

World
Watch
Research

India: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Woman in India (c) IMB

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 Situation in brief / India

Brief country details

India: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
1,397,423,000	68,863,000	4.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Map of country



India: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	82	10
WWL 2021	83	10
WWL 2020	83	10
WWL 2019	83	10
WWL 2018	81	11

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

India: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Religious nationalism	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Political parties, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties
Clan oppression	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders
Ethno-religious hostility	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Government officials

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

The rights of all categories of Christian communities are violated in India since Hindu radicals view all Christians as alien to the nation. They want to cleanse their country from Islam and Christianity and do not shy away from using extensive violence to achieve this. Converts to Christianity – here from a Hindu background - bear the brunt of the persecution in India and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism, especially via campaigns known as Ghar Wapsi ("home-coming"). They are often physically assaulted and sometimes killed.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

India has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in 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 to 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)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **28 November 2020:** At the Sacred Heart parish church in Morapai, two statues of the Virgin Mary were destroyed and a statue of Mother Teresa of Calcutta damaged. Two weeks later, local Catholics were still wondering why no one had been arrested in connection with these acts of vandalism. (Source: [AsiaNews, 12 December 2020](#))
- **19 December 2020:** Police arrested a 50-year-old South Korean and three others in Greater Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar District, Uttar Pradesh. They were accused of fraudulent conversion attempts while distributing food and other aid to people in need due to the COVID-19 lockdown. (Source: [Morning Star News, 4 January 2021](#))
- **8 June 2021:** Christians in the village of Sikapai, district of Rayagada, Odisha, were attacked by radical Hindus. The village is home to 40 families, 8 of them Christian. The Hindu mob destroyed the homes of the Christians, then expelled them from their village. (Source: [AsiaNews, 10 June 2021](#))
- **11 August 2021:** A 14-year-old Christian boy, was attacked by suspected Hindu extremists in Gaya district, Bihar state, when acid was thrown at him. He died on Sunday 26 September 2021 at a Patna hospital after struggling for more than a month with severe burns on more than 70 percent of his body. (Sources: [Morning Star News, 13 September 2021](#), [AsiaNews, 29 September 2021](#))

Specific examples of positive developments

- In late September 2020, Christians from Kakadabeda, Telliabeda, and Singanpur in India's Chhattisgarh state were called to a village meeting and told to recant their Christian faith. When the Christians refused, they were attacked by radical Hindu nationalists and their homes were destroyed. On 8 November 2020, the Bilaspur High Court, located in India's Chhattisgarh state, ordered the district administration of Kondagaon to facilitate the safe return of the displaced Christians. This order came after 12 Christians filed a Public Interest Litigation with the court, pleading for security to be provided for the displaced Christians. (Source: [International Christian Concern, 14 November 2020](#))

- On 4 May 2021, the Archdiocese of Ranchi, in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand, launched a free lunch service for relatives of COVID-19 patients hospitalized in the state capital's biggest hospital. The Archdiocese started the humanitarian initiative outside the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS). More than 300 people received a free lunch every day and numbers soon rose. (Source: [UCAN, 6 May 2021](#))
- On 6 August 2021, an inauguration function was organized by the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in Goa. Goa Governor P S Sreedharan Pillai said he received a message from officials in the district saying it was inappropriate on his part to attend the program. Pillai said he had directed his staff to inform the officials in Kottayam that he was not going to cancel the program and that he had decided to pay floral tribute at the tomb of the senior priest. (Source: [Matters India, 7 August 2021](#))

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: AsiaNews, 12 December 2020 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/No-arrest-in-connection-with-the-attack-against-statues-of-the-Virgin-Mary-and-Mother-Teresa-in-West-Bengal-51832.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Morning Star News, 4 January 2021 - <https://morningstarnews.org/2021/01/first-christian-arrested-under-new-anti-conversion-law-in-u-p-india/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: AsiaNews, 10 June 2021 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Orissa,-8-Christian-families-attacked-and-expelled-from-their-village-53379.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Morning Star News, 13 September 2021 - <https://morningstarnews.org/2021/09/christian-boy-14-clinging-to-life-after-burn-attack-in-eastern-india/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: AsiaNews, 29 September 2021 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/In-Bihar-Dalit-Christian-boy-dies-from-acid-attack,-labelled-suicide-by-police-54171.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: International Christian Concern, 14 November 2020 - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/11/14/court-central-india-orders-authorities-protect-displaced-christians/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: UCAN, 6 May 2021 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/church-cares-for-pandemic-hit-poor-in-eastern-india/92364>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Matters India, 7 August 2021 - <https://mattersindia.com/2021/08/governor-ignores-officials-objection-attends-church-function/>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / India

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/india/	6 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12557384	6 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-IND.html	6 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/india/	6 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	6 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	6 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2021	6 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-net/2020	6 July 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/india	6 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/india	6 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#in	6 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	https://rsf.org/en/india	6 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/india	6 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IND	6 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/india/	6 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/India%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf	6 July 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india	6 July 2021

Recent history

From 1920 onwards, nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi led non-violent protests against British colonial rule which eventually led to independence in 1947, which is also when Muslim majority Pakistan split off as a separate nation. In 1971 war over East Pakistan led to the creation of Bangladesh.

Since the 1990s India has also taken a much more assertive role in world politics and has attempted to become one of the new superpowers. India is a member of a group of countries called BRICS (i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) that seeks to become an alternative to Western dominated global politics and economy. India possesses nuclear technology and has even launched its own Mars probe.

Another feature that has changed in India over the past decades is a notable decrease in the level of religious tolerance. Traditionally, Hinduism and Buddhism (both originating in India) used to be regarded as peaceful religions. Since the 1990s, Hinduism has taken on a much more aggressive character. Tolerance towards dissent, minorities, or respecting religious and cultural diversity has dwindled. A substantial part of the population sympathizes with authoritarian leadership. Such leadership does not shy away from imposing its will on opponents by violent means.

Since May 2014, India is governed by the hardline Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi had a reputation for ignoring atrocities committed by radical Hindus when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat State in 2002, in which hundreds (if not thousands) of Muslims died in pogroms. Since May 2014, the level of intolerance in India has increased and hundreds of violent incidents against Christians have been recorded each year.

In the May 2019 elections, the BJP gained an even greater majority in parliament. This meant the Modi government stayed in power and that violent incidents against Christians continued unabated.

In May 2021, [hundreds of corpses](#), many suspected to be victims of COVID-19, were found left along riverbanks in northern India (HRW, 20 May 2021). Villagers indicated that fear of the disease and lack of funds to cremate were likely reasons for families to leave their dead. The abandoned corpses discovered near the Ganges in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar states have raised serious questions about the accuracy of official COVID-19 statistics and are a clear indication of the spread of the pandemic in rural areas, where health infrastructure is extremely weak, and containment efforts are hindered by limited testing capacity, stigma, and low vaccination rates. According to Matters India reporting on 2 June 2021, [1.21 million](#) Indians are estimated to have died from COVID-19 related causes.

Political and legal landscape

India is the seventh largest country in the world and the second most populous. It lies in southern Asia. Officially known as the Republic of India, it is a complex political entity. It is a federation with a central government in New Delhi which controls foreign affairs, the armed forces and the economy. The country consists of 28 states and 9 union territories (areas ruled by the central government with effect from 31 October 2019).

The political atmosphere of India is multi-faceted as is its religious atmosphere. The political table of India has many chairs round it, where secular, Hindu nationalist, socialist and communist politicians sit together. On various occasions, several political adversaries have come together to form a coalition government at State or Central level. At the current time, Hindu nationalists are very powerful.

The Constitution of India declares the country to be a secular state. Hindu radicals are calling to change this and make Hinduism the national religion. They also want to impose anti-conversion legislation at the national level, but for this a two-thirds majority in parliament is needed.

India's Freedom of Religion Acts or "anti-forced-conversion" laws are state-level statutes that have been enacted to regulate religious conversions. Anti-conversion laws exist in nine states: Odisha (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968), Arunachal Pradesh (1978), Chhattisgarh (2000), Gujarat (2003), Himachal Pradesh (2006/2019), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), and Uttar Pradesh (2020). 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. There is also the [Indian Penal Code-295-A](#) (accessed 17 August 2020) which is a highly misused law against Christians. While there are some variations between the state laws, they are very similar in content and structure. All of the laws seek to prevent anyone from making or attempting to make another person change their religion (either directly or otherwise) through "forcible" or "fraudulent" means, or by "allurement" or "inducement." However, even in the states where this law has not been implemented, police have arrested Christians for evangelistic activities.

In May 2019, new parliamentary elections were held in India and the support for Prime Minister Modi increased even further with the BJP gaining an absolute majority. Consequently, it was no longer necessary for the BJP to form a coalition with other parties (and thus to accept compromises). It was therefore clear that Muslims and Christians would not experience any improvement in their situation.

In August 2019, the Modi government decided to remove Article 370 from the state of Jammu & Kashmir – this article provided an exemption to the state from the Indian Constitution. The government decided to do this to put an end to the Muslim insurgency that has been going on in Jammu & Kashmir for decades. The decision to end to the special status was an important event in Indian history. Article 35-A was removed as well, which allowed the state to have the prerogative on citizenship. The process was conducted with heavy military deployment in the state. After the bill was passed in parliament, Jammu & Kashmir lost its state status and was split up into two so-called Union Territories named Jammu & Kashmir and Leh & Ladakh. The central government in New Delhi has much more power in Union Territories than in states. As a result, India now has 28 states.

In September 2020, the [Rajya Sabha](#), the upper house of parliament, passed two farm bills amid protests from opposition members and farmers (Matters India, 20 September 2020). The passing of the new farm bills meant a huge blow to the principles of federal structure of the Constitution. The states were not consulted and their concerns were ignored.

The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience and the right of all individuals to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion; mandates a secular state; requires the state to treat all religions impartially; and prohibits discrimination based on religion. It also states that citizens must practice their faith in a way that does not adversely affect public order, morality or health.

According to USCIRF 2021:

- "In 2020, religious freedom conditions in India continued their negative trajectory. The government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), promoted Hindu nationalist policies resulting in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. In early 2020, the passage of the religiously discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) - a fast track to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan residing in India - led to nationwide protests against the CAA and spurred state and nonstate violence, largely targeting Muslims."
- In September [2020], the Indian Parliament amended the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to increase restrictions on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), further stifling civil society and forcing religious organizations and human rights organizations, including those advocating for religious freedom, to shut down. Amnesty International India closed operations in October 2020 after the authorities froze its bank account."

Christians do not have a major political party of their own (barring a few attempts in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh). Christians can only join existing parties. It may come as a surprise that some of them have even joined the BJP. In fact, many Christians voted for Modi because they liked his economic agenda and hoped that he would do away with the inertia that characterized the Manmohan Singh era. Christians are also hardly present in the judicial body.

Under India's pluralistic legal system, marriage laws vary according to religion. In addition to Hindu, Muslim and Christian legislation, the Special Marriage Act ([1954](#)) provides a means of citizens getting married irrespective of religious background ([OECD, 2019](#)). However, a controversial new anti-conversion law that criminalizes interfaith relationships has put couples on edge in certain states, primarily Hindu-Muslim couples ([BBC News, March 15 2021](#)).

Under the Special Marriage Act, forced marriages and child marriages are outlawed. Early marriages nonetheless remain widespread, and reportedly spiked in the context of COVID-19 ([Al-Jazeera, April 14, 2021](#)). According to [Girls Not Brides](#), 27% of Indian girls are married before they reach 18 years of age. Divorce laws also vary in accordance with the relevant religious or civil law that the marriage occurred under. Under Christian and Muslim laws, a man is entitled to divorce his wife for any reason, whereas both genders have equal rights to file for divorce under the Special Marriage Act and Hindu Marriage Act ([OECD, 2019](#)).

India signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and ratified it in 1993. A [2014 review](#) by the CEDAW committee highlighted a culture of impunity for perpetrators of violence against women (CEDAW, 2014, p.3). It further observed an increase in violent crimes against women, especially rape (including marital), kidnappings and abductions.

Female representation in Parliament in 2019 was 14%. Whilst modest, this represents a 9% rise from just 5% in 1990 (Index Mundi).

Religious landscape

India: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	68,863,000	4.9
Muslim	203,971,000	14.6
Hindu	1,010,526,000	72.3
Buddhist	10,699,000	0.8
Ethno-religionist	50,030,000	3.6
Jewish	4,400	0.0
Bahai	2,199,000	0.2
Atheist	2,311,000	0.2
Agnostic	16,796,000	1.2
Other	32,025,000	2.3
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

According to the World Christian Database estimates (April 2021), 1,010 million citizens are Hindus (72.3% of the population), 204 million are Muslims (14.6% of the population), 68.9 million are Christians (4.9% of the population), 50 million are Ethno-religionists (3.6% of the population), 25.8 million are Sikhs (1.8% of the population) and 10.7 million citizens are Buddhists (0.8% of the population).

Hinduism has dominated India for centuries (it started to develop between 500 and 300 BC). The second biggest religion in India is Islam. 14.6% may seem an unimportant minority until you realize that India is the country with the third largest Muslim population on earth - only Indonesia and Pakistan have a greater number of Muslim citizens.

Christianity is the third largest religion in India. The group of Christians in India growing fastest are the non-traditional Christian communities (including converts to Christianity). Bureaucracy and corruption are well-known factors all over India: If Christians try to build a new church, or renovate an existing one, they will encounter much red-tape and opposition. The only way to bypass the obstacle of bureaucracy is by paying bribes. Many staff in lower administration posts have low incomes and seek extra income from corruption to survive. Christians in India are constantly encountering these obstacles in almost every aspect of their lives.

The fourth largest religious group are adherents of so-called Ethno-religionism. These are the traditional tribal religions, which predate the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism in the country. Sikhs (mainly living in the state of Punjab in India's northwest), are the next largest group. Buddhism only makes up 0.8% of the country's population. Buddhism originated in Ancient India sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, from where it spread through much of Asia.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank:

- **GDP (current US\$) (billions):** 2,713.17 (2018)
- **India's GDP has been growing over the past years - growth (annual):** 6.1%

India is the world's 7th-largest economy by market exchange rates. But the new wealth is not distributed equally and the gap between very rich and very poor is growing rapidly. Despite the economic growth, poverty (see below: *Social and cultural landscape*) is incredibly high.

The economy of India stands on 4 pillars: Agriculture, Unorganized sector, Organized or core sector and Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME). All four sectors contribute more than 90% to the GDP of India. On 8 November 2016, the Government of India announced the demonetization of all 500 and 1,000 rupee banknotes of the Mahatma Gandhi series. It also announced the issuance of new 500 and 2,000 rupee banknotes in exchange for the demonetized banknotes. It was enacted by the single-hand decision of Prime Minister Modi. It resulted in a steep decline in all sections of Indian economy; however, the Unorganized sector (which makes up 42% of GDP) suffered most. Millions of jobs were lost and recession has struck the nation. It pushed 520 million people 'Below Poverty Line (BPL)'. Most of the rural Christians are already under BPL.

At the end of August 2019, media outlets published reports based on a Reuters study, showing that the Indian economy was [continuing to contract](#) (Asia News, 30 August 2019) and had hit its lowest recorded level for the past five years. According to experts, in the April-June 2019 quarter, the increase in GDP was 'only' 5.7%: far lower than the same period in 2018, when growth was 8%, thus losing its place as the world's fastest growing economy.

The crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic also had a huge impact on the Indian economy in 2020. As society went into lockdown, many businesses had to stop their work, causing many people to lose their jobs and income. As already mentioned, the Indian economy shrank 23.9% year-on-year in the second quarter of 2020, much worse than market forecasts of an 18.3% drop. It is the biggest contraction on record, as India imposed a coronavirus lockdown in late March 2020 and extended it several times, halting most economic activities. India's GDP will contract by 10.3% this fiscal year, IMF has projected.

In June 2021, BBC News published [a sceptical analysis](#) of India's economy under Prime Minister Modi. The basic line in this analysis is that Asia's third-largest economy is not doing well at all, and this is only partly due to COVID-19 measures. The pandemic battered what was an already under-par performance. Mismanagement was also a very important factor. (BBC News, 22 June 2021)

The Christian community in India is the second most literate community in India but, 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. Many churches lack the finances to do anything about this. They need assistance from abroad to run social projects etc. but the government restrictions make this virtually impossible. The work of Christian NGOs has suffered from the fact that it has been made very difficult (if not impossible) to receive financial support from abroad.

Economic pressures restrict the freedom of Christians, especially converts. Reports indicate that Christian men have experienced harassment within their workplace, or even lost their jobs due to their Christian faith. The loss of income affects their dependent family. Female Christians are additionally economically vulnerable on the grounds of their gender, due to lower education and employment rates for women and girls, and patrilineal inheritance practices ([Georgetown 2019/20; The Conversation, January 6 2021](#)). While the landmark '2009 Right to Education Act' (which made education free and compulsory for children between 6 and 14) has decreased the percentage of children out of school, many children – particularly girls – remain out of school. Sexual harassment at work also remains an entrenched problem (HRW 2021).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP full 2020 report](#) (page 343) and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Mongoloid and other 3% (2000 est.).
- **Main languages:** Hindi 43.6%, Bengali 8%, Marathi 6.9%, Telugu 6.7%, Tamil 5.7%, Gujarati 4.6%, Urdu 4.2%, Kannada 3.6%, Odia 3.1%, Malayalam 2.9%, Punjabi 2.7%, Assamese 1.3%, Maithili 1.1%, other 5.6% (2011 est.). English enjoys the status of subsidiary official language but is the most important language for national, political, and commercial communication; there are 22 other officially recognized languages.

- **Urban population:** 35.4% (2021 est.)
- **Literacy rate:** 74.4% (2018 est.)

According to the UN's HDI:

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.645, ranking 131
- **Total population:** 1,503.6 million
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 69.7 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 12.2
- **Employment to population ratio (% ages 15 years and older):** 46.7
- **Population in multidimensional poverty, headcount (thousands – for the year of the survey):** 369,643
- **Gender inequality index:** 0.488

The most characteristic social feature of India is the caste system – a hierarchical stratification of Indian society dating back many centuries. According to a tradition called Varna, there are four castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras), plus a list of groups, now known as Dalits, who were historically excluded from the Varna system altogether, and are still ostracized as “Untouchables”. The caste system is omnipresent in India with upper castes ruling the country. It may come as a surprise that the caste system also permeates the Church in India. Most Christians in India come from the lower castes or even the Dalits. They converted from Hinduism partly to escape their hopeless situation as “Untouchables” only to find that the same barriers exist inside the Church. Many of them became disappointed and this is part of the explanation why the [Ghar Wapsi campaign](#) of the Hindu radicals has been effective in reconverting many back to Hinduism (World Watch Monitor, 16 February 2017). Abolishing elements of the caste system still existing in the Church is a major challenge which needs to be dealt with.

Women and girls in India are still widely neglected and perceived to be inferior. They have lower literacy and education rates. Society’s preference for boys leads to selective abortion of girls and to female infanticide; reflecting this strong son preference, there are [1.11](#) male births per one female birth (Georgetown, 2020, p.21). India has a growing female population deficit of 35 million. The media in India bring reports of rape virtually every day. Police forces often do not show any real interest in helping victims or bringing justice to the perpetrators. There is no difference in the situation of women and girls if they are Christians.

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on society, with many businesses being forced to stop working, which caused large numbers of employees to lose their jobs and income. 21 million salaried jobs were lost between April 2020 and August 2020, while the unemployment rate in India rose to 8.4% in August 2020 ([Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy](#)). 95.2% of migrants lost their jobs and livelihoods, as confirmed by a survey conducted by Caritas India in the 18 states most affected by the pandemic. Millions of people are being thrust into extreme poverty and hunger, not through illness but because of the economic impact of the lockdown.

As stated above (in *Economic landscape*), Christians make up the [largest unemployed group](#) among all minorities in India (without even including the number of new Christians who officially stick to their Hindu status for various socio-economic reasons). Would this number of unofficial Christians have been included, the proportion of unemployed Christians would have been even bigger. Many Christians live in slum areas where many people become totally dependent upon food distribution programs carried out by the government and aid organizations. Christians have often been deliberately overlooked when this aid is distributed.

Against this backdrop of patriarchal norms and a hierarchical caste system, the weakest in society are exploited. Women and girls are considered weak and emotional subjects, so violations against Christian women and girls is often targeted at their body through molestation and sexual harassment ([Religious Freedom and Business Foundation, 3 November 2020](#)). Thousands of girls have also been reportedly aborted on the basis of their sex ([ADF, 6 May 2021](#)). Men and boys on the other hand, are viewed as physically strong. Persecution consequently targets their physical strength (through beatings and torture) as well as their role as family decision-maker.

Sexual attacks on women harm the victim's wider family and community due to the connotations between sexual purity and pride and prestige within Indian culture. There is particularly strong stigma and shame around reporting sexual abuse against boys, which is also reported to be widespread (in part as they have more freedom to leave the home in India's patriarchal society, thus becoming more exposed to potential contexts of abuse) ([Reuters, 8 May 2018](#)). Domestic violence is also reportedly high, compounded by socioeconomic dependency of women upon men and the impact of COVID-19 ([BBC News, 2 June 2020](#); [UN News, 28 December 2020](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 54.2% penetration (survey date: December 2020)
- **Facebook usage:** 28.9% penetration (survey date: March 2021)

According to World Bank:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 86.9 per 100 people

According to the GSMA [Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020](#) report:

- 79% of men own a mobile phone compared to 53% of women. 42% of men are mobile internet users - double the rate of women. However, the gender gap in mobile internet awareness has decreased dramatically in recent years. 50% of women surveyed in 2019 reported awareness, compared to just 19% two years previously.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (updated 27 July 2020):

- The mobile market continues to be the main focus of India's telecom sector. There is considerable government investment in national infrastructure, including the BharatNet

project which aims to connect 250,000 villages to broadband networks, of which 100,000 are expected to be connected with FttP services by the end of 2020.

- India's fixed-line and fixed broadband sectors remain highly under-developed, largely due to the dominance of the mobile platform and the relatively limited extent of fixed infrastructure.

According to Freedom House/ Internet Freedom 2020 report:

- "Internet freedom in India declined dramatically for a third straight year. Government authorities increasingly shut off connectivity in a bid to suppress protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which gives certain non-Muslim groups special access to citizenship. New evidence also pointed to spyware campaigns targeting human rights defenders, adding to an already restrictive environment for privacy. International platforms were increasingly pressured to remove content critical of the government's Hindu nationalist agenda and its actions in Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state. Meanwhile, both the CAA protests and COVID-19 pandemic led to an information environment plagued by disinformation, often pushed by political leaders themselves. Within this environment, women, religious and marginalized communities in particular experienced online harassment and trolling. In a positive development, the Supreme Court laid down certain safeguards to be followed by the government before ordering internet shutdowns. Both governmental and non-governmental entities continued their efforts to bridge the country's digital divides."

Further information:

Among the rapid economic changes mentioned above, investment in technology has skyrocketed in India. The introduction of new technology started in the major cities, but India has also begun to modernize rural areas, giving almost everyone Internet access. A [report](#) published on 26 September 2019 by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Nielsen, showed that the total number of internet users in rural India is 227 million against 205 million of urban users.

This means that Christians and others have more access to Christian materials than ever before, but it could also open the eyes of people in India (especially the younger generation) to what is going on in the rest of the world. Hindu hard-liners are continually attacking the Christian media, accusing them of evangelism. There have already been instances where cable operators have been pressured by Hindu groups into removing Christian content even as Hindu content and channels multiply.

In the past decade, Christian satellite TV channels and other Christian media have expanded enormously. India has no e-censorship which means that Christians are free to publish whatever they want. This means (among other things) that Christians also have many more possibilities for reporting on violence, intolerance and discrimination. Websites reporting in this manner are: [Matters India](#), [Christian Today India](#) and the site of the [Evangelical Fellowship of India](#).

Security situation

A major issue in India is the high level of physical violence and the lack of respect for human life. Honor killings, acid throwing, beatings by mobs, executions and many other atrocities happen regularly all over the country. Christians are often the victims of these actions as testified by the long lists of violent incidents published annually.

Hindu radicalism has gained momentum since the beginning of the 1990s. The ultimate aim of these Hindu groups is to change India from being a secular country (as defined by the country's Constitution) into a country where Hinduism is the state religion. Over the years, Hindu radicals have carried out numerous violent attacks against non-Hindu religious minorities. There has been little if any protection against these attacks from the local, state or national authorities. Modi's administration refuses to speak out against this violence, which results in a constant increase in the level of impunity. Local police officers have a reputation for being corrupt. In the states and many other areas where the BJP forms the government, police officers are known for not being neutral and for often siding with Hindu hard-liners. They regularly take part in raids on Christian meetings, issue threats to Christians, refuse to register cases reported by Christians (FIR registrations) and give protection to radical Hindus involved in acts of violence, intolerance and discrimination. When Christians want to register a complaint, the local police will refuse to do so in about 90% of the cases. The police also have a reputation for brutality and mistreating Christians who are in custody.

Another major problem for Christians in India is the presence of the Maoists, a.k.a. Naxalites. (It is believed that the term Naxal/Naxalite derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in the Indian State of West Bengal, where the movement had its origin.) They are a remnant of the Cold War era and are Communist militants whose strongholds are to be found in the poorest regions of India. These are regions that are difficult to control, such as the jungles of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha and Telangana. Christians living in areas under Naxalite control are constantly monitored and cannot openly practice their faith. If they refuse to follow each and every command, the Naxalites will pick them out and set an example during a special village meeting. This may be limited to a severe beating, but can go as far as an open execution.

There are some major reasons why Christians are subjected to violence in the Naxal-prone areas:

- Local villagers who are generally anti-Christian sometimes encourage Naxalite action against Christians, convincing them that Christians in the villages are police informants reporting Naxal activities. As a result Naxals do not hesitate to kidnap, brutally beat and kill Christians.
- Christians are known to share their faith and thus help convert people (even Naxal leaders) to Christianity. This angers the Naxalite community which then abducts and kills Christian leaders.
- Christians in villages generally do not provide shelter and food for Naxals, unlike other locals.

There are ongoing conflicts between India and its neighbors (especially Pakistan, China, Nepal). The relationship between India and Pakistan has always been tense since 1947 - especially concerning the region of Jammu & Kashmir. Border fighting between China and India occurred in [June 2020](#) when 20 Indian and 43 Chinese soldiers died (Asia News, 17 June 2020). Finally, a conflict broke out between [India and Nepal](#) about border region control in May 2020 (Hindustan Times, 10 June 2020).

Sexual assault is a pervasive issue in India, with one woman reporting a rape every 15 minutes ([Reuters, 9 January 2020](#)). Women from lower castes and tribes are especially vulnerable; outrage was recently renewed in the light of two separately reported gang rapes of Dalit women, both of which led to their deaths ([CBS, 1 October, 2020](#)). As noted by Human Rights Watch, a culture of victim-blaming remains prevalent and women face several obstacles in reporting crimes, including a lack of victim protection laws ([Human Rights Watch, India: Events of 2018](#)). Trafficking is also an endemic issue ([US State Department, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2020, p.19](#)). Debt bondage traps entire families in forced labor, and many men, women and children are caught up in networks of human trafficking. Pre-adulthood, more boys are affected. Post-adulthood, more women are affected ([Asia Times, 6 February 2020](#)).

Violent and lethal attacks by radical Hindu groups have focused heavily on Christian leaders and pastors, the majority of whom are men ([Open Doors UK, 2019, "We're Indians Too"](#)).

Trends analysis

1) Social hostility against Christians has grown

Since Narendra Modi first came to power in May 2014 the level of religious freedom violations against Christians has gone up dramatically. Talking about the Christian faith to a group wider than one's own family is now generally regarded as a form of evangelism. Intolerance against this has grown over the past five years. Even just revealing one's Christian faith can be regarded as evangelism in the eyes of Hindu radicals. The growing social hostility towards Christians is increasingly expressed through (though not limited to) the widespread use of social media.

2) The BJP is consolidating its power-base

In the April and May 2019 elections, the BJP gained an absolute majority in parliament which means that Prime Minister Modi will stay in power for the next 5 years. Hardline Hindus will therefore continue to attack Muslims and Christians with impunity and the level of violence is likely to remain at an extreme level.

In August 2019, the Modi government took away the statehood of the Muslim majority region of Jammu and Kashmir, turning the region into two separate union territories (Jammu and Kashmir, plus Ladakh). This means that the central government can exert much more control there. As of October 2021, Jammu and Kashmir still has no right of state and its leading politicians are still detained.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: hundreds of corpses - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/20/abandoned-corpses-rural-india-indicate-surge-covid-19-deaths>
- Recent history: 1.21 million - <https://mattersindia.com/2021/06/study-estimates-1-21-million-indians-have-died-from-covid-19/>
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WWL 2022: Church information / India

Christian origins

According to the oldest tradition, the Apostle Thomas came to India in the 1st century AD and established the first churches in the country – mainly in Kerala. It is assumed that the initial converts were largely Jewish proselytes among the Cochin Jews who are believed to have arrived in India around 562 BC, after the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem. Another tradition mentions Saint Bartholomew who visited India in the 2nd century AD.

In the 4th century, several Christians from the Middle East came to India to evangelize. The colony of Syrian Christians established at Kodungallur may be the first Christian community in South India for which there is a continuous written record. The most important leader of these Christians was Thomas of Cana.

The Dominican missionary, Jordanus Catalani, was the first Catholic European to arrive in India in 1320 and start missionary work from the city of Surat. The 15th century saw the rise of colonialism. For India this meant the arrival of the Portuguese in Goa and other cities, and with them missionaries of the different orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, Augustinians, etc.) who began at once to build churches along the coastal districts where Portuguese power made itself felt.

The first Protestant missionaries to set foot in India were two Lutherans from Germany, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, who began work in 1705 in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar (now known as Tharangambadi in Tamil Nadu). In 1793, William Carey, an English Baptist minister came to India as a missionary. He worked in Serampore, Calcutta, and other places and translated the Bible into Bengali, Sanskrit and numerous other languages and dialects. He worked in India until his death in 1834. During the 19th century, several American Baptist missionaries evangelized in the north-eastern parts of India. Even today the heaviest concentrations of Christians in India continue to be in the northeast among the Nagas, Khasis, Kukis, and Mizos.

Church spectrum today

India: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	5,399,000	7.8
Catholic	21,480,000	31.2
Protestant	23,401,000	34.0
Independent	19,709,000	28.6
Unaffiliated	184,000	0.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-1,310,000	-1.9
Total	68,863,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	12,401,000	18.0
Renewalist movement	21,581,000	31.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

According to the World Christian Database data of April 2021, the largest official denominations (with more than 1 million members) in India are:

- Catholic Church in India
- Church of South India (Anglican)
- United Evangelical Lutheran Churches
- Orthodox Syrian Church of the East
- Seventh-day Adventist Church
- Council of Baptist Churches in NE India

- Church of North India (Anglican)
- Presbyterian Church in India
- Churches of Christ
- Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar
- Believers' Churches in India

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / India

Reporting period

01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

India: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	82	10
WWL 2021	83	10
WWL 2020	83	10
WWL 2019	83	10
WWL 2018	81	11

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

India scored 82 points in WWL 2022, just one point lower than in WWL 2021. In a number of violence categories, the score is lower than in WWL 2021 but this is no indication that the situation for Christians has improved. Overall violence remained at an extreme level and levels of pressure in the spheres of life remained very high or extreme too. Since the current government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in May 2014 (and was re-elected with even greater mandate in May 2019) pressure on Christians in India has risen dramatically. Hindu radicals can continue their attacks unabated, and the level of impunity is very high.

Persecution engines

India: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Very strong
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Strong
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Weak

Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Weak

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Religious nationalism - Hindu (Very strong)

The assertiveness and aggressiveness of all kinds of Hindu organizations have 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. Other forms of *Religious nationalism* in India further worsen the score, e.g. from various radical groups such as Buddhist extremists in Ladakh, forms of Neo-Buddhism in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and Sikh extremists in Punjab. Since 2014 *Religious nationalism* is also influencing tribal groups, causing them to regard their religions as being related to Hinduism.

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong) - blended with Religious nationalism - Hindu

After winning the May 2019 elections, the BJP formed a new government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is being hailed as the strong 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, are just some of the signs of a growing dictatorial movement within government circles. Attacks (including fake news) have been unleashed by state machinery on journalists, opposition leaders, human rights activists and media chiefs. The propaganda against 'alien' religions like Islam and Christianity is also increasing.

Clan oppression (Strong)

Clan oppression 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 which run the *Khaps*. The *Khaps* seem to be against modernity, and oppose, for instance, marrying outside the community rules of kinship, religion and status. Naturally, conversion to Christianity is a serious crime in their eyes. *Clan oppression* is rapidly becoming a serious threat to the Church in India. In the tribal villages of mainland India, where the Christian population is scarce, many converts have been forced into 'Ghar Wapsi' re-conversion. Influenced by local radical Hindu groups, tribal village leaders are known to impose heavy fines on Christians and vandalize their homes. The Christians are socially boycotted and excommunicated if they refuse to comply with the leaders' orders.

Ethno-religious hostility (Strong) - blended with Religious nationalism - Hindu

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. In the tribal areas, people have come (and are still coming) to Christian faith. This is not something new; the Church has been in tribal areas for at least 100-150 years and experienced little violent opposition in that time. But since the late 1990s, the influence of Hindu extremists, pro-Hindutva government officials and media has been responsible for instigating violent attacks on tribal Christians. Jhabua region in Madhya Pradesh, Bastar region in Chhattisgarh and many other parts of Jharkhand and Odisha have witnessed this. 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 the villagers. *Ethno-religious hostility* is thus rapidly becoming a serious threat to the Church in India.

Drivers of persecution

India: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	WEAK	VERY STRONG	STRONG	STRONG	WEAK	WEAK	-	VERY STRONG	WEAK
Government officials	-	Strong	Medium	Strong	-	-	-	Strong	Weak
Ethnic group leaders	Very weak	Strong	Strong	Strong	-	-	-	Strong	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very weak	Very strong	Strong	Medium	-	-	-	Strong	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	Very strong	Strong	Weak	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very weak	Strong	Strong	Strong	Very weak	-	-	Strong	-
One's own (extended) family	Weak	Strong	Strong	Strong	Very weak	-	-	Weak	-
Political parties	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-

India:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	WEAK	VERY STRONG	STRONG	STRONG	WEAK	WEAK	-	VERY STRONG	WEAK
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Religious nationalism - Hindu

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Hindu religious leaders are a main source of anti-Christian sentiment spreading among the Hindu masses. Prominent examples are Yogi Adityanath (founder of Hindu Yuva Wahini which is responsible for the majority of attacks in Uttar Pradesh), Sakshi Mahraj (Member of the Legislative Assembly), Sadhvi Pragya, Sadhvi Prachi, Rajrajeshwaracharya and Narendra Maharaj who are all known for their open hate-speech against Christians. They play the role of mediator between religious nationalist ideology and its actual manifestation on the ground, planning and executing misinformation and violent action against Christians and other minorities.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Various hardline Hindu groups are active in India: VHP, RSS, Sangh Parivar etc. They are almost always the hands and feet that exert Hindu pressure on Christians. Other violent groups include Naxalites and Islamic groups (such as the Islamic State group), although the latter have not yet attacked Christians.
- **Political parties (Very strong):** The BJP is the political wing of the RSS and has a majority in the political centre. It is the parent organization of all types of Hindu extremism in India. All the top leaders of the ruling BJP come from this RSS background. In fact, all members of BJP are usually a member of RSS or one of its 35 direct branches. BJP has been giving direct political support to the Hindutva militant wings all over the country. Raghubar Das (Chief Minister of Jharkhand), Adityanath (Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh), Manohar Lal Khattar (Chief Minister of Haryana), Rajnath Singh (Defense Minister of India) and other BJP ministers have been speaking publicly against Christians and other minorities. With the BJP in the political driving seat, radical Hindus feel empowered to persecute Christians and enjoy virtual impunity.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** At the level of the village, community members play a big role in persecuting Christians, both converts from Hinduism and other categories of Christianity. Most of the time, it is these local villagers who actually carry out the hostilities against Christians, such as beatings, setting fire to churches, damaging cemeteries etc.

- **Government officials (Strong):** The BJP government under Prime Minister Modi, biased officials and Hindu extremists (members of the family of organizations of RSS) are major forces hostile to Christians. After Modi and the BJP came to power in May 2014, a power nexus of RSS extremists, media and government-controlled officials has come into existence and work together against Christianity. This nexus carries most responsibility for the increase in hostility towards Christians.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** Tribal leaders commonly put pressure on Christian converts for leaving the culture of the ancestors and insulting the religion of the family and community (i.e. Hinduism).
- **Family members (Strong):** Close relatives of converts will very quickly regard any conversion to Christianity as shaming the honor of the family and act accordingly.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

(Dictatorial paranoia is greatly influenced by *Religious nationalism* - both engines are strongly blended.)

- **Government officials (Strong):** In states and regions that are under the control of Hindu radicals, local government officials oppose Christianity.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** In most states and regions, Hindus will dominate the local authorities and oppose Christians.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Local Hindu leaders will strongly support anti-Christian measures from the government.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Radical Hindu groups like RSS and VHS are hostile towards Christians.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** Hindu mobs will support the BJP government. They have been encouraged to increase their attacks on Christians since this can more or less be done with impunity.
- **Political parties (Strong):** The BJP is a master in using modern technology and social media to promote their agenda. They are also skilled at creating fake news to attack their opponents. One Hindu leader stated publicly in 2014 that Muslims and Christians should be [removed](#) from India by 2021 (Mail Online India, 19 December 2014).

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Government officials (Strong):** At the local level, councils and police will side with the majority tribal group. This means Christian may often face opposition.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** Some tribal leaders are strongly opposed to the main religions in India. This not only affects Christianity and Islam, but occasionally also Hinduism, especially where Hindu radicals have put pressure on tribal people to accept Hinduism. This has led to conflicts.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** Tribal people will do their best to protect their own culture and resist conversion to Christianity. This has already led to violence.
- **Family members (Strong):** Tribal families will oppose any conversion of one of their members away from their traditional faith. This may result in house arrest and violence for Christian converts.

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Hindu radicals will put pressure on tribal people to accept Hinduism as the default religion and attack other religions. (Most of the time, the level of pressure from tribal religions on Christians is much less.)
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** Tribes may have their own ancestral beliefs, or have accepted Hinduism (especially under pressure from Hindu radicals). Militant tribal groups are actively hostile towards Christians.

Drivers of Ethno-religious hostility

(Ethno-religious hostility is greatly influenced by *Religious nationalism* - both engines are strongly blended.)

- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** Most ethnic groups in India are traditionally Hindus. They will strongly oppose any Christian presence in their midst.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Local Hindu leaders are generally hostile to any Christian presence in their communities.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Militant Hindu groups at the local level are intolerant of any Christian presence in their areas of influence.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** Local ethnic people are per tradition Hindus. Quite often they form mobs to attack Christians in their villages. Their view is that no one should leave the faith of the fathers.
- **Family members (Strong):** Local ethnic families strongly oppose conversion to Christianity. No one should leave the faith of the fathers.
- **Government officials (Medium):** At the local level, government officials will oppose Christians. They regard them as not belonging to the ethnic group whose culture traditionally is Hindu. There is a close link to *Religious nationalism*.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no particular hotspots of 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 5 years due to elections. Current examples of such states are Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Odisha.

Christian communities and how they are affected

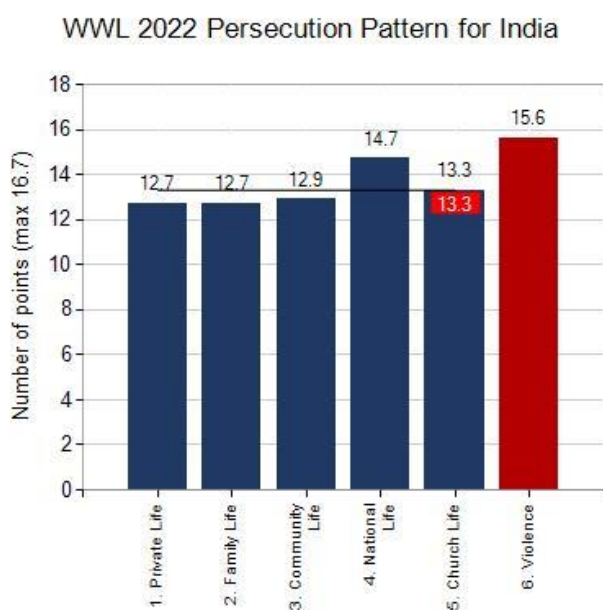
Communities of expatriate Christians: There are several expatriate groups active in India. It is not only Christians from Western countries living in India who have their own congregations, but also refugees. One example is the Afghan community that has a congregation in New Delhi. Most of the time, these congregations do not draw the ire of the radical Hindus in India. There are two reasons for this: They have a very distinct ethnic membership, and they are not very active in outreach among Indian nationals.

Historical Christian communities: These communities (e.g. 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. These churches are not growing strongly because they are hardly active in outreach. Nevertheless, even this group of Christians is sometimes attacked by radical Hindus who vandalize churches, religious statues and crucifixes. The Historical churches frequently own significant assets and property in India. Other than that, church bodies own some of the finest educational and medical institutes and large amounts of land. The Constitution of India gives special provision to Christians to set up and manage the education centers of their own choice. The BJP government under Prime Minister Modi has made attempts to take away the right to manage these institutes. These institutes are vital for the education of the Christian minorities and other marginalized communities. In many places, government authorities have taken over church properties.

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. Converts are often physically assaulted, hospitalized and sometimes even killed. They live mostly in rural areas, where they face societal pressure not only from family, friends, community and local Hindu priests, but also from radical Hindus. 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 regarded as the second main target by radical Hindus because of their involvement in outreach activities and conversion. They face regular attacks.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for India shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.3 points), slightly lower than in WWL 2021. Oppression by Hindus against Christians (especially against converts) is present at all levels of society, ranging from the personal level all the way up to the national and church levels. Christians experience opposition to conversions and baptisms constantly. Anti-conversion legislation has been imposed in at least 9 states. Threats are expressed and church meetings are disturbed very frequently.
- Although all other spheres of life show very high levels of pressure, pressure is extremely high in the *National sphere of life*. Christians experience increasing restrictions in this realm: More states are considering the introduction of anti-conversion legislation to put an end to conversion by force and/or allurements; the media are increasingly negative and the level of impunity for militant Hindus has increased even further.
- The score for violence reached 15.6 points in WWL 2022 (a slight increase from 15.4 points in WWL 2021). Physical violence and attacks on Christian religious assemblies are the two most frequent forms of persecution in India.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)

Revealing one's Christian faith is regarded as evangelism in the eyes of Hindu radicals. They will also react aggressively to any social media posts bearing Christian content. At first only converts were targeted, but now all Christian messages can expect to be under attack.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Conversion in India is currently one of the biggest issues used by Hindu radicals against Christians. They are using the term 'forced conversion' to attack pastors, church leaders and congregation. Accusations of conversion usually lead to physical violence, with Christians consequently being taken to the local police station on charges of 'forced conversion' and detained there. Anti-conversion laws exist in nine states: Odisha (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968), Arunachal Pradesh (1978), Chhattisgarh (2000), Gujarat (2003), Himachal Pradesh (2006/2019), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), and Uttar Pradesh (2020). 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.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (3.25 points)

Christians only used to experience problems in their private prayer times at the community level. Especially converts had to be careful how they carried out prayer in their family homes. However, sentiments against visible Christian behavior appear to have grown in India over the past five years. Protestants are now also monitored (because of suspicion of evangelism activities), and the phenomenon is no longer limited to the countryside. Being seen at prayer has become risky all over India (barring two or three north-eastern states).

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

Talking about the Christian faith to a wider group than the family is now generally regarded as a form of evangelism. This affects not just converts, but also Protestants. Intolerance against this has grown over the past five years. Social hostility against Christians sharing their faith has increased, driven by Hindu radicalism.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (4.00 points)

Although India's Supreme Court passed the Juvenile Justice Act in 2015 (which allows adoption of Hindu children by non-Hindu parents), Christians still find it extremely difficult (if not impossible) to adopt children. Procedures are very complicated - sometimes intentionally - in an attempt to block adoptions by Christians. Members of the committees who decide about the adoptions are sometimes very biased against Christians. Therefore, although the Juvenile Justice Act seemed to promise an improvement for Christians, in reality it has so far brought no change for the better.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)

Christian children are forced to participate in many Hindu elements in the classroom, even in Christian schools. Examples of this are Hindu mythology, Yoga lessons and Hindu literature. State-run schools go much further and demand that Christian children attend Hindu festivals and take part in Hindu worship.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)

Due to the enormous pressure from Hindu radicals, baptisms in India have become a low-key affair. Baptism is regarded as the final sign that one has left Hinduism to become a Christian. This also affects pastors; there is perhaps nothing as worrying for a pastor as a convert's baptism service because of the possible consequences. Even traditional churches fear the reaction of government officials and police at baptismal services. As a result, open air baptisms are now regarded as being too risky.

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.25 points)

This happens very frequently to Christians who do not have anglicized names. Nowadays questions are asked of Christians who have names of Indian origin. Everything Indian has been equated with Hinduism, so being a Christian means that one cannot have an "Indian" name and if that is the case, questions are raised. These Christians will have to go a long way to have authorities change the 'default' Hindu religion to Christian. And the same goes for the next generations.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)

Over the past five years, the monitoring of Christians and their activities has increased. This is being implemented by the community authorities and members, but also by various Hindu organizations (Bajrang Dal, Hindu Yuva Vahini, Shiv Sena, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc.) The goal is to stop any form of evangelism.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)

The community will exert pressure on the Christians in their midst to convert them (back) to Hinduism. There have been 'home-coming' campaigns (Ghar Wapsi) organized by radical Hindus.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Known Christians must face quite some discrimination at the community level regarding employment in the public and private sector. Promotion being denied is one of the most common forms of discrimination.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.25 points)

Many incidents of social discrimination have been reported. These are incidents where the access of Christians to drinking water and other community resources including land for cattle etc. has been cut off. They are barred from social life of the village community and are sometimes forced to flee their homes.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)

Anti-conversion laws exist in nine states: Odisha (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968), Arunachal Pradesh (1978), Chhattisgarh (2000), Gujarat (2003), Himachal Pradesh (2006/2019), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), and Uttar Pradesh (2020). 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. In Tamil Nadu the law was passed but later repealed. These laws regulate and limit religious freedom. The Article 25 of the Indian Constitution that gives religious freedom itself is subject to public order which has not been defined. The sub-clause to Article 25 gives states permission to formulate law to restrict the freedom of religion.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)

Hindu radicals have increasingly limited the options for Christians to operate such organizations or political parties over the past five years. Christian political parties continue to be a seasonal phenomenon without any impact. Christian organizations receiving funds from abroad have always been restricted through the Foreign Currency Regulation Act because they are viewed as engaging in proselytization or advocacy related activities. Many Christian groups and organizations received notices from the authorities to give details of their activities, including the names of all the workers as well as those who have ever worked with them. Some schools run by religious minorities have also been asked to give the names of Christian students.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (4.00 points)

The media in India, especially those publishing in Indian dialects, are generally very biased against Christians and are positively hostile in rural areas, where hate-speech and propaganda from Hindu extremists is given plenty of space.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (4.00 points)

Hindu radicals have been targeting Muslims and Christians since the 1990s. An example of this are remarks made by a radical Hindu leader in 2014 hoping to [eradicate](#) Islam and Christianity from India by 2021 (Mail Online India, 19 December 2014). That would mean getting rid of about 250 million people from India. This is an extreme view and totally unrealistic, but it is a fact that most Hindu leaders are prone to making sweeping statements against Muslims and Christians. Further examples of hate-speech can regularly be found in commentaries by radical Hindu leaders such as Yogi Adityanath, Mohan Bhagwat, Praveen Togadia, Vinay Katiyar, Sadhvi Prachi, Sakshi Maharaj, Indresh Kumar, Suresh Chahvan; some central government leaders like Rajnath Singh (Home Minister of India), Giriraj Singh, Mukhtar Abbas Naqui (Minister of Minority Affairs) are also openly involved. They are regularly blaming Christians for luring Hindus to convert to Christianity. Disinformation about Christians in social media during the COVID-19 pandemic (when the use of social media increased immensely) led to an increase in attacks against Christians.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)

The state is constantly monitoring Christian activities and has imposed many restrictions (e.g. concerning foreign funding, invitations for foreign missionaries, difficulties with registration, anti-conversion laws, blasphemy laws etc.). Hindu radicals have stepped up their activities against Christians over the past years - there have been many cases of Hindu mobs staging raids, of carrying out beatings and causing arrests, and of ordering Christians to leave their homes. Since Hindu radicals can mostly pursue such activities with impunity, the level of fear among many Christians has increased.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)

Organizing Christian activities outside has become very difficult and very unsafe. Hindu radicals will immediately regard this as a form of evangelism and react vehemently. If Christians were to try this, Hindu mobs would cause disruption and beat everyone present.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

Hindu extremists and local authorities monitor Christian materials (including digital material on the Internet) very closely. They will also constantly monitor evangelists and Christian workers.

Block 5.19: Churches have been hindered in their interaction with the global church (both foreigners visiting and nationals being able to visit Christians in other countries to attend conferences etc.). (3.75 points)

The central government in New Delhi has imposed very strict regulations to hinder foreign missionaries from entering India: They require a special type of visa, which is almost impossible to obtain. Foreigners visiting the country, even for tourism, are severely restricted and have to sign a statement saying that they will not carry out preaching or conversion activities. Many Christian foreigners living in India with a work visa have been deported, and many foreigners of Indian-origin have been deported because they were part of churches or Christian groups in India.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol “x” in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

India: Violence Block question		WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10	12
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	47	76
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	1310	72
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	5	5

6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	2
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	38	15
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	20	2
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1779	1500
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	91	45
6.10	How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	2	4
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	380	422
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

Violence - additional details:

- **Christians sentenced:** At least 5 Christians were sentenced to jail on conversion charges in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Christians sexually harassed:** At least 38 Christian women were subjected to rape or attempted rape, or whose private parts were deliberately targeted for beating. In one of the cases the victim was raped and killed.

5 Year trends

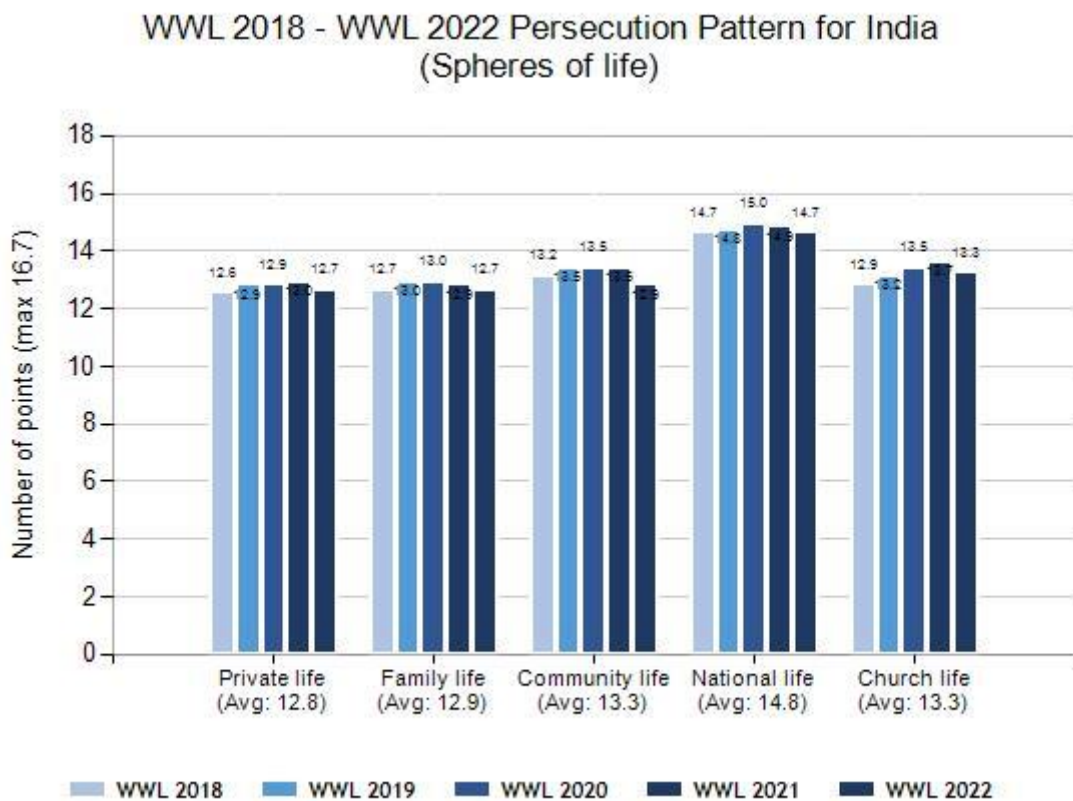
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

A very large increase in pressure was visible in the years directly after the current government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was first elected in 2014. However, over the past five reporting periods, the average pressure against Christians in India has been very high, but stable – with all scores in the range of 13.2-13.6 points. Although the score for average pressure did decrease slightly in WWL 2022, this is not an indication that the situation in the country has improved for Christians.

India: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	13.3
2021	13.6
2020	13.6
2019	13.5
2018	13.2

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

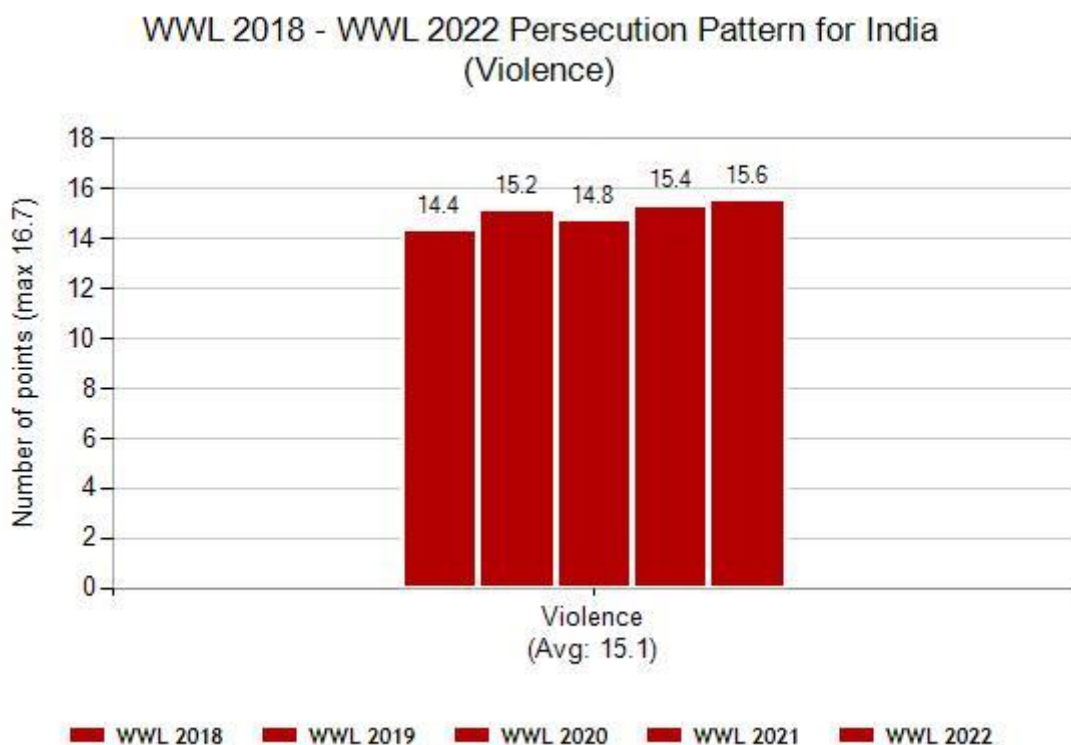


Over the past five years the scores for pressure in most of the five spheres of life have remained very high. This means that the situation for Christians in the country has been constantly problematic under Prime Minister Modi's leadership. The spheres of life where the situation is most precarious are: *National*, *Church* and *Community life*. But even in the other two *spheres of life* pressure is above average. Life for Christians is not easy – and it is not getting better.

- Pressure in *Private life* over the past five years has always been very high - it has never been lower than 12.6 points. This is an indication of pressure exerted especially on converts.
- Pressure in *Family life* has also been very high over the past five years. It started at 12.7 points in WWL 2018, and increased to 13.0 in WWL 2020. In WWL 2022 it was a fraction lower at 12.7 points. Pressure from family on converts has always been very high.

- Pressure in *Community life* has been even higher over the past five years. It peaked at 13.5 points in WWLs 2019-2021. In WWL 2022 it went down to 12.9 points. This sphere of life includes pressure on converts, but also on other Christians.
- Over the past 5 years pressure in *National life* has been extremely high. In WWL 2018 it was 14.7 points, and in WWL 2020 it reached 15.0 points. In WWL 2022 the score dropped a fraction to the still extreme level of 14.7 points. The score of this sphere of life reflects the pressure from Hindu radicals on Indian society as a whole.
- Pressure in *Church life* peaked in WWL 2021 at 13.7 points. In WWL 2022 it went slightly down to 13.3 points. However, this is no indication that state pressure on the Church is getting less.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



For a country that describes itself as the world’s largest democracy the level of violence against Christians over the past five years has been extremely high. The greatest force behind this are the radical Hindu groups that are aiming at eradicating ‘alien’ religions (such as Islam and Christianity) from the country. They have been able to carry out their violence (including killings) with impunity as the BJP government in New Delhi and various states hardly ever take action against these atrocities. The score of violence against Christians reached 15.6 points in WWL 2022, the highest level in the last five WWL reporting periods.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

India is a religiously diverse and democratic society whose national Constitution provides legal equality for all citizens irrespective of their religion, sex, race or caste, and prohibits religion-based discrimination. However, the reality is far different; other simultaneously existing laws uphold ancient traditions, which are by nature patriarchal and exploitative of weaker classes of society. As a country expert explained: ‘Women have fewer rights than men and are considered merely tools for community subjugation - gender violence on women is an expression of power over the other’.

Shame is a very powerful force in Indian society. Sexual attacks serve to shame the family, as a woman's sexual purity connotes the honor and prestige of her family. Daughters, sisters and wives of pastors are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, and verbal slurs. Young Christian women and girls are particularly vulnerable in tribal areas to sexual predation. Physical attacks on Christian women have historically included acid attacks, brutal beatings and killings. While both male and female converts face pressure if their faith is discovered, female converts are more vulnerable to physical, domestic violence. They further risk incarceration by their family and local community, forced marriage, forced divorce and being abandoned or expelled from their home or village. Social discrimination is widely utilized as a means of isolating and pressuring converts; they are banned from social life as well as communal resources, such as drinking water.

Women from the lower strata have always been exploited by high caste Hindus who mostly adhere to Hinduvta’s ideology today. Many women from this lower caste community have turned to Christianity; this makes them a double target - for being Dalit and now Christian. As a country expert stated: “India's patriarchal society is possibly a worse enemy of women than religious bigotry. Together, the two make a fatal cocktail.”

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite legal protection, Christian men who are discovered talking about Christianity or choosing to adhere to the Christian faith are likely to be subjected to violence in many forms. Men and boys are seen as physically strong, and so the persecution of Christian men targets their physical strength as well as their position as decision-maker in the family and head of the household (if older), or head of the church. Violations against men include brutal beatings, killings and 'emotional torture' such as being forced to watch family members being assaulted. Church leaders are particularly vulnerable; being a pastor continues to be one of the riskiest vocations in the country today. Hindu radicals target them and their families in order to set an example to the wider Christian community. Fear grows with each attack.

Another prevalent and effective form of discrimination in India is social exclusion. Men and boys may be socially isolated by their community and family, excluded from taking seats in councils or accessing government schemes and benefits, or verbally harassed. Upon discovery of their faith, they may lose their job, be transferred to faraway places, be given increasing workloads, face client boycotts and be compelled to participate in Hindu worship practices. Others may face challenges in obtaining a permit to set up a new business. Such pressure in the workplace has, according to a country expert, been getting worse over the past years. Economic deprivation also takes the form of unjust fines and being detained for extended periods of time. As men are the main providers, this can throw the whole family into poverty. It also serves to dishearten the local community.

False charges are often brought against Christian men, such as accusations of blasphemy, attempting to convert Hindus, molestation or rape of women, or denigrating Hindu gods and goddesses. These charges are usually brought against pastors and preachers. Imprisonment of Christians carries a stigma which falls on their family as well. Whilst most detainees are released after a few days, some cases drag on for years.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020):

- In January 2020, during anti-CAA protests in New Delhi, an armed crowd stormed a mosque, killed the muezzin, beat the imam, scattered worshippers, and set the building on fire.

- There were reports by NGOs that the government sometimes failed to prevent or stop attacks on religious minorities. Political party leaders made inflammatory public remarks or social media posts about religious minorities. Attacks on members of religious minority communities, based on allegations of cow slaughter or trade in beef, occurred throughout 2020. Such "cow vigilantism" included killings, assaults, and intimidation. Uttar Pradesh police filed charges in 1,716 cases of cow slaughter and made more than 4,000 arrests under the Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act as of August. In October 2020, the Allahabad High Court in Uttar Pradesh ruled that the state Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act "was being misused against innocent persons" and granted bail to a Muslim individual arrested under the act.
- Twenty-four 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. In the majority of the states where bovine slaughter is banned, punishments include imprisonment for six months to two years and a fine of 1,000 to 10,000 rupees (\$14-\$140). Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir penalize cow slaughter with imprisonment of two to 10 years. Gujarat state law mandates a minimum 10-year sentence (the punishment for some counts of manslaughter) and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment (the punishment for premeditated murder of humans) for killing cows, selling beef, and illegally transporting cows or beef.

Further information:

Hindu radicals have called both Islam and Christianity 'alien' religions which should eventually be removed from the country. Thus the Muslim minority experiences similar treatment as Christians do at the hands of militant Hindus. Buddhists and Sikhs find they are more acceptable to Hindu radicals, since their religions originate from the territory of India.

- India has become increasingly intolerant towards religious minorities, especially the Muslim community, according to the South Asia State of Minorities Report 2020, which noted that the general public has come under attack from federal and state governments for criticizing the administration and institutions. (Source: [UCAN, 17 December 2020](#))
- Cow vigilantes in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh killed a Muslim man and injured five of his friends. on 2 June 2021. The victims were accused of smuggling cows from Kosi Kalan village in Mathura district to take them to Mewat in the neighboring state of Haryana. (Source: [UCAN, 8 June 2021](#))
- On 11 August 2021, a video of a Muslim man in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, being beaten up and paraded by a mob while his young daughter pleaded with them to spare his life, went viral on social media. In the video, the mob, allegedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal, a right-wing organization, can be seen assaulting the Muslim, while the police watched on. The mob was also reported to have forced the man to chant 'Jai Shri Ram', a Hindu chant. The man was later handed over to the police. The incident happened where the Bajrang Dal had just concluded a meeting. They accused the victim of attempting to forcefully convert a Hindu woman in the locality. However, the victim's family claimed that the accusation was a lie and that he was being targeted because of his faith. (Source: [Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 20 August 2021](#))

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Religious nationalism

Hindu extremists are often engaged in violence against Muslims and Christians. In the past, large-scale pogroms cost many Muslims and Christians their lives. So far, radical Hindus have been able to carry out their attacks with impunity, and as Modi won the May 2019 elections, it may be expected that many Hindus will feel encouraged to step up their plans for further violence.

Ethno-religious hostility

Hindus from an ethnic minority background will in all likelihood continue to oppose any Christian presence in their communities. With the re-election of the BJP government, tribal Hindus may even increase levels of violence against Christians.

Dictatorial paranoia

India is often seen as the largest democracy on earth. But the current government is a master in manipulating information to their advantage and in out-manoeuvring their opponents. With the BJP at the helm after the May 2019 electoral victory, it may be expected that militant Hindus will feel encouraged to step up their violence. The central government is likely to continue to look the other way and reports of attacks against Muslims and Christians are likely to remain uninvestigated.

Clan oppression

Tribal people will continue to cling on to their traditional faith and culture. Hindu radicals will support them in this as they consider tribal religions to be part of the indigenous culture of India – in contrast to ‘alien’ religions like Islam and Christianity. It may therefore be expected that tribal people will continue to exert pressure on converts and those Christians they accuse of luring their people into a faith that is not part of their traditions.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: removed - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2879597/We-free-India-Muslims-Christians-2021-DJS-leader-vows-continue-ghar-wapsi-plans-restore-Hindu-glory.html>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: eradicate - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2879597/We-free-India-Muslims-Christians-2021-DJS-leader-vows-continue-ghar-wapsi-plans-restore-Hindu-glory.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: UCAN, 17 December 2020 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indias-minorities-face-increasing-intolerance/90721>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: UCAN, 8 June 2021 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/cow-vigilantes-shoot-muslim-man-dead-in-india/92793>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 20 August 2021 - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2021/08/20/press/5376/article.htm>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=India>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/India>
- <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/about/how-we-help/advocacy/uk-india-resource-booklet.pdf>