

Hindu Holidays: Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Hinduism (or Sanatana Dharma) is the third-largest religion in the world behind Christianity and Islam, with nearly 1 billion adherents.¹ According to the Pew Research Center, about 1% of Americans self-identify as Hindu.² Originating on the Indian subcontinent, Hinduism is often described as a combination of many religious beliefs and philosophical schools. “Hindu” originated as the term used by ancient Persians to describe the people who lived beyond the Indus River Valley (in Sanskrit, “Sindhu”). The term “Hinduism” began to be more widely used by devotees on the Indian subcontinent and throughout the world by the end of the 19th century.³

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to Hindu holidays. It contains significant holidays and observances, legislation, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential proclamations and remarks, and selected governmental and nongovernmental resources.

This is part of a series of Congressional Research Service fact sheets on religious holidays in the United States.

Holidays and Observances

Hindu holidays are historically observed following the lunar calendar, which is based on the waxing and waning of the moon. In India, observance dates are typically determined using both the solar calendar and the traditional lunar calendar.⁴ Because the Hindu religious calendar has “many technical details and regional variations, along with various overlapping systems,”⁵ this fact sheet uses the traditional Gregorian calendar for approximate months. The following are selected holidays that may be observed throughout the United States.

Selected Major Holidays

Holi

Holi is a spring festival, also known as the festival of colors. It falls in late February or early March. On the eve of Holi, some practitioners burn an effigy of the demoness Holika, to commemorate her defeat by a young prince named Prahlada, who was devoted to Lord Vishnu. Among many observers, Holi is tied to the devotion of Lord Krishna and commemorates his love for his consort Radha. Holi is most known for the practice of playfully throwing colored powder and colored water balloons at family, friends, and strangers.⁶

¹ Stephanie Kramer, *Key findings about the religious composition of India*, Pew Research Center, September 21, 2021, p. 5, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/21/key-findings-about-the-religious-composition-of-india/>; Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050, Pew Research Center, December 21, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050/>.

² Pew Research Center, *2023-24 U.S. Religious Landscape Study Interactive Database*, 2025, doi: 10.58094/3zs9-jc14.

³ J. Brodd et al., *Invitation to World Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 83-143.

⁴ R. Rinehart, *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 123-153.

⁵ *Britannica Academic*, n.d., “Hindu calendar,” <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Hindu-calendar/40517>.

⁶ Manveena Suri, “Why India celebrates Holi: The legends behind the festival of color,” *CNN*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/01/asia/india-holi-explainer-intl/index.html>.

Diwali

Diwali, or Deepavali, is the Hindu festival of lights. It often falls between mid-October and mid-November, and for some observers coincides with the beginning of the New Year. Although the specific celebrations vary by region and group, Diwali is a celebration of the “victory of light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair.”⁷ It is celebrated over five days and often observed by wearing new clothes, participating in pujas (prayer or worship), exchanging gifts, cleaning the home, lighting oil lamps, participating in festivals, and setting off fireworks.⁸

Other Significant Holidays

Dussehra

Dussehra, or Dasera, the 10th and final day of the festival of Navaratri, is often observed as a celebration to commemorate Lord Rama’s victory over Ravana, as told in the sacred Hindu text, the *Ramayana*.⁹ Dussehra typically falls between late September and early October.

Raksha Bandhan

Raksha Bandhan is a festival that celebrates and honors the bond between a brother and a sister. Ceremonies often include a sister tying a ceremonial thread or amulet called a *rakhi* around a brother’s wrist, as a symbol of her love. The brother provides a gift in return, as a symbol of his promise to protect her. Raksha Bandhan typically falls in August.¹⁰

Krishna Janmashtami

Krishna Janmashtami celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna. It is observed on the eighth day of the *dark fortnight*¹¹ and begins with fasting the preceding day until midnight. Prayers occur at midnight and temples are decorated with leaves and flowers. Krishna Janmashtami typically falls between August and September.¹²

Legislation

H.Res. 69—Celebrating Hindu Americans, condemning attacks on Hindu places of worship, Hinduphobia, and anti-Hindu bigotry, and for other purposes, introduced on January 24, 2025.

⁷ D. Heiligman and V. Narayanan, *Celebrate Diwali: With Sweets, Lights and Fireworks* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2008).

⁸ R. Rinehart, *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 149-150.

⁹ The *Ramayana* is one of many Hindu sacred texts. Others include, but are not limited to, the *Mahabharata*, which contains the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Puranas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Vedas*. (J. Brodd et al., *Invitation to World Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 99-103).

¹⁰ Newsround, “Raksha Bandhan: What is it, when is it and how is it celebrated?,” *BBC*, August 30, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/66616799>.

¹¹ Each month of the Hindu calendar is divided into two fortnights, the dark fortnight corresponds to the waning of the moon and the bright fortnight corresponds to the waxing of the moon. For more information, see *Britannica Academic*, n.d., “Hindu calendar,” <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Hindu-calendar/40517>.

¹² *Britannica Academic*, n.d., “Janmashtami,” <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Janmashtami/43341>.

H.Res. 844—Recognizing the religious and historical significance of the festival of Diwali, introduced November 3, 2023.

H.R. 3336—Diwali Day Act, introduced on May 15, 2023.

H.Res. 764—Recognizing the religious and historical significance of the festival of Diwali, introduced on November 2, 2021.

Related CRS Reports

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus.

CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*, by Jacob R. Straus et al.

Selected Statements and Speeches

Some members of Congress make floor statements, issue press releases, introduce resolutions, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

Representative Jim Costa, “Happy Diwali,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 169 (November 9, 2023), p. H5657.

Representative Josh Harder, “Celebrating Diwali,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 169 (November 7, 2023), p. H5480.

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, “CAPAC Members Celebrate Holi,” press release, March 8, 2023.

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, “CAPAC Members Celebrate Diwali,” press release, October 24, 2022.

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, “Congressman Krishnamoorthi Joins President Biden At White House Celebration Of Diwali,” press release, October 24, 2022.

Representative Buddy Carter, “Hindu Heritage Month,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 167 (October 27, 2021), p. H5955.

Selected Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some recent proclamations and remarks commemorating Hindu holidays from the *Compilation of Presidential Documents*¹³ include

Presidential Statements—Donald J. Trump (2025-)¹⁴

Presidential Statements—Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (2021-2025)

¹³ The *Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains proclamations and remarks from 1992 to the present and is available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/CPD>.

¹⁴ Link provides access to proclamations and remarks made by President Trump during both of his nonconsecutive terms, where available.

Presidential Statements—Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)¹⁵

Presidential Statements—Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)

Remarks prior to 1992 are available through the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara.¹⁶

Government Resources

Federal government resources provide information on the history and culture of Hinduism. Some of these include the following:

ShareAmerica, a resource maintained by the U.S. Department of State, includes several entries regarding the celebration of Hindu holidays in the United States, including “Diwali brings ‘a sense of togetherness.’”

National Archives collections include historical celebrations of Hindu holidays, including Diwali. Diwali celebrations at the U.S. Capitol in 2024 with BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

Nongovernment Resources

Below is a selected list of nongovernmental resources for additional information on the history and culture of Hinduism.

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) is a nonprofit advocacy organization for the Hindu American community. HAF’s website includes information about Hinduism and common Hindu holidays. It also includes a toolkit on Holi and other Hindu holidays.

The National Geographic Society provides resources for educators and learners on Hindu holidays, including Diwali and Holi.

¹⁵ Link provides access to proclamations and remarks made by President Trump during both of his nonconsecutive terms, where available.

¹⁶ The American Presidency Project, hosted by the University of California, Santa Barbara, offers browsing and searching of many presidential documents (including selected audio and video clips) at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

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