

The Diaspora as a Factor in U.S.-India Relations

ARTHUR G. RUBINOFF

This article examines the impact that the Indo-American community has had on transforming the historic hostile bilateral relationship between Washington and New Delhi. It finds the role of Indians in the United States to be decisive in altering perceptions of decision makers between two countries that had limited contact and conflicting interests. As Devesh Kapur suggests, any diaspora's ideational effects depends on its size, socioeconomic characteristics and its access to points in the power structure in the country of origin.¹ In the first years of India's existence as an independent state, when the Indian community in the United States was small and uneducated, its impact on foreign policy was negligible. During the mid-1980s, Myron Weiner speculated about whether the growing presence of the affluent Indian American expatriate community in the United States would make a difference for bilateral relations.² As will be seen, the diaspora's influence in the United States has grown as its skills, education, income, and size have increased. It is apparent that the prosperous and demographically significant Indo-American community, typified by physicians and Silicon Valley computer technicians, has remarkably changed not only its image, but also the perception of its home country in the United States. In the time span of a single generation the image of Indians, in the United States and the subcontinent, has been transformed from a malnourished skeleton in a filthy dhoti to a highly educated prosperous professional in a designer business suit who is a threat to Americans seeking American jobs—an impression reinforced by the impressive number of widely-read and acclaimed novels written in English by expatriates.

The diaspora serves as a reservoir of support for New Delhi in Washington. It has also played a major role in transforming Indian society by infusing new ideas—formally or informally—as well as economic, human, and social capital from the United States. Its entrepreneurial success in the United States has also influenced Indian policymakers as they undertake economic reforms, a reality recently acknowledged by Prime Minister and former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh during his latest visit to the United States.³

The Ambivalent Indo-American Relationship

Washington's actions attract greater attention in the course of bilateral relations because they impinge more on New Delhi's security and prosperity than vice versa. This asymmetrical Indo-American relationship has a direct bearing on mutual perceptions. While Indians pay close attention to U.S. affairs, ignorance of India typifies American attitudes, and neglect has characterized the United States' policies toward the country as it has not been regarded as economically significant. While the United States is India's leading foreign investor and trading partner, accounting for 20 percent of India's exports, these transactions amount to less than 1 percent of America's global trade and a negligible amount of U.S. foreign investment. The disparity of mutual importance, which had increased since the breakup of the Soviet Union, has made Indian officials—who have never been comfortable with the notion of a unipolar world—resentful of America's insensitivity.

Individuals relate to international actors and their environment according to a set of relatively stable and durable thought patterns that translate into policy preferences.⁴ The impressions Indian and American officials formed about each other's countries translated into policy.⁵ As Harold Isaacs suggests, perceptions are particularly important in any foreign policy relationship where there is little shared history, and "neither high politics nor high emotion."⁶ Mutually hostile perceptions have complicated relations between the world's two largest democracies and often impeded the resolution of outstanding issues. Due to their asymmetrical importance, bilateral relations have tended to focus on images rather than interests. Sulochana Raghavan Glazer and Nathan Glazer found that a surprising degree of emotionally weighted and correspondingly ambivalent images—including indifference, hostility, resentment, exasperation, and disdain—characterized the relations between India and the United States.⁷ According to former ambassador Chester Bowles, the correspondingly ambivalent conceptions Indians have of the United States are quite different—but equally stereotyped—from those Americans have of India, since they have been shaped by similar factors. Writing in 1961, he found that "India is inclined to look upon American foreign policy as negative, overly militaristic, and purely defensive against communism," while the United States saw a non-

aligned India as unwilling to “stand up and be counted in a struggle between the forces of freedom and those of servitude.”⁸

Historic Indian Perceptions

India has played a remarkably significant international role for a developing country with a large illiterate population. Public opinion has counted less than elite attitudes in the formulation of foreign policy in India’s parliamentary system.⁹ The personality perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of decision makers shaped by education provide the ideological context and historical legacy in any foreign policy relationship.¹⁰

While international migration, education, and return were characteristics of pre-independence India, that channel of migration was primarily with Great Britain, the colonial power, and not the United States. These Indian elite attitudes—which include Fabian socialism, Gandhism, Marxism, and anti-Americanism¹¹—were formulated by the British-educated founding generation. Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel pursued their legal training there. A host of others, including Krishna Menon and many prominent bureaucrats attended the London School of Economics (LSE) which ensured the lasting influence of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, as well as Harold Laski, on the Indian elite. Even B. R. Ambedkar, the untouchable leader who earned a PhD from Columbia and drafted the Indian constitution, also studied at LSE. Others like Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon and Lala Lajpath Rai, who studied in the United States were exceptions, as was Jayprakash Narayan, whose socialism was reinforced at the University of Wisconsin and Ohio State during the depression.

Jawaharlal Nehru, who dominated the foreign policy apparatus and Parliament from 1947–64, was educated at Cambridge. Nehru considered American leaders condescending and, as a Marxist, deplored American materialism.¹² Nehru’s policy of nonalignment with the great powers forged a wide-ranging consensus at home and provided prominence abroad. Little advantage, but a considerable loss of sovereignty, was seen by the majority of Indians in any formal ties to Washington. For the most part—with the exception of members of the pro-Western Swatantra party—Nehru’s views on the United States were shared by his associates in the Congress Party and even exceeded by Hindu nationalist, socialist, and communist legislators.

There is a long-standing perception among Indians that the United States has consistently been reluctant to accord New Delhi great power status and constantly works against India’s interests.¹³ The transformation of the American image from the symbol of liberty, equality, and democracy to an association with British imperialism in India was established during World War II.¹⁴ Resentment still persists because China—not India—was granted a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in 1945. U.S.-Soviet competition and Indo-Pakistani rivalry aggravated Washington’s bilateral ties with New Delhi. The

U.S. alliance with Pakistan, formalized in 1954, has been the most prominent and continuing irritant in bilateral relations. The pact was widely viewed as an American intervention on the subcontinent, explicitly directed against India rather than the Soviet Union.¹⁵

Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, who attended but never graduated from Oxford, had a more visceral antipathy toward the United States when she served as prime minister (1966–77, 1980–84). This sentiment was reinforced by Washington's insistence that India devalue its currency by 50 percent during the financial crisis of 1966, which the left parties depicted in a no-confidence motion as a "craven surrender" of India's economic independence to the United States.¹⁶ The implicit justification for the State of Emergency that she proclaimed in 1975 was that the CIA was trying to destabilize her government.

Legislators in both countries were particularly slow to abandon Cold War rhetoric after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As late as the passage of the Brown Amendment of 1995, which weakened the prohibition on arms sales to Pakistan, there was a latent hostility that could consistently be tapped by New Delhi's opponents and supporters of Islamabad in Washington, while anti-Americanism was prevalent among elites in India.

The Indian Diaspora and the United States

The United States was late in discovering India. Prior to World War II, American contact with India, except for missionary activity, was nominal, and political and economic relations between the two countries were sporadic. As late as 1940, there were approximately three thousand persons of Indian descent in the United States, and as a consequence, relations with their country of origin were of little domestic importance to either the general public or Congress. Under the circumstances, advocates for better relations such as J. J. Singh, the president of the India League of America, could make little progress in his attempt to secure backing from the Roosevelt administration for Indian independence.¹⁷ Sympathetic to the anticolonialism espoused by the Indian National Congress, Washington nevertheless felt it necessary to support its ally Great Britain, rather than the nationalist movement that was demanding independence from London.¹⁸

Early Patterns of Immigration

Even before New Delhi achieved independence, the barring of Indians and the denial of citizenship on the basis of race scarred America's relations with India.¹⁹ The first wave of immigrants from South Asia arrived in the United States in the 1890s primarily as agricultural laborers from the Punjab and worked on farms in the Pacific Northwest and California. The latter—the California workers—often took Mexican wives.²⁰ No matter what their religious persuasion, all Indians were

deemed Hindus and subjected to the widespread prejudice against Asians that prevailed during the first half of the twentieth century. As a consequence, “the first and second generation of Indian leaders, including senior officials and bureaucrats . . . considered the United States a racist country comparable to South Africa in the way it treated minorities.”²¹ Immigration from India for purposes of employment was completely barred under a 1917 statute, and in 1923 the Supreme Court ruled²² Indian nationals ineligible for citizenship on grounds that as “Hindus” they were not “white persons.” Further restrictions banning Asians were applied by Congress in 1924, and the Indian legislature retaliated in 1926 by passing the Indian Naturalization Act, which denied Indian citizenship to nationals of any country that withheld the same privilege to Indians. Proposals for reform of the quota and naturalization provisions introduced by Claire Booth Luce (R-CT) and Emanuel Celler (D-NY) in 1945 were stalled by an anti-civil rights coalition. It required the active intervention of President Truman to secure passage of the immigration reform measure on July 2, 1946.²³ It would take the 1965 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act to reverse decades of discrimination and initiate preferential admission of skilled Asian professionals such as physicians. However, its impact on immigration would not be felt until the family reunification provisions of legislation passed in the 1980s. As will be shown, it would take an additional decade for Indian Americans to become a factor in bilateral relations.

Historic American Perceptions

In the meantime, the relative lack of contact was responsible for uninformed, condescending, and critical perceptions of India transmitted by Christian missionaries.²⁴ As anthropologist Milton Singer suggests, these subjective images often reflect more about the psychology of the holder than about reality.²⁵ This was certainly true in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, who was alternately depicted in the United States as a saint and a fraud.²⁶ Images of India in the United States projected by Katherine Mayo in 1927 were highly negative—picturing the country as characterized by either fabulous opulence or pervasive poverty.²⁷

These unflattering sentiments were developed and reinforced by a “self-indoctrinating” and circular information system, including school textbooks, the media, and academic writings—all of which depicted India as a backward society.²⁸ A 1979 academic survey indicated that scholars continued to perceive South Asian countries as exclusively backward societies, neglecting the foreign trade and industrial economies of the region.²⁹ The Asia Society, in a review of some three hundred school textbooks, found that the presentation of India was the most negative of all Asian countries.³⁰ According to a State Department analysis, American attitudes concerning India focused on disease, death, and illiteracy more than for any other country.³¹

TABLE 1. Indian Americans in the United States by Decade

Year	Number
1910	2,544
1920	2,544
1930	3,130
1940	2,405
1950	2,398
1960	8,746
1970	13,149
1980	387,221
1990	815,447
2000	1,678,765

As a result, public opinion surveys have consistently documented that most Americans have had misconceptions and negative feelings about India and Indians.³² A 1928 poll found that immigrants from India were regarded “as the most undesirable” of all newcomers living in the United States.³³

American legislators and decision-makers are subject to the same impressions as the general public. It is the view of John Mellor that U.S. policy itself is the product of similar stereotypes that portray India “as poverty-stricken and helpless.”³⁴ Certainly during the 1971 Bangladesh crisis, President Richard Nixon’s tilt toward Pakistan “was influenced by his long-standing dislike for India and the Indians.”³⁵ A similar sentiment is attributed to President Lyndon Johnson, who “regarded Indians as weak and indecisive.”³⁶ A former high AID official, who had been posted in New Delhi, described “a majority” of key players in the White House, the State Department and Congress to be *ab initio*, anti-Indian.³⁷

American Congress is likely to be more representative of public attitudes than the executive branch. Like other Americans, most congressmen get their news and impressions from the media.³⁸ The information they get about India is neither adequate nor accurate.³⁹ Even service as ambassador to New Delhi did not prevent Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), perhaps the most knowledgeable legislator of his time on the subject, from stating, “What does [India] export but communicable diseases?”⁴⁰ One of the most informed and thoughtful Congressmen, Lee Hamilton (D-IN), chairman of a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee that dealt with South Asia and the Near East, and later chairman of the full committee, was moved to exclaim in response to testimony describing India’s circumstances, “I don’t know that I have ever heard such a long list of difficulties, ills and problems and so little hope.”⁴¹

The complaint was raised that although India has one of the largest populations, most powerful military establishments and dynamic economies in the world, it has not been taken seriously by the United States.⁴² Myron Weiner cogently explained the reasons why South Asia has until recently been accorded such a low priority in American thinking:

Unlike the Middle East, Indonesia or Nigeria, it has no resources vital to the American economy. Unlike Latin America it is not a region with substantial American private investment. Its geopolitical position raises no fundamental problems for American security. . . . Unlike China . . . India has no deep cultural or historic ties with the United States, and unlike the countries of Western Europe, Israel and Greece, no significant segment of the American population originates from nor has an enduring association with the region. In short, none of the elements exist that attract the daily concerns of the president, Congress, the press, or the foreign policy publics.⁴³

Implications for U.S. Policy

Relative to other areas of the world, the United States has neglected India despite the country's growing economic, political, and strategic importance. Within both the executive and legislative branches, South Asia has had a low priority. American interests have been seen as limited in a region that was associated with problems rather than opportunities. Oriented toward Europe, the State Department until 1991 included South Asia with the Near East and resisted the creation of a separate bureau for the region. As a result, a deputy assistant secretary four levels removed from the secretary of state handled relations with India. Under this arrangement, the "Near East received the lion's share of attention," holding six country directorates compared to two for South Asia, although the three to one population ratio was the inverse.⁴⁴ South Asia is also attached to the Near East in the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, causing regional issues to be handled intermittently by functional experts.⁴⁵

The legislative scene is even more diffuse. During the Cold War the Senate Foreign Relations Committee concerned itself primarily with U.S.-Soviet issues and the Vietnam conflict, abrogating other responsibilities—including South Asia—to subcommittee chairmen who showed an interest and desired a platform.⁴⁶ After a major reorganization of its subcommittees in 1970, the House of Representatives treated South Asia in a typically residual fashion, thereby reducing both continuity and expertise in that chamber. At times South Asia has been paired with the Near East in the manner of the State Department, as a subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where Arab-Israeli and Iraqi matters overshadowed it. At other times it has been coupled with the Asia and the Pacific region where it was dwarfed by concerns such as the Vietnam War and bilateral relations with China and Japan. As recently as the mid-1980s, only about 5 percent of the members of Congress had an interest in South Asia.⁴⁷ Given this

situation, congressional concern about India is not constant. Legislative activity towards the region tends to manifest in amendments to related issues such as human rights and nuclear proliferation. When issues are peripheral to interest groups, political parties, and the congressional leadership, members have great discretion regarding their activities. This enables "marginals" to become involved in the foreign policy process as it relates to areas peripheral to the national interest. Hence "India bashers" such as Dan Burton (R-IN), Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), and Robert Dornan (R-CA) have used the Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Committees as a platform to criticize New Delhi with impunity.⁴⁸

The tendency toward neglect has implications for U.S. policy in a region where American interests have been seen as limited. Hence, perceptions have, until recently, been more important than security interests in shaping U.S. policy toward South Asia.⁴⁹ Robert Dahl observed that perceptions about a policy in Washington tend to be "persistent, consistent and shared."⁵⁰ The most enduring factor in Washington's bilateral relations with New Delhi is the belief that India was on the wrong side of the two most important conflicts of the past century: World War II and the Cold War. Although millions of Indian soldiers served in the British army, the Indian National Congress refused to support the war against the Axis powers so long as London would not promise independence. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was viewed as "clearly pro-Russian," and Indian non-alignment was seen as "a major obstacle to U.S. efforts to rally and unite the free nations of Asia in the struggle against Soviet world domination."⁵¹ While there is little institutional memory in Washington, these perceptions have remained consistent in the State Department and on Capitol Hill.⁵²

Bilateral relations were rarely on an even keel, but tended instead to oscillate between high and low points. The high points were U.S. support for New Delhi during its 1962 border war with China, which coincided with the Cuban missile crisis, and U.S. relief programs that extended from the early 1950s into the next decade. The low points have been more numerous: differences that emerged during the Korean War, India's failure to sign the Japanese peace treaty, the inclusion of Pakistan in the American alliance system in 1954–55, the attempt by the United States to prevent India from using force in Goa in 1961, the U.S. decision to send the carrier *Enterprise* into the Bay of Bengal in 1971, and Indian resentment over the accrual of rupee currencies by the United States. Because New Delhi seldom agreed with Washington on issues such as Afghanistan, foreign assistance to India was perceived as deriving ingratitude and resentment rather than benefits for the United States, and Congressional appropriations subcommittees chaired by Otto Passman (D-LA) and Clarence Long (D-MD) only grudgingly provided it.⁵³ The situation of the Sikhs in the Punjab and the ensuing civil war in Kashmir added a human rights dimension to bilateral relations that divided the expatriate community during the 1980s. Economic and nuclear issues are more recent irritants.

A Lag in Perceptions

The end of the Cold War—for the first time—provided anticipation that bilateral relations, freed from the historic shibboleths, would flourish. However, policymakers', especially legislators', beliefs are so deep-rooted that they have been slow to adjust to changing international circumstances. Even though Moscow was no longer regarded as a threat to Washington, hostility toward India lingered on Capitol Hill as late as the passage of the watershed Brown Amendment in 1995, which eased sanctions on Pakistan for Islamabad's nuclear program.⁵⁴ Anachronistic Cold War logic was resurrected to portray Pakistan as being a loyal partner of the United States, while India was depicted as being a client of Russia always taking positions contrary to American interests and branded "as the greatest source of instability in South Asia."⁵⁵ Predictably, the Brown Amendment's passage caused outrage in India and worsened relations with the United States. Parliamentarians from the parties on the left ridiculed the government of Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao for pursuing what they regarded as a misguided policy of cooperation with the United States.⁵⁶ The setback to U.S.-Indian relations was signaled by a speech that Home Minister S. B. Chavan made in the Rajya Sabha on November 29, 1995. He claimed that the selling of arms to Pakistan indicated that the United States had "evil designs" on the subcontinent. His assertion that the United States was interested in acquiring a "foothold" in Kashmir was endorsed by the Bharatiya Janata Party opposition leader.⁵⁷ The fact that this unsubstantiated charge was widely endorsed throughout India without refutation is indicative of the persistence of obsolete perceptions. The passage of the Brown Amendment and the Indian parliament's reaction to it showed the delicate nature of Indo-American relations. This legacy of mistrust has carried over to the conduct of the war on terrorism in Afghanistan, where the United States has had to delicately balance its improved relationship with India with its renewed commitment to Pakistan as a frontline state.

Changing Perceptions

Twenty years ago Surgit Mansingh found that few articulate persons in the Indian press or Parliament were "pro-American,"⁵⁸ but that is no longer the case. Now there is concern that India has become too close with Washington because it is "over-invested in the United States." India's urban youth and burgeoning middle class have become Americanized through the globalization of the communications media. Hundreds of thousands of Indians have worked in the United States on H-1B visas. Thousands have returned home—many who are employed in businesses engaged in the outsourcing of services. Once back in India they have become an important lobby for better relations with the United States.⁵⁹ In addition, "practically every educated or wealthy family in India has one or more members resident in America

with vested interests in good relations with that country.”⁶⁰ It is estimated that 25 percent of the Indian elite has relatives living in the United States. With 74,603 Indians studying in the United States, India is the largest source of foreign students in the country.⁶¹ Sixty percent of retired Indian generals have children studying abroad—half of them in the United States.

Even as vernacular politicians have replaced the earlier, more sophisticated generation, the number of American-educated Indian legislators across the political spectrum is growing.⁶² Reflecting increased cooperation between American and Indian legislators,⁶³ a recent parliamentary delegation included Milind Deora, son of veteran Mumbai Congress politician Murli Deora who earned a bachelor of science degree in business administration from Boston University; Sachin Pilot, son of the late Congress leader Rajesh Pilot who has an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School; B. J. Panada of the Biju Janata Dal, who majored in scientific and technical communication at Michigan Tech; and the Bharatiya Janata Party’s Manvendra Singh, son of former external affairs minister Jaswant Singh, who is an alumnus of Hampshire College.⁶⁴ Other prominent Members of Parliament educated in the United States include Ajit Singh, son of former Prime Minister Charan Singh, who actually became a U.S. citizen, before renouncing his American citizenship in order to return to India and run for Parliament, and, of course, Palaniappan Chidambaram, finance minister in the United Front government in 1996 and again in the Congress-led government in 2004, who earned a Harvard MBA. Children of prominent politicians who have studied in the United States include Congress leader Sonia Gandhi’s son Rahul, who studied at Harvard, as did Dayanidhi Maran, the son of former Industries Minister Murasoli Maran of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK); Jyotridaya Scindia, the son of the late Madhav Rao Scindia, who earned an MBA at Stanford; and Dushyant Singh, the son of Vasundhara Raje, who attended Boston University. While an education in the United States does not guarantee support for Washington’s policies, it does impart an understanding and transmission of American values and culture. Students, as well as an increasing number of other immigrants to America, serve as a bridge between the two countries.

The new Indian elite that has emerged in both countries has had a significant impact on Indo-American relations. Indian economists have routinely been educated abroad and worked at institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Many did not return home after completing their education. Economists trained in Britain tended to endorse the command economy model. Some of the initial dissenters from the state-dominated economic strategy were economists who tended to locate in the United States, such as Jagdish Bhagwati at Columbia University and T. N. Srinivasan of Yale. In recent years they have been reinforced by a new generation of American-educated scholars who have returned to India and assumed positions of influence.

These include Arun Shourie, whose dissertation at Syracuse was critical of India's licensing regimes; Rakesh Mohan and Suman Bery, two Princeton-trained economists who both headed the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER); S. Venkitaramanan, a champion of liberalization who did his doctoral work at Carnegie Mellon and was a member of the IAS; and Vijay Kelkar, who earned a PhD from Berkeley before becoming finance secretary.⁶⁵ Others have moved from India to the American financial sector. Jayant Sinha, son of former Finance and Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha, joined Citibank in New York before moving to Bear Sterns, and then Lehman Brothers. It is believed his endorsement of free enterprise affected the evolution of his father's economic thinking.⁶⁶

After the demise of the Soviet Union, ethnic politics became more important in Washington. Since New Delhi's belated adoption of a free market economy, India's hundreds of millions of consumers have "attracted the attention of both Wall Street and Main Street" as well as the U.S. Congress.⁶⁷ American legislators have finally realized that India's 1991 economic liberalization can yield domestic dividends. Economic opportunity has for the first time figured in congressional thinking about India. Legislators, who once avoided the region,⁶⁸ now regularly visit the commercial centers of Mumbai (Bombay) and India's Silicon valley in Bangalore, as well as the capital, Delhi.⁶⁹ Pepsico and General Electric, which have major investments in India, have become important lobbyists for the country in Washington. As American investment in India increases, so too has New Delhi's influence in Washington, thanks to the activity of the U.S.-India Business Council and the India Interest Group lobby. At a time when ethnic politics have trumped nuclear proliferation, Indian interest groups have replicated the tactics of the Israeli lobbies in Washington⁷⁰ and in recent years have held a number of joint functions with Jewish groups on Capitol Hill.⁷¹

The Changing Face of the Indo-American Community

New Delhi's position in Washington has been especially bolstered by the political activity of the over 1.7 million Indian Americans—up from 387,000 in 1980—who reside in the United States (see figure 1). Fifty-three percent were born in India—a declining majority of whom came from Gujarat—while the rest migrated from diasporic communities in England, Africa, the Caribbean, and Pakistan.⁷² While their influence is diluted by Khalistani and Kashmiri separatists and a Pakistani-American community that is one-tenth its size, it is nonetheless growing. Their annual growth rate of 7.6 percent makes the community the fastest growing ethnic group in the country. Many own small businesses, including 37 percent of all hotel rooms in the United States.⁷³ The educational achievement and economic status of this upwardly mobile community has succeeded in changing the perception of Indians in the United

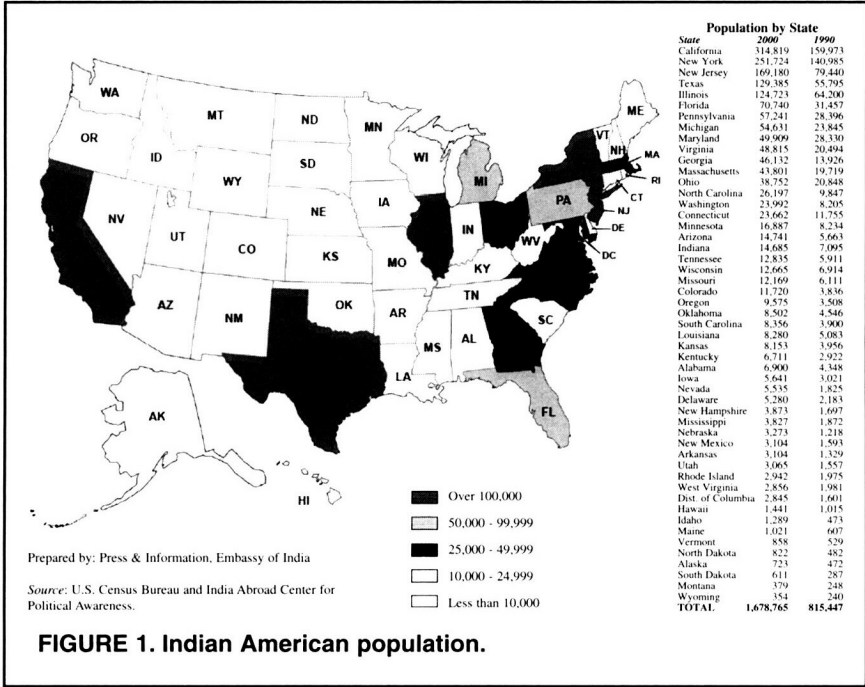
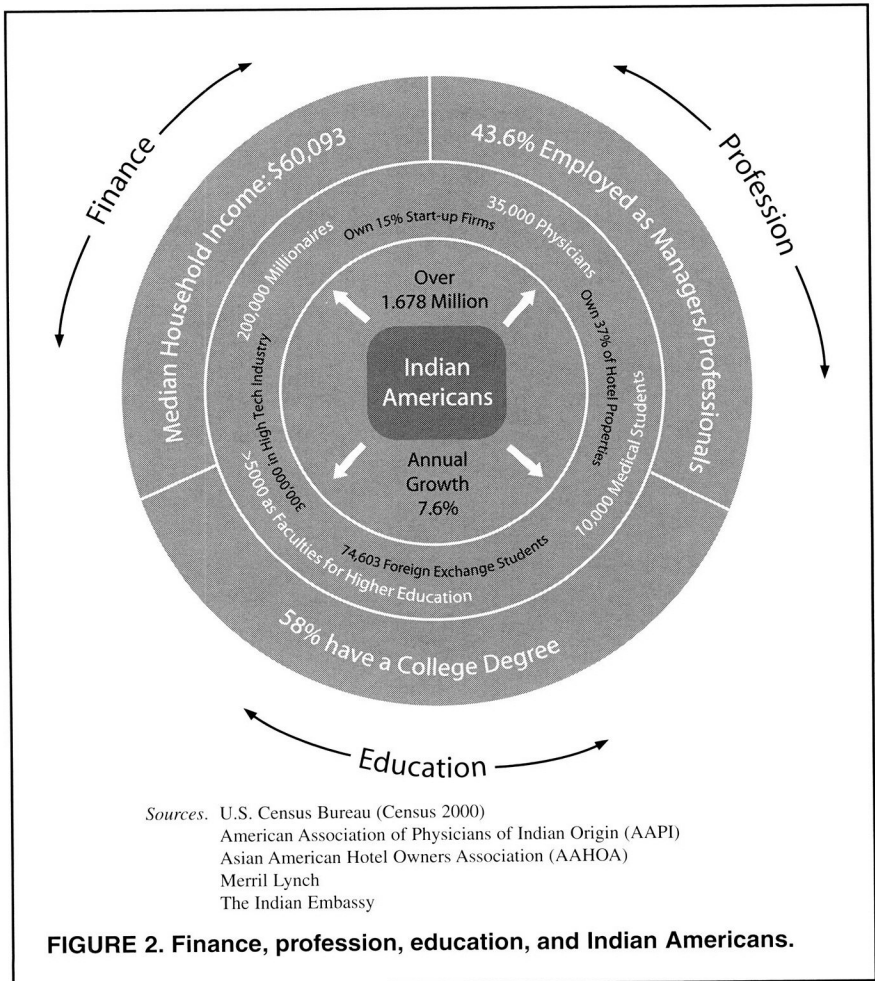


FIGURE 1. Indian American population.

States (see figure 2). Indian Americans have a median income nearly 50 percent higher than the average American—\$60,093 compared to the national average of \$38,885.⁷⁴ Moreover, it has the smallest number of people living below the poverty line—less than 6 percent. The community, which includes 200,000 millionaires,⁷⁵ has a higher per capita income, and a larger percentage of its workforce (46 percent) holds a managerial or professional position than any other group except Japanese Americans in the United States.⁷⁶ Fifty-eight percent of adults have college degrees—triple the number of whites in America and twenty times the number of Indians in India—and five thousand are academics, many in elite business schools. The community has an especially high representation of doctors (thirty-five thousand), engineers, scientists, architects, and computer technologists (three hundred thousand). They account for 15 percent of all high-tech startups in the Silicon Valley.⁷⁷ Among its success stories are Vinod Khosla, cofounder of Sun Microsystems; Sabeer Bhatia, the creator of Hotmail; and billionaire Gururaj Deshpande.⁷⁸ Others have achieved prominent influence at Citibank, US Airways, and United Airlines.

These demographic and economic factors have translated into political clout in both countries. Highly paid Indo-American professionals, derisively characterized by their opponents as the “chapatti lobby,” are politically active—especially in the

major urban-industrial areas of California and the Northeast and Midwest, as well as Texas. Their outreach through such groups⁷⁹ as the Indian American Forum for Political Education (IAFPE), which has twenty-eight chapters across the United States, and the Indian American Political Advocacy Council (IAPAC) translates into political and financial clout. The American Association of Physicians was instrumental in lifting restrictions against foreign-trained physicians practicing in the United States.⁸⁰ Indian Americans raised four million dollars on behalf of political candidates in the 1992 election; six years later this figure had almost doubled to seven million dollars.⁸¹ Under the circumstances, both Republicans and Democrats have attempted to mobilize the community's resources. Members of Congress see



little downside, and have many reasons to be attentive to the community's concerns.⁸² The Indian American Friendship Council attracted nearly forty lawmakers to a July 1999 function in Washington that featured speeches by House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, House International Relations Committee chair Benjamin Gilman, and Doug Bereuter, the chairman of the House subcommittee that dealt with Asia. The India Abroad Center for Political Awareness regularly runs summer sessions for congressional interns, an activity that has led to the placement of more than three dozen staffers of Indian origin on the Hill.

This growing influence of the Indian American community⁸³ is reflected in the strength of the Caucus of India and Indian Americans in the House of Representatives, which claims 163 members, making it the largest country caucus on the Hill in the 108th Congress (2003–05). The caucus was founded by Frank Pallone (D-NJ), whose district had a significant population of Indian Americans and Bill McCollum (R-FL), who was critical of Pakistan's record on narcotics and terrorism after India's champion Stephen Solarz (D-NY) left Congress in 1993. The positions of the bipartisan⁸⁴ caucus on South Asian and related matters, such as immigration, family reunification, and civil rights issues, must be taken into account by an administration that regards its numbers as a mixed blessing and a threat to executive control of foreign policy. The sale of wheat and aircraft were more instrumental than the Caucus in lifting sanctions against New Delhi after the 1998 nuclear tests.⁸⁵ My research indicates that its strength and accomplishments are exaggerated. The Caucus' principal activities are feel-good resolutions praising India's democracy and contrasting New Delhi's political system with the authoritarian military dictatorship in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the Caucus—despite its rivalries⁸⁶—has for the first time provided India “with an institutional base of support on Capitol Hill.”⁸⁷ It has done so by enlisting floor speakers, lining up votes, and placing material in the Congressional Record. Whereas a generation ago, supporters of India such as Stephen Solarz and Charles Percy (R-IL) had difficulty in finding colleagues and community activists to advance New Delhi's interests, the Caucus has been instrumental in negating the influence of Pakistan and defeating Dan Burton's annual amendments to slash assistance to India.

The example of the House caucus was not lost on the Senate. In March 2004, a thirty-five member “Friends of India” grouping was formed in the Senate in conjunction with the Indian Embassy, the first such country-focused grouping in the history of that body—a development made easier by the departure of legislators with a broader agenda than ethnic politics, such as the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan and John Glenn (D-OH). Co-chaired by John Cornyn (R-TX) and Hilary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), its membership includes Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD), former Judiciary Committee Chair Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Finance Committee Chair Charles Grassley (R-IA), Appropriations Chair Thad Cochran (R-MS), and other influential senators such as Joe Lieberman (D-CT) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA).⁸⁸

The wealthy Non-resident Indian (NRI) community in the United States has also become a magnet for Indian politicians engaged in fundraising for their own elections.⁸⁹ Indian finance ministers of all political persuasions regularly approach NRIs—always an important source of remittances—to invest in their country of origin.

The net result of these diverse developments has been a remarkable turnaround in congressional attitudes toward India and U.S.-India ties.⁹⁰ “The transformation of congressional attitudes from indifference or deep-seated hostility to their current positive state on Capitol Hill confirms the necessity for a foreign country to have a strong domestic base of support in the American political system if it intends to be influential in Washington.”⁹¹ It reinforces the administration’s disposition for improved ties with India in light of the threat of global Islamic terrorism after September 11, 2001, and the prospect of the challenge presented by China. Yet, even though the image of Indians in the United States has been dramatically and positively transformed, the delicate nature of bilateral relations remains inhibited from achieving partnership by their residual pattern of ambiguity and mistrust. This wariness is evidenced by India’s unhappiness with America’s renewed commitment to Pakistan as a frontline state, and American anxiety over outsourcing service jobs to highly-educated, but lower-paid Indians. The irony of the evolution of the Indo-American relationship was not lost on Congressman Gary Ackerman. He bemoaned what he called “India bashing,” arguing that “for years we told the Indians they were too aligned with the Soviet Union, they were too socialist; they had to free their economy and be entrepreneurial. Now that India is free and entrepreneurial, we are telling them you are coming on too strong.”⁹²

NOTES

1. Devesh Kapur, “Ideas and Economic Reforms in India: The Role of International Migration and the Indian Diaspora” (unpublished paper, Harvard University, 2004), 8. I am grateful to Professor Kapur for making available his insights and extensive data.

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23. See D. S. Saund, *Congressman from India* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960) for a discussion of efforts to redress these matters. Saund—the first legislator of Indian descent to serve in Congress—entered the United States in 1920 and earned a PhD from the University of California at Berkeley. Elected to the House of Representatives as the first Democrat from the Imperial Valley of California in 1956, he served on the Foreign Affairs Committee. In 2004 Bobby Jindal (R-LA) became the second Indian American elected to Congress. By contrast, Indo-Canadians—which account for 1 million people in a country one-tenth the size of the United States—currently have nine members of their community in the House of Commons.

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Washington Quarterly 24, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 26.

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72. Sonalde Desai and Rahul Kanakia, "Profiles of a Diasporic Community," *Seminar*, no. 538 (June 2004): 49.

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83. While reasonably cohesive on issues, there are evident fissures within the community. The Indian American Association's immediate past president attempted to organize a boycott of competing groups' reception for former Indian president K. R. Narayanan in Washington in May 2003. *India Abroad*, June 6, 2003. Similar rivalries were evident during a recent visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. *India Abroad*, September 24, 2004.

84. Given the overwhelmingly Democratic character of the Indian American community, a concerted effort was made to recruit Republican members in order that the organization not appear partisan. *Washington Post* (Internet edition), October 25, 2003. In the 1988 presidential election 56.3 percent of Indian Americans voted for Michael Dukakis, the Democratic candidate for president and 23 percent voted for George H. W. Bush, the Republican nominee. Tanmay Kanjil, "The Indian-Americans in the United States: Participation in the U.S. Political Process," *International Studies* 32, no. 4 (October–December, 1996): 90. In 2000, Democrat Al Gore garnered 53 percent of the Indo-American community's vote compared to just 14 percent for George W. Bush, the Republican nominee. *India Abroad*, September 24, 2004. In 2004—despite the unpopularity of John Kerry's position on outsourcing—he led President George W. Bush by 42 percent to 8 percent, with 23 percent undecided. Interestingly, the results are fifty-fifty in India.

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- 92. *India Abroad*, February 13, 2004.

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Contributors



ROBERT G. WIRSING is a professor of security studies at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), a unit of the United States Pacific Command, in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is the author of a number of books on the politics and international relations of South Asia.

SANJAY CHATURVEDI is Reader in political science, and he is affiliated with the Department of Political Science at Panjab University in India. Dr. Chaturvedi is also an honorary director at the Centre for the Study of Mid-West and Central Asia, at the university.

ARTHUR G. RUBINOFF is a professor of political science at the University of Toronto. He is currently writing a book on the influence of Congress in the formulation of U.S.–South Asian policy.

ASAF HUSSAIN is a research fellow and consultant to the Institute for the Study of Indo-Pakistan Relations at the University of Leicester. He also teaches courses at the university on Islamic civilization and intercultural relationships. He is the author of a number of books and is presently writing a research study on Islamic fundamentalism in Britain.