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World Watch Research

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# India: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

India: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
1,441,720,000	73,233,000	5.1

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

India: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	73,233,000	5.1
Muslim	198,517,000	13.8
Hindu	1,053,400,000	73.1
Buddhist	11,978,000	0.8
Ethnic religionist	44,804,000	3.1
Jewish	4,800	0.0
Bahai	2,720,000	0.2
Atheist	2,754,000	0.2
Agnostic	21,866,000	1.5
Other	32,441,500	2.3
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

## Map of country



## 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
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
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

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Christian communities in India are increasingly under threat from Hindu radicals who 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 violence to achieve this. Converts to Christianity 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

- **June 2024, Jiribam District in Manipur:** A Meitei man, Soibam Saratkumar Singh, went missing for many weeks but his body was eventually discovered on 6 June 2024. Even though he was abducted and killed by unknown persons, the Meiteis went on the rampage destroying three Kuki villages in Jiribam District. A Kuki man, L. Thianmuang, was also abducted and has gone missing since. Meitei extremist group *Arambai Tenggol* is suspected of being responsible for the abduction. In the ensuing violence, more than 200 civilians were evacuated from Jiribam District, hundreds of houses belonging to both Meitei and Kuki were destroyed and several Kuki churches were burned down ([The Hindu, 8 June 2024](#)).
- **January 2024, Betul District in Madhya Pradesh:** A group of people including a woman, reportedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal (affiliated to the RSS) barged into a Christian missionary school in Betul district on 7 January 2024. They created a serious disturbance in the school, accusing the management of ‘forced conversion’, implying that the school had forced locals to pray there when classes were not being taught ([The Observer Post, 9 January 2024](#)).
- **12 June 2024, Jagdalpur District in Chhattisgarh:** A vigilante mob from the *Bajrang Dal* (affiliated to the RSS) attacked Christian families on 12 June 2024 resulting in one person injured with a broken leg and two people hospitalized with other severe injuries. The mob forced the families to sign a pact agreeing to ‘reconvert’ to Hinduism within 10 days and were then banished from the village. Their fields and homes have been destroyed while the local village council and the local authorities have not taken any action to protect these Christian families so far ([Maktoob Media, 25 June 2024](#)).

## Specific examples of positive developments

At the national level, the 2024 General Election result can be interpreted as a check on the advance of Hindu nationalism, with the opposition doing better than many had expected. However India is a federal state, and state elections have seen an increasing number of states being controlled by the BJP.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians

There are several expatriate groups active in India. In addition to international churches in some cities, some refugees form groups such as the Afghan community that has a congregation in New Delhi. Most of these groups are found in northeastern states like Mizoram and Manipur, particularly refugees from Myanmar, some of whom are Christians. 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 usually 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 claiming to date back to the 3rd century AD. These churches are not growing strongly because they are not usually 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. Additionally, 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 institutions 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 to the point of being 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. Converts in tribal regions also face the prospect of surrendering their reservation benefits once they embrace the Christian faith. 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. It is mostly Dalit and tribal communities (Adivasis) who convert to Evangelical or Pentecostal Christianity, and these communities have historically been the targets of dominant caste Hindu groups.

## **Areas where Christians face most difficulties**

There are no particular hotspots of religious freedom violations in India. The most difficult regions for Christians tend to be the states where the BJP controls the state government (currently 13 states) and that includes the states of Uttar Pradesh, Manipur and Chhattisgarh where persecution has been particularly intense in the last two years.

## Position on the World Watch List

India: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	84	11
WWL 2024	83	11
WWL 2023	82	11
WWL 2022	82	10
WWL 2021	83	10

The overall score for WWL 2025 increased by one point as it had the previous year. Pressure rose most notably in the *Church sphere of life* as the legal protection that Christians have had historically to practice their faith is slowly being eroded. The violence score remained at 16.5 points, which is almost the maximum level. The ethno-religious violence that erupted in May 2023 in the northeastern state of Manipur has continued into the WWL 2025 reporting period, although what keeps the violence level so high is the fact that there is localized violence spreading across the country.

## 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	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 (Strong) - blended with Religious nationalism - Hindu**

In the 2024 elections, the BJP was reduced to 240 seats, a full 32 seats short of a majority. However, the past electoral success of the BJP and popular support for Narendra Modi (since June 2024 in his third term as prime minister) has translated into authoritarian rule. 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.

A strong indicator of *Dictatorial paranoia* is the government's complete control over investigative and enforcement agencies and their misuse to target dissenters and opposition; and also the December 2023 [suspension of over 140 MPs](#) from the parliament's winter session on the flimsiest of grounds (The Guardian, 19 December 2023). Consequently, the government was able to pass crucial laws without any debate or input from the opposition.

### **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* has thus become a serious threat to the Church in India.

### **Clan oppression (Strong)**

*Clan oppression* is particularly 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* continues to be 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.

## Drivers of persecution

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

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. 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 Maharaj, Sadhvi Pragya, Sadhwi 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 specifically.

- **Political parties (Very strong):** The BJP is the political wing of the RSS and has a majority in the political center. 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 (former Chief Minister of Jharkhand), Adityanath (Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh), Manohar Lal Khattar (former 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 major role in making life for Christians (both for converts from Hinduism and for other categories of Christianity) very difficult. Most of the time, it is 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 first 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 viewing it as an insult to their religion, family and community.
- **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 its agenda. It is also skilled at creating fake news to attack opponents with. 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 Ethno-religious hostility

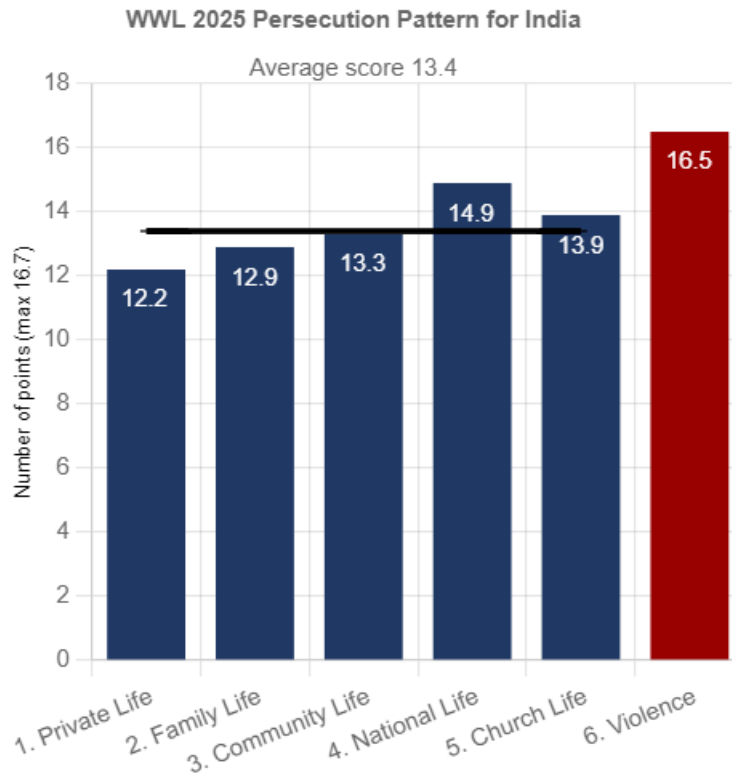
(*Ethno-religious hostility* is greatly influenced by *Religious nationalism* - both engines are strongly blended.)

- ***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*.

## Drivers of Clan oppression

- ***Government officials (Strong)***: At the local level, councils and police will side with the majority tribal group. This means Christians may often face opposition.
- ***Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong)***: Some tribes have their own ancestral beliefs 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. Several tribal leaders are actively hostile towards Christians.
- ***Normal citizens (Strong)***: Tribal people will do their best to protect their own culture and act against anyone converting 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 than that exerted by Hindu radicals.)

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for India shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.4 points), 0.2 of a point above the level in WWL 2024. Hindu hostility towards Christians (especially against converts) is present at all levels of society, ranging from the private 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 11 states. Threats are issued and church meetings are disturbed very frequently.
- Besides three spheres of life showing very high levels of pressure, pressure is extremely high in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*. Christians experience increasing restrictions with more states considering the introduction of anti-conversion legislation to put an end to conversion by force and/or allurement; the media are increasingly negative and the level of impunity for militant Hindus has increased even further.
- The score for violence in WWL 2025 remained at the almost maximum level, 16.5 points. This reflects ongoing violence in Manipur though also the continued spread of smaller scale violent attacks across the country.



## 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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### 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.). (3.75 points)***

Revealing one's Christian faith can be interpreted as evangelism in the eyes of Hindu radicals. In particular, expressing Christian faith on social media has become very risky, and this is increasingly not just for converts but for any Christians. Anti-Christian elements are very organized and active on social media platforms thus any exclusive religious expression pulls counter posts with false accusations and slander. Further, the intensity is high due to numerous agencies that are funded by the Hindutva factions to control social media and spread disinformation about the Christians. There have been recent cases of Christians from Manipur state being brutally beaten because they shared a Christmas Greeting, and a Christian from Jharkhand was arrested and charged for posting a video expressing his faith.

***Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (3.50 points)***

In certain contexts, amongst converts, even private acts of worship are provoking persecution, particularly from family members or neighbors. This can take the form of physical assault, eviction of the tenant by the landlord, police arrest and detention, confiscation of religious literature, or isolation by family members. In one recent case in Manipur, a woman was praying privately when her husband verbally and physically assaulted her, threatening divorce.

***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)***

Talking about the Christian faith to a wider group than the family is now generally regarded as a form of evangelism. This primarily affects converts, but is also affecting more long-standing Christian groups as intolerance of Christians in general has grown. Extended family members may conspire with the religious extremists and plan forceful reconversion. In one recent case, a convert to Christianity from a Hindu background, from Tamil Nadu state, visited his family members to share his faith. His family, together with the wider village, attacked him and tied him to a tree in an attempt to force him to recant his faith.

***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, congregations etc. Accusations of conversion usually lead to physical violence, and then Christians are taken to police post on charges

of 'forced conversion' and detained there. Anti-conversion laws are in force in eleven out of 28 states, namely: Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Karnataka. There have been rumors that Hindu radicals plan to implement similar anti-conversion legislation at the federal level, but so far these attempts have not led to concrete results. Other indications of the importance of the battle against conversion are the impossibility to obtain missionary visas for foreign Christians and the large-scale 'home-coming campaign' (Ghar Wapsi) organized by Hindu radicals all over India.

## **Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere**

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

Due to the enormous pressure from Hindu radicals, baptisms in India have had to become low-key celebrations. 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. In a recent case, a 68 year old pastor and all the persons being baptized were attacked by villagers brandishing knives and sticks. In another case, the pastor was taken to the police station, where a case was filed against him for alleged forced conversion activities.

### ***Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.50 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 - very likely 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. (3.50 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. In February 2024, the Education Minister of Rajasthan declared that any (including Christian) school not showing the statue of Saraswati Devi was going to be investigated and punished. In state schools the curriculum is even more shaped by Hinduism, and this particularly impacts Christians in rural areas, where parents have limited options for educating their children.

### ***Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (3.50 points)***

The law allows for disinheritance due to conversion and this is a common issue with new converts to the faith, who then face economic hardship. In a recent case, a widow in Punjab state was accused of being responsible for the growing number of people converting to Christianity in her locality, and her

husband's family boycotted her and she is now restricted from claiming any of the property which belonged to her late husband.

### **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 missionary activity.

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

Since the act of embracing Christianity is widely viewed as an adoption of a foreign belief system, communities often understand it to be their patriotic duty to pressure converts into returning to Hinduism, and Hindu radicals mobilize such sentiments through their 'home-coming campaigns' (*Ghar Wapsi*). Converts can be threatened with verbal abuse, physical harm, ostracism within their community, restricted access to communal resources, destruction of personal property and in extreme cases, the ultimate price of losing their lives. In one recent case in Chhattisgarh state, two village families were placed under pressure at a village meeting to renounce their Christian faith. When they refused, the villagers became enraged, physically assaulted them, damaged their house, and expelled them from the village.

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

Christians are increasingly discriminated against in professions, including being passed over for jobs or promotion, or mocked and ridiculed for their faith. This is particularly acute for converts from socially deprived communities, who do not receive caste benefits, subsidies, and promotions in government roles. Christians' request to have Sundays off for church can be used as a pretext for firing them, illustrated by one case from Himachal Pradesh, in which a cleaner was fired. In another case in Chhattisgarh, the cook for the village school was asked to give up his Christian faith and join Hinduism. When he refused someone else was given his job.

***Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.25 points)***

Christians, as a minority in most of the country, are often compelled to participate in non-Christian rituals or events, whether in workplace settings, educational institutions such as schools, or within various communal gatherings. The fusing of Hindu and Indian identify means that refusal to participate in overtly religious ceremonies is met with threats of expulsion from the community. Even when given exemptions, Christians can be threatened with violence if they refuse to make 'donations' towards Hindu festivals. In a recent incident in a village in Tamil Nadu state, a pastor and a group of believer families were placed under pressure to pay a contribution for the celebration at the local Hindu temple. When the pastor and believers refused, the villagers were infuriated and threw them out of the village.

## 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)***

Although India has a strong tradition of secularism and of giving the right to practice and express different faiths, this has been more limited in practice and the Hindutva ideology directly contradicts this principle of religious freedom, suggesting that India has to be purified from all non-Hindu religions. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which gives religious freedom, is itself subject to public order which has not been defined. Thus, the sub-clause to Article 25 gives state authorities permission to formulate laws which restrict the freedom of religion. Anti-conversion laws (currently in force in 11 Indian states) regulate and limit religious freedom and are being strengthened in some states. For example, at the end of July 2024, the government of Uttar Pradesh strengthened the Anti-Conversion Law 2024, introducing life imprisonment for 'illegal religious conversion', the option for any citizen to raise a complaint (and not just blood relatives as was previously the case) and penalties for using foreign money for conversion.

### ***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 faith-based organizations or political parties in recent years. This includes increased restrictions on Christian organizations receiving funds from abroad through the Foreign Currency Regulation Act (FCRA). Increasingly Christian organizations are having their FCRA licenses cancelled, being raided by the intelligence services or having their assets scrutinized to find possible discrepancies that could serve as grounds for closure. Large Christian organizations like the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the Church of North India and World Vision have had their licenses cancelled.

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

The media in India is 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. Any mistakes by Christian organizations are amplified in the media, creating antipathy toward Christians. Persecution incidents, however, are much less reported. Social media in particular is used to spread false rumors about Christians. For example, a pastor in Tamil Nadu state recently gathered children to conduct a summer camp, but Hindu extremists spread a false report on WhatsApp that he was kidnapping children in order to extort money. After his arrest, the report was proved false but damage to the church's reputation was already done.

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

Cases of hate speech directed at Christians as well as Muslims are increasing in number and often stem from politicians and public religious leaders. For example in February 2024, Promod Muthalik (chief of the Rashtriya Hindu Sena) claimed that of the 3,600 Lambani villages in Karnataka, 50% were now Christian through the people being deceived and converted. The accusation of forced conversion portrays Christians as devious, exploitative and serving foreign masters, undermining their reputation in the country.

## 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. For example, in early 2024 in Chhattisgarh state, during a small Sunday gathering in a house, several Christians were attacked by a group of around 12 people, with the pastor sustaining serious injuries and losing consciousness. Despite efforts by his wife and other Christians to file a report at the police station, a larger group of extremists (about 50) arrived and prevented the filing of the complaint.

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

In many areas, the organizing of Christian activities in public has become very risky, as they are perceived as a form of evangelism. There are greater restrictions now on what Christian events can take place in public spaces, with the police and other authorities reluctant to grant permission. Now it is rarer for Christians to do any literature distribution, carol singing or Good Friday processions.

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

What Christians preach and teach is under increasing scrutiny, as Hindu extremists look for evidence to back up their in claims of proselytization and forced conversion. Hindu vigilante groups have secretly entered churches to record and use the recordings against the Christian community. The few remaining open-air meetings and healing crusades are particularly closely monitored, as a common attack on Christians is that they are spreading superstition and leading people astray in the guise of religion. Two state governments, Maharashtra and Assam, have enacted laws against healing campaigns.

### ***Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)***

The risk to speak out against the attackers of Christians continues to rise as Hindu radicals feel they have the blessing of the highest levels of government and so may double down on any attempts by Christians to defend themselves. This means that several house churches which have been attacked did not lodge any complaint against persecutors, because of their political patronage.

## 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 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. 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 WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

India: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	20	160
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	459	2,228
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	1,629	2,085
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?	547	247
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	9	8
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	13	35
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	71	10
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	97,273	10,000 *
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?	1,632	5,878
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?	196	1572
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	9,251	62,119
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	50	110

The numbers of Christians killed, raped, detained and displaced and churches or Christian properties attacked in the WWL 2025 reporting period is lower than in the previous year. This is in large part due to the peak of the Manipur ethno-religious conflict having been in the previous reporting year. However, out data suggests that other forms of violent persecution are on the increase, including forced marriages and general physical or mental abuse of Christians, which are occurring not just in a few hot-spots, but across the country.

## 5 Year trends

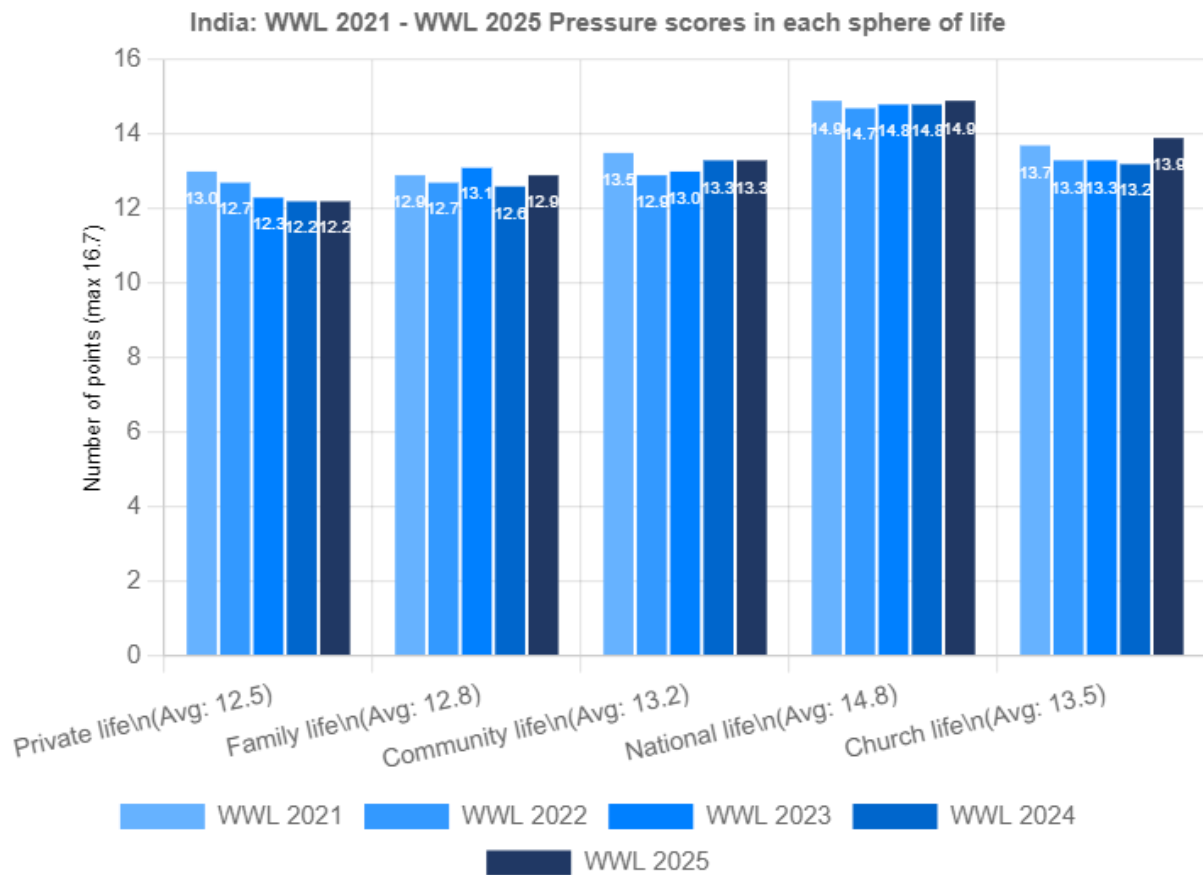
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

India: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	13.4
2024	13.2
2023	13.3
2022	13.3
2021	13.6

Over the past five reporting periods, the average pressure against Christians in India has been very high, but stable – with all scores within the range of 13.2-13.6 points.

### 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, with extremely high scores in the *National sphere*. This means that the situation for Christians in the country has been constantly problematic under Prime Minister Modi's leadership and is not getting better.

- Pressure in the *Private sphere of life* over the past five years has always been very high - it has never been lower than 12.2 points.
- Pressure in the *Family sphere of life* has also been very high over the past five years - never lower than 12.6 points.
- Pressure in the *Community sphere of life* peaked at 13.5 points in WWL 2021. In WWL 2022 it went down to 12.9 points but has now stabilized at a level of 13.3 points.
- Over the past 5 years pressure in the *National sphere of life* has been extremely high and has stabilized within the region of 14.7 - 14.9 points.
- Pressure in the *Church sphere of life* rose in WWL 2025 to its highest level in five years - to 13.9 points, reflecting the shrinking space for the Church in the midst of the Hinduvta campaigns.

### 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, with yearly scores increasing to almost maximum level. The greatest force behind this has been 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 appears to be sympathetic to such hostility.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

India	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Abduction Denied communal resources Forced divorce Forced marriage Forced out of home – expulsion Incarceration by family (house arrest) Trafficking Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – sexual Violence – Verbal

The conflict in the north-eastern state of Manipur resulted in the forced displacement of tens of thousands of people, destruction of churches and Christian properties, and many deaths. Alarming, there were increased reports of abduction, rape, torture and murder of Christian women. Whilst termed an ethnic conflict, there has been a noticeable undercurrent of religious intolerance. Christian women carry multiple vulnerabilities in such conflict due to their gender and faith, with Geeta Pandey, a BBC reporter in Delhi, explaining “women’s bodies have become a battleground” ([BBC News, 20 July 2023](#)).

There were numerous brutal and violent attacks on women in Manipur, intentionally undertaken to inflict trauma and humiliation. In many of the cases the state police were either bystanders to violence inflicted on women and girls, or were complicit in the crime by handing over the victims to the mob. Just one example was from 4 May 2023, when two Christian Kuki women were filmed being paraded naked by a mob, groped and later gang raped ([BBC News, 20 July 2023](#); [Stream, 26 July 2023](#)). Other women and girls were sexually abused and brutally murdered. The footage of the Kuki women sparked outrage in India and globally, highlighting the complicity of the police and culture of impunity in Manipur. This placed the authorities under pressure to act swiftly to prosecute perpetrators and bring justice to the survivors, especially those from minority Christian groups.

In the wider Indian context, Christian women, especially converts, continue to face serious challenges. In addition to enduring harsh treatment in a society which has traditionally favored boys to girls, practiced child marriage, and restricted access to education and employment, Christian women and girls face persecution from the communities they have left. As noted above, such persecution often targets their physical body through molestation, rape and sexual harassment. Daughters, sisters and wives of pastors are particularly vulnerable. Shame is a very powerful force in Indian society, with sexual attacks being seen to corrode the honor and prestige of the whole family. Young Christian women and girls are particularly vulnerable in tribal areas to sexual predation, and those who are easy identifiable, such as Catholic nuns, often become victims of violence. In many states, Christian women were frequently shamed for not wearing (Hindu) symbols connoting a married woman, such as bangles, *mangalsutra* (a necklace) and vermilion on the forehead. Christian women were often

labelled (mostly by Hindu women) as prostitutes or loose women for not displaying these symbols.

Physical attacks on Christian women have historically included acid attacks, brutal beatings, including with the butt of a gun, and killings. While both male and female converts face pressure if their faith is discovered, female converts are more vulnerable to domestic violence, placing them under extreme pressure to give up their faith in Jesus. Those who convert to Christianity are also at risk of losing custody of their children, causing lasting emotional distress. Christian women risk incarceration (house arrest) by their family, abduction, forced marriage and forced divorce. A country expert commented: “Women and girls are targeted more because they are likely to not being able to retaliate. In families of Christian leaders, often his wife and his daughters are attacked or abused when they are alone”.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

India	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Denied access to social community/networks Denied communal resources Denied food or water Denied inheritance of possessions Economic harassment via business/job/work access Economic harassment via fines False charges Forced out of home – expulsion Imprisonment by government Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Travel bans/restrictions on movement Violence – death Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – Verbal

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 across most Indian states. 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 includes brutal beatings, killings via mob violence and emotional torture such as being forced to watch family members being assaulted.

Church leaders are particularly vulnerable; being a pastor continues to be understood to be one of the riskiest vocations in the country today. For example, a country expert shares that “young Christians and itinerant pastors are subject to abuse and various forms of torture, including forcible tonsuring of the hair ... and being [forced] to swallow the excrement and urine of the cow”. Another male Christian leader was interrogated by police and “humiliated for conducting prayer at his house. He was threatened not to do any sort of prayer in the house.” Hindu radicals target Christian leaders and their families in order to set an example to the wider Christian community. Fear grows with each attack.

Economic deprivation takes the form of unjust fines and being detained for extended periods of time. Social boycott (including boycott from labor-sharing) is also a significant mode of economic deprivation that Christians face in rural areas. 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 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. A country expert explained that “police torture can include being denied food and water, or beatings.” Whilst most detainees are released after a few days, some cases drag on for years.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to [HRW 2023 India country chapter](#):

- “The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government continued its systematic discrimination and stigmatization of religious and other minorities, particularly Muslims.”
- “In October [2022], police in Gujarat publicly flogged Muslim men accused of disrupting a Hindu festival in a form of abusive punishment while authorities in Madhya Pradesh demolished the homes of three men accused of throwing stones at a Hindu ceremonial dance, without any legal authorization.”

“In June [2022], a BJP politician’s remarks against the Prophet Mohammed led to widespread protests by Muslims across the country. Police in Jharkhand allegedly used excessive force against protesters, killing two people, while authorities in Uttar Pradesh illegally demolished homes of Muslims suspected of being ‘key conspirators’ behind protest violence.”

“In April [2022], authorities in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Delhi summarily demolished property mostly owned by Muslims in response to communal clashes. Although they tried to justify the demolitions by claiming the structures were illegal, the destruction appeared intended to be collective punishment for Muslims.”

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 India](#)):

- In December [2023], Parliament approved new criminal laws that included provisions to criminalize making false promises and concealing one’s identity to sexually exploit a woman, including for marriage. Media commentators said the new laws could be used to punish Muslim men purportedly seeking to marry non-Muslim women to convert them to Islam.

## Trends Summary

### 1) Social hostility towards Christians has grown

In the decade 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. Radical Hindu vigilantes use social

media platforms to mobilize and attack Christians - disrupting prayer meetings in private homes, vandalizing churches, beating pastors etc.. Social media platforms have failed to take action (e.g., taking down inflammatory posts) against such digital mobilization and hate speech by Hindu vigilantes.

## **2) A weakened BJP will not stop vigilantism**

In the 2024 elections, the BJP was reduced to 240 seats, a full 32 seats short of a majority. As a result, even though the BJP has formed the government and Modi is back as prime minister for the third time, his government is dependent on the support of ally parties. It appears that his allies will support Modi as long as they receive financial resources for their states. In such a situation, it is likely that the Hindutva movement will be able to operate with impunity without any moral pressure exerted on Modi. Although the 2024 elections have returned a much strengthened opposition, the BJP controls all the important cabinet ministries and the Parliament Speaker. It is likely that in the states where the BJP or its allies have secured historic victories at both state and national levels (Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Chhattisgarh), vigilante violence by RSS-affiliated organizations against religious minorities will increase sharply, while existing violence against minorities in states like Uttar Pradesh will continue unabated.

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; and Ladakh). This means that the central government can exert much more control there. In the 2024 elections, the BJP did not contest any seats in Kashmir, and even though the elections were conducted peacefully, the population of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are unhappy with the intervention of the central government to take away their statehood and centralize power.

## **3) Increased control over media and narratives**

In the last ten years of Modi government, the mainstream media (television news, newspapers and the cinema industry) has been largely captured by the ruling party. There is little space for any oppositional views nor objective criticism of the government. So far social media platforms are the only space where those affected by violence, discrimination can speak freely. The third term of the Modi government is on the verge of introducing new legislation that will make it easier for authorities to shut down voices that are critical of the government. In the coming five years, it is likely that the online space for dissent and free expression will become highly contested. Correspondingly, it is likely that disinformation targeting minorities and other marginalized groups will continue to rise, thereby increasing the likelihood of mob violence, lynchings, vandalism, riots and other forms of violence.

## **Further useful reports**

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.
- [India - Spotlight on Kerala, Odisha and Chhattisgarh - July 2024 update](#)
- [India - Report on the 2024 General Elections - What are the implications? - revised July 2024](#)
- [India - The 2024 elections - What is at stake? - May 2024](#)
- [India - Spotlight on Assam - revised May 2024](#)

- [India - Spotlight on Odisha - revised May 2024](#)
- [India - Spotlight on Uttar Pradesh - February 2024](#)

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- 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: The Hindu, 8 June 2024 - <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur/200-evacuated-from-manipurs-jiribam-district-amid-tension/article68264074.ece>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: The Observer Post, 9 January 2024 - <https://theobserverpost.com/christian-missionary-school-in-madhya-pradesh-betul-attacked-by-right-wing-mob/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Maktoob Media, 25 June 2024 - <https://maktoobmedia.com/india/chhattisgarh-hindutva-group-attacks-christian-families-forces-to-sign-pact-to-convert-within-ten-days/>
- Persecution engines description: suspension of over 140 MPs - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/19/indian-government-accused-attack-democracy-mps-suspended-modi-bjp?ref=upstract.com>
- 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>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: BBC News, 20 July 2023 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-66253389>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: BBC News, 20 July 2023 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-66253389>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Stream, 26 July 2023 - <https://stream.org/christian-women-abused-in-india/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: HRW 2023 India country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/india>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 India - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/india/>
- Further useful reports: India - Spotlight on Kerala, Odisha and Chhattisgarh - July 2024 update - <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/reports/INDIA-Spotlight-on-Kerala-Odisha-Chhattisgarh-July-2024-FINAL.pdf>
- Further useful reports: India - Report on the 2024 General Elections - What are the implications? - revised July 2024 - <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/reports/INDIA-The-2024-general-elections-what-are-the-implications-Revised-July-2024.pdf>
- Further useful reports: India - The 2024 elections - What is at stake? - May 2024 - <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/reports/INDIA-The-2024-general-elections-what-is-at-stake-May-2024.pdf>
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- Further useful reports: India - Spotlight on Odisha - revised May 2024 - <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/reports/INDIA-Spotlight-on-Odisha-revised-version-May-2024.pdf>

- Further useful reports: India - Spotlight on Uttar Pradesh - February 2024 - <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/reports/INDIA-Spotlight-on-Uttar-Pradesh-FINAL.pdf>