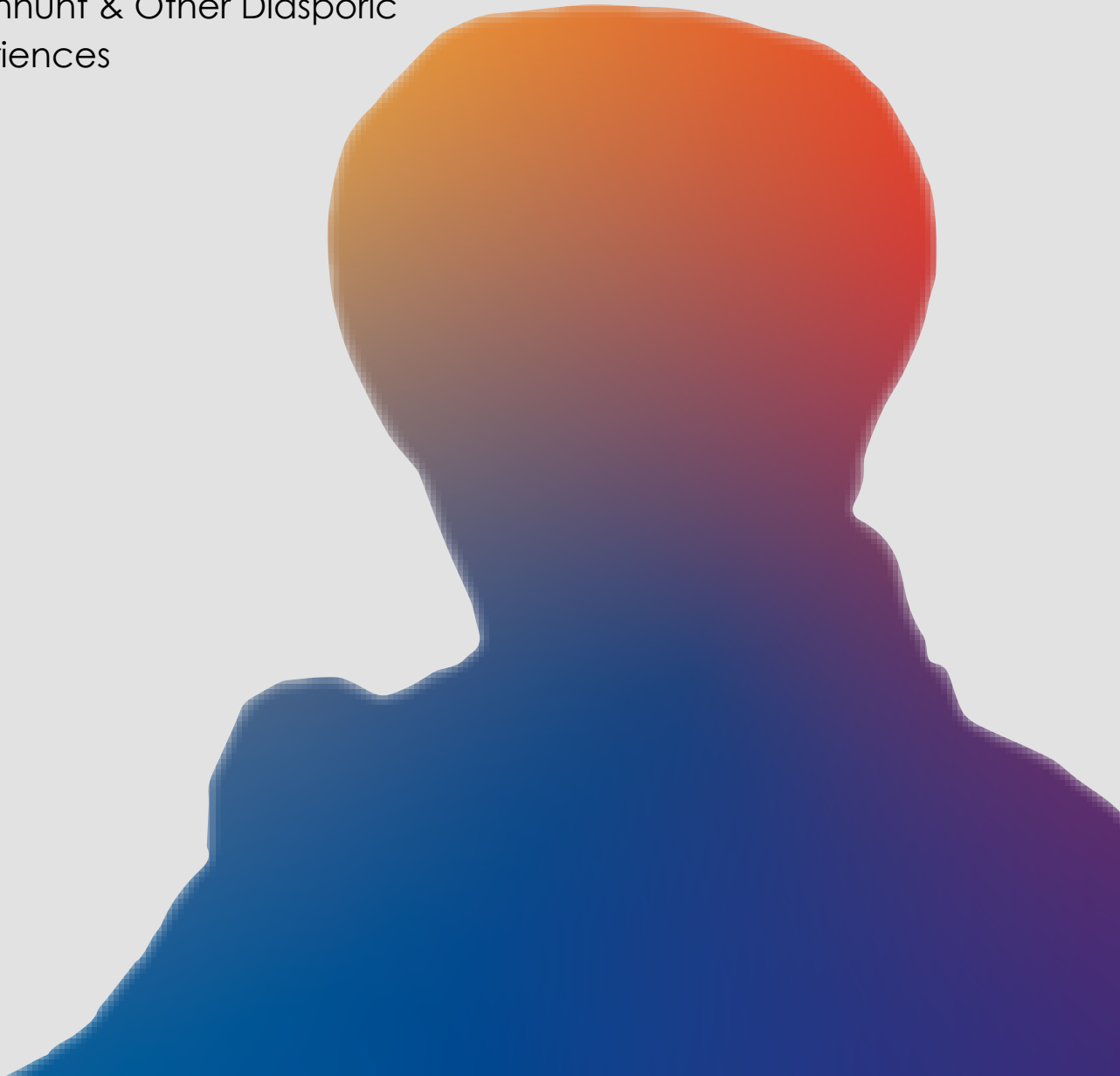




# Dissent Across 'Democracies'

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**How the Indian State Deploys  
Disinformation and Online Hate:**  
Case Studies from the Amritpal  
Singh Manhunt & Other Diasporic  
Sikh Experiences



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As SALDEF continues to monitor and report on the Modi regime’s weaponization of social media and the broader internet, the work has only gained relevance. Less than two years after the Farmers’ Protest ended, the Amritpal Singh manhunt began. While the cases were different, the systemic online discrimination against the community globally was tragically similar.

We are grateful to all those in the community who display the courage to stand up against online expressions of caste discrimination, Hindu supremacy, and overt hate speech at personal and professional cost. SALDEF stands firm in our commitment to protect all diasporic South Asians from being forced to live the profoundly anti-American ideals of Hindutva. If anyone reading this has their own story to tell, we hope you will be in touch whether you are American, a diasporic minority elsewhere, or living in the BJP’s India. We are here to help.



# PREFACE

When Twitter founder Jack Dorsey appeared on a June 2023 episode of the YouTube show Breaking Points, he was asked to share anecdotes of foreign governments and some of the most powerful people in the world bringing pressure on and making demands of the heads of social media platforms.<sup>1</sup> In his reply, the first country he cited was India.

**“India is a country that had many requests of [Twitter] around the Farmers’ Protest [and] around particular journalists that were critical of the government, and it manifested in ways such as ‘we will shut Twitter down in India’, which is a very large market for us; ‘we will raid the homes of your employees’, which they did; ‘we will shut down your offices if you don’t follow suit.’**

**“And this is India—a democratic country.”**



# 1

## INTRODUCTION

# INTRODUCTION

*It is common across the Sikh diaspora for far-flung families to maintain their connections via social media. As SALDEF has reported previously, the dual threat faced by the community worldwide is highly visible articles of faith that are lightning rods for hate as well as an Indian state that is willing and able to use these same social media channels to erase the voices of the entire diaspora if deemed necessary.*

For two years after the intensive social media censorship of the community during the Farmers' Protests movement of 2020-21, SALDEF worked extensively to surface these issues to social media companies and to offices of Congress, along with our suggested solutions to prevent foreign political agendas from becoming the basis of global algorithmic censorship.<sup>2</sup> Chief among these recommendations is the development of greater institutional competence on issues affecting diasporic communities, guardrails to prevent global application of foreign governments' domestic politics, and closer relationships with subject matter experts and community-oriented nonprofits.

There is cause for optimism in the global fight against the type of Hindu supremacy peddled by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), particularly in the increasing awareness of how antidemocratic the Indian state is becoming. For five years in a row as of 2023, Access Now has flagged India as the world's greatest serial

offender in targeted internet shutdowns.<sup>3</sup> For four years in a row as of 2023, the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (US CIRF) has identified India as an appropriate designee of Country of Particular Concern status under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).<sup>4</sup> Even the US State Department, in its 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: India and its 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: India, identifies deeply problematic trends like attacks on religious minorities, extrajudicial killings, indefinite detention without formal charges under expansive anti-terrorism statutes, systemic erosion of the free press, and lack of accountability and checks on authority for government actors.<sup>5,6</sup>

Unfortunately, in the fight against Hindu supremacy online, progress remains incremental. When the Indian government, in March 2023, launched a manhunt in the Punjab for a lone individual named Amritpal Singh, they successfully redeployed most of the tactics used

in the Farmers' Protest. Amritpal Singh was the subject of persistent misinformation, repeated in both the Indian and Western media; social media platforms complied with takedown requests and blocked accounts of non-Indian citizens speaking out on the issue; and many members of the Sikh community outside India were the victims of trolling and abuses of systems intended to maintain public safety online.

Our discussion proceeds in four sections: first, we consider the community perspective on Amritpal Singh, and where it differs from the Indian state narrative. Then we offer case studies: the media amplification of the social media narrative; the

experience of advocates who become lightning rods for hate; and the chilling effect these BJP policies are having on the exercise of free speech by Sikh Americans. We conclude by offering the same set of recommendations that we developed in the wake of the Farmers' Protests, and that we continue to push social media platforms to adopt to prevent the erasure of their most vulnerable users.



# 2

## AMRITPAL SINGH & THE INDIAN STATE'S NARRATIVE DISCIPLINE

# AMRITPAL SINGH & THE INDIAN STATE'S NARRATIVE DISCIPLINE

*SALDEF does not endorse any of the behaviors or actions attributed to Amritpal Singh. As ever, our stake is a reflection of our connection to the Sikh American community. Our community did find Singh to be a subject of interest during his meteoric rise in Punjab politics as he took over leadership of Waris Punjab De, an organization that played a large role in mobilizing Punjabi farmers during the mass protests of 2020-21, after the death of its founder Deep Sidhu.<sup>7</sup>*

Singh's ascent coincided with a re-emergent image of the leader of the original Khalistan movement, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale; Amritpal Singh in fact styled himself after Bhindranwale.<sup>8</sup> While the Indian government is quick to define the revived Bhindranwale image as a lightning rod for separatist sentiment, his re-emergence is a totem for dissatisfaction with the disrepair of the Punjab and resistance to persistent state violence against the community, not a re-manifestation of territorial separatism.<sup>9,10</sup>

Over the seven or so months in which he shot from obscurity to notoriety, an array of factors led to Amritpal Singh's rise: a disconnect between Punjab's elected leaders and its people; his avowed commitment to fighting drug addiction; and, playing an outsized role in media coverage, his call for Sikh self-government in the form of a Sikh state called Khalistan.<sup>11</sup> While the original Khalistan movement peaked in the 1980s with Operation Blue Star and anti-Sikh riots, most Indian Sikhs in Punjab today consider their future to be within the Indian state.<sup>12</sup> Amritpal Singh's appeal was rooted in his promises to reverse cultural stagnation and less so in his calls for a revived Khalistan, which he framed in democratic terms (certainly in his early speeches).<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately Amritpal Singh's self-described nonviolent approach was abandoned in the incident cited by the Indian government as the straw that broke the camel's back: a group of his followers stormed a police station in Ajnala, Punjab to force the release of one of their own in February 2023; on the basis of that event, the manhunt for Amritpal Singh began in March 2023.<sup>14,15</sup> While Amritpal Singh was arrested after a month on the run, the tactics used by the Indian government demonstrate clearly that punishing the entire Sikh community for its perceived recalcitrance is a consistent policy across administrations.

The root of the Sikh American community's and other diasporic Sikh communities' deep anger at the manhunt was the disproportionate scale of the crackdown.<sup>16,17</sup> When the manhunt for this individual began, the Indian government deployed thousands of paramilitary troops across Punjab, arrested more than 150 people who are associates in Waris Punjab De or family of Amritpal Singh, and suspended 4G cell phone service for the entire state.<sup>18</sup>



In a third world country, shutting down 4G internet access for 27 million people is effectively cutting them off from the world and preventing basic services from functioning, like the use of QR codes for small businesses, the ability to wirelessly transfer funds, and the ability to exercise free speech online.

As diasporic community members could not reach or talk to their family members, the Indian government was able to invoke an array of laws suspending fundamental democratic rights for the entire Punjab: public assembly in numbers greater than four became illegal, as did freedoms of expression like public protest. With the eyes of the world diverted and the diasporic Sikh community unable to reach the Punjab, the Indian government conducted a campaign of oppression that was both unwarranted in the circumstances and wholly consistent with standing state policy toward the Sikh community and toward the Punjab.

Just as we saw and reported during the Farmers' Protest in 2020-21, the familiar formula becomes apparent: first, shut down the ability to share information outside of state-controlled channels; second, spread misinformation from state-controlled accounts by invoking things like a

decades-old separatist movement and religious fanaticism, while punishing and arresting those who question the state narrative; and third, couch the actions being undertaken as specific to this community in question.

The only element that changes is the trigger, whether that is a mass protest movement by the farmers of the Punjab or a lone figure who evokes unfounded fears of a new wave of separatist violence. While the media obligingly framed the manhunt as a state protecting itself from a dangerous and widespread separatist movement, the very same policies of mass repression that so animate the diaspora were levied again and again.<sup>19,20</sup>



# 3

## WEAPONIZING MEDIA TO TURN SIKHS INTO 'KHALISTANIS'

# WEAPONIZING MEDIA TO TURN SIKHS INTO ‘KHALISTANIS’

*As Narendra Modi nears a full decade in power and prepares to run for a third term, the digital narrative control operation his party has built has become one of the most refined in the world. Chief among its advantages is its ability to dictate how Western media covers issues pertaining to diasporic communities, paired with its documented tendency to lean on social media platforms to broadly classify and shut down all dissenting dialogue as terrorism.*

As global attention focused on the Punjab, the Sikh diaspora saw disheartening headlines from major Western publications. NBC News covered the story by describing Singh as “a Sikh separatist leader”, defining him in the lead through the lens of that single aspect of his politics.<sup>21</sup> CNN did the same thing.<sup>22</sup> The Washington Post ran three separate articles shortly after the manhunt began: one as the news was breaking that identified Amritpal Singh as a ‘Sikh separatist’; a second that again centered ‘Sikh separatism’ in its lead despite the journalist in question traveling to the Punjab and finding in interviews that support for Khalistan was a fringe view; and a third that presented conjecture by a single research center (the Network Contagion Research Institute, or NCRI) as proof that a vast ‘Khalistani’ terror network, backed by Pakistan, was using Twitter to encourage overt terrorism among Sikhs worldwide and would be targeting American cities in a series of attacks that never materialized.<sup>23,24,25</sup> In the latter case, the argument was so strongly aligned with preferred BJP narratives that the Washington Post article presenting the conjectures by NCRI was re-reported across state-aligned Indian media.<sup>26</sup>

The word ‘Khalistani’ is itself an indicator of misinformation, as dialogue within the community centers on whether individuals *support* Khalistan. The term’s use by the Indian

state, and its pushing the term across Indian and Western media, is a tactical decision to paint Khalistan not as an issue that merits debate but as a sect or affiliation within the Sikh community that poses a fundamental national security threat. Its utility can be seen in completely unconnected events, like in a visit to the United States from Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi in late May 2023.

Gandhi, the son of the prime minister whose regime launched Operation Blue Star, was heckled by a group of angry Sikhs—who were immediately branded ‘Khalistanis’ across media coverage despite the bulk of their comments being tied to Operation Blue Star and the Indian government’s ongoing lack of accountability or transparency around those events.<sup>27,28</sup> Dubbing all Sikh protesters ‘Khalistanis’ allows media and state actors to neatly sidestep the issues driving protests, reduce their anger to a single controversial issue, and position them as angry, unreasonable antagonists.

The Indian government’s success in presenting cherry-picked evidence of threats was also demonstrated at the highest levels of Western governments: when a handful of protestors in western cities like San Francisco and London committed vandalism against Indian consulates, forceful reprimands of these individuals’

“unacceptable” actions came swiftly from the White House and 16 Downing Street.<sup>29,30</sup> Unfortunately, there was never any comment from the highest levels on the reasons for the protests. In fact, just the opposite occurred: less than two weeks after Amritpal Singh was captured, President Biden—after remaining silent on the situation—extended an invitation for the high honor of a formal state visit to PM Modi.<sup>31</sup>

As a matter of course, the macro-level trends playing out at the highest levels of governments and major media publications are repeated in microcosms across social media. Twitter, for example, complied with BJP demands to take down accounts of Sikhs not based in India for commenting on the Amritpal Singh manhunt—in keeping with the strategy of completely removing all narratives and discourse contrary to the state narrative from the internet.<sup>32,33</sup> The crackdowns went all the way up to blocking the BBC Punjabi-language Twitter account along with those of multiple accredited journalists.<sup>34</sup>

Citing ‘legal demands’ without ever explaining what those demands are, Twitter has become complicit in the BJP’s work of narrative control on issues ranging far beyond the manhunt.<sup>35,36</sup> In fact, during the Amritpal Singh manhunt, the Indian government amended its IT Rules yet again to require major social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and others to rely exclusively on internal government fact-checking when determining whether any information

on their platforms about “any business” of the Indian government is false or misleading.<sup>37</sup> In other words, it is now a legal requirement for platforms operating in India to allow the Indian government to solely dictate whether information about its own policies and their consequences is true or false. Even as they protest via industry organizations, there is little indication that social media platforms will do anything other than comply in order to preserve their access to the world’s largest market.<sup>38</sup>

When considering the totality of the Indian government’s approach to dissent—leaning on Western governments to decry protests without engaging with the root causes; exerting ever-tightening control over what social media platforms can allow to be said within India; presenting hate tropes as absolute fact to be amplified by Western media; cutting off internet access and suspending democratic rights on a whim—it becomes painfully obvious that diasporic communities like the Sikh community are being boxed into a corner from which they feel they have no chance to advocate for themselves and their families back home. To wit: the Indian state’s misinformation operation has become so sophisticated that Sikh citizens of western democracies are being intimidated into believing they cannot exercise their constitutional rights to free speech.

## Case Study: The Chilling Effect of BJP Policies on Sikhs Outside India

In our interviews with community leaders, we focused on understanding how Sikh American communities experience bad news about the Punjab, like the news that broke on March 18th that the Indian state had cut off 4G internet statewide and invoked martial law in pursuit of Amritpal Singh.

The universal theme interviewees shared was that people reacted to the news quietly. Even in gurdwaras, among their own, most of the discussion entailed private conversations in which people would directly update each other about what they had heard. Some gurdwara secretaries made announcements, and some individuals logged into Whatsapp to broadcast and amplify messages. Ultimately, in most cases, people went quiet and didn't really spread anything: as one gurdwara leader told us, "this is what the Indian government has instilled within the Sikh community over years of persecution."

Reactions to the news differed depending upon the broad categories into which respondents fell, in a pattern belying the Indian state narrative that Amritpal Singh enjoys widespread support across all demographics in the diaspora. Some youth and older generations simply had no idea who Amritpal Singh was. Younger community members who were more aware and who did not have first-hand memories of the persecution of the entire community in the 1980s were more willing to engage with the issue, as they considered Amritpal Singh's social work to be his defining feature and rooted for him to evade the dragnet.

Quite a few older individuals who were aware of Amritpal Singh, on the other hand, expressed resentment for his behavior and rhetoric triggering another major military incursion into the Punjab and putting their families at risk of harm or death at the hands of Indian armed forces in a pattern reminiscent of the events that led to Operation Blue Star in 1984. Some individuals went even further, endorsing the view that Amritpal Singh was planted by the BJP to create the pretense for a crackdown on the entire Sikh community. The one consensus that was reported was that all demographics were certain Amritpal Singh's capture would be the very last time anyone ever heard from or about him, given India's draconian anti-terrorism statutes. The de jure policy holds that individuals accused of terrorism or sedition can be held for a year without being charged; the de facto reality is they can be and often are held indefinitely.<sup>39</sup>

The other critical consensus shared with us by gurdwara leaders was a deep reticence to post anything about the situation on social media. Sikh American community members developed a shared belief that if they posted what they thought and believed about the situation, they would never be able to return to India to see family again. Community members cited examples of individuals who lived in other countries doing a modicum of activism or social media activity, then being arrested by Indian authorities when they next attempted to visit family in Punjab. The fear of abuse and harassment of their families, and suffering those consequences directly should they set foot themselves in India, froze American citizens from exercising First Amendment rights that are guaranteed to them under the Constitution.

In addition to the patchwork of opinions and responses that are the opposite of the Indian government's depiction of Amritpal Singh's reach, community leaders also shared the frustration and resignation community members felt when they looked at media coverage of these events.

“If we google it, we see all this rhetoric about Khalistanis and a separatist movement and allegations that Amritpal Singh is a Pakistan-funded terrorist. That makes it complicated to engage because we see how easily the Indian government is pushing its narrative via Western media.”

— a community leader in California

Remarkably, we still saw our local communities overcome these well-founded fears of persecution because as Amritpal Singh continued to evade capture into mid-April, the

holy Sikh holiday of Vaisakhi began to loom on the calendar. Given the decades-old collective community trauma from Operation Blue Star, which was also conducted on a holy day for the community, Sikh Americans overcame their fear of censorship and punishment to reach out to organizations like SALDEF and their elected representatives to advocate for state and federal governments to take a stand and make clear that they were watching the events unfolding in Punjab.

While only two Congressional offices issued formal statements on the matter—and we remain deeply grateful to Representatives Judy Chu and Ilhan Omar for their principled stands on behalf of the community—we believe firmly that these statements went a long way toward curbing the Indian state's more violent instincts. The holiday of Vaisakhi came and went without mass violence. Amritpal Singh was arrested shortly afterwards, but the consequences inflicted by the Indian state on those who speak out about human rights violations in the Punjab continue to be painfully real.

## Case Study: Inflicting Personal and Professional Losses to Punish Sikh Advocates

While algorithmic censorship and shadowbanning is a persistent fear for those who attempt to advocate online for restoration of India's democracy and respect for religious freedoms, more vocal advocates face greater threats than that. SALDEF interviewed the founders of multiple diasporic Sikh advocacy organizations outside India to get a deeper sense of the digital warfare unleashed by the BJP on those who advance narratives outside those peddled by the Indian state.

Among those advocates, a common refrain was heavy trolling. They reported a long period of time in which their social media direct messages (DMs) were being flooded with hateful messages and reminders of key traumatic events, like Operation Blue Star in 1984. More recently and more troubling, however, is the fact that the hateful messages via DM are sent not just to the official organization accounts but to the personal accounts of founders and leaders. Some of these hateful messages come in response to specific posts from the advocacy organizations,

but some are pre-emptive of or arrive during flare-ups like the Farmers' Protest or the Amritpal Singh manhunt. Advocates reported older posts receiving new hateful comments on key holidays for the Indian state like Independence Day or Republic Day.



Faced with this volume and relentlessness, the inadequacy of protections for minorities on social media platforms once more becomes evident. Our interviewees reported a sense of helplessness and an intimidating scale, in which they simply cannot find time or will to report every single hateful Tweet or direct message or email. Despite the encouragement of platforms to report content in this vein, the onus remains on the targeted victims to sink significant time and effort that they do not have. As such, the current state of affairs is the advocates doing their best to ignore these messages and hiding some of the most hateful ones.

“Nobody is interested in dealing with it in any meaningful fashion because it's online and the wild west. So without direct evidence there's not a lot of support you can get.”

— a Canadian Sikh advocate

Even as the online attacks come in such volume that advocates are discouraged from even attempting to stem the flow, the damage to the same advocates who are real and non-anonymous online is much more profound. Some interviewees reported political trolling of their online businesses. In one example, even though the business was nonpolitical and worked in consumer products, extensive trolling from 2021 onward caused their Google Business listing to be hammered with negative reviews.

Given the real impact to his life, this advocate worked to mitigate this by using Google's official review mechanisms to try to get some of these false reviews removed, while urging his team members and customers to give offsetting and accurate 5-star reviews.

Unfortunately, he told us, “it's a 25:1 impact having a one star review versus a five star review.” Despite the fact that many of these were clearly radical hindu nationalists making comments unrelated to his business, he still had no success in getting those removed.



In yet another instance of social media platforms' support systems falling far short of their advertised efficacy, his navigation of Google's appeals machine included boilerplate responses like "we've conducted a thorough review and this seems fine"; which left him with the sole option of legal recourse. The reputational damage to his personal business, inflicted solely because of his exercise of his own free speech, has been substantial. The trolls not only filled in the company's web 'contact us' form with hateful messages and death threats, but then attacked his client list. Any client with their own web-based 'contact us' form received hateful messages accusing them of working with terrorists, as did any of his employees who had a reachable online presence. Ultimately, clients with whom he had longstanding service agreements terminated their partnerships because their legal arms classified his business as a risk, despite nothing changing about the business itself.

In our interviews with advocates who were punished by trolls for exercising free speech rights codified in the constitutions of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, a common question was asked: how is it that this wide array of trolls working across a variety of channels use the same small batch of doctored images as 'evidence'? Another common theme was resignation that this situation is not changing any time soon. Canadian advocates reported frustration that despite years of pleading with provincial and national governments to take foreign interference by India seriously, acknowledgments by PM Trudeau and his cabinet that this problem exists are few and far between.



Of possibly greatest concern is the increasing sophistication and granularity of the Indian state's control over the functioning of a free and open internet. Technically sophisticated advocates shared that their longstanding practice of using virtual private networks (VPNs) has been compromised in India. Historically, they could use a VPN to access their online content "from" India to see if it was blocked and, if so, determine appropriate domain names under which they could re-publish. From the summer of 2022 onward, this became impossible. Industry leading VPN products like NordVPN cannot connect users to servers in India.



This development speaks volumes to the variety of fronts on which the Indian state is developing and refining tools to clamp down on open data and communication. In the broader Sikh community there is an annoyance around Tweets getting shadowbanned or being drawn into online arguments with Hindutva trolls, but in some respects this misses the forest for the trees. There is a degree of sophistication to the digital architecture of the Indian state that bodes ill for anyone who believes that the Internet should be a means of open and transparent connection the world over—and especially those who believe that free speech should exist online the same ways it exists offline. As social media platforms continue to lag in addressing these problems, autocratic and technologically savvy states like India are increasing the gap.



# 4

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PLATFORMS: CHOOSE HUMAN RIGHTS

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PLATFORMS: CHOOSE HUMAN RIGHTS

*The recommendations we offer to correct the root issue of social media and western media manipulation by the Indian state are in many respects a retread of the recommendations in our Farmers' Protest censorship report, When #Sikh Was Banned Worldwide. This is a reflection of both the continued efficacy of the Indian government's strategies and of the lack of meaningful movement on the part of social media platforms to correct these vulnerabilities.*

To that end, we offer the following set of four policy recommendations in this censorship report that will help mitigate the issues we outlined, particularly regarding the issues of American companies performing international censorship on behalf of foreign governments. A close reading will find the recommendations are virtually unchanged from our Farmers' Protest report—a reflection of the Indian government's wisdom in continuing to use the same tools as long as social media platforms fail to heed advocates' warnings.

## **1** Developing International Standards for International Issues.

India, throughout the Modi administration, has been scored by Freedom House as being only 'Partly Free' in addition to the routine coverage of religious and political violence that are increasingly surfaced in reports like those prepared by US CIRF, the US State Department, and other nonprofit watchdogs like Access Now. In the case of the manhunt for Amritpal Singh, the Indian government was able to control the online narrative and use it in turn to define media coverage that overstated the presence of "radical" elements while failing to question the appropriateness of the Indian government's

draconian crackdowns. The root cause of all of this is social media companies' inability to restrict policies enacted at the request of one state to just that state's geographic borders.

We strongly endorse the development of geofencing protocols to curtail the ability of domestic political demands to adversely impact users outside those countries' borders. This will be particularly helpful in protecting the social graphs of users from becoming exploitable maps for governments like the Modi BJP. If a government is attempting to restrict religious expression globally because of agitation within its borders, social media companies should have policies in place that at least require consulting advocates of the same community before a decision is made on whether to comply. In the case of social media platforms banning #sikh, any number of advocacy organizations in the US, UK, Canada, or other free countries in which Meta operates could have brought clarity about the reasons behind and motivation for the Farmers' Protest.

## 2 Developing Greater Institutional Competence.

It would be a difficult ask for Meta, Google, or Twitter to employ multiple members of every global minority community. Regardless, when companies have achieved the scale and significance of social media firms, it is no longer viable for the firm to simply accept the word of a government as to what is happening within its borders or why it is demanding a specific set of data and/or takedowns. Fact-checking is becoming increasingly common across all platforms, which is a wonderful trend, but part of due diligence must be a detailed understanding of how a given platform may be abused within the context of historical friction between communities.

Given the plethora of advocacy organizations in the United States, it would be plausible for social media platforms to build a deep roster of consultants on issues impacting diasporic communities. These consultants should be leveraged not just in moments of duress or crisis, but on a steady and recurring basis so that social media companies can operate with maximal clarity.

## 3 Working Closely with Democracy- and Community-Oriented Nonprofits.

Organizations like Freedom House and Access Now are already engaged in documenting situations on the ground all over the world. Bringing some of the significant technical and/or monetary capacity of social media firms to these endeavors will facilitate

a re-commitment to the vision toward which social media companies were building a decade-and-a-half ago. This support can take many forms: boosting reports released by these organizations and citing them in policy decisions, helping these organizations build technical tools for reporting and analysis, or funding research conducted by academics and facilitated by nonprofits that centers on different communities' experiences with social media.

We ask for an explicit commitment to roll out new content moderation standards that prevent violence against marginalized groups while protecting the safety of users' rights to speech and congregation. A prerequisite for such standards should be prioritizing working with community-based organizations to ensure they have access to the appropriate datasets and algorithmic inputs that would allow for efficient monitoring of discourse across their platforms. Simultaneously, these platforms should work with minority communities to ensure they have a proper path of recourse to revive fully appropriate content after misrepresentation by hostile government actors.

## 4 Collaborating Offensively, Rather than Retreating Defensively

SALDEF calls for transparency in both the decision-making behind and implementation of social media content moderation standards and policies. As outlined throughout this document, Sikh Americans are especially concerned with how the standards mandated by foreign governments have and will continue to impact their ability to communicate, organize, and post online. In particular, it has become clear that the censorship of content in India has biased algorithmic content to automatically censor the same content in other regions of the world, including the United States. Moving forward, we hope these platforms will share their plans to prevent the ‘spillover’ of content moderation outside of the borders of specific countries. Moreover, SALDEF joins other community organizations in calling for Facebook, Google, and Twitter to specifically outline how they will ensure those in power are not favored at the expense of minority communities.

In keeping with the adage that the best defense is a good offense, social media companies should endeavor to be proactive against abuses of their platforms with the help of advocates. We hope to see social media companies adopt a position of trust and a realization that we all share a goal of distilling the positives of social media—like the ability to reconnect with people all over the world, including our loved ones oceans away—without the toxicity, confusion, and resentment that has been thus far weaponized for political gain.



# 5

## FUTURE WORK

## FUTURE WORK

*Our report on censorship during the Farmers' Protest and this sequel report on censorship during the Amritpal Singh manhunt do not represent the end of the road. As SALDEF endeavors to support global technology platforms in developing policy guardrails so they may carry out the mission of connecting people without complying in erasure of minority voices, we know our community is our power.*

Together with fellow advocates for other marginalized South Asian communities, we are developing a landscape report on the BJP's leverage of social media platforms' global reach to push Hindutva into American life. This report will underpin our shared efforts to advocate for South Asian Americans, as well as speaking with the voices of all of those communities. It is our hope that in doing this work together we can celebrate the pluralism that is India's greatest blessing, even as we work to protect the rights of all members of the Indian diaspora in the United States.

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