

"Quit Panjab (Khalistan), India"

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The Khalistan Referendum: A Catalyst for Self-Determination, Mirroring Historical Nation-Building Votes, and Highlighting the Sikh Diaspora's Strategic Importance to the USA.

The Khalistan referendum, akin to historical non-binding referendums that led to new nations like Norway or South Sudan, demonstrates the profound power of a popular vote to express aspirations for self-determination and identity. This movement, fueled by India's unaddressed historical grievances and policies promoting Hindu majoritarianism that undermine national unity, consequently, positions the influential Sikh diaspora as a crucial strategic ally for the United States in South Asia.

Referendum: In democratic governance, a referendum is a direct vote by the electorate on a specific proposal, law, or political issue. Essentially, it's a mechanism for the public to participate in decision-making directly, bypassing their representatives on that issue.

Binding referendum: Resulting in the adoption of a new policy or change to the law without further action from a legislative body, like Parliament. The outcome is legally enforceable and must be implemented by the government.

Non-binding (advisory or indicative) referendum: Seeks the opinion of voters and acts as a large-scale opinion poll. The government is not legally compelled to implement the results, although it may feel political pressure to do so.

How many non-binding referendums have resulted in a new country?

Non-binding referendums (also called **advisory referendums**) are technically *not legally enforceable*, in practice, some **have led to the creation of new countries**. These outcomes usually depend **on political will, public pressure, international recognition, and geopolitical context**.

Examples of Non-Binding Referendums Leading to Independence or New Countries

Norway (from Sweden): 1905 (99.95%) voted to dissolve the union. Sweden accepted the result peacefully. Norway became independent. Norway separated from Sweden in 1905 primarily due to growing Norwegian nationalism and disagreements over foreign policy, particularly concerning the establishment of a separate Norwegian consular service. The union, established in 1814 following the Napoleonic Wars, was increasingly

seen as unequal by Norwegians, who desired greater autonomy and national representation

Iceland (from Denmark): 1944 (98.6%) voted for a republic. Denmark couldn't stop it. Iceland became a republic. Iceland separated from Denmark due to a combination of factors, primarily World War II and a growing Icelandic independence movement. Following the German occupation of Denmark in 1940, Iceland assumed control of its foreign affairs and, after a plebiscite, declared its independence in 1944

Eritrea (from Ethiopia): 1993 (99.8%) voted for independence. Initially non-binding, it was later recognized by Ethiopia and the UN. Eritrea became independent. Eritrea was under Italian colonial rule until World War II, after which it was federated with Ethiopia. In 1962, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea, leading to resentment and a prolonged armed struggle for independence.

The War for Independence: The [Eritrean People's Liberation Front \(EPLF\)](#) waged a 30-year war against Ethiopia, finally gaining control of Eritrea in 1991. **Referendum and Independence:** Following the EPLF victory, a referendum on Eritrean independence was held in 1993, with a near-unanimous vote for independence. Eritrea officially became independent on May 24th, 1993.

Montenegro (from Serbia and Montenegro): 2006 (55.5%) voted to split. Though the referendum was advisory, Serbia accepted the result. After the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Montenegro and Serbia initially formed the [Federal Republic of Yugoslavia](#), later renamed the [State Union of Serbia and Montenegro](#).

Growing Independence Movement: A strong independence movement emerged in Montenegro, led by Prime Minister [Milo Đukanović](#), pushing for a referendum on the issue. **Referendum and Separation:** The referendum, which had a clause allowing it after three years, was held in **2006**. The result, with a slim majority in favor of independence, triggered the formal separation of Montenegro from Serbia.

South Sudan (from Sudan): 2011 (98.8%) voted for independence. The referendum was technically non-binding under the terms of the peace agreement, but it led to complete freedom.

Bangladesh (from Pakistan): 1971 No formal referendum, but overwhelming support. A de facto result of civil war and international support.

Key Conditions for Success

Non-binding referendums only lead to new countries when several conditions are met:

1. **Overwhelming public support**
2. **Breakdown or withdrawal of central government authority**
3. **International recognition**
4. **Peace agreements or armed conflict resolution.**
5. **Willingness (or inability) of the parent state to resist.**

Brexit and Khalistan referendum comparison involves looking at two quite different political movements, each with its own historical, legal, and geopolitical context. Brexit a binding referendum was conducted by UK government and Khalistan referendum a nonbinding a referendum is conducted by Sikhs for justice. Although there are two different political movements however basis for each one of them is very similar. Britain joined European Union in 1973 but people in Britain were not satisfied. They felt they had lost Sovereignty and were increasingly making laws and regulations to satisfy European Union. Britain was giving the estimated net contribution in 2014 was around £150 million per week. People of Britain also felt they have lost control of their immigration policy. An official referendum was organized by UK government in 2016, leading UK to leave European Union successfully.

The Khalistan movement is remarkably like Brexit, as India has not kept its promises given to Sikhs before 1947. The BJP Govt is working to create a **Hindu Rashtra**, and Sikhs are asking the same for themselves.

Arguments to support the Sikh case.

1. Historical Promises Made to Sikhs (Pre- and Post-1947)

Verbal Assurances Before Partition

Sikh leaders claim that Indian National Congress leaders like **Jawaharlal Nehru** and **Mahatma Gandhi** gave **assurances** to Sikhs that they would enjoy "**special status**" and "**autonomy**" in the new India.

In 1946, Nehru allegedly told Sikh leaders:

"The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area set up in the North where the Sikhs can experience the glow of freedom."

Constitutional Marginalization

Sikhs argue that **India's Constitution (1950)** does not recognize Sikhism as a separate religion, clubbing Sikhs under the broad definition of "Hindus" in **Article 25**.

This has been a long-standing grievance: that **Sikh identity was diluted** constitutionally after independence.

2. Demand for Autonomy vs. Religious Nationalism

Hindu Rashtra Parallel

Sikh groups argue that if **Hindutva ideology** is allowed to reshape India into a "**Hindu Rashtra**", then religious minorities like Sikhs have the right to **protect and preserve their distinct identity**, even through secession.

Sikhism is Distinct

Sikhism has **its scripture, culture, language (Punjabi/Gurmukhi), and history**.

Sikhs argue that **Sikhs are not part of the Hindu fold** and thus should have the **right to self-determination** if India becomes explicitly Hindu.

3. Cultural and Political Suppression

1984 Operation Blue Star and Operation Shanti killed thousands of Sikhs. These were state-backed pogroms.

Delayed Justice, lack of accountability, and the resulting lack of Justice have fueled long-term resentment.

Many see 1984 as the moment when the Indian state **lost moral legitimacy** in the eyes of many Sikhs.

Censorship and Surveillance

Pro-Khalistan expression is **banned or heavily surveilled** in India.

Activists abroad face bans, asset seizures, and extradition attempts, leading some to argue that **India does not allow peaceful democratic expression** of Sikh political identity.

4. Diaspora-Led Support & Right to Self-Determination

Global Sikh Community

Large Sikh populations in **Canada, the UK, the USA, Australia**, etc., support Khalistan via unofficial referendums, lobbying, and advocacy.

They frame this as a **human rights issue**: peaceful, democratic advocacy for a homeland.

UN Charter Argument

Sikhs argue their movement fits under **UN principles of self-determination**, especially if:

A distinct person,

Experiencing systemic discrimination,

Denied autonomy or meaningful participation.

5. Economic and Political Grievances in Punjab

Resource Control

Punjab contributes disproportionately to India's food supply but has **limited control** over its **river waters**, resources, and taxation.

The **Punjab Reorganization Act (1966)** is viewed by many as a betrayal, as it made Chandigarh a union territory and distributed river water to other states.

Decline of Punjabi Language and Culture

There is concern that **Hindi imposition** and Bollywood cultural dominance are **erasing Punjabi culture**.

6. Moral Consistency with Global Movements

If the UK could vote to leave the EU (Brexit) on the grounds of sovereignty and identity,

Then the argument goes: **Why not vote for Khalistan?**

If democratic principles are applied equally, all groups should have the **right to self-determination** through peaceful means.

Peaceful resolution depends on open political space, dialogue, and addressing historical grievances.

Conclusion: Sikhism is perhaps one of the few religious traditions that organically mirrors many aspects of liberal democracy.

2. Strategic Geopolitical Ally in South Asia

Counterbalance to China and India

- Sikhs are **numerically strong and politically active** in **Punjab**, a border state near both Pakistan and China.

- A politically empowered Sikh population (whether within India or as a diaspora movement) can **serve as a counterweight to radicalization in India** and Chinese Influence in the region.

Diaspora Power

- The Sikh diaspora is highly influential in **Canada, the US, and the UK**.

Sikh Americans are:

Among the **most educated** and **economically prosperous** communities.

Deeply integrated into American institutions (e.g., military, medicine, tech).

This community can serve as **a soft power bridge** between the US and South Asia.

3. Long History of Standing Up to Tyranny

Sikh history is full of **resistance to imperialism, oppression, and forced religious conversion** — from the Mughals to the British Raj.

This echoes America's founding spirit — resistance to tyranny and the fight for liberty.

Example: Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life **defending religious freedom** — not his own. That's a **universal human rights value**.

4. Commitment to Service (Seva) — Like American Civic Duty

Sikhs believe in **selfless service** (Seva), a concept close to American ideals of civic responsibility.

During COVID-19, natural disasters, and protests, **Sikh-led NGOs** like Khalsa Aid and local gurdwaras provided food, aid, and support globally.

This shows **compatibility with American humanitarian and civil society principles**.

5. Military Tradition + Pro-American Sentiment

Sikhs have a strong **warrior ethos (Sant-Salahi)** — saint-soldier identity.

Historically, Sikhs served valiantly in **British and Allied forces** during WWI and WWII.

Today, Sikhs serve in the **US Armed Forces** — especially after court victories allowing religious articles (like turbans and beards).

Sikh martial values align well with American values of **defense, duty, and honor**.

6. Support for Pluralism and Human Rights

- Sikh teachings **reject casteism, racism, and gender inequality**.

- Guru Granth Sahib includes teachings from **Muslims, Hindus, and lower castes**, showing an **inclusive and pluralistic worldview** — like the **American melting pot** ideal.

7. Sikhs as a Stabilizing Force in South Asia

If treated as equal stakeholders, Sikhs could be **peacemakers and protectors** of democratic values in the India-Pakistan-China triangle.

Empowering Sikh civil society and religious institutions may help **prevent radicalization**, encourage **regional cooperation**, and promote **liberal democratic ideals** in a volatile region.

Summary of Arguments

Category Supporting Points

Ideological Alignment: Equality, freedom, religious liberty, resistance to tyranny.

Geostrategic Value: Border region (Punjab), diaspora power, counterbalance to China/India.

Human Rights & Service Strong civic culture, humanitarian leadership, inclusion.

Military Compatibility: Saint-soldier identity, historic military service, pro-American values.

Talking Point (for policy or academic use)

"Given the shared values of liberty, equality, and democratic governance, Sikhs — both in India and across the diaspora — represent a natural ally for the United States in South Asia. Supporting Sikh self-expression and civil rights not only strengthens regional stability but also reinforces America's commitment to religious freedom and pluralism worldwide."

India is currently much weaker due to Hindutva policies. How is it affecting the country's unity?

Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) policies might be affecting **India's internal unity**. While the government claims national unity is being strengthened under a unified Hindu identity, critics argue that **Hindutva is weakening India's secular foundation and fragmenting its social fabric**. Last August 15th, P.M. Modi was praising RSS, and it appears he was walking with RSS than 140 million Indians>

How Hindutva Is Affecting India's Unity (Negatively)

1. Undermining Secularism

India's Founding Principle:

India was founded as a **secular, pluralist** republic, giving equal rights to all religions.

The Constitution guarantees **freedom of religion, equality before the law, and non-discrimination**.

Hindutva's Impact:

Hindutva ideology promotes **India as a Hindu Rashtra** (nation), which directly contradicts Secularism.

This **excludes Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and even liberal Hindus** from full participation in national identity.

Result: Growing feeling among minorities that **India is no longer their country**, which increases alienation and social fragmentation.

2. Religious Polarization and Violence

Increased Tensions:

Hate crimes and lynchings of Muslims and Dalits (often over beef or "love jihad") have risen sharply since 2014.

Politicians and media personalities often **use religion to polarize voters**.

Community Fear:

Muslims and Christians in particular report **fear of being second-class citizens**.

Churches and mosques have been attacked; **bulldozer politics** have targeted Muslim-owned properties.

Result: Religious communities feel unsafe, leading to deep **distrust** and **social segregation**.

3. Alienation of Regional and Ethnic Identities

One Nation, One Culture?

The government pushes ideas like:

One language (Hindi)

One religion (Hinduism)

One culture (North Indian Brahmanical traditions)

Impact on States:

South India, Northeast, Punjab, and Kashmir resist this homogenization.

Regional languages, customs, and histories are being **devalued**, causing resentment.

Result: Growing regional identity movements and calls for **greater autonomy or even secession** (Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Northeast).

4. Kashmir & Muslim Alienation

The abrogation of **Article 370** in 2019 ended Kashmir's semi-autonomous status.

Internet shutdowns, military crackdowns, and political detention followed.

Result: Most Kashmiris (even moderates) feel betrayed. Trust in Indian democracy is at a historic low there.

5. Erosion of Democratic Institutions

Judiciary, Election Commission, universities, and media are seen as compromised or heavily influenced by the ruling party's ideology.

Dissenters are labeled as "anti-nationals", "urban Naxals", or "Khalistanis".

Result: Youth, intellectuals, minorities, and activists feel silenced, leading to anger, radicalization, or apathy — all of which weaken national cohesion.

6. Economic Inequality and Caste Politics

While Hindutva promotes a "unified Hindu identity", **caste remains a deep fault line**.

Dalits and OBCs continue to face discrimination and violence — often under the cover of Hindutva.

Result: Lower caste groups feel that Hindutva **protects upper caste interests** while **marginalizing them** further.

7. Exodus of Minorities from Institutions

Increasing numbers of **Muslim and Christian professionals, students, and intellectuals** are leaving India or withdrawing from public life.

Fear of **social profiling, police bias, and limited opportunities** is driving a brain drain.

Result: India loses its **diverse talent pool** and becomes more insular.

8. Alienation of Sikhs and Farmers

Events like the **2020-21 Farmers' Protest**, in which many Sikh farmers were branded as "Khalistanis", increased Sikh mistrust of the state.

The **repression of Sikh symbols** and labeling dissent as extremism has sparked **identity-based resentment**.

Result: Revival of **Sikh nationalist sentiment** and increasing Sikh disconnection from Indian nationalism.

A nation's unity is strongest when **all its people feel they belong**, not just the majority. Hindutva might rally one group, but it's **pushing many others away**, creating internal fault lines that could weaken India overall — socially, politically, and economically.

The **Sikh diaspora** is **highly influential**, both **economically** and **politically**, and has the **potential to help Punjab significantly** — if mobilized strategically. While it does face limitations (especially politically within India), its **economic strength, advocacy power, and global networks** make it one of the most capable diaspora communities in the world.

Who Is the Sikh Diaspora?

An estimated **28–30 million Sikhs worldwide**, with **4–5 million** living outside India.

Largest diaspora communities:

Canada CA (~800,000+)

United Kingdom GB (~500,000+)

United States US (~500,000+)

Australia, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, etc.

1. Economic Power of the Sikh Diaspora

High Income & Education Levels

Canada, U.S., UK: Sikhs are among the **highest-earning and most-educated** communities.

Sikh Canadians have high representation in professions like **law, medicine, IT, construction, and transport**.

In the US, Sikh households often exceed **the median national income**.

Remittances to Punjab

NRIs send billions back to India annually — a **substantial portion goes to Punjab**.

NRI-owned land, property, and businesses significantly boost the **rural economy**.

Estimated remittances to Punjab:(\$1–1.2 billion USD/year)

2. Development & Humanitarian Aid

Diaspora-led NGOs like:

Khalsa Aid

United Sikhs

Basics of Sikhi

Seva Trusts

Actively provide **relief, education, and healthcare** in Punjab.

Key Sectors of Impact:

Medical camps and hospitals

Water purification projects

Drug de-addiction centers

Education sponsorships

Farmer support and legal aid

Grassroots impact in villages, especially in **the Malwa and Doab** regions.

3. Political Influence Abroad

Canada

Sikhs hold top political offices:

Jagmeet Singh was the Leader of the NDP (third-largest party).

There are several Sikh ministers in the federal and provincial governments.

Strong lobbying power and Influence on **foreign policy** and **human rights issues** related to India.

United Kingdom

Sikh MPs and Lords in Parliament.

Active lobbying for **1984 justice, human rights in Punjab**, and **freedom of religion**.

United States

Increasing political participation, growing presence in Congress, and local offices.

W.S.O. Sikh Coalition and SALDEF work on **civil rights and anti-discrimination**, and influence US policy on South Asia. **Sikhs for Justice** has been the most effective organization in bringing Sikh issues to the entire world and is most feared by India.

Sikhs can bring **global pressure on India** through diplomatic and human rights channels.

4. Potential to Help Punjab Politically and Economically

Opportunity: How the Sikh Diaspora Can Help

Policy Pressure Lobby Western governments to raise issues of Punjab's human rights and federal rights with India.

Investment: Support **startups, education, tech hubs, and organic farming** in Punjab.

Skill Transfer: Promote exchange programs, tech training, and higher education links with the West.

Media Power Use diaspora-run media to raise awareness of Punjab's issues (agriculture crisis, youth migration, drug abuse).

Diaspora Voting Rights Push for voting rights or remote participation in Punjab politics.

Strength Details

Economic Power: Billions of remittances, land ownership, and charity work in Punjab.

Political Influence Abroad: Ministers and MPs in Canada, UK, US; intense lobbying for Punjab-related issues.

Development Projects: Education, health, farming, and social reform projects funded by diaspora NGOs.

Soft Power Global media (Sutlej T.V.), humanitarian branding (e.g., Khalsa Aid), World Sikh News 1984-1996, cultural diplomacy.

Conclusion: The Sikh diaspora is **immensely powerful**, especially **economically and diplomatically**. If organized and coordinated better, it could become a significant **force for positive change in Punjab** — from **infrastructure and education** to **human rights and political advocacy**. The Sikh diaspora has every right to continue fighting for Khalistan and to do so more vigorously. India feels threatened and murdered SFJ leader Harjit Singh Nijjar in Canada and was planning to assassinate GurPatwant Singh Pannu in the USA Impact: causes diplomatic tensions (e.g., India-Canada relations and India -US relations).

I Want to Break Free. A practical guide to making a new country by **MATT QVORTUP** is a book must-read for every Sikh who is concerned about the future of Sikhs.

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