

# THE WEAPONIZATION OF CASTE IN AMERICA



**Indian Century**  
ROUNDTABLE

## The Weaponization of Caste in America

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### Executive Summary

A coalition of Muslim, Sikh, and Dalit civil society organizations is campaigning for laws to explicitly ban caste-based discrimination in the United States. These campaigns are largely symbolic, since caste-based discrimination is in most cases already illegal. They have, however, been used to generate publicity that implicitly or explicitly links caste-based discrimination with Hindus and the Hindu faith. The Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition has in effect turned caste into a weapon for attacking Hindus in a South Asian diaspora culture war.

Dalits are at the center of this war. The term "Dalit" refers to a group that faces widespread discrimination in South Asia. In India, Dalits are often equated with the Scheduled Castes, a list of 1108 caste groups whose members can access educational and employment reservations under a system of affirmative action designed to redress historical disadvantage. But "Dalit" is a term that carries significant political and religious significance across South Asia, while "Scheduled Caste" is a purely Indian civil administrative category.

"Dalit" is not a caste in India (or any other country), and the term does not meet the definitions of "caste" that have been used in or proposed for American legislation to ban caste-based discrimination. Nonetheless, the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition has repeatedly sought to incorporate language into American civil rights legislation that associates present-day caste-based discrimination with historical Hindu discrimination against Dalits. This bait-and-switch conflates the religious term "Dalit" with the civil category "caste."

In short, the sympathetic rhetoric of anti-discrimination has been leveraged by Muslim, Sikh, and Dalit civil society organizations to wage an active campaign of antihinduism. The laws proposed by the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition would do nothing to protect American Dalits from discrimination, since (1) caste is already a protected category and (2) "Dalit" is not a caste. The real goal of the proposed laws seems to be to turn an ill-informed American public against Hindus and Hindu religious institutions.

### Key take-aways

- (1) The movement to ban caste-based discrimination is sponsored mainly by Muslim, Sikh, and Dalit civil society organizations.
- (2) "Dalit" is a religious and political term; it is not a "caste" as defined in India or under the definition proposed for California's SB 403.
- (3) The best survey data suggest that there are probably between 20,000 and 25,000 Dalits in the United States.
- (4) Unlike Indian Dalits (who face serious disadvantage), American Dalits seem to form a highly privileged population.
- (5) The survey of Dalits conducted by Equality Labs for its "Caste in the United States" report relied on a wildly unrepresentative sample of self-selected Dalit rights activists, 80% of whom were either graduate students or holders of postgraduate degrees.
- (6) Anti-Hindu activism overlaps substantially with antisemitic activism in terms of both strategy and participating organizations.

## Introduction: Caste comes to California

In 2022, Californians for the first time elected a Muslim to represent them in their state senate, Senator Aisha Wahab. At the same time, they elected the first Sikh to represent them in their state assembly, Assemblymember Jasmeet Bains. Both are accomplished 30-something second generation Americans, Wahab an IT professional active in multiple community service organizations and Bains a family physician who volunteers with a charity that fights child trafficking. Immediately upon taking office at the beginning of 2023, Wahab put forward several bills that represented the interests of organized labor. That's not surprising, considering that her campaign was [disproportionately funded](#) by trade unions. The [top source](#) of funding for the Bains campaign was the healthcare industry, and it comes as no surprise that this medical doctor with a history of child advocacy would sponsor several bills related to drug abuse and child welfare.

Much more remarkable is the one legislative priority that these two first-term legislators held in common: the sponsorship of a bill to ban "discrimination on the basis of caste," California's controversial [SB 403](#).

The elimination of caste-based discrimination is certainly a noble cause, one that Indian civil society and religious organizations have pursued for more than a century. But it is not a goal typically associated with Muslims and Sikhs. Nor is it a top legislative priority for organized labor, the healthcare industry, or other major Democratic Party power centers (both Wahab and Bains are Democrats). Although the bill was passed by both the Senate and the Assembly with little opposition, it attracted no additional sponsors. The bill was substantially watered down during the legislative process, and the [final version](#) did little more than specify that caste was a form of ancestry. On October 7, 2023 California Governor Gavin Newsom [vetoed](#) the bill on the grounds that discrimination based on ancestry was already prohibited under California law.

As [originally proposed](#) by Senator Wahab, SB 403 was much more assertive. It opened with a long declaratory list of "findings" about caste and caste-based discrimination, specifically linking caste-based discrimination to the oppression of "Dalits" and "Adivasis"—both religiously charged terms that lack precise definitions. The term "Dalit" refers to members of castes that historically were ritually excluded from Hindu society; in India, it is the non-derogatory equivalent of the historical term "untouchable." The term "Adivasi" refers to the tribal peoples of South Asia; in India, it is associated with the claim that tribal peoples constitute a pre-Hindu (and implicitly non-Hindu) indigenous population of the region.

Moving beyond its introductory rhetoric, the bill sponsored by Wahab and Bains originally defined caste in purely civil terms as "a system of social stratification where each position is characterized by hereditary status, endogamy, social barriers, and social exclusion," a definition that is in fact quite reasonable. That definition, however, does not limit caste identity to Dalits and Adivasis. The Government of India, for example, recognizes 1108 [Scheduled Castes](#) and 744 [Scheduled Tribes](#), and there are roughly 4000 additional castes that are not scheduled (i.e., do not receive special Constitutional protections in India). Any genuine effort to prohibit discrimination on the basis of caste would thus have to protect roughly 6000 distinct groups—a daunting challenge indeed.

Instead, California's SB 403 and similar efforts in other jurisdictions have been motivated almost exclusively by the supposed need to protect Dalits (Adivasis being almost non-existent in the United States). This seems carefully calibrated to vilify Hindu religious traditions for their historical victimization of Dalits without explicitly naming Hindus or the Hindu faith as perpetrators of caste-based discrimination today. Seen in this light, it seems relevant that SB 403 was sponsored by a Muslim and a Sikh, while being opposed by broad-based Hindu (i.e., not specifically Dalit) civil society organizations like the [Hindu American Foundation](#), the [Coalition of Hindus of North America](#), and [HinduPACT](#) (a program of the World Hindu Council of America).

By contrast, the umbrella group for organizations that supported SB 403, [Californians for Caste Equity](#), lists on its [website](#) "sponsors and coalition anchors" that include 12 Sikh organizations, 3 Dalit organizations, 2 Muslim

organizations, 1 Dalit-Muslim collaborative organization, 2 labor organizations, and 2 broad-based civil rights organizations. Dozens of other Muslim and Sikh civil society organizations are listed as supporters. There are Hindu civil society organizations that supported SB 403 (most prominently, [Hindus for Human Rights](#)), but all of them seem to be recently-founded, built on narrow membership bases, and strongly associated with Dalit rights activism. It seems that no major Hindu religious institution supported SB 403.

## The Dalits at the center of the diaspora culture war

The obvious prima facie interpretation of the controversy over SB 403 is that a coalition of Muslim and Sikh organizations and lawmakers allied with Dalit rights activists to promote legislation that would stigmatize the Hindu faith by associating it with caste-based oppression. The alternative interpretation—that American Muslim and Sikh civil society organizations are so deeply concerned about potential discrimination within the Hindu-American community that they are willing to devote scarce financial and political resources to the fight against caste-based oppression—is, frankly, fantastical. Whatever the merits of the legislation itself, the rosters of supporters and opponents make the relevant political battlelines abundantly clear.

Identical battlelines were drawn up in Washington state when the Seattle city council voted to [add caste](#) to its official list of protected forms of personal identity. Just like California's SB 403, which was proposed in the same month (February 2023), the Seattle caste ordinance was [endorsed](#) by a coalition of Dalit rights organizations, Sikh organizations, and the Indian American Muslim Council. It was opposed by the Hindu American Foundation, the Coalition of Hindus of North America, and HinduPACT. The Seattle ordinance [specifically cites](#) as its motivation the need to protect Dalits from caste-based discrimination.

Most Americans are familiar with the identity-based "culture wars" that have divided the country in recent years. Few realize that another, adjacent culture war has engulfed America's South Asian diaspora communities. Beneath the radar of mainstream American society, the South Asian diaspora is sharply divided along communal religious lines, with US-based Muslim, Sikh, and Dalit civil society organizations squaring off against broad-based Hindu (i.e., not specifically Dalit) ones. Some mainstream labor and human rights organizations have also joined in, mainly on the side of the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition.

The South Asian diaspora culture war is real, and the supposed need to protect Dalits from caste-based discrimination has become the most potent tactic in the arsenal of the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition. When Senator Wahab first publicly introduced SB 403, she cited [three pieces](#) of evidence to substantiate the need for new legislation: [allegations](#) of anti-Dalit discrimination at Google, [allegations](#) of anti-Dalit discrimination in the California State University (CSU) system, and [allegations](#) of anti-Dalit discrimination at Cisco Systems. There have also been conflicts over the addition of caste to anti-discrimination provisions at [Brandeis](#), [Harvard](#), [Brown](#), and [Columbia](#) Universities.

All of these controversies centered on Dalits, but strangely they all centered on relatively elite Dalits. Google and Cisco are, obviously, rarefied corporate environments, and the issues at both companies involved professional engineers, not low-level associates like cleaning contractors or parking attendants. Seattle is second only to Silicon Valley as a major technology center, and the sponsor of Seattle's caste ordinance is herself [married to](#) a Microsoft engineer. The CSU controversy was more down to earth, but even there the [prime mover](#) was a postgraduate student. The other institutions where the protection of Dalits has been on the agenda are all highly selective, extremely expensive private universities. Of course, highly successful people can and do face discrimination, but the protection of small, elite immigrant groups is rarely the focus of civil rights legislation.

Dalits are central to the diaspora culture war not because Dalits face serious disadvantage in the United States, but because the Dalit cause can be leveraged by the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition to implicitly disparage their

(institutionally) Hindu opponents. When expressing solidarity with Dalits, the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition do not have to explicitly link caste to the Hindu faith, because most Americans already associate caste with Hindus. By focusing their anti-discrimination efforts explicitly on discrimination against Dalits, the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition can in effect undermine public support for broad-based Hindu civil society organizations without directly attacking Hindus as such. They can also exploit the characteristic idealism of American society, especially on university campuses.

Understanding that most Americans know virtually nothing about Hindus or the Hindu faith, the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition seems to sense an opportunity to use allegations of caste-based discrimination as a social justice wedge issue to divide American Hindus along partisan and generational lines. The proposals for new legislation and new policies put broad-based Hindu civil society organizations in the awkward position of opposing anti-discrimination measures that appear benign but surreptitiously vilify Hindus and Hindu religious institutions. The measures themselves are, as Governor Newsom observed, generally redundant. Their primary purpose is to not to redress a grievance, but to generate a narrative.

### What are Dalits, and how many are there in America?

The terms "Dalit" and "Adivasi" refer to disadvantaged groups in Indian society. Both terms carry substantial cultural and religious connotations. Their civil equivalents in modern India (recognized in the Indian Constitution) are "Scheduled Castes" and "Scheduled Tribes." These groups are "scheduled" because there are detailed lists of specific castes and tribes that qualify under these two categories. Although the civil categories of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the more emotionally-laden terms Dalit and Adivasi are often used interchangeably, the characterization of a caste as Dalit or a tribe as Adivasi is an implicitly political act. Claims of Dalit or Adivasi identity originate in Indian civil rights activism, and not all members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes self-identify as Dalit or Adivasi.

No one seriously questions that Dalits and Adivasis faced extreme levels of discrimination in British colonial India. When India became independent in 1947, the task of drafting its Constitution was entrusted to the leading Dalit rights campaigner B.R. Ambedkar. India's Constitution outlawed "untouchability," prohibited discrimination based on caste, and made provisions for electoral and employment reservations for members of "Scheduled Castes" (broadly equated with castes whose members self-identify as "Dalit"). Nearly all authorities agree that social discrimination against Dalits [still exists](#) in India, but there is much less evidence that self-identified Dalits face systematic discrimination in the United States.

The Dalit population of the United States is small, but no one knows just how small. In the United States (as in India), "Dalit" is a cultural signifier, not a legal category, and the term is not recognized by the US Census Bureau. According to the most widely-cited figure, "in 2003, only 1.5 percent of Indian immigrants in the United States were Dalits or members of lower castes, according to the Center for the Advanced Study of India at the University of Pennsylvania." This figure was reported in 2019 by Tinku Ray for [WGBH Boston](#), [TheWorld](#), and the [Pulitzer Center](#), all highly respected media organizations. Strangely, Ray provided no link for this figure, and an extensive search revealed no trace of its existence before Ray's article. The Center for the Advanced Study of India confirmed (via personal communication) that they never published this statistic.

The figure appears to be a rough estimate drawn from a [2010 book](#) published by Johns Hopkins professor (and former director of the Center for the Advanced Study of India) Devesh Kumar. The data presented in that book were derived from a search for Indian family names in a commercial mailing list of American households. Professor Kumar's survey strategy was clever, well-documented, and appropriate for the purposes of his research. His survey was not, however, designed to produce an estimate of America's self-identified Dalit population. Based on the characteristics of his sample, Professor Kumar suggested only that "members of the most socially marginalized

groups, India's scheduled castes and scheduled tribes ... is at best a couple of percent in the India origin population residing in the United States." He drew no further conclusions.

A more recent nationally-representative survey [conducted](#) by YouGov in 2020 for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) found that "1%" of Indian-Americans who identified with a caste identified as Dalit. This seems to be the best statistic available, although it is also problematic: the question conflated "Scheduled Caste" identification with "Dalit" identification, and the CEIP numbers were only reported to the nearest percentage point. Even worse, the caste identity question was only asked of people who identified as Hindu (54% of the sample) and who identified with a caste (47% of the Hindus): in other words, only a quarter of the sample were even asked the caste identity question. Assuming that non-Hindus identify with a caste and as Dalit at the same rate that Hindus do, and taking the "1%" figure as exact (i.e., as implying 1.00%), the CEIP figures suggest that 0.47% of Indian-Americans self-identify as Dalits. The CEIP declined to provide more detailed information about the survey.

The implicit CEIP figure of 0.47% suffers from imprecise inputs and multiple assumptions, but it is ultimately based on a recently-conducted, nationally-representative survey. It does not include the small number of Dalits who originate from countries other than India, but it does include people who come from Scheduled Caste backgrounds in India who may not self-identify as "Dalit." Assuming that these two opposing biases roughly balance each other, applying the CEIP-derived estimate of 0.47% to America's [Indian-origin population](#) of 4,768,846 suggests that the number of self-identifying Dalits in the United States falls somewhere between 20,000 and 25,000 people.

Compared to other groups that are the focus of civil rights legislation, this is a tiny population. For example, Dalits are [far outnumbered](#) by Aztec (583,981) and Mayan (300,519) indigenous Latin American immigrants to the United States, who face serious intersectional discrimination, exploitation, and violence. Dalits are, by contrast with these vulnerable groups, a small, well-connected, and by all accounts highly successful immigrant community. The fact of Dalit disadvantage in India should not be generalized to assume Dalit disadvantage in the United States, since the American Dalit population represents a highly selected sliver from the upper stratum of Indian Dalit society.

## Equality Labs and the narrative of anti-Dalit discrimination

Despite the fact that Dalits constitute a small and seemingly privileged minority in American society, "Dalit rights" has become the cause célèbre of the South Asian diaspora culture war. It is the key tactic that the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition uses to vilify Hindus while maintaining a solemn façade of concern for the dignity of the downtrodden. The narrative of anti-Dalit discrimination is a highly sympathetic one, but it does require an articulate Dalit to voice it. In the diaspora culture war, one charismatic American-born Dalit in particular is highly visible on every front: Thenmozhi Soundararajan, the founder and executive director of the Dalit rights organization [Equality Labs](#).

When the Google caste diversity champion Tanuja Jain Gupta [resigned](#) in 2022 (the first piece of evidence cited by California Senator Aisha Wahab in her justification for SB 403), it was because Google denied her request to host "Thenmozhi Soundararajan, the co-founder of Dalit History Month and Equality Labs." When a Nepali Dalit CSU graduate student started a campaign to enshrine caste as a protected category in the university system's non-discrimination policies (Wahab's second piece of evidence), he did so [in collaboration](#) with "organizers at Equality Labs." When the California Civil Rights Department filed a case against Cisco and two of its senior engineers (Wahab's third piece of evidence), it cited Equality Labs in its [lawsuit](#) and even in its [press release](#). Seattle's 2023 ordinance banning caste-based discrimination literally embeds a reference to Equality Labs in the [actual text](#) of the bill.

In fact, nearly all allegations of widespread caste-based discrimination in the United States cite a [2018 report](#) published by Equality Labs under the title "Caste in the United States." It is the pivotal document on which the entire diaspora culture war turns. The report includes a basic primer on caste followed by data from a 2016 caste survey

conducted by Equality Labs in collaboration with other civil rights organizations. In the report's headline summary of findings, Soundararajan and her collaborators claimed that:

The results of our 2016 survey definitively find that all of the inequalities associated with Caste status, ritual purity, and social exclusion have become embedded within all of the major South Asian American institutions. Further, they extend into American mainstream institutions that have significant South Asian immigrant populations. This includes schools, workplaces, places of business, and religious institutions.

They found that 52% of their Dalit respondents feared being "outed" as Dalits, 40% reported facing caste-based educational discrimination in the United States, and 67% reported facing caste-based discrimination in their American workplaces. Alarming, according to the report "26% of Dalits who responded said they had faced physical assault in the United States based on their Caste" (compared to 0% for all other groups studied), though this result is contradicted by the fact that the report also claimed that "25% of Dalits who responded said they had faced verbal or physical assault based on their Caste."

These claims have been widely cited, but they are highly suspect. The Equality Labs survey relied on a "web-based, self-reported, self-administered questionnaire" that was distributed mainly via activist networks; the report specifically mentions 8 Dalit rights organizations and a group of Sikh religious organizations as distributing the survey. Coincidentally, the exact same Sikh organizations that campaigned for SB 403 through Californians for Caste Equity were those that distributed the Equality Labs survey. In short, Equality Labs surveyed a pool of Dalit rights activists about their views on caste-based oppression, and found that those activists thought that such oppression was endemic and widespread.

It seems likely that the Equality Labs survey respondents constituted a highly selected, highly energized sample. It is certain that the sample was wildly unrepresentative of the Dalit-identifying population of the United States. In terms of education, a remarkable 80% of the survey's Dalit-identifying respondents were either postgraduate students or holders of postgraduate degrees. This [compares](#) to 15% for the US adult population aged 25 or over. Nearly half of the survey's respondents were under the age of 30, and 96% were under the age of 50. Nearly 30% of the respondents identified as LGBTQIA+, compared to 7.1% for the American population [as a whole](#). All evidence suggests that the 2016 Equality Labs survey should not be taken seriously.

Equality Labs did not respond to multiple e-mails requesting further details about the survey.

## The strategic redefinition of "caste" for American audiences

The term "Dalit" is imbued with religious overtones. The chief ideologue of India's Dalit rights movement, B.R. Ambedkar, adopted the term as part of a campaign to create a separate identity for Dalits within the Hindu faith, and ultimately to separate Dalits from the Hindu faith. In 1956, Ambedkar fulfilled his [famous pledge](#) that "even though I was born in the Hindu religion, I will not die in the Hindu religion" and led a mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism. Dalit rights organizations almost universally eulogize Ambedkar, and Equality Labs makes no bones about the equation of caste oppression with Hindu religion. In its highly-cited [2018 report](#) "Caste in the United States" (which includes a full-page memorialization of Ambedkar), Equality Labs claims that

it is important to understand that religious identity in South Asian Americans communities can also be closely linked with Caste. This is because many non-Hindu religious traditions in the subcontinent emerged as a challenge to Caste, including Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Ravidassia faiths. Many Christian and Muslim South Asians also converted to these faiths to escape Caste and gain access to education, business, and political representation—all of which were traditionally reserved for the "upper" Castes by Hindu scriptures.

This view of caste is widely held, and is not entirely false. It is, however, incomplete and selectively inaccurate.

Caste is a long-standing feature of Indian society, but Indians of all religions retain caste identities. A major survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2019-2020 [found that](#) "nearly all Indians (98%) identify as a member of a caste, regardless of their religious background." Caste is a civil concept, and although the members of the 1108 castes that are legally designated as "Scheduled Castes" in India are generally described as "Dalits," the link between the two terms is fluid. In fact, members of non-scheduled caste groups in India have [lobbied](#) to have their castes scheduled, and a major civil conflict has broken out in the Indian state of Manipur over the [designation](#) of new Scheduled Tribes.

Castes are well-defined, historically endogamous groups that are present in all South Asian societies. They are typically patrilineal, often associated with a particular surname, usually associated with a particular region, and sometimes associated with a particular occupation. But Equality Labs and other organizations that link Dalit disadvantage to Hindu religious tradition attempt to link caste to a characteristically Hindu concept called *varna*. The four-fold *varna* system laid out in ancient Sanskrit texts describes a division of societal roles among Brahmins (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (farmers and herders), and Shudras (workers and artisans). The names of the four roles and their stylized descriptions are not consistent across texts, and views differ as to whether the roles were meant to be descriptive or prescriptive. Needless to say, this system is not operative in modern Indian society.

Equality Labs, however, takes it very seriously. Equality Labs characterizes the *varna* system as a form of "Caste apartheid" under which Dalits were "forced ... into slave and bonded agricultural labor, and undignified sanitation work like manual scavenging" by "Caste oppression in Hinduism." The interpretation that Dalits have no *varna* or represent a fifth *varna* is widely held, and is not unique to Equality Labs. Nor is it necessarily wrong. Opinions about *varna* and Dalits are so diverse that credible authorities can be found to support almost any view. Many Indians themselves conflate caste with *varna*, and there is no reason to believe that Equality Labs is being disingenuous in presenting its viewpoint.

But by embracing the theory that caste derives from *varna*—and that Dalit oppression derives from the ongoing exclusion of Dalits from the *varna* system—Equality Labs conflates a civil concept (caste) with a religious one (*varna*). This represents a bait-and-switch that seems calculated to link caste-based discrimination with Hindu religious beliefs. California's SB 403, the Cisco case, the Seattle caste ordinance, and the panoply of university anti-discrimination policies have all been justified by the supposed need to protect Dalits from discrimination, not by the need to prevent caste-based discrimination tout court. American governments may welcome the demand to protect only one disadvantaged group (Dalits) instead of 6000 individual caste groups. But when Dalit rights activists present their account of caste to an credulous American public, it represents as much the weaponization of ignorance as the weaponization of caste.

### **Conclusion: Caste and the anti-Hindu coalition**

The South Asian diaspora culture war in the United States pits a unified coalition of mainly Muslim, Sikh, and Dalit civil society organizations against a looser grouping of broad-based (i.e., not specifically Dalit) Hindu civil society organizations. The Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition has collectively put forward an organized program of legislation and policies, while various Hindu organizations have responded with a series of uncoordinated defensive mobilizations. The Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition has not always succeeded in prosecuting its program, but it has consistently succeeded in generating [mainstream press coverage](#) that reinforces its preferred narrative—and places its opponents in the unenviable position of seeming to defend caste-based discrimination.

The Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition has accomplished this goal by consistently framing "caste" in terms of the oppression of Dalits, instead of seeking to proscribe all forms of caste-based discrimination against people of any caste background. This bait-and-switch links a civil policy goal (the elimination of caste-based discrimination in the



United States) to an outdated religious generalization (the historical association of the Hindu faith with anti-Dalit oppression in India). Hindu civil society organizations have correctly ascertained that the purpose of the proposed anti-discrimination measures is not to prevent actual discrimination (which in most cases is already prohibited) but to link caste-based discrimination with the Hindu faith, both in law and in the American mind.

The movement against caste-based discrimination led by Equality Labs and other Dalit rights organizations in collaboration with Muslim and Sikh civil society organizations is thus implicitly (if not explicitly) anti-Hindu in intent and execution. Anti-Hindu activism is often characterized by Hindu civil society organizations as being motivated by "Hinduphobia" (on the model of "Islamophobia"), but that label is analytically inaccurate. The actions of the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition do not suggest that they suffer from a genuine fear of Hindus or Hindu religious practice. Islamophobia, like homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia, is an organic, irrational fear. Antihinduism is, by contrast, an organized movement for the vilification of Hindus and the Hindu faith.

The promotion of antihinduism in the United States [closely parallels](#) the promotion of antisemitism, and indeed there is a substantial overlap in organizations and strategies between antisemitic and anti-Hindu movements. This qualitative conclusion is mirrored by the results of a [quantitative study](#) of online behavior published in 2022 by the Network Contagion Research Institute. Similar anti-Hindu activism was also observed in the United Kingdom in a [2022 study](#) conducted by Charlotte Littlewood for the Henry Jackson Society.

The particular tactics used by the Muslim-Sikh-Dalit coalition in the United States play on uniquely American emotional vulnerabilities, but the weaponization of caste to promote a negative view of Hindus and the Hindu faith fits in with a larger pattern of anti-Hindu and anti-India activism that extends throughout the global South Asian diaspora. It sits adjacent to the Islamist movement pushing for independence for Muslim-majority Kashmir and the Khalistani movement for an independent Sikh state, both of which have strong support in their respective diaspora communities in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Support for Dalit rights is, for these movements, merely a minor front in a wider, global war.

In 2021, an NAACP resolution on "Caste Based Discrimination in the United States" [included the claim](#) that Dalits "are often limited to certain occupations which are deemed 'polluting' or menial by others." This phrase was used to describe an American minority group that (according to Equality Labs) is 80% postgraduate educated. The conflation of caste with *varna* weaponizes American ignorance by linking an appealing social justice slogan ("end caste-based discrimination") to an appealing victim group (Indian Dalits). But American Dalits are not Indian Dalits, and *varna* is not caste. Clearly, a much deeper understanding of South Asian society is needed before American public institutions can make well-informed policy decisions about caste-based discrimination.

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