

SIKHS

IN THE UNITED STATES

A PROFILE OF WHO WE ARE



AUTHORED BY

Nikhita Luthra & Shawn Singh Ghuman

EDITED BY

Sumeet Kaur

INTRODUCTION

Sikhism is the world's fifth largest organized religion and the third largest monotheistic religion, with around half a million Sikhs living in the United States. Sikhs began immigrating to the United States 150 years ago to build better lives for themselves and their families. However, today, there is a lack of data on this demographic. This gap is indicative of the larger dearth of awareness of the religion, including studies that have shown two-thirds of Americans do not know who Sikhs are, how they look, or what the Sikh religion is. The lack of information around the Sikh American community in the United States has two troubling consequences: discrimination and misunderstanding, which hinders our ability to address them.

As one of the world's youngest religions, whose community has been dispersed through diaspora, the Sikh community, particularly in America, does not have a large organizational hierarchy or catalog of population size and scope. Accordingly, for community members to organize, it can be difficult to know where and how to engage with a Sikh American community that is widely spread in pockets around the country. Without prior census data that speaks specifically to Sikh religious identification, low awareness and understanding of Sikh American demographics can lead to the underreporting of hate crimes by governmental agencies.

The research outlined below seeks to bridge this gap in information, by locating where Sikhs live and understanding their community demographics.

DATA & METHODOLOGY

The findings listed below were pulled from tools and voter registration profiles provided by BlueLabs, an analytics, data, and technology company, and data vendor TargetSmart. The sample detailed below is pulled from this file using people with the last name “SINGH” or “KAUR”—surnames often taken by members of the Sikh faith. Anyone for whom a specific non-Sikh religion was already coded, or for whom the race “WHITE” was coded, was excluded from the final sample. In the end, the sample included 104,421 individuals with the last names Singh or Kaur.

Data on religion, race, educational status, political party affiliation, income and occupational status was built using the person’s ID. The individual-level religion variables were available from TargetSmart’s consumer data file and may be self-reported or modeled. Individual-level race data was either: (1) self-reported in states that collect race information for voter registration, or (2) modeled by BlueLabs.

Finally, in regards to geographic location, the addresses of the individuals were converted into coordinates plotted as dots. Research showing where Gurdwaras, or Sikh temples, were pulled manually from public data on religious institutions, and not the consumer data provided.

THE FINDINGS:

The discoveries outlined below illustrate an immigrant community that has not only traversed the United States but has achieved the American Dream: educated, employed, prosperous and politically active.

Geography

From the data set, Sikh Americans were found to mainly live in California (35 percent) and New York (21 percent)—showing more than half of the sample residing in those two states alone, as well as clustered populations around mid-Atlantic and southern metropolitan areas.

New Jersey, Florida and Washington round out the top five states with the most Sikhs, respectively, while Wyoming, South Dakota, Montana, Alaska and Vermont are states with the least number of Sikhs, respectively.

In addition, to further validate these findings, locations of Sikh houses of worship, Gurdwaras, almost identically mimicked clusters of Sikh American populations. Here is a map of these findings:



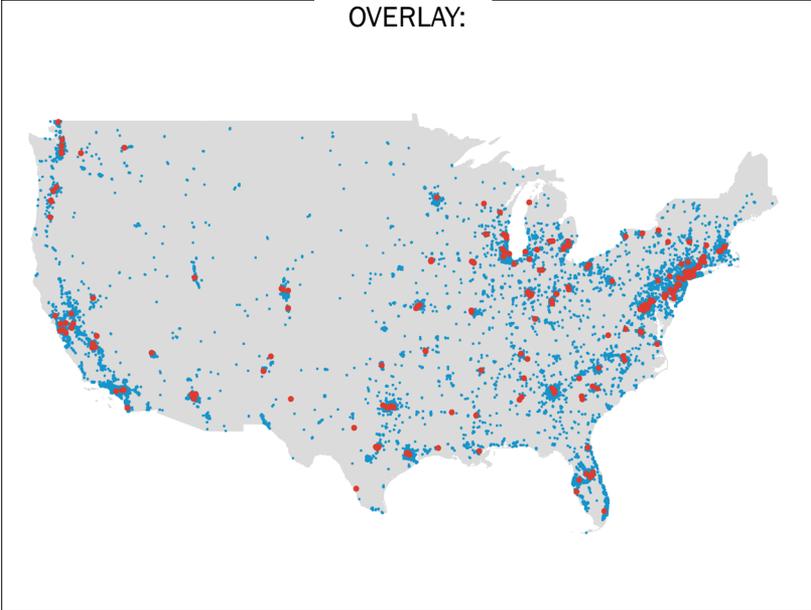
SINGHS & KAURS
ACROSS AMERICA:



GURDWARAS
ACROSS AMERICA:

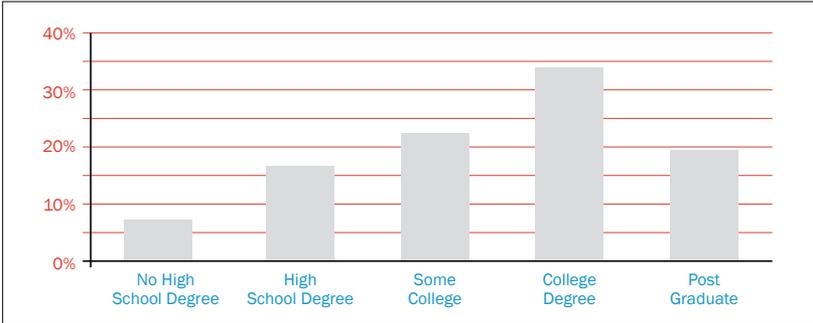


HERE IS AN
OVERLAY:



Education

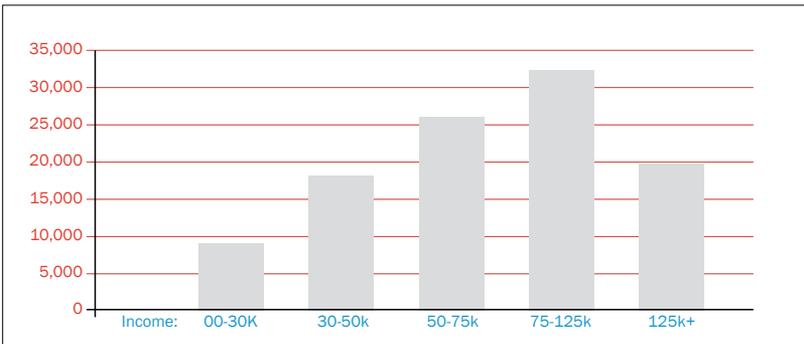
From the sample, it was found that Sikh Americans have higher levels of educational attainment than the average American—with a majority having received a college degree. Here is a breakdown:



As you can see from the chart above, the majority of individuals in the sample have a college education. 76 percent of the individuals have higher than “some college” education or higher, and around 53 percent of individuals have a college degree or higher, compared with 40 percent of Americans.

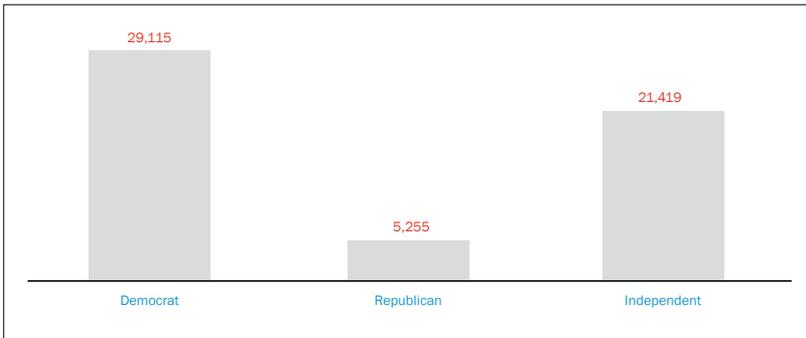
Income

Sikh Americans make slightly more than the average American. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, the median household income was \$51,939. As seen in the graph below, around three-fourths (74 percent) of individuals in the sample earned more than \$50,000 per year. Note that our data shows individual-level income, not household income. Accordingly, a Sikh American family with at least two income earning members will likely have a higher income than the typical American family.



Political Affiliation

The overwhelming majority of Sikh Americans are registered to vote and affiliate themselves with the Democratic Party. Based on the sample, here is a breakdown of affiliation:



LIMITATIONS

The sample described above is significantly limited due to the fact we exclude many members of the Sikh community by only looking at individuals with the last names Singh and Kaur. In addition, there is a real possibility that the Americans last names may not be practicing Sikhs, or may not be embedded in the Sikh community. Moreover, some Indian cultures, such as the Rajasthani people, use the last name Singh. Accordingly, it may be best in proceeding research to expand sample sizes using other more common Sikh surnames.

Most importantly, our data source may not have been exhaustive since we were basing them off personal and voter IDs, meaning only those with relevant last names who had a voting history were considered. They are by no means statistically significant or conclusive in an academic sense.

The limits in this data collection only serve to point out how much Sikhs need to be paid more attention and awareness. Without a benchmark to compare the data collection, it is impossible to create something statistically significant. With this data collection, we are only allowing the Sikh community the ability to paint a very loose picture of where Sikhs in America might live or how they behave.

CONCLUSION

It is critical to understand that this first-of-its-kind research is a humble attempt at learning about the Sikh American community. By simply showing where people with popular Sikh surnames are located as well as their socioeconomic and political background, we are capable of painting a previously non-existent picture of who Sikh Americans are from a demographic data perspective.

The goal of this research is to begin a much needed conversation around Sikhism in the United States, not only for the larger American public but also within the Sikh American community itself. The immense value of a data-driven approach to fighting discrimination, bias and animosity toward a group on account of their physical characteristics, cultural background, skin color or religion, will only become more apparent as research continues.

In fact, according to an early 2000s study published in the *American Sociological Review* (https://www.jstor.org/stable/1519748?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) on how public policy is influenced, researchers found that politicians must not only shine a light on a particular problem, but they must also offer a diagnosis to that very same problem to make a convincing case that the policy they are supporting will serve as an active remedy. This is extremely important in the case of civil rights, as hate crimes and other data signifiers are reported to the government and thus, can be captured and used as metrics to form a positive outcome of a social movement.

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