who report that they voted in the election say they would prefer a leader with a strong hand (48%) over a democratic form of government (46%). BJP voters are slightly more likely than those who voted for the opposition Indian National Congress party to say they see a leader with a strong hand as more suited to solve the country's problems (53% vs. 47%).

Sidebar: What other surveys on religion, democracy and pluralism in India show

While this study is the first large-scale, nationally representative survey of India performed by Pew Research Center, other surveys in India have asked similar questions. One of the largest is the [National Election Study](#) conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) through its research wing, Lokniti. This survey has been conducted alongside every Lok Sabha election since 1996, and the most recent round included about 24,000 respondents in the post-election poll. Due to differences in question wording and sampling, data from Pew Research Center's survey and that of CSDS should not be directly compared. But looking at the CSDS studies in conjunction with Pew Research Center's survey shows broadly similar findings on issues around religion and nationalism.

High levels of support for religious pluralism

Previous work conducted by CSDS shows that support for religious pluralism has remained high over time. In 2009, more than 80% of Indians agreed with the statement "Citizens of India should promote harmonious relationship between all religions." The 2019 National Election Study by CSDS also demonstrates a high level of support for religious pluralism. Roughly three-quarters of Indians in the CSDS study (76%) say that "India belongs to citizens of all religions equally, not just Hindus," while just 15% say "India primarily belongs to only Hindus." Meanwhile, 2019 Pew Research Center data shows that 84% of Indians believe respecting all religions is very important to being truly Indian. (See "[What constitutes 'true' Indian identity?](#)" above for more details.)

Declining support for democracy

The CSDS National Election Studies show that, over time, Indians have become less supportive of democracy. In 2009, about four-in-ten Indians agreed with the statement "The country should be governed by a strong leader who does not have to bother about winning elections." A decade later, more than six-in-ten Indians say they would prefer a strong leader who does not have to worry about elections.

Strong preference for religious segregation

In addition to the National Election Study, CSDS, in collaboration with Azim Premji University, [measured public opinion](#) around communal relations in 2018. The survey interviewed roughly 24,000 Indians from 12 states, and the findings highlight a preference for public policies that maintain the separation of religious groups: Hindus and Sikhs in the states surveyed say people who engage in religious conversion should be punished by the government. Members of other minority religions are less supportive than Hindus and Sikhs of policies that would punish proselytizing. Similarly, Pew Research Center's survey shows an inclination for religious segregation; for example, roughly two-thirds of Indians say it is very important to stop men and women in their religious community from marrying into another religion. (See [Chapter 3](#) for more details.)

Majorities support politicians being involved in religious matters

A majority of Indians say that politicians should have at least “some” influence in religious matters (62%), including roughly three-in-ten (29%) who say politicians should have “a large” influence. Meanwhile, 31% of all Indian adults say politicians should generally stay out of religious affairs, including 17% who think politicians should have no influence at all.

Majorities of both Hindus (64%) and Muslims (59%) – India’s two largest religious groups – say politicians should have at least some influence in religious matters, while on balance, Sikhs and Buddhists tend to prefer little or no political influence in religious affairs.

Generally, men and women, Indians of different age groups and those living in different parts of the country lean toward the position that politicians should have at least some influence in religious matters. Indians who have a favorable view of the BJP are slightly more likely than other Indians to say politicians should have some or a large influence in religious matters (66% vs. 60%).

Among Hindus, those who say religion is very important in their lives are somewhat more likely than other Hindus to say that politicians should have at least some influence in religious matters (65% vs. 59%).

Hindus, Muslims most likely to favor political involvement in religious affairs

% of Indian adults who say politicians should have _____ influence in religious matters

	A large/ some	Not too much/ none at all
General population	62%	31%
Hindus	64	29
Muslims	59	35
Christians	50	44
Sikhs	42	52
Buddhists	44	52
Jains	51	47
Men	62	33
Women	62	29
Ages 18-34	61	32
35+	62	31
Less than college	62	31
College graduate	59	38
General Category	62	32
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	60	32
Other/Most Backward Class	64	31
Religion very important	63	31
Religion less important	57	34
Favorable view of BJP	66	30
Unfavorable view of BJP	60	37

Note: Don’t know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indian Muslims favor their own religious courts; other religious groups less supportive

Alongside the civil court system, Muslims in India have the option of settling family disputes such as inheritance issues in courts that follow Islamic legal principles (for more information, see [“Islamic courts in India”](#) in the report overview). But whether or not Muslims *should* be allowed to go to their own religious courts remains a [hotly debated topic](#).

Indians on the whole express mixed opinions on this issue, with similar proportions of the public supporting (35%) and opposing (38%) the use of these courts. Roughly a quarter of Indians (27%) do not take a position, perhaps reflecting the low salience of this issue for many people.

However, a clear majority of Muslims (74%) say they should be allowed to have their own courts to resolve family and property disputes. Hindus, on the other hand, are more likely to oppose (41%) rather than support (30%) religious courts for Muslims; the same pattern holds among Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains, although substantial shares of all non-Muslim groups do not express an opinion on this subject.

There is far less opposition to Islamic courts in Northeastern India than in any other region.

No consensus on allowing Muslims to use their own religious courts

% of Indian adults who _____ allowing Muslims to go to their own religious court to solve family disputes

	Support 35%	Oppose 38%	Other/ DK/ref. 27%
General population			
Hindus	30	41	28
Muslims	74	18	9
Christians	27	27	46
Sikhs	25	39	37
Buddhists	33	48	19
Jains	33	45	22
Men	36	40	24
Women	34	36	30
Ages 18-34	36	39	25
35+	34	38	28
Less than college	35	38	27
College graduate	34	45	20
General Category	38	37	25
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	29	41	31
Other/Most Backward Class	39	38	23
North	35	46	19
Central	32	45	24
East	35	32	33
West	41	38	21
South	32	36	31
Northeast	51	17	32

Note: “DK/ref.” indicates respondents who answered “Don’t know” or refused to give a response to the question. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
“Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation”

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Muslims across different regions, castes and educational backgrounds consistently support religious courts for their group. Muslim men (76%) are slightly more likely than Muslim women (71%) to support religious courts.

Majority of Muslims support having access to their own religious courts

% of Indian Muslims who _____ allowing Muslims to go to their own religious court to solve family disputes

	Support	Oppose
Total Muslims	74%	18%
Men	76	17
Women	71	19
Ages 18-34	74	17
35+	74	18
Less than college	74	18
College graduate	73	18
General Category	72	17
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	70	23
Other/Most Backward Class	77	16
North	78	18
Central	82	18
East	71	13
West	71	23
South	70	23
Northeast	68	14

Note: Other/Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Indians do not support allowing triple talaq for Muslims

For the first seven decades after Indian independence, it was legal for Muslim men to instantly divorce their wives by saying “talaq” (“divorce” in Urdu and Arabic) three times – commonly referred to as “triple talaq” (for more information, see [“Islamic courts in India”](#) in the report overview). The Supreme Court ruled triple talaq unconstitutional in 2017, and in 2019, after much public debate, India’s Parliament passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Marriage) Bill, which [banned the practice](#).

A clear majority of Indians as a whole (68%) – including seven-in-ten or more Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains – say that Muslim men should *not* be allowed to divorce their wives using triple talaq. Just 14% say triple talaq should be allowed, while 18% do not answer the question, perhaps reflecting some unfamiliarity with the practice – especially among Christians.

Among Muslims, too, a majority (56%) oppose allowing Muslim men to divorce their wives by saying “talaq” three times. Still, 37% of Muslims favor the practice, which is considerably higher than in any other religious group surveyed.

Slim majority of Muslims oppose triple talaq

% of Indian adults who say Muslim men _____ be able to divorce their wives by saying “talaq” three times

	Should	Should not	DK/ref.
	14%	68%	18%
General population			
Hindus	11	70	19
Muslims	37	56	7
Christians	14	44	42
Sikhs	5	71	23
Buddhists	10	77	13
Jains	11	77	12
Men	15	69	16
Women	13	67	21
Ages 18-34	14	70	17
35+	14	66	20
Less than college	14	67	19
College graduate	12	75	13
General Category	16	66	17
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	11	67	22
Other/Most Backward Class	14	70	16
North	9	82	9
Central	10	81	9
East	15	67	18
West	9	72	19
South	22	44	34
Northeast	25	49	26

Note: “DK/ref.” indicates respondents who answered “Don’t know” or refused to give a response to the question. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Muslim opinions of triple talaq differ based on several factors. For example, Muslim men are more likely than women to approve of the practice (42% vs. 32%). And Muslims in General Category castes (43%) are more likely than members of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (29%) and Other Backward Classes (33%) to say triple talaq should be allowed. Relatedly, Muslims with college degrees also are more supportive of triple talaq than are Muslims with less education (46% vs. 37%).

Religious observance also plays a significant role. Muslims who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely to support triple talaq than those who say religion is less important (39% vs. 26%). And Muslim men who attend religious services at least once a week also are more likely than other men to support the practice (44% vs. 27%).

Muslims in the South (58%) and Northeast (50%) are more likely than those in other regions of India to say Muslim men should be allowed to divorce their wives by triple talaq. Conversely, at least two-thirds of Muslims in the Western (71%), Central (70%) and Northern (67%) regions of the country do not support the practice.

Muslim men more likely than women to support triple talaq

% of Indian Muslims who say Muslim men _____ be able to divorce their wives by saying "talaq" three times

	Should	Should not
	37%	56%
Total Muslims		
Men	42	52
Women	32	61
Ages 18-34	35	59
35+	40	53
Less than college	37	56
College graduate	46	46
General Category	43	49
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	29	69
Other/Most Backward Class	33	61
North	25	67
Central	30	70
East	39	53
West	27	71
South	58	30
Northeast	50	34
Religion very important	39	55
Religion less important	26	65

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

See Methodology for details.

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7. Religious practices

By several standard measures, Indians are highly religious. A majority of Indian adults pray daily (60%), more than two-thirds visit a house of worship at least monthly (71%), and an overwhelming share say religion is very important in their lives (84%). Previous Pew Research Center surveys show much less importance given to religion in several other regions of the world, including [Western Europe](#), [Central and Eastern Europe](#), [Israel](#), [Latin America](#) and the [United States](#). Only in [sub-Saharan Africa](#) and some regions with [large Muslim populations](#) do similar or higher shares of the public say religion is very important to them.

For many Indians, the high importance of religion is reflected in religious practices centered at home. Roughly eight-in-ten Indian adults (81%) have an altar, shrine or religious symbol in their home for worship, and a similar share (78%) say they have invited a religious leader to conduct religious rites at their home. These home-based religious practices are widely followed among both Hindus and members of smaller religious communities.

Some other religious and spiritual practices, though, are much less common. For instance, while yoga is strongly promoted [by the Indian government](#) as a core Indian practice, 62% of Indians report *never* practicing yoga. Scripture reading is also not as common: Most Indian adults (58%) say they read or listen to recitation of scripture either on a yearly basis or less often than that, including about one-in-five (22%) who say they never do this.

Buddhists are the least likely group to engage in many of these religious practices. And Southern Indians are often less observant than other Indians by these measures.

Several of the religious practices covered in the survey are common among Hindus regardless of demographic background or political preference. But among Hindus, nationalist attitudes and support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are connected with somewhat higher levels of religious practice. For example, those who say it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian are more likely than other Hindus to meditate at least weekly (55% vs. 35%). And Hindus who have a favorable view of the BJP are more likely than those who have an unfavorable view of the party to say they have received purification by taking a dip in a holy body of water, such as the Ganges River (68% vs. 58%).

Southern Indians least likely to say religion is very important in their life

Indians overwhelmingly say that religion is *very* important in their lives (84%), including majorities in each of the country's major religious groups. Christians are the least likely religious community to feel religion plays a very important role in their personal lives, but still, fully three-quarters (76%) say this is the case. And most others, both among Christians and the population as a whole, say religion is "somewhat" important to them; just 3% of Indian adults say religion is "not too" or "not at all" important in their lives.

Roughly nine-in-ten Indians in the country's Central region (92%) say religion is very important to them, while far fewer Southern Indians (69%) feel this way. And rural Indians are somewhat more likely than those who live in cities to place great importance on religion (86% vs. 81%).

College graduates are modestly less likely than other Indians to say religion has high importance in their life (80% vs. 85%).

Most Indians say religion is very important

*% of Indian adults who say religion is **very** important in their life*

General population	84%
Hindus	84
Muslims	91
Christians	76
Sikhs	84
Buddhists	87
Jains	89
Men	84
Women	85
Ages 18-34	83
35+	85
Less than college	85
College graduate	80
North	86
Central	92
East	88
West	87
South	69
Northeast	86
Urban	81
Rural	86

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Indians regularly visit their houses of worship

The survey, conducted before the Indian government began imposing lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, asked Indians how frequently they visit religious sites or houses of worship. Hindus, Buddhists and Jains were asked about visiting temples; Muslims about visiting mosques for namaz; Sikhs about visiting gurdwaras; and all other respondents, including Christians, about attending religious services. Most Indians (71%) say they visit these religious sites at least once a month. (The survey also asked people if they have prayed, meditated or performed a ritual at houses of worship outside of their own religious group; see [Chapter 2](#).)

Large majorities in every major religious community – with the exception of Buddhists – say they visit a house of worship at least monthly. And majorities in nearly all these groups even do so on a weekly basis. For example, 87% of Jains go to a temple at least monthly, including 70% who visit the temple at least once a week.

Fewer than half of India's Buddhists (44%) visit temples at least monthly. And Buddhists are also among the most likely to report *never* visiting their house of worship (16%). A similar share of Muslims (20%) say they never go to a mosque for namaz, but this is almost entirely driven by Muslim women – fully 41% of whom report never visiting a mosque, compared with just 1% of Muslim men.

Most Indians visit temples or other houses of worship at least monthly

% of Indian adults who say they go to temple/mosque/gurdwara/religious services ...

	At least weekly	Monthly	A few times a year/seldom	Never
General population	53%	18%	25%	5%
Hindus	50	21	27	2
Muslims	70	3	7	20
Christians	55	12	27	5
Sikhs	79	8	13	0
Buddhists	30	14	39	16
Jains	70	17	12	0
Men	54	18	26	2
Women	51	18	23	7
Ages 18-34	52	18	25	5
35+	53	18	24	4
Less than college	52	18	25	5
College graduate	55	18	24	2
General Category	61	15	19	4
Lower castes	49	19	27	4
North	70	13	14	3
Central	45	23	27	4
East	37	19	37	7
West	59	16	20	5
South	62	15	21	2
Northeast	54	19	17	9
Pray daily	59	18	19	4
Pray less often	43	18	33	6

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Respondents were asked how often they "go to the temple" if Hindu, Buddhist or Jain; "attend the mosque for namaz" if Muslim; "go to the gurdwara" if Sikh; and "attend religious services" for all others. Christians were asked to exclude their attendance at weddings and funerals.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Among Indians overall, however, gender, age and education have little connection to how often people report attending their house of worship. But members of General Category castes are more likely than Indians from lower castes to visit their religion's sites at least monthly (77% vs. 68%).

Visiting a temple, mosque, gurdwara or religious service also is more common among Indians who are more religious in other ways. For example, Indians who say they pray daily are more likely than other Indians to visit religious sites at least monthly (77% vs. 62%).

Most Indians give to charitable causes

While most Indians visit a house of worship monthly or more often, even larger shares report donating money to these venues. Nearly nine-in-ten Indians (89%), including nearly identical shares across most religious groups, say they give money to a house of worship associated with their religion. Even among Buddhists, who have the lowest rate of monthly temple attendance (44%), three-quarters of adults say they give money to temples.

Indians also overwhelmingly give to other charities. About eight-in-ten Indian adults (78%) say they give money to charitable causes other than their house of worship.

Among Muslims, those with a college education are more inclined than less-educated Muslims to give money to charitable causes aside from the mosque (87% vs. 73%).

Among Indians as a whole, higher levels of religious observance are connected with giving money not only to a house of worship, but also to other charities. For example, 80% of Indians who say religion is very important to their lives donate money to charities other than their house of worship, compared with 68% among those for whom religion is less important.

Overwhelming shares of Indians give money to houses of worship

% of Indian adults who say they give money to ...

	A house of worship	Any other charitable cause
General population	89%	78%
Hindus	90	79
Muslims	89	74
Christians	89	72
Sikhs	89	71
Buddhists	75	78
Jains	91	83
Men	90	80
Women	89	76
Ages 18-34	87	76
35+	91	79
Less than college	89	77
College graduate	90	81
Religion very important	91	80
Religion less important	79	68
Visit house of worship at least monthly	91	81
Visit less often	85	71

Note: For giving money to a “house of worship,” respondents were asked about “a temple” if Hindu, Buddhist or Jain; “a mosque” if Muslim; “a church” if Christian; “a gurdwara” if Sikh; or “a house of worship” for all others. When asked about visiting a “house of worship,” respondents were asked about “the temple” if Hindu, Buddhist or Jain; “the mosque” if Muslim; “the gurdwara” if Sikh; or “religious services” for Christians and all others.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Majorities of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jains in India pray daily

Six-in-ten Indians say they pray daily, including 18% of Indians who say they pray several times a day.¹⁹

But prayer practices vary widely in India. Large majorities of Christians (77%) and Jains (73%), for example, pray at least once a day, while far fewer Sikhs (45%) and Buddhists (38%) do so.

Nationally, women are more inclined than men to pray daily (64% vs. 56%). And adults ages 35 and older are slightly more likely to offer daily prayers or namaz than are younger adults (62% vs. 57%). People of different education levels, however, pray daily at similar rates.

The frequency of prayer differs considerably by region – from 37% in the South saying they pray daily to about three-quarters in the Central region (74%). The low rate of daily prayer in the South is driven by the region's Hindus:

Southern Muslims and Christians pray at similar rates to their national counterparts, but Southern Hindus are much less likely to pray daily than Hindus nationally (30% vs. 59%).

Indians who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than others to pray daily (63% vs. 45%).

Among Sikhs and Buddhists – the groups least likely to pray daily – prayer is more common among those who recently faced financial hardship. For example, Buddhists who recently struggled to pay for the basic necessities of food, medical care or housing are more likely than other Buddhists to pray daily (48% vs. 32%).

Daily prayer common across India's major religious groups

% of Indian adults who say they pray ...

	At least daily	Weekly	Monthly	Seldom/never
General population	60%	17%	5%	19%
Hindus	59	16	5	19
Muslims	66	24	2	8
Christians	77	17	1	4
Sikhs	45	10	2	41
Buddhists	38	16	12	33
Jains	73	7	4	15
Men	56	18	5	21
Women	64	16	4	16
Ages 18-34	57	18	5	20
35+	62	16	5	17
Less than college	60	17	5	18
College graduate	61	14	4	21
North	67	14	3	17
Central	74	12	4	10
East	57	14	6	21
West	65	15	5	15
South	37	28	5	30
Northeast	71	14	4	10

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Muslims were asked how often they "offer namaz."

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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¹⁹ Muslims were asked how often they "offer namaz" (the Urdu word for prayer, which is commonly used among Muslims in India).

About four-in-ten Muslims (38%) say they pray all five namaz daily; this figure is similar across different age groups, education levels and castes. And while Indian women nationally pray daily at higher rates than men, Muslim men (37%) are just as likely as women (38%) to pray all five namaz.

Nearly four-in-ten Muslims in India pray five times a day

% of Indian Muslims who say they pray all five namaz daily

Total Muslims	38%
Men	37
Women	38
Ages 18-34	36
35+	39
Less than college	37
College graduate	43

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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More Indians practice puja at home than at temple

Puja is a practice that often involves prayer and giving offerings to deities. The survey asked Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains how frequently they perform this ritual at home and at a temple. Majorities of Jains (83%), Hindus (76%) and Buddhists (58%) practice puja at home at least once a week. In fact, the vast majority of Jains (79%) say they perform puja at home *daily*.

Across religious groups, people perform puja at home more often than they do at a temple. For example, while about three-in-four Hindus (76%) practice puja at home weekly, roughly half (53%) do so at a temple each week.

Sikhs are less likely than other groups to report performing puja at least weekly at home (40%) or at a temple (21%).

Among Hindus, women are much more likely than men to perform puja in their home at least weekly (84% vs. 68%). But the shares of Hindu women and men who perform puja at temples are more similar (55% and 51%, respectively).

Hindus in the Eastern region of India are generally less likely than Hindus elsewhere to practice puja at home or at temple on a weekly basis. And lower-caste Hindus are less inclined than General Category Hindus to perform puja.

Most Jains, Hindus and Buddhists in India perform puja regularly

% of Indian adults who say they perform puja at ____ at least weekly

	Home	Temple
Hindus	76%	53%
Sikhs	40	21
Buddhists	58	30
Jains	83	67
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>		
Men	68	51
Women	84	55
Ages 18-34	76	52
35+	77	53
Less than college	76	52
College graduate	76	54
General Category	82	60
Lower castes	74	50
North	84	69
Central	78	51
East	66	36
West	87	62
South	72	57
Northeast	76	50
Religion very important	79	54
Religion less important	63	47
Pray daily	89	62
Pray less often	58	39

Notes: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

See Methodology for details.

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Most Hindus do not read or listen to religious books frequently

The survey asked Indians how often they read or listen to recitations of religious books. For most of the religious communities, an example of a religious text was included in the question: Hindus were asked about the Bhagavad Gita, Muslims about the Quran, Christians about the Bible, Sikhs about the Guru Granth Sahib and Buddhists about the Sutras. (Jains were not given an example of a specific text.)

While large majorities of Christians (78%) and Sikhs (70%) say they read scriptures at least weekly, and over half of Jains (56%) and Muslims (53%) do this as well, fewer Hindus and Buddhists (22% each) read or listen to religious books with such regularity.

Among Hindus, reading or listening to recitations of religious books at least weekly is more common among people belonging to upper castes (29%) than among people who belong to lower castes (19%). Highly educated Hindus are also somewhat more likely than their less-educated peers to read or listen to recitations of religious texts.

In every community, though, the majority believes their religion's sacred text is the word of God. And in each case, the share who say their religious texts are the word of God is substantially higher than the share who read or listen to these texts at least weekly. For example, 82% of Hindus say the Bhagavad Gita is the word of God; 22% read it every week.

Overwhelming shares of Indians across most religious groups believe their scripture is the word of God

% of Indian adults who say they ...

	Read or listen to recitations of religious books at least weekly	Believe their religion's sacred text is the word of God
General population	28%	84%
Hindus	22	82
Muslims	53	93
Christians	78	94
Sikhs	70	94
Buddhists	22	60
Jains	56	95
Men	29	84
Women	28	83
Ages 18-34	28	83
35+	28	84
Less than college	28	83
College graduate	32	84
General Category	35	86
Lower castes	25	83
North	43	90
Central	30	92
East	21	84
West	27	82
South	24	71
Northeast	47	87

Notes: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Respondents were first asked, "How often do you read or listen to recitations of religious books?" with religion-specific examples given for most groups. Only those who identified with a religion were then asked if they think the sacred text of their religion is or is not the word of God, with religion-specific examples again given for most groups. Hindus were asked about the Bhagavad Gita, Muslims about the Quran, Christians about the Bible, Sikhs about the Guru Granth Sahib and Buddhists about the Sutras.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Southern Indians are the least likely to say their sacred text is the word of God (71%), with Hindus driving this pattern. Two-thirds of Southern Hindus say the Bhagavad Gita is the word of God (67%), compared with 82% of all Indian Hindus. But nearly all Muslims (94%) and Christians (96%) in the South say their sacred text is the word of God, just like Muslims (93%) and Christians (94%) nationally.

Most Indians have an altar or shrine in their home for worship

Puja is not the only home-based religious practice for many Indians. The survey also asked if Indians have an altar, shrine or religious symbol in their home for worship; if they ever invite religious leaders (e.g., a pundit, an imam, a priest or pastor, or a monk) to perform religious rites at their home; and if they have holy basil at home.

The vast majority of Indians (81%) say they have religious symbols in their home for worship, and a comparable share (78%) say they ever invite religious leaders into their home to conduct religious rites.

Overall, Hindus and Jains are the most likely to have altars, shrines or religious objects in their homes. This is especially true for holy basil (the tulsi plant), which is considered [sacred in India](#) – majorities of

Hindus (72%) and Jains (62%) have tulsi at home, compared with about three-in-ten or fewer in other groups. Large majorities in all religious communities have invited a religious leader to their home for religious rituals.

Most Hindus, Jains have holy basil at home

% of Indian adults who say they ...

	Have an altar, shrine or religious symbol in their home for worship	Ever invite a religious leader to conduct religious rites at their home	Have holy basil at home
General population	81%	78%	61%
Hindus	85	78	72
Muslims	61	82	10
Christians	64	82	15
Sikhs	67	69	20
Buddhists	76	71	29
Jains	87	79	62
Men	81	80	61
Women	81	77	62
Ages 18-34	81	77	60
35+	81	80	62
Less than college	81	78	60
College graduate	83	81	72
North	81	79	56
Central	86	86	70
East	77	88	71
West	88	73	66
South	76	64	43
Northeast	67	74	58
Religion very important	82	82	63
Religion less important	73	61	52

Note: Respondents were asked if they ever invite the following people to their home to conduct religious rituals: “pundit or learned person” if Hindu, “imam” if Muslim, “priest or pastor” if Christian, “monk or learned person” if Buddhist, or “religious leader” for all others. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Among Hindus, college graduates are more likely than other Hindus to have holy basil (80% vs. 71%). And college-educated Christians are much more likely than Christians with less education to keep an altar, shrine or religious symbol at home (77% vs. 62%).

Where people live also is linked with household practices. Southern Indians are less likely than Indians in other regions to invite religious leaders to their homes. Yet Indians in the Northeast are the least likely to have altars, shrines or religious symbols at home for worship.

Among Hindus, people in General Category castes are slightly more likely than lower-caste Hindus to have holy basil at home (77% vs. 70%).

Religious pilgrimages common across most religious groups in India

In India, most adults (56%) say they have made a religious pilgrimage, and this is true across most religious groups. The majority of Muslims, however, say they have *not* made a pilgrimage (62%).

Throughout the country, older adults are more likely than those ages 18 to 34 to have made a pilgrimage (61% vs. 49%). And those in the Northern (61%) and Central (65%) regions are generally more likely to have taken a pilgrimage. Meanwhile, the vast majority of Northeastern Indians have never taken one (81%).

Most Indians who say they pray daily have been on a pilgrimage (60%), compared with about half of Indians who pray less often (48%).

Among Muslims, those who recently have faced financial hardship (i.e., were unable to pay for food, medicine or housing in the last year) are slightly *more* likely than other Muslims to have made a pilgrimage (41% vs. 34%). And lower-caste Muslims also are more likely than General Category Muslims to have done this (42% vs. 33%).

Muslims in India least likely to have made a religious pilgrimage

% of Indian adults who say they have ever made a pilgrimage

General population	56%
Hindus	58
Muslims	37
Christians	48
Sikhs	62
Buddhists	54
Jains	55
Men	57
Women	54
Ages 18-34	49
35+	61
Less than college	56
College graduate	58
North	61
Central	65
East	52
West	55
South	53
Northeast	16
Pray daily	60
Pray less often	48

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Hindus say they have received purification from a holy body of water

Nearly two-thirds of Hindus say they have received purification by taking a dip in a holy body of water, such as the Ganges River (65%). Far fewer Jains (40%), Sikhs (34%) and Buddhists (20%) say they have ever been purified in a holy body of water. (Muslims and Christians did not receive this question.)

Older Hindus (ages 35 and older) are more likely than younger Hindu adults to have received purification in a holy body of water (69% vs. 60%).

Strong majorities of Hindus in the Eastern (64%), Northern (71%) and Central (81%) regions – through which the Ganges flows – say they have taken a dip in a holy body of water. But even in the South, most Hindus (63%) have received purification in this way.

Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives are significantly more likely than other Hindus to have taken a dip in a holy body of water (68% vs. 50%).

Many Sikhs, Jains report receiving purification in a holy body of water

% of Indian adults who say they have ever received purification by taking a dip in a holy body of water, like the Ganges River

Hindus	65%
Sikhs	34
Buddhists	20
Jains	40

Among Hindus ...

Men	66
Women	63
Ages 18-34	60
35+	69
Less than college	65
College graduate	63
North	71
Central	81
East	64
West	40
South	63
Northeast	27
Religion very important	68
Religion less important	50

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Roughly half of Indian adults meditate at least weekly

About half of Indian adults (48%) report meditating once a week or more, including nearly a third (32%) who do so daily. Most Sikhs (57%) and Jains (61%) say they practice meditation at least once a week, as do 52% of Muslims and 47% of Hindus. Fewer Christians (34%) and Buddhists (35%) meditate weekly.

Indians who pray daily are more than twice as likely as other Indians to meditate at least once a week (62% vs. 26%).

Indians in different regions are drastically different in their meditation habits. About three-quarters of Indians in the Central region (76%) report that they meditate at least once a week, including a majority who meditate *daily* (61%). By contrast, only 19% of South Indians meditate at least weekly.

Large regional variation in Indians' meditation habits

% of Indian adults who say they meditate ...

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
General population	32%	15%	22%	29%
Hindus	32	15	23	28
Muslims	41	12	14	31
Christians	15	19	21	43
Sikhs	36	21	27	13
Buddhists	18	17	35	26
Jains	36	25	32	7
Men	32	15	24	28
Women	33	15	20	30
Ages 18-34	30	17	24	29
35+	34	14	21	29
Less than college	33	15	22	29
College graduate	30	19	24	26
North	38	28	23	9
Central	61	15	18	5
East	35	11	21	31
West	21	15	30	33
South	7	12	23	57
Northeast	15	13	14	55
Pray daily	47	16	16	21
Pray less often	12	15	32	40

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Only about a third of Indians ever practice yoga

India is the birthplace of yoga, but most Indians do not practice it. About a third of Indians (35%) say they *ever* practice yoga, with just 13% doing so weekly or more often. Meanwhile, roughly six-in-ten (62%) – including an identical share of Hindus – say they never do yoga.

Jains are more likely than members of India's other major religious groups to practice yoga (61%), though many Sikhs (50%) do so as well. About a quarter of Jains and Sikhs say they do yoga at least weekly.

In India, those who do yoga tend to be relatively young, highly educated and disproportionately men. For instance, a majority of college-educated Indians (56%) practice yoga, compared with only a third of those with less education. And people in North India are more likely than Indians in other regions to ever practice yoga.

Most Indians, including most Hindus, do not practice yoga

% of Indian adults who say they practice yoga ...

	NET Ever do yoga	Daily	Weekly	Monthly or less	Never
General population	35%	7%	6%	22%	62%
Hindus	36	7	7	22	62
Muslims	29	6	5	18	68
Christians	24	3	4	16	74
Sikhs	50	14	11	25	46
Buddhists	38	12	6	20	60
Jains	61	11	14	35	39
Men	42	8	8	26	56
Women	28	5	5	18	69
Ages 18-34	40	8	8	24	58
35+	31	6	5	20	66
Less than college	33	6	6	21	64
College graduate	56	15	10	32	43
North	52	11	14	26	46
Central	43	6	5	31	56
East	28	7	4	17	67
West	34	8	7	19	65
South	25	3	5	16	73
Northeast	29	5	8	17	66
Religion very important	35	7	6	22	62
Religion less important	36	5	11	20	62
Pray daily	38	9	7	23	59
Pray less often	30	4	5	21	67
Favorable view of BJP	38	8	7	23	60
Unfavorable view of BJP	31	6	6	20	67

Note: Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Indians who pray daily are slightly more inclined than other Indians to participate in yoga (38% vs. 30%). But on the whole, Indians who say religion is very important in their lives are not more

likely than other Indians to do yoga. In fact, among Sikhs, those who say religion is very important are *less* likely than other Sikhs to ever practice yoga.

Nearly three-quarters of Christians sing devotionally

The survey also asked Indians whether they dance or sing devotionally. A slim majority of Indians (54%) say they sing devotionally, and about a quarter (27%) report dancing as a devotional practice.

Majorities of Christians (74%), Hindus (57%) and Jains (56%) say they sing devotionally.

On balance, older adults (ages 35 and older) are a little more likely than younger adults to say they sing devotionally. But older Indians are somewhat *less* likely than younger adults to dance devotionally (25% vs. 29%). College-educated Indians also are more likely to dance than those with less education (32% vs. 26%).

South Indians are less inclined than those in other regions to sing devotionally. Lower singing rates in the South are driven by Hindus; Southern Muslims and Christians sing devotionally at similar or higher rates compared with Muslims and Christians nationally.

Majority of Indians worship through singing, some dance devotionally

% of Indian adults who say they _____ devotionally

	Sing	Dance
General population	54%	27%
Hindus	57	29
Muslims	31	13
Christians	74	22
Sikhs	37	23
Buddhists	44	30
Jains	56	27
Men	52	28
Women	56	26
Ages 18-34	52	29
35+	55	25
Less than college	53	26
College graduate	57	32
North	50	31
Central	68	41
East	49	18
West	59	36
South	42	12
Northeast	55	16
Urban	50	26
Rural	55	27
Religion very important	56	29
Religion less important	40	17

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Most Muslims and few Jains say they have participated in or witnessed animal sacrifice for religious purposes

While a majority of Indian Muslims (58%) say they have participated in or witnessed animal sacrifices for religious purposes, fewer than half of respondents in all of the country's other major religious communities have ever taken part in such practices. And among Jains, whose religion teaches that no harm should be done to [any life form](#), just 7% of adults have witnessed or participated in animal sacrifices.

Muslims more likely than others to have witnessed animal sacrifices

% of Indian adults who say they have ever participated in or witnessed animal sacrifices for religious purposes

General population	42%
Hindus	41
Muslims	58
Christians	22
Sikhs	15
Buddhists	35
Jains	7

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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A majority (65%) of Muslim men in India have witnessed an animal sacrifice for religious purposes (which could include the slaughter of a lamb or a goat for the Eid holiday, for example), compared with half of Muslim women (50%). Older Muslims, that is, those over the age of 34, are somewhat more likely than younger Muslims to have participated in or witnessed this ritual (61% vs. 55%). The practice is much less common among Muslims in the Northeast (24%) than elsewhere.

Hindus differ significantly by region on whether they have ever participated in or witnessed an animal sacrifice. Southern Hindus are the most likely to have ever participated in or witnessed animal sacrifices (65%), while those in the North are generally less likely to have engaged in this practice (25%).

Less-educated and poorer Hindus – those who report recently struggling to pay for necessities like shelter, health care or food – are more likely than other Hindus to have participated in or witnessed animal sacrifices.

Most Hindus in South India have witnessed or participated in religious animal sacrifices

% of Indian Hindus/Muslims who say they have ever participated in or witnessed animal sacrifices for religious purposes

	Hindus Muslims	
Total adults	41%	58%
Men	45	65
Women	38	50
Ages 18-34	40	55
35+	43	61
Less than college	42	58
College graduate	35	55
North	25	66
Central	29	65
East	48	56
West	30	69
South	65	55
Northeast	42	24
Urban	39	61
Rural	42	57
Recent financial hardship	47	58
No financial hardship	36	59
Pray daily	35	59
Pray less often	50	56
Favorable view of BJP	41	59
Unfavorable view of BJP	48	64

Note: "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Many Sikhs and Muslims follow a guru, pir or baba

The survey asked Indians if they follow a guru, pir or baba – spiritual guides or teachers common in most of India’s major religious groups. Sikhs and Muslims are the most likely to say they follow a guru, pir or baba (57% and 53%, respectively). By contrast, majorities of Hindus (56%), Jains (58%), Buddhists (77%) and Christians (83%) say they do *not* follow these types of spiritual teachers.

More than half of Indians in the Central (55%) and Northern (54%) regions follow a spiritual teacher, but far fewer in the West (30%) and South (23%) say they do this. And rural Indians are more likely than urban Indians to follow a guru, pir or baba (45% vs. 35%).

Hindus who pray daily are more likely than others to follow a guru, pir or baba (47% vs. 33%). However, among Sikhs, those who pray daily are *less* likely than other Sikhs to follow a spiritual teacher (51% vs. 62%).

Four-in-ten Hindus in India follow a spiritual teacher

% of Indian adults who say they currently follow a guru, pir or baba

General population	42%
Hindus	41
Muslims	53
Christians	14
Sikhs	57
Buddhists	20
Jains	32
Men	42
Women	42
Ages 18-34	40
35+	44
Less than college	42
College graduate	37
North	54
Central	55
East	47
West	30
South	23
Northeast	45
Urban	35
Rural	45
Pray daily	47
Pray less often	35

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. “Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation”

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Most Indians schedule key life events based on auspicious dates

Respondents were asked if they fix important dates – such as for a wedding – based on auspicious times or dates. Majorities in most religious groups responded that they do, including the vast majority of Hindus (87%) and Jains (85%). Among Buddhists, far fewer (47%) say the same.

Planning for major life events in this way is very common among both men and women, Indians who are highly educated and those who are not, and older and younger Indian adults. Those who say religion is very important in their lives are somewhat more likely than others to fix dates based on auspicious times or dates (85% vs. 76%).

Almost nine-in-ten Hindus plan important events based on auspicious dates or times

% of Indian adults who say they fix important dates, such as for a wedding, based on auspicious times or dates

General population	83%
Hindus	87
Muslims	73
Christians	66
Sikhs	58
Buddhists	47
Jains	85
Men	84
Women	83
Ages 18-34	81
35+	86
Less than college	83
College graduate	84
Religion very important	85
Religion less important	76

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
“Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation”

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About half of Indians watch religious programs weekly

Roughly half of Indian adults (48%) say they watch religious programs or serials at least weekly. This is slightly lower than the share who watch other serials with this frequency (53%). Meanwhile, a clear majority of Indians (62%) watch the news at least weekly.

Sikhs (63%) and Jains (57%) are somewhat more likely than followers of other religions to watch religious programming on a weekly basis. Jains also are the most likely community to watch the news or other serial programming.

Most Indians in General Category castes (56%) watch religious programming at least weekly, compared with fewer in lower castes (45%). Among Christians, however, members of lower castes and those who have faced financial trouble are *more* likely than other Christians to watch religious programming weekly. For example, 49% of lower-caste Christians watch religious programming weekly, while about half as many General Category Christians report doing this (25%).

In general, college-educated Indians, younger adults (ages 18 to 34) and those who live in urban areas are slightly more inclined than other Indians to watch religious programs weekly.

Indians watch the news more often than other programming

% of Indian adults who say they watch _____ once a week or more often

	Religious programs or serials	Other serials	News programs
General population	48%	53%	62%
Hindus	49	54	61
Muslims	41	49	63
Christians	42	48	65
Sikhs	63	58	65
Buddhists	40	57	68
Jains	57	72	89
Men	45	46	70
Women	51	60	53
Ages 18-34	49	57	66
35+	47	49	58
Less than college	48	52	59
College graduate	52	63	85
General Category	56	62	72
Lower castes	45	50	57
Urban	50	61	73
Rural	47	49	56
Pray daily	55	57	64
Pray less often	38	47	58

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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While Indian women are more likely than men to watch religious programs or other serials at least weekly, men are much more likely than women to watch news programs.

Indians who pray daily tend to report higher viewership of not just religious programs and serials, but also other serials and the news. For example, 57% of Indians who pray daily watch other serial programs weekly, while 47% of other Indians do this.

For Hindus, nationalism associated with greater religious observance

Religious observances described throughout this chapter are common among Hindus regardless of partisanship and other political views. However, Hindus who have a favorable view of the BJP and those who express elements of Hindu nationalist sentiment tend to be more religiously observant.

Hindus who link religious, national identity are more observant

% of Indian Hindus who say ...

	They give money to a temple	Religion is very important in their life	They have invited a pundit or learned person to conduct religious rites at their home	They have received purification by taking a dip in a holy body of water, like the Ganges	They meditate at least weekly	They dance devotionally
Total Hindus	90%	84%	78%	65%	47%	29%
Favorable view of BJP	91	87	80	68	53	30
Unfavorable view of BJP	89	76	73	58	43	26
Say being Hindu is very important to be truly Indian	92	91	83	69	55	33
Say being Hindu is less important to be truly Indian	86	71	71	58	35	22
Say being able to speak Hindi is very important to be truly Indian	93	91	84	70	60	33
Say being able to speak Hindi is less important to be truly Indian	86	73	71	57	31	23
Say that Indian culture is superior to others*	90	85	79	65	48	30
Disagree that Indian culture is superior to others	84	69	71	58	35	21

* Respondents were asked if they agree with the statement "Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others."

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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For instance, Hindus with a favorable view of the BJP are somewhat more likely than those who do not favor the party to have invited a religious leader to their home to conduct religious rites (80% vs. 73%). Hindus who see a strong connection between their religious and national identities also are more likely to participate in religious activities. For example, Hindus who say it is very important to be Hindu to be truly Indian are much more likely than other Hindus to say they meditate weekly or more often (55% vs. 35%).

Similarly, Hindus who place an emphasis on the Hindi language's role in Indian identity and those who view Indian culture as superior are much more inclined to engage in a range of religious practices.

8. Religion, family and children

Indians value marking important life events through religious ceremonies. Across all major religious groups, most people say it is very important to have a religious naming ceremony (or baptism) for their children, a religious wedding ceremony for themselves or their children, and a religious cremation (or burial) for their loved ones.

Most parents of children under the age of 18 say religion has a role in their children's upbringing. Indian parents generally say their children visit houses of worship (whether temples, mosques, gurdwaras or churches), and most say their children pray. For example, two-thirds of both Hindu and Muslim parents say their children pray.

But the survey also suggests that formal religious education is not a central part of how religious tradition is passed on to children in India, at least not for most religious groups. Fewer than half of Indian parents say their children receive religious instruction outside the home, suggesting that religious traditions and beliefs are mostly passed down within families.

Sikhs are an exception to this pattern: About three-quarters of Sikhs (74%) say their children receive religious education outside the home, which is higher than any other religious group in India. Sikhs also are especially likely to say their children are engaged in their religious traditions. Nine-in-ten Sikh parents say their children go to the gurdwara (90%), compared with 74% of Indian parents overall who say their children go to a house of worship. And a majority of Sikh parents (70%) say their children read Sikh scripture, compared with one-third of all Indian parents (34%) who say their children read holy texts associated with their religious tradition.

Sikhs also value passing on a uniquely Sikh tradition to their community's children – keeping their hair uncut. A majority of Sikhs (76%), including both men and women, say they keep their own hair long (see [Chapter 9](#)), and 67% say it is very important that children in their family keep their hair long. Even among Sikhs who *don't* follow the practice of keeping their own hair long, nearly half (49%) say it is very important that children in the family keep their hair long, indicating the close association of this tradition with Sikh culture.

Indians value marking lifecycle events with religious rituals

The survey asked respondents how important it is to them to have religious ceremonies for lifecycle events – specifically, a religious naming ceremony or baptism for their family’s children, a religious wedding for themselves or for the children in their family, and a religious cremation or burial for loved ones. Most Indians in all six major religious groups consider it very important to perform each of these three ceremonies.

Among Hindus, three-quarters or more say it is very important to have a religious naming ceremony (76%), a religious wedding (86%) and a religious cremation (85%). Sikhs answer similarly, as do Christians (Christians were asked about baptism and a religious burial). Muslims are slightly less likely than Hindus to say a religious naming ceremony is very important (65%), but a near-universal share value a religious burial (92%).

Most Hindus say it is very important to have religious naming ceremonies, weddings and cremation

% of Indian adults who say it is **very** important that they have ...

	A baptism/ religious naming ceremony for sons or daughters in their family	A religious wedding ceremony for themselves or the children in their family	A religious cremation/ burial for their loved ones
General population	75%	85%	86%
Hindus	76	86	85
Muslims	65	83	92
Christians	79	82	86
Sikhs	72	81	81
Buddhists	59	65	70
Jains	67	81	82
Among Hindus ...			
Men	76	85	86
Women	77	86	85
Ages 18-34	76	84	84
35+	77	87	86
Less than college	76	86	85
College graduate	77	84	85
North	78	85	87
Central	83	95	90
East	67	81	83
West	80	88	91
South	75	77	77
Northeast	82	87	84
Religion very important	81	90	89
Religion less important	54	63	63

Note: All groups except Christians were asked about religious naming ceremonies; Christians were asked about baptism. All religious groups were asked about religious wedding ceremonies. Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were asked about the importance of religious cremation; Muslims and Christians were asked about religious burial.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Buddhists are less likely to place high priority on these ceremonies, but still, most Buddhists say it is very important to have a religious naming ceremony (59%), religious wedding (65%) and religious cremation (70%) for their loved ones.

Hindus across different genders, age groups, education levels and regions generally agree on the importance of these ceremonies. But Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than other Hindus to say these ceremonies are very important to them.

Most Indian parents say they are raising their children in a religion

Virtually all Indian parents (or legal guardians) of minor children are bringing up children in a religious tradition; bringing up children with no religion is exceedingly rare in India.

Given that interreligious marriage is very uncommon in India (see [Chapter 3](#)), it stands to reason that Indian parents nearly universally say they are bringing up their children in the same religion as their own (99%).

In addition, a majority of Indian parents say their

children visit a house of worship associated with their faith (74%) and that their children pray (67%). Sikh parents are especially likely to say their children go to the gurdwara (90%). (Fieldwork for this survey was completed before the country's first major lockdown due to COVID-19.)

A smaller share of Indian parents say their children read scripture (34%). Sikhs are, again, more likely than members of other religious groups to say their children do this (70%). Among Hindu parents, those who live in extended family households (joint families) are more likely than those who live in nuclear families to say their children read scripture (38% vs. 23%).²⁰

Fewer Buddhist parents than parents in other religious groups say their children ever go to temple (44%), pray (47%) or read scripture (14%).

Overall, younger and more highly educated parents are less likely than older and less-educated parents to say their children do religious activities. For example, among Hindus, 76% of those

Most Indian parents say their children are observant, although scripture reading is less common

% of Indian parents (or legal guardians) of minor children who say their children ever ...

	Go to temple/mosque/ religious services/ gurdwara	Pray	Read scripture
General population	74%	67%	34%
Hindus	75	67	32
Muslims	69	67	46
Christians	78	80	54
Sikhs	90	69	70
Buddhists	44	47	14

Note: Respondents were asked if their children ever "go to the temple" if Hindu, Buddhist or Jain; "go to the mosque" if Muslim; "go to gurdwara" if Sikh; and "attend religious services" for all others. The survey did not have an adequate sample of Jain parents to include in analysis.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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²⁰ According to the survey, 55% of Indian Hindus say they live in joint families (also known as [extended family households](#)). Joint families can involve multigenerational living arrangements where parents and married children's families cohabitate. Elders of the family, especially grandparents, often play a central role in religious ceremonies and religious instruction of children in such households.

without a college education say their children go to temple, compared with 61% among those with a college degree.

Fewer than half of Indian parents say their children receive religious instruction outside the home

Even though most parents of minor children say their children pray and visit houses of worship, fewer say their children receive religious instruction outside the home, suggesting that in India, children learn about religion primarily at home.

Overall, 43% of Indian parents say their children ever receive religious instruction outside the home. A slightly smaller share explicitly say their children do *not* receive such instruction (38%); some parents responded that the question does not apply to them or that their children are too young (16%).

Sikhs are the most likely of the religious groups surveyed to say their children receive religious instruction outside the home (74%).

Meanwhile, about half of Muslim (49%) and Christian (53%) parents say their children take religious classes. Roughly four-in-ten Hindu parents (41%) say their children receive formal instruction in religion, while fewer Buddhist parents (15%) say this.

Younger parents (under age 35) and those who are highly educated are less likely to say their children receive religious instruction outside the home. For example, roughly one-third of college-educated Hindu parents (32%) send their children to formal classes in religion, compared with 42% of those who have less education.

Sikhs most likely to say their children receive religious instruction outside the home

% of Indian parents (or legal guardians) of minor children who say their children ever receive/do not receive religious instruction outside the home

	Yes, receive religious instruction	No, do not	Not applicable/ children too young
General population	43%	38%	16%
Hindus	41	39	16
Muslims	49	30	16
Christians	53	31	14
Sikhs	74	15	8
Buddhists	15	64	20
Men	42	38	15
Women	43	38	16
Ages 18-34	31	37	28
35+	51	38	6
Less than college	43	37	15
College graduate	33	40	23
North	52	30	14
Central	53	22	17
East	48	31	16
West	23	58	17
South	34	52	13
Northeast	38	46	14
Religion very important	45	36	15
Religion less important	31	47	17
Pray daily	49	31	15
Pray less often	32	47	16

Note: The survey did not have an adequate sample of Jain parents to include in analysis. Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Hindu parents who say religion is very important to their lives and who pray daily are more likely than less religious Hindus to send their children for formal instruction in religion. But this pattern is less sharp among other religious groups, suggesting that formal instruction in religion may not be an important indicator of religious commitment for families of different religious backgrounds. For example, 15% of highly religious Buddhists and 12% of less religious Buddhists say their children receive religious instruction outside the home.

Parents in the West (23%) and South (34%) of India are generally less likely to send their children for formal religious instruction than parents in the Northern (52%), Central (53%) and Eastern (48%) regions. A majority of Muslim parents in the Northern (63%) and Central (60%) parts of the country say their children receive formal religious education. Meanwhile, among Christians, two-thirds of parents in the Northeast (68%) send their children for religious instruction.

Vast majority of Sikhs say it is very important that their children keep their hair long

Most Sikhs in India (76%) keep their hair long, a practice closely associated with Sikh religion and culture. When asked how important it is for the children in their family to keep their hair long, two-thirds of Sikhs (67%) say it is very important.

Sikhs across different demographic backgrounds generally say it is very important that children in their family keep their hair uncut. More religious Sikhs are more likely to say this is crucial: For example, among those who pray daily, three-in-four Sikhs place high value on the tradition. Still, 62% of those who pray less often also say it is very important that children in the family keep their hair long, indicating the strong association of this tradition with Sikh identity beyond religious observance.

Similarly, Sikhs who themselves keep their hair long are more likely than Sikhs who cut their hair to say it is very important that children in their family follow the same Sikh tradition. Still, even among Sikhs who cut their own hair, nearly half (49%) say it is very important that children keep their hair long.

Sikh attitudes on passing this tradition down to children also are linked to politics. Specifically, Sikhs who say they voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2019 parliamentary elections are much more likely than those who voted for the Indian National Congress (INC) to say Sikh children should keep their hair uncut (81% vs. 56%). Among those who voted for Shiromani Akali Dal, a Sikh party, 65% say it is very important that children in their family keep their hair uncut.²¹

Caste also is linked with attitudes on this issue. Fully 76% of General Category Sikhs say it is very important to keep children's hair long, compared with 59% of those belonging to lower castes.

General Category Sikhs and those who voted for BJP more likely to place high value on keeping children's hair long

% of Indian Sikhs who say it is very important that the children in their family keep their hair long

Total Sikhs	67%
Men	65
Women	69
Ages 18-34	66
35+	68
Less than college	67
College graduate	72
General Category	76
Lower castes	59
Pray daily	75
Pray less often	62
Voted BJP in 2019	81
Voted INC*	56
Voted Shiromani Akali Dal**	65
Sikh adults who keep their own hair long	72
Do not keep their own hair long	49

* Indian National Congress party.

** Shiromani Akali Dal represents Punjabi interests.

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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²¹ A plurality of Sikhs say they voted for INC in 2019; see [Chapter 6](#) for details.

9. Religious clothing and personal appearance

In addition to religious activities like praying, visiting houses of worship or having a home altar, many Indians also display their religious observance through attire, including the use of special clothing, jewelry, and other aspects of their personal appearance such as beards.

Half of Hindus (52%) and Muslims (50%) and a majority of Christians (61%), for instance, say they generally wear a religious pendant. And most Sikh men and women wear a traditional metal bracelet, known as a kara, and follow the distinctive Sikh practice of keeping their hair long.

Many of these practices are gender-specific. The vast majority of Muslim men say they wear a skullcap (84%), and most also have a beard (64%). Similarly, Sikh men largely have beards (83%) and wear turbans (69%).

Among women, wearing a head covering outside the home is a common practice among Muslims (89%), Sikhs (86%) and Hindus (59%). The practice of covering the head outside the home is less widespread among Buddhist (30%) and Christian (21%) women. Nearly two-thirds of Muslim women in India (64%) say they wear a burqa. A burqa is a covering for the whole body, including the face and head, but interviewers did not define the term for the respondents, leaving the exact definition up to their own understanding.

Overwhelming majorities of Hindu (84%) and Buddhist (78%) women say they wear a bindi, a forehead marking, and at least some Muslim (18%), Christian (22%) and Sikh (29%) women also say they do this, even though the practice is not typically considered part of these religious groups’

Definitions of terms in this chapter

Bindi: A decorative mark on the forehead, worn by Hindu women (and members of some other religious groups), traditionally believed to be venerating an energy center of the human body or representing “the third eye,” but also worn as an adornment or a sign of marriage.

Burqa: A loose-fitting garment worn by some Muslim women that covers the whole body, including the face and head.

Hijab: A head scarf, worn by some Muslim women, which leaves the face exposed.

Janeu: A white thread worn traditionally by Brahmin men across the torso after a boyhood rite of passage ceremony.

Kara: A metal bracelet traditionally worn by Sikh men and women as a symbol of their faith.

Kirpan: A metal dagger or sword carried by Sikhs as a symbol of their commitment to justice, compassion and service to humanity.

Niqab: A garment worn by some Muslim women that covers both the face and neck but leaves the eyes exposed.

Tilak: A mark on the forehead typically worn by Hindu men (and some members of other religious groups) as a sign of piety.

traditions. Meanwhile, a slim majority of Hindu men wear a tilak (53%), another type of forehead marking often made in red.²²

In general, Indians with higher religious observance are more likely to follow these practices related to clothing and appearance. For example, Hindu men who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than other Hindu men to wear a tilak (56% vs. 42%).

Religious appearances also differ by region: Hindu women in the South are significantly less likely than Hindu women nationally to say they cover their heads outside of the home (22% vs. 59%). And wearing a hijab (a garment that covers the hair only) is more common among Southern Indian Muslim women than Muslim women elsewhere in the country: About one-in-four Muslim women in the South (23%) say they wear a hijab, compared with single-digit percentages elsewhere in the country.

Hindu respondents in the Northeastern region are generally the least likely to follow customary appearance practices. Hindu women in the Northeast are significantly less likely than Hindu women nationally to wear a bindi (59% vs. 84%), or to cover their head (29% vs. 59%). The same pattern applies to men: Hindu men in the region are less likely than Hindu men elsewhere to wear a tilak (21% in Northeast, 53% nationally).

Among Hindus, caste is also an important marker of religious clothing. Brahmin (priestly caste) men are more inclined than others to say they wear a tilak (76%, compared with 53% among Hindu men overall) and a janeu, a sacred white thread worn around the chest, usually after an initiation ceremony (56% vs. 18%).

²² The survey did not include enough interviews with Jain men and women to analyze their practices separately.

Half or more of Hindus, Muslims and Christians wear religious pendants

The survey asked whether respondents generally wear a religious pendant, such as an amulet, cross, image or symbol of God. Around half of all Indian adults (51%) say they generally wear a religious pendant. Responses vary by religious group; for example, roughly half of Hindus (52%) and Muslims (50%) wear them, compared with much smaller shares of Jains (24%) and Buddhists (17%). Christians are the most likely to say they wear religious pendants (61%).

Hindus who say religion is very important in their personal lives are slightly more likely than other Hindus to say they wear a religious pendant (54% vs. 46%). And Hindus in urban areas are a bit less likely than rural Hindus to say they do this (48% vs. 54%).

Regionally, a minority of Hindus in the West (40%) and Northeast (34%) say they generally wear a religious pendant, compared with 52% of Hindus nationally.

Half of Hindus wear a religious pendant

% of Indian adults who say they generally wear a religious pendant, such as an amulet, cross, image or symbol of God

General population	51%
Hindus	52
Muslims	50
Christians	61
Sikhs	36
Buddhists	17
Jains	24
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>	
Men	50
Women	55
Ages 18-34	52
35+	53
Less than college	53
College graduate	48
North	53
Central	58
East	53
West	40
South	57
Northeast	34
Urban	48
Rural	54
Religion very important	54
Religion less important	46

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Most Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women cover their heads outside the home

Vast majorities of Hindu (84%) and Buddhist (78%) women say they generally wear a bindi – a decorative mark worn on the part of the forehead traditionally believed [to be the location of “the third eye,”](#) but also worn as an adornment or a sign of marriage. (The survey did not include enough interviews with Jain women to separately analyze their practices, but Jain women are known to wear bindis as well.) Smaller shares of Muslim (18%), Christian (22%) and Sikh (29%) women also say they wear a bindi.

Hindu women of different age groups, education levels and degrees of religious commitment are all highly likely to wear a bindi, but Hindu women in the Northeast are significantly less likely to wear a bindi than those elsewhere in India. Among Muslims, meanwhile, women who live in the Eastern region are more likely than those in other parts of India to say they wear a bindi (31% vs. 18% nationally).

A majority of Indian women overall also say they keep the practice of covering their head outside their home, including especially high shares of Muslim (89%) and Sikh women (86%) who do this. A smaller majority of Hindu women (59%) cover their heads. The practice is less common among Christians (21%) and Buddhists (30%).

Younger Hindu women (ages 18 to 34) are less likely than their elders to cover their heads (55% vs. 63%). Among Hindus, the practice of covering the head also is closely associated with

Most Hindu and Buddhist women wear a bindi

% of Indian women who say they ...

	Generally wear a bindi	Keep the practice of covering their heads outside their homes
Total women	74%	61%
Hindus	84	59
Muslims	18	89
Christians	22	21
Sikhs	29	86
Buddhists	78	30
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>		
Ages 18-34	85	55
35+	84	63
Less than college	85	61
College graduate	80	38
General Category	83	51
Lower castes	85	62
North	81	82
Central	83	84
East	85	67
West	84	51
South	89	22
Northeast	59	29
Urban	83	45
Rural	85	66
Religion very important	85	62
Religion less important	82	42

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Adequate sample size is not available for analysis of Jain women.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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socioeconomic status: Hindu women with college degrees are significantly less likely than others to wear a head covering in public (38% vs. 61%). A majority of rural women (66%) say they keep the practice, compared with 45% among urban Hindu women. Similarly, lower-caste women are more likely than those belonging to General Category castes to say they cover their heads (62% vs. 51%).

Hindu women in the Northeast (29%) and South (22%) are least inclined to wear a head covering, while Hindu women in the Northern (82%) and Central (84%) regions are the most likely to cover their heads.

Muslim women who say they cover their heads were further asked what type of head covering they generally use – hijab, niqab or burqa. (The terms were not defined for respondents.) A majority of all Muslim women in India (64%) say they generally wear a burqa, which covers the entire face. Smaller shares say they wear a niqab (12%) or a hijab (8%).

Muslim women who have faced recent financial hardship (i.e., did not have enough money to pay for food, medicine or housing in the last year) are less likely than other women to wear a burqa (57% vs. 69%) and more likely to wear a niqab (17% vs. 8%).

The South differs from the rest of India in that Muslim women there are more likely to wear a hijab (23%) and less likely to wear a niqab (1%) than those in several other regions. For example, in the Western region, 15% wear a niqab and just 4% say they wear a hijab.

Nearly two-thirds of Muslim women in India say they wear a burqa

% of Muslim women who say they ...

	<i>Keep the practice of covering their head outside their home and wear a ...</i>				Do not cover head
	TOTAL	Burqa	Niqab	Hijab	
Muslim women	89%	64%	12%	8%	11%
Ages 18-34	87	64	12	7	13
35+	90	63	12	9	9
North	85	61	15	7	15
East	92	59	17	7	8
West	90	67	15	4	9
South	83	59	1	23	16
Northeast	85	55	3	7	15
Recent financial hardship	87	57	17	8	13
No financial hardship	90	69	8	8	10
Religion very important	88	64	12	7	11
Religion less important	91	63	11	13	8

Note: "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year. Adequate sample size is not available for analysis of Muslim women in the Central region. Something else/Don't know/Refused responses are not shown, so figures do not add to subtotal indicated.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Slim majority of Hindu men say they wear a tilak, fewer wear a janeu

The survey asked Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist men if they generally wear a tilak – a mark on the forehead typically worn as a sign of piety. Men in these three religious groups also were asked if they wear a janeu, a white thread worn traditionally by Brahmin men across the torso [after a boyhood rite of passage ceremony](#).

Just over half of Hindu men wear a tilak (53%), while smaller shares of Buddhists (17%) and Sikhs (7%) say they do this. Hindu men are less likely to say they generally wear a janeu (18%). And very few Sikhs (7%) or Buddhists (3%) say they wear a janeu.

Within the Hindu community, Brahmin men are much more inclined than those in other castes (including other General Category castes) to say they wear a tilak (76%) or a janeu (56%). (Both practices are historically associated with the priestly caste.) Wearing a janeu, however, is significantly less common among younger Brahmin men – that is, under the age of 35 – than older Brahmins (45% vs. 65%).

Among Hindu men overall, those living in Northeastern India (21%) are significantly less likely than those living elsewhere to wear a tilak, while those in the Northern region wear the tilak at the highest rate (66%). Meanwhile, Hindus in the South (33%) and East (23%) are the most likely to wear a janeu, with those in the West (6%) least likely.

Hindu men who say religion is very important in their lives are significantly more likely than other Hindu men to say they wear a tilak (56% vs. 42%), although this gap does not exist for the janeu.

Among Hindu men, Brahmins more likely to wear tilak, janeu

% of Indian men who say they generally wear a ...

	Tilak	Janeu
Hindu men	53%	18%
Sikh men	7	7
Buddhist men	17	3
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>		
Ages 18-34	53	16
35+	54	20
Less than college	54	18
College graduate	52	20
Brahmin	76	56
Other General Category	48	22
Scheduled Caste/Tribe	48	15
Other/Most Backward Class	59	14
North	66	17
Central	54	10
East	49	23
West	44	6
South	60	33
Northeast	21	12
Religion very important	56	17
Religion less important	42	22

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Eight-in-ten Muslim men in India wear a skullcap

The overwhelming majority of Indian Muslim men (84%) say they generally wear a skullcap, a head covering often but not exclusively worn during daily prayers.

Muslim men who say religion is very important in their lives are significantly more likely than other Muslims to wear a skullcap (86% vs. 67%).

Skullcap usage varies by region, with Muslim men in the Northeast (36%) significantly less likely than men elsewhere to wear a skullcap. Nine-in-ten or more in the Eastern, Western and Central regions of India say they wear a skullcap.

Vast majority of Muslim men in India wear a skullcap

% of Muslim men who say they generally wear a skullcap

Muslim men	84%
Ages 18-34	82
35+	86
Less than college	84
College graduate	84
North	75
Central	90
East	95
West	91
South	78
Northeast	36
Religion very important	86
Religion less important	67

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Majority of Sikh men wear a turban

The survey asked Sikh respondents if they follow some of the traditional displays of devotion prescribed in Sikhism: wearing a metal bracelet (kara), keeping their hair long, and for men, wearing a turban and carrying a metal dagger (kirpan). These practices have been used historically to create a distinct Sikh identity and community.

Large majorities of Sikh adults say they wear a kara (84%) and keep their hair long (76%). Sikh men are slightly more likely than Sikh women to wear a kara (88% vs. 81%), while women are more inclined than men to keep their hair long (93% vs. 61%).

Among Sikh men, most respondents say they wear a turban (69%), although fewer say they generally carry a kirpan (29%). Sikh men who say they pray daily are more likely to carry a kirpan than those who pray less often (36% vs. 24%).

Older Sikhs (ages 35 and older) keep their hair long at slightly higher rates than younger Sikh adults (81% vs. 70%). Similarly, older Sikh men are considerably more likely than younger men to wear a turban (79% vs. 58%).

Most Sikhs keep their hair long, but younger Sikhs less likely to do so

% of Indian Sikhs who say they generally ...

	Among men and women		Among men only	
	Wear a kara	Keep their hair long	Wear a turban	Carry a kirpan
Total Sikhs	84%	76%	-	-
Men	88	61	69%	29%
Women	81	93	-	-
Ages 18-34	85	70	58	26
35+	84	81	79	31
Less than college	84	77	69	29
College graduate	90	74	69	28

Note: Only Sikh men were asked if they wear a turban or carry a kirpan (dagger).
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Muslim and Sikh men generally keep beards

The survey asked interviewers to record if a male respondent has a beard. Among Muslim and Sikh men in India, majorities have beards, (64% and 83%, respectively). For many Sikh men, having a beard is seen as a religious obligation, and beards are also traditional in [several Islamic schools of thought](#). Fewer Buddhist (51%), Christian (48%) and Hindu men (42%) have beards.

Muslim men ages 35 and older are considerably more likely to have a beard than younger men (80% vs. 48%). Similarly, older Sikh men are more likely than their younger counterparts to have a beard (92% vs. 72%).

While half of Muslim men or more in all regions have a beard, roughly three-quarters in the West and South keep a beard (76% and 75%, respectively).

Muslim men who pray daily are significantly more likely than other Muslim men to have a beard (71% vs. 52%). But among Sikhs, religious observance matters less in whether or not men keep a beard.

In India, eight-in-ten Sikh men and nearly two-thirds of Muslim men have beards

% of Indian men who have a beard

Total men	46%	
Hindus	42	
Muslims	64	
Christians	48	
Sikhs	83	
Buddhists	51	
Among ...	Muslim men	Sikh men
Ages 18-34	48%	72%
35+	80	92
Less than college	65	82
College graduate	57	86
North	68	82
Central	52	NA
East	64	NA
West	76	NA
South	75	NA
Northeast	62	NA
Pray daily	71	87
Pray less often	52	80

Note: Adequate sample size is not available for analysis of Sikh men outside the Northern region. The vast majority of India's Sikhs are concentrated in the North of the country. Survey interviewers recorded by observation whether male respondents had a beard. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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10. Religion and food

Several of India's most widely practiced religions include strict dietary laws. For instance, Islamic teachings have guidelines for halal eating, forbidding the consumption of pork and other products. Many Jains avoid not only meat but also root vegetables to avoid destroying the entire plant, which is seen as a form of violence in Jain theology. And restrictions on beef consumption and cow slaughter, linked with the Hindu concept of cows as sacred animals, have become a [politically charged topic](#) in India.

The survey finds that about four-in-ten Indian adults say they are vegetarian. And many others restrict meat in their diet in some way, either by abstaining from eating certain meats, by abstaining from eating meat on certain days, or both. Altogether, about eight-in-ten Indian adults limit their meat consumption in some manner, including majorities in all major religious groups. Jains (97%) are the most likely to restrict meat in their diet, while Muslims (67%) and Christians (66%) are the least likely.

Many Hindus and Jains also say they won't eat food in places where the rules around diet are different from what they personally follow. For example, 51% of Hindus and an even larger share of Jains (72%) say they would *never* eat food in the home of someone whose religion has different rules about food than theirs. Buddhists (37%), Muslims (33%) and Christians (28%) are much less likely to say they would avoid eating food in these circumstances.

Hindu dietary restrictions are closely tied to religious observance in India. For example, highly religious Hindus are more likely to say they are vegetarians. And eating habits also differ by region. For example, a majority of Hindus in the Western (57%), Central (61%) and Northern (71%) regions say they are vegetarians, but far fewer in the East (18%), Northeast (19%) and South (30%) follow a vegetarian diet. And vegetarian Hindus in the South are more likely to say they would eat in the home of a non-vegetarian neighbor or friend (67%) than are vegetarian Hindus nationally (39%).

Most Indians are not vegetarians, but majorities do follow at least some restrictions on meat in their diet

The majority of Indians do not describe themselves as vegetarians: When asked if they are vegetarian, 61% of Indians say “no.” (While there are many ways to [define “vegetarian” in India](#), the survey left the definition of vegetarian up to the respondent.)

Nearly four-in-ten adults in India (39%) say they do follow a vegetarian diet, including 44% of Hindus. Most Sikhs (59%) identify as vegetarians, as do an overwhelming majority of Jains (92%). Muslims (8%), Christians (10%) and Buddhists (25%) are less likely to say they are vegetarians.

In addition to those who say they are vegetarian, many other Indians abstain from eating meat in some manner. About four-in-ten Indians (42%) say they are not vegetarian but that they abstain from eating meat on certain days and/or abstain from eating certain meats, including three-in-ten who follow both of these restrictions. Altogether, 81% of Indians limit their meat consumption in some way – either they are vegetarians, or they avoid certain meats and/or avoid meat on certain days.

Majorities in all of India’s religious groups follow at least some restrictions on meat in their diet

% of Indian adults who say they are ...

	NET Any restrictions on meat	Vegetarian	Not vegetarian			
			Abstain from eating meat on certain days AND from eating certain meats	ONLY abstain from eating meat on certain days	ONLY abstain from eating certain meats	No restrictions on meat
General population	81%	39%	30%	6%	5%	18%
Hindus	83	44	29	6	4	16
Muslims	67	8	39	7	14	32
Christians	66	10	30	10	16	33
Sikhs	82	59	16	3	4	16
Buddhists	84	25	38	14	8	15
Jains	97	92	4	1	0	3

Note: Don’t know/Refused responses to any of the three questions included here are not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Respondents were asked if they are vegetarian; those who said no were then asked two separate questions: “Do you abstain from eating meat on certain days?” and “Do you abstain from eating certain meats?”

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Majorities among all of India's major religious groups say they follow at least one of these restrictions on meat in their diet. Jains nearly universally abstain from meat either fully or partially (97%). Christians and Muslims are the least likely to abide by such dietary restrictions; still, about two-thirds among these groups abstain from meat in some way, including 53% of Muslims and 46% of Christians who abstain from eating certain meats. Among Hindus, 83% say they are either vegetarians or have restrictions on what kinds of meat they eat or when.

The survey also finds that most Hindus say a person cannot be Hindu if they eat beef, and most Muslims say a person cannot be Muslim if they eat pork (see [Chapter 5](#)).

Hindus with higher levels of religious observance are more likely to be vegetarians. Among those who say religion is very important in their lives, 46% say they are vegetarians, compared with 33% among Hindus who say religion is less important to them. A similar pattern holds with partisanship: Hindus who express a favorable view of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are more likely than others to be vegetarians (49% vs. 35%). Meanwhile, Hindu members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes are *less* likely than General Category Hindus to say they are vegetarians (40% vs. 53%).

There is also significant regional variation among Hindus on this question: The majority of Hindus in Northern (71%), Central (61%) and Western (57%) India say they are vegetarians, while this is much rarer in the East (18%), Northeast (19%) and South (30%). Even in the regions where fewer Hindus are vegetarians, however, many do follow at least some restrictions on meat in their diet. For example, 39% of Hindus in the South say they don't eat meat on certain days *and* don't eat certain meats, while another 14% abide by just one of these two limitations.

Significant regional variation among Hindus on rates of vegetarianism

% of Indian Hindus who say they are ...

	NET Any restrictions on meat	Vegetarian	Not vegetarian			
			Abstain from eating meat on certain days AND from eating certain meats	ONLY abstain from eating meat on certain days	ONLY abstain from eating certain meats	No restrictions on meat
Total Hindus	83%	44%	29%	6%	4%	16%
Men	82	42	29	6	4	17
Women	84	46	29	6	3	15
Ages 18-34	83	43	29	6	4	16
35+	83	44	29	6	4	16
Less than college	82	43	29	6	4	16
College graduate	87	50	28	6	3	13
General Category	87	53	26	5	4	12
Lower castes	82	40	31	7	4	17
North	91	71	17	2	1	8
Central	89	61	22	4	2	10
East	69	18	36	11	5	29
West	88	57	24	4	3	12
South	83	30	39	7	7	17
Northeast	74	19	39	5	12	22
Religion very important	83	46	28	6	3	16
Religion less important	82	33	36	7	6	17
Favorable view of BJP	86	49	28	5	4	13
Unfavorable view of BJP	80	35	33	8	4	19

Note: Don't know/Refused responses to any of the three questions included here are not shown. Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Respondents were asked if they are vegetarian; those who said no were then asked two separate questions: "Do you abstain from eating meat on certain days?" and "Do you abstain from eating certain meats?"

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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One-in-five Hindus abstain from eating root vegetables

The survey asked all those who identify as vegetarians whether or not they eat root vegetables, such as garlic and onion. Jain religious teachings recommend against eating root vegetables, since pulling out a plant's roots destroys the plant.

Indeed, a majority of Indian Jains (67%) say they abstain from eating root vegetables. Jains are far more likely than any other religious group to do this, but even among Hindus (21%) and Sikhs (18%), roughly one-in-five say they do not eat root vegetables. Hindu vegetarians are about evenly divided between those who eat root vegetables and those who do not.

Among Hindus, those who say religion is very important in their lives are slightly more likely than others to say they abstain from eating root vegetables (22% vs. 17%). And Hindus in the Northern (35%) and Central (29%) regions are more likely than Hindus elsewhere to avoid root vegetables.

The survey did not include enough interviews with Jain respondents to conduct a deeper analysis of their dietary practices.

Two-thirds of Jains abstain from eating root vegetables

% of Indian adults who say they ...

	Vegetarian		Not vegetarian
	Abstain from eating root vegetables	Do not abstain from eating root vegetables	
General population	19%	20%	61%
Hindus	21	22	56
Muslims	4	3	92
Christians	6	5	89
Sikhs	18	40	40
Buddhists	13	12	75
Jains	67	25	8
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>			
Men	20	21	58
Women	22	24	54
Ages 18-34	21	22	56
35+	22	23	55
Less than college	21	22	56
College graduate	24	26	50
North	35	36	29
Central	29	32	38
East	13	4	82
West	17	39	43
South	18	12	70
Northeast	11	8	81
Religion very important	22	23	54
Religion less important	17	17	66

Note: Don't know/Refused responses to either of the two questions included here are not shown. Respondents were asked if they are vegetarian; those who said yes were then asked: "Do you abstain from eating root vegetables, such as garlic and onion?"

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Fewer than half of vegetarian Hindus willing to eat in non-vegetarian settings

Most vegetarians in India say they would *not* eat food in non-vegetarian settings, though these views vary widely by religious group.

Fewer than half of Hindu vegetarians say they would ever eat food in a restaurant that serves both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food (36%) or in the home of a friend or neighbor who is non-vegetarian (39%). And much smaller shares of Jain vegetarians share these sentiments: 8% say they would eat at a restaurant that serves non-vegetarian food, and 11% say they would eat at the home of a friend who is not a vegetarian. About three-in-ten Sikh vegetarians would eat in such situations.

By contrast, most Muslim, Christian and Buddhist vegetarians say they would eat in these non-vegetarian settings. For example, roughly three-in-four vegetarian Christians (77%) say they would eat at the home of a friend or neighbor who is non-vegetarian.

Among Hindus, vegetarians in the South are most likely to express willingness to eat in a non-vegetarian restaurant or home – around two-thirds say they would eat at a restaurant that serves meat (64%) or in the home of someone who is not vegetarian (67%). By comparison, fewer than half of Hindu vegetarians in most other regions feel similarly.

Among Hindu vegetarians, men are slightly more likely than women to say they would eat in non-vegetarian settings.

Muslim, Christian, Buddhist vegetarians most flexible about where they will eat

Among Indian vegetarians, % who say they would ever eat food ...

	In a restaurant that serves both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food	In the home of a friend or neighbor who is non-vegetarian
General population	37%	40%
Hindus	36	39
Muslims	76	78
Christians	78	77
Sikhs	29	31
Buddhists	60	63
Jains	8	11
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>		
Men	40	42
Women	32	36
Ages 18-34	37	39
35+	35	39
Less than college	35	39
College graduate	39	39
North	31	29
Central	28	30
East	40	48
West	31	39
South	64	67
Northeast	43	54
Religion very important	35	38
Religion less important	43	45

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
 "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Indians evenly split about willingness to eat meals with hosts who have different religious rules about food

Given that different religions in India have different dietary rules, the survey asked Indian adults whether they would ever eat food in the home of someone – or at a function hosted by people – whose religion has different rules about food than their own.

Overall, Indians are evenly split on whether they would be willing to eat in each setting. Just under half of India's Hindus say they would eat in a home (46%) or at a function (47%) where the host's religion has different rules about food than Hinduism, and nearly identical shares of Sikhs say they would be willing to eat in the home of (45%), or at an event hosted by (47%), people whose religion has different dietary rules than Sikhism.

Only about one-quarter of Jains indicate they would be willing to eat food in these situations. By contrast, roughly six-in-ten or more Christians, Muslims and Buddhists would be willing to eat at a home or a function hosted by people with different rules about food.

Only in the South do a majority of Hindus say they would be willing to eat either in the home of (66%), or at an event hosted by (67%), people whose dietary rules differ from their own.

Only about a quarter of Jains willing to eat at home of people with different religious rules about food

% of Indian adults who say they would ever eat food ...

	In the home of someone whose religion has different rules about food	At a function hosted by people whose religion has different rules about food
General population	49%	50%
Hindus	46	47
Muslims	63	64
Christians	68	69
Sikhs	45	47
Buddhists	62	66
Jains	24	27
Among Hindus ...		
Men	50	51
Women	42	43
Ages 18-34	48	49
35+	44	46
Less than college	45	46
College graduate	54	54
North	40	42
Central	37	38
East	40	42
West	46	48
South	66	67
Northeast	41	39
Religion very important	45	46
Religion less important	53	54

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Majority of Indians say they fast

Fasting is an important religious observance in India. Religious festivals in India are often accompanied by fasting, and many people also observe religious fasts on certain days of the week and to mark important events in their life. Most Indian adults say they fast, including nearly eight-in-ten or more Hindus (79%), Jains (84%) and Muslims (85%). Smaller majorities of Christians and Buddhists respond similarly (64% and 61%, respectively), while Sikhs have the lowest rate of fasting (28%).

Among Hindus, those of different ages, education levels and caste classifications say they fast at similarly high rates. Hindu women, though, are significantly more likely than Hindu men to say they fast (87% vs. 70%). And Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than other Hindus to say they fast (81% vs. 65%).

Hindus living in the Southern (68%) and Northeastern (64%) regions are less inclined toward fasting than Hindus living in the rest of the country.

The vast majority of Muslims across different educational backgrounds, age groups and regions say they fast. (Fasting during Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.) But Muslims in the Northeast are somewhat less likely than Muslims elsewhere to say they fast (65% vs. 85% nationally).

Most Hindus, Muslims say they fast

% of Indian adults who say they fast

General population	77%
Hindus	79
Muslims	85
Christians	64
Sikhs	28
Buddhists	61
Jains	84
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>	
Men	70
Women	87
Ages 18-34	78
35+	79
Less than college	79
College graduate	76
General Category	79
Lower castes	79
North	83
Central	85
East	80
West	81
South	68
Northeast	64
Religion very important	81
Religion less important	65

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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11. Religious beliefs

India is home to a wide range of religious traditions, which is evident in the blend of beliefs held by its people – some of which cross religious lines.

For instance, not only do most Hindus and Jains believe the Ganges River has the power to purify – a belief with roots in Hindu scripture – but substantial minorities of Indian Christians and Muslims believe this as well. And Muslims are just as likely as Hindus (77% each) to believe in the concept of karma, which is not inherent to Islam. Meanwhile, a majority of Hindus, Muslims and Christians all believe in some form of heaven.

At the same time, some beliefs that may seem mainstream for a certain group are not held by most members of that group. Although many people might consider reincarnation a core teaching in several religions native to South Asia, in no religious community does a majority express belief in reincarnation. Just 40% of Hindus, 23% of Jains and 18% of both Buddhists and Sikhs in India say they believe in reincarnation. Similarly, although miracles are central to the story of Jesus in Christian scripture, only about half of India's Christians (48%) say they believe in miracles.

On a variety of religious beliefs measured by the survey, there are consistent patterns. In general, men, younger adults (ages 18 to 34) and those who have a college education are less likely to hold these beliefs. For instance, while a minority of men say they believe in the evil eye – the idea that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen to others – most Indian women believe this (44% vs. 55%). And college-educated Hindus are less likely than other Hindus to believe the Ganges has the power to purify (73% vs. 82%).

Politics plays a role as well. Hindu supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are more likely than Hindus who have an unfavorable view of the party to express devotion to various tenets of their religion. For example, Hindus who hold a favorable view of the BJP are more likely than other Hindus to say they believe in reincarnation, karma and the purifying power of the Ganges.

In addition, members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes are more likely than members of General Category castes to hold a variety of religious beliefs, with a particularly notable gap among Christians (see [“Lower-caste Christians much more likely than General Category Christians to hold both Christian and non-Christian beliefs”](#) below). And those who have faced a financial hardship in the previous year – that is, those who did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care or housing – are more often believers than other Indians.

The rest of this chapter looks in more detail at individual religious beliefs, including what types of treatments people trust for their and their family's health problems. For information about the nuances of Indians' belief in God, including whether God can be manifest in people, see [Chapter 12](#).

More Hindus say there are multiple ways to interpret Hinduism than say there is only one true way

The survey asked respondents whether there is “only one true way” or “more than one true way” to interpret the teachings of their religion.

Most of India’s Muslims (63%) say there is only one true way of interpreting Islam, while fewer (28%) feel there are multiple ways of interpreting their religion. Christians also lean toward the view that there is one true way to interpret their faith.

Hindus are the sole religious group in India whose followers are more likely to say there are multiple ways of interpreting their religion (47%) than that there is only one correct interpretation (38%).

At least one-in-ten Indians in all religions do not offer a clear answer to this question. For example, among Sikhs, 44% say there is only one true way to interpret Sikh teachings, 35% say there are multiple ways, and roughly one-in-five do not take either position (21%).

Hindus differ regionally in their views on this theological question. In the South, a majority of Hindus (56%) say there are multiple ways to interpret the teachings of the religion. By comparison, Hindus in the Northern and Central parts of the country are more evenly divided: 44% of Hindus in the North say there is only one true way to interpret the teachings of Hinduism, and a nearly identical share (45%) say there can be multiple understandings of the religion.

Most Indian Muslims say there is only one true way to interpret Islam

% of Indian adults who say “There is _____ to interpret the teachings of my religion”

	Only ONE true way	MORE than one true way
Hindus	38%	47%
Muslims	63	28
Christians	52	35
Sikhs	44	35
Buddhists	46	42
Jains	48	38
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>		
Men	38	48
Women	38	46
Ages 18-34	38	48
35+	38	46
Less than college	39	46
College graduate	31	55
North	44	45
Central	44	43
East	32	48
West	49	40
South	25	56
Northeast	45	37
Religion very important	41	47
Religion less important	23	49
Favorable view of BJP	43	46
Unfavorable view of BJP	30	54

Note: Other/Both/Neither/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Hindu college graduates are somewhat less inclined than other Hindus to say there is only one true interpretation of Hinduism (31% vs. 39%). And Hindus who say religion is very important in their lives are significantly *more* likely than others to express this view (41% vs. 23%). Similarly, Sikhs who say religion is very important also are more likely to say there is only one true interpretation of Sikh teachings (46% vs. 30%).

Among Hindus, partisanship makes a difference as well. A majority of those who have an unfavorable view of the BJP (54%) say there are multiple ways to interpret Hinduism, while those with a favorable view of the party are more evenly divided on the question: 43% say there is only one true interpretation of the religion, compared with 46% who see multiple understandings.

Majorities of Muslims across different regions say there is only one true way to interpret Islam. And older Muslims (i.e., those ages 35 and older) are slightly more likely than younger Muslim adults to see a singular interpretation of their religion (65% vs. 60%). Muslim men are also slightly more inclined than women to say that there is only one true interpretation of Islam (65% vs. 60%). Among Christians, the gender pattern is reversed: Christian men are *less* likely than Christian women to say Christianity has only one true interpretation (49% vs. 56%).

Most Indians across different religious groups believe in karma

Most Indians of all religions surveyed believe in karma, the idea that people will reap the benefits of their good deeds, and pay the price for their bad deeds, often in their next life. This includes roughly three-quarters of Hindus (77%), Muslims (77%) and Jains (75%) who share this belief.

Indian adults of different ages and educational backgrounds generally believe in karma. The one exception to the widespread belief in karma is the Southern region: About half of Southern Indians say they believe in karma (51%), compared with much higher percentages in other parts of the country (72% or more). This regional pattern holds true for Hindus as well as Muslims.

Among Hindus, those who have a favorable view of the BJP are slightly more likely than those who have an unfavorable view of the party to believe in karma (79% vs. 70%). And among Indians overall and Hindus specifically, those who pray daily are more inclined to believe in karma. But the opposite is true among Muslims: Those who pray daily are *less* likely than other Muslims to believe in karma (75% vs. 83%).

Equal shares of Hindus, Muslims believe in karma

% of Indian adults who say they believe in karma

General population	76%
Hindus	77
Muslims	77
Christians	54
Sikhs	62
Buddhists	64
Jains	75
Men	76
Women	77
Ages 18-34	75
35+	77
Less than college	76
College graduate	76
General Category	73
Lower castes	78
Pray daily	81
Pray less often	69

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Hindus, Jains believe in Ganges' power to purify

The Ganges River originates in the Himalayan mountains, crosses the Northern, Central and Eastern parts of India, and has special significance in Hinduism. Indeed, the vast majority of Indian Hindus (81%) say that the Ganges has the power to purify, and most Jains (66%) share this view. This belief is considerably less common among other religious groups in India, but, still, about one-third of Christians (32%) and Sikhs (32%) and roughly a quarter of Muslims (26%) feel that the Ganges has the power to purify.

Large majorities of Hindus across all regions of India believe that the Ganges River can purify. Hindus in the Central region, which includes some of the Ganges' most sacred cities, such as Varanasi, are especially inclined to hold this belief (90%). Rural Hindus also are somewhat more likely than those who live in urban locations to believe the Ganges can purify (83% vs. 76%), while college-educated Hindus are somewhat *less* inclined than other Hindus to believe in the Ganges' purifying properties (73% vs. 82%).

Hindus who have a favorable opinion of the BJP are more likely than Hindus who have an unfavorable view of the party to believe the Ganges can purify (84% vs. 74%). Similarly, among Muslims, BJP supporters are more likely than BJP detractors to say the Ganges purifies (34% vs. 24%). And while just under half of Christian BJP supporters say the Ganges purifies (46%), fewer than one-quarter of Christians who view the ruling party unfavorably believe this (21%).

About one-third of Christians, quarter of Muslims in India say Ganges can purify

% of Indian adults who say that the Ganges has the power to purify

General population	71%
Hindus	81
Muslims	26
Christians	32
Sikhs	32
Buddhists	21
Jains	66
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>	
Men	80
Women	82
Ages 18-34	79
35+	82
Less than college	82
College graduate	73
General Category	79
Lower castes	82
Urban	76
Rural	83
Religion very important	84
Religion less important	64
Favorable view of BJP	84
Unfavorable view of BJP	74

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Belief in reincarnation is not widespread in India

[Reincarnation](#) is a mainstream teaching in Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. But fewer than half of Indians in each of these groups say they believe in reincarnation.²³ For example, 40% of India's Hindus believe in reincarnation. And Christians (29%) and Muslims (27%) are more likely than Sikhs (18%) to hold this belief.

Personal religious observance makes little difference: 38% of both Indians who pray daily and those who pray less often believe in reincarnation. Among Hindus, those who say religion is very important in their personal lives are only slightly more likely than other Hindus to hold this belief (41% vs. 37%).

Older Indians are a bit more inclined than younger Indians to believe in reincarnation: 40% of Indians ages 35 and older believe in reincarnation, compared with 35% of those 18 to 34. Conversely, older Buddhists are less likely than younger Buddhists to believe in reincarnation (13% vs. 22%).

College-educated Indians are slightly less likely than others to say they believe in reincarnation (32% vs. 38%). While people in different caste categories do not vary much in their belief in reincarnation, there are bigger differences within the Christian community (see "[Lower-caste Christians much more likely than General Category Christians to hold both Christian and non-Christian beliefs](#)" below).

Among Hindus, those who favor the BJP are somewhat more likely than those who hold an unfavorable view of India's ruling party to believe in reincarnation (42% vs. 34%). Muslim supporters of the BJP also are slightly more likely than other Muslims to hold this belief (29% vs. 22%).

Roughly a quarter of Muslims believe in reincarnation

% of Indian adults who say they believe in reincarnation

General population	38%
Hindus	40
Muslims	27
Christians	29
Sikhs	18
Buddhists	18
Jains	23
Men	36
Women	39
Ages 18-34	35
35+	40
Less than college	38
College graduate	32
General Category	38
Lower castes	38

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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²³ While reincarnation broadly is understood as a belief that after physical death, the essence of a being will be reborn into another physical body, there are many interpretations of how this occurs.

More Hindus and Jains than Sikhs believe in moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth)

Different religions or traditions teach that people can escape reincarnation's cycle of rebirth through various means. Achieving this liberation is often referred to as [moksha](#), or the related concept of [kaivalya](#). The survey asked Hindus, Sikhs and Jains if they believe in moksha and kaivalya; Buddhists were asked if they believe in [nirvana](#), a term more often used in Buddhist teachings to refer to the state of liberation from the cycle of rebirth (see below).

Nearly half of Hindus (47%) and a majority of Jains (56%) say they believe in moksha. And among both groups, much larger shares believe in moksha than kaivalya. Sikhs are the least likely of the three groups to believe in both moksha (17%) and kaivalya (5%).

The concept of kaivalya is more closely associated with Jain teachings. And the survey finds that nearly a quarter of Jains (23%) believe in the concept. Jains also are the most likely to answer the question at all when asked about their belief in kaivalya, suggesting a higher level of familiarity with the term. Only about one-in-ten Jains do not answer this question (11%), compared with about three-in-ten Hindus (31%) and Sikhs (28%).

Older Hindus are somewhat more likely than younger Hindus to believe in moksha and kaivalya. For example, nearly half of older Hindus (ages 35 and older) believe in moksha, while closer to four-in-ten younger Hindu adults (ages 18 to 34) hold this belief (49% vs. 43%).

More Jains, Hindus believe in moksha than kaivalya

% of Indian adults who say they believe in ...

	Moksha	Kaivalya
Hindus	47%	17%
Sikhs	17	5
Jains	56	23
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>		
Men	46	17
Women	47	17
Ages 18-34	43	15
35+	49	19
Less than college	47	17
College graduate	46	17
General Category	49	21
Lower castes	46	16
North	57	17
Central	48	10
East	34	15
West	52	18
South	48	26
Northeast	49	27
Recent financial hardship	49	21
No financial hardship	44	14
Pray daily	49	18
Pray less often	43	16
Favorable view of BJP	50	18
Unfavorable view of BJP	41	16

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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About four-in-ten Indian Buddhists believe in nirvana (39%).

Buddhist women are significantly more likely than men to believe in nirvana (45% vs. 34%). And Buddhists with a favorable view of the BJP are more inclined than other Buddhists to say they believe (46% vs. 31%).

Nearly four-in-ten Buddhists believe in nirvana

% of Indian Buddhists who say they believe in nirvana

Total Buddhists	39%
Men	34
Women	45
Ages 18-34	34
35+	44
Favorable view of BJP	46
Unfavorable view of BJP	31

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.
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Most Hindus, Muslims, Christians believe in heaven

Most Indians say they believe in heaven (55%), though teachings about heaven vary widely across India's religions. Some religions teach that heaven is the [final destination](#) for those who have lived a good life, others teach that it is a [temporary home between rebirths](#), and still others teach that heaven is a state of being that people can aspire to experience [during this life](#).

Majorities of Christians (64%), Muslims (58%) and Hindus (56%) believe in heaven. Among other religious groups, belief in heaven is less common, particularly among Buddhists (24%).

As with many other religious beliefs, those with more education are *less* likely to believe in heaven: 47% of Indians with a college degree say they believe in heaven, compared with 56% of those with less education.

Among the Muslim community, members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes are significantly more likely than General Category Muslims to believe in heaven (63% vs. 51%).

Nearly two-thirds of Christians believe in heaven

% of Indian adults who say they believe in heaven

General population	55%
Hindus	56
Muslims	58
Christians	64
Sikhs	35
Buddhists	24
Jains	40
Men	54
Women	56
Ages 18-25	50
26-34	54
35+	58
Less than college	56
College graduate	47
General Category	55
Lower castes	55
Pray daily	58
Pray less often	51

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Belief in angels more prevalent than belief in demons

About half of Indians (49%) believe in angels or benevolent spirits. This includes roughly two-thirds of Christians (68%), about half of Muslims (53%) and Hindus (49%), and far fewer among Jains (25%), Buddhists (24%) and Sikhs (17%).

Across religious groups, Indians are generally less likely to believe in demons or evil spirits (37%). For instance, just four-in-ten Christians (41%) say they believe in demons, far lower than the share who believe in angels.

Indian women are slightly more likely than men to believe in both angels and demons. And among Buddhists, women are twice as likely as men to believe in angels (32% vs. 16%).

A majority of Indians who have recently faced financial hardship believe in angels, compared with fewer than half of those who have not faced such challenges in the past year (56% vs. 43%). And Indians who pray daily are more likely than others to believe in angels or benevolent spirits (52% vs. 44%); this contrast is especially strong within the Christian community (71% vs. 57%). At the same time, Muslims who pray daily are slightly *less* likely than other Muslims to believe in demons or evil spirits (43% vs. 50%).

Christians most likely to believe in angels

% of Indian adults who say they believe in ...

	Angels	Demons
General population	49%	37%
Hindus	49	37
Muslims	53	45
Christians	68	41
Sikhs	17	14
Buddhists	24	10
Jains	25	15
Men	47	35
Women	50	39
Ages 18-34	47	35
35+	51	39
Less than college	49	38
College graduate	43	30
General Category	41	33
Lower castes	52	39
Recent financial hardship	56	42
No financial hardship	43	33
Pray daily	52	38
Pray less often	44	36

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Nearly half of Indian Christians believe in miracles

Roughly four-in-ten Indians (41%), including nearly half of Christians (48%), say they believe in miracles. Among Hindus and Muslims, about four-in-ten hold this belief (42% and 38%, respectively). Similar to belief in angels and demons, far fewer Sikhs (20%), Jains (15%) and Buddhists (14%) believe in miracles.

Across India, women are slightly more likely than men to profess belief in miracles (43% vs. 39%), with gender differences particularly pronounced among Christians (53% vs. 43%).

Different caste groups generally believe in miracles at similar rates. Among Muslims, however, members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes are significantly more likely than other Muslims to believe in miracles (42% vs. 32%).

Hindus with a favorable view of the BJP are more likely than other Hindus to believe in miracles (45% vs. 34%).

Relatively few Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains believe in miracles

% of Indian adults who say they believe in miracles

General population	41%
Hindus	42
Muslims	38
Christians	48
Sikhs	20
Buddhists	14
Jains	15
Men	39
Women	43
Ages 18-34	39
35+	43
Less than college	41
College graduate	35
General Category	38
Lower castes	42
Recent financial hardship	44
No financial hardship	39

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Most Muslims in India believe in Judgment Day

Often considered a core doctrine of both Islam and Christianity, [Judgment Day](#) refers to an end-of-time belief that the dead shall rise and be judged for their life's works. A majority of Indian Muslims (71%) say they believe in Judgment Day, as do about half of Christians (49%).

Across a wide range of personal characteristics, including age group, education level and gender, majorities of Muslims believe in Judgment Day. And the Northeast is the only region where fewer than half of Muslims believe in Judgment Day (46%).

Among Christians, women are more likely than men to believe in Judgment Day (53% vs. 44%). And Christians who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than other Christians to say they hold this end-times belief (52% vs. 40%).

About half of India's Christians believe in Judgment Day

% of Indian adults who say they believe in Judgment Day

Muslims	71%
Christians	49

Among Muslims ...

Men	72
Women	70
Ages 18-34	70
35+	72

Less than college	71
College graduate	69
Religion very important	71
Religion less important	68

Among Christians ...

Men	44
Women	53
Ages 18-34	45
35+	52
Less than college	48
College graduate	57
Religion very important	52
Religion less important	40

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Most Indians believe in fate, fewer believe in astrology

Indians generally (70%) say they believe in fate, the idea that events in one's life are largely predestined. Majorities of Hindus (73%), Muslims (63%) and Sikhs (59%) say they believe in fate.

Fewer Indians believe in astrology (44%), or the idea that the position of the planets and the stars can influence events in people's lives. (Still, 83% of Indians say they fix important dates based on auspicious dates or times. See [Chapter 7.](#))

Hindus are the most likely of India's six major religious groups to say they believe in both fate (73%) and astrology (49%).

Both beliefs are more common among those who are older. For example, roughly two-thirds of Indians ages 18 to 25 (65%) believe in fate, compared with nearly three-quarters of those ages 35 and older (73%).

The Northeast is the only region where fewer than half believe in fate (40%), and Western Indians are the least likely to believe in astrology (32%).

Hindus more likely than other religious groups to believe in fate, astrology

% of Indian adults who say they believe in ...

	Fate	Astrology
General population	70%	44%
Hindus	73	49
Muslims	63	22
Christians	46	14
Sikhs	59	17
Buddhists	48	13
Jains	51	37
Men	67	42
Women	73	46
Ages 18-25	65	37
26-34	69	43
35+	73	47
Less than college	71	44
College graduate	64	42
North	73	43
Central	74	43
East	78	47
West	69	32
South	61	51
Northeast	40	43
Pray daily	72	43
Pray less often	67	45

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Many Hindus and Muslims say magic, witchcraft or sorcery can influence people's lives

Many Indians say people's lives can be influenced through the evil eye (49%) or through magic, witchcraft and sorcery (39%).

About half of both Hindus and Muslims (51% each) say they believe in the evil eye – the notion that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen to others. And roughly four-in-ten among both Hindus (40%) and Muslims (43%) say that magic, sorcery or witchcraft can influence people's lives. Among other religious groups, these beliefs are less common. For example, 27% of Sikhs say they believe in the evil eye, and 15% say they believe in the influence of magic, witchcraft or sorcery.

Women are more likely than men to hold both beliefs: A majority of Indian women say they believe in the evil eye, compared with fewer than half of men (55% vs. 44%). And those with less education are much more likely than other Indians to say they believe in both magic and the evil eye. For example, just under half of those who did not receive any formal education believe in magic's influence on people's lives, but fewer than a third of college graduates share this view (46% vs. 29%).

Members of General Category castes are less likely than Indians in Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes to say they believe that magic can influence people's lives (33% vs. 42%). Caste differences are particularly pronounced among Christians (see "[Lower-caste Christians much more likely than General Category Christians to hold both Christian and non-Christian beliefs](#)" below for full analysis).

Most Indian women believe in evil eye

% of Indian adults who say they believe ...

	In the evil eye	That magic, sorcery or witchcraft can influence people's lives
General population	49%	39%
Hindus	51	40
Muslims	51	43
Christians	28	22
Sikhs	27	15
Buddhists	35	16
Jains	32	21
Men	44	36
Women	55	42
Ages 18-34	46	36
35+	53	41
No formal education	55	46
Primary through secondary	47	36
College graduate	39	29
Recent financial hardship	53	43
No financial hardship	47	36

Note: "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Roughly half of Indians trust religious ritual to treat health problems

The survey asked the Indian public how much they trust different types of treatments for their own health or their family's health – medical science, [ayurveda](#) or home remedies, homeopathy, or religious rituals.

Nearly all Indians (94%) trust medical science at least to some degree, including 81% who say they trust medical science “a lot.” A majority of Indians (60%) also trust ayurvedic treatments. Meanwhile, roughly half say they trust homeopathy or religious rituals at least somewhat (47% each) to treat their or their family's health problems.

An overwhelming 98% of Buddhists trust medical science, but they are much less inclined than members of other religious communities to trust religious ritual to treat health problems (22%).

As might be expected, Indians who say religion is very important or who pray daily tend to trust religious ritual more than other Indians. But these highly religious individuals are also more likely than other Indians to trust the other forms of treatment.

Indians far more likely to trust medical science than ayurveda, homeopathy, religious ritual to treat health problems

% of Indian adults who say they trust ____ for treatment a lot/somewhat when they or someone in their family has health problems

	Medical science	Ayurveda or home remedies	Homeopathy	Religious ritual
General population	94%	60%	47%	47%
Hindus	94	61	47	47
Muslims	94	55	54	46
Christians	95	50	38	43
Sikhs	87	62	43	42
Buddhists	98	48	34	22
Jains	95	70	43	39
Religion very important	94	61	49	48
Religion less important	90	53	42	37
Pray daily	95	64	51	49
Pray less often	91	54	43	43
Ever invite a religious leader to conduct religious rites at their home	94	61	50	49
Never invite a religious leader to conduct religious rites at their home	91	54	36	39

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

“Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation”

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Similarly, people who invite religious leaders to their home to conduct religious rites are more likely than other Indians to trust religious rituals and other treatments to manage their family members' health problems.

Members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes are slightly more likely than those in General Category castes to trust religious rituals to treat health conditions (48% vs. 44%). And Indians who have received less education are more likely than college-educated adults to trust religious rituals (47% vs. 39%).

Trust in religious rituals also varies widely by region. While majorities in the North (57%) and Northeast (64%) trust religious ritual to some degree, only about one-third of Indians in the West say they trust religious rituals to treat health problems (31%).

Those who have faced financial hardship in the last year are more inclined than other Indians to trust religious ritual for health care needs (52% vs. 42%).

Indians in North and Northeast most trusting of religious ritual to treat health problems

% of Indian adults who say they trust religious ritual for treatment a lot/somewhat when they or someone in their family has health problems

General population	47%
Men	46
Women	47
Ages 18-34	46
35+	47
Less than college	47
College graduate	39
General Category	44
Lower castes	48
North	57
Central	48
East	52
West	31
South	43
Northeast	64
Urban	41
Rural	49

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Lower-caste Christians much more likely than General Category Christians to hold both Christian and non-Christian beliefs

Members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes are more likely than others to hold a variety of religious beliefs. For example, about half of lower-caste Indians believe in angels or benevolent spirits (52%), while roughly four-in-ten of those in General Category castes share this belief (41%).

This pattern certainly applies to the Hindu majority. For instance, 43% of lower-caste Hindus believe that magic, sorcery or witchcraft can influence people's lives, compared with 33% of General Category Hindus.

But the belief gap between lower and upper castes is considerably larger among Christians – and this applies to beliefs that are typically associated with Christianity as well as with those that are not.

For example, a majority of Christian members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other lower castes say they believe in karma (58%), compared with 44% among upper-caste Christians – a gap of 14 percentage points. And about half (51%) of lower-caste Christians believe in demons or evil spirits, while just 12% of upper-caste Christians do. In both cases, these gaps in belief are much less pronounced among Hindus.

The vast majority of Christians in India identify with either Scheduled Castes (33%), Scheduled Tribes (24%) or Other Backward Classes (17%); see [Chapter 4](#) for details.

Lower-caste Hindus, Christians more likely to believe in demons, magic

% of Indian Hindus/Christians who believe ...

	Hindus		Christians	
	General Category	Lower castes	General Category	Lower castes
In demons or evil spirits	33%	39%	12%	51%
That magic, sorcery or witchcraft can influence people's lives	33	43	4	28
In reincarnation	41	40	11	34
In the evil eye	48	52	12	33
In angels or benevolent spirits	42	52	58	71
In karma	74	79	44	58
That the Ganges has the power to purify	79	82	22	35

Note: Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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12. Beliefs about God

Nearly all Indians believe in God, with most saying they are absolutely certain in this belief. But the nature of the deities Indians believe in varies. While the majority of Hindus (61%) and Jains (54%) say there is “only one God with many manifestations,” most Muslims (66%), Christians (68%) and Sikhs (57%) say there is “only one God.” Meanwhile, fully one-third of Buddhists do not believe in God at all.

Many Indians – particularly Hindus – believe that God can be manifest in people, including in people in lower castes. Far fewer believe God can manifest in people who have done bad things in their lives.

When given the opportunity to select the deity they feel closest to, Hindus most commonly select Shiva (44%), often referred to as the [god of destruction](#). Roughly similar shares of Hindus feel close to Shiva, regardless of whether they believe there is just one God (42%), there is one God with many manifestations (46%) or there are many gods (46%).

Broadly speaking, Indians who have had financial difficulties in the previous year (i.e., had trouble paying for food, medical care or housing) are similar to other Indians in how they interact with and believe in God – even when the actions or beliefs touch on financial matters. For example, Indians who have faced financial hardship are about as likely to ever ask God for prosperity (94%) as they are to ask for good health (93%) or forgiveness (92%) – and these shares are nearly identical for those who have not faced financial troubles. Hindus who have faced financial hardship are also just as likely as other Hindus to feel close to Lakshmi, the [goddess of wealth, fortune and success](#) (28% vs. 27%).

Nearly all Indians believe in God

Belief in God is nearly universal in India (97%), and roughly eight-in-ten Indians (79%) say they believe in God with absolute certainty.

Majorities among all major religious groups believe in God. However, one-third of Buddhists *do not* believe in God at all, and fewer than half of Buddhists believe with absolute certainty (43%).

While similar shares of Indian men and women believe in God with absolute certainty (78% and 80%, respectively), Muslim men are slightly more likely than Muslim women to believe with certainty (81% vs. 76%).

Hindus across India's various regions believe in God at roughly similar rates. But Muslims in the East are less likely than Muslims elsewhere to believe in God with total certainty (67% vs. 79% nationally).

As with many other aspects of religious belief, Hindus who have a favorable view of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appear somewhat more devout by this measure: They are slightly more likely than those with an unfavorable view of the ruling party to believe in God with absolute certainty (81% vs. 74%).

But unlike most other religious beliefs, Indians from General Category castes are slightly *more* religious in this way. General Category Indians are slightly more likely than lower-caste Indians to believe in God with certainty (82% vs. 78%), especially among Christians (85% vs. 76%).

Excluding Buddhists, Indians of all religions overwhelmingly believe in God

% of Indian adults who say they ...

	Believe in God ...			Do not believe in God
	Total	With absolute certainty	With less certainty	
General population	97%	79%	17%	3%
Hindus	98	80	18	2
Muslims	91	79	12	6
Christians	98	78	20	2
Sikhs	94	82	12	6
Buddhists	67	43	23	33
Jains	99	82	18	1
Men	96	78	18	3
Women	97	80	17	3
Ages 18-34	96	78	19	3
35+	97	80	16	3
Less than college	97	79	17	3
College graduate	96	77	19	3
General Category	96	82	14	3
Lower castes	97	78	19	3
Religion very important	97	83	14	3
Religion less important	94	59	35	6

Note: People who say they don't know if they believe in God or refuse to answer the question are not shown. Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Few Indians believe ‘there are many gods’

While belief in God is nearly universal in India, the kind of God(s) that Indians believe in varies. Majorities or pluralities of Muslims (66%), Christians (68%), Sikhs (57%) and Buddhists (39%) say “there is only one God.” By contrast, most Hindus (61%) and Jains (54%) say that there is “only one God with many manifestations.”

In all of India’s major religious communities, much smaller shares believe that “there are many gods,” including just 7% of Hindus who choose this option from the three possible responses provided.

In most regions, at least half of Hindus believe in one God with many manifestations, but in the Northeast, most Hindus believe in one God alone (56%). And Hindus in the South are somewhat more likely than those in other regions to say there are many gods (18% vs. 7% nationally).

Similarly, Southern Muslims

(10%) and Christians (8%) are more likely than Muslims and Christians elsewhere in India to say there are many gods.

Most Hindus believe there is ‘only one God with many manifestations’

% of Indian adults who say that ...

	They believe in God and ...			Do not believe in God
	There is only one God	There is only one God with many manifestations	There are many gods	
General population	35%	54%	6%	3%
Hindus	29	61	7	2
Muslims	66	22	3	6
Christians	68	24	5	2
Sikhs	57	36	0	6
Buddhists	39	22	5	33
Jains	41	54	5	1
<i>Among Hindus ...</i>				
Men	29	61	7	2
Women	29	61	7	1
Ages 18-34	30	60	7	2
35+	29	61	7	2
Less than college	29	61	7	2
College graduate	28	63	6	2
General Category	32	57	8	1
Lower castes	28	62	6	2
North	32	64	1	2
Central	27	70	1	1
East	25	66	5	2
West	36	53	8	3
South	27	51	18	2
Northeast	56	37	5	1
Pray daily	30	64	4	1
Pray less often	28	56	11	3

Note: Don’t know/Refused responses not shown. Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

“Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation”

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Many Hindus feel close to Shiva

The survey asked Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains who say they believe in God which god they feel closest to, seeking to measure the concept of *ishta devata* (“personal god”). Respondents were shown 15 images of gods on a card as possible options (though they could also name other deities), and they could select up to three gods.²⁴

Hindus most commonly feel close to Shiva (44%). In Hindu temples, Shiva is represented both through his male form as well as [a symbol, known as a lingam](#). In Hindu philosophy, Shiva’s role in destruction does not necessarily have a negative connotation. In fact, [destruction is considered central to creation](#) as it may pave the way for beneficial change.

In addition, roughly one-third of Hindus feel close to Hanuman (35%), the [god who symbolizes strength and loyalty](#), or Ganesha (32%), the [remover of obstacles](#) who is especially revered before starting new projects. Among Jains, the most popular responses are Lakshmi (20%) and Ganesha (17%), although six-in-ten Jains (59%) say there is “another god” not named by the survey to whom they feel closest.

Among Sikhs and Buddhists, no single god is chosen by more than one-in-ten respondents (although about three-in-ten in each group choose the “another god” option). An additional 29% of Sikhs decline to answer the question, and one-third of Buddhists do not believe in God and thus did not receive this question.

²⁴ Fifteen named deities were available for selection, though no answer options were read aloud. Respondents could select up to three of those 15 deities by naming them or selecting the corresponding image shown on a card. The answer option “another god” was available on the card or if any other deity name was volunteered by the respondent. Other possible answer options included “I do not have a god I feel closest to” and “I have many personal gods,” though neither was on the card. See the [questionnaire](#) or [topline](#) for the full list of gods offered.

One-third of Hindus in India feel close to Hanuman, Ganesha

% of Indian adults who feel closest to ...

	Shiva	Hanuman	Ganesha	Lakshmi	Krishna	Kali	Lord Ram	Vishnu	Saraswati	Other gods
Hindus	44%	35%	32%	28%	21%	20%	17%	10%	8%	22%
Sikhs	6	5	4	3	2	4	2	1	1	41
Buddhists	5	9	10	6	4	2	2	1	1	43
Jains	12	8	17	20	9	6	7	5	2	70

Note: Respondents could select up to three responses shown as images on a card or verbally, so totals for some rows exceed 100%. In addition to the nine gods listed here, six other gods were available for selection, as was "Another god." Other possible answer options included "I do not have a god I feel closest to" and "I have many personal gods," though neither was on the card. "Other gods" column includes those who selected any of the six named gods not listed here, "Another god" or "I have many personal gods." "I do not have a god I feel closest to"/Don't know/Refused responses not shown. See the questionnaire or topline for details.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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While Shiva is the most common deity Hindus feel close to nationally, a significantly smaller share of Hindus in India's West feel this connection (30%). In the West, instead, the most common deity Hindus feel close to is Ganesha (46%).

In the Northeast, fully 46% of Hindus say they feel closest to Krishna, often depicted as a [lover and prankster](#), whose dialogue with a prince during battle is the basis for [the Bhagavad Gita](#). Krishna is more popular in the Northeast than in any other region. And Hanuman and Lord Ram, the [god of chivalry and virtue](#) and hero of the epic Ramayana, find far less affinity among Hindus in the Northeast than they do elsewhere.

Noticeable shares of Hindus in the South feel close to several deities who have hardly any Hindu followers elsewhere in the country: [Murugan](#) (14% of South Hindus), [Ayyappa](#) (13%) and [Meenakshi](#) (7%).

Krishna's strongest following in India is in the Northeast

% of Indian Hindus who feel closest to ...

	Shiva	Hanuman	Ganesha	Lakshmi	Krishna	Kali	Lord Ram	Vishnu	Saraswati
Total Hindus	44%	35%	32%	28%	21%	20%	17%	10%	8%
Men	44	41	32	22	20	18	20	10	6
Women	44	29	32	33	23	21	15	10	9
Ages 18-34	44	37	33	27	21	20	17	10	9
35+	43	34	31	28	22	19	18	10	7
Less than college	44	35	32	28	21	20	18	10	8
College graduate	42	38	31	24	23	17	16	10	7
North	41	43	41	27	28	20	20	11	7
Central	51	36	29	29	23	20	27	6	6
East	52	35	17	32	21	34	15	14	10
West	30	35	46	29	21	10	12	6	5
South	39	34	37	22	14	13	13	12	10
Northeast	44	12	15	28	46	18	5	20	10

Note: Respondents could select up to three responses shown as images on a card or verbally, so totals for some rows exceed 100%. In addition to the nine gods listed here, six other gods were available for selection, as was "Another god." Other possible answer options included "I do not have a god I feel closest to" and "I have many personal gods," though neither was on the card. Don't know/Refused responses not shown. See the questionnaire or topline for details.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Hindu men are far more likely than Hindu women to feel close to Hanuman (41% vs. 29%). Meanwhile, Hindu women are more likely than men to say they are closest to the goddess Lakshmi (33% vs. 22%).

Many Indians believe God can be manifested in other people

Most Indians say that God can be manifested in nature, such as mountains, rivers and trees (69%). Additionally, a majority say God can be manifested in animals (62%) and the same share say God can appear in people. Hindus are much more likely than those in other religious communities to believe that each of these manifestations is possible.

About three-quarters of Hindus say that God can be manifested in nature (76%) – the most common manifestation Hindus say is possible. By contrast, Muslims and Christians are more likely to believe that God can be manifested in people (44% and 46%, respectively) than in nature or animals.

Indians who have a favorable view of the BJP are significantly more likely than Indians who disapprove of the ruling party to think God can manifest in any of these ways. For instance, while two-thirds of BJP supporters say God can be manifested in animals, roughly half of BJP detractors (52%) share this belief.

Indians' beliefs on how God can be manifested tie into where they live. Urban Indians are less likely than rural Indians to say God can be manifested in nature, animals and people. And Southern Indians are the least likely to say that God can be manifested in people.

Hindus more likely than others to say God can be manifested in nature, animals, people

% of Indian adults who say God can be manifested in ...

	Nature*	Animals	People
General population	69%	62%	62%
Hindus	76	68	67
Muslims	38	34	44
Christians	40	30	46
Sikhs	45	41	43
Buddhists	30	32	37
Jains	56	52	41
Men	68	61	62
Women	70	63	63
Ages 18-34	67	59	60
35+	71	64	64
Less than college	69	62	63
College graduate	67	59	55
North	68	59	58
Central	77	68	75
East	65	61	67
West	65	61	58
South	68	57	47
Northeast	71	70	80
Urban	65	58	58
Rural	71	64	65
Religion very important	71	64	64
Religion less important	58	50	52
Favorable view of BJP	75	67	65
Unfavorable view of BJP	59	52	57

* Respondents were asked, "Do you think God can be manifested in nature, such as mountains, rivers or trees?"

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Half of Indians believe God can be manifested in lower-caste people

Survey respondents who said God can be manifested in people were then asked if God can be manifested in people who belong to a lower caste or, separately, who have done bad things in their life. Just over half of Indians say God can be manifested in people who belong to a lower caste (53%). Fewer people say God can be manifested in people who have done bad things in their life (30%).

People who belong to Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other lower castes are more likely than those in General Category castes to say God can be manifested in a person who is of a lower caste (56% vs. 48%). But there are no significant differences in responses by caste on whether God can be manifested in people who have done bad deeds.

Hindus are more likely than members of other religious groups to say that God can manifest in lower-caste people and in people who have done bad things, in part because Hindus are more inclined than people from other religious communities to say God can be manifested in people at all.

Indians less likely to say God can be manifested in people who have done bad things

% of Indian adults who say God can be manifested in people who ...

	Belong to a lower caste	Have done bad things in their life
General population	53%	30%
Hindus	57	32
Muslims	37	19
Christians	34	23
Sikhs	37	21
Buddhists	31	13
Jains	25	10
Men	53	31
Women	54	29
Ages 18-34	51	28
35+	55	32
Less than college	54	30
College graduate	48	27
General Category	48	29
Lower castes*	56	31
Religion very important	56	31
Religion less important	41	24
Favorable view of BJP	56	32
Unfavorable view of BJP	47	26

* Lower castes include Scheduled Castes/Tribes as well as Other/Most Backward Classes.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

"Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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Indians almost universally ask God for good health, prosperity, forgiveness

Indians who expressed a belief in God were also asked if they ever ask God to give them or their families several things: good health, prosperity and forgiveness. At least nine-in-ten Indians ask God for each. Buddhists are the least likely to ever ask God for these things, but much of this is because one-third of Buddhists say they do not believe in God; the vast majority of Buddhists who do believe in God ask God for good health, prosperity and forgiveness.

Indian adults who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than others to ask God for good health (93% vs. 85%), with similar patterns in asking for prosperity or forgiveness. However, among Christians, those who say religion is very important are slightly *less* likely than other Christians to ask God for good health (92% vs. 96%).

The vast majority of Indians who have faced financial difficulties in the past year say they ask God for prosperity (94%) as well as good health (93%) and forgiveness (92%). But Indians who recently faced financial hardship are only slightly more likely than other Indians to ask God for each of these things, including prosperity (94% and 92%, respectively).

While Indians with different levels of education also are about equally likely to ask God for good health, prosperity and forgiveness, college-educated Christians are somewhat more inclined than other Christians to ever ask God for forgiveness (98% vs. 90%), a pattern also seen among Sikhs (95% vs. 86%).

Financial hardship has minimal impact on asking God for prosperity

% of Indian adults who say they ever ask God for ____ for themselves or their family

	Good health 92%	Prosperity 93%	Forgiveness 90%
General population			
Hindus	94	94	92
Muslims	86	87	86
Christians	93	92	91
Sikhs	85	88	87
Buddhists	60	59	57
Jains	91	88	87
Men	91	92	89
Women	93	93	91
Ages 18-34	91	92	89
35+	93	94	91
Less than college	92	93	90
College graduate	92	92	89
Recent financial hardship	93	94	92
No financial hardship	91	92	89
Religion very important	93	94	92
Religion less important	85	87	79

Note: "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care and/or housing in the last year.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Appendix A: Methodology

Between Nov. 17, 2019, and March 23, 2020, Pew Research Center completed 29,999 face-to-face interviews with non-institutionalized adults ages 18 and older living in 26 states and three union territories across India. The sample includes interviews with 22,975 Hindus, 3,336 Muslims, 1,782 Sikhs, 1,011 Christians, 719 Buddhists and 109 Jains. An additional 67 respondents belong to other religions or are religiously unaffiliated. Six groups were targeted for oversampling as part of the survey design: Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and those living in the Northeast region.

Interviews were conducted under the direction of RTI International. Data collection used computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) after random selection of households. Sampling was conducted through a probability-based, stratified multistage clustered random design that used composite measures of size (cMOS) to increase diversity in religious representation. National population and religious composition data are available from the 2011 census of India.

The questionnaire was designed by Pew Research Center staff in consultation with subject-matter experts and advisers to the project. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into 16 languages, independently verified by professional linguists with native proficiency in regional dialects, and pretested in various phases prior to fieldwork.

Fieldwork dates by location

States/union territories	Fieldwork dates
Andhra Pradesh	Nov. 28, 2019 – Jan. 2, 2020
Arunachal Pradesh	Feb. 25 – March 21, 2020
Assam	Feb. 17 – March 18, 2020
Bihar	Dec. 1, 2019 – Jan. 26, 2020
Chhattisgarh	Nov. 26 – Dec. 13, 2019
Goa	Dec. 11, 2019 – Jan. 13, 2020
Gujarat	Dec. 10, 2019 – Feb. 6, 2020
Haryana	Nov. 24, 2019 – March 17, 2020
Himachal Pradesh	Jan. 23 – Feb. 24, 2020
Jammu & Kashmir	Feb. 20 – March 8, 2020
Jharkhand	Dec. 1, 2019 – Jan. 19, 2020
Karnataka	Dec. 23, 2019 – March 22, 2020
Kerala	Jan. 29 – March 2, 2020
Madhya Pradesh	Nov. 24 – Dec. 13, 2019
Maharashtra	Nov. 30, 2019 – March 12, 2020
Meghalaya	Feb. 25 – March 18, 2020
Mizoram	Feb. 27 – March 21, 2020
Nagaland	Feb. 28 – March 22, 2020
NCT of Delhi	Nov. 27, 2019 – March 19, 2020
Odisha	Dec. 8, 2019 – March 6, 2020
Puducherry	Jan. 12 – Jan. 24, 2020
Punjab	Dec. 23, 2019 – March 21, 2020
Rajasthan	Nov. 17, 2019 – Jan. 31, 2020
Tamil Nadu	Dec. 3, 2019 – March 20, 2020
Telangana	Nov. 25, 2019 – Feb. 1, 2020
Tripura	Feb. 23 – March 8, 2020
Uttar Pradesh	Nov. 25, 2019 – Feb. 13, 2020
Uttarakhand	Dec. 2, 2019 – Feb. 20, 2020
West Bengal	Dec. 9, 2019 – March 23, 2020

Note: Two states, Manipur and Sikkim, were included in the sample design as strata. Due to events that took place during fieldwork, no interviews were conducted in these areas or in the Kashmir Valley. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019–March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

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Throughout fieldwork, survey performance was assessed by comparing regional results for key demographic variables (including reported religion) with region-specific population statistics available through the census. Data are weighted to account for different probabilities of selection among respondents as well as through an iterative procedure to more closely align the samples with official state and national population figures for gender, age, urbanicity, region and education. The reported margins of sampling error and the statistical tests of significance used in the analysis account for the design effects due to weighting and sample design.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire covers multiple topics, including religious identity, belief and practice; social cohesion, national identity and politics; gender and the family; and demographic characteristics.²⁵ To improve respondent comprehension of survey questions and to ensure all questions were culturally appropriate, Pew Research Center followed a multiphase questionnaire development process that included focus groups, cognitive interviews, a pretest and a pilot survey before the national survey. An in-country institutional review board (IRB) also approved the questionnaire, including the consent language, to protect the rights and privacy of Indian respondents.

The question wording and approach to various topics were refined between each phase of the research process. Throughout questionnaire development, academic experts and other advisers were consulted to further improve the questionnaire.

Twenty-two focus groups were conducted to explore and identify key topics related to religion, diversity, nationalism and gender. Focus groups were conducted under the direction of Ipsos MORI and Quipper Research. They were held in five states – Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

Fifty-six cognitive interviews were conducted to test survey questions for general comprehension, problematic phrasing or concepts, and to pinpoint sensitivity concerns. Cognitive interviews were conducted under the

Languages used to conduct interviews

	Sample size
Assamese	800
Bengali	2,942
English	246
Gujarati	1,964
Hindi	10,994
Kannada	1,403
Konkani	31
Malayalam	857
Manipuri	11
Marathi	4,175
Mizo	90
Nepali	7
Oriya	972
Punjabi	1,902
Tamil	1,530
Telugu	1,708
Urdu	367

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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²⁵ Most of these topics are covered in this report, but questions about gender and the family have been held for a future report.

direction of Ipsos MORI. They were held in 10 states – Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

The fully translated and independently verified questionnaire was then pretested (n=100) across all 16 local languages used in the final survey. The pretest was conducted in six states and union territories – Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Finally, a pilot survey (n=2,045) was administered to test all survey processes, including interviewer training, questionnaire sensitivity and data quality checks. Pilot survey states were Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

In addition to a CAPI instrument, the questionnaire included two show cards. One show card displayed 23 political party symbols and was used to administer questions on party preference and voting behavior. The other show card displayed 15 images of gods and goddesses and was used to administer the question on ishta devata (personal deities). For all questions that used a show card, respondents could select a political party or deity by either selecting an image or saying the associated name.

Sample design and weighting

The survey sample was designed to be nationally representative of the Indian population and was selected using a stratified, multistage cluster method. The sample is also designed to allow for robust analysis of all major religious groups – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains – as well as all major regional zones.²⁶ To bolster representation of religious groups with lower prevalence in the country, the sample design uses a composite measure of size (cMOS) to increase the probability of selecting primary and secondary sampling units with those religious populations. To ensure adequate sample for stand-alone analyses of the Northeast, the least populated of the zones, the region's strata are allocated more sample than proportional to population size.

Sample design

Strata design begins with states and union territories (UTs) as defined by the 2011 census. The smallest groups are then collapsed together, resulting in a total of 30 strata covering 33 states and UTs as defined by the 2011 census.²⁷ All sampling units have official statuses and known boundaries defined by the 2011 census. The primary sampling units (PSUs) are clusters of

²⁶ Zones in this instance are based on the [zonal council divisions](#) of India, as defined by the States Re-organisation Act of 1956, the North Eastern Council Act of 1972 and the North Eastern Council (Amendment) Act of 2002.

²⁷ Only the UTs of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep were excluded from the sample design due to remoteness. At the time of the 2011 census, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were still a unified state.

districts, grouped to have approximately 10 or more secondary sampling units (SSUs); the SSUs are primarily subdistricts but also include some large metropolitan areas; and the tertiary sampling units (TSUs) are 2011 census enumeration blocks (CEBs) in urban areas and villages in rural areas. The number of PSUs sampled per stratum is proportional to the composite measure of size for a total of 138 PSUs. Six SSUs are sampled from each PSU and four TSUs are sampled from each SSU, with some exceptions. The sample draw for the national study was conducted in June 2019, five months prior to the start of fieldwork.

Twelve households within each TSU are selected via a random-route procedure – a process in which field staff count residential dwellings from a random starting point as they walk the street and select every *n*th dwelling for an interview, where *n* is adjusted for the size of the area for random route. Within a household, interviewers list all adults (18+ years) and the CAPI device selects one adult at random for the interview. At every address, up to four visits to the household are made to complete an interview. Attempts to contact selected households and respondents are carried out on different days of the week and times of day (with a few exceptions where security and remoteness call for a one-day approach).

Composite measure of size (cMOS)

If the sample had been selected using a typical approach for general population surveys (e.g., probability proportional to population size), there likely would not have been enough respondents from some religious groups of interest for separate analysis and reporting. Instead, the design sought to increase the chance of selecting less-prevalent religious groups by using a cMOS for sampling PSUs and SSUs. Constructed using the 2011 census data on religious compositions of districts and subdistricts, the cMOS calculations assign more value to PSUs and SSUs with greater shares of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists or Jains relative to the national figures. PSUs and SSUs are both selected using a systematic probability proportional to composite size method, resulting in areas with low-incidence religious populations having greater chances of selection.

Targeting increased number of achieved interviews for some religious groups, Northeast region

Religion	Estimated interviews without targeting	Minimum target with cMOS/ oversample	Achieved
Hindus	24,306	15,000	22,975
Muslims	3,857	5,000	3,336
Christians	731	1,000	1,011
Sikhs	569	1,000	1,782
Buddhists	223	500	719
Jains	130	500	109
Region			
Northeast	1,102	1,500	1,626

Note: Estimated interviews were calculated as the total desired sample size (n=30,000) multiplied by the national incidence according to the 2011 Census.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019–March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

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For example, Mansahi and Sameli, two subdistricts in the eastern state of Bihar, have approximately the same population size (84,257 and 84,486, respectively), but Mansahi's population as of the 2011 census was 44% Muslim while Sameli's was 9% Muslim. In a general population design, these two subdistricts would have about equal chances of selection. But in this study, Mansahi has a greater chance using our cMOS, since Mansahi is home to a large share of a lower-incidence religious group. The cMOS method improved the odds of a religiously diverse sample but did not guarantee it, as demonstrated by the shortfall that remains for Muslims and Jains. Prior to systematic selection, the frame is sorted geographically to help disperse the sample within strata and sampling units.

No religious composition data is available at the TSU level, so TSUs are selected with probability proportional to their population size. A systematic selection approach and implicit stratification by urbanicity are used to help diversify the sample to cover both urban and rural areas.

Weighting

The data are weighted in a multistep process. As a result of using the cMOS, the unweighted sample has more respondents belonging to certain religious groups than would normally occur in a nationally representative sample. Varying probabilities of selection are addressed through statistical adjustments, or weighting, and areas with higher sampling rates are represented in proper proportion to areas with lower sampling rates.

Weights are also adjusted in an iterative proportional fitting poststratification process, commonly referred to as raking, so that the weighted sample distribution more closely aligns with 2011 census population figures. This calibration process is conducted for age by gender, education and urbanicity separately for each of the 28 strata where fieldwork was completed and using stratum-specific population parameters.

The weights for each stratum are then scaled to correct for the oversampling of some regions and states and the corresponding undersampling of larger regions and states. This ensures that all states and subsequent regions are represented in their proper proportion in the weighted estimates included in this report. Finally, the distribution of the raked weights is examined separately for each regional zone, and customized weight trimming (i.e., setting weight ceiling and floor figures) is

Unweighted vs. weighted sample size for religious groups, Northeast region

Religion	Unweighted	Weighted
Hindus	22,975	24,503
Muslims	3,336	3,364
Christians	1,011	779
Sikhs	1,782	703
Buddhists	719	516
Jains	109	71
Region		
Northeast	1,626	920

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. "Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation"

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performed at the zonal level to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results.

In the end, the oversampled religious groups and the higher number of respondents in the Northeast *do not* represent a disproportionate share of the final, weighted sample that is used for analysis.

Coverage and exclusions

Survey coverage is calculated to be 98% of the Indian population. Exclusions, listed below, amounted to about 2% of the national population of India.

Exclusions known prior to sampling:

- Union territories of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep due to remoteness
- Subdistricts that posed a security risk to field staff
- Subdistricts with no reliable population figures from the 2011 census
- Ministry of Defense military cantonment board areas due to inaccessibility
- TSUs with fewer than 25 households due to remoteness.

Exclusions after sampling (see “[Significant events during fieldwork](#)” below for more information):

- Kashmir districts due to continued shutdown of the Kashmir Valley during fieldwork
- Sikkim and Manipur states due to COVID-19.

Precision of estimates

Each item in a survey has its own margin of sampling error (MOSE). The multistage sampling process used in this survey – districts or district groups, subdistricts, villages or census enumeration blocks, households, and eligible individuals within households – means that survey responses are not independent of each other as they would be if we had taken a simple random sample of the Indian population. This clustering of respondents has the effect of increasing the MOSE estimates relative to a simple random sample of the same size. Additionally, this clustering means that every question has a different margin of error depending on how similar respondents in the same village or region are to one another for the item in question. Some estimates (e.g., self-identification as a vegetarian) have a relatively small MOSE, while other estimates (e.g., knowledge of other religions' practices) have a larger margin of error.

In addition to clustering, the MOSE is affected by stratified sampling and weighting. Analyses to determine statistical significance for this report were performed using Stata statistical software that accounts for all of these complex design features for tests of statistical significance and measures of sampling error.

We have reported the median MOSE as a rule of thumb when assessing significant differences. In order to reach one MOSE overall and for each subgroup, a median MOSE is produced from 155 individual ones. One should also bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into survey results that is not captured by the MOSE.

For results, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to collecting data from some, rather than all, adults within the population is plus or minus the MOSE. This means that in

Design effects and margins of sampling error

	Unweighted N	Median design effect	Margin of sampling error (percentage points)
Overall	29,999	9.5	1.7
Hindus	22,975	22.2	3.0
Muslims	3,336	9.2	5.2
Christians	1,011	3.7	5.9
Sikhs	1,782	10.8	7.6
Buddhists	719	5.9	8.8
Jains	109	1.6	11.9
North	7,238	14.7	4.4
Central	2,034	15.9	8.7
East	6,852	17.2	4.9
West	6,679	25.9	6.1
South	5,570	10.9	4.3
Northeast	1,626	9.2	7.4

Note: Median design effect (DEFF) derived from DEFF of 155 survey items asked to all survey respondents.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019–March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

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95 out of 100 samples of the same size and type, the results obtained would vary by no more than plus or minus the MOSE for the population in question.

Response rates

The contact rate for the survey was around 97% for the country overall and for both urban and rural areas.²⁸ Most regions had a contact rate around 97%, except for the Central region, which had a contact rate of 90%.

The overall cooperation rate for this project was 89%, and the cooperation rates were roughly the same for urban and rural areas.²⁹ The cooperation rates range from 83% in the South to 93% in the West.

The overall response rate for this survey is 86%.³⁰ The response rates vary somewhat by region and urbanicity but are generally between 80% and 90%.

Significant events during fieldwork

During the fieldwork period between November 2019 and March 2020, fieldwork teams dealt with a number of events that posed challenges to entering certain areas of study and securing interviews with selected households and respondents.

Due to [access and safety concerns](#), planned fieldwork in Kashmir Valley was canceled and the 480 interviews expected to take place there were reallocated to other Muslim-majority areas of the country, including in Jammu, Haryana and West Bengal.

Starting in December 2019, protests broke out in several regions against the country's [new citizenship law](#) that would expedite citizenship for followers of certain religions, excluding, most notably, Muslims. Fieldwork in West Bengal was paused due to the unrest and teams slowly rolled

Contact, cooperation, response rates

	Dwellings contacted (n)	Contact rate	Cooperation rate	Response rate
Overall	35,124	97%	89%	86%
North	8,588	97	87	85
Central	2,530	90	89	80
East	7,653	97	92	90
West	7,446	98	93	91
South	6,925	97	83	81
Northeast	1,982	95	86	82
Urban	10,972	97	87	84
Rural	24,152	96	90	86

Notes: All calculations follow AAPOR's Standard Definitions formulas. Contact rates are calculated using AAPOR #2, cooperation rates are calculated using AAPOR #1, and response rates are calculated using AAPOR #3.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.

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²⁸ A contact rate captures how often interviewers spoke with a member of selected households, whether or not an interview was successfully completed.

²⁹ A cooperation rate describes how often a member of a contacted household agrees to an interview.

³⁰ A response rate accounts for cooperation and contact rates to form a single indicator of how often interviews with randomly selected individuals were completed from all households selected at random to participate.

out in the area again starting from January 2020. Delhi field teams were also delayed in their work due to security issues and curfews in study areas.

In March 2020, international concerns for the spread of COVID-19 emerged. Given the safety threat to the field teams, interviews stopped on March 23, 2020, resulting in 39 total villages and census enumeration blocks (1.3% of sample) left incomplete, including the entirety of work in Sikkim and Manipur states.

The Kashmir reallocation and incomplete sampling areas resulted in adjustments to survey weights. Probabilities of selection, cMOS and population parameters were recalculated to exclude Kashmir, Sikkim and Manipur.

Appendix B: Index of religious segregation

This study includes three sets of questions that can be used to measure the extent to which people prefer to keep their lives religiously segregated from others: the religious composition of respondents' friend circle; how important, if at all, they feel it is to stop interreligious marriage of men and women; and whether they would be willing to have people of other religions as neighbors.

These three sets of questions are highly correlated with each other (Cronbach's alpha is higher than 0.7 for all six religious groups) and can reliably be combined into an index of religious segregation.³¹

The study displays the results of the index ranging from 0 (no preference for religious segregation) to 6 (highest preference for religious segregation). The higher the score on the index, the higher the respondent's preference for religious segregation.

The individual components of the scale are as follows:

1. *Composition of the respondents' friend circle:* How many of your close friends are [respondent's religion]? (e.g., If respondent is Hindu: are Hindu? If respondent is Muslim: are Muslim?, etc.). All of them, Most of them, Some of them, Hardly any of them, None of them.
2. *Views on stopping interreligious marriage:*
 - a. How important is it to stop women in your community from marrying into another religion? Very important, Somewhat important, Not too important, Not at all important.
 - b. How important is it to stop men in your community from marrying into another religion? Very important, Somewhat important, Not too important, Not at all important.

(The two separate questions on interreligious marriage of men and women are highly correlated with each other and can be reliably combined into one variable.)

3. *Willingness to accept people of other religions as neighbors:* Would you be willing to accept [a Hindu/Muslim/Christian/Sikh/Buddhist/Jain] as a neighbor? Yes, No. [Respondents were not asked if they would be willing to accept members of their own religious group as neighbors, but they were asked about all other groups.]

³¹ Cronbach's alphas were calculated in SPSS by recoding each variable as a binary. For example, those who say *all* their friends share their religion were coded as 1, everyone else was coded as 0. Scores were run separately for each religious group.

Respondents could also volunteer a range of nonresponses such as they “don’t know” or that “it depends on the situation,” or refuse to answer the question. See [questionnaire](#) for full question wording and response options.

Each set of questions was coded as follows:

1. *Composition of the respondents’ friend circle:*
 - a. All friends belong to the same religion (2)
 - b. Most friends belong to the same religion (1)
 - c. Some/Hardly any/No friends belong to the same religion/Don’t know/Refused (0)
2. *Views on stopping interreligious marriage:*
 - a. Of women
 - i. Very important to stop (2)
 - ii. Somewhat important (1)
 - iii. Not too important/Not at all important/Depends on the situation/Don’t know/Refused (0)
 - b. Of men
 - i. Very important to stop (2)
 - ii. Somewhat important (1)
 - iii. Not too important/Not at all important/Depends on the situation/Don’t know/Refused (0)

The separate scores were then added to a total score ranging from 0 to 4, and recoded as follows: (0=0) (1,2=1) (3,4=2).

3. *Willingness to accept people of other religions as neighbors:*
 - a. For each religious group asked about:
 - i. No, not willing to accept as a neighbor (1)
 - ii. Yes/Other/Both/Neither/Depends/Don’t know/Refused (0).³²
 - b. Each person was asked about five religious groups (not including their own) resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 5. The total score was then recoded as follows: (0=0) (1,2=1) (3,4,5=2).

³² A separate analysis of those who responded Don’t know/Refused to the neighbor question shows that these respondents tended to give no response to a wide range of questions in the survey.

Scores on all three sets of questions were then added, resulting in a total religious segregation score for each religious group ranging from 0 to 6.