

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

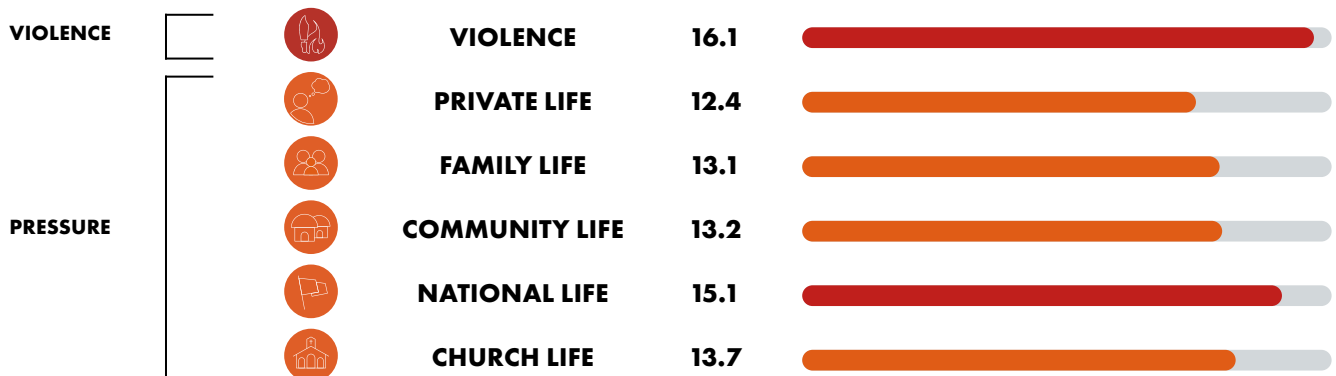
## SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

# INDIA

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**12**



### 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

All of India's Christian communities face increasing persecution as Hindu nationalism grows in influence. The nationalist argument that Christians are alien to the nation leaves Christians exposed to systematic discrimination and violence. Converts to Christianity from a Hindu background bear the brunt of persecution and are pressurized to return to Hinduism. There are Anti-Conversion laws in 12 states, meaning that increasingly the law is being used to prosecute rather than protect the Christian minority. In 2025, Jose and Sheeja Pappachan became the first Christians convicted under Uttar Pradesh's increasingly strict anti-conversion law and were fined and sentenced to five years of jail time ([UCA News, 23 January 2025](#)). Hindu nationalists mobilize mobs to intimidate, assault and kill Christians. In the state of Manipur, Christians continue to face extreme violence in a conflict planned, in part, by political leaders ([The Hindu, 20 August 2025](#)). Restrictions on receiving funds from abroad combine with this violence to create a pincer movement against India's church.

## Quick facts

### LEADER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

### POPULATION

1,454,607,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

2,326,000<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Hinduism

### GOVERNMENT

Federal Parliamentary Republic



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## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	72,326,000	5.0
Hindus	1,065,348,000	73.2
Muslims	199,536,000	13.7
Others	117,397,000	8.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>2</sup>

The Constitution of India declared the country to be a secular state to maintain harmony amongst the different religious communities that were present when India became an independent state in 1947. The Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) movement is trying to change this and make Hinduism the national religion. Prime Minister 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 and his BJP party has since won two further elections. Since Modi became Prime Minister, the annual reported number of violent attacks against Christians has increased significantly. The Evangelical Fellowship of India Religious Liberty Commission (EFIRLC) reported a 6.5 percent increase in targeted attacks against Christians in 2024 compared to the previous year ([Christianity Today, 11 March 2025](#)). Modi's margin of re-election

was narrower in 2024, but this hasn't held back a growing tide of persecution against Christians, enabled at both the federal and state levels.

India's Freedom of Religion Acts or "anti-forced-conversion" laws are state-level statutes that have been enacted to regulate religious conversions. In practice, they legislate the Hindu nationalist narrative that Hindus only convert due to pressure or incentives from Christians, so effectively criminalizing actions that lead to, or might lead to, Hindus converting. Anti-conversion laws exist in twelve states (with the year introduced in brackets): Odisha (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968), Arunachal Pradesh (1978), Chhattisgarh (2000), Gujarat (2003), Himachal Pradesh (2006 and updated in 2019), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), Uttar Pradesh (2020 and strengthened in 2024), Haryana (2022), Karnataka (2022) and Rajasthan (2025). The pattern is of an increasing expansion of such laws.

India's sustained economic growth, now the fourth largest economy in the world ([Deloitte, 5 August 2025](#)), and its status as the world's most populous country has made it more confident in resisting international pressure on minority rights and in promoting religious nationalism. India's government has become increasingly assertive against its neighbor (Pakistan) and has met the threat of US tariffs with a call to greater self-reliance ([BBC, 27 August 2025](#)).

<sup>1</sup> Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

<sup>2</sup> Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

Hindu nationalism is the dominant source of persecution, with the movement's momentum having increased over the last few decades. They claim that India belongs to Hinduism and that other religions are alien to the country. This creates a culture of fear and violence against Muslims and Christians, the two largest minority groups. Persecution of Christians in particular is seen as an effective political strategy, as Christianity is portrayed as both an outside threat (economic insecurity created by globalization is associated with the Christian West) and an internal threat, through the West supported Christian community.

### DICTATORIAL PARANOIA – BLENDED WITH RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created an image of being the strong man that India needs in leadership during uncertain times. 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 growing dictatorial tendencies.

### 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, are areas with tribal societies. Hindu nationalists such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have successfully infiltrated these tribal societies and turned them against the Christian presence in those areas.

### CLAN OPPRESSION

This is particularly strong in parts of northern India. In what is called the Jat Belt, the Khap panchayats (clan courts) hold sway. They function independently of the country's legal system, which often turns a blind eye.

## How the situation varies by region

There are no particular hotspots for religious freedom violations in India. The worst regions are states where the BJP holds power, though that can change every five years due to elections. Even when opposition parties are in control, a 'soft' Hindutva of intimidation and violence against Christians is pursued. Hindu extremist groups have established offices across the country, including in remote villages. The largest number of incidents of persecution are in the northern Uttar Pradesh state, though there are also many in the central-eastern states and Manipur state.

## Who is affected?

### 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. Any Christians who are active in outreach to Hindus are also targeted, particularly through the anti-conversion, and this is most common in the Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Historical Christian communities (such as the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican-based churches) are relatively less affected, but the overall culture of intolerance against Christians is making life increasingly difficult for them.





## How are men and women differently affected?

### WOMEN

Christian women in India face compounded vulnerabilities due to gender, caste and faith. In Manipur, women and girls risk abduction, rape, torture and murder, often with police as bystanders or complicit actors. Across India, converts - especially from Hindu or Dalit backgrounds - are pressured to return to Hinduism, facing domestic violence, house arrest, forced marriage or divorce, and loss of child custody. Wives and daughters of Christian leaders are often attacked when alone. Sexual violence, acid attacks and brutal beatings aim to shame families and force women from their faith.

#### Female typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied communal resources
- Denied custody of children
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

### MEN

Christian men in India face severe persecution, particularly from Hindu extremist groups. As heads of households and church leaders, they are targeted with beatings, mob violence, torture and killings. Pastors are especially vulnerable, with their vocation among the riskiest in the country; many face false charges, prolonged detention and harassment. Extremists have openly called for the eradication of Christianity, with mobs attacking Sunday services. Imprisonment or economic boycotts leave families destitute, while men are stigmatized by accusations of forced conversions or insulting Hindu deities.

#### Male typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied communal resources
- 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
2026	12	84
2025	11	84
2024	11	83
2023	11	82
2022	10	82

The rounded score remains the same as for the previous reporting period, however the more detailed scoring reflects some stabilizing of the situation in Manipur state, but increased pressure on individual Christians and families across the country. In Manipur state, while there remain outbreaks of brutal violence, fewer Christians were forced to flee their homes this year, and this was the main reason for the reduction in the violence score. Increased scores in the private and family life reflect the wider societal shift created by the Hindutva movement, which frames Christians as betraying their country and community, that makes even the quiet practice of faith risky, particularly when it comes to expressing one’s faith online, which can increasingly be portrayed as attempts at conversion.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

- October 2024:** In Telangana state, a church youth service was interrupted by RSS and BJP leaders, who then assaulted the youth and broke their phones, chairs and sound system. Despite the pastor reporting it, the police did not take action.
- 7 November 2024:** In Manipur state, a Christian woman was tortured, killed and dismembered (and likely raped) as part of an attack by suspected Meitei militants that included the burning of houses and displacement of 35 families ([NDTV, 14 November 2024](#)).
- January 2025:** A pastor and his wife in Uttar Pradesh state were sentenced to five years in prison under the state’s anti-conversion law, after working among the Dalits.
- June 2025:** In a village in Jharkhand state, a woman who had been sharing her Christian faith with others, some of whom had converted, was killed by fellow villagers. Her family did not discover her body until a week later.



WWL Year	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians detained	Christians raped or sexually harassed
2026	16	82	1,622	22
2025	20	459	1,629	13

*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

Even talking about one's Christian faith can now be portrayed as a form of evangelism or attempt to convert. Being seen praying is no longer risky just for converts, but for all Christians, except in two or three northeastern 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, and physical violence is often involved.

### 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. 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.

### 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 place in 12 states. Christian organizations receiving funds from abroad have always been restricted by the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act because they are viewed as engaging in proselytization or advocacy. Removing permission to receive funds has become a tool by the government to reduce the influence of Christians in national life. Christians from the Dalit community face discrimination by being denied access to affirmative action programs that are available to Dalits who are Hindus, Sikhs or Buddhists. The media, especially in Indian dialects, are generally very biased against Christians and positively hostile in rural areas.

### 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. Complaints about the noise churches make is used, among other things, to create local tensions and restrict the ability of Christians to meet together freely



## 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 Muslim minority is much larger than the Christian minority and has, for a long time, been subject to violent persecution. Incidents related to speech that incites violence and discrimination rose by 74% in 2024, with most targeted at Muslims ([BBC, 11 February 2025](#)) and Muslims are also subject to convictions for forced conversion, such as the case of the Muslim cleric, Kalim Siddiqui, and 11 others sentenced to life in prison in Uttar Pradesh ([USCIRF, March 2025](#)).





## 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 for the victims of persecution





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## ABOUT THIS DOSSIER

- The content of this Country Dossier is based on detailed analysis carried out by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. This dossier may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2026 Open Doors International.
- All 50 Country Dossiers – along with the latest update of WWL Methodology – can be accessed [here](#).
- The WWL 2026 reporting period was 01 October 2024 - 30 September 2025.

*Most of the photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.*