

04 BRIEFING 11 Facts Political Leaders Should Know About Hinduism

A quick foundation for understanding one of the world's oldest living religious traditions.

- 1 **Hinduism is also called Sanatan Dharma.** The term means “the eternal path” or “eternal order.” Hinduism has about 1.2 billion followers worldwide, making it the third-largest religion. The majority live in India, where it originated.
- 2 **There is no single founder.** Hindu traditions developed over thousands of years through many sages, teachers, texts, and schools of thought.
- 3 **Hinduism has many sacred texts.** The Vedas, preserved through oral tradition, are the oldest, with their earliest layers dating back roughly 3,500 years. The Bhagavad Gita is among the best known.
- 4 **Women are central to Hinduism.** Hymns in the oldest scriptures, Vedas, are attributed to women sages, and the Divine Feminine is worshipped through many goddesses.
- 5 **The Hindu Concept of God: One Supreme Reality, Many Divine Forms.** Hinduism recognizes one Supreme Reality (“God”), a Universal Consciousness that encompasses everything in the universe. God may be understood as formless or approached through many deities, names, and forms, each representing divine attributes. The deities seen in temples represent this same Supreme Reality, understood to be present in every person, all living beings, and nature.
- 6 **There is no single required creed or dogma.** No one philosophy, ritual, or practice binds every Hindu. Hindu thought includes theistic, non-theistic, devotional, and questioning traditions.
- 7 **Rebirth and liberation are central ideas.** Many Hindus understand existence as a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth shaped by karma. Moksha — freedom from that cycle — is the highest spiritual goal.
- 8 **Worship may take place at home or in a temple.** Home shrines are common. Prayer, meditation, study, service, and rituals may be practiced privately, with family, or in a temple community.
- 9 **Temple worship is generally not congregation-based.** Hindus are not assigned to one temple or required to attend weekly services. They may visit different temples according to personal or family tradition.
- 10 **Hinduism has deep internal diversity.** No organization, teacher, temple, ethnic group, or political viewpoint speaks for every Hindu. Practices vary widely, while shared concepts and a broad worldview connect the traditions.
- 11 **The Hindu worldview sees the world as one family.** Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam teaches that no person is inherently “other.” It emphasizes non-harm, truth, respect for other faiths, a non-proselytizing outlook, and service to humanity as service to the Divine. Many Hindu traditions see wrongdoing as arising from ignorance or misguided thought — not inherent evil.

FOR PUBLIC LEADERS

Use these facts to frame remarks accurately. When in doubt, ask a local Hindu leader how their community understands a concept.