

Opinion

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Why the U.S. should embrace India

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President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden greet Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, at the White House on June 22, 2023. (Sarah Silbiger / Bloomberg)

By [Sital Kalantry](#)

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As world leaders gather in New Delhi for the G-20 summit on Sept. 9, India's global influence is shining bright. Prime Minister Modi's recent state visit to the United States demonstrates the strong geopolitical relationship between the countries.

Rather than encouraging this relationship, a growing number of commentators have urged the United States to distance itself from India because of its human rights record. On the other hand, some members of the Indian diaspora deny that India has any human rights problems or argue that, even if it does, they pale in comparison to China's.

Instead of ignoring the issue of human rights, the best path forward is continued engagement. By forging closer ties with India, the U.S. will be able to influence human rights while expanding business, innovation and educational opportunities.

In addressing human rights concerns, the United States should value India as a peer rather than preach to it. After all, the United States is experiencing its own democratic challenges, with a former president being indicted on a charge of leading a plot to overturn a democratic election. Moreover, while India can certainly learn from the United States, there are things India can teach the United States. As an ethnically and religiously diverse constitutional democracy, India grapples with many of the same issues as the United States. And it does so within a framework of a constitutional democracy and a practice of judicial review by its Supreme Court. India has had its own debates over issues like abortion, trans rights and affirmative action. By comparing our answers to India's, our legal system can expand its understanding of possible solutions to these complex legal questions.

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Seattle-Setu conference

A conference highlighting the benefits Indian companies bring to Washington state's economy and investments flowing from the state to India, as well as other aspects of India-Washington collaboration, is Wednesday at Seattle University. It's free and open to the public. Information: seattleu.edu/setu/

Washington state businesses, educational institutions, farmers and others have a lot to gain from a strong relationship with India. India is projected to become the third largest economy in the world in a few years. As a result, this region will benefit greatly from expanded trade and deeper economic relationships with India. For example, Air India recently placed the second largest order ever of aircrafts received by Boeing. Indians are the second largest population studying in the United States and Indian workers are the largest recipients of work visas, providing U.S. businesses more desperately needed skilled labor. U.S. businesses can also leverage their relationships in India to promote human rights by encouraging India meet international human rights standards.

In addition, the Indian diaspora community can play a meaningful role in promoting human rights. India receives more than \$100 billion dollars in annual remittances from its diaspora, which is more than any other country. In 1904, Indian-origins residents were forced to leave their homes in Bellingham by rioters who threatened to kill them, but King County is now home to more than 70,000 Indian Americans, making it the county with the fifth largest Indian population in the United States.

Indian Americans have done well overall with a median annual income of \$150,000, compared to \$70,000 for all other households. The right to be free from discrimination in employment and the right to speech, among other rights, have laid the foundation for the community's success in the United States. We should encourage the Indian government to promise the same rights to its residents that Indian Americans benefit from in the United States.

To ignore India would harm the U.S. economy and job creation and do nothing to promote human rights in India. The over half-century long embargo against Cuba has yet to provide political rights to people in that country. While it is true that the strong U.S.-China relationship has not led to basic human freedoms in China, the world's largest democracy might be more open to change. Embracing India as an equal partner will go a longer way in promoting human rights and our shared ideals than declaring it a pariah.

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