

NATIONAL SIKH
★ CAMPAIGN ★

SIKHISM *in the*
UNITED STATES:

**What Americans Know
and Need to Know**

Report of Findings from a National Survey
by Hart Research Associates

January 2015

ABOUT US

National Sikh Campaign

The National Sikh Campaign is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is working to build the image of Sikhism in America and highlight the impact Sikh Americans have made in the United States. The aim of this campaign is to create an environment of mutual acceptance in which Sikhs don't have to hide their articles of faith and lay the foundation for more Sikh Americans to become leaders in the United States.

Hart Research Associates

Founded in 1971, Hart Research Associates is one of the leading survey research firms in the United States and has been at the cutting edge of change in the field of public opinion for more than three decades. In that time, Hart Research has conducted well over 5,000 public opinion surveys and has administered and analyzed interviews among more than three million individuals and undertaken more than 5,000 focus group sessions.

Special thanks to:

Kaval Kaur, Satnam Singh Gambhir, Chhavi Singh Sethi, Harminder Singh Sethi, Darshan Singh Sehbi, Gurbax Singh Bhasin, Avtar Singh Dhaliwal, Dalsher Singh Nagra, Surinder Singh, Jasjit Singh Bindra, Amarjeet Singh Sandhu, the Achreja family, Jasvir Kaur, Tejinder Singh Glamour, Satinderpal Sodhi, Kanverjit Bedi and Gursagur Singh whose significant contributions made this historic work possible As well as the Sikh Coalition, Sikhnet, Kaur Foundation, United Sikhs, Valarie Kaur, Kamal Kalsi, Prabhjot Singh, Sandy Dhaliwal, and Salim Zymet who each contributed to the either the framing, substance, or design of the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

Officially the world's fifth largest organized religion, there are now 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. Despite successful leadership in diverse fields—from farming to medicine to business—and efforts to integrate in communities across the United States, Sikhs continue to experience discrimination and prejudice from their fellow Americans. More than half of Sikh children are subjected to bullying in their schools, and the numbers are even worse for children who wear turbans.¹ Since 9/11, there has been a dramatic increase in hate-based violence against Sikhs, including the biggest act of violence against a faith community in the United States since the 1963 church bombings in Birmingham, Alabama. This act of violence, which occurred in 2012 in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, left six people dead and four others wounded. Moreover, many Sikhs experience daily encounters with discrimination and hate incidents that go unreported and therefore unrecognized.

To help the Sikh American community better communicate with the broader American public, the National Sikh Campaign commissioned Hart Research Associates to conduct a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative research study. This project builds on previous research findings, which provided invaluable insights into the pervasiveness of unconscious and emotion-charged biases against Sikh articles of faith, particularly the turban and beard.² The present study reported here seeks to advance this research agenda by identifying the most effective messaging and information to increase positive perceptions and attitudes toward Sikh Americans among the American public. While the findings from this study reaffirm that most Americans know little to nothing about Sikh Americans and some even feel uncertain or anxious upon seeing Sikhs, we also show that there is enormous potential to enhance positive feelings toward Sikh Americans. In particular, messages and information that emphasize the commonalities Sikhs share with other Americans and Sikhism's strong focus on equality are effective in communicating the Sikh American story to the broader American public. We hope that this in-depth review of the survey's findings provides clarity on Americans' baseline knowledge and perceptions of Sikh Americans and clear direction for how Sikh Americans most effectively can communicate with the larger public to tell their story in the most compelling terms.

¹ The Sikh Coalition, 2014. "'Go Home Terrorist' A Report on Bullying against Sikh American School Children."

² Stanford Peace Innovation Lab, September, 2013. "Turban Myths: The Opportunity and Challenges for Reframing a Cultural Symbol for Post-9/11 America."

2. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE & METHODOLOGY

This project began with three focus groups among white Americans with mixed levels of education (one group in Iselin, NJ, and two in Chicago, IL) to allow Americans to describe in their own words their knowledge, perceptions, and reactions to Sikh Americans. Following the focus groups, a nationwide survey of 1,144 non-Asian Americans was conducted in August and September of 2014. These interviews were conducted online to allow participants to view and react to images of Sikh Americans, to read in-depth descriptions of Sikh Americans, and to engage in message highlighting exercises in addition to responding to traditional open- and closed-ended questions.

The overall sample is representative of non-Asian Americans living in the United States (see demographics in table below).

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Respondents

	%		%
Men	49	Whites	73
Women	51	African Americans	12
		Hispanics	13
Age 16 to 24	15		
Age 25 to 34	17	High school graduate or less	34
Age 35 to 49	26	Some college/Associate degree	28
Age 50 to 64	24	Four-year college graduate	23
Age 65 and over	18	Postgraduate education or degree	15
Northeast	21	Democrats	39
Midwest	23	Independents	17
South	33	Republicans	32
West	23		
		Evangelical Protestants	16
Urban	30	Mainline Protestants	30
Suburban	35	Catholics	30
Small town/rural	35	No religious affiliation	15

³ Regions are defined in accordance with Census definitions. Please see the Appendix for a full list of states included in each region.

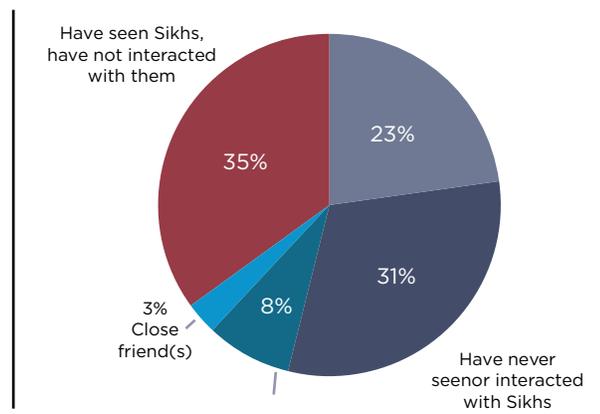
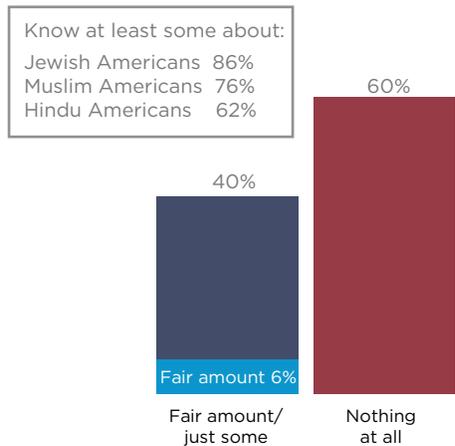
3. AMERICANS' KNOWLEDGE OF & EXPERIENCE WITH SIKH AMERICANS

Sikhs have lived in the United States for more than 150 years, contributing to the growth and success of this nation—from helping to build the Transcontinental Railroad to serving in major wars to cultivating fertile farmland in California—and yet their people and culture remain largely unknown to the vast majority of Americans. The findings of this nationwide survey reveal that most Americans know little to nothing about Sikh Americans or Sikh culture. Many have never personally interacted with someone who is Sikh and a significant proportion has never even heard of the religion. Most Americans are a blank slate when it comes to Sikh Americans. The majority (60%) of Americans admit to knowing nothing at all about Sikh Americans and knowledge of Sikhism is substantially lower than for other minority religious groups in the United States. Whereas only 40% of Americans say they know at least something about Sikh Americans, far more are familiar with Hindu Americans (62% say know they at least something), Muslim Americans (76%), and Jewish Americans (86%).

How much do you feel you know about Sikh Americans?

Which best describes your experiences interacting with Sikhs?

Most Americans are a blank slate concerning Sikhs; a majority admit they know nothing at all and few have personal relationships with Sikh Americans.



One of the primary reasons that Americans know so little about Sikh Americans is that very few have had personal experiences with Sikhs. Only 11% of Americans say they have a close friend or acquaintance who is Sikh, while three times as many (31%) have never seen or interacted with a Sikh person at all. To the extent that the remainder has contact, it is superficial at best—be that either meeting briefly (23%) or seeing but not interacting with someone who is Sikh (35%). As Table 2 shows, knowledge and personal relationships are correlated closely. Groups that are more likely to know Sikh Americans personally also are more likely to say they know at least something about Sikhs. Among those most likely to have knowledge of or personal relationships with Sikh Americans are 16- to 34-year-olds, men and women with college degrees, Americans living in urban environments, and Democrats. This is consistent with other research showing that these groups are more likely to encounter people of different races and cultural backgrounds.

For example, Millennials are the most racially diverse generation in the nation’s history and tend to hold more liberal views on a range of social issues.³ Thus, it is not surprising that they would be more likely to have at least some knowledge or experience of Sikh Americans than older age groups.

Table 2: Knowledge and Experience with Sikh Americans across Subgroups

	Know a Great Deal/Fair Amount/Just Some %	Have a Close Friend or Personal Acquaintance %
All	40	11
Men	45	13
Women	35	8
Age 16 to 24	41	17
Age 25 to 34	52	14
Age 35 to 49	40	11
Age 50 to 64	35	7
Age 65 and over	35	9
Whites	38	10
African Americans	48	13
Hispanics	43	12
Men without a college degree	38	11
Men with a college degree	56	18
Women without a college degree	26	6
Women with a college degree	50	10
Northeast	43	13
Midwest	36	11
South	36	8
West	48	10
Urban	49	14
Suburban	41	11
Small town/rural	32	8
Democrats	50	13
Independents	39	10
Republicans	34	7
Evangelical Protestants	35	8
Mainline Protestants	38	11
Catholics	39	10
No religious affiliation	48	9

Further underscoring Americans’ complete lack of knowledge about Sikhism is the finding that only 5% of Americans have heard of Guru Nanak. Across all subgroups, overwhelming majorities of Americans say they have never heard the name of the founder of Sikhism. Even among Americans who have a personal relationship with someone who is Sikh, only 12% say they have heard of Guru Nanak.

⁴ Pew Research Center, March, 2014. “Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends.”

4. INITIAL PERCEPTIONS OF AND FEELINGS TOWARD SIKH AMERICANS

This lack of knowledge of Sikh Americans is manifested in the assumptions many Americans make when they see Sikh men and women. To better understand how Americans react to images of Sikhs, we exposed survey respondents to a series of pictures of Sikh men and women. As shown below, when asked what they could tell about each person from looking at their picture, the most commonly

volunteered response is that the person is of Indian descent, though many others assume that the man, boy, and women are Middle Eastern. Very few Americans volunteer that they recognize any of those pictured

“I don’t know anything about the Sikh. It’s the first time I’ve ever heard that word. And I’m judgmental about it, & I’ll admit it.”
-Chicago focus group participant

as Sikh, though the turbaned man clearly is the most commonly associated with Sikhs (11%). Far more volunteer that the person in each image is Muslim, and this is true especially of the turbaned man (20% assumed he was Muslim), the boy (17% guessed Muslim), and the turbaned woman (17% said Muslim). As one man put it in the focus groups when reacting to a picture of a Sikh man in a turban, “I’ll say it—you just think they’re Muslim. I do.” Others admitted to feeling a little “wary,” “nervous,” or “cautious” of men in turbans.

When they see a Sikh person, most Americans assume the person is from India or the Middle East; only men with turbans are associated with Sikhism.

If you saw this person on the street, what could you tell by looking at him/her?
 (aggregated volunteered comments)



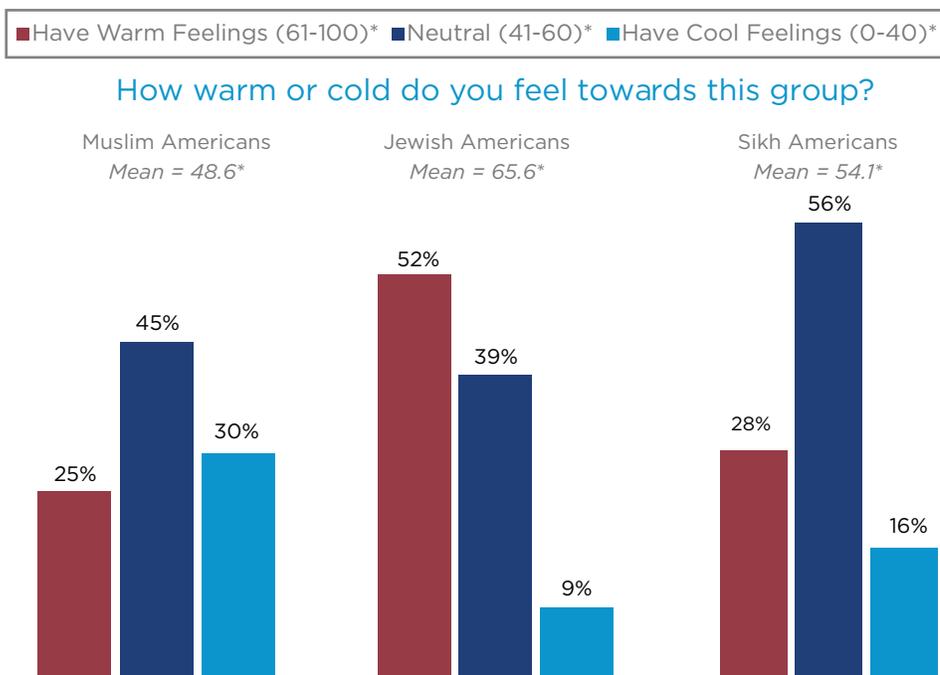
India, of Indian descent	35%	India, of Indian descent	19%	India, of Indian descent	40%	India, of Indian descent	35%
Middle Eastern	28%	Middle Eastern	24%	Middle Eastern	20%	Middle Eastern	20%
Muslim	20%	Muslim	17%	Muslim	2%	Muslim	17%
Hindu	13%	Hindu	7%	Hindu	3%	Hindu	10%
Sikh	11%	Sikh	6%	Sikh	0%	Sikh	2%

When given only images to react to, only a minority of Americans assume that they have much in common with Sikh men or women. Only 18% of Americans feel they have a great deal or a fair amount in common with a Sikh man in a turban (as indicated by a rating of six or higher on a zero-to-10 scale). Similarly, only 17% of Americans feel that they have a great deal or a fair amount in common with the turbaned woman. Though still only a minority, liberals and college-educated Americans are relatively more likely to believe that they have much in common with Sikh Americans who wear turbans. Americans have an easier time relating to the Sikh woman with long hair and no turban (30% feel they have a great deal or fair amount in common with her) and to an Indian man without a beard or turban (28%). In focus groups, participants explained that they felt these individuals were more “Westernized” and “modern.”

Despite some uneasiness or uncertainty, many Americans say they strive to remain open-minded when meeting new people. After viewing all the images, the most commonly volunteered thought in reaction to Sikh Americans is that “they are human beings just like me and they deserve respect”. One in 10 (11%) Americans volunteered a response along these lines, though it should be noted that half (49%) of Americans still said they do not know enough to say anything at all. As one survey respondent explained, “I do not believe I have ever met a Sikh American and I do not know anything about them. I feel that all cultures and races should be welcome in America and I would not judge them by their race.”

FEELINGS TOWARDS SIKH AMERICANS

Without much knowledge to form attitudes, Americans rate their feelings toward Sikh Americans as generally neutral.



* Ratings on zero-to-100 scale, 100 = extremely warm, 50 = in the middle/neither warm nor cold, 0 = extremely cold

Reflecting their desire to remain non-judgmental in the absence of further information, a majority of Americans say they feel neutral toward Sikh Americans. When asked to rate their feelings toward Sikh Americans on a zero-to-100 scale simply based on the images and any previous knowledge they had coming into the survey, 56% choose a neutral rating between 41 and 60 (mean = 54.1). Twenty-eight percent (28%) say they have warm feelings (ratings of 61 or higher), which is significantly higher than those who have cool feelings (16% rate at zero to 40). When comparing ratings of Sikh Americans to feelings toward Jewish and Muslim Americans, it appears that Americans are neutral toward Sikh Americans because they do not have enough information to form an opinion, rather than that they are afraid to admit to negative feelings. In the case of Muslim Americans, a higher proportion of Americans say they have cool feelings (30%, twice as many as those who have cool feelings toward Sikh Americans) than have warm feelings (25%).

CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH SIKH AMERICANS

Given their lack of experience, most Americans simply do not know enough about Sikh Americans to form an impression one way or the other on a number of aspects.

Table 3: Initial Mean Ratings of Feelings toward Sikh Americans across Subgroups

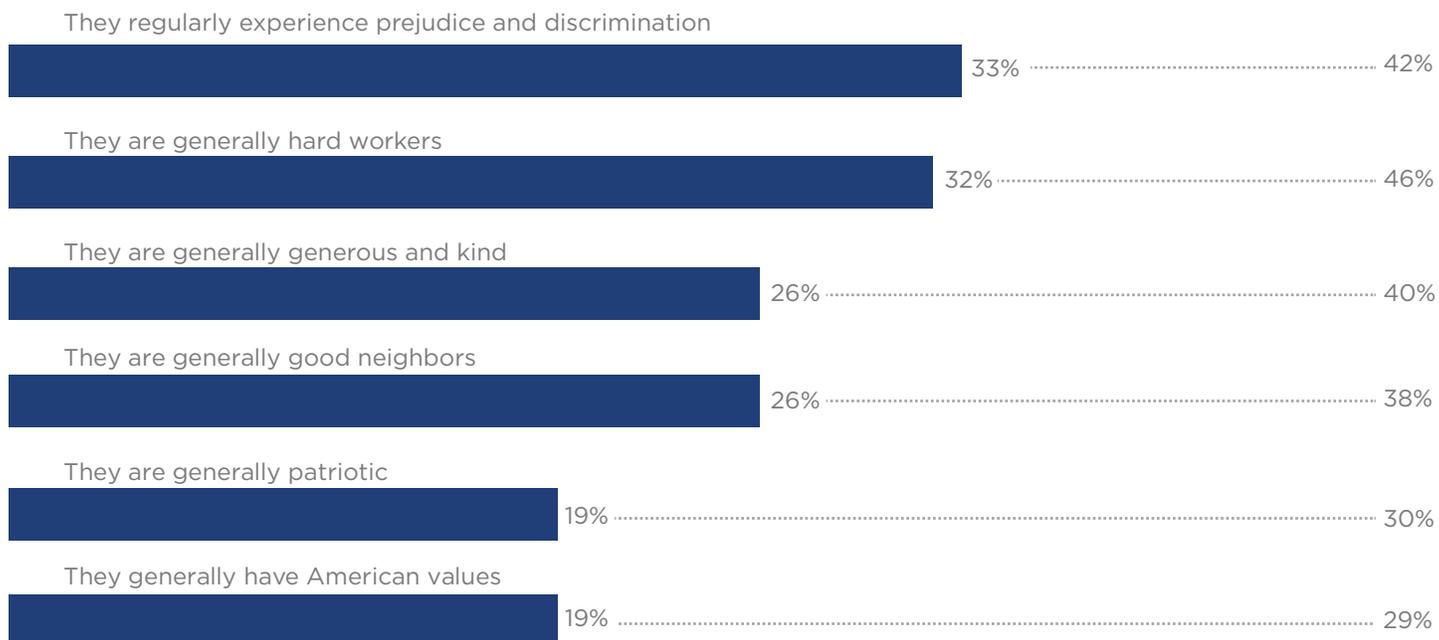
All	54.1
Men	54.9
Women	53.4
Age 16 to 24	59.4
Age 25 to 34	60.8
Age 35 to 49	53.3
Age 50 to 64	52.2
Age 65 and over	47.6
Whites	53.8
African Americans	56.2
Hispanics	52.5
Men without a college degree	52.0
Men with a college degree	59.3
Women without a college degree	51.5
Women with a college degree	56.6
Northeast	56.7
Midwest	54.1
South	49.7
West	57.9
Urban	55.9
Suburban	56.1
Small town/rural	50.6
Democrats	58.0
Independents	54.4
Republicans	49.8
Evangelical Protestants	50.9
Mainline Protestants	54.1
Catholics	52.2
No religious affiliation	56.2
Know at least something about Sikhs	62.4
Know nothing about Sikhs	48.6

When asked early in the survey to rate how well a series of characteristics describes Sikh Americans, only a small proportion rates each quality as an “8” or higher on a zero-to-10 scale, on which a “0” means that the phrase does not describe Sikh Americans at all and a “10” means it describes Sikh Americans extremely well. As the following figure shows, “they regularly experience prejudice and discrimination” (33% rate as an “8” or higher) and “they are generally hard workers” (32% rate as an “8” or higher) are the characteristics most commonly associated with Sikh Americans, though still only one in three Americans says each quality describes Sikh Americans very well. Even fewer say that Sikh Americans generally are patriotic (19% rate this as an “8” or higher) or have American values (19%). This is the case even among Americans who have at least some familiarity with Sikh Americans and culture—fewer than half of those who say they know something also say each quality describes Sikh Americans very well—suggesting that the knowledge these Americans possess is fairly limited. To be clear, most respondents are not saying that these qualities do not describe Sikh Americans. On each quality, more Americans rate Sikh Americans as an eight to 10 than as a zero to two. Instead, Americans more commonly hover around the midpoint of the scale to indicate their neutrality. For example, 40% of Americans choose the neutral midpoint “5” on the zero-to-10 scale for how well the phrase “they generally have American values” describes Sikh Americans.

Few Americans know enough to associate positive qualities with Sikh Americans.

Proportions who feel that each describes Sikh Americans well (8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = describes extremely well)

Adults who know at least some about Sikhs



5. INFORMATION AND MESSAGING ABOUT SIKH AMERICANS

Americans' knowledge of and familiarity with Sikh Americans should not be underestimated. This research shows that Americans' baseline level of knowledge is either completely null or mostly superficial. In the survey, a majority admitted to knowing nothing at all, and in focus groups, many said they had never even heard of the religion. While this is undoubtedly a challenge, it also represents an enormous opportunity to educate and tell the Sikh story on Sikh Americans' own terms. Because most Americans do not already have solidified impressions or opinions, Sikh Americans do not have to fight against as many entrenched stereotypes or prejudicial feelings that other minority groups unfortunately might face. Instead, the challenge is to provide information that has an impact on and elevates the conversation about Sikhs in America. This research provides clear guidance about the most important themes to emphasize and the most effective frames to use when telling the Sikh story.

One of the most encouraging findings from the research is how receptive Americans are to learning about Sikh culture, beliefs, and people. A description of the Sikh religion and Sikhs' history in America (shown below) evokes a strongly positive reaction from survey respondents. Two in three (65%) adults rate their feelings toward this description as highly favorable (ratings of 8 to 10 on a zero-to-10 scale).

Description of Sikhism and Sikh Americans

Sikhism comes from Northern India and is the world's fifth-largest organized religion. There are more than 25 million Sikhs throughout the world and approximately half a million in the United States. Sikhism was founded 500 years ago when a man named Nanak walked the South Asian subcontinent teaching that all paths lead to One God, all people are equal, and each of us can experience freedom through loving and serving others. The word "Sikh" means "Seeker of Truth." As a faith rooted in love, Sikhism stands for the equality of women and men and denounces any discrimination pertaining to gender, race, caste, creed, or color. There are three core tenets of the Sikh religion: meditation upon and devotion to the Creator, truthful living, and service to humanity. Sikhs are meant to uphold the values of honesty, compassion, generosity, humility, integrity, service, and spirituality on a daily basis. Sikh prayer ends with a wish for the welfare for all mankind. A Sikh place of worship welcomes people of all faiths and backgrounds. Many Sikhs wear five articles of faith to express their commitment to these values, including long hair that men and some women wrap in a turban. Sikhs have lived in America for more than 150 years, helped build the Transcontinental Railroad, served valiantly in every major world war, stood at the forefront of civil rights struggles, and were first responders on 9/11.

Table 4: Ratings of Description of Sikh Religion & Sikh Americans

	8-10 rating, %
All	65
Men	64
Women	66
Age 16 to 24	60
Age 25 to 34	68
Age 35 to 49	65
Age 50 to 64	69
Age 65 and over	61
Whites	64
African Americans	72
Hispanics	66
Men without a college degree	60
Men with a college degree	70
Women without a college degree	60
Women with a college degree	76
Northeast	64
Midwest	63
South	62
West	72
Urban	65
Suburban	66
Small town/rural	64
Democrats	70
Independents	59
Republicans	67
Evangelical Protestants	65
Mainline Protestants	67
Catholics	63
No religious affiliation	67
Know at least something about Sikhs	73
Know nothing about Sikhs	60
Warm initial feelings	84
Neutral initial feelings	64
Cool initial feelings	36

Reactions to the description are strongly favorable across a number of subgroups (see Table 4), although it is clear that those with warm pre-existing feelings toward Sikh Americans have the most positive response. Eighty-four percent (84%) of Americans who rate their initial feelings toward Sikh Americans as warm have a highly favorable reaction to the description, whereas 64% of those with neutral feelings and only 36% who have cool feelings rate their reactions as an “8” or higher. This finding suggests that there is a significant minority of Americans who will hold onto their initial negative reactions to Sikh Americans and may resist further information that might contradict their assumptions.

Nevertheless, many other Americans are eager to learn more. Table 4 shows that among every demographic subgroup, a solid majority have a favorable response to the description of the Sikh religion and Sikh Americans. Again, men and women with a college degree—who also are more familiar with Sikh Americans—have the most positive responses. In focus groups, those without a college degree expressed some skepticism about the trustworthiness of the information presented, which helps to explain their relatively less favorable reactions. The fact that they had never heard of the religion or seen Sikh Americans proved to be a stumbling block for some focus group participants to accept at face value that Sikhs had been in the United States for more than 150 years or that they actively participate in their communities. Encouragingly, however, several subgroups that initially felt cooler and had less personal experience with Sikh Americans did have strong favorable reactions to the statement. For example, whereas Democrats started the survey feeling more favorable toward Sikh Americans, similarly large majorities of Democrats (70%) and Republicans (67%) say they have a highly favorable reaction to the description.

One of the most powerful aspects of the description is that the Sikh faith is rooted in the value of equality. In response to an open-ended question about what in particular gave them a favorable impression of the Sikh religion and Sikh Americans, the most commonly volunteered response revolved around the theme that Sikh Americans stand for equality for all (26% volunteered this). This resonated especially with women, of whom fully one in three (32%) volunteered that Sikhs' focus on equality stood out for them (compared with 19% of men).

MESSAGING ABOUT SIKH AMERICANS

The survey also tested a series of shorter statements about Sikh Americans to identify the most compelling ways for sharing the Sikh story. The survey presented each message individually for participants to rate on a zero-to-10 scale for how much the message helped them connect with and understand Sikh Americans. After rating each message individually, participants chose the message that they found the most important and gave them the greatest understanding of Sikh Americans. Each of these two distinct tasks is useful and yielded unique results. As discussions in the focus groups illustrated, Americans tend to connect more with messages that they can relate to (e.g., such as being regular members of their communities and feeling proud to be an American). However, the statements they choose as the most important in understanding Sikhs address their broader and more salient questions and concerns about Sikhs (such as whether Sikh Americans hold American values, and why they wear turbans).

Table 5. Ratings of Messages about Sikh Americans (continued on next page)

	Connection/ Understanding Ratings 8-10 ¹	Single most Important Message ²
<p>AMERICAN STORY. Sikhs embody the quintessential American story. Like the Irish, Italians, and Chinese before them, Sikhs immigrated to this country seeking a chance to build a better life for their families through hard work. Today, Sikhs serve on their local PTAs and in Boy Scout troops, run small businesses and local charities, and sing our national anthem with pride. They are part of the fabric of their communities in every corner of this nation. They know that the United States is the greatest country on earth, and they are proud to call themselves Americans.</p>	53%	22%
<p>PATRIOTISM. Sikhs have a long history of serving in the U.S. armed forces with honor, including World War I and II. More than 80,000 Sikh soldiers died fighting for Allied forces during the wars, and their service to the United States continues to this day, with Sikhs serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.</p>	52%	9%
<p>BULLYING. A 2014 research study found that more than half of Sikh children endure bullying in schools, and the numbers are worse for children who wear turbans. Two in three turbaned children report being bullied in schools, more than double the national average for all children. In May 2007, a student wrestled down a Sikh boy at a New York City public school, forcibly cut his hair, and flushed it down the toilet, and the next year in New Jersey a Sikh boy’s turban was set on fire by another student. Bullying is a serious problem that affects kids nationwide, and all Americans play an important role in helping to stop bullying for all children.</p>	49%	9%
<p>PARALLEL WITH AMERICAN HISTORY. If the American Revolution had started out as a spiritual movement instead of a political movement, it would look a lot like the Sikh religion. Just as the Founding Fathers of the United States put together a Bill of Rights that protected the fundamental rights for all US citizens, Sikhs also share a core set of beliefs that focuses on the rights of all people to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Sikhs believe that all men and women are created equal and that the right to practice religion freely is encoded in Sikhs’ founding documents. For hundreds of years, Sikhs have fought, and many have given their lives, to protect the rights of others—including Hindus, Christians, and Muslims—to practice their own religions.</p>	48%	30%

¹Ratings of each message on a 0-to-10 scale, on which a “0” means that it does not make you feel a strong connection with and help you understand Sikh Americans and a “10” means it makes you feel a strong connection and helps you understand.

²Chosen from list as the one most important message that gives the greatest understanding.

(Cont. Table 5.) Ratings of Messages about Sikh Americans

DISCRIMINATION. Since September 11, 2001, there has been a dramatic increase in hate-based violence against Sikhs. Four days after the attacks, a Sikh man was shot and killed while planting flowers in front of his store in Mesa, AZ. In 2012, a man fatally shot six people and wounded four others at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. It was the biggest act of violence against a faith community in the United States since the 1963 church bombing in Birmingham that took four little girls. Many Sikh Americans report that these violent acts are only the tip of the iceberg. Many experience daily encounters with discrimination and hate incidents that go unreported and unrecognized by the general public.

Connection/
Understanding
Ratings 8-10¹

Single most
Important
Message²

44%

8%

CONTRIBUTION TO FABRIC OF SOCIETY. Like many immigrant communities in America, Sikhs came to this country to work hard and seek a better life for their families. The first Sikhs immigrated to the United States over 150 years ago, most of them settling in California as farmers. And they've strengthened America--from inventing fiber optic technologies to creating businesses that employ thousands of American workers. Today, Sikhs are leaders in business and their communities--from the most prominent peach farmers to the CEO of MasterCard--distinguishing themselves in fields from medicine to technology to public service.

44%

20%

SYMBOL OF THE TURBAN. Today, and for the last 500 years, many Sikhs around the world have worn the turban as an expression of their faith and their commitment to serve humanity. Throughout history, Sikhs have worn the turban to signal their readiness to protect all people against injustice, regardless of faith, gender, caste, or color. Today, a Sikh American who wears a turban signals that he or she is always ready to put him- or herself forward to serve the community's needs. It represents their commitment to the equality, unity, and service that are at the heart of the American ethic.

42%

25%

¹Ratings of each message on a 0-to-10 scale, on which a "0" means that it does not make you feel a strong connection with and help you understand Sikh Americans and a "10" means it makes you feel a strong connection and helps you understand.

²Chosen from list as the one most important message that gives the greatest understanding.

As Table 5 shows, many Americans connect to all of these messages when they rate each on a zero-to-10 scale. More than half say that the American Story message (53% rate as an "8" or higher) and the Patriotism message (52% rate as an "8" or higher) help them to connect with Sikh Americans.

Americans likely feel such a strong connection to the American Story message because it puts the Sikh story in familiar terms—that of immigrating to America and becoming regular, hardworking members of communities. Consistent with this, the most effective features of the American Story message, as identified through a highlighting exercise, are the phrases emphasizing Sikhs’ work ethic and pride in America. More than 40% of participants highlighted that Sikhs immigrated to this country “seeking a chance to build a better life for their families through hard work” and “they are proud to call themselves American” to indicate that they had an especially positive reaction to this part of the message.

“They’re proud to call themselves Americans; they came here to be Americans. They didn’t come here just for what this country offers, but they wanted to be part of the work in progress.”

-Chicago focus group participant

In the Patriotism message, more than half of participants highlighted that Sikhs have a “long history of serving in the U.S. armed forces with honor.” It is clear from the focus groups and responses to open-ended questions that Sikh Americans’ patriotism and military service is a compelling and powerful point. Still, these same focus group discussions suggest that military service should not be the central focus of a messaging campaign, for this point immediately invites skepticism and questions about the total number of Sikhs serving in the U.S. military. Several openly wondered how this could be true given that they had never seen someone in a turban serving in the military. These skeptics did not object to Sikh Americans serving but learning that the current numbers are so few undermines the larger point that Sikh Americans are patriotic and willing and able to serve their country.

While a comparable number of Americans rate the other messages highly in terms of the degree to which each helps them to connect with and understand Sikh Americans, the forced-choice exercise reveals that one of the most important points of entry is that Sikh

values. When the messages, commonly American important. is the strong who initially Americans messages

“The fact that Sikh Americans stand for equality and for individual rights stands out to me in a positive way. I feel more positive toward Sikh Americans knowing they have the same ideals as our Founding Fathers.”
-Survey respondent

Americans hold American asked to select among all Americans most choose the “Parallel with History” as the most Interestingly, this message favorite among Americans feel neutral toward Sikh (see Table 6 for favorite across all subgroups). earlier, those who are

As discussed neutral toward Sikh Americans initially know very little about Sikhs but try to keep an open mind. The message highlighting exercise reveals within the entire “Parallel with American History” message, it is especially the shared values, rather than the analogy with the American Revolution, that truly resonate with Americans. More than 40% of participants highlighted the parts of the message underlined below, and more than half highlighted the phrase “created equal,” underscoring the importance of emphasizing Sikhism’s focus on equality when communicating with new audiences.

If the American Revolution had started out as a spiritual movement instead of a political movement, it would look a lot like the Sikh religion. Just as the Founding Fathers of the United States put together a Bill of Rights that protected the fundamental rights for all U.S. citizens, Sikhs also share a core set of beliefs that **focuses on the rights of all people to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”** **Sikhs believe that all men and women are created equal and that the right to practice religion freely** is encoded in Sikhs’ founding documents. For hundreds of years, Sikhs have fought, and many have given their lives, to **protect the rights of others**—including Hindus, Christians, and Muslims—to practice their own religions.

The second-most commonly chosen message is “The Symbol of the Turban.” This is particularly popular among Americans who already have warmer feelings toward Sikh Americans, including Millennials, Democrats, and Americans living in the Western⁵ United States (see Table 6 for favorite messages across all subgroups). While these groups also appreciate the “Parallel with American History” message, the message about the turban likely addresses many of their unanswered questions. The highlighting exercise reveals that the fact that the turban symbolizes Sikhs’ values, their “readiness to protect all people against injustice,” and their “commitment to the equality, unity, and service at the heart of the American ethic” is acutely powerful. This finding also provides an important reminder to be cognizant of the lack of knowledge about Sikh Americans even among those who know Sikhs personally. The turban is, after all, the article of faith most associated with uncertainty and uneasiness among Americans and many may be uncomfortable asking about its meaning despite their curiosity.

It is worth noting that the two messages chosen as the most important both emphasize Sikhs’ value of equality. More than half of participants highlighted the word “equal” in both messages to indicate that they had an especially positive response. Furthermore, in response to multiple open-ended questions, Americans say that Sikhs’ focus on equality is one of the most important pieces of information they learned throughout the survey exercises. This was the case in response to the open-ended question after the description of Sikh history in America and again after reading all the messages. When asked at the end of the survey to think about what had the most positive impact out of everything they had learned, Americans most commonly volunteered that Sikhs’ valuing equality in general and gender equality specifically stood out to them. The consistency of this finding indicates that it is one of the most memorable and compelling points to make and the theme of equality should be a prominent feature of a successful messaging campaign.

Taken together, the results from the messaging test show that many aspects of the Sikh story resonate with Americans. The most effective messages connect Sikhism with American values, particularly equality, and describe how Sikhs embody the quintessential American story. Americans must understand that Sikh Americans are regular Americans—they live in the same neighborhoods, are integrated into their communities, hold American values, and are proud to be Americans. As the next section describes, when presented in these terms, the Sikh story can have an enormously positive impact on how Americans feel about Sikh Americans.

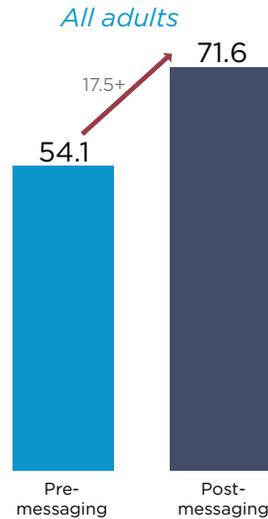
⁵ Regions are defined in accordance with Census definitions. Please see Appendix for full list of states included in each region.

6. IMPACT OF MESSAGING ON ATTITUDES TOWARD SIKH AMERICANS

Not only are Americans curious to learn about Sikh Americans and receptive to this information, messaging about Sikh Americans has a significant effect on Americans' attitudes toward and perceptions of Sikh Americans. After reading about Sikh history and beliefs as well as the series of messages, warm feelings toward Sikh Americans increase substantially. By the end of the survey, a large portion of Americans moved from feeling neutral (mean = 54.1 on a zero-to-100 scale) to warm (mean = 71.6, an increase of 17.5 points).

Warm feelings toward Sikh Americans increase substantially after extensive information and messaging.

Mean ratings* of feelings toward Sikh Americans*



* Ratings on zero-to-100 scale, 100 = extremely warm, 50 = in the middle/neither warm nor cold, 0 = extremely cold

As Table 6 shows, this movement toward warmth and positivity spans a wide swath of Americans, with all subgroups moving to at least a mean rating of 68 on the zero-to-100 scale. One of the most encouraging findings is that some of the most initially challenging audiences also are among those who exhibit the largest increases. Seniors (+21.9), Republicans (+21.7), Hispanics (+21.4), and Americans who initially know nothing about Sikhs (+19.7) exhibit particularly strong increases. This is partly because they had more ground to make up, but it nevertheless illustrates the power of the Sikh story. Although many of the groups who initially felt warmer at the beginning of the survey exhibited smaller increases in their ratings of Sikh Americans, these groups generally ended up with higher overall mean ratings post-messaging. These groups include Millennials, college-educated men and women, Mainline Protestants, Democrats, and Americans living in the Western United States. Because these segments initially are the most open to Sikhs and have the most positive reaction to messaging and information, they represent the most promising targets for an initial campaign.

Women age 50 and older are another particularly promising target group but are unique in that although they are among the most receptive to learning more about Sikhs, they start out as less warm toward and familiar with Sikhs than the other target groups. In fact, women age 50 and older demonstrated the largest increase across all subgroups in feelings toward Sikh Americans (+23.4).

Table 6. Impact of Messaging Across Subgroups and Most Important Message (Continued on next page)

	Pre-messaging feelings (Mean)	Post-messaging feelings (Mean)	Pre- to Post-Messaging Increase (Impact)	Best Message(s)
All	54.1	71.6	+17.5	Parallel with American History
Men	54.9	70.4	+15.5	Parallel with American History, Symbol of the Turban, American Story
Women	53.4	72.8	+19.4	Parallel with American History
Age 16 to 24	59.4	74.8	+15.4	Symbol of the Turban
Age 25 to 34	60.8	76.4	+15.6	Symbol of the Turban
Age 35 to 49	53.3	68.2	+14.9	Parallel with American History
Age 50 to 64	52.2	71.8	+19.6	Parallel with American History
Age 65 and over	47.6	69.5	+21.9	Parallel with American History, Contribution to Fabric of Society
Women 16-49	55.8	72.4	+16.6	Parallel with American History, Symbol of the Turban
Women 50 and older	50.0	73.4	+23.4	Parallel with American History
Men 16-49	58.4	72.1	+13.7	Parallel with American History, Symbol of the Turban
Men 50 and older	50.3	68.1	+17.8	Parallel with American History, Contribution to Fabric of Society, American Story
Whites	53.8	71.4	+17.6	Parallel with American History
African Americans	56.2	70.7	+14.5	Parallel with American, History, Symbol of the Turban, Contribution to Fabric of Society
Hispanics	52.5	73.9	+21.4	Symbol of the Turban, Contribution to Fabric of Society
Men without a college degree	52.0	69.1	+17.1	Symbol of the Turban
Men with a college degree	59.3	72.4	+13.1	Parallel with American History, American Story
Women without a college degree	51.5	70.5	+19.0	Parallel with American History
Women with a college degree	56.6	76.9	+20.3	Parallel with American History

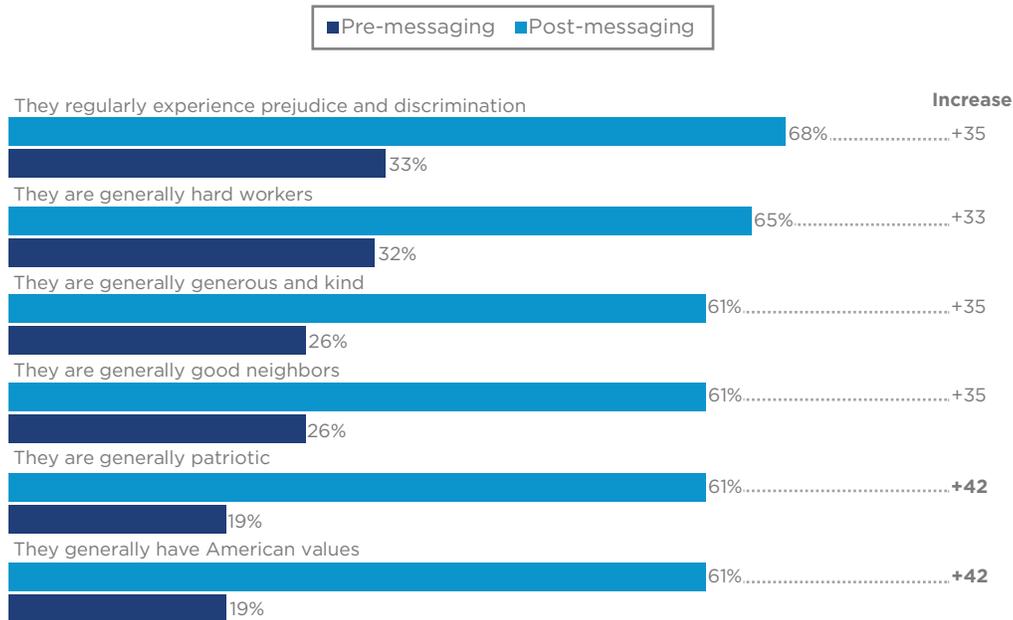
Table 6. Impact of Messaging Across Subgroups and Most Important Message (Continued)

	Pre-messaging feelings (Mean)	Post-messaging feelings (Mean)	Pre- to Post-Messaging Increase (Impact)	Best Message(s)
Northeast	56.7	72.3	+15.6	Parallel with American History, Symbol of the Turban, American Story
Midwest	54.1	69.3	+15.2	Parallel with American History
South	49.7	70.5	+20.8	Parallel with American History, American Story
West	57.9	74.9	+17.0	Parallel with American History, Symbol of the Turban
Urban	55.9	72.1	+16.2	Symbol of the Turban
Suburban	56.1	73.4	+17.3	Parallel with American History
Small town/rural	50.6	69.4	+18.8	Parallel with American History
Democrats	58.0	75.6	+17.6	Parallel with American History Symbol of the Turban
Independents	54.4	68.0	+13.6	Parallel with American History
Republicans	49.8	71.5	+21.7	Parallel with American History American Story
Evangelical Protestants	50.9	69.5	+18.6	Parallel with American History
Mainline Protestants	54.1	74.1	+20.0	Parallel with American History
Catholics	52.2	69.7	+17.5	Parallel with American History, American Story
No religious affiliation	56.2	71.8	+15.6	Parallel with American History, Symbol of the Turban
Know at least something about Sikhs	62.4	76.6	+14.2	Parallel with American History, Symbol of the Turban
Know nothing about Sikhs	48.6	68.3	+19.7	Parallel with American History

Messaging and information also significantly affects how Americans perceive Sikh Americans. Recall that most Americans do not initially know enough to say whether different traits and qualities (e.g., “They are generally hard workers,” “They are generous and kind”) describe Sikh Americans at the beginning of the survey. When presented again with these qualities to rate after messaging, solid majorities say that each of the positive attributes describes Sikh Americans well (as indicated by a rating of “8” or higher on a zero-to-10 scale). Consistent with the finding that the most resonant messages emphasize Sikh Americans’ American qualities, the following figure shows that messaging has the largest impact on perceptions that Sikhs are patriotic (an increase of 42 points) and hold American values (an increase of 42 points).

Messaging significantly increases positive attributes associated with Sikh Americans.

Proportions who feel that each describes Sikh Americans well
(8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale, 10 = describes extremely well)



Women and older Americans exhibited the largest increases in perceptions of Sikh Americans as holding American values. Whereas only 18% of women initially believed that Sikh Americans hold American values, by the end of the survey 65% of women believe this (an increase of 47 points). Along these same lines, while Americans age 65 and older are less likely to believe that Sikh Americans hold American values than younger generations (16% compared with 23% of Millennials), by the end of the survey, they have reached nearly comparable levels (61% of those ages 65 and older and 65% of Millennials).

While these findings give Sikh Americans great reason to be optimistic, it is important to recognize that the impact of messaging in the real world will not be so large. The survey exposed participants to extensive information and messaging about Sikh Americans for a period of 20 minutes, a time commitment that cannot be replicated in an outreach campaign. As a result, the campaign must focus on the most effective messages and target the most receptive audiences (named above) to cut through the noise and begin to change Americans' attitudes and perceptions. Table 6 provides direction in this respect by also listing the statements chosen by each subgroup as the most important to share about Sikh Americans. Clearly, "Parallel with American History" is the most robust of the messages, as it shows up as the most important across the greatest numbers of subgroups. As previously discussed, the power of this message resides primarily in its description of the values Sikhs share with Americans (with particular emphasis on the value of equality). Again, consistent with the previously reported finding that Americans who are initially warmer toward Sikh Americans also place importance on the "Symbol of the Turban," Table 6 shows that the most receptive targets—Millennials, Democrats, and Americans living in the West—also prefer this message.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research should be viewed by the Sikh American community as profoundly optimistic. After educating a non-Asian American adult audience about the Sikh religion, Sikh Americans, and Sikh culture and conducting extensive message testing to determine what resonates best with this audience and its various subgroups, warm feelings toward Sikhs increased substantially. Not only did the audience prove receptive and responsive to the Sikh American story, the research clearly indicated which messages are most persuasive. This is encouraging news. One respondent's heartfelt reaction shows the attainable attitudinal shift that could result from a successful communication effort on behalf of Sikh Americans:

“I think that their core values and beliefs are wonderful. I would be proud to call them family, friend, neighbor, etc. . . . I think that they are misunderstood, and it saddens me that people including myself were unaware of their amazing values and core beliefs. I had no idea what a Sikh was until now.” - Survey respondent

Below are some recommendations for Sikh organizations, Gurdwaras, and Sikh activists—informed by both the extensive quantitative and qualitative research in this study—which the research indicates would aid the Sikh American community in communicating its uniquely compelling story to the American public.

- ★ **RECOGNIZE THAT MOST AMERICANS KNOW LITTLE TO NOTHING ABOUT SIKHS.** The baseline level of familiarity with and knowledge of Sikh Americans is incredibly low and therefore will need to be established. Many Americans have never heard of the religion or met someone who is Sikh. Even Americans who have personal relationships with Sikh Americans will be unlikely to know the symbolism of Sikhs' articles of faith—including the turban—or to have heard of Guru Nanak.
- ★ **TELL THE SIKH STORY IN FAMILIAR AND POSITIVE TERMS.** Americans are more likely to feel warm toward others who they see as similar to themselves. As one survey respondent explained his favorable response, “They are normal Americans—they may dress different but their beliefs are very similar.” Talk about the Sikh Americans' history in this country not as victims of discrimination, but as striving to build better lives for your families through hard work. Americans react most positively when they see immigrants as making efforts to integrate into their communities and showing pride in America.

- ★ **SHOW THAT SIKH VALUES ARE AMERICAN VALUES.** Americans who know little or nothing about Sikh Americans are unlikely to associate Sikhism with American values. Draw parallels between America’s founding principles and values and those valued in the Sikh faith (particularly equality)—Americans are more likely to accept others into their communities if they believe they share common values. Those with neutral attitudes toward Sikh Americans are most likely to develop warm feelings in response to this messaging strategy.
- ★ **HIGHLIGHT THE VALUE OF EQUALITY.** Equality and the belief that all men and women are believed to be created equal proved to be the tenet of Sikhism that resonates most with the American public. This is evident not only in the message highlighting exercises, but in multiple open-ended questions throughout the survey. Among women—an important outreach target—Sikhism’s value of equality is especially powerful. Including and emphasizing this value should be one of the main components of your communication strategy.
- ★ **TARGET THE MOST RECEPTIVE AND OPEN AUDIENCES IN INITIAL OUTREACH.** The most promising targets are those who initially are the most open toward Sikhs and have the most positive reactions to messaging and information. Initial groups to target include Millennials, Democrats, Americans living in the West, mainline Protestants, college-educated men and women, and women age 50 and older.
- ★ **EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THE TURBAN TO RECEPTIVE AUDIENCES.** The turban is the article of faith most commonly associated with Sikh Americans. It is also the article of faith that Americans feel most uncertain and uneasy about (and often incorrectly associate it with Islam). Educate Americans about the symbol of the turban by describing it as an expression of Sikh (and hence, American) values and answer their broader, more basic questions about the Sikh faith.

APPENDIX: STATES INCLUDED IN EACH REGION

Northeast	South	Midwest	West
Connecticut	Alabama	Illinois	Alaska
Delaware	Arkansas	Indiana	Arizona
District of Columbia	Florida	Iowa	California
Maine	Georgia	Kansas	Colorado
Maryland	Kentucky	Michigan	Hawaii
Massachusetts	Louisiana	Minnesota	Idaho
New Hampshire	Mississippi	Missouri	Montana
Rhode Island	North Carolina	Nebraska	Nevada
Vermont	Oklahoma	North Dakota	New Mexico
New Jersey	South Carolina	Ohio	Oregon
New York	Tennessee	South Dakota	Utah
Pennsylvania	Texas	Wisconsin	Washington
West Virginia	Virginia		Wyoming