



Understanding & Addressing Anti-Sikh Hate in Canada

Authored by the World Sikh Organization of Canada
Funded by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation





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Executive Summary

Understanding and Addressing Anti-Sikh Hate in Canada is the first comprehensive report dedicated to documenting and analyzing the experiences of hate and discrimination against Sikhs across Canada. Developed by the *World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO)* and funded by the *Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF)*, this report combines survey data from over 1,600 Sikh Canadians collected between January 1st and March 1st, 2025 with nationwide town halls to present a detailed picture of how hate, discrimination, and systemic exclusion impact one of Canada's most visible and vibrant communities.

Funding for this report was provided by CRRF; however, the content, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations are solely those of WSO.

Sikhs have lived in Canada for over a century and have made significant contributions to every aspect of Canadian life, from building infrastructure in the early 20th century to holding leadership roles in government and civil society today. Despite this, Sikhs face persistent hate, discrimination, and marginalization. Anti-Sikh hate stems from two main sources: domestic racism and xenophobia, and transnational repression and disinformation, specifically from India.

The report defines anti-Sikh hate as prejudice or hostility against individuals who are or are perceived to be Sikh based on their appearance, beliefs, or advocacy related to their identity. It includes physical violence, online harassment, political profiling, systemic exclusion from institutions, and the denial of religious rights. Anti-Sikh hate manifests on multiple, overlapping levels, including institutional, community-level, transnational, and individual-level hate, and must also be understood through an intersectional lens, where gender, visibility, and immigration status compound the impact of the hate.

In this report, “anti-Sikh hate” is used as a broad term encompassing a spectrum of attitudes, actions, and systemic practices directed at Sikhs or those perceived to be Sikh. It includes conduct that may not meet the legal threshold for hate speech or hate crimes under Canadian law, but nonetheless contributes to exclusion, marginalization, and harm.



Key findings from the report include:

- Over 80% of respondents felt that hate and discrimination against Sikhs have increased in the past five years.
- According to the survey, verbal harassment was the most commonly reported form of hate, with 65% of participants indicating they had experienced it.
- Incidents ranged from hate crimes and school bullying to employment discrimination and invasive airport screenings.
- Visible Sikhs, including Sikh women, international students, and Sikhs in Quebec experience overlapping barriers linked to racial, gender, and regional inequities.
- 91% of visibly identifiable Sikhs (e.g. those who wear dastaars) reported being targeted.
- Respondents who speak French in Québec were far more likely to report experiencing anti-Sikh hate (at 89% compared to 65% who did not speak French). This indicates that French language use may increase visibility and perceived difference, amplifying experiences of discrimination.
- Of the over one thousand respondents who answered a question regarding hate experiences based on one's political beliefs and/or support for Khalistan, 54% of those reported experiencing hate.
- Nearly 65% of respondents reported that hate incidents had significantly impacted their mental health and well-being.
- Anti-Sikh hate often goes unreported, with over 70% of victims choosing to not report incidents, citing futility, a fear of retaliation, or a lack of institutional support.

To address this growing problem, the report calls for:

- Adoption of a formal, federal definition of anti-Sikh hate in Canada's next Anti-Racism Strategy.
- Inclusion of Sikh-specific concerns in Canada's next national Anti-Racism Strategy.
- Public reporting of data on hate crimes and other race/religiously-motivated crimes with a disaggregated category to include Sikhs.
- Public education campaigns and cultural competency training for law enforcement and public servants.
- Targeted policy responses that recognize the diversity within Sikh communities both provincially and nationally.
- Institutional support for gurdwaras and community organizations to enhance security and resilience.

Section 27 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* affirms the preservation and enhancement of Canada's multicultural heritage. The continued targeting and hate toward Sikhs undermines this constitutional commitment and highlights the urgent need for meaningful action to uphold the rights and dignity of all Canadians.

Anti-Sikh hate is a contemporary, growing issue that requires serious attention from all sectors of Canadian society. This report provides the data, context, and lived experiences necessary to inform real policy change and meaningful action.



Image of pro-India Hindutva nationalist mobs gathered at the Hindu Sabha Mandir in Brampton in November 2024, where incidents of violence and hate were reported.



Understanding and Addressing Anti-Sikh Hate in Canada

Introduction

Context

Sikh Canadians are an integral part of Canada's multicultural fabric - from building railways and farms in British Columbia in the early 1900s to serving at the highest levels of government today, Sikh Canadians exemplify the Canadian ideals of diversity and inclusion¹. Yet, alongside these contributions, another troubling reality exists: persistent violence, prejudicial treatment and hatred towards Sikhs². This report seeks to better understand, contextualize, quantify, and define anti-Sikh hate.

Today, Sikhs form a global community with over 30 million adherents. At more than 1,000,000 Sikhs, Canada has the highest proportion of Sikhs relative to the national population, higher even than India³. The largest Sikh populations in Canada are found in Ontario, followed by British Columbia and Alberta⁴. The Sikh-Canadian experience is uniquely marked by religious and racially-motivated violence, discrimination, and bias that has become commonplace in Canada.



The above image is a photograph from the Downtown Toronto Nagar Kirtan in 2016.

¹ Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada. "Sikhs in Canada." Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada, <https://shmc.ca/events-exhibitions/sikhs-in-canada>. Accessed 14 May 2025.

² Sandhu, Gian Singh. *An Uncommon Road: How Canadian Sikhs Struggled Out of the Fringes and Into the Mainstream*. 1st ed., Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., 2019.

³ Statistics Canada. "Religion by Visible Minority and Generation Status: Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations with Parts." *Table 98-10-0342-01*, 26 October 2022, <https://doi.org/10.25318/9810034201-eng>.

⁴ Ibid.



Anti-Sikh hate is not new, nor is it recent. Sikh Canadians have endured a persistent and multifaceted pattern of discrimination for decades in Canada that directly impacts their lives and threatens their safety⁵. For example, in 1907, Anti-Asian riots shook the Pacific Northwest where Sikhs were targeted alongside other Asians and violently beaten, including in Vancouver's Chinatown^{6,7}. In response to the influx of labourers from Asia, the Continuous Journey Regulation of 1908 was developed as an anti-Asian migration legislation and effectively barred legal migration of Sikhs to Canada⁸. An anti-imperialist named Gurdit Singh challenged this regulation by chartering a ship to Canada and naming it the *Guru Nanak Jahaz*⁹. On April 4 1914¹⁰ it sailed continuously from Hong Kong to Vancouver with 376 Punjabi passengers on it, 351 of whom were Sikhs. Upon arrival, the passengers were not permitted to disembark and while docked in Vancouver harbour for two months, the passengers were left hungry, without water, medical aid, and faced other forms of inhumane treatment. After forcefully being made to return, the passengers faced arrest upon their arrival in India, and some were killed at the hands of British officials during the Budge Budge riot¹¹.

The *Guru Nanak Jahaz*, widely known as the Komagata Maru incident, serves as a prime example of how race-based immigration policies have targeted Sikhs. Since the *Guru Nanak Jahaz* incident, Sikhs have faced continued harm from being violently assaulted in public, demeaned, harassed, or profiled as extremists to facing obstacles in employment, education, and public service due to visible articles of faith like the *dastaar* (Sikh turban) or *kirpan* in Canada, and even being killed for it. Anti-Sikh hatred is not a new phenomenon but a pattern that is problematically woven deep into Canada's social psyche which impacts public opinion, influences government policy, and threatens the lives of Sikhs in Canada.

⁵ Canada, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. *Evidence*, 44th Parliament, 1st Session, Meeting No. 110, 3 June 2024, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/44-1/SECU/meeting-110/evidence>. The committee hearing included expert testimony from WSO's Legal Counsel.

⁶ Englesberg, Paul. "The 1907 Bellingham Riot and Anti-Asian Hostilities in the Pacific Northwest." *Walden Faculty and Staff Publications*, vol. 177, 2015, <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1188&context=facpubs>.

⁷ South Asian American Digital Archive. "Gifts of Famine: Invasion of Sikhs from the Punjab" (1907). 13 July 2011, <https://www.saada.org/item/20110713-236>.

⁸ Khalsa Diwan Society. *Settler History*. Canadian Sikh Heritage, 2018, <https://canadiansikhheritage.ca/passage-to-canada/>.

⁹ City of Vancouver. "Guru Nanak Jahaz (Komagata Maru) Place." 4 May 2025, <https://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/guru-nanak-jahaz-place.aspx>.

¹⁰ Johnston, Hugh. "Komagata Maru." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 7 February 2006, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/komagata-maru>.

¹¹ Singh, Baba Gurdit. *Guru Nanak Jahaz*. Edited by Gurdev Singh Sidhu and Gurvinder Singh, Guru Nanak Heritage Society BC, Canada, Lokgeet Parkashan, 2024.

Recent discourse in Canada has seen misleading and harmful narratives blaming immigrants (often to reference Sikh Punjabis) for systemic issues like housing shortages, youth unemployment, and crime. Domestically, higher levels of immigration and the visibility of Sikh Canadians in public life have unfortunately provoked xenophobic backlash¹². Accounts on social media platforms have amplified racist tropes about communities such as Brampton's Sikh population, stoking fears about "overrepresentation" or unwelcomed population change. Such rhetoric not only causes physical and mental harm by fueling anti-immigrant and specifically, anti-Sikh sentiments, but it also contributes to hate crimes against Sikhs and has impacted legitimate policy debates. The need to document and confront anti-Sikh hate is urgent and clear.

The Anti-Sikh Hate Project is the first of its kind, shedding light on the threats that Sikh-Canadians continue to experience due to hate and discrimination. Funded by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) and developed and implemented by the World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO), the Anti-Sikh Hate Project examines the varied forms of discrimination, ranging from violence and overt racism to systemic exclusion and microaggressions. With a survey sample of over 1,600 Sikh-Canadians, this report includes the largest data collection on Sikh-Canadians to date. This report also includes insights gathered through townhalls from across the country that provide a nuanced, evidence-based account of the threat anti-Sikh hatred poses to Sikhs in Canada. It also addresses the institutional failures that allow this hate to go unchallenged and unresolved. Ultimately, this report demonstrates a critical framework for understanding the layers of hate endured by Sikh-Canadians; it is a timely opportunity for governments, institutions, and civil society to implement the meaningful and lasting solutions suggested by this report.



Images from World Sikh Organization anti-Sikh hate townhalls held in British Columbia and Edmonton, where hundreds of participants shared lived experiences of discrimination and harassment.

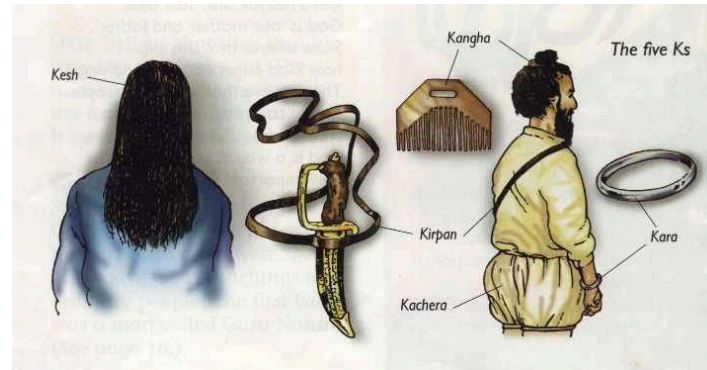
¹² Mehler Paperny, Anna. "Backlash against Immigrants Challenges Canada's Welcoming Image." *Reuters*, 6 September 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/backlash-against-immigrants-challenges-canadas-welcoming-image-2024-09-06/>.

An Introduction to Sikhs and Sikhi

Sikhi is a distinct faith founded in the 15th century by Guru Nanak in Punjab. Guru Nanak asserted a belief in One Creator whose light is in all creation therefore creating a fundamental equality between all individuals, regardless of race, religion, gender, caste or nationality. Grounded in the concepts of *seva* (selfless service) and *sarbat da bhala* (the upliftment of all), Guru Nanak took his message from Punjab to across Asia, including throughout India, current day China, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Iraq. His teachings were carried forward by nine successive Gurus and compiled in the Sikh scripture, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*¹³, which exists as the living and eternal Guru.

In 1699, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, introduced the Order of the Khalsa, the collective body of initiated Sikhs committed to spiritual discipline and social justice. The word Khalsa means sovereign or pure, and the Khalsa was established to confront injustice and tyranny, defend the oppressed, and uphold righteousness¹⁴.

Initiated Sikhs are distinguished by their articles of faith, known as the *Panj (5) Kakaar*, and adherence to a code of conduct known as the *Rehat Maryada*¹⁵. The *Panj Kakaar* and the *Rehat Maryada* are adhered to by both Sikh women and men.



Above is a diagram illustrating the *Panj Kakaars (Five Ks)*, the articles of faith worn by initiated (Amritdhari) Sikhs.

¹³ Sandhu, Gian Singh. *Who Are the Sikhs? An Exploration of the Beliefs, Practices, & Traditions of the Sikh People*. Archway Publishing, 2023.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The *Panj* (5) *Kakaar* or Sikh articles of faith are as follows:

1. *kes*h – unshorn hair signifying acceptance of Vahiguru's will; the hair must be kept covered at all times with a keski or dastaar (turban or head-covering) representing spiritual wisdom;
2. *kangha* – a wooden comb representing self-discipline; worn in the hair and used to keep it neat and tidy;
3. *kara* – an iron or steel bracelet worn on the wrist; the circle signifies the oneness and eternity of Vahiguru and to use one's hands for the benefit of humanity;
4. *kachhera* – cotton undergarment representing high moral character and restraint; and
5. *kirpan* – a small iron or steel sword, which is worn sheathed, restrained in a cloth belt and next to the body; The word kirpan means grace and honour. The kirpan signifies the duty of a Sikh to stand up against injustice.

The Rehat Maryada guides a Sikh's way of life, including daily meditation on Vahiguru's name (*naam japo*), earning an honest living (*kirat karo*), and sharing those earnings with others (*vand chhako*).

The Sikh articles of faith create a distinct and visible identity for practicing Sikhs. Throughout its history, the Sikh community has faced repeated efforts to suppress its identity and autonomy, many of which are represented throughout this report.



Photograph of an Amritdhari Sikh wedding.



A Historical Overview of Sikhs in Canada

Understanding more about the history of Sikhs in Canada and their struggle to be recognized as equal citizens helps establish a historical context through which to contextualize anti-Sikh hate today. It exemplifies that anti-Sikh hate is not new, but rather a thread woven into Canada's history and if left unaddressed, into Canada's future.

Early 20th Century: Pioneers and Prejudice

Although the first recorded arrival of a practicing Sikh in Canada is that of Major Kesar Singh in 1897¹⁶, most Sikhs began migrating to Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, making them among the first non-European immigrant communities in Western Canada¹⁷. Many were veterans of the British Indian Army or farmers from Punjab pursuing opportunities in British Columbia¹⁸. They arrived in a Canada that promised equality as part of the British Empire yet were met with entrenched racism and exclusionary laws. A pivotal example was the Guru Nanak Jahaz incident of 1914 (referenced in the "Introduction" section). The Guru Nanak Jahaz incident stands as an early marker of anti-Sikh hate in Canada, an event now acknowledged by official apologies (the B.C. government in 2008¹⁹, Canadian Parliament in 2016²⁰ and City of Vancouver in 2021²¹).



The above image is a photograph of Major Kesar Singh.

¹⁶ Luscombe, Stephen. "Risaldar-Major Kesur Singh." *The British Empire*, <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armyunits/indiancavalry/25thcavkesursingh.htm>.

¹⁷ Sandhu, Gian Singh. *An Uncommon Road: How Canadian Sikhs Struggled Out of the Fringes and into the Mainstream*. Echo Storytelling Agency, 2018.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

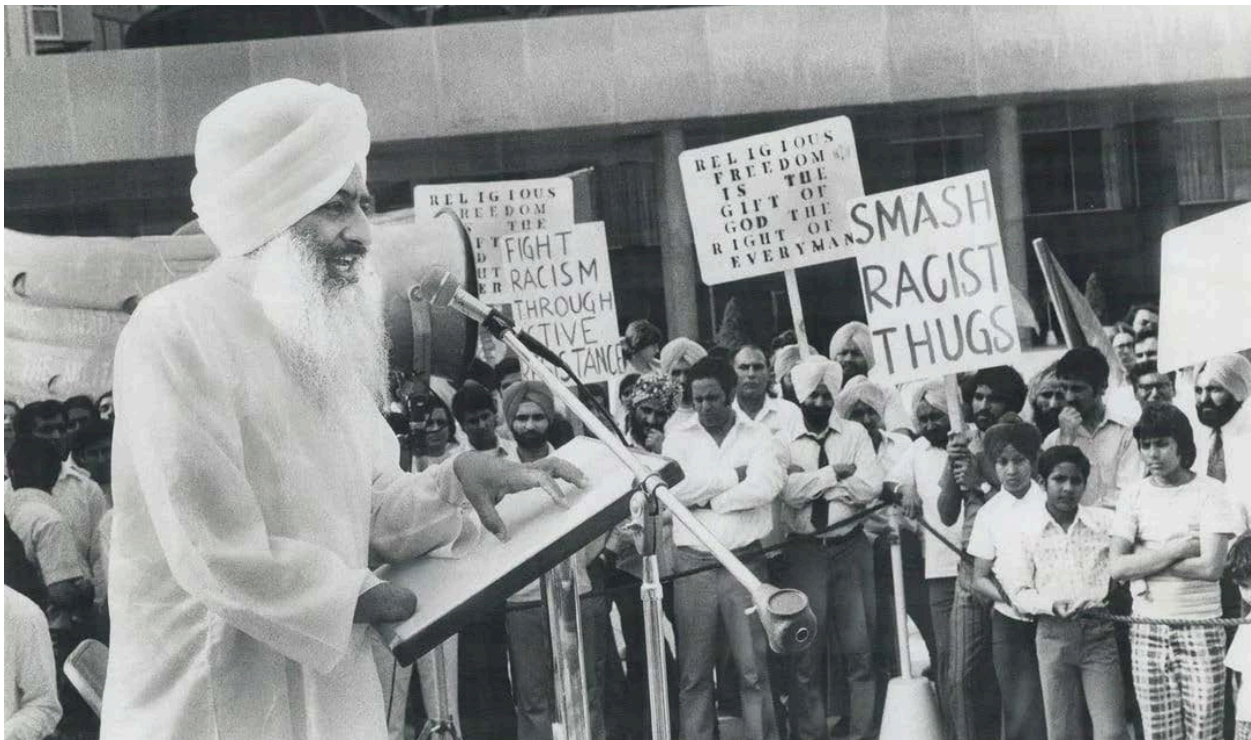
¹⁹ Province of British Columbia. "Komagata Maru Remembrance Day Proclamation 2023." *BC Laws*, 12 May 2023, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/proclamations/proclamations/KomagataMaruRemembranceDay2023>.

²⁰ Trudeau, Justin. "Komagata Maru Apology in the House of Commons." *Prime Minister of Canada*, 18 May 2016, <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2016/05/18/komagata-maru-apology-house-commons>.

²¹ City of Vancouver. "Guru Nanak Jahaz (Komagata Maru) Remembrance Day." *City of Vancouver*, <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/guru-nanak-jahaz-remembrance-day.aspx>.

This incident did not occur in isolation but was part of a broader climate of anti-Asian racism. The Vancouver race riots, orchestrated by the Asiatic Exclusion League, were sparked in part by the arrival of Sikh refugees from Bellingham, who had been attacked on September 5, 1907²². As these refugees arrived, a protest targeting all Asians erupted in Vancouver on September 7, 1907, eventually escalating into a riot primarily directed at Chinese and Japanese establishments. However, the Sikh community also felt the impact, highlighting the widespread hostility toward Asian immigrants.

For Sikhs, who were often mislabeled as “Hindoos” in that era, such racism meant loss of rights and dignity. In 1907, Sikhs remained disenfranchised in British Columbia – they could not vote, practice certain professions, or serve on juries²³. Following halted Sikh migration (due to the Continuous Journey Regulation), it wasn’t until 1947 that the franchise was restored to Sikhs in Canada²⁴. These structural barriers sent a clear message that Sikhs were outsiders in their adopted country, fueling prejudice that would persist in various forms.



Sikh community in Toronto protests a racist attack on the Pape Street Gurdwara, 1974

²² BC Labour Heritage Centre. "The Asiatic Exclusion League Riot, 1907." *Working People Built BC*, 23 May 2018, <https://www.labourheritagecentre.ca/asiatic-exclusion-league-riot-1907/>.

²³ Sandhra, Sharanjit Kaur, and Satwinder Kaur Bains. "(Dis)Enfranchisement: 1907–1947 – The Forty Year Struggle for the Vote." South Asian Canadian Digital Archive, 8 March 2022, <https://sacda.ca/exhibits/disenfranchisement/>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*



Mid to Late 20th Century: Breaking Barriers and Community Growth

Despite hostility, the Sikh community persevered and slowly expanded. By mid-century, small but tight-knit Sikh communities had established roots in B.C.'s Lower Mainland²⁵ and in provinces like Ontario. Racist laws began to ease after World War II, and in 1962–67, Canada overhauled its immigration policies, ending overtly racial quotas²⁶. This opened the door to a new wave of Sikh immigration. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of Sikhs arrived, many as educated professionals or skilled workers²⁷. As the community grew, Sikh institutions (gurdwaras, schools, cultural associations, etc.) flourished, and Sikhs became more visible in public life. However, social acceptance lagged behind legal change. Sikhs often faced daily discrimination – from slurs like “Paki” hurled on the streets to landlords refusing to rent to “East Indians.” The violence associated with the term “Paki-bashing,” imported from Britain, also found resonance in Canada, describing targeted attacks on brown-skinned immigrants in the 1970s and 80s²⁸.

Ontario's first gurdwara, the Shiromani Sikh Sangat on Pape Ave in Toronto saw several racist attacks, including in 1974 when the gurdwara was spray-painted with racist slogans, a fire was set in the basement of the building²⁹, and the 1980 theft of the sacred *Nishan Sahib* (the Sikh standard or flag that flies outside most gurdwaras)³⁰.



The above image is a photograph of Ontario's first gurdwara located on Pape Street in Toronto.

²⁵ Cook, Denise, and Renisa Mawani. *South Asian Canadian Historic Places: Historical Context Thematic Framework*, 3 Feb. 2017, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/our-history/historic-places/documents/heritage/sachp_context_study-final.pdf.

²⁶ Van Dyk, Lindsay. "Canadian Immigration Acts and Legislation." *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-immigration-acts-and-legislation>.

²⁷ Buchignani, Norman. "Sikhism." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 28 August 2008, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sikhism>.

²⁸ Ihsan, Aqeel. "'Paki Go Home': The Story of Racism in the Gerrard India Bazaar." *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, vol. 10, no. 1, 13 March 2023, pp. 28–32. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i4.556>.

²⁹ Keating, Michael. "Sikhs' Temple Has Long History of Rival Battles, Racial Violence." *The Globe and Mail*, 19 March 1982, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/sikhs-temple-has-long-history-rival-battles/docview/386723965/se-2>.

³⁰ Johnson, Arthur. "Sikhs Suffer Worst Insult; Flag Stolen from Temple." *The Globe and Mail*, 20 May 1980, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/sikhs-suffer-worst-insult-flag-stolen-temple/docview/386953711/se-2>.

"In the last few days they said Sikhs have been attacked as they left the temple, cars belonging to Sikhs have been damaged and shop windows of Sikh merchants have been smashed.... 'When these people attack our members they call us Paki bastards'"³¹.

Sikhs in British Columbia faced similar racist violence, including an incident in October 1974, where the Khalsa Diwan Society Vancouver gurdwara was defaced with graffiti and "white young hoodlums" shouted obscenities at worshipers³².

Due to their distinct appearance, names, and articles of faith, Sikhs faced discrimination and exclusion from workplaces and Canadian institutions³³. This resulted in Sikhs being at the forefront of human rights jurisprudence, challenging religious discrimination in Canada. A major structural barrier fell in 1980 when human rights challenges led to the removal of a longstanding ban on dastaars in the RCMP and Canadian military³⁴. In 1988, Baltej Singh Dhillon became the first Sikh Mountie



permitted to wear a dastar on duty, after a divisive national debate³⁵. This was a human rights milestone, affirming that Sikh articles of faith could be accommodated within Canadian institutions. However, this period also saw a peak in anti-Sikh hate, marked by numerous racist and hate-filled campaigns targeting Dhillon that gained traction across Canada³⁶.

The above image is a photograph of Baltej Singh Dhillon.

³¹ Ruimy, Joel. "Toronto Sikh See Riots Over Racism." *The Montreal Gazette*, 30 August 1977, p. 5. <https://books.google.ca/books?id=NwsyAAAAIBAJ&pg=PA1>.

³² Sagi, Douglas. "Trying to Take Us at Our World". *The Calgary Herald*, 8 March 1975, https://books.google.ca/books?id=1G5kAAAAIBAJ&redir_esc=y.

³³ Council of Sikh Affairs. "Council of Sikh Affairs Submission to the Ontario Workplace Review Phase 2". Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, University of Toronto, 12 Oct. 2016, https://cirhr.library.utoronto.ca/sites/default/public/ontario_workplace_review_phase2/Council%20of%20Sikh%20Affairs.pdf.

³⁴ *Grant v. Canada (Attorney General)*, [1995] 1 F.C. 158. Federal Court of Appeal, 1995. Federal Court Reports, Volume 1, 1995, p. 158.

³⁵ Canada, House of Commons. *Debates*. 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, Sitting No. 332, 4 October 2018, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/42-1/house/sitting-332/hansard>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Legal battles over Sikh religious expression exposed both progress and resistance within Canadian institutions. In *Bhinder v. CN* (1985)³⁷ Mr. Bhinder's loss brought public scrutiny to discriminatory workplace practices and highlighted the need for accommodation of religious attire. Two decades later, *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* (2006)³⁸ marked a turning point, as the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously upheld a Sikh student's right to wear a kirpan in school. These cases collectively advanced the interpretation of *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, yet their recurrence illuminated the ongoing struggle against systemic exclusion of Sikhs in Canada.

1984: The Sikh Genocide Intergenerational Trauma

In 1984, Sikhs experienced a genocide³⁹ in India and many Sikh-Canadians lost family in massacres and others arrived as refugees fleeing state-sponsored violence⁴⁰. The 1984 Sikh Genocide became a catalyst for renewed advocacy and reflection within the global Sikh community, including Sikh-Canadians, regarding the vision of Khalistan.



Khalistan is the term Sikhs use to refer to a state and model of governance in accordance with the Sikh values of *sarbat da bhalla* (upliftment of all) and *seva* (selfless service). For Sikhs, Khalistan is a concept deeply rooted in Sikh spirituality- it reflects a vision shaped by centuries of Sikh history and the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, embodying an inclusive and compassionate model of governance, uniquely aimed at uplifting all of humanity. This vision, bolstered by Sikh resistance to colonial oppression under British rule and later challenged by systemic marginalization within the post-independence Indian state, reflects both a historical continuity and an ongoing struggle for equity, autonomy, and the affordance and protection of human rights for Sikhs.

The above image is a photograph from Delhi during the 1984 Sikh Genocide

³⁷ 2 S.C.R. 561.

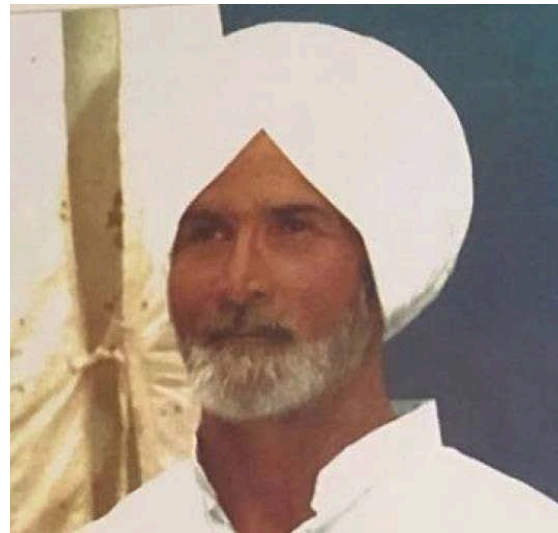
³⁸ 1 S.C.R. 256, 2006 SCC 6.

³⁹ The 1984 Sikh Genocide has been recognized by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario through a private member's motion passed in April 2017. This recognition has not yet been formally adopted at the federal level by the Parliament of Canada.

⁴⁰ *Supra* note 20.

The 1985 Air India bombing had a profoundly damaging impact on the Sikh community in Canada. Despite the community's deep shock and sadness over the bombing—evidenced by prayer vigils held in gurdwaras nationwide and widespread condemnation of the attack—Sikhs faced intense backlash and negative public perception⁴¹. Practicing Sikhs, identifiable by their dastaars and beards, became targets of police scrutiny, additional screenings at airports, and public hostility⁴². This unjust suspicion and stereotyping not only deepened the community's grief but also fueled widespread discrimination against Sikhs⁴³.

Hate incidents targeting Sikhs continued through the 90s including firebombing of gurdwaras, assaults⁴⁴, and the shocking murder of Nirmal Singh Gill, the caretaker of the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey in January 1998. Gill was brutally kicked and stomped to death by neo-Nazi skinheads in the gurdwara parking lot⁴⁵. The lived experiences of Sikhs, alongside documented racially motivated hate crimes, have left an enduring legacy of fear and trauma that continues to reverberate across generations. For many Sikh-Canadians, these experiences have been normalized as part of their Canadian reality, an unsettling reminder of how racism and the oppression of minoritized groups persist and are likely to continue for future generations if not addressed directly.



The above image is a photograph of Nirmal Singh Gill.

⁴¹ Kashmeri, Zuhair, and Victor Malarek. "Terror in the Skies: Hindus, Sikhs Forget Bitterness to Unite in Grief over Loss." *The Globe and Mail*, 24 June 1985. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/terror-skies-hindus-sikhs-forget-bitterness-unite/docview/386319854/se-2>.

⁴² Sandhu, Gian Singh. "In the Air India Bombing Aftermath, I Wished I Kept My Turban." *Vice*, 5 June 2018, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/in-the-air-india-bombing-aftermath-i-wished-i-kept-my-turban/>.

⁴³ Sandhu, Gian Singh. *An Uncommon Road: How Canadian Sikhs Struggled Out of the Fringes and into the Mainstream*. Echo Storytelling Agency, 2018.

⁴⁴ Hum, Peter. "Cab Driver's Turban Pulled Off Before He Was Beaten, Court Told." *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 June 1998, www.proquest.com/newspapers/cab-drivers-turban-pulled-off-before-he-was/docview/240162050/se-2.

⁴⁵ CBC News. "Skinheads Given Stiff Sentences for Killing Caretaker." 16 November 1999, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/skinheads-given-stiff-sentences-for-killing-caretaker-1.187374>.

21st Century: New Challenges, Ongoing Struggles

The 21st century ushered in both hope and new challenges for Sikh Canadians. On one hand, Sikhs have seen representation at the highest levels of Canadian society – Sikhs have served in senior cabinet positions in the federal and several provincial governments⁴⁶, a Sikh has served as the first person of colour to lead a major federal political party (Jagmeet Singh of the NDP), numerous Sikh MPs, provincial legislators and mayors have been elected as well. Despite notable advancements within the Sikh community, these instances of progress remain exceptions rather than the norm and have yet to yield widespread positive change for most Sikh-Canadians. A convergence of international political influences and domestic socio-cultural currents continues to perpetuate and reshape anti-Sikh sentiment in Canada:

Post-9/11 Backlash (2001): After the September 11 terror attacks in the U.S., a wave of Islamophobic violence swept North America. Both the US and Canada saw a sharp increase of hate crimes waged against the Sikh population who were ‘mistakenly’ targeted in racist attacks directed at Muslims⁴⁷. The first person murdered in an Islamophobic hate crime in the U.S. after 9/11 was a Sikh man, Balbir Singh Sodhi⁴⁸. In Canada, there were also multiple reports of Sikhs being harassed and assaulted for similar reasons⁴⁹.



Images from a memorial for Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh man murdered in a hate crime in the United States following the events of September 11, 2001.

⁴⁶ CBC News. "Full List of Justin Trudeau's 2015 Cabinet." 4 November 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/full-list-of-justin-trudeau-s-2015-cabinet-1.3300699>.

⁴⁷ Sian, Katy P. "Surveillance, Islamophobia, and Sikh Bodies in the War on Terror." *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2017, pp. 37–52, <https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.4.1.0037>.

⁴⁸ Dirks, Sandhya. "Remembering the Oak Creek Killings, a Harbinger of White Supremacist Violence." *NPR*, 5 August 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/05/1115931555/remembering-the-oak-creek-killings-a-harbinger-of-white-supremacist-violence>.

⁴⁹ Bhasin, Ritu. "Sikhs Have Been Living in Fear of Hate Crimes Since 9/11." *The Globe and Mail*, 8 August. 2012, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/columnists/sikhs-have-been-living-in-fear-of-hate-crimes-since-911/article4468643/>.

Challenging the Negative Narrative: Understanding Bias and Hate Against Sikh-Canadians

This section is best understood within a broader pattern of securitization and state surveillance that has long shaped the experience of Sikh Canadians. Rather than being isolated acts of community tension, they reflect a climate in which Sikh political expression, particularly around human rights, self-determination, and criticism of India, has been systematically scrutinized and stigmatized.

Over the decades, Canadian security and intelligence frameworks have often positioned Sikh activism within a national security lens, conflating advocacy for justice with extremism. This framing not only undermines legitimate democratic participation but also contributes to a culture of fear and self-censorship among Sikh Canadians. In effect, the community's visibility, once a symbol of faith and resilience, has been recast as a marker of suspicion, eroding trust in institutions meant to protect all citizens equally and fueling anti-Sikh sentiments across Canada.



The above image is from a 1990 editorial cartoon.

During Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's trip to India in February and March 2018, online disinformation campaigns from India spread alleging Sikh extremism in Canada⁵⁰. The negative rhetoric around Sikhs in Canada had real life impacts as the community saw hate attacks against Sikhs in Calgary⁵¹ and Ottawa⁵² in the immediate aftermath of the trip.

⁵⁰ National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. Special report into the allegations associated with Prime Minister Trudeau's official visit to India in February 2018. 2018. NSICOP, <https://www.nsicop-cpsnr.ca/reports/rp-2018-12-03/SpecialReport-en.pdf>.

⁵¹ Montalvo, Deanna. "Elderly Sikh Man Victim of Hate Crime: Family." *Calgary Herald*, 7 April 2018, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/elderly-sikh-man-victim-hate-crime-family/docview/2022804620/se-2>.

⁵² Helmer, Aedan. "Don't Let Muggers Win, Sikh Leader Tells Young Victim; Student Considers Returning to India After Swarming in Which His Turban Was Stolen." *The Ottawa Citizen*, 29 March 2018, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/dont-let-muggers-win-sikh-leader-tells-young/docview/2019799057/se-2>.

In 2023, tensions between Canada and India escalated following public accusations by Canadian authorities that agents of the Government of India were involved in the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh community leader and advocate for Khalistan⁵³. For many Sikh Canadians, this event served as a stark reminder of the risks associated with Sikh visibility and political expression, even for Canadian citizens on Canadian soil. In October 2024, the RCMP confirmed that India was linked to multiple targeted acts of violence within Canada, including the use of organized crime networks⁵⁴. These ongoing investigations and revelations have only confirmed and validated the long-standing concerns by Sikh-Canadians regarding transnational repression, surveillance and interference.



Photograph of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

These revelations have not occurred in a vacuum. For decades, Canadian national security frameworks have frequently viewed Sikh activism through a lens of suspicion, often conflating peaceful protest with extremism. This securitized framing undermines legitimate democratic participation and contributes to a broader culture of fear and censorship within the Sikh-Canadian community. In this context, the expression of political beliefs, particularly those critical of the Indian state, can carry social, political and increasingly, physical risks.

⁵³ *Supra* notes 3 and 4.

⁵⁴ Royal Canadian Mounted Police. “RCMP Statement on Violent Criminal Activity Occurring in Canada with Connections to Agents of the Government of India.” *Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, 14 October 2024, <https://rcmp.ca/en/news/2024/10/rcmp-statement-violent-criminal-activity-occurring-canada-connections-agents-government-india>.

Recent protests and counter-demonstrations in Ontario illustrate how these dynamics have come to unfold on the ground. In November 2024, a peaceful demonstration was organized near Hindu Sabha Mandir in Brampton in response to a consular outreach event held by Indian officials⁵⁵. This demonstration was against the special consular camp that was set-up and expressed concerns about Indian political interference in Canada. Members of pro-India counterdemonstrators physically assaulted protesters, issued death threats, and shouted inflammatory slogans, including praise for Lawrence Bishnoi⁵⁶, an Indian gangster identified by Canadian authorities as being linked to organized crime and targeted violence against Sikhs⁵⁷. The Bishnoi Gang was listed as a terrorist entity in Canada in September 2025⁵⁸. That same evening, a mob of roughly 300 masked and armed individuals gathered outside the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara in Mississauga, prompting police intervention to prevent escalations, including threats to attack the gurdwara⁵⁹.



The above image is a photograph from the 2024 incidents of unrest and violence in Brampton involving anti-Sikh sentiment.

The following day, another demonstration took place near the same Mandir, where some participants openly called for violence against Sikh institutions and calls for the mob to “storm the f***** Sikh temples⁶⁰”. As tensions spilled into surrounding neighbourhoods, there were reports of property damage and assaults, further amplifying community concerns about safety and political repression⁶¹.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Staff. “How India’s Hindu Nationalist Rhetoric Played a Role in the Violence at a Canadian Temple.” *News@York*, York University, 9 December 2024, <https://www.yorku.ca/news/2024/12/09/how-indias-hindu-nationalist-rhetoric-played-a-role-in-the-violence-at-a-canadian-temple/>.

⁵⁷ *Supra* note 104.

⁵⁸ Jessica Murphy, “Canada Designates India’s Bishnoi Gang as Terrorist Entity,” *BBC News*, 29 September 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj07vzm9n11o>

⁵⁹ *Supra* note 104.

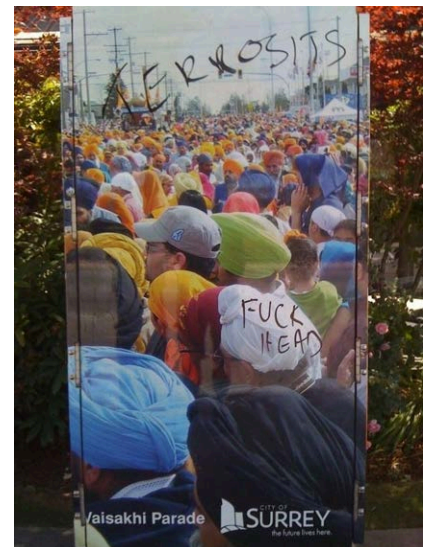
⁶⁰ Hamza, Muhammad. “Protests in Brampton amid Foreign Interference Have Roots in India’s Longstanding Political Tensions.” *The Pointer*, 5 November 2024, <https://thepointer.com/article/2024-11-05/protests-in-brampton-amid-foreign-interference-have-roots-in-india-s-longstanding-political-tensions>.

⁶¹ *Supra* note 104.

Importantly, Sikh community leaders and organizations, including the Ontario Gurdwaras Committee, were quick to clarify that these were not religious or intercommunal conflicts⁶². The events underscored the vulnerability of Sikh Canadians not only to foreign interference but also to threats originating within Canada's border. Often enabled by a broader political climate that equates Sikhs with extremism, a Montréal resident recounted in the townhall how,

"in November [2024], a friend of mine [in Brampton] was attacked near a Mandir because they assumed he supported Khalistan."

Two core factors appear to drive this growing atmosphere of hostility. First, a sustained, disinformation campaign with much of it originating from actors aligned with the Indian state⁶³, seeking to delegitimize Sikh activism and framing it as Khalistani "extremism"⁶⁴. These narratives, which increasingly dominate digital platforms, have led to increased surveillance, harassment, and online abuse, posing a direct threat to the constitutional rights of Sikh-Canadians to freedom of expression and peaceful political engagement. This mirrors findings from the survey where over 54% of survey respondents reported experiencing hate specifically because of their actual or perceived support of Khalistan, both in person and online (referenced in the "Community-Based Data and Perspectives" section). Many Sikhs also reported that their social media content is routinely monitored or targeted by India-based accounts and bots, especially when expressing political or human rights views⁶⁵.



The above image is a photograph of anti-Sikh graffiti in Surrey, BC.

⁶² *Supra* note 104.

⁶³ *Supra* note 124.

⁶⁴ Liddar, Rupinder. "South Asian Canadians and the politics of identity." *Inroads Journal*, <https://inroadsjournal.ca/south-asian-canadians-and-the-politics-of-identity/>

⁶⁵ *Supra* note 124.

The second source of this hate is more domestic, often coming from other Canadians and is rooted in white supremacy, racism and xenophobia. Domestic hate against Sikhs has grown substantially in the 2020s, due to the migration of Sikh international students and temporary foreign workers⁶⁶. Communities in suburban Toronto (Brampton, Mississauga, Scarborough) and Vancouver (Surrey, Abbotsford) saw the growth of established Sikh communities. This visibility has at times provoked a xenophobic response^{67 68}. Instances of public space hostility have become more common, including being stared at, excluded, or told to "go back to your country." One Winnipeg resident recalled a disturbing incident:

"A woman approached a group of international students at a restaurant and told them to 'go back home' because they were 'stealing our jobs.'"



Photograph from 2023 of an international Sikh student who was violently assaulted in Kelowna, British Columbia, including having his turban forcibly removed.

⁶⁶ The Economic Times. "Here's Why the Sikh Population in Canada Surged to over 7.71 Lakh after 1991." 20 September 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/how-to/heres-why-the-sikh-population-in-canada-surged-to-over-7-71-lakh-after-1991/articleshow/103798499.cms>.

⁶⁷ Kukreja, Reena. "Anti-Immigrant Politics Is Fueling Hate Toward South Asian People in Canada." *Queen's University Faculty of Arts and Science*, 21 July 2023, <https://www.queensu.ca/artsci/news/anti-immigrant-politics-is-fueling-hate-toward-south-asian-people-in-canada>.

⁶⁸ Thanthong-Knight, Randy. "Canada's 'Student Trafficking' Industry Is Backfiring on Trudeau." *Bloomberg*, 28 February 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-28/canada-s-student-trafficking-industry-is-backfiring-on-trudeau>.

On social media and online forums⁶⁹, there has been a growing narrative of “too many turbans” in public spaces or conspiracy theories about a “Sikh takeover” specifically in the fields of trucking, real estate, or politics⁷⁰. These online platforms have increasingly become outlets for expressing racist views using dog whistles for “immigrants” or “international students” to target the Sikh community^{71,72}. As one participant shared, “Online, I get messages saying Sikhs don’t belong here.” Another Winnipeg resident explained, “The ability to say anything behind a screen gives people much more confidence,” highlighting how anonymity fuels hate speech. During an online town hall, one attendee described it as “the type of racism that you can’t exactly pinpoint that feels a lot more threatening.” These experiences demonstrate how digital spaces can normalize discriminatory narratives such as anti-immigrant sentiment and further fuel anti-Sikh hate, ultimately contributing to hostile encounters, hate, and microaggressions both virtually and in-person.

By 2023, public surveys showed a steep decline in support for immigration, and anti-immigrant rhetoric became “potent,” often using Punjabi Sikh men as scapegoats. For example, the popular Toronto Instagram account 6ixbuzz was criticized for content that “deliberately stir[red] racist commentary,” using Brampton and its large Sikh Punjabi population as a dog-whistle for xenophobic reactions⁷³. Videos of Punjabi students or truck drivers would attract a flood of derogatory comments about “immigrant gangs” or telling people to “go back to Punjab”. Thus, age-old tropes about Sikhs stealing opportunities and resources from “real” Canadians or assuming a lack of assimilation have resurfaced, cloaked in current anxieties.



The above image is anti-Sikh graffiti at the Khalsa Community School in Brampton in July 2012.

⁶⁹ Johal, Rumneek. "Canada's Far-Right is Targeting South Asian and Sikh Canadians to Incite Anti-Immigrant Hate." *PressProgress*, 8 August 2024, <https://pressprogress.ca/canadas-far-right-is-targeting-south-asian-and-sikh-canadians-to-incite-anti-immigrant-hate/>.

⁷⁰ Todd, Douglas. "Why Sikhs Are So Powerful in Canadian Politics." *Vancouver Sun*, 10 March 2018, <https://vancouversun.com/opinion/columnists/douglas-todd-why-sikhs-are-so-powerful-in-canadian-politics>.

⁷¹ "The rise of anti-South Asian hate in Canada". *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2025, <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/the-rise-of-anti-south-asian-hate-in-canada/>.

⁷² Sengupta, Joyita, host. "The rise of anti-South Asian content online". *Front Burner*, CBC, 25 September 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/frontburner/the-rise-of-anti-south-asian-content-online-transcript-1.7333452>

⁷³ Liddar, Rupinder, and Sonya Pallapothu. "The Familiar Rise of Anti-Indian Racism in Canada." *Policy Options*, 1 November 2024, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/november-2024/anti-indian-racism-canada/>.

A major setback for Sikhs, and all other visibly faith-practicing communities in Canada is Québec's Act Respecting the Laïcité (or secularism) of the State (Bill 21), enacted in 2019, which bars public school teachers, police, prosecutors, and other officials in public office from wearing visible religious symbols at work. This law, while framed as general secularism, has had a devastating effect on observant Sikh Québeckers: it "bars practicing Sikhs from pursuing many professions simply because of their faith,"⁷⁴ effectively forcing Sikhs in Québec to choose between their careers and their articles of faith.

Today, a Sikh who wears a dastaar or kirpan cannot become a teacher or police officer in Québec under this law. As a participant shared

"I was denied a job after I mentioned I keep my kesh and wear a kirpan."

This state-sanctioned discrimination, currently being challenged in courts (the Supreme Court of Canada has agreed to hear a constitutional challenge)⁷⁵. As can be expected, state-sanctioned racism has led to Sikhs in Québec facing discrimination and hate in contexts that extend beyond the scope of Bill 21⁷⁶; however, these experiences are often overlooked or dismissed in broader public discourse, further marginalizing the Sikh community. Sikhs in Québec report facing hate in public spaces and being excluded from public institutions. Bill 21's existence highlights that institutionalized bias can still occur, even as Canada ostensibly continues to be committed to multiculturalism, diversity, equity and inclusion held by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.



The above image is a photograph from a protest against Quebec's Bill 21 in Montreal in 2019.

⁷⁴ World Sikh Organization of Canada. "The Battle Against Bill 21". *Our Work*, 16 June 2019, <https://www.worldsikh.org/battlebill21>.

⁷⁵ Supreme Court of Canada. Judgment on Leave Application. *Supreme Court of Canada – News Releases*, 23 January 2025, <https://decisions.scc-csc.ca/scc-csc/news/en/item/8142/index.do>.

⁷⁶ Association for Canadian Studies. Law 21: Discourse, Perceptions & Impacts. ACS Survey May-June 2022, 10 August 2022, https://acs-metropolis.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Report_Survey-Law-21_ACS_Leger-4.pdf.

Understanding the history of Sikhs in Canada, and their ongoing struggle for recognition as equal citizens is essential to contextualizing the persistence of anti-Sikh hate today. The incidents of transnational repression and politically motivated violence cannot be viewed in isolation; rather, they form part of a long-standing pattern in which Sikh identity has been racialized, securitized, and contested within Canada's evolving social and political landscape. From early 20th-century exclusionary immigration policies and racially motivated attacks to contemporary surveillance, disinformation, and foreign interference, anti-Sikh bias has been woven into the fabric of Canadian history.



The above image is a photograph from the Guru Nanak Jahaz (Komagata Maru).

These patterns reveal both continuity and transformation: the same narratives of suspicion and exclusion have merely adapted to new political realities. Over the decades, Canadian security and intelligence frameworks have frequently positioned Sikh activism within a national security lens, conflating advocacy for justice, human rights, and self-determination with extremism. This framing not only undermines legitimate democratic participation but also fosters a climate of fear and self-censorship among Sikh Canadians. In effect, the community's visibility – once a symbol of faith, resilience, and contribution – has been recast as a marker of suspicion, eroding trust in institutions meant to safeguard all citizens equally.

Recognizing this historical throughline is critical, for it underscores that anti-Sikh hate is not a new phenomenon, but a recurring expression of systemic inequities that, if left unaddressed, risk being carried into Canada's future.

Defining Anti-Sikh Hate

Before delving into the analysis, it is crucial to clearly define what “anti-Sikh hate” is. Throughout the data collection for this report, Sikhs from across Canada were asked to define anti-Sikh hate in their own words.

Anti-Sikh hate is defined in the following manner:

Anti-Sikh hate refers to prejudice, hostility, discrimination, and systemic oppression directed at Sikhs or non-Sikhs because of an actual or assumed Sikh identity. This identity may be understood through an expression of religion, culture, or advocacy related to their identity.

Anti-Sikh hate can manifest in many forms, including but not limited to harmful stereotypes, negative rhetoric, social and political disenfranchisement, cultural erasure, and acts of aggression or violence against Sikh individuals, communities, gurdwaras, institutions, or symbols. Violence can include verbal abuse or slurs, physical harm, and/or online harassment.

In legal and policy contexts, anti-Sikh hate can take the form of discrimination based on the grounds of religion, race, ethnic/national origin or perceived immigration status and includes hate crimes and hate speech as well as disinformation, misinformation, or propaganda that aims to stigmatize or suppress Sikh identity, activism, or political expression.



Photograph of an American Sikh man during the #TakeOnHate Campaign.



Based on the findings of the analysis, this report examines four manifestations of Anti-Sikh Hate in Canada: (1) Institutional Anti-Sikh Hate; (2) Community-Level Anti-Sikh Hate; (3) Interpersonal Anti-Sikh Hate; and (4) Intersectional Anti-Sikh Hate. These forms of hate are multifaceted and interrelated in their expressions of oppression. The definition of these four manifestations are as follows:

- (1) Institutional Anti-Sikh Hate involves the systemic marginalization of Sikhs through policies, practices, or laws that either directly or indirectly disadvantage members of the Sikh community. This can manifest in discriminatory security protocols that disproportionately scrutinize Sikhs (such as mandatory secondary screening of dastaars)⁷⁷, barriers to public service employment due to visible religious identity (such as the exclusion of the kirpan)⁷⁸, exclusionary legislation like Québec's Bill 21⁷⁹, and political rhetoric that casts suspicion on Sikhs for their advocacy or religious expression⁸⁰. Such measures undermine constitutional protections, including freedom of religion and equality under the Charter, especially when not supported by evidence in a rights-based society.
- (2) Community-Level Anti-Sikh Hate is visible in the normalization of hostility toward Sikhs at the societal level. This includes the normalization of anti-Sikh stereotypes or tropes in media, social media, and public discourse⁸¹, opposition to Sikh institutions like gurdwaras, and acts of vandalism or protest. These acts are intended to isolate and vilify Sikhs in public discourse and community life and are often exacerbated by foreign disinformation.

⁷⁷ Canadian Air Transport Security Authority. "Security Screening: Religious or Cultural Head Coverings." CATSA, 30 August 2024, <https://www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca/en/security-screening#religious>.

⁷⁸ Government of Québec. *An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State*. CQLR c L-0.3, 2019, <https://www.legisQuebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/l-0.3>.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Supra* note 14.

⁸¹ World Sikh Organization of Canada. "Toronto & Peterborough Hate Attacks Highlight Growing Anti-Sikh Sentiment: WSO." 1 August 2024, https://www.worldsikh.org/toronto_peterborough_hate_attacks_highlight_growing_anti_sikh_sentiment_wso.



- (3) Interpersonal Anti-Sikh Hate refers to an individual's experience of acts of prejudice or aggression based on Sikh identity during interactions with others. Sikhs may encounter verbal abuse, online harassment, discriminatory treatment in schools or workplaces⁸², and even physical assaults⁸³, often because they wear articles of faith such as the dastar or kirpan or are perceived to support Sikh political causes. Interpersonal anti-Sikh Hate also considers microaggressions including but not limited to derogatory stares and verbal hostility.
- (4) Intersectional Anti-Sikh Hate considers anti-Sikh hate through an intersectional lens. Over the course of this study, it became clear that multiple overlapping identities, such as race, gender, visible articles of faith, and immigration status, can intensify the harm experienced by Sikh individuals and communities. Therefore, an intersectional approach, one that recognizes different aspects of people's identity and considers how these interact with one another to produce anti-Sikh hate, is essential to fully understand and address it. This manifestation of anti-Sikh hate acknowledges that the experiences of Sikh individuals are not shaped by a single aspect of their identity but by the interaction of multiple, interlocking systems of oppression.

⁸² World Sikh Organization of Canada. "WSO Releases Report on Bullying of Sikh Students in Peel Region." 26 April 2017, https://www.worldsikh.org/wso_releases_report_on_bullying_of_sikh_students_in_peel_region.

⁸³ Kulkarni, Akshay. "Sikh Student Attacked While Taking Bus Home from School in Kelowna, RCMP Say." *CBC News*, 13 September 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/sikh-student-attacked-kelowna-1.6966142>.



Illustrative Examples of Anti-Sikh Hate

Disclaimer: This section contains graphic, sensitive or disturbing imagery and content to document the lived experiences of anti-Sikh hate. These examples are included for educational and evidentiary purposes but may be distressing to some readers.

The following illustrative examples highlight the lived realities of anti-Sikh hate in Canada and the broad range of its manifestations. They offer crucial context for understanding how and where this hate is experienced as well as showing how pervasive anti-Sikh hate cuts across nearly every aspect of life, from education and employment to safety and community engagement. Sikhs in Canada are impacted by a barrage of anti-Sikh Hate not only in their everyday lives, but increasingly on online platforms. Today anti-Sikh hate is experienced doubly due to the recent tensions between Canada and India. By grounding the definition of anti-Sikh hate in lived experience, these examples reveal its systemic and long-standing impact on the Sikh community.

1) Pejorative terms referring to Sikhs who wear dastaars (e.g. raghead, diaperhead, towelhead, etc.)

Categories: Interpersonal-Level Anti-Sikh Hate, Community-Level Anti-Sikh Hate

Case Studies:

- a. Rashpal Rai, Senior communications professional – Victoria, British Columbia (2022)

Sharing his personal story, Rashpal Singh Rai highlighted racism and discrimination he has faced as a Sikh Canadian throughout his career, which are commonly shared experiences amongst Sikhs in Canada. “How many public relations or communications professionals can say they were called towel head, rag head, a terrorist or Osama Bin Laden? It's a reminder that however far I've come, some people will also always judge me and put me in a box because of what I look like”.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Rai, Rashpal. "A Turbaned Sikh in Communications." *LinkedIn*, 1 December 2021, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/turbaned-sikh-communications-rashpal-rai-apr/>.

b. Derogatory representations of Sikhs on social media





2) Harassing, physically threatening, and perpetrating physical violence towards Sikhs (e.g. forceful removal of dastaars, the cutting of hair without consent)

Categories: Interpersonal-Level Anti-Sikh Hate

Case Studies:

a. International Student (Ottawa, ON - March 2018)

A Sikh international student was physically and verbally assaulted near his workplace by two men who hurled racial slurs, forcefully removed his dastar, and stole it. The victim described the experience as “absolutely humiliating” and shared that he is now “too petrified” to return to work⁸⁵.

b. Gagandeep Singh (Kelowna, BC – March 2023)

A 21-year-old Sikh international student was brutally assaulted at a bus stop by a group of teenagers. His dastar was violently removed, he was dragged, punched repeatedly, and left with a concussion. Despite the public nature of the attack, the BC Prosecution Service later declined to approve charges, citing “no substantial likelihood of conviction”⁸⁶. The community expressed deep concerns with the response. Gagandeep’s friend stated that “I don’t think it matters if you’re Black, brown, grey, or yellow. At the end of the day, you should feel safe taking public transportation”⁸⁷.

c. Rupinder Singh (Scarborough, Ontario - July 16, 2024)

While returning home from a visit to Gursikh Sabha Canada, a gurdwara in Scarborough, Rupinder Singh was followed by a car and an individual on a bicycle. Just as he was about to reach home, the individual on the bike approached him and forcefully snatched his dastar from his head before running toward the car. Rupinder Singh immediately called 911 and reported the incident⁸⁸.

⁸⁵ Audet, Beth. "Ottawa Student 'Too Petrified' to Return to Job after Turban Removed in Assault near Workplace." *Ottawa Citizen*, 28 March 2018, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/weekend-swarmed-investigated-as-possible-hate-crime-after-mans-turban-removed-and-stolen>.

⁸⁶ Michaels, Kathy. "Kelowna Sikh Community Disappointed Charges Not Laid Against Accused Attackers." *Global News*, 15 March 2024, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10364306/kelowna-sikh-attack-no-charges/>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ World Sikh Organization of Canada. "Toronto & Peterborough Hate Attacks Highlight Growing Anti-Sikh Sentiment: WSO." 1 August 2024, https://www.worldsikh.org/toronto_peterborough_hate_attacks_highlight_growing_anti_sikh_sentiment_wso.



d. Sikh Man (Peterborough, Ontario - July 25, 2024)

A Sikh man was spat on, his dastaar was torn off and stomped on by four young men⁸⁹. When a bystander attempted to intervene, both he and the Sikh man were struck on the head with soda cans⁹⁰. The Peterborough Police have classified this as a hate crime⁹¹. The attack, which occurred in a public space at Hunter Street East and Mark Street⁹², has left members of the Sikh community deeply concerned for their safety in public.

e. Sikh Man (Sudbury, Ontario)

In an incident in the parking lot of a Walmart in New Sudbury, a Sikh man was targeted for wearing his kirpan, an article of faith. The perpetrator confronted the Sikh man, issuing threats and demanding the removal of the kirpan⁹³. When the Sikh man refused, the perpetrator made a threatening move toward the victim using his truck, revving the engine and lunging the vehicle forward as if to run him over⁹⁴. This alarming incident, described by local members of the Sikh community as an "eye-opener," has heightened concerns about public safety and religious freedom⁹⁵. It is not an isolated case but rather part of a troubling rise in hate-motivated acts targeting Sikhs in Sudbury. According to data reported by the Greater Sudbury Police Service, hate incidents against the South Asian community doubled between 2022 and 2023⁹⁶.

These acts of forcibly removing a dastaar is deeply humiliating to Sikh believers, and underscore hate-driven attacks on their faith identity as well as their person. In these clear acts of hate, Sikhs are targeted specifically due to their visible Sikh faith and identity.

⁸⁹ kawarthaNOW. "Police Investigating Hate Crime Assault in Peterborough's East City." 25 July 2024, <https://kawarthanow.com/2024/07/25/police-investigating-hate-crime-assault-in-peterborough-s-east-city/>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ The Indo-Canadian Voice. "Ontario Hate Attacks Highlight Growing Anti-Sikh Sentiment: WSO." *Voice Online*, 1 August 2024, <https://voiceonline.com/ontario-hate-attacks-highlight-growing-anti-sikh-sentiment-wso/>.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Sahota, Rajpreet. "Uncovering the Surge of Hate Incidents Targeting South Asians in Greater Sudbury: The Greater Sudbury Police Service Says Hate Crimes, Incidents Are Extremely Underreported." *CBC News*, 15 July 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/south-asian-hate-1.7261917>.

⁹⁴ *Supra* note 39.

⁹⁵ *Supra* note 44.

⁹⁶ *Supra* note 44.

3) Vandalising and desecrating Gurdwaras or Sikh schools and other institutions

Categories: Community-Level Anti-Sikh Hate

Case Studies:

- a) On November 19, 2018, families arriving at the Gurdwara Guru Amardas Darbar Sikh Society in Kelowna were confronted with racist graffiti sprayed on the gurdwara's exterior⁹⁷. The incident likely occurred around 7 p.m. on Sunday, before the temple's front gate was locked. The vandalism shocked the Sikh community as the sanctity of the gurdwara was defiled with racial slurs.



- b) On the night of October 24, 2021, hateful graffiti targeting the Sikh community was discovered outside the Sikh Society Gurdwara in Calgary. Two derogatory phrases were spray-painted on the road, with arrows pointing towards the Gurdwara. The incident was investigated as a hate-motivated crime by the Calgary Police Service⁹⁸.



⁹⁷ Morton, Sydney. "B.C. Sikh Temple Vandalized with Racist Graffiti," The Abbotsford News, 19 November 2018,

<https://www.abbynews.com/news/b-c-sikh-temple-vandalized-with-racist-graffiti>.

⁹⁸ Calgary Police Service. "Police Investigate Hateful Graffiti at Sikh Gurdwara." *Calgary Police Service Newsroom*, 26 October 2021,

<https://newsroom.calgary.ca/police-investigate-hateful-graffiti-at-sikh-gurdwara/#:~:text=Sometime%20between%209%20p.m.%2C%20on,Old%20Banff%20Coach%20Road%20S.W.>



4) Developing and enacting policies and laws which infringe on the rights of Sikhs to practice their faith, such as regulations that disproportionately target Sikh religious practices,

Categories: Institutional & Systemic Discrimination

Anti-Sikh hate also manifests within the very institutions designed to protect rights and ensure equality. Despite the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guaranteeing the freedom of religion and religious expression, institutional and systemic hate against Sikhs on the basis of their identity exemplifies how some policies, legislations, and professional practices continue to perpetuate exclusion and violate *Charter* rights.

a) Case Study: Air Travel

In 2015, the Canadian Air Transportation Security Authority (CATSA) implemented a policy mandating compulsory secondary screening for Sikhs wearing dastaars, regardless of whether an alarm was triggered. The policy treated the dastar as an inherent security risk rather than a protected religious article. The policy was reversed after an outcry from the Sikh community⁹⁹, however, the decision to implement such a policy has left lasting scars of humiliation and reinforces the perception that Sikh articles of faith are incompatible with Canadian society.

b) Case Study: Discrimination in Healthcare Settings

In September 2024, William Osler Health System acknowledged that Brampton Civic Hospital shaved a Sikh patient's beard without consent and without medical necessity, and apologized to the patient, family, and Sikh community¹⁰⁰. For Sikhs, uncut hair (*kesh*) is a sacred religious commitment and forcibly shaving a beard without consent violates bodily autonomy and desecrates a Sikh's adherence to their faith. The incident underscores systemic failures in consent practices, training, and institutional awareness that erode trust in essential services.

⁹⁹ World Sikh Organization of Canada. "WSO Welcomes Reversal of Airport Turban Screening Procedure." 16 June 2016, https://www.worldsikh.org/wso_welcomes_reversal_of_airport_turban_screening_procedure.

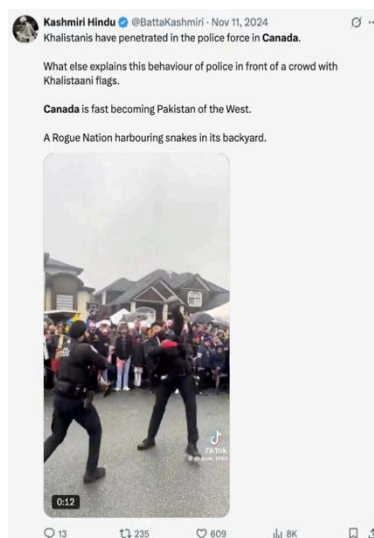
¹⁰⁰ William Osler Health System, public statement acknowledging non-consensual shaving and lack of medical necessity (Oct. 9, 2024).

5) Use of the term “Khalistani” in a Pejorative Way to Refer to Sikhs

Categories: Community-Level Anti-Sikh Hate

Case Study:

Since the 1980s, the term “Khalistani” began to be used in a pejorative way to refer to Sikhs in which Indian or pro-India actors perpetuate a definition of Khalistani as akin to extremism. Today, the term “Khalistani” is maliciously used, sometimes as a slur, in which some social media posts collectively label all Sikhs as “Khalistanis” and portray Khalistan advocacy as inherently extremist or terrorist. Sikhs who express support for Sikh sovereignty are frequently labeled as “terrorists,” and their activism is framed as a national security threat. Such discourse not only vilifies legitimate political expression but also fuels suspicion and hostility toward the broader Sikh community in Canada.

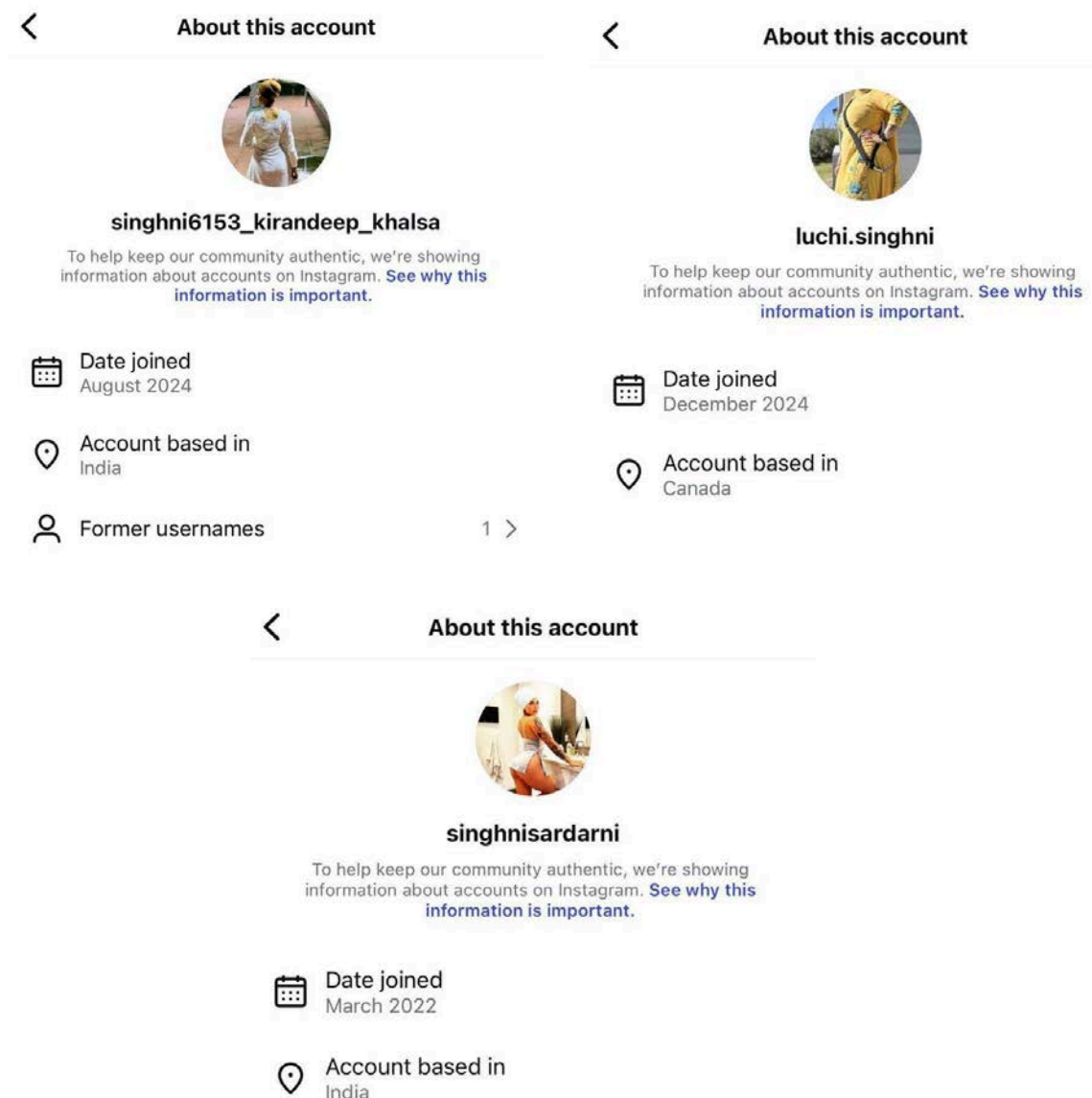


6) Fetishizing and sexually demeaning Sikh women

Categories: Interpersonal-Level Anti-Sikh Hate, Intersectional Anti-Sikh Hate

Case Study:

There has been a proliferation of social media accounts posting AI manipulated pictures of observant Sikh women, often wearing the dastaar and kirpan, posing in exploitative ways. Due to the intersection of their gender and faith-based identity (e.g. making sexually suggestive remarks that specifically target Sikh women, distorting pictures of Sikh women online into pornographic images). Several affected women approached WSO, and steps were taken to have the accounts suspended and the offensive material removed.



7) Defamatory allegations towards Sikh-Canadian politicians and voters

Categories: Community-Level Anti-Sikh Hate

Case Study:

Some commentators have alleged that due to the representation of Sikhs in Canadian politics, Sikhs are exerting unduly influence over Canadian institutions, and are collectively supporting a hidden agenda linked to Khalistan and its activism. In an opinion piece published in the Vancouver Sun in the aftermath of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visit to India, one commentator stated,

"The problem, therefore, is not only that Sikhs are heavily over-represented in federal politics, but that the Liberal party has chosen to concentrate on getting the support of Khalistani separatists and extremists as the easiest way of strengthening its support base in that community....In the circumstances, it is time for Canadians, including members of the Sikh community, to reflect on whether the inordinate influence the latter now enjoy is good for democracy, is good for the Liberal and NDP parties in the longer term and, indeed, for Sikhs themselves. This influence may provide benefits at election time for parties and individual candidates but may well have negative repercussions in terms of resentment and reaction from other ethnic groups as well as the public at large"¹⁰¹.

Other common narratives assert that the Sikh community votes in blocs and that Sikhs manipulate political nominations and elections. These stereotypes portray Sikhs as clannish and power-hungry, feeding resentment that "they're taking over" beyond their fair share which gets distorted into a conspiratorial narrative of undue influence.



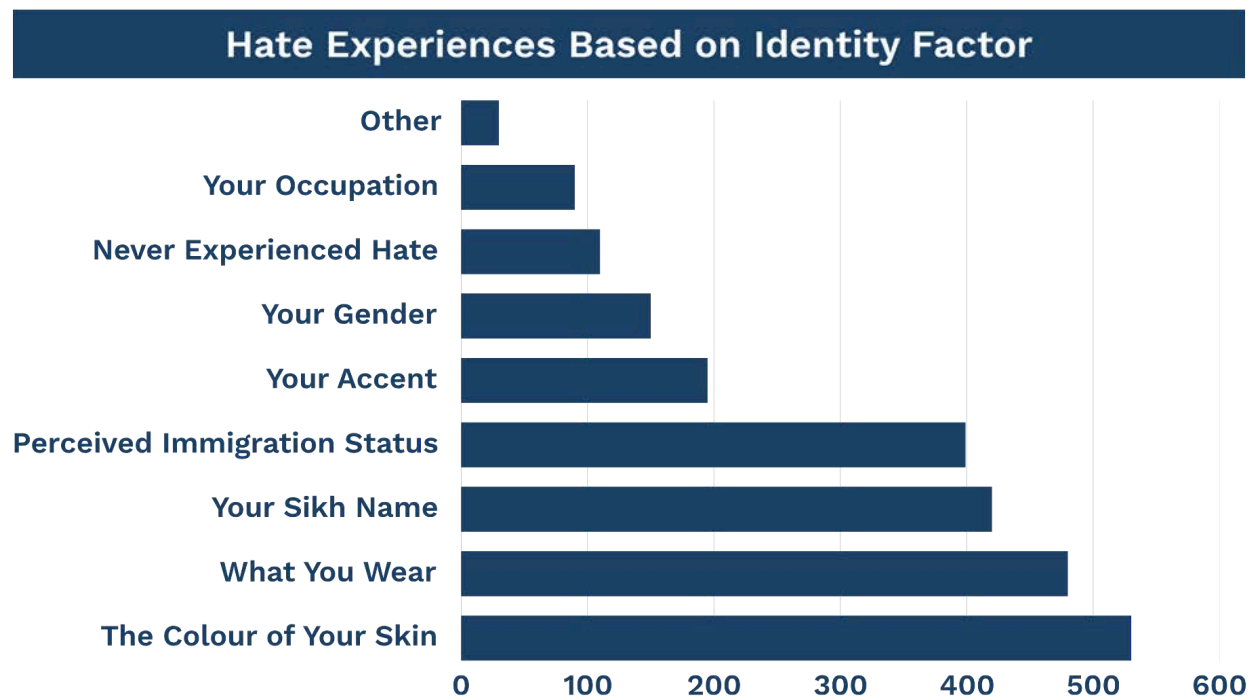
Above is an anti-Sikh social media meme in the aftermath of the 2025 federal election.

¹⁰¹ Collacott, Martin. "Sikh Political Power in Canada Under Scrutiny." *Vancouver Sun*, 20 March 2018, <https://vancouversun.com/opinion/op-ed/martin-collacott-sikh-political-power-in-canada-under-scrutiny>.

Community-Based Data and Perspectives

As part of this report, WSO conducted an original national survey from January 1st to March 1st in 2025, collecting responses from over 1,600 Sikh-Canadians. Additionally, in-person town halls were held across the country and provided a platform for community members to speak directly with WSO and with each other about their experiences. Together, these testimonies offer a vital lens in understanding the nuances of how anti-Sikh hate is defined, experienced, and perpetuated in Canada today.

Anti-Sikh hate in Canada today manifests in a spectrum of forms, ranging from violent hate crimes to insidious online disinformation. It is perpetrated by various actors – including white supremacist extremists, Indian online influencers and bots¹⁰², and members of other minority communities who are exposed to racist narratives about Sikhs.



The above figure depicts the results from the question in the original WSO survey about the experiences of anti-Sikh hate along the following identity factors indicated on the y-axis. It should be noted that respondents were able to check all that applied for how often they experienced hate along these dimensions.

¹⁰² Montpetit, Jonathan, Saloni Bhugra, and Ivan Angelovski. "Bots and Indian TV Push Fake News about Canada in Wake of Hindu Temple Clashes." *CBC News*, 18 December 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/bots-temple-clashes-hindu-sikh-canada-1.7411094>.



Over the course of this study, a consistent theme emerging from the findings is that anti-Sikh hate is often rooted in the visibility of Sikh identity, particularly in relation to their articles of faith and distinctive Sikh names (see figure above).

The Angus Reid Institute in March 2023 released a survey which found that 22% of respondents in Canada held an unfavourable attitude towards the Sikh faith. In Québec, that number rose to 32%. In Québec, the percentage of individuals opposed to the wearing of the kirpan was 66%, while 34% of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable with having a Sikh gurdwara in their neighbourhood¹⁰³.

The prevalence of anti-Sikh hate is widespread across Canada with approximately 73-86% of respondents in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Québec reporting that they have experienced anti-Sikh hate. Among those who visibly express their Sikh identity, this figure rises sharply to nearly 91% (compared to 46% for those not visibly expressing their Sikh identity).

Throughout the data collection, a majority of the respondents reported the hate they experience is in response to their visibility as Sikhs. This includes the Sikh articles of faith in conjunction with their racial identity. A respondent noted,

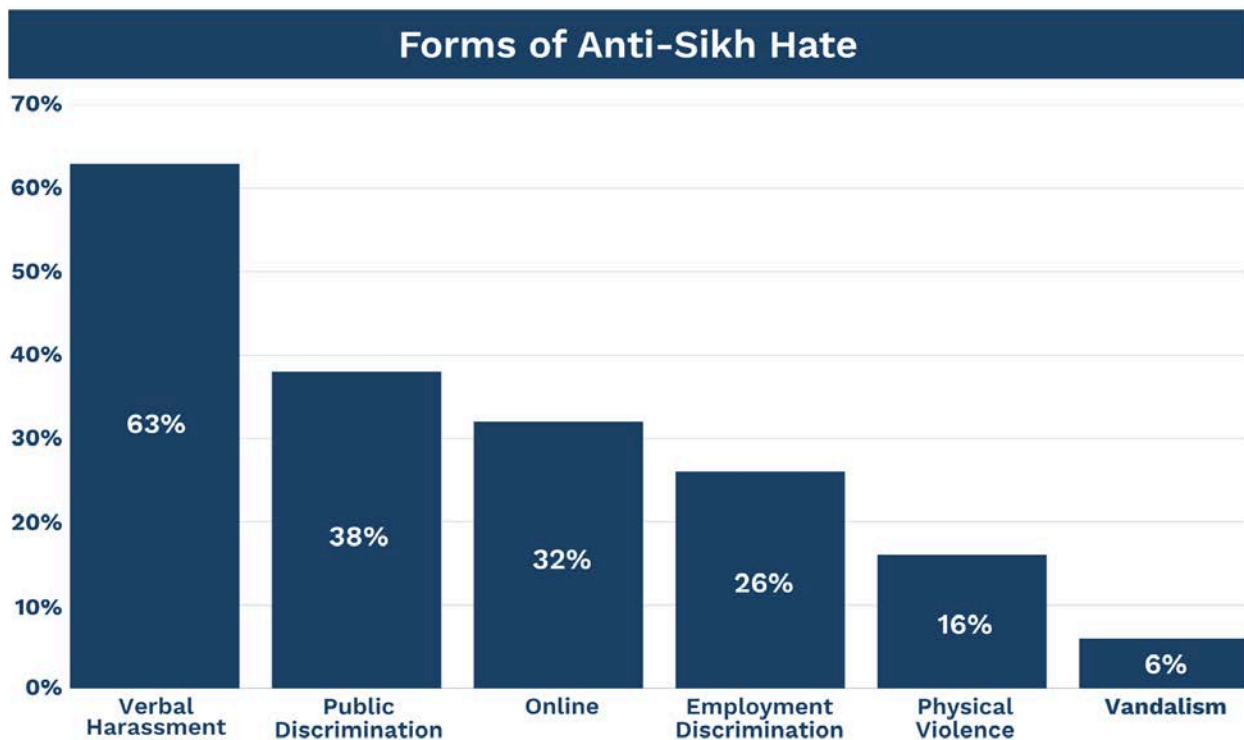
“We’re never seen as truly Canadian. Even when we’re born here, people ask us where we’re really from.”

“Because of my pag [dastaar] and beard, they don’t treat me well. As soon as I speak in perfect English, they flip the switch – they judge us and assume things about us.”

The *Panj Kakaars* are five articles of faith worn by initiated Sikhs (referenced in the “Understanding Sikhs & Sikhi” section) representing their commitment to the Sikh religion. Respondents who wore the 5 Kakaars reported drastically higher experiences of anti-Sikh hate, at over 90% for those wearing all five articles, compared to just 25% among those wearing none, highlighting a profound link between visible Sikh identity and hate experiences.

¹⁰³ Angus Reid Institute. "Islamophobia in Canada: Four Mindsets Indicate Negativity Is Nationwide, Most Intense in Québec." *Angus Reid Institute*, 13 March 2023, <https://angusreid.org/islamophobia-canada-Québec/>.

Visibly practicing Sikhs, particularly Sikhs who wear dastaars, are often misidentified as members of other groups and subjected to Islamophobic or racialized violence¹⁰⁴. This misrecognition is not just a case of mistaken identity but reflects deeper societal biases and ignorance about Sikhs and South Asian communities more broadly. This underscores a deeper, systemic issue: Sikh identity, especially when visibly expressed, is often perceived as incompatible with dominant colonial narratives of Canadian identity and society, reinforcing exclusion and challenging the community's sense of belonging in their own country.



The above figure depicts the forms of anti-Sikh hate experienced by respondents. Again, respondents were able to select more than one option. It should be noted that “public discrimination” includes anti-Sikh hate experienced or witnessed in public spaces such as on public transit, schools, hospitals, and other public spaces.

Below, we outline the major types and sources of anti-Sikh hate as reported in the survey.

¹⁰⁴ “[A] 2013 study published by Stanford Peace Innovation Lab found that Americans associated turbans with bin Laden and that 49 percent of Americans believed that Sikhism was a sect of Islam.”

Sra, Sahel. “Misconceptions and Misidentification of Sikhs Post-9/11.” *American Bar Association*, 25 November 2024, <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/resources/human-rights/2024-november/misconceptions-misidentification-sikhs/>.

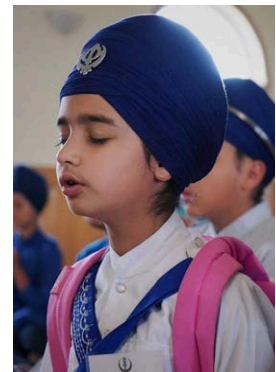
Hate Crimes and Violent Incidents

Physical assaults and vandalism targeting Sikhs have occurred with disturbing frequency in recent years, reflecting a troubling rise in hate-motivated violence. According to survey data, 16% of respondents reported experiencing physical violence, while 6% said they had been victims of vandalism and/or property damage. These acts are often explicitly motivated by anti-Sikh bias, as evidenced by attackers' words or actions. Not only do these acts cause immediate physical and emotional harm, but they also send a broader message of exclusion and fear to the entire Sikh community. As a result, many Sikhs live with a heightened sense of vulnerability, as recent incidents continue to underscore the persistent and tangible threats to their safety.

- **Attacks on Individuals:** There have been several high-profile assaults where Sikh victims were beaten and had their dastaars torn off (referenced in the “Illustrative Examples of Anti-Sikh Hate” section) – a particularly degrading attack given the spiritual significance of the dastar. Attacks on individuals can occur in any setting. Among respondents, as 27% reported incidents on public transit, another 27% reported facing discrimination in restaurants, and 40% described encountering hate in other public spaces beyond transportation and restaurants.
- **Attacks on Students in Public Schools:** According to the survey, 34% of respondents reported experiencing hate at school. In public schools, Sikh students have consistently faced bullying, intimidation, and even physical assault. A Brampton resident shared,

“We would get beaten up every day in school. We had to cut our hair at 13 or 14 because of what we went through.”

The persistent threats to safety and the targeting of Sikh identity have led some community members to take drastic measures, including removing articles of faith such as the dastar or patka in an attempt to avoid harassment. While this is by no means a solution to the issue, many Sikhs, particularly young Sikhs and parents of young Sikhs, feel pressured to remove articles of faith in order to limit potential experiences and exposure to hate. Another Brampton resident recalled how her son's patka was forcibly removed at school without any intervention from staff.



The above image is a photograph of a Sikh child praying.



“They let the kids stand in the hallway and continue to make fun of him. The last thing you want is to stand in the hallway and wait for your mom to come and retie your patka.”

Another survey respondent said,

“Most of my anti-Sikh hate experiences would come from kids in my school. It would happen on a daily basis. It started from name calling (paki, terrorist, Osama, sand monkey, etc.) to threats of taking my dastaar off.”

These visible expressions of hate not only create a climate of fear but also leave lasting psychological scars. The trauma, humiliation, and degradation they experience are compounded by the inaction of school administrators and the institutions responsible for their protection. Experiencing such hateful incidents at a young age has profound and long-term consequences, including mental health challenges and a diminished sense of belonging, both in broader society and within the Sikh community itself.

According to Statistics Canada data, police-reported hate crimes against South Asians and against “other religions (including Sikh)” have been climbing. In 2023, police recorded 265 hate crime incidents targeting South Asians (up from ~80 in 2019)¹⁰⁵ and 85 incidents targeting the “other religion” category (Sikh, Hindu, etc.)¹⁰⁶. These numbers are likely low, as not all incidents are reported. As will be discussed later, over 70% of survey respondents who experienced anti-Sikh hate in our survey indicated that they did not report their experiences. This concern is particularly relevant in cases of physical hate crimes, where victims may feel especially vulnerable or unsafe coming forward. This widespread reluctance to report, combined with inadequate institutional responses, suggests that the actual prevalence of anti-Sikh violence may be significantly higher than current data reflects. This also highlights the necessity for Canadian institutions to collect disaggregated racial and religious data in order to better understand the scope of hate incidents threats facing communities and to develop effective, evidence-based responses that ensure safety and accountability.

¹⁰⁵ Statistics Canada. “Police-reported Hate Crime in Canada, 2023.” *The Daily*, 25 March 2025, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250325/dq250325a-eng.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ Government of Canada. “Canada’s Action Plan on Combatting Hate”. *Canadian Heritage*, 22 October 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/combating-hate/action-plan.html>.

Harassment, Bias, and Microaggressions

Beyond outright crimes, many Sikhs experience everyday harassment and discrimination that may not make headlines but cumulatively impacts the well-being and mental health of the Sikh-Canadian community. According to the survey, verbal harassment (such as name-calling and slurs) was the most commonly reported form of hate, with 65% of participants indicating they had experienced it. Respondents described being mocked, judged, or excluded in addition to receiving name-calling and slurs because of their visible Sikh identity consisting of the articles of faith and identifiable Sikh names. These experiences are not limited to isolated events; instead, they represent frequent and normalized patterns occurring across multiple social and institutional contexts.

As mentioned, this type of subtle but persistent hostility often goes unreported. The second most commonly cited reason for not reporting hate incidents was the perception that such events were “unimportant,” reflecting how deeply normalized and commonplace these forms of discrimination have become. This also points to a broader systemic issue in which minoritized communities exhibit low institutional trust, stemming from repeated experiences of inaction and the perception that reporting discrimination rarely produces meaningful outcomes.

Respondents reported experiencing harassment such as verbal hate through online platforms, workplaces, schools, and everyday public spaces, further underscoring the pervasiveness of anti-Sikh sentiments including harassment, bias, and microaggressions. Many emphasized direct verbal harassment manifested in being called slurs such as “terrorist” or “Khalistani” in a derogatory manner or being told to “go back to your country.” When describing microaggressions, respondents reported being stared at, excluded, or made to feel unwelcome and unsafe in public environments. Overall, 38% of respondents reported that they have experienced anti-Sikh hate in public spaces, reinforcing feelings of insecurity and exclusion.



The above image is an editorial Cartoon Montreal Gazette 1984.

Over 26% of respondents reported experiencing employment discrimination. Employment discrimination is pervasive and ranges from a denial of opportunities, to bullying and harassment and microaggressions used in the workplace. Although such bias may not always be overt, many Sikhs have felt its impact in persistent ways. One respondent noted,

"I've been denied promotions. They don't say it's because I'm Sikh—but I know it is."

While some participants attributed this hate to ignorance, many also pointed to a deeper pattern of systemic racism and the persistent othering of Sikhs based on their appearance, language, and religious affiliation. This is further compounded by transnational repression and distorted media campaigns against Sikhs, which reinforce negative stereotypes and intensify the discrimination that Sikhs experience daily. These layered and intersecting factors create an environment where these microaggressions contribute to the growing sentiment of hate and discrimination that are a part of a grim reality for many Sikhs.

Stereotyping and Profiling

A unique aspect of anti-Sikh hate is the political stereotyping of Sikhs as extremists or terrorists. For the past forty years, the Indian state has pushed anti-Sikh narratives and disinformation in Canada¹⁰⁷, maligning Sikhs who criticize India or support a separate state of Khalistan as extremists or terrorists¹⁰⁸. With the Canadian Foreign Interference Commission finding India as a notorious actor of transnational repression against Sikhs in Canada, this narrative has resulted in Sikhs being surveilled and viewed through a security lens¹⁰⁹. In the word cloud below, evidence of these stereotypes was captured through our townhalls, depicting discriminatory language and terms used against Sikh participant. In this word cloud, the larger the words appear, the more frequently participants reported this language being used against them. It should be noted that while the terms "Hindu" and "Muslim" appear in the word cloud, these words themselves are not inherently discriminatory. In this context, Sikh participants highlighted that being labeled as "Hindu" or "Muslim" is perceived as discriminatory because it reflects a historical and ongoing pattern of undermining and erasing Sikh identity by misidentifying them with another religion.



¹⁰⁷ *Supra* note 85.

¹⁰⁸ Mitchell, Alanna. "Canadian Public Misled, Visiting Sikh Charges." *Toronto Star*, 6 June 1988, p. A19. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/435757578?sourcetype=Newspapers>.

¹⁰⁹ *Supra* note 14 and 87.



Other contemporary manifestations include:

“Khalistani” Labeling: Public discourse influenced by Indian disinformation actors has often labeled Sikh activists, or even assertive Sikh voices, as “Khalistanis” which is used as a slur and is posed as being synonymous with extremism or terrorism¹¹⁰. According to survey respondents, one of the most common ways this hate manifests is through verbal harassment, including being called a “terrorist” or “Khalistani” in a derogatory manner.

To be clear, support for Khalistan or self identifying as a Khalistani is neither extremist nor terrorist. Khalistan is the term Sikhs use to refer to a state and model of governance in accordance with the Sikh values of *sarbat da bhallā* (upliftment of all) and *seva* (selfless service). While the term Khalistani is not inherently a slur, it has been co-opted and weaponized by certain actors to malign Sikhs and suppress legitimate political expression. As one survey participant explained,

“Khalistan has become a way to silence us.”

Of the 1,011 respondents who answered the question specifically regarding hate based on Khalistan support, 542 reported experiencing hate. This amounts to about 54% of those who explicitly addressed the issue, highlighting that support for or association with Khalistan significantly contributes to hate incidents experienced by Sikh individuals. Among those who reported experiencing discrimination related to Khalistan - regardless of their personal views - an overwhelming 96.1% also reported experiencing anti-Sikh hate. This underscores a strong link between Khalistan-associated discrimination and broader anti-Sikh hate and illustrates how perception-based discrimination, driven by misinformation and political stereotyping, fuels hate. Further, 22% of respondents indicated that the hate they experience based on their perceived political views primarily comes from individuals of the same skin color, pointing to a concerning trend of Sikhs being targeted by those of Indian background, likely due to anti-Sikh narratives originating from that country. The data and lived experiences clearly show that anti-Sikh hate is not solely based on religion; it is deeply racialized, politicized, and rooted in long-standing historical bias.

¹¹⁰ Ahmed, Fahad, and Baljit Nagra. “India’s accusation of ‘terrorism’ is a ploy to hide its own human rights abuses.” *The Conversation*, 15 October 2023, <https://theconversation.com/indias-accusation-of-terrorism-is-a-ploy-to-hide-its-own-human-rights-abuses-214660>.



Another survey respondent commenting on anti-Sikh hate said,

“Most of it seems to be orchestrated towards support for Sikh sovereignty. Online slurs towards Sikhi, articles of faith, and continuous labelling of the Sikh identity as ‘terrorists’ is especially worrisome.”

While political concepts such as Khalistan can and should be subject to legitimate debate and critique, using the term ‘Khalistani’ as a slur to stigmatize, intimidate, or incite hatred against Sikhs is unacceptable. The term has increasingly been weaponized to undermine and stereotype Sikh activism across a range of contexts, including Farmers’ Protests¹¹¹ and even in attacks on prominent Sikh athletes¹¹², celebrities and public figures¹¹³.

Criticism of Khalistan crosses the line into anti-Sikh hate when it frames peaceful Sikh political expression, such as seeking justice for the 1984 genocide or advocating for minority rights, as extremism, or delegitimizes Sikh identity by portraying it as inherently dangerous. Denying Sikhs the right to self-determination or silencing and stigmatizing those who advocate for it is also a form of anti-Sikh hate. This rhetoric, primarily emerging out of India, excludes Sikh history, distorts community narratives, and is fueled by Indian state media and online personalities. As another respondent put it, “TV panels discuss us without us”. These targeted efforts seek to discredit Sikh advocacy and portray the community in a negative light, reinforces harmful stereotypes and undermines political participation, engagement, and expression.

¹¹¹ Menon, Shruti, and Flora Carmichael. “Farm Laws: Sikhs Being Targeted by Fake Social Media Profiles.” *BBC News*, 24 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-59338245>.

¹¹² Singh, Valay. “Arshdeep Called ‘Khalistani’ after India’s Loss to Pakistan”. *Al Jazeera*, 6 September 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/6/bowler-called-khalistani-after-india-loses-to-pakistan-in-dubai>.

¹¹³ Entertainment Desk. “Kangana Ranaut Again Targets Diljit Dosanjh as She Warns ‘Supporters’ of Khalistan: ‘Pols Aa Gayi Pols’”. *The Indian Express*, 22 March 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/kangana-ranaut-takes-a-dig-at-diljit-dosanjh-as-she-warns-supporters-of-khalistanis-8511698/>.

Intersectional and Gendered Anti-Sikh Hate

Anti-Sikh hate through an intersectional lens considers how some Sikhs hold multiple, overlapping identities that can intensify the harm they experience^{114,115}. Respondents identifying as cisgender women reported that their experiences of anti-Sikh hate were often shaped by both gender and religious visibility. This aligns with broader patterns in which hate is directed toward those who are visibly identifiable as Sikh, such as individuals wearing a dastaar or other articles of faith.

At the intersection of race, gender and religion, Sikh women face a distinct set of challenges, experiencing racial prejudice, gender-based discrimination and religious intolerance. These multifaceted and often marginalized identities combine to make Sikh women a group that is subject to unique forms of hate, rooted in racist, sexist and xenophobic sentiments. Due to their visible identity and societal expectations of femininity, Sikh women face often overlooked forms of harassment and discrimination. An online town hall participant shared:

“It is especially difficult for Sikh women who keep their kesh. They are brutally bullied for having facial hair. It is seen as problematic because it does not follow the white, colonial definition of what it means to be a girl or a woman. Due to our kesh, Sikh women face distinct forms of discrimination and hate.”



Sikh women wearing the dastaar.

¹¹⁴ Ontario Human Rights Commission. *An Intersectional Approach to Discrimination: Addressing Multiple Grounds in Human Rights Claims*. 2024, <https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/intersectional-approach-discrimination-addressing-multiple-grounds-human-rights-claims/introduction>.

¹¹⁵ Out of the 1353 respondents who answered the question asking about their gender identity, 22 respondents chose ‘prefer not to say’ and did not to disclose their identity while 5 respondents identified as gender diverse. Gender diverse identities included transgender and non-binary identities.



The targeting of Sikh women based on their physical appearance, particularly those who wear articles of faith, places them in especially vulnerable and isolating positions, often with limited avenues for support or redress. Alarming, 97% of women who wear head coverings report experiencing anti-Sikh hate. Sikh women who do not wear head coverings still report significantly higher rates of hate (77%) compared to men without head coverings (47%), indicating that intersectionality is a key factor into the hate experienced by Sikhs. This disparity highlights the deeply gendered nature of anti-Sikh hate, and the compounded discrimination Sikh women face. Targeting Sikh women for their commitment to their faith undermines the core Sikh principle of equality and reinforces colonial standards and expectations of femininity which have always been different in postcolonial societies^{116,117}.

Anti-Sikh Hate and the Québec Experience

The Sikh community in Québec faces a unique set of challenges that is distinct in comparison to other provinces. This reality is shaped by Quebec's commitment to laïcité and the implementation of Bill 21. Although framed as a policy to maintain religious neutrality in public institutions, Bill 21 has disproportionately impacted Sikhs by restricting the wearing of religious symbols, including the dastaar (turban) and kirpan, for public sector employees. This legislation has created barriers to employment, exacerbated social exclusion, and reinforced negative stereotypes, collectively undermining Sikh Canadians' sense of belonging, security, and equal citizenship. Respondents living in Québec reported experiencing a higher rate of anti-Sikh hate (73.5%) compared to those outside Québec (64.2%).

In Montréal, participants shared accounts of institutional racism and discrimination, perpetuated by the provincial government's nation-building agenda that excludes the visible Sikh identity from the public sphere and exacerbates hate and discrimination experienced in daily life. One Montréal resident reported,

"The province did not allow me to enter the National Assembly because of my kirpan."

Another shared,

"I have been spit on in public,"

¹¹⁶ Deliovsky, Kathy. "Normative White Femininity: Race, Gender and the Politics of Beauty." *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Reddy, Vanita. *Fashioning Diaspora: Beauty, Femininity, and South Asian American Culture*. Temple University Press, 2016.

while a third recounted,

“When I moved to Montreal from BC, two gores (white people) spit on me.”

International students and Sikhs living in provinces like Québec face additional and distinct challenges. Sikhs who wear visible articles of faith, such as the dastaar or kirpan, encounter discriminatory barriers to employment and professional advancement. However, this discrimination transcends the public sphere, influencing everyday social interactions and shaping how Sikhs are perceived and treated in private and community settings. These experiences contribute to a persistent sense of othering and exclusion. This often leaves Sikh residents questioning their sense of belonging in Québec, deepening feelings of vulnerability and exclusion within the province.



Amrit Kaur, who left Quebec after being unable to continue teaching while maintaining her Sikh articles of faith under Bill 21.

Legislation such as Québec’s Bill 21 further compounds these challenges by isolating those who are culturally and religiously distinct from the majority population. By codifying the exclusion of individuals with visible religious identities from public-facing roles, the law implicitly defines what a Quebecker is expected to look like. In doing so, it systemically marginalizes and excludes those who do not conform to that legislated ideal of ‘secular’ identity and appearance.



French Language and Anti-Sikh Hate

Respondents who speak French in Québec were far more likely to report experiencing anti-Sikh hate (89%; compared with 65% for the rest). This suggests that French language use may increase visibility and perceived difference, thereby amplifying experiences of discrimination. Proficiency in French is commonly perceived as a pathway to more professional opportunities, particularly in Québec's public sector. However, contrary to the government of Québec's narrative¹¹⁸ that French fluency facilitates integration and inclusion, the data suggests that it may instead increase exposure to environments where Sikh representation is limited. This underrepresentation in professional and institutional settings can heighten discrimination and hate rooted in limited awareness and respect for Sikh identity. It also contributes to isolation and vulnerability, as the lived experiences of Sikhs in Québec shows that linguistic integration does not necessarily lead to social acceptance. Proficiency in the French language may expose Québec Sikhs to experience verbal harassment in both languages. As reported during the Montréal townhalls, French-language slurs directed at Sikhs are a common and distressing experience within the Québec Sikh community. In effect, greater visibility within workplaces that lack cultural and religious diversity can inadvertently lead to more frequent and possibly intensified encounters with hate.

These findings raise concerns and important questions regarding Bill 84, *An Act respecting national integration*, recently introduced by the Minister Responsible for the Canadian Francophonie. This Bill establishes a Québec model of national integration to preserve the Québec culture and to promote social cohesion by using the French language as a vehicle¹¹⁹. WSO's data collection illustrates that French-speaking Sikhs may actually encounter higher levels of hate, a concerning paradox in Québec's integration policies if discrimination and hate is not meaningfully addressed. Overall, anti-Sikh hate in Québec underscores a complex and troubling intersection of linguistic visibility, religious distinctiveness, and systemic discrimination. While French fluency may grant access to societal participation, it can also amplify exposure to hate and systematic exclusion for Sikhs and other minorized groups, eroding their opportunities to fully participate and hopes to thrive in Canadian society.

¹¹⁸ Gouvernement du Québec. "Learn French." *Gouvernement du Québec*, May 2025, <https://www.quebec.ca/en/education/learn-french>.

¹¹⁹ National Assembly of Québec. *Bill 84: National Integration Act*. 43rd Legislature, 1st Session, 2025, www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-84-43-1.html.



Rising Trends in Anti-Sikh Hate

In recent years—both online and offline—there has been a palpable rise in overt racism and hidden microaggressions against Sikhs. Our survey found a staggering 80% of survey respondents reported that they felt anti-Sikh hate had increased in the past five years, while only 8% felt it had decreased and another 8% said it remained the same. As shown throughout the illustrated examples, this correlates to the targeting of Sikh institutions, leaders, and community members, in addition to a sharp rise in hate crime statistics against South Asians and Sikhs.

This report focuses on anti-Sikh hate that is rooted in longstanding systemic racism, colonial ideologies, and white supremacist attitudes. Driven by the increase in immigration (both past and present), this source of anti-Sikh hate views Sikhs and Sikh newcomers as an unwelcome demographic change. These ideologies frame difference as a threat, positioning Sikhs as “the Other” and specifically, Sikh articles of faith as incompatible with dominant cultural norms which are rooted in the belief that Canada always was and should continue to be a “white nation”. As an online town hall participant noted:

“The discrimination against a Sikh’s kesh (hair) stems from white supremacy, which labels cut hair as being ‘clean-cut’ or ‘civilized’. We can see this with the atrocities that Indigenous people face and the similar perceptions of their hair. Settlers dictate which cultures and ways of life are deemed ‘acceptable’.”

Anti-Sikh hate originates both domestically through white supremacy and racism and transnationally through repression and targeting by foreign states. However, these two sources converge in their impact: to isolate, target and intensify hate towards Sikhs, particularly those who are visibly identifiable. Whether through surveillance, stereotyping, exclusion from public institutions, or threats of violence, the combined effect of these forces has created a climate of hostility that undermines safety, rights, and inclusion for Sikhs in Canada.



The Harmful Impact of Anti-Sikh Hate

Psychological and Emotional Impacts

As has been emphasized throughout this report, experiencing hate – whether a violent attack or a derogatory comment – can inflict deep psychological wounds that often go unacknowledged. From our findings, 94% of respondents reported psychological and emotional trauma from having experienced hate in Canada, underscoring the widespread and persistent nature of anti-Sikh discrimination across the country.

Common impacts include:

- **Trauma and Anxiety**
- **Depression and Self-Esteem Issues**
- **Anger and Alienation**
- **Intergenerational Trauma**

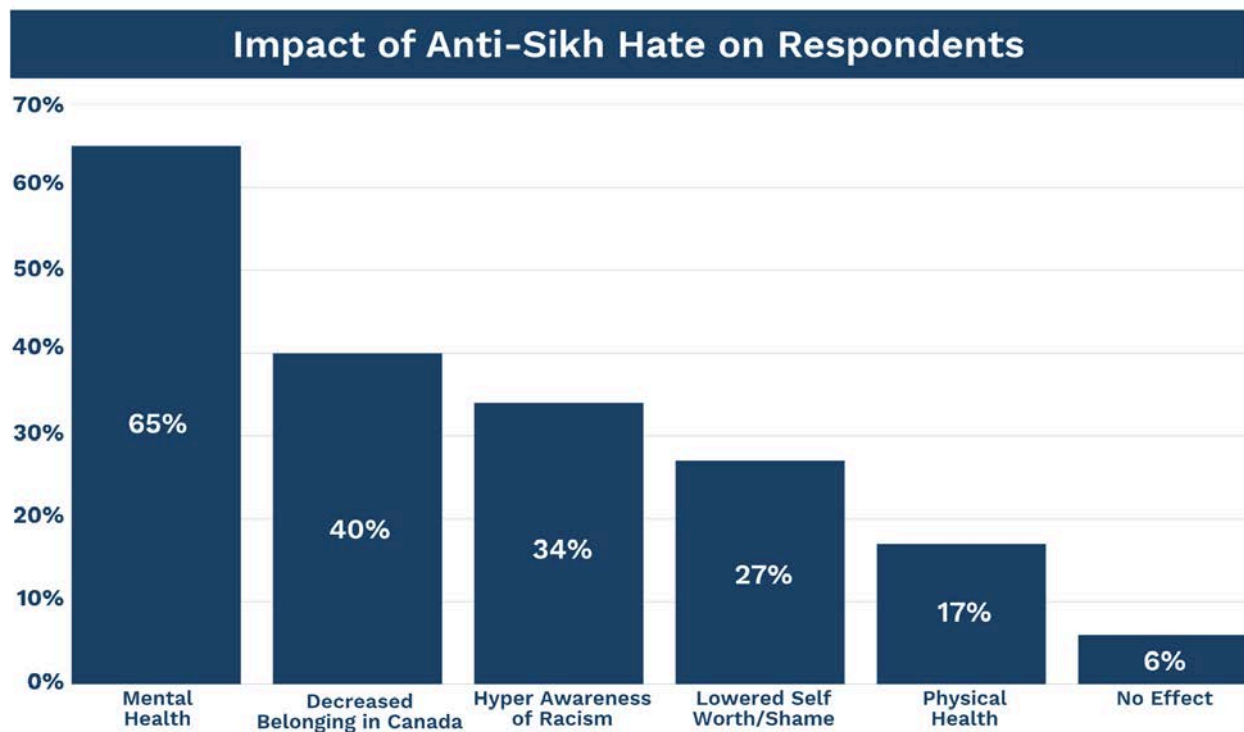
These emotional consequences are further compounded by historical and intergenerational trauma. For many Sikhs, present-day experiences of discrimination amplify longstanding feelings of exclusion and marginalization. Fewer than 10% of respondents said that hate incidents had no effect on them, demonstrating just how pervasive and damaging this issue is within the community.

The fear of being targeted, judged, or dismissed is constant, often leading to mental health challenges including heightened self-consciousness and anxiety. Of those experiencing anti-Sikh hate, 48% of respondents reported becoming hyper-aware of how they are perceived by others and of the racism around them. One Winnipeg resident shared:

“Even if people do not say or ‘do’ anything outwardly hateful, it is in their heads. I can tell by the way they look at us. They have conversations behind our backs, and you can tell just what they’re thinking.”



65% of respondents reported that hate incidents had significantly impacted their mental health. Others shared feelings of exclusion and impacting their sense of belonging and shame and lowered self-worth, at 40% and 27%, respectively. This underscores the urgent need for mental health support, institutional accountability, and stronger community-based interventions to help Sikhs navigate the lasting harm caused by hate.



The above figure depicts the physical and emotional impacts of anti-Sikh hate on survey respondents. Again, respondents were able to check more than one answer as it applied to their experiences of hate and discrimination.



Social and Community Impacts

Anti-Sikh hate doesn't just harm individuals; it affects the cohesion and dynamics of the Sikh community and its relationship with other communities:

- **Community Vigilance and Burden:** In response to threats, Sikh communities often mobilize their own resources for protection and advocacy. Gurdwaras have had to invest in security measures (cameras, guards for big events) – funds that could have gone to community programs are now diverted to safety. Community organizations like WSO run reporting hotlines and legal aid for hate incidents. The mental bandwidth of community leaders gets consumed by crisis response, sometimes at the expense of other community development work. While these are positive forms of resilience, they also represent an extra burden on minority communities.
- **Youth Identity Struggles:** Experiencing hate in school often leads to deep identity struggles for Sikh youth. Given the absence of meaningful action from school administrators and public institutions, students may lack the tools to recognize that the hate directed at their Sikh identity is rooted in systemic racism and broader societal issues, such as distorted media narratives or a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment. As a result, they are more likely to internalize the discrimination, which can cause them to question their identity and connection to Sikhi. This internal conflict can erode their confidence, create a sense of distance from their faith and community, and leave lasting psychological scars.
- **Aging Members of the Sikh community:** Aging members of the Sikh community are especially vulnerable to anti-Sikh hate, which has led to fear for their personal safety and negative impacts on their mental health, including feelings of isolation, anxiety, and confusion following such incidents. Recently, there have been alarming incidents in Ontario of elderly Sikhs being targeted, physically assaulted, and harassed on their way to the gurdwara. Language barriers and limited digital literacy are significant obstacles that prevent many from accessing the support they need. Without adequate resources to seek help or redress the situation, the emotional and psychological toll of these experiences is compounded. This often instills fear around going outside alone, which increases isolation, disconnects individuals from their community, and creates a growing reliance on others for everyday activities. One survey respondent said,



“Any time you stand up for Sikhi you are branded as Khalistani. I am afraid for my elderly father living as Keshdari Sikh, I am afraid my sons may not identify as Sikh in saroop due to negative images of Sikhs portrayed in media and anti-Sikh sentiment in Canada.”

Economic and Professional Impacts

Sikhs report experiencing significant levels of discrimination in both professional and educational settings, with over 38% of respondents indicating they had faced anti-Sikh hate in the workplace and 34% reporting similar experiences in schools. These experiences do not exist in isolation; they shape long-term educational and professional trajectories, limiting opportunities and undermining confidence. While more difficult to quantify, the economic consequences of anti-Sikh hate are both real and far-reaching.

- **Career Limitations and Differential Treatment:** Experiencing anti-Sikh hate in educational institutions and workplaces likely not only affects an individual's confidence and participation at work but also impacts their feeling of a sense of belonging in the wider community and overall career progression. Among those who reported experiencing anti-Sikh hate, over 26% specifically cited employment discrimination. According to open-ended survey responses, workplace discrimination included being denied job opportunities, treated unfairly by colleagues or supervisors, or mocked for one's appearance and beliefs. One respondent from Surrey described this dynamic clearly:

“In the workplace, I don't identify myself as a Sikh. I don't go out of my way to tell them I am Sikh. [...] With the rise of anti-Sikh hate, it feels like a burden—to identify and advocate as a Sikh.”

This sentiment was echoed by others who reported exclusion, stereotyping, and a persistent lack of understanding of political issues affecting the Sikh community. Some shared that they were ridiculed about the geo-political events sharing that

“Coworkers laughed at me and asked if I supported violence in India.”

This illustrates a troubling disconnect where ignorance and bias translate into professional marginalization.



Merely identifying as Sikh, particularly in workplaces that lack cultural literacy or inclusive environments, often leads to differential treatment. For some, this results in distancing themselves from their identity, a decision that carries emotional and psychological weight. These impacts run counter to Canada's professed multicultural values, revealing how systemic barriers continue to inhibit the full and equal participation of Sikh individuals in professional life.

- **Health and Social Services:** More than 12% of respondents reported experiencing anti-Sikh hate while accessing healthcare services. The rate was notably higher among women (18.4%) compared to men (7.8%). While accessing healthcare services or during treatment, many Sikhs face discrimination and racism for their articles of faith. A notable illustration is the William Osler Health System incident in Brampton in 2024 (referenced in “Illustrative Examples” section)¹²⁰. Further, discussion surrounding this incident online saw ignorance and a lack of empathy by online users who commented on the incident saying “That’s the beauty of hair, it grows back. Quit crying.” or “This is Canada, assimilate or leave. Who cares”. This incident, despite taking place in one of Canada’s most diverse cities, highlights a troubling lack of religious sensitivity and cultural competency within the healthcare system but also within online discourse and public sentiment. It underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms, including mandatory anti-racism and religious sensitivity training for healthcare professionals, to ensure equitable and respectful care for Sikh patients.

Unwelcome and Unsafe: The Impact of Anti-Sikh Hate on International Students

For newcomer or immigrant Sikhs, the risks are compounded. Fear of jeopardizing immigration status, limited language access, unfamiliarity with legal systems, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities can all inhibit their ability to report hate incidents or access support. These individuals may also encounter systemic barriers in education, employment, and healthcare that reinforce marginalization and social exclusion.

¹²⁰ Martino, Frank, and Pardeep Singh Gill. “Statement from William Osler Health System.” *William Osler Health System*, 9 October 2024, <https://www.williamoslerhs.ca/en/news/statement-from-william-osler-health-system.aspx>.



International students have reported fearing for their safety, facing open hostility, and struggling with their integration into Canadian society. These experiences deeply impact their mental health, sense of belonging, and trust in the institutions meant to protect them. There have been numerous, documented cases of Sikh international students being targeted ranging from being assaulted in public spaces, denied public and private services, and subjected to verbal harassment. Overt racism, hate, and disdain for Sikh international students and newcomers has become normalized in Canadian society and are indicative of the failure of Canada's multicultural model. In many ways, online discourse about international students has bolstered the negative sentiments that some Canadians hold towards racialized people and provided them with fertile ground to be openly xenophobic and discriminatory in their offline behaviour. Throughout our data collection, we heard from many in the community who discussed that, regardless of their citizenship status, they were assumed to be immigrants. The colour of their skin or visible Sikh identity alone was cause for hostility.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has grown alongside rising immigration levels, and Sikh international students are in a challenging position with increased anti-Sikh hate and the precarity that comes with being an international student. Their aspirations are often ridiculed, and their experiences of hate and discrimination go unnoticed or are dismissed. A Winnipeg resident recounted:

"In my university class, I got asked, 'Why are you in university? Shouldn't you be driving a taxi?'"

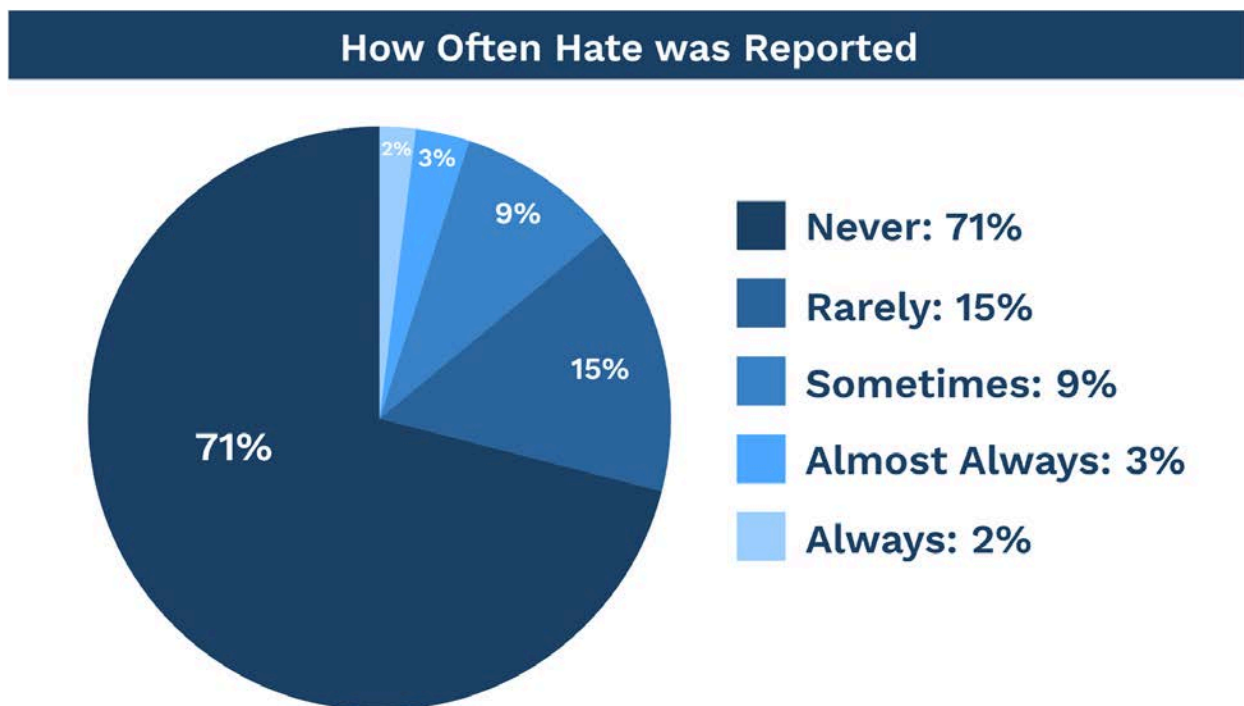
Such remarks are not only belittling and discriminatory but also minimize the contributions made to Canadian society by the Sikh community. These experiences create lasting psychological impacts such as feelings of alienation, humiliation, and invisibility, and cause many to question their place in Canada.



Survey responses deeply reflect this felt exclusion. 40% of respondents experiencing hate stated the experience diminished their sense of belonging in Canada. Despite Canada's official commitment to multiculturalism and minority rights as organizing values of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom*, this reality reveals a stark contrast. Anti-Sikh hate reinforces the notion that Canada is a white nation, perpetuating the harmful conspiracy of "the great replacement theory"^{121,122} and undermining the very principles of diversity and inclusion that Canada strives to uphold.

Anti-Sikh Hate: Unnoticed and Underreported

There is a stark number of anti-Sikh hate incidents that go unreported to the police for various reasons. Despite this underreporting, it is evident that anti-Sikh hate is widespread, increasing, and largely going unaddressed. The prevalence is undeniable: the vast majority of respondents reported experiencing hate incidents, yet most of these incidents were not reported. The survey found that 71% said they never reported incidents of hate, and only a striking 2% said that they always did.



¹²¹ Coletto, David. "Millions believe in conspiracy theories in Canada." *Abacus Data*, 12 June 2022, <https://abacusdata.ca/conspiracy-theories-canada/>.

¹²² Coates, Rodney. "What is the 'great replacement theory'? A scholar of race relations explains." *The Conversation*, 15 March 2024, <https://theconversation.com/what-is-the-great-replacement-theory-a-scholar-of-race-relations-explains-224835>.

One survey respondent offered the following example:

“My manager's former supervisor used to schedule regular meetings with me and question me about Sikhi in a demeaning way. She used to question why I keep my Kesh and wear Kakaars...I never reported anything because I was on a temporary contract and I was trying to establish my career.”



Photograph from the WSO anti-Sikh hate town hall held in Brampton.

When asked about why respondents did not report the hate, 20% of respondents stated that they felt reporting the incident would not change anything. This grim reality reflects a broader sense of futility. Equally concerning, 15% of respondents said they believed the incident they experienced was unimportant, which shaped their decision not to report it. This may reflect a normalized expectation of hate—an internalized belief that such experiences are simply part of life for Sikhs in Canada, given the frequency and persistence of anti-Sikh prejudice. These beliefs and perceptions could be rooted in long-standing patterns of racism, pointing to deeper structural and societal injustices that need to be addressed.



Pathways Forward

Despite Canada's robust legal framework and official commitment to multiculturalism, there have been notable failures by institutions in adequately preventing or responding to anti-Sikh hate. These failures span government policy, law enforcement, data collection, and education, and they reflect a lag between ideals and practice.

A critical indicator of institutional failure is the mistrust expressed by Sikh Canadians toward systems that are meant to protect them. Approximately 11% of respondents cited a lack of institutional support as a reason for not reporting hate incidents, while 8% pointed to the reporting process being too long and complicated (barriers often worsened by language limitations or a lack of awareness of available resources). Many respondents said they believed reporting would lead to no meaningful change, reinforcing a perception of institutional inaction. When asked to rate Canadian institutions' efforts to combat hate, 50% of respondents rated them as "poor" or "very poor," while only 12% said "good" or "very good." These findings point to systemic shortcomings, deeply rooted mistrust, and a growing disconnect between Canada's multicultural ideals and the lived reality of Sikh Canadians.

Addressing anti-Sikh hate in Canada requires a multi-pronged strategy involving government, law enforcement, educators, civil society, communities, and individuals. This section outlines comprehensive, actionable recommendations grounded in data, case studies, and community input, including insights from survey responses. These pathways forward aim to prevent hate, protect potential victims, and promote inclusion and understanding.



1. Government and Policy Actions

- **Adopt a Formal Definition of Anti-Sikh Hate:** The federal government should adopt a non-binding working definition of anti-Sikh hate proposed through this report to help recognize both overt and subtle forms of bias. The absence of a clear definition meant institutions might not distinguish anti-Sikh hate from generic categories, as noted. Symbolic recognition matters too – for instance, Parliament has not yet passed a motion specifically condemning anti-Sikh hate. Such a gesture could be introduced in the future by a sitting Member of Parliament in the same way M-103 recognized the persistence of Islamophobia and called for open condemnation in 2017¹²³.
- **Integrate Anti-Sikh Hate in National Action Plans:** Canada's forthcoming Action Plan on Combating Hate must explicitly address anti-Sikh hate. This includes incorporating case studies of anti-Sikh incidents in training materials for public servants and law enforcement. Allocate dedicated funding for Sikh-specific anti-hate initiatives under federal anti-racism programs, supporting workshops, public education campaigns, and inclusive school curricula.
- **Support Legislation and Policy Changes:** The federal government should continue to support legal challenges to laws that institutionalize religious discrimination, such as Québec's Bill 21, through court interventions. Simultaneously, review federal policies in areas like security, immigration, and employment to identify and remove indirect bias against Sikhs. For example, revise any security screening directives that disproportionately flag Sikh travelers.
- **Improve Hate Crime Data Collection:** Statistics Canada and police services should disaggregate hate crime data to track anti-Sikh incidents as a distinct category (not combined under "other religion" or "South Asian"). National surveys on discrimination and victimization should include "Sikh" as a selectable identity and ensure religious bias questions reflect the Sikh experience.

¹²³ House of Commons Canada. "M-103 Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination." *House of Commons Canada*, 2017, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en/88849/motions/8661986>.



- **Integrating Anti-Sikh Hate Education into Judicial and Public Service Training:** To ensure a consistent and equitable approach to combating all forms of hate, the Government of Canada should support the development of training modules focused on anti-Sikh hate for use across the public sector, including in judicial education. Just as targeted programs have been created to address antisemitism and Islamophobia, similar educational tools should be developed in collaboration with Sikh organizations to address the unique history, identity, and contemporary challenges faced by Sikh Canadians. These modules should equip judges, law enforcement, and public servants with the knowledge to recognize how anti-Sikh hate manifests, including through religious discrimination, stereotyping of political expression, and transnational repression. Incorporating such training into the offerings of institutions like the Canada School of Public Service and the National Judicial Institute would help ensure that Sikh Canadians are not overlooked in anti-racism efforts.
- **Strengthen Hate Crime Law Enforcement:** Encourage robust enforcement of existing laws against hate propaganda and hate-motivated crimes. The Department of Justice should issue prosecution guidelines and training effectively proving hate motivation, using anti-Sikh cases as examples.
- **Combat Online Anti-Sikh Hate and Preventing Censorship:** The Canadian government must hold social media platforms accountable for the unchecked spread of anti-Sikh hate and disinformation. This includes requiring greater transparency and enforcement of platform policies around hate speech, particularly content targeting Sikhs through slurs, stereotypes, or disinformation campaigns.

2. Law Enforcement and Security

- **Development and Delivery of Cultural Competency and Training:** All police and RCMP officers should receive mandatory training on Sikh culture, articles of faith, and community relations, developed in collaboration with Sikh organizations. Training should include information on anti-Sikh hate, practical scenarios (e.g., responding to incidents at a gurdwara or interacting with Sikh victims), emphasizing respect for religious articles like the dastaar and kirpan.



- **Dedicated Community Liaison Officers:** Police services in areas with significant Sikh populations should have dedicated Sikh community liaison officers (or include Sikhs in existing diversity committees). This facilitates communication – community members will be more likely to report incidents if they know there’s an officer who understands their context. Liaison officers can also attend gurdwara events, building trust and providing safety tips (like how to report online threats, etc.).
- **Encourage Reporting and Treat Every Incident Seriously:** Police should encourage the reporting of all hate incidents, big or small. Police should offer simple, accessible reporting channels and follow up with victims to demonstrate seriousness. Leadership should treat hate incidents as serious crimes and take measures like rapid public statements and seeking tips for suspects (as was done by Peterborough Police in the July 2024 assault).
- **Expand Hate Crime Units and Proactive Monitoring:** Expand and adequately fund hate crime units. These units can proactively monitor online spaces for local threats against Sikhs and others. For example, if far-right groups announce plans to protest outside a gurdwara (as they have done for mosques), police can intervene before things escalate. Intelligence-sharing between RCMP/CSIS and local police about any extremist actors or groups that are promoting anti-Sikh hatred is also key. Given the issue of foreign interference, law enforcement should protect Sikh activists who are being targeted by foreign entities – e.g., offering protection if credible threats from abroad are identified, and investigating any harassment possibly linked to overseas influences.
- **Victim Support:** Ensure Sikh victims of hate crimes can access culturally competent victim services. This includes Punjabi-speaking staff or interpreters, and referrals to counselors who understand racial trauma. Police should build bridges with Sikh community centers to offer workshops on healing, reporting, and safety.
- **Review Internal Bias in Policing:** Police forces should review their own practices to eliminate biases – e.g., analyze if Sikhs are disproportionately subject to traffic stops or searches. If any pattern emerges, address it through training and policy. It’s an internal pathway: ensure the institution that is supposed to protect doesn’t inadvertently perpetuate bias.



3. Education Sector

- **Develop Inclusive Curriculum:** Provincial education ministries should update curricula to integrate Sikh Canadian history and culture. This could include: learning about the *Guru Nanak Jahaz* incident from the Sikh perspective and its lessons (often cited in discussions of racism in Canada); inclusion of Sikh perspectives in World Wars discussions (noting Sikh soldiers in the Commonwealth armies well as in the Canadian Armed Forces in World War 1); case studies like the Multani kirpan case to illustrate Charter rights in civics classes; and contemporary contributions (e.g., highlighting that Canada's defense minister (2015-2021) was Sikh – illustrating diversity in leadership). Moreover, teaching about the 1984 Sikh Genocide is virtually non-existent, meaning the trauma carried by Sikh families is invisible to classmates and teachers. Sikh Heritage Month in April is a good opportunity to integrate this type of learning into schools and to affirm and support Sikh student identities.
- **Religious and Anti-Racism Inclusion and Bullying Programs:** Schools should explicitly include religious attire and beliefs in anti-bullying initiatives. For instance, anti-bullying education can mention that pulling off someone's dastar or hijab is a serious offense, not a prank. School assemblies during Sikh Heritage Month (April) can celebrate Sikh culture (invite Sikh speakers or do a presentation on what the 5 Kakaars are and why they matter). Many schools already do multicultural days – ensuring Sikh students can share their heritage to build peer respect. Boards in areas with Sikh students should have resources – possibly a “toolkit” for teachers with FAQs about Sikh practices (so if a child's dastar or patka comes off, they know how to respond and assist).
- **Teacher and Staff Development:** Beyond students, teachers, admin staff, and counselors need awareness. Include material in teacher's college or professional development about Sikh religious accommodation (highlighting legal duty to accommodate things like kirpans, hijabs, etc.). Share effective strategies to respond to derogatory comments in class. If a student says something racist about Sikhs, a teacher should know how to address it constructively. Zero-tolerance policies for hate in schools should be amended to include educational content about the lived experiences of Sikh students – e.g., if a student offends a Sikh peer out of ignorance, the class could partake in an activity to research about Sikh-Canadian history, turning it into a learning moment.



- **Increased Supports on Post-Secondary Campuses:** Universities and colleges should be mindful of issues Sikh students face. Campus security and officials should be prepared to deal with any harassment (for instance, Sikh student associations have received hateful emails in the past advocating for Sikh students; campuses should treat that as a hate incident). Universities and Colleges should support Sikh Student Associations in raising awareness about the Sikh community and combating hate.

4. Community and Interfaith Initiatives

- **Interfaith Alliances:** Work closely with other religious and ethnic communities to form a united front against hate. When any community is targeted, others, including Sikhs, should show solidarity. Joint events, public statements, and educational panels on combating religious hate promote unity and resilience.
- **Enhancement of Security at Gurdwaras:** Gurdwara management committees across Canada are strongly encouraged to proactively enhance the security of their facilities by leveraging existing federal and provincial programs designed to support places of worship. In light of increasing threats, including hate-motivated incidents and transnational repression, gurdwaras should explore programs such as the Federal Security Infrastructure Program (SIP) and comparable provincial initiatives, which provide funding for surveillance systems, access control, emergency preparedness, and staff training. Similar measures have already been widely adopted by mosques and synagogues across the country to safeguard their congregations. By applying for these resources and building strong relationships with local law enforcement, gurdwaras can better protect their sangat and assert the Sikh community's right to gather and worship without fear.
- **Community-Led Safety Measures:** While law enforcement is primary for security, communities can establish volunteer groups to help keep watch, especially after any threats. For instance, in the wake of a local incident, organize a roster of community volunteers to watch over the gurdwara or accompany elders on evening walks if they feel unsafe. Additionally, community hotlines or online forms (like WSO's incident report form) should be maintained and well-publicized, so Sikhs know where to turn first. Those community groups can then liaise with police, ensuring no report falls through cracks.



- **Guiding Community Members Toward Help and Accountability:** Gurdwaras play a central role in the life of Sikh communities and are often the first place individuals turn to when they experience discrimination or hate. Gurwara leadership should be prepared to support victims by helping them access appropriate resources and guiding them in reporting incidents. This includes connecting individuals with trusted organizations like WSO and others that can assist in filing police reports, human rights complaints, or workplace discrimination claims. Gurdwaras should also consider training staff and sevadaars on basic rights awareness and referral pathways so that victims feel empowered, supported, and not alone in seeking justice.
- **Empowering Youth Voices:** It's crucial to engage Sikh youth as ambassadors. Encourage Sikh youth organizations (like Sikh student associations, Khalsa camps, etc.) to take up anti-hate projects. This might include creating social media content that dispels myths or organizing seminars at local libraries about Sikh culture. Empowering Sikh youth to tell their own stories can be very effective in reaching their non-Sikh peers (e.g., a young Sikh doing a TedX talk or YouTube video series on "Growing up with a Turban in Canada"). This counters the narrative of victimhood with one of proactive education.

5. Media and Representation

- **Accurate and Respectful Coverage of Sikh Practices:** Canadian media outlets should adopt clear internal guidelines for the fair and accurate portrayal of minority communities, including Sikhs. Reporters must be equipped with accessible resources on Sikh religious practices to avoid misrepresentation, especially in sensitive incidents involving articles of faith¹²⁴. The use of authentic Sikh terms such as gurdwara instead of temple or kirpan instead of 'ceremonial dagger', etc. should be implemented. When reporting on a kirpan, the story should contextualize its religious and legal significance, rather than leaving space for fear-based or sensational interpretations. Style guides like that of the Canadian Press should be updated to include: "Mention a Sikh's dastaar only if relevant, and do so respectfully, for example, 'wearing a dastaar as part of his faith.'"

¹²⁴ Segeren, Jamie. *Immigrants in the Making: Media Analysis of South Asian Representation within Canadian Media*. 2024. University of Windsor, Master of Arts thesis. <https://uwindsor.scholaris.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/0c2fc2c6-2b73-484e-864c-970465c7e4ee/content>



- **Representation Must Be Meaningful, Not Tokenistic:** Sikh voices must be consistently included in news reporting, commentary, and expert panels especially when the subject matter directly involves Sikh communities, such as issues of religious freedom, foreign interference, or repression. This representation must be authentic and rooted in lived community experience. Media outlets should take care not to rely on fringe or disconnected individuals who do not reflect the values or views of the broader Sikh community. Inclusion ensures balanced narratives and helps build public understanding of complex issues affecting one of Canada's largest and most visible faith groups.
- **Avoiding Stigmatization-Individual Acts Should Not Define Communities:** When reporting on incidents involving Sikh individuals especially when names or religious identifiers like the dastaar are visible. Journalists must avoid framing that implicitly casts suspicion on the broader Sikh community. In cities like Brampton or Surrey, where Sikhs form a significant portion of the population and, in some cases, the largest faith group, it is statistically expected that some individuals involved in local incidents may be Sikh, just as they are represented across all professions and public life. Media should ensure that such demographic context is understood and that reporting does not create the false impression of overrepresentation or suggest a cultural link to criminality. Responsible journalism distinguishes between individual actions and collective identity and avoids patterns of coverage that feed harmful stereotypes.
- **Normalize Sikh Presence Across Storylines:** Mainstream media should go beyond tokenistic coverage of Vaisakhi or political milestones and proactively highlight Sikh Canadians across all sectors (educators, environmentalists, artists, healthcare workers, and more). Media outlets and community partners should collaborate to pitch stories that reflect the everyday experiences and contributions of Sikhs. Similarly, television and film productions, especially those set in cities like Toronto, Brampton, or Vancouver, should naturally include Sikh characters as part of the social fabric.



6. Legal and Advocacy Measures

- **Recognizing that Anti-Sikh Hate Undermines Canadian Multiculturalism:** Section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms explicitly affirms that the Charter “shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.” The persistence of anti-Sikh hate, particularly when it targets religious expression, political identity, or cultural heritage, represents a direct challenge to this constitutional commitment. Confronting and addressing anti-Sikh hate is therefore not only a matter of community safety – it is essential to upholding Canada’s democratic values and the constitutional vision of a truly inclusive and multicultural nation.



Conclusion

In Canada's journey toward a just and inclusive society, confronting anti-Sikh hate is an essential chapter. This report has illuminated how Sikh Canadians – recognizable by their articles of faith and vibrant culture – have too often been targets of hatred, from the blatant exclusion and racism of a century ago to the multifaceted prejudices of today. It has also shown that this hate, while persistent, is not insurmountable. The Sikh ethos, rooted in resilience and *Chardi Kala* (eternal optimism), coupled with Canada's principles of equality, provides a strong foundation on which to build solutions.

By defining anti-Sikh hate, we acknowledge the problem in a concrete way. By exploring its historical roots, we understand that today's issues are not isolated aberrations but part of a continuum we are duty-bound to break. The examination of contemporary manifestations and impacts underscores that this is not a minor or “niche” issue – it affects thousands of Canadians' safety and dignity, and by extension, the health of our democracy.

The recommendations laid out in “Pathways Forward” chart a clear course. What is required now is the will to act. Governments must show leadership by implementing policy changes and dedicating resources to these efforts. Law enforcement and educators must treat anti-Sikh hate with the seriousness it warrants. Communities and individuals must continue to speak out, support one another, and build bridges of understanding. Crucially, these efforts should not be seen as favouring one group over another, but as *strengthening the very fabric of Canadian society*. Every Canadian benefits when we reduce ignorance and bigotry, because we create a safer, more cohesive country for all.

There are some encouraging signs. Politicians across the spectrum have started to condemn anti-Sikh incidents alongside other forms of hate, indicating growing awareness. Interfaith collaborations are at an all-time high in Canada, and Sikh Canadians are often at the forefront of solidarity movements – whether standing with Muslim Canadians after a mosque attack or with Indigenous peoples in their journey towards truth and reconciliation.



In concluding, let us remember the Sikh concept of *Sarbat da Bhala* – wishing well for all humanity. Combating anti-Sikh hate is not solely about protecting Sikhs; it's about nurturing a society where all can thrive without fear. It's about the “promise of Canada” – that everyone can live, play, and raise their family in freedom and security – a promise that must hold true not just in our rhetoric, but in lived reality. As we implement the strategies in this report, we move closer to a Canada that truly lives up to its ideals: a Canada where a boy wearing a patka can walk to school with pride and without fear, where a woman in a dastaar can serve on the police force and be respected, where gurdwaras are seen as pillars of the community, not mysterious others, and where hate in any form finds no haven.

Together – through informed policy, vigilant protection of rights, education, and solidarity – we can ensure that the ugly specter of anti-Sikh hate is relegated to the past, and that the future of Canada is one of unity in diversity. This endeavor will not only uplift Sikh Canadians but will stand as a testament to Canada's enduring commitment to justice and human dignity for all.



Appendix A: Key Terms and Concepts

- **1984 Sikh Genocide:** From October 31 to November 5, 1984, following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, mobs across India hunted, attacked, and murdered thousands of Sikhs¹²⁵. This government-orchestrated campaign of violence involved systematic killings, sexual and gender-based violence, torture, and the desecration of gurdwaras across India¹²⁶. Sikh homes and businesses were destroyed with the aim of eradicating Sikhs from Delhi and other cities across India. Recognized as a genocide by the Ontario Legislature in 2017¹²⁷, it has also been officially acknowledged by the Delhi Legislative Assembly in 2018¹²⁸, New York State Senate in 2025¹²⁹, and by other political institutions. However, justice has not been served, with many prominent political leaders who never faced charges or prosecution and the continuing suffering of the Sikh victims. The failure to fully acknowledge it as a genocide perpetuates the hurt and trauma that still deeply affects the Sikh diaspora.
- **Amritdhari Sikh:** A Sikh who has undergone the formal initiation ceremony known as Amrit Sanchar, committing to live according to the Sikh code of conduct (Rehat Maryada) and wearing the Five Kakaars at all times.

¹²⁵ Sikh Coalition. "Remembering 1984 on the 40th Anniversary of the Sikh Genocide." Sikh Coalition, 31 October 2024, www.sikhcoalition.org/blog/2024/remembering-1984-on-the-40th-anniversary-of-the-sikh-genocide/.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Malhi, Harinder. "Motion on the Recognition of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Violence as Genocide." Official Report of Debates (Hansard), 41st Parliament, 2nd Session, No. 65, Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 6 April 2017, www.ola.org/sites/default/files/node-files/hansard/document/pdf/2017/2017-04/house-document-hansard-transcript-2-EN-06-APR-2017_L065.pdf.

¹²⁸ The Times of India. "Anti-Sikh Riots: Row Over Reference to Rajiv Gandhi as Delhi Assembly Adopts Resolution." *The Times of India*, 21 December 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/anti-sikh-riots-row-over-reference-to-rajiv-gandhi-as-delhi-assembly-adopts-resolution/articleshow/67197223.cms>.

¹²⁹ New York State Senate. Senate Resolution J569: Recognizing the Contributions of the Sikh Community and Commemorating the Sikh Massacre of 1984, 24 March 2025, nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/J569.



- **Bill 21 (Québec's Laicity Law):** "*Act Respecting the Laicity of the State*," a Québec law passed in 2019 that prohibits public-sector employees in positions of authority (teachers, police, judges, etc.) from wearing religious symbols at work. For Sikhs, this means observant individuals who wear *dastaars* or *kirpans* cannot serve in those roles in Québec, unless they remove those articles. The law has been widely criticized as discriminatory, barring freedom of religious expression and forcing individuals to choose between their faith and their careers. It significantly limits the participation of religious minorities in Québec's public life and has faced ongoing legal challenges. The law was reaffirmed by the Québec government in 2022, despite continued opposition from civil liberties groups and minority communities.
- **Chardi Kala:** A core Sikh concept meaning "ever-rising spirits". It refers to maintaining a state of unwavering positivity, faith, and high morale, even in the face of hardship or injustice.
- **Dastaar (Turban):** A *dastaar* is an article of faith, it is a long cloth elegantly tied over the head to cover the kesh. It represents honor, spirituality, discipline, and equality, and is worn with pride by both Sikh men and women. A smaller or under-dastaar is called a *keski*. The *dastaar* is a visible expression of Sikh identity and commitment to their faith. Forcibly removing a Sikh's *dastaar* without consent is a deeply humiliating and disrespectful act and an expression of anti-Sikh hate. In Canada, the right to wear the *dastaar* has been legally protected and accommodated in official uniforms, including the RCMP, since 1988.



- **Gurdwara:** A *gurdwara*, directly translating to “gateway to the Guru”, is the Sikh place of worship and learning. It is a fundamental institution for the Sikh community, where *sangat* (congregation) gathers and *langar* (free community kitchen) is offered. It also serves as a space for civic engagement, community dialogue, and reflection¹³⁰. Gurdwaras can usually be identified by the Sikh flag or *Nishan Sahib* which is traditionally orange/yellow or blue and bears the Sikh *Khanda* symbol. The *gurdwara* welcomes everyone, regardless of faith, gender, or background, reflecting Sikh values of equality and service. The oldest existing gurdwara in Canada is the Guru Sikh Temple in Abbotsford, British Columbia, which was built in 1911 by Sikh mill workers and is now a National Historic Site¹³¹. Today, gurdwaras across Canada continue to serve as pillars of Sikh faith and community life.
- **Guru Nanak Jahaz:** Chartered by Baba Gurdit Singh, the Japanese steamship carried 376 British subjects, mostly Sikhs, from Punjab to Vancouver in 1914. Upon arrival, they were denied entry under Canada’s discriminatory “continuous journey” regulation. Forced to remain anchored in Vancouver Harbour for two months, the passengers endured malnutrition, overcrowding, and unsanitary conditions. While docked, they received critical support from the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver. Their legal challenge to the exclusion, *Munshi Singh (Re)*, 1914¹³² was ultimately unsuccessful, and the ship was forced to return to India. The incident remains a defining example of early anti-Sikh hate and discrimination in Canada. In 2016, the Canadian government issued a formal apology, referring to the ship by its Japanese name, *Komagata Maru*, rather than its Sikh-given name, *Guru Nanak Jahaz*¹³³.

¹³⁰ World Sikh Organization of Canada. “Gurdwara FAQs.” *Resources*, https://www.worldsikh.org/gurdwara_lqzhx0md6bd_piyu3cyh_ryxweu.

¹³¹ Parks Canada. “Abbotsford Sikh Temple National Historic Site of Canada.” *Directory of Federal Heritage Designations*, 1 November 2002, https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=10044.

¹³² *Munshi Singh (Re)*, 1914 CanLII 679 (BC CA).

¹³³ Trudeau, Justin. “Komagata Maru Apology in the House of Commons.” *Prime Minister of Canada*, 18 May 2016, Available at: <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2016/05/18/komagata-maru-apology-house-commons>.



- **Hate Crime:** In Canada, a criminal offense can be designated a hate crime when it is motivated in whole or part by bias, prejudice, or hate toward an identifiable group (distinguished by race, religion, ethnicity, etc.). Hate crimes can include assault, vandalism, threats, or hate propaganda. Under the Criminal Code, sentences for crimes proven to have a hate motive can be increased. Public incitement of hatred and willful promotion of hatred against an identifiable group are also criminal offenses (sections 319(1) and 319(2) of the Criminal Code).
- **Khalsa:** The collective of initiated Sikhs, founded by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, who commit to observing the Sikh Rehat Maryada. Individuals become Khalsa through the Amrit initiation ceremony. The word Khalsa means “sovereign” or “pure”.
- **Khalistan:** Khalistan refers to an independent and sovereign Sikh state. Khalistan is the term Sikhs use to refer to a state and model of governance in accordance with the Sikh values of *sarbat da bhallā* (upliftment of all) and *seva* (selfless service). For Sikhs, Khalistan is a concept deeply rooted in Sikh spirituality- it reflects a vision shaped by centuries of Sikh history and the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, embodying an inclusive and compassionate model of governance, uniquely aimed at uplifting all of humanity.
- **Panj Kakaars (5 Kakaar):** The five articles of faith worn by Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs, which serve to outwardly express and embody their inner spiritual identity:

Kesh – unshorn hair symbolizing acceptance of God’s will; the hair must be kept covered at all times with a keski or dastar (turban or head-covering) representing spiritual wisdom;

Kangha – a wooden comb representing self-discipline; worn in the hair and used to keep it neat and tidy;

Kara – an iron or steel bracelet worn on the wrist; the circle signifies the oneness and eternity of Vahiguru and to use one’s hands for the benefit of humanity;

Kachera – cotton undergarment representing high moral character and restraint; and

Kirpan – a small iron or steel sword, which is worn sheathed, restrained in a cloth belt, and next to the body; The word kirpan means grace and honour. The kirpan signifies the duty of a Sikh to stand up against injustice.



- **Rehat Maryada:** The Sikh code of conduct and spiritual discipline that guides the daily life, values, and practices of initiated Sikhs. It includes ethical behavior, meditation, community service, and adherence to the articles of faith.
- **Sarbat da Bhalla:** A core Sikh principle meaning “the welfare of all.” It reflects the Sikh commitment to work toward the upliftment and well-being of all humanity, regardless of background, and is central to Sikh political and social thought.
- **Seva:** Meaning “selfless service,” seva is a foundational concept in Sikhi. It refers to voluntary service performed without desire for reward or recognition, often undertaken to support the community, serve humanity, and express humility. Someone engaging in seva is referred to as a “**sevadaar**”.
- **Sikh:** A follower of Sikhi, a way of life founded in the 15th century in Punjab by Guru Nanak. Sikhs believe in one universal Creator and follow the teachings of ten Gurus, whose spiritual guidance is eternally enshrined in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.
- **Sikhi:** “The Sikh doctrine, philosophy, and practices associated with teachings of the Sikh gurus that enable a Sikh worldview”¹³⁴.
- **Vahiguru (Waheguru):** A term used by Sikhs to refer to the One Creator, meaning the wondrous Enlightener. It combines “Vah” (an expression of awe and wonder) and “Guru” (spiritual teacher or guide). Sikhs use it both in meditation (simran) and daily speech as an expression of gratitude and remembrance of God.
- **Vaisakhi:** A major Sikh festival celebrated on April 13 or 14 each year, marking the establishment of the Khalsa in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh Ji at Anandpur Sahib. The day is also known as “Khalsa Sirjana Divas” or the Day of the Establishment of the Khalsa. For Sikhs, Vaisakhi represents the formalization of the Sikh identity, the five beloved ones (Panj Pyare), and the principles of equality, courage, and service. Sikhs often have *Nagar Kirtans* or parades to mark the event.

¹³⁴ Sandhu, Gian Singh. *Who Are the Sikhs? An Exploration of the Beliefs, Practices, & Traditions of the Sikh People*. Archway Publishing, 2023, p.2.



Appendix B: Legal References and Protections

- **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982):**

- *Section 2(a)* – Freedom of conscience and religion. Protects the right of Sikhs to wear religious articles (dastaar, kirpan, etc.) and practice their faith openly. Limitations on this freedom must be justified under Section 1 (reasonable limits).

- *Section 15(1)* – Equality rights. Guarantees equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination, including on the basis of religion. This underpins anti-discrimination protections for Sikh Canadians in government action.

- **Criminal Code Hate Provisions:**

- *Section 318(1)*: Advocating genocide is an indictable offense (genocide defined as killing members of, or inflicting serious harm to, an identifiable group). This would criminalize calls for violence such as extreme rhetoric like “Sikhs deserve to die”.

- *Section 319(1)*: Public incitement of hatred – illegal to communicate statements in a public place that incite hatred against an identifiable group likely to lead to a breach of the peace.

- *Section 319(2)*: Willful promotion of hatred – illegal to wilfully promote hatred (other than in private conversation) against an identifiable group. (These provisions have defenses (truth, public interest, etc.) and require Attorney General consent to prosecute.)

- *Section 718.2(a)(i)*: Sentencing provision that states if an offense was motivated by bias, prejudice, or hate based on factors like religion or race, that shall be considered an aggravating circumstance for sentencing.



- **Human Rights Legislation:** Every jurisdiction in Canada has human rights codes/acts prohibiting discrimination based on religion (often termed “creed”) and race in employment, housing, services, etc. For example, the Ontario Human Rights Code protects Sikhs from being denied jobs or services due to wearing a dastaar or other observances. Such laws have been used to strike down unjust rules (e.g., no-headgear policies) unless bona fide and accommodated. Federally, the Canadian Human Rights Act does similarly for federal sectors.

- **Key Court Decisions:**

– ***Munshi Singh (Re)*, 1914¹³⁵** – British Columbia Court of Appeal case where passengers of the Guru Nanak Jahaz challenged Canada’s discriminatory “continuous journey” regulation, which was used to deny their entry despite their status as British subjects. Represented by Munshi Singh, the passengers argued that the law was unjust, but the court upheld the restriction. This decision forced the passengers to remain aboard for two months under harsh conditions before being sent back to India. The case is a landmark early example, and arguably the first, of Sikhs in Canada legally resisting anti-Sikh hate and exclusion.

– ***Bhinder v. CN (1985)*¹³⁶** – Supreme Court case where a Sikh railway worker argued a requirement to wear a hard-hat (forcing him to remove dastaar) was discriminatory. The Court (under the law then) ruled against Bhinder, accepting the safety rule as a bona fide requirement. This outcome (now viewed as outdated) spurred awareness and was effectively reversed by later human rights law developments emphasizing accommodation.

– ***Grant v. Canada (1989)*¹³⁷** – Federal Court case upholding the policy change that allowed dastaars in the RCMP, noting it did not infringe the rights of others. (Not the Supreme Court, but historically significant after public controversy.)

¹³⁵ *Supra* note 157.

¹³⁶ 2 SCR 561.

¹³⁷ 1 F.C. 158. Federal Court of Appeal, 1995. Federal Court Reports, Volume 1, 1995, p. 158.



– ***Multani v. Commission Scolaire (2006)***¹³⁸: A Supreme Court of Canada decision that affirmed the right of a Sikh student (Gurbaj Singh Multani) to wear a kirpan at school. The Court struck down a school board's outright ban on kirpans, ruling it violated the Charter's guarantee of religious freedom. The Court noted the kirpan is a religious symbol and reasonable safety measures addressed the school's concerns. This case is a key precedent on accommodating religious practice in Canadian institutions.

– ***R. v. Keegstra (1990)***¹³⁹: A landmark Supreme Court of Canada case where the Court upheld Canada's hate speech law. The case involved a teacher (Keegstra) who willfully promoted hatred against Jews. In defining hatred, the Court said it is an emotion of "an intense and extreme nature that is clearly associated with vilification and detestation" of a target group. This legal definition is often cited when dealing with hate crimes and would apply to extreme anti-Sikh propaganda as well.

– ***Ontario (Human Rights Commission) v. Simpson-Sears (1985)***¹⁴⁰ – (Not Sikh-specific, but important) Supreme Court established the duty to accommodate religious practices to the point of undue hardship. Though this case involved Saturday Sabbath (Seventh-day Adventist), the principle applies to accommodating Sikh religious needs in workplaces and schools.

¹³⁸ 1 S.C.R. 256, 2006 SCC 6..

¹³⁹ 3 SCR 697.

¹⁴⁰ 2 S.C.R. 536.