

# How Indian Americans are reacting to Kamala Harris as Joe Biden's VP pick

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By [Rupa Shenoy](#)

Sonya Mehta, who directs the youth council of [Desi Blue](#), a group formed in 2018 to organize South Asians to elect Democratic candidates, is enthusiastic about Kamala Harris, Joe Biden's vice presidential nominee.

“She is a really powerful example of the diverse tapestry of this country, which is, I think, in sharp contrast to Donald Trump's anti-immigrant, racist rhetoric and bigotry,” said Mehta, who is based in Oakland, California.

Harris, born to an Indian mother and Jamaican father, is the first candidate on a major party ticket in the US to have an Indian background.

For many Indian Americans, Harris symbolizes the inherent multiculturalism that resonates with their lives in the US. But India is also a source of friction among the campaign's Indian American supporters. Some say Biden and Harris haven't addressed crucial India-related issues. Others are still weighing things.

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Karthik Soora, Desi Blue chapter in Houston

“I did not expect to feel so emotional about all of this,” said Karthik Soora, who helps lead a Desi Blue chapter in Houston.

He says he feels seen in a way he hadn’t before — in part because Harris is the child of interracial marriage, born in 1964 when interracial marriage was still legally forbidden.

“I think Kamala offers us a possibility of what the world can be, in terms of ‘out of many, creating one.’”

[Attorney Amar Shergill](#), chair of the Progressive Caucus of the California Democratic Party, supports the Biden-Harris campaign and wants India to continue as an important US ally, but also believes Democrats should hold India accountable for the treatment of its marginalized communities.

“They [Biden and Harris] very rarely speak out regarding the horrors and oppression that marginalized communities — Dalits, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, women — are forced to face in India,” Shergill said.

The situation in India is a lot like the current political reality of the US, in that [Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#), like President Donald

Trump, is a deeply divisive leader. Critics say Modi has led the BJP party to its apex by persecuting and oppressing minorities in [pursuit of a more Hindu nationalist state](#).

However, Shergill notes that Modi supporters — including many Indian Americans — see Modi as someone who has helped India's poor and encouraged development.

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Some activists in the US and India have been working to connect the Black Lives Matter movement with marginalized communities in India.

“This is really about who do we want to be at the end of the day, when our children ask us, ‘Did you stand on the right side of

history?” said Thenmozhi Soundararajan, who leads [Equality Labs](#), a US-based organization advocating for lower-caste Dalit rights in India and the US.

Soundararajan said it’s important for Harris to acknowledge her Indian family’s own high-caste status — particularly because caste discrimination seems to be encroaching on the US. Soundararajan points to caste discrimination lawsuits being filed in Silicon Valley.

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Yet other Biden-Harris supporters with Indian heritage say the focus should remain on defeating Trump.

“I think that people are looking in this current time with everything that's going on — whether it's racial justice or coronavirus or anything else — for this perfect candidate that does not exist,” said [Feroza Syed](#), who helped found the Atlanta chapter of Desi Blue, and defends Harris against possibly undue criticism.

“What bothers me currently is that I think she's being held to a standard that we don't see our male politicians, our white politicians or others, held to.”

Syed said Harris has shown a capacity to acknowledge mistakes, change her positions, and grow.