

California hate crime hotline gives Hindus more evidence of shortfall in FBI reporting

by [Richa Karmarkar](#)

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The vandalized entrance sign at Vijay's Sherawali Temple in Hayward, California. (Photo courtesy of Vijay's Sherawali Temple)

In its inaugural [report](#) released May 22, California's year-old CA vs. Hate program found that anti-Hindu incidents were the second most common religion-related hate crime reported to a state-sponsored hotline in the past year.

The non-emergency hate crime reporting hotline, administered by the California Civil Rights Department with support from organizations supporting minority groups in

the state, saw 1,020 reports of hate in the past year. Of those reported as anti-religious incidents, 36.9 percent were anti-Jewish and 14.6 percent were anti-Muslim. Anti-Hindu crimes fell in between the two, at 23.3 percent.

According to the California Department of Public Affairs, approximately 24 out of 103 crimes reported targeted Hindus, among cases where information on religious bias motivation was provided.

“It’s important to note that CA vs. Hate is new, and the data should not be treated as being representative of all acts of hate in California,” the department added in a statement.

The program, albeit new, has provided Hindu advocates with support for the claim that there has been a steady rise in anti-Hindu sentiment in the workplace, academia, and media in recent years.

“Currently we live in a world where powerful groups and academics deny the very existence of religiously motivated violence against Hindus, even though they accept it happens to other faith communities,” said Pushpita Prasad of the Coalition of Hindus of North America. “As a California resident, I have been aghast at the lack of action and attention to this violation of my sacred spaces and my religious freedom.”

Over a three-month period in 2023, six Hindu temples in the Bay Area were reportedly vandalized, many with inflammatory statements against India Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Hindus for Human Rights, an organization that has been more wary of activists’ propagating the term “Hinduphobia,” released a statement calling the report’s findings an “alarming trend,” but cautioned that the data needed further examination.

“We are committed to understanding the underlying causes of this trend and urge the community to join us in addressing and combating all forms of religious hatred,” said the HfHR [statement](#). “This report underscores the urgent need for continued vigilance and collective, interfaith action against intolerance in all its forms.”

The CA vs. Hate initiative nonetheless seems to establish a new horizon for hate crime reporting.

For more than 30 years, the FBI's Hate Crime Statistics report has been the most comprehensive snapshot of hate violence in the United States. But critics charge that local law enforcement agencies are often "incomplete and inconsistent" in reporting their hate crime data to the FBI, which depends on voluntary compliance from localities.

According to the FBI's most recently published hate-crime [report](#), there were 37 instances of anti-Hindu hate crimes in 2021 and 2022 nationwide—14 more than were reported, CA vs. Hate found. In the US, there are 4.6 million people of Indian origin, of whom 2.5 million are Hindus; close to 900,000 Californians are of Indian origin.

A coalition of national organizations known as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, which includes HAF, the Anti-Defamation League, the Sikh Coalition, and others, released a [statement](#) on May 8 in support of the Improving Reporting to Prevent Hate Act. The bipartisan bill, introduced in Congress on March 13, would require local law enforcement in cities with more than 100,000 residents to report credible hate crime data to the FBI.

"It is impossible to address our nation's hate crime problem without accurate data," said the statement. "We cannot confront a problem we are not measuring effectively."

Mannirmal Kaur, federal policy manager for the Sikh Coalition, said the bill promotes greater opportunities for law enforcement agencies to understand the needs of religious minorities, like Sikhs and Hindus. The group has been working with law enforcement to address hate crimes since the devastating mass shooting at a Wisconsin gurdwara in 2012.

"Each year, fewer and fewer LEAs (law enforcement agencies) report any hate crimes or bias incidents to the FBI, leaving huge gaps in our knowledge about the lived experiences of marginalized communities in different places across the country," said Kaur. "Mandating the reporting of hate crimes and bias incidents is one of the strongest policy steps that the federal government could take towards truly understanding the scope of hate-motivated violence and crimes."

Congressman Shri Thanedar, a Democrat from Michigan, said his constituents are living "in fear" due to the "substantial increase in attacks on Hinduism."

Thanedar, who is Hindu, and four other members of Congress of Indian origin signed a letter to the Department of Justice in March, urging them to investigate the California instances of vandalism. Many current investigations, Thanedar said at an April 17 [news conference](#), go “nowhere,” adding that “it leaves the community feeling like nobody cares about them.”

On April 10, Thanedar introduced House Resolution 1131, a bill that “celebrates the significant contributions of Hindu Americans to the United States and addresses the troubling rise of Hinduphobia and anti-Hindu bigotry.” The bill has been cosponsored by eight lawmakers, five of them Republicans.

“I am deeply saddened and outraged by the rise in Hinduphobic and anti-Indian hate crimes this year,” he said in a statement. “This behavior is unworthy of our nation and does not reflect our values. To Hindu and South Asian Americans, I offer a message of hope: Your Congress stands with you against these senseless acts of ignorance and violence.” —Religion News Service