

WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

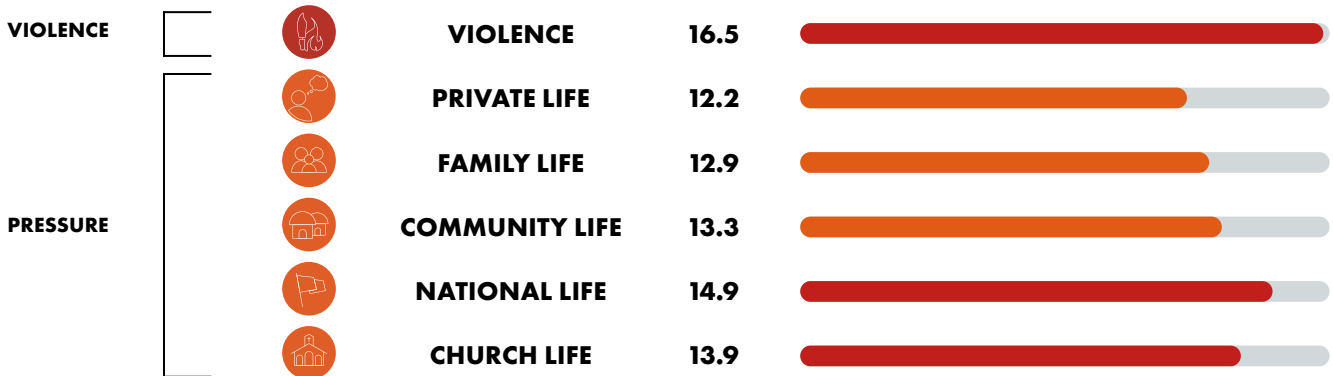
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
11

INDIA



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

The rights of all categories of Christian communities are violated in India since Hindutva radicals view them all as alien to the nation. They want to cleanse their country of Islam and Christianity and do not shy away from using extensive violence to achieve this. Converts to Christianity from a Hindu background bear the brunt of persecution in India and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism, especially via campaigns known as [Ghar Wapsi](#) (homecoming). Pressure is also mounted on Christians through Delisting and Anti-Conversion laws. They are often physically assaulted and sometimes killed.

Quick facts

LEADER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

POPULATION

1,441,720,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

73,233,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Hinduism

GOVERNMENT

Federal Parliamentary Republic



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Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	73,233,000	5.1
Hindus	1,053,400,000	73.1
Muslims	198,517,000	13.8
Ethno-religionist	44,804,000	3.1

Source²

The Constitution of India declares the country to be a secular state. Hindu radicals are trying to change this and make Hinduism the national religion. Narendra Modi, criticized for his inaction to protect hundreds of Muslims killed by Hindu extremists in the pogroms that took place in Gujarat in 2002, was elected as India's Prime Minister in 2014. He was re-elected in 2019 and 2024. Since Modi became Prime Minister, the annual reported number of violent attacks against Christians has increased dramatically. Modi's margin of re-election was narrower in 2024, but this does not influence the pressure and violence Christians are facing.

India's Freedom of Religion Acts or "anti-forced-conversion" laws are state-level statutes that have been enacted to regulate religious conversions. However, in practice, these laws, as well as the Indian Penal Code, are misused to punish Christians by falsely accusing them of conversion. Even in

states with no anti-conversion law, police have arrested Christians for evangelistic activities. Anti-conversion laws exist in eleven states: Odisha (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968), Arunachal Pradesh (1978), Chhattisgarh (2000), Gujarat (2003), Himachal Pradesh (2006/2019), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), Uttar Pradesh (2020), Haryana (2022) and Karnataka (2022). The anti-conversion law in Arunachal Pradesh has not been fully implemented due to a lack of subsidiary rules, and the state of Rajasthan passed an anti-conversion bill, but it has yet to be signed by the President of India to make it law. The anti-conversion law in Karnataka is was to be revised or withdrawn in 2023, but no action has been taken yet.³ In August 2024, the government of Uttar Pradesh passed the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2024 ("the Bill") which amends the existing anti-conversion law of the state, making its provisions stricter and harsher. Apart from the ambiguity in the definitions of offenses as to what constitutes "misrepresentation", "force", "undue influence", "coercion", "allurement", "fraudulent means", the Bill now includes stricter bail conditions and increases the maximum jail imprisonment term from 10 years to life.

India is the world's seventh-largest economy, but the gap between rich and poor is wide, and the poverty level is incredibly high. The caste system, a hierarchical stratification of Indian society dating back many centuries, remains omnipresent. Most Christians come from the scheduled castes (a group called the Dalits,

¹ Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

² Data source: Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024)

³ Password: freedom

ostracized as “Untouchables”) and scheduled tribes (a group called the Adivasis/Janjatis). Many converted from Hinduism partly to escape their hopeless situation, only to find the same barriers exist inside the church.

The Christian community in India is the second most literate community in India; at the same time, it is the [largest unemployed group](#) among all minorities in India. Christians are further facing daily challenges of discrimination, inadequate public healthcare and malnutrition. Government restrictions make it virtually impossible for churches to receive assistance from abroad to run social projects. The work of Christian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is similarly restricted. [The Foreign Contributions Regulation Act \(FCRA\)](#) licenses of thousands of NGOs, including hundreds of faith-based organizations, lapsed after the government said the organizations did not apply for renewal in time. In the meanwhile, in June 2024, the BJP led central government lifted a ban on government staff members joining the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological wing of the BJP which promotes the idea of Hindu rashtra (Hindu nation).

There is a high level of physical violence; honor killings, acid throwing, mob beatings and other atrocities happen regularly all over the country. The rampant circulation of disinformation targeting Christian activities (such as prayer meetings or preaching) by vigilante groups on social media has created enabling conditions for mob beatings and other atrocities against Christians. The police also have a reputation for corruption, brutality and mistreating Christians who are in custody. Another major problem for Christians is the Maoists (otherwise known as Naxalites), who are Communist militants controlling some of the poorest rural regions of India. Christians living in Naxalite-controlled areas are constantly monitored and cannot openly practice their faith. If they do, the Naxalites seriously threaten them.

In 2023, violence erupted between the Meitei (mostly Hindu) and Kuki (mostly Christian) ethnic groups in Manipur state. The violence, led by the majority Meitei community, which caused well over 200 churches to go up in flames, was sparked by an affirmative action controversy which saw Kukis protest against a demand seeking tribal status for the Meiteis. According to BBC News reporting on 12 July 2023: “Now the Kuki have demanded [‘territorial autonomy’](#) for the group, a euphemism for a separate, independent administration. The Meitei have warned that any dismemberment of Manipur is out of question. Life and work between the two communities has stalled. Internet has been cut all over the state, further heightening the isolation.” The ethnic unrest continues.

How the situation varies by region

There are no particular hotspots for religious freedom violations in India. The worst regions are the states where the BJP is a major factor in the state government, but that can change every five years due to elections. Hindu extremist groups have established offices across the country, including in remote villages. They keep a close watch on events where Christians preach about their religion. In areas where the BJP is not in power, they are a powerful opposition party. Although monitoring is high, Christians only run into problems when they start preaching about Christianity.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

These communities (such as the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican-based churches) bear witness that Christians have been in India for many centuries, with the (Orthodox) Kerala Mar Thoma Church dating back to the 3rd century AD. They are affected by religious freedom violations, but are generally less affected than the other categories of Christian communities.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Christian converts from a Hindu background bear the brunt of religious freedom violations in India. These Christians face harassment on an almost daily basis and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism. Other converts (from Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism) also face pressure from their social environment, but their numbers are far smaller. Christians with a Muslim background face violence, intolerance and discrimination only in areas where there is a high concentration of Muslims in the local population.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

After converts, Christians from Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are the second-biggest target of radical Hindus because of their involvement in outreach activities and conversion..

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

The assertiveness and aggressiveness of all kinds of Hindutva ideology inspired organizations has increased over the years. They claim that India belongs to Hinduism and that other religions should be driven out of the country. Radical Hinduism is by far the main persecutor in India. It is vocal, omnipresent and very violent.

Dictatorial Paranoia – Blended with Religious Nationalism

After winning the May 2019 and 2024 elections again, the BJP formed a new government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is being hailed as the strongest man to lead India. As a result, dictatorial tendencies are emerging. Social media control, inflammatory speeches, the gagging of media who question government policies and statistics and propaganda against ‘alien’ religions like Islam and Christianity are just some of the signs of a growing dictatorial movement within government circles.

Ethno-Religious Hostility – Blended with Religious Nationalism

In the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, southern Madhya Pradesh, southern

Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Manipur, there are areas with tribal societies. The Hindu radical movement RSS has successfully infiltrated these tribal societies and has turned them against the Christian presence in those areas. Increasingly, tribal converts are being threatened, boycotted socially, expelled, denied drinking water, raped and even murdered. In a number of cases, the construction of church buildings has been forcibly stopped by villagers.

CLAN OPPRESSION

This is very strong in parts of northern India. In what is called the Jat Belt (i.e., regions of Punjab, Haryana and parts of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh), the *Khap panchayats* (clan courts) hold sway. They are regarded as having power over life and death and function independently of the country’s legal system, which often turns a blind eye. The police is collaborative; its membership comes largely from the same communities that run the Khaps. Naturally, conversion to Christianity is a serious crime in their eyes.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

While the ongoing conflict in the northeastern state of Manipur has been termed an ethnic conflict, there has been a noticeable undercurrent of religious intolerance. Christian women carry multiple vulnerabilities in this conflict due to their gender and faith, and risk abduction, rape, torture and murder. State police have reportedly been bystanders to incidences of violence inflicted on women and girls, even complicit in some crimes. Converts to Christianity risk house arrest, forced marriage, forced divorce, being expelled from their home and being socially isolated. High rates of domestic violence place further pressure on converts.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied communal resources
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Trafficking
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

MEN

Men are seen as physically strong, so the persecution of Christian men targets their physical strength as well as their position as head of the household. Violations against men include harsh beatings, killings and emotional torture. Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to attacks from Hindu radicals; being a pastor continues to be one of the riskiest vocations in the country. Converts may be socially isolated by their community and family, economically boycotted and excluded from accessing communal resources. False charges are often brought against men, such as denigrating Hindu gods and goddesses.

Male typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied communal resources
- Denied food or water
- Denied inheritance of possessions
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Economic harassment via fines
- False charges
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Travel bans/restrictions on movement
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal



WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2025	11	84
2024	11	83
2023	11	82
2022	10	82
2021	10	83

The rise in overall score in WWL 2025 was one point. Pressure rose most notably in the Church sphere of life as the protections that Christians have had historically to practice are slowly eroded. The violence score remained at 16.5 points, which is almost the maximum level. All categories of Christian communities face hostility from militant Hindu groups who view Christians as alien to the nation. They want to cleanse their country of Islam and Christianity and do not shy away from using extensive mob violence to achieve this. Converts to Christianity from a Hindu background bear the brunt of persecution in India and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- January 2024, Betul District in Madhya Pradesh:** A group of people including a woman, reportedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal (affiliated to the RSS) [barged into a Christian missionary school](#) in Betul district on 7 January 2024. They created a serious disturbance in the school, accusing the management of ‘forced conversion’, implying that the school had forced locals to pray there when classes were not being taught.
- June 2024, Jiribam District in Manipur:** A Meitei man, Soibam Saratkumar Singh, went missing for many weeks but his body was eventually discovered on 6 June 2024. Even though he was abducted and killed by unknown persons, the Meiteis went on the rampage destroying three Kuki villages in Jiribam District. A Kuki man, L. Thianmuang, was also abducted and has gone missing since. Meitei extremist group Arambai Tenggol is suspected of being responsible for the abduction. In the ensuing violence, [more than 200 civilians have been evacuated from Jiribam district](#), hundreds of houses belonging to both Meitei and Kuki have been destroyed and several Kuki churches have been burned down.
- 12 June 2024, Jagdalpur District in Chhattisgarh:** A vigilante mob from the Bajrang Dal (affiliated to the RSS) [attacked Christian families](#) on 12 June 2024 resulting in one person being injured with a broken leg and two people hospitalized with other severe injuries. The mob forced the families to sign a pact agreeing to ‘reconvert’ to Hinduism within 10 days and were then banished from the village. Their fields and homes have been destroyed and the local village council and the local authorities have not taken any action to protect these Christian families so far.

WWL Year	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians killed	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians internally displaced
2025	459	20	10,000*	9251
2024	2228	160	10,000*	62119

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - for full results see the violence section of the country’s corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*.

PRIVATE LIFE

Talking about one's Christian faith is now generally regarded as a form of evangelism. Being seen praying is no longer risky just for converts, but for all Christians, except in two or three north eastern states. Constitutionally-protected activities such as church services can lead to false accusations of forced conversion by Hindu radicals. Christians, especially leaders, can be arrested on such charges, with physical violence often involved. It is impossible for foreign Christians to obtain a missionary visa.

FAMILY LIFE

Although the Juvenile Justice Act allows the adoption of Hindu children by non-Hindu parents, Christians still find it extremely difficult to adopt in practice. Procedures are very complicated, and adoption panel members are sometimes biased against Christians. Christian children are forced to participate in Hindu aspects of the curriculum, even in Christian schools, such as yoga, Hindu literature and mythology. Open-air baptisms are now regarded as too risky for both the pastor conducting the baptism and the person getting baptized. Christian children, especially those of converts, increasingly experience discrimination and physical harassment due to Hindu radical influence.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Over the past five years, monitoring of Christians by Hindu radical organizations and community authorities has increased. The goal is to stop any form of evangelism. There has been an increase in harassment, threats and social discrimination, especially around community celebrations of key Christian festivals such as Easter, Christmas, New Year etc. Ghar Wapsi (homecoming) reconversion campaigns succeed in part due to community pressure on Christians.

NATIONAL LIFE

Anti-conversion legislation, which limits religious freedom, is in force in 11 states. Christian organizations receiving funds from abroad have always been restricted through the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act because they are viewed as engaging in proselytization or advocacy. The media, especially in Indian dialects, are generally very biased against Christians and positively hostile in rural areas, where propaganda and incitement to violence against Christians from Hindu extremists is given plenty of airtime. All major social media platforms have hate speech against Christians by radical Hindu leaders. Such speech is prevalent, especially in Indian languages and dialects.

CHURCH LIFE

The state monitors Christian activities and has imposed many restrictions (e.g., on foreign funding, invitations to foreign missionaries, difficulties with registration and anti-conversion laws). Local authorities and Hindu extremists closely monitor Christians' internet activity, and even tourists visiting must sign a statement saying that they will not carry out preaching or conversion activities. Many Christian foreigners living in India on a work visa have been deported. Many foreigners of Indian origin have been deported because they were part of churches or Christian groups in India. Any Christian speaking out against an attack risks further violence.



International obligations & rights violated

India has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
3. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
4. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

India is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian women and girls are raped and sexually abused because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christians are attacked, ostracized, and unjustly accused of forcefully converting others (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are victims of incendiary speech and smear campaigns that incite violence and discrimination (ICCPR Art. 20)
- Peaceful religious gatherings of Christians are disrupted by mobs and attacks, in violation of the right to peaceful assembly (ICCPR Art. 21)
- Christian Dalits are excluded from government affirmative action because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26 and ICESCR Art. 11)

Situation of other religious minorities

The US State Department ([IRFR 2023 India report](#)): Twenty-five of the 28 states apply partial to full restrictions on bovine slaughter. Penalties vary among states and may vary based on whether the animal is a cow, calf, bull, or ox. The ban mostly affects Muslims and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that traditionally consume beef or handle, transport, and slaughter cattle.

On June 27, 2023, Prime Minister Modi said the country should have a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as called for in the constitution. He said the country could not run with a system of “separate laws for separate (religious) communities.” Several leaders of the Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and tribal communities, including some state government officials and their governments, opposed the initiative.



Open Doors in India

The work of Open Doors local partners in India is focused on the following areas:

- Distribution of Bibles
- Training: Holistic training including persecution preparedness
- Socio-economic development: Livelihood and community development for persecuted Christians
- Urgent Aid: Help the victims of persecution



ABOUT THIS BRIEF

- The content of this document is based on the more detailed WWL Persecution Dynamics per country published annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2025 Open Doors International.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the WWL Persecution Dynamics per country, accompanying Background Information per country and the latest update of WWL Methodology. These are also available at the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).
- The WWL 2025 reporting period was 01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024.

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.