

WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
48

Nepal



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).¹ Red = extreme level, orange = very high, yellow = high

Key findings

Converts from Hinduism are put under the most pressure from family and community, as they are viewed as deviating from the faith of the ancestors. From time to time, Hindu radicals take advantage of the ongoing political instability by attacking Christians, mostly with impunity. There have been reports of churches being attacked, and Christians being beaten, arrested and sentenced to prison. Christians have also fled their homes and villages because of threats. At a national level, there are some legal restrictions which prevent Christians from freely practising their faith.

¹World Watch Research measures pressure across all spheres of life as well as violence (full methodology [here](#) – password: freedom).

Quick facts

LEADER

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba

POPULATION

30,578,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

1,341,000 (4.4%)²

MAIN RELIGION

Hinduism

GOVERNMENT

Federal Parliamentary Republic



Context

Source³

Main Religions	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	1,341,000	4.4
Hindus	20,095,000	65.7
Buddhists	3,719,000	12.2
Ethno-religionists	3,941,000	12.9

In 2008, Nepal changed from being a monarchy to a federal republic. Since then, there has been much argument between political parties. Despite being officially secular, the 2015 Constitution curbs the freedom to proselytize and convert, regarding it as a punishable offence. The 2017 criminal code also prohibits religious behavior which disrupts public order or goes contrary to public morality.

Hinduism is the dominant religion in Nepal and there are also predominately Buddhist ethnic groups. One remnant of the fact that Hinduism used to be

the state religion is the caste system. A highly marginalized group, now known as Dalits, are still ostracized as 'untouchables'. Many Christians in Nepal are from Dalit backgrounds.

How the situation varies by region

Pressure on converts is stronger in the countryside than in urban areas.

Who is affected?

Communities of expatriate Christians

Foreign missionaries are not allowed to enter Nepal for religious purposes. If foreign visitors are found to be involved in evangelistic activities, they are immediately deported back to their respective country.

Historical Christian communities

Established Christian communities tend not to be involved in evangelistic activities, so are rarely exposed to hostilities from radical Hindus who oppose any conversion activity.

Converts to Christianity

Christians from a Hindu background are the largest group of Christians in Nepal and their numbers have continued to grow. Of all Christian groups, converts' rights are most often violated, with pressure coming from local government officials, Hindu priests, family and community.

Non-traditional Christian communities

These mostly consist of independent churches. Converts from Hinduism will usually go to such churches, which are active in evangelism and therefore experience persecution and discrimination.



²Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Religious nationalism - Hindu:

Most persecution of Christians in Nepal comes from Hindu radical groups. These groups are influenced by the Hindutva movement in India and want to turn Nepal back into a Hindu state. There are at least two Hindu political parties in the national parliament, both in favor of turning Nepal into a Hindu nation again.

Clan oppression blended with religious nationalism - Hindu:

In most cases, 'clan oppression' is blended with 'religious nationalism'. If a convert from a radical Hindu family is vocal about their faith, he or she is likely to face pressure and violence and be expelled from their home. Furthermore, they are not allowed to inherit property. Tribal Hindu leaders, especially in the northern and extreme southern regions of Nepal, have been intolerant towards Christians.



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How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Constitutionally there is religious freedom, but there are also anti-conversion and blasphemy laws in Nepal and it is dangerous for Christian converts to reveal their faith. Women converts risk discrimination, social ostracization, divorce, house arrest and beatings. They may be deprived of basic needs, educational support, family possessions and basic legal rights. Physical violence follows gradually after emotional and mental pressure, and families occasionally arrange forced marriages or expel their daughter from home. In the patriarchal society, women and girls have less ability to exercise their rights and can face persistent harassment.

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied citizenship
- Denied food or water
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home - expulsion
- Forced to flee town/country
- Incarceration by family/house arrest
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological
- Violence - sexual
- Violence - verbal

MEN

Recent converts are particularly vulnerable to physical and mental torture from family and society; they are made to feel like outcasts. Often denied access to ancestral property or basic legal rights, men and boys are also victims of false charges and accusations. In employment, they may be denied promotions and forced to worship Hindu gods and observe Hindu festivals. When they are beaten and ostracized, a man's ability to support his family is depleted and many chose to emigrate. Church leaders are often the main targets of harassment, particularly by Hindu radicals.

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied citizenship
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- False charges
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological
- Violence - verbal

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution score out of 100
2022	48	63.60
2021	34	65.76
2020	32	64.40
2019	32	64.20
2018	25	63.76

Nepal scored 64 points in WWL 2022, two points lower than in WWL 2021. The biggest pressure comes from radical Hindus and is highest in the 'private', 'national' and 'church' spheres of life. Violence against Christians, by radical Hindus, continued. Churches were damaged, Christians were arrested, physically harassed and forced to leave their homes.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **On 20 January 2021**, Nepalese authorities demolished the Rupantaran Khristiya Church in Naya Basti, near Banepa, 10 km southeast of the capital Kathmandu. The church had been established in a slum area in 2013, thanks to a generous donation from a family who offered the building for Christian use.
- **In July 2021**, after refusing to follow Hindu burial rituals for his father, villagers forced a Christian convert from Hinduism to leave his village.
- Kaski authorities arrested four Koreans on **September 27 2021** on false charges of proselytizing. The Koreans had provided financial assistance and free tuition to orphans and poor children for years. Locals falsely reported to the police that they were trying to convert children.

WWL Year	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians detained	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians forced to flee their countries
2022	5	7	33	10
2021	10	17	60	1

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - see [here](#) for full results. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given which in reality could be significantly higher.



Private life

Anyone speaking about Christianity outside their immediate family or posting about it on social media is regarded as evangelizing. They are opposed by the community, sometimes with violence. Many converts prefer to keep their faith a secret.

Family life

The Hindu and Buddhist tradition in Nepal is to cremate people when they die. There are no common burial grounds so the only places where Christians can be buried is in very few privately owned places. Even this may attract opposition from locals. Some children of Christian parents face difficulties or harassment. They are left out of games by friends, whose parents have told them not to mix with Christian children.

Community life

Christians (especially converts) are often threatened by their family or community. All their activities are monitored by community and local officials and Christian house meetings are regularly disturbed and obstructed. Local police and councils often force Christians to come to their offices for questioning.

National life

Religious conversion activities are prohibited, even though Nepal is a secular state. Sharing one's faith in a manner that undermines the faith or belief of any caste or ethnic group is banned. The 2017 criminal code prohibits religious behavior that disrupts public order or goes contrary to public morality. In the media, there is a tendency to portray evangelical groups as luring innocent villagers with money and false promises. Conversion is shown in a very negative light. Christian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face harassment from local authorities who often claim the NGOs have been engaging in forced conversions.

Church life

Since the passing of anti-conversion laws, surveillance of Christian activities by local councils and Hindu community members has increased. There is no legal recognition of churches in Nepal. Church property is registered under the name of private persons or NGOs. The police recommend churches not to organize activities outside church-buildings for security reasons. Christian NGOs and other social service organizations have come under heavy restrictions. Pressure is especially focused on charitable work as there is always the suspicion of conversion activities taking place. There are examples of organizations that were requested to remove Christian references in their documents, including prefaces stating which Christian communities originally founded the charity.

International obligations & rights violated

Nepal 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 against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

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

- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face discrimination in the workplace because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by the authorities and surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)

Situation of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department's IRF 2020 report](#), Nepalese law only officially recognizes Buddhist monasteries. All other religious groups must register as NGOs to own properties or operate legally. In recent years, police arrested five Jehovah's Witnesses for proselytizing, and eventually deported two. Muslim groups reported they continued to face difficulties in buying or using land for burials.



Open Doors in Nepal

Working through local partners, Open Doors is focused on the following areas:

- Distribution: Bibles
- Training: Holistic training including persecution preparedness modules
- SED: Livelihood and community development
- Advocacy: Field advocacy
- Urgent aid: Help for persecuted believers

About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the full Country Dossier produced annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2021 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The full Country Dossier for this country can be accessed [here](#) (password: freedom). The latest update of WWL methodology, as well as the complete WWL 2022 ranking and reports, can be found [here](#) (password: freedom).

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
