

'INDIANS VALUE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, NOT INTEGRATION'

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

Most Indians, cutting across religions, feel they enjoy religious freedom, value religious tolerance, and regard respect for all religions as central to what India is as a nation. At the same time the majority in each of the major religious groups show a marked preference for religious segregation and “want to live separately”, according to a nation-wide survey on religious attitudes, behaviours and beliefs conducted by Pew Research Center, a non-profit based in Washington DC.

For instance, the report found that 91% of Hindus felt they have religious freedom, while 85% of them believed that respecting all religions was very important ‘to being truly Indian’.

Also, for most Hindus, religious tolerance was not just a civic virtue but also a religious value, with 80% of them stating that respecting other religions was an integral aspect of ‘being Hindu’. Other religions showed similar numbers for freedom of religion and religious tolerance. While 89% of Muslims and Christians said they felt free to practice their religion, the comparative figures for Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were 82%, 93%, and 85% respectively.

And yet, paradoxically the majority in all the faiths scored poorly on the metrics for religious segregation: composition of friends circle, views on stopping inter-religious marriage, and willingness to accept people of other religions as neighbours. The survey found that nationally, three-in-ten Hindus took both these positions: linking being Hindu and speaking Hindi to being Indian, and voting for BJP. But there was a clear geographical skew in their distribution: while roughly half of the Hindu voters in northern and central India fell into this category, only 5% of Hindu voters in the South did so.

Also, Hindu nationalist sentiments were less prevalent in the South.

Among Hindus, those in the South (42%) were far less likely to say that being Hindu was very important to being truly Indian.

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