

GREAT DECISIONS

1918 • FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

HIGH SCHOOL

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INDIA

AND THE UNITED STATES

**A BUDDING
PARTNERSHIP**

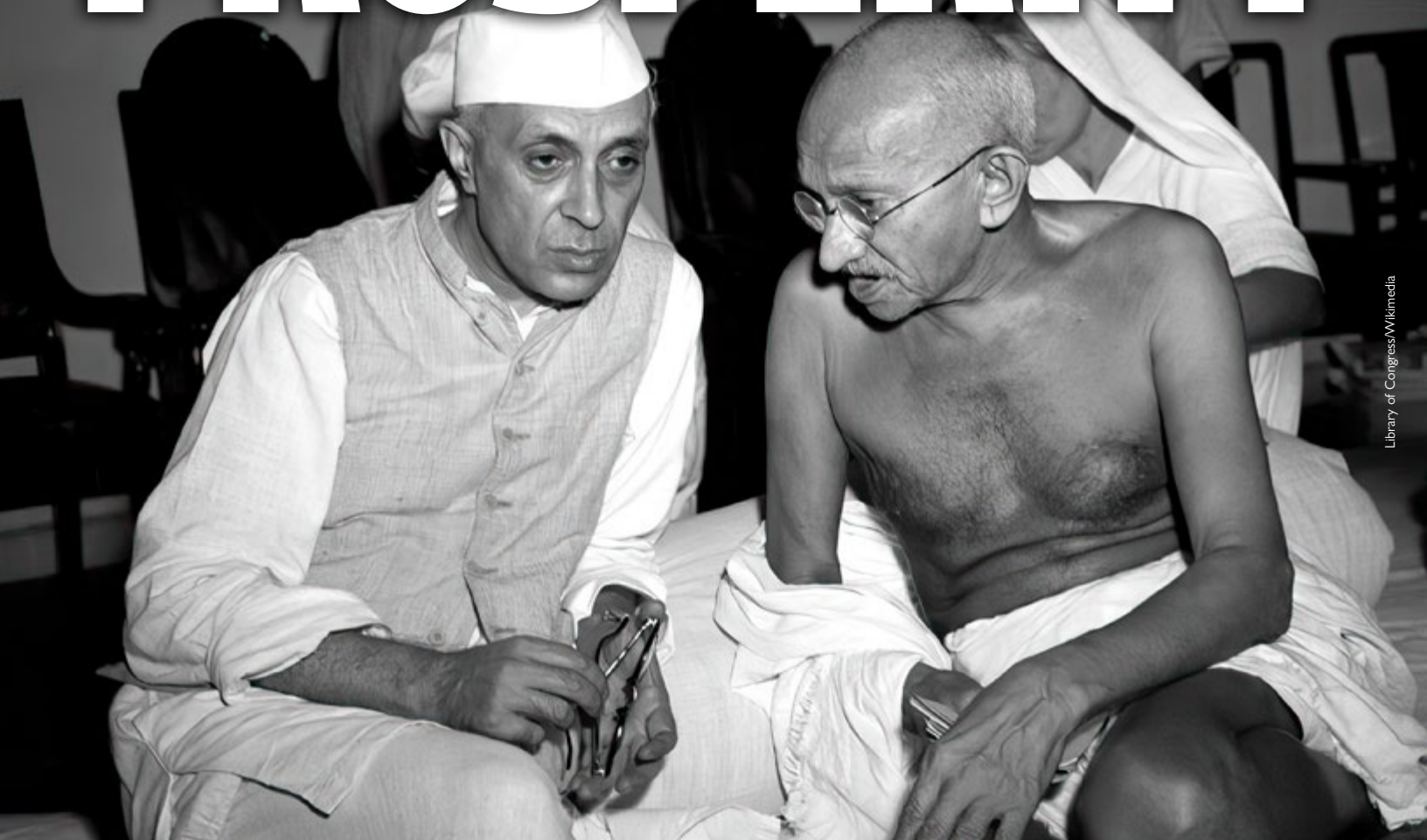
**CULTURAL
CROSSOVER**

**GLOBAL
CHALLENGES**

BY AKSHAT SINGH



SHARED PROSPERITY



Library of Congress/Wikimedia

Jawaharlal Nehru (left) and Mahatma Gandhi (right), pictured here in 1946, helped lead a peaceful movement for Indian independence.

India and the United States are two of the world's most prominent **democracies**. The two countries have not always been close allies. But over the past few years, the partnership between them has strengthened substantially. Today, India is recognized as an important strategic partner to the United States due to its large (and growing) economy, skilled workforce, and advances in science and technology.

The US-India partnership hinges on a common respect for a democratic, **liberal** world order. The two countries also share a goal of countering an increasingly powerful China. But while the relationship continues to blossom, India and the United States still have many differences, and relations between them do not always go smoothly. Understanding the nuances of the US-India relationship will be key to ensuring its sustained growth and success.

THE ORIGIN OF MODERN INDIA

The roots of modern India's global significance can be traced back thousands of years to the Indus Valley Civilization, known for its advanced city-building and technological achievements. In the following centuries, many different cultures developed and thrived in the region that is now India.

In the 19th century, India became a **colony** of the British Empire. However, many Indians

did not want to live under British rule, and the colonial period led to a long struggle for independence. By 1947, thanks to leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, India had gained independence through a nonviolent struggle that inspired similar movements around the world. Jawaharlal Nehru, as India's first prime minister, steered the newly formed country toward democracy and self-reliance.

GOVERNMENT AND CULTURE

Much like the United States, India's government operates under a **federal** structure with a multi-party system. The president serves as the ceremonial head of state, while the prime minister wields executive power similar to that of the US president. India's parliament, composed of two houses—the **Lok Sabha** (lower house) and the **Rajya Sabha** (upper house)—is the heart of its democracy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led the country since 2014, becoming the third-longest-serving prime minister after Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

India's federal system divides powers between the central government and its 28 states and 8 union territories. Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, has a population exceeding 240 million—more than most countries. Like in the US, each state has the power to make its own laws, which leads to differences in areas like education, health, and law enforcement. This style of government allows for diverse approaches to modernization and



DigitalVision Vectors/Getty Images

India's northern borders are under dispute with both Pakistan and China.

development across the nation.

India's cultural diversity is one of its defining features. With 22 official languages, numerous religions, and festivals that could fill every day of the year, India is a vibrant mosaic of traditions.

But while colorful **Bollywood** movies and thrilling **cricket** matches dominate the cultural scene, the country also grapples with challenges like poverty and inequality. Efforts to modernize technology, **infrastructure**, and

THE DEBATE

SHOULD THE US ENCOURAGE IMMIGRATION FROM INDIA?

YES

- ✓ Immigration brings valuable cultural exchange and the sharing of ideas.
- ✓ Attracting talented workers from India will help companies increase their performance.
- ✓ The US has always been a “**melting pot**” of different cultures, and it's important to preserve this tradition.

NO

- ✗ Immigrants take jobs and other resources that could go to current US citizens.
- ✗ There are plenty of talented workers in the US already.
- ✗ Encouraging the most skilled Indians to come to the US leaves India with a smaller talent pool for its own companies and projects.



Great Art/Dreamstime.com



Zee Studios

Drawing more than a billion dollars at the box office each year, Bollywood is one of the world's biggest film industries. The word "Bollywood" is a combination of "Hollywood" and "Bombay" (the former name for Mumbai). Bollywood films are known for their combination of action, comedy, romance, and musical sequences.

education are reshaping India in the 21st century. Notably, India's [space program](#) has achieved remarkable milestones, such as sending a spacecraft to Mars on a budget smaller than that of most Hollywood films.

JOINING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The 1990s marked a turning point for India's economy and its global standing. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, India embraced economic liberalization—in other words, it reduced restrictions on how private companies do business. These changes unleashed India's economic potential and laid the

foundation for a partnership with the United States. The two nations began to collaborate more closely on trade, technology, and security, setting the stage for the dynamic relationship we see today.

Since the economic reforms of the 1990s, India's economy has grown impressively. It is now the world's fifth-largest economy and is predicted to become the third-largest by 2030. Key sectors driving this growth include information technology, agriculture, and services. Despite this progress, challenges such as poverty and unemployment persist.

India's young and growing population presents immense opportunities in emerging sectors like clean energy, digital services,

and advanced manufacturing. Its active participation in global platforms like the **G20** highlights its increasing economic influence. India's "Make in India" initiative has also attracted international companies to set up manufacturing hubs, further integrating the country into **global supply chains**.

THE US-INDIA RELATIONSHIP TODAY

Today, the US is one of India's largest [trading partners](#), with key sectors including technology, agriculture, and pharmaceuticals. American companies have found a hub in India's growing information technology (IT) sector, while Indian firms are making significant

investments in the US. Innovation and technology remain major areas of collaboration, bolstered by India's skilled workforce and vibrant startup ecosystem. Joint ventures in green energy, artificial intelligence, and semiconductor manufacturing are expected to drive the next phase of economic collaboration.

Both nations also recognize the importance of resource security. Through the Minerals Security Partnership, they are working to reduce reliance on nations like China for critical minerals.

Defense ties have also grown considerably. Joint exercises, co-production of military technology, and intelligence sharing have enhanced the two nations' militaries' ability to work together. The US and India now collaborate on issues ranging from counter-terrorism to ensuring security in the Indo-Pacific region, driven by shared concerns about China. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which is made up of the US, India, Japan, and Australia, continues to play a big role in coordinating regional security efforts. Leaders from the four countries meet each year to discuss issues such as maritime security, disaster response, and infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific region.


The immigration of Indian people to the US has led to a major

Indian students account for 29 percent of the total international student population in the United States.

THE DEBATE

SHOULD THE US PUSH INDIA ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES?

<h4>YES</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The US has a moral obligation to raise concerns about issues like freedom of speech and religious tolerance in India.✓ Open dialogue on human rights strengthens democratic institutions, benefiting both nations in the long run.✓ Without pressure from the US, India will not address these issues.	<h4>NO</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ India views external pressure on domestic matters as interference, which can undermine trust.✗ Both nations should focus on shared goals like economic development and security.✗ India will address its internal issues on its own timeline.
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cultural exchange. The Indian **diaspora** in the US, now over four million strong, contributes significantly to technology, academia, and popular culture. Educational exchanges bring thousands of Indian students to US universities each year; Indian students

account for 29 percent of the total international student population in the United States. Cultural exchanges—from Bollywood films to American fast food chains—strengthen personal and relatable connections. For example, the popularity of naan and

India's spicy curry dishes have become popular all around the world.





Alex Brandon/AP Images

US president Donald Trump meets with Indian prime minister Narendra Modi. Based on their shared nationalist approach to governing, a strong relationship between the two leaders is expected to continue during Trump's second term in office.

curry in New York is matched by pizza and burgers in Mumbai!

FUTURE CHALLENGES

While the US-India partnership holds immense promise, it also faces significant challenges. Trade battles, differing perspectives on global order, and human rights issues remain areas of friction. The **tariff** wars during the first Trump administration left lasting impacts, and additional future disagreements over trade could disrupt progress.

One of the most pressing issues is [climate change](#). As two of the world's largest economies, the US and India both face growing pressure to lead in reducing carbon emissions. However, the two have very different approaches. India is focused on economic growth and energy access, while the US emphasizes rapid decarbonisation. Finding common ground on sustainable practices and green technology will be critical.

Human rights concerns also continue to pose a sensitive challenge. US officials have occasionally raised concerns about India's domestic policies on freedom of speech, religious tolerance, and press freedom. India views such criticisms as interference in its internal affairs. Managing these delicate issues without undermining the partnership's broader goals will require nuanced diplomacy.

Another potential challenge lies in technological collaboration. As both nations advance in sectors like artificial intelligence and quantum computing, disagreements over data protection, intellectual property, and technology

THE DEBATE

IS IT FAIR TO HOLD THE US AND INDIA TO THE SAME STANDARDS FOR CLIMATE ISSUES?

YES

- ✓ To solve climate change, all countries will need to reduce their use of fossil fuels.
- ✓ India is the most populated country in the world.
- ✓ Climate change is the biggest issue facing all people today, no matter where they live.

NO

- ✗ India is still growing and modernizing, and it needs more energy to achieve these goals.
- ✗ India already produces fewer carbon emissions per person than the US.
- ✗ India is predicted to be more heavily impacted than the US by the effects of climate change.



Adobe Stock

transfer could arise. Establishing frameworks for ethical and secure technology sharing will be essential for avoiding conflicts in these high-stakes areas.

Finally, regional stability remains a significant concern. Instability in South Asia—whether due to political crises in

neighboring countries, terrorism, or refugee movements—could impact both nations’ strategic interests. The US and India will need to work together to address these challenges while respecting each other’s unique regional roles.

The US-India relationship is dynamic and evolving, driven

by shared democratic values and mutual goals for global stability. By addressing challenges and building on shared interests, the two nations can shape a future that allows both to thrive. The journey ahead is filled with potential—and perhaps a few shared recipes for fusion dishes along the way!

TEEN TRAILBLAZERS



Press Association/AP Images

Uday Bhatia

While visiting a village in Uttar Pradesh, 18-year-old Uday Bhatia (pictured above with Prince William of Great Britain) of Delhi learned that people in the village faced frequent power outages lasting 8 to 10 hours daily. Determined to help children who couldn’t afford backup power devices to study during these outages, Uday developed a special type of [light bulb](#) capable of providing up to 10 hours of backup light during power cuts. After eight months and 24 prototypes, the bulb, priced affordably, became a reality in May 2022. The venture’s tagline, “*Bijli gul phir bhi ujjala full*” (“Even if the power is cut, there will still be light”), reflects its mission. Uday has sold thousands of the bulbs and donated hundreds more to people in need.

Sirish Subhash

for his groundbreaking invention: a low-cost, biodegradable bandage designed to accelerate wound healing. His innovative bandage incorporates a unique blend of natural polymers and medicinal herbs, promoting faster tissue regeneration while minimizing infection risks. Sirish’s project stood out among thousands of entries in the [3M Young Scientist Challenge](#), earning him a \$25,000 prize. His invention holds significant potential for improving medical care, especially in underserved communities lacking access to advanced wound treatment options.



3M Young Scientist Lab



"Our salaries are so low, companies in India are outsourcing to us."

Harley Schwabron/CartoonStock.com

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

1. What is this cartoon trying to say? Why do or don't you agree?
2. What is outsourcing? What are the pros and cons of this practice?
3. Why are the American workers in the cartoon surprised their salaries are lower than those of Indian workers?

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS

1. What are the most important reasons for the US to continue building a strong relationship with India?
2. What, if anything, should the US government be doing differently to adjust its relations with India?
3. **YOUR STORY:** What is your experience with Indian culture? What do you like best about movies, music, food, or other things from India?

KEY WORDS & TERMS

Bollywood	G20	melting pot
colony	global supply chains	Rajya Sabha
cricket	infrastructure	tariff
democracies	liberal	
diaspora	Lok Sabha	



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