

Asia | Beyond the bromance

Why the Indian diaspora has not yet embraced Donald Trump

Despite his overtures

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On March 17th Narendra Modi, India’s prime minister, sat down for a three-hour interview with Lex Fridman, a podcaster popular with MAGA types and tech bros. In the interview Mr Modi spoke warmly of Donald Trump, with whom he has a “strong bond”. Soon after the interview he signed up to Truth Social, Mr Trump’s social-media site. “Thank you my friend,” he wrote.

In many ways it seems a particularly big moment for America-India relations. The two countries have been getting closer for two decades. But now, for the first time, America’s intelligence chief, Tulsi Gabbard, is of Hindu faith, and the second lady, Usha Vance, is of Indian origin. And the

strongmen leading the two countries clearly have a rapport. But one group remains unmoved by Mr Trump, for now at least: India's diaspora.

In swing states such as Georgia and Pennsylvania, there are enough Indian-Americans to help shape local, state and federal elections. Republicans made some inroads with ethnic minorities in the 2024 presidential election. But so far, America First has a limited appeal to 5.2m Indian-Americans, who are increasingly influential: fully 80% have a university degree and as a cohort they earn twice the national average. Such success means some 75% of Indian-Americans believe they have achieved or are about to achieve the American dream.

According to a survey last year by the Carnegie Endowment, a think-tank in Washington, the proportion who identify as Democrats is 47%, down from 56% in 2020. But the data show that, despite this, the group is not becoming more right-wing. The proportion of Republican voters has barely budged; instead, more members of this diaspora are declaring themselves to be independent.

This seems odd, not least as Mr Trump has gone out of his way to charm America's Hindus. In a campaign message on Diwali, a religious festival, last October, he pledged to protect Hindu Americans from the left's "anti-religion agenda" and accused Joe Biden of ignoring them. The president has also hired Indian-Americans for influential positions, including Kash Patel as FBI Director, Kush Desai as deputy press secretary and Harmeet Dhillon as assistant attorney-general for civil rights.

Even so, many Indian-Americans are concerned with issues that Mr Trump is unlikely to solve. Fully 82% want stricter gun laws and 77% think climate change is important. At the end of Mr Trump's first term only 33% approved of his handling of the India-America relationship. Another Carnegie report revealed this month that Indian-Americans rate Mr Biden's record as better than Mr Trump's. ■

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