

World  
Watch  
Research

## India: Country Dossier

November 2020 (revised 2020-12-07)



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

November 2020

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

## Copyright notice

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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).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- 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 2021 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 Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

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

# WWL 2021 Short country profile / India

## Brief country details

India: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
1,383,198,000	67,356,000	4.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

India: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	83	10
WWL 2020	83	10
WWL 2019	83	10
WWL 2018	81	11
WWL 2017	73	15

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

Dictatorial paranoia	Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Violent religious groups, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials
Ethno-religious hostility	Violent religious groups, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, 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

All categories of Christian communities' rights are violated in India since Hindu radicals view them all 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

- **23 September 2020:** Around 14 Christian homes were attacked by Hindutva followers. The radical Hindu group seeks to ban Christian residents from their villages in Chhattisgarh unless they return to Hinduism. Dozens of Christians have been expelled from Kakdabeda, Tiliyabeda and Singanpur, a group of villages in Kondagaon district (Chhattisgarh). (Source: [AsiaNews, 24 September 2020](#))
- **4 June 2020:** Samaru Madkami, 14, was killed in Kenduguda village of Malkangiri district in the eastern state of Odisha. "It was the cold-blooded murder of a Christian boy by religious fanatics and there is no doubt that local as well as district officials are trying to protect the culprits due to pressure from vested groups," said Shibu Thomas of Persecution Relief, an agency that monitors the persecution of Christians in India. (Source: [UCAN, 9 June 2020](#))
- **12 January 2020:** A mob of 100 Hindu extremists led by a man named Raghu, who local Christians believe to be a member of the RSS (a Hindu nationalist organization known for its radical Hindu ideology), attacked the Christian homes of Banni Mardatti village. Using wooden clubs and sharp stones, the mob ransacked the homes, breaking windows and leaving several Christians severely wounded. Following this brutal assault, the Christian families of Banni Mardatti village fled. (Source: [International Christian Concern, 1 February 2020](#))
- **1 January 2020:** A church was demolished by a group of 30 suspected Hindu nationalists in a village called Kongalnagaram, located in India's Tamil Nadu state. According to local Christians, the church was completely destroyed after the radicals vandalized three cars parked in front of the church building. Three church members, who were sleeping inside the church, were awoken and quickly fled the mob, fearing for their lives. (Source: [International Christian Concern, 6 January 2020](#))

## Specific examples of positive developments

- The government of the state of Orissa, led by Prime Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik, allocated 16 million Indian rupees (the equivalent of over 200 thousand euros) as a special contribution to religious and social institutions of Christian and Muslim religious minorities present in the State, also in order to create structures for the pilgrims of the community. (Source: [Fides, 14 February 2020](#))
- The government of Jharkhand sought the Catholic Church's help to aid those stranded in the eastern Indian state because of the nationwide lockdown. A statement signed by Jesuit Archbishop Felix Toppo of Ranchi and Auxiliary Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas said: "We have been invited by the government to join the relief work for stranded laborers in border district of Ranchi," says . (Source: [Matters India, 4 April 2020](#))
- In a rare address to a Christian group, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asserted that his government "does not discriminate" between people of different faiths. "We are guided by the desire to empower 1.3 billion Indians and our guiding light is the constitution of India," Modi said through a video address to Christians. The prime minister's reference to India's Constitution comes amid allegations from religious minorities such as Christians



and Muslims that his government undermines secularism and religious freedom enshrined in the constitution. Modi lauded the Christian contribution to the nation in general, and by the Mar Thoma Church in particular, in one of the rare interactions he has had with religious minorities since he came to power six years ago. (Source: [UCAN, 28 June 2020](#))

## External Links - Short country profile

- 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, 24 September 2020 - [http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christians-expelled-from-villages-in-Chhattisgarh,-their-homes-vandalised-\(videos\)-51125.html](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christians-expelled-from-villages-in-Chhattisgarh,-their-homes-vandalised-(videos)-51125.html)
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: UCAN, 9 June 2020 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/christian-youth-murdered-in-eastern-india/88324>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: International Christian Concern, 1 February 2020 - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/01/christians-southern-india-attacked-harassed-displaced-extremists/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: International Christian Concern, 6 January 2020 - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/06/church-demolished-suspected-radicals-southern-india/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Fides, 14 February 2020 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/67395-ASIA\\_INDIA\\_Aid\\_to\\_religious\\_minorities\\_and\\_Dalits\\_from\\_the\\_government\\_of\\_Orissa](http://www.fides.org/en/news/67395-ASIA_INDIA_Aid_to_religious_minorities_and_Dalits_from_the_government_of_Orissa)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Matters India, 4 April 2020 - <http://mattersindia.com/2020/04/jharkhand-government-urges-church-to-help-stranded-workers/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: UCAN, 28 June 2020 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/modis-rare-address-appreciates-indias-christian-contributions/88565>

## WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / India

### Link for general background information

- [India country profile - BBC News](#)

### 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 the 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.

## Political and legal landscape

India is the seventh largest country in the world and also the second populous. It lies in southern Asia. It is officially known as the Republic of India. India 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 plural alike its religious atmosphere. The political table of India has many chairs around, where seculars, Hindu nationalists, socialists and communists sit together. On various occasions, many political adversaries have come together to form coalition govt. at state and Central level. As for now, the 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-conversion” laws are state-level statutes that have been enacted to regulate religious conversions. The laws are in force in nine out of 28 states (Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand). Meanwhile the Rajasthan government was making attempts to get the President’s nod for the Bill that has been pending since 2008, the High court of Rajasthan in 2017, laid ten points’ directives to the state govt. on conversion and made mandatory to inform district Collector a month ago of conversion. Other than that, [Indian Penal Code-295-A](#) (accessed 17 August 2020) is a highly misused law against Christians. While there are some variations between the state laws, they are very similar in their content and structure. All of the laws seek to prevent any person from converting or attempting to convert, either directly or otherwise, another person 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 is therefore expected that Muslims and Christians will not experience any improvement in their situation; a deterioration is more likely.

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 put an end to the special position 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.

On 20 September 2020 the [Rajya Sabha](#), the upper house of parliament, passed two farm bills amid a ruckus from opposition members and protests from farmers. 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.

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, “Social Institutions and Gender Index”). Under the Special Marriage Act, forced marriage and child marriage are outlawed. Whilst the introduction of this legislation has led to a decline of early marriages, they nonetheless remain widespread. According to [Girls Not Brides](#), 27% of Indian girls are married before they reach 18; some of these marriages are authorized under [Muslim Personal Laws](#) (OECD, 2019, p.2). Domestic violence is [reportedly high](#) within marriages (Georgetown, “Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20” p.23), compounded by socio-economic dependency of women upon men and the [impact of COVID-19](#) (BBC News, 2 June 2020).

Divorce laws also vary in accordance with the relevant religious or civil law that the marriage occurred under. Under both the Christian Marriage Act (1972) and the Muslim Sharia Application Act (1973) 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.

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, “Concluding Observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic report of India” 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 adherents	of %
Christians	67,356,000	4.9
Muslim	200,000,000	14.5
Hindu	1,002,825,000	72.5
Buddhist	10,500,000	0.8
Ethno-religionist	50,000,000	3.6
Jewish	4,500	0.0
Bahai	2,150,000	0.2
Atheist	2,264,000	0.2
Agnostic	16,495,000	1.2
Other	31,603,000	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 February 2020).

According to the World Christian Database estimates from February 2020, 1,002 million citizens are Hindus (72.5% of the population), 200 million are Muslims (14.5% of the population), 67.4 million are Christians (4.9% of the population), 50 million are Ethno-religionists (3.6% of the population), 25.5 million are Sikhs (1.8% of the population) and 10.5 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. This may seem an unimportant minority until you realize that India is the country with the second largest Muslim population on earth - only Indonesia has more Muslims.

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 [World Bank's October 2019 update](#) overview/data:

- **GDP (current US\$) (billions):** 2,873 (in 2019)
- **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 *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 the 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 and led to the devastation of the unorganized sector (45% of the Indian economy) and agriculture, followed by MSME and Core sector. Consequently, a negative growth (-23.9% by the 2nd quarter of 2020) was witnessed for the first time in the history. 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 and their subsistence is in a very bad shape.

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 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has also had a huge impact on the Indian economy. 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 and extended it several times, halting most economic activities. India's post-Covid losses the biggest in South Asia, India's GDP will contract by 10.3% this fiscal year, IMF has projected.

The majority of Christians in India are from the lower social strata and many lack good education/training - as a result many are poor. Christians are further facing daily challenges of discrimination, illiteracy, 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. Women are particularly vulnerable, as are more economically dependent within Indian society due to lower education rates, [employment rates](#) and [being denied their inheritance rights](#). 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. According to 2018 statistics, 4.1% of girls between the ages of 11 and 14 are not in education. The primary factor for drop-outs is [reportedly](#) housework. Women and girls are expected to fulfil traditional domestic duties, whereas men are expected to be the primary breadwinners. 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 his dependent family.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and [World Factbook](#) (April 2020):

- **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:** 34.9% (2020 est.)
- **Literacy rate:** 74.4% (2018 est.)

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.647, ranking 129. India’s 2018 HDI of 0.647 is above the average of 0.634 for countries in the medium human development group and above the average of 0.642 for countries in South Asia.
- **Total population:** 1,352.6 million
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 69.4 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 12.3
- **Employment to population ratio (% ages 15 years and older):** 50.6
- **Population in multidimensional poverty, headcount:** 27.9%
- **Gender inequality index:** 0.501

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. 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 has also had a huge impact on the Indian economy. As society went into lockdown, many businesses had to stop their work, causing many people to lose their jobs and income. 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. 95.2% of migrants have lost their jobs and livelihoods, as confirmed by a survey conducted by Caritas India in 18 states most affected by the pandemic. Millions of people are being thrust into extreme poverty and hunger because of the economic impacts of the lockdown and the raging pandemic. 21 million salaried jobs have been lost between April and August, while unemployment Rate in India Rose to 8.4% in August 2020 ([Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy](#)).

Christians are the [largest unemployed group](#) among all minorities in India (without even including the number of the 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 the slum areas, people are now totally dependent upon the food being distributed by the government and social organizations. Christians are often deliberately overlooked when this aid is distributed. As the months have passed, the situation hasn't got any easier for many believers.

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 are often targeted at their body through molestation and sexual harassment. 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. False charges may be made against them, such as attempting to convert Hindus, or molesting and raping women. Typically, such accusations are made against [Indian pastors and preachers](#), which against the socio-cultural backdrop of India is understood to be a highly risky vocation (AsiaNews, 29 Jan 2020).

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).

Converts to Christianity will likely experience hostility from their local village or town, particularly in tribal areas. They risk being incarcerated by their family and local community, forcibly married or divorced, or expelled from the village. Both men and women experience the full weight of social exclusion.

## Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 40.6% penetration - survey date: July 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 18.2% penetration – survey date: January 2020

According to [World Bank's Country profile](#) (2018):

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

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

- The mobile market continues to be the main focus of the Indian telecom sector. India's mobile market continues to get the bulk of local capital expenditure as the operators expand their infrastructure.



- India has the potential to become one of the five largest data centre markets globally. In the last few years, there has been a radical shift in the way Indians produce and consume data. A number of government initiatives and regulations will see further increases in the number of internet users and enforce strict data residency laws that will require vastly more data centre capacity. There will be a rapid increase in the rate in which on-premise facilities are being outsourced to third-party data centres, especially as cloud computing continues to grow.
- India's telecom industry is expected to see a major expansion of its network infrastructure during the 2019 to 2022 period. Each of the top three mobile operators: Reliance Jio, Airtel and Vodafone-Idea are now planning to extend coverage to address a surge in data consumption.
- The fixed line market in India remains highly underdeveloped due to the dominance of the mobile segment. Further, the number of fixed telephone lines is slowly declining as the mobile segment continues to expand.

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#):

Internet freedom declined for the fourth year in a row in India—the result of an increase in arrests for online activity, and continued internet shutdowns during times of perceived unrest. Plagued by the spread of disinformation and its violent effects offline, the government proposed worrisome new rules that would undermine freedom online. Data protection and surveillance issues remained of key concern to Indians during the coverage period; controversies also continued around Aadhaar, the world's largest biometric identification system, and a problematic draft data protection bill remained in limbo. Meanwhile, ahead of and during the 2019 elections, incumbents and candidates alike manipulated content, used bots, and employed volunteers to push inorganic content and exacerbate existing social tensions for political gain. Within this environment, marginalized groups in particular experienced online harassment and trolling.

India maintains a robust electoral democracy with a competitive multiparty system at federal and state levels, though politics are beset by corruption. While the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, and the news media are vibrant, harassment and violence against journalists has increased under the administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his right-leaning, Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as have religiously motivated attacks against non-Hindus.

***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. In a report prepared by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Nielsen showed that the total number of internet users in the 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 to remove 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 have many more means to report on violence, intolerance and discrimination in India as well. Examples of Indian Christian websites reporting in this manner are: [Matters India](#), [Christian Today India](#) and the site of the [Evangelical Fellowship of India](#).

According to a [GSMA](#) report, 79% of men own a mobile phone compared to 53% of women (GSMA, 2020, “The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020”). 42% of men are mobile internet users - double the rate of women. The gender gap in awareness of mobile internet awareness has decreased dramatically in recent years however. 50% of women surveyed in 2019 reported awareness, compared to just 19% two years previously.

## 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 radicals have gained momentum since the beginning of the 1990s. Their ultimate aim 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 neighbours (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).

Rape is a pervasive issue in India. According to government released data one woman reports a rape [every 15 minutes](#) in India. Women from lower castes and tribes are especially vulnerable. Outrage was recently renewed in the light of two separate [reported gang rapes](#) of Dalit women, both of which led to their deaths. 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 Department of State, June 2020, “Trafficking in Persons report” 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 Feb 2020). It is feared that [Covid-19](#) will fuel these problems (Deutsche Welle, 6 Oct 2020 Youtube video).

Violent and lethal attacks by radical Hindu extremists 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 wider group than the 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. Both Pakistan and China have reacted furiously and tensions are rising rapidly.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Political and legal landscape: Indian Penal Code-295-A - <http://devgan.in/ipc/section/295/>
- Political and legal landscape: Rajya Sabha - <https://mattersindia.com/2020/09/farm-bills-passed-amid-opposition-protest/>
- Political and legal landscape: Hindu, Muslim and Christian - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/IN.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: 1954 - <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/4234/>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/india/>
- Political and legal landscape: Muslim Personal Laws - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/IN.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: reportedly high - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: impact of Covid-19 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-52846304>
- Political and legal landscape: 2014 review - <https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CEDAW-Concluding-Observations-India.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: 14%. - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/india/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's October 2019 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india>
- Economic landscape: continuing to contract - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Indian-economy-hits-five-year-low-47867.html>
- Economic landscape: employment rates - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Economic landscape: being denied their inheritance rights - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/what-every-woman-in-india-must-know-about-her-inheritance-rights/articleshow/70606122.cms>
- Economic landscape: Right to Education Act - <http://righttoeducation.in/know-your-rte/about>
- Economic landscape: reportedly - <https://time.com/5614642/india-girls-education/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>

- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/IN-summary.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IND>
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- Social and cultural landscape: 1.11 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy - <https://www.cmie.com/>
- Social and cultural landscape: largest unemployed group - <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/unemployment-rate-among-christian-men-highest-govt/story-BqMtQpHQUNLoqIBxmbiWso.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: Indian pastors and preachers - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Northern-India:-Christian-pastors-beaten-and-arrested-for-%27forced-conversions%27--49153.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: reported - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-rape-insight-idUSKBN1I9146>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#in>
- Technological landscape: World Bank's Country profile - [https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report\\_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=IND](https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=IND)
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/India-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net Report 2019: - [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/11042019\\_Report\\_FH\\_FOTN\\_2019\\_final\\_Public\\_Download.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/11042019_Report_FH_FOTN_2019_final_Public_Download.pdf)
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- Technological landscape: Evangelical Fellowship of India - <https://efionline.org/>
- Technological landscape: GSMA - <https://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/>
- Security situation: June 2020 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/20-Indian-and-43-Chinese-soldiers-die-in-clashes-along-Himalayan-border-50365.html>
- Security situation: India and Nepal - <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-s-ties-with-nepal-set-for-deep-freeze-after-kathmandu-s-decisive-step-on-new-map/story-MF1pWaJYEQRB0PMuFe9XmL.html>
- Security situation: every 15 minutes - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-crime-women-idUSKBN1Z821W>
- Security situation: reported gang rapes - <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/woman-dies-gang-rape-india-second-in-week/>
- Security situation: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/india#d91ede>
- Security situation: Trafficking - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>
- Security situation: more boys - <https://asiatimes.com/2020/02/new-law-to-counter-human-trafficking-in-india/>
- Security situation: Covid-19 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1xjNyyVlxY>
- Security situation: Christian leaders and pastors - <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=we%27re+indians+too&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

## WWL 2021: 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 the 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	5,346,000	7.9
Catholic	21,100,000	31.3
Protestant	23,000,000	34.1
Independent	19,130,000	28.4

Unaffiliated	180,000	0.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-1,400,000	-2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,356,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	12,200,000	18.1
Renewalist movement	21,000,000	31.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

**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.

## Church spectrum today - additional information

According to the World Christian Database data of February 2020 the largest official denominations (with more than 1 million members) in India are:

- Catholic Church in India, with 19.947.000 members
- Church of South India (Anglican), with 4.400.000 members
- United Evangelical Lutheran Churches, with 4.043.000 members
- Orthodox Syrian Church of the East, with 2.700.000 members
- Seventh-day Adventist Church, with 1.973.000 members
- Council of Baptist Churches in NE India, with 1.604.000 members
- Church of North India (Anglican), with 1.500.000 members
- Presbyterian Church in India, with 1.406.000 members
- Churches of Christ, with 1.337.000 members
- Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, with 1.245.000 members

# WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / India

## Reporting period

01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

## Position on the World Watch List

India: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	83	10
WWL 2020	83	10
WWL 2019	83	10
WWL 2018	81	11
WWL 2017	73	15

*Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods*

India scored 83 points in WWL 2021, the same score as in WWL 2020. In a number of violence categories the score is lower than in the previous year 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	Very 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.

### **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 1990's, the RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and their affiliates have been working systematically to divide tribal societies and generate opposition towards Christians. 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.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (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. The law often turns a blind eye. The police is collaborative, its membership largely from the same communities which run the *Khaps*. The *Khaps* seem to be against modernity, against marrying outside the community rules of kinship and desirability in 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 fanatical Hindus, tribal village leaders impose heavy fines on Christians and vandalize their homes. The Christians are socially boycotted and get 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
	WEAK	VERY STRONG	STRONG	STRONG	VERY WEAK	WEAK	-	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	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	Very strong	Strong	Weak	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very weak	Very strong	Strong	Strong	Very weak	-	-	Strong	-
One's own (extended) family	Weak	Strong	Strong	Strong	Very weak	-	-	Weak	-
Political parties	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	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 sentiments spreading among the Hindu masses. Prominent examples are Yogi Adityanath (founder of Hindu Yuva Wahini which is responsible for the most 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.
- **Normal citizens (Very 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.
- **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 (Home 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.
- **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 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 Ethno-religious hostility:

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

- **Ethnic 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 Dictatorial paranoia:

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

- **Political parties (Very 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. According to BJP leaders, Muslims and Christians should be [removed](#) from India by 2021 (Mail Online India, 19 December 2014).
- **Government officials (Strong):** In states and regions that are under the control of Hindu radicals, local government officials oppose Christianity.
- **Ethnic 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.

### 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 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.
- **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.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** 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.)

## Map of country



## 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, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh.

## 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.

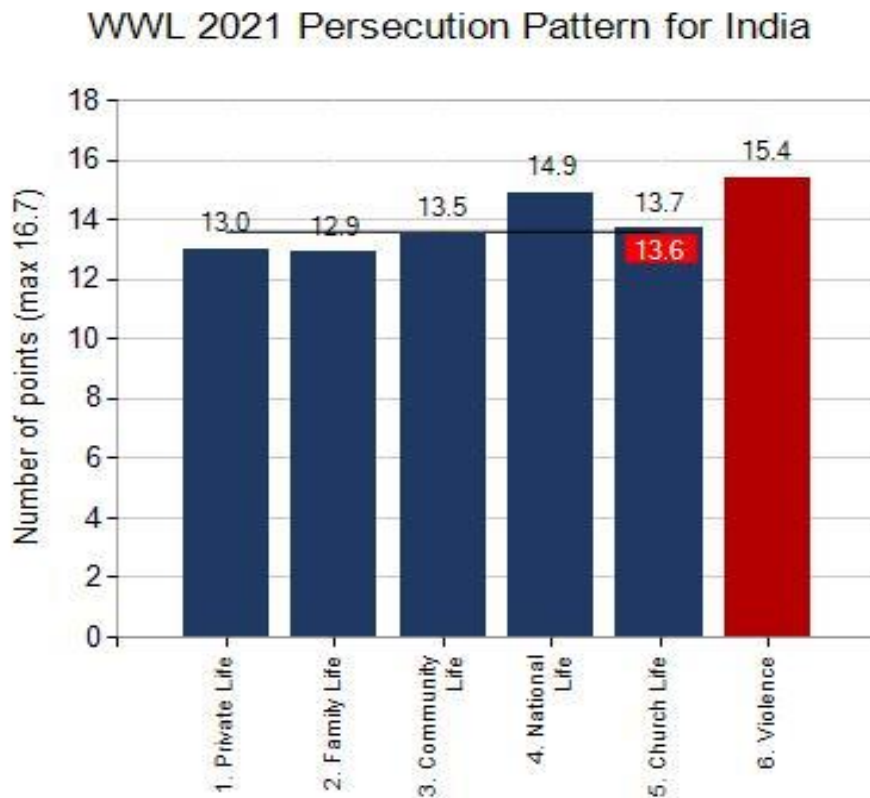
### **Converts to Christianity:**

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 2021 Persecution pattern for India shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.6 points), the same score as in WWL 2020. 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 spheres of life show at least very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in the *sphere of National 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 15.4 points in WWL 2021 (an increase from 14.8 points in WWL 2020). Of the 12 categories of violence used in WWL analysis, most get the maximum score for India. Physical violence and attacks on Christian religious assemblies are two most frequent forms religious freedom violations 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: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

**Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.75 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.

**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)**

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 1.4: 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 are in force in nine out of 28 states (Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand).



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 i) the large-scale 'home-coming' campaign (Ghar Wapsi) organized by Hindu radicals all over India; and ii) the impossibility for foreign Christians to obtain a missionary visa.

## 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 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)**

Christian children are increasingly discriminated against and (physically) harassed in their communities. This is due to the growing influence of Hindu radicalism which causes ordinary community members to believe that Christians do not belong there. Children of converts are especially targeted, but children of other Christians are also affected.

## 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 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)**

Over the past five years the number of incidents at the community level involving harassment, threats and obstructions has increased to unprecedented levels. Social hostility towards Christians has become a severe problem in India.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 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 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 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 are in force in nine out of 28 states (Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand). 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 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.

## 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 5.8: 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.). (4.00 points)**

The central government in New Delhi has imposed very strict regulations to hinder foreign missionaries effectively from entering India: they need 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 - the number could be over 100 in the WWL 2021 reporting period - and many foreigners of Indian-origin have been deported because they were part of churches or Christian groups in India.

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

Over the past five years, the risks involved in speaking out against those who have attacked Christians have risen dramatically. Hindu radicals have been emboldened by the inaction of the central government and feel they can act with impunity. Thus there have been increased levels of death threats on social media, of leaking personal information and other forms of attack on families. Also, if Christians do speak out against Hindu radicals or against the biased judiciary, this simply gives the Hindu militants all the more reason to step up their attacks.

## 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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol “x” denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.*

India: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	12	9
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?	76	34
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	72	295
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	7
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	11
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	15	41
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	2	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1500	1445
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?	45	47
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?	4	7
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	422	214
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	1

For the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** 12 Christians were killed during the WWL 2021 reporting period.
- **Churches and religious properties attacked:** The number of damaged, confiscated or destroyed churches and properties more than doubled in comparison with WWL 2020.

- **Christians detained:** Our partners reported that at least 72 cases have been registered where Christians were detained for faith-related reasons. In WWL 2020 the number for this category was three times higher.
- **Christians sentenced:** In November 2019 the Supreme Court of India decided to release on bail the last five of the seven Christians sentenced to life imprisonment charged with the murder of the Hindu swami Laxamananda Saraswati in 2008 (Source: [AsiaNews](#), 27 November 2019).
- **Christians kidnapped:** At least 2 Christians were kidnapped. This was considerably less than in WWL 2020.
- **Christians sexually harassed:** At least 15 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. This was less than in WWL 2020 and made the score for this category slightly lower than in the previous reporting period.
- **Forced marriages:** At least two Christian women were forcibly married to Hindu men by their families who opposed the conversion of their daughters to Christianity.
- **Christians attacked:** There were reports of 366 cases of physical abuse (including death threats), directly affecting about 1,500 Christians. This number is higher than in WWL 2021.
- **House and/or properties of Christians damaged:** 45 houses and/or properties were damaged, about the same number as in WWL 2020.
- **Shops/businesses attacked:** 4 shops were damaged, less than in WWL 2020.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes:** More than 59 incidents were recorded where people were either forced to leave their homes or villages. Over 422 people emigrated for safety.

## 5 Year trends

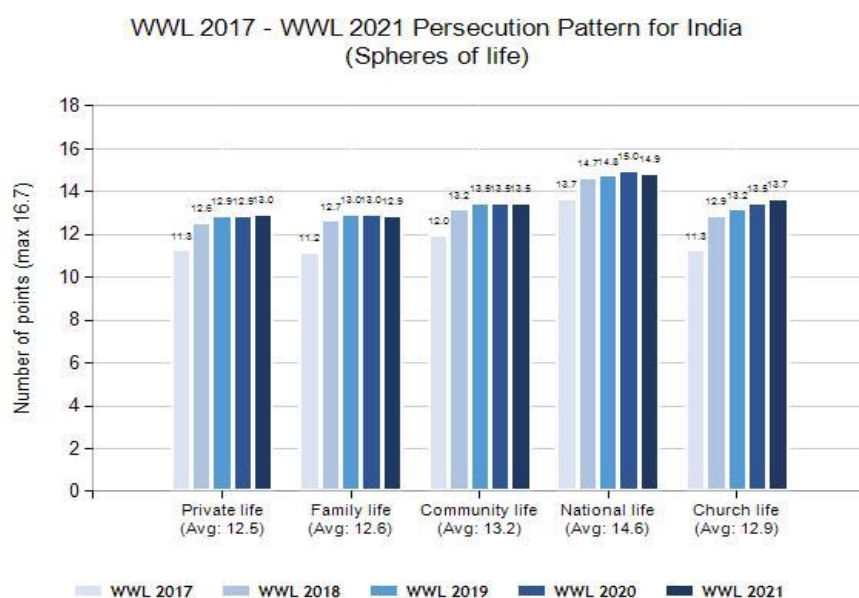
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

India: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	13.6
2020	13.6
2019	13.5
2018	13.2
2017	11.9

The average pressure level against Christians in India has been high over the past five years. A huge increase was visible in the years after the current government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected in 2014 – more or less levelling off over the past three years. This levelling off is not an indication that things are getting better, but how little the situation in the country has changed over the past years.

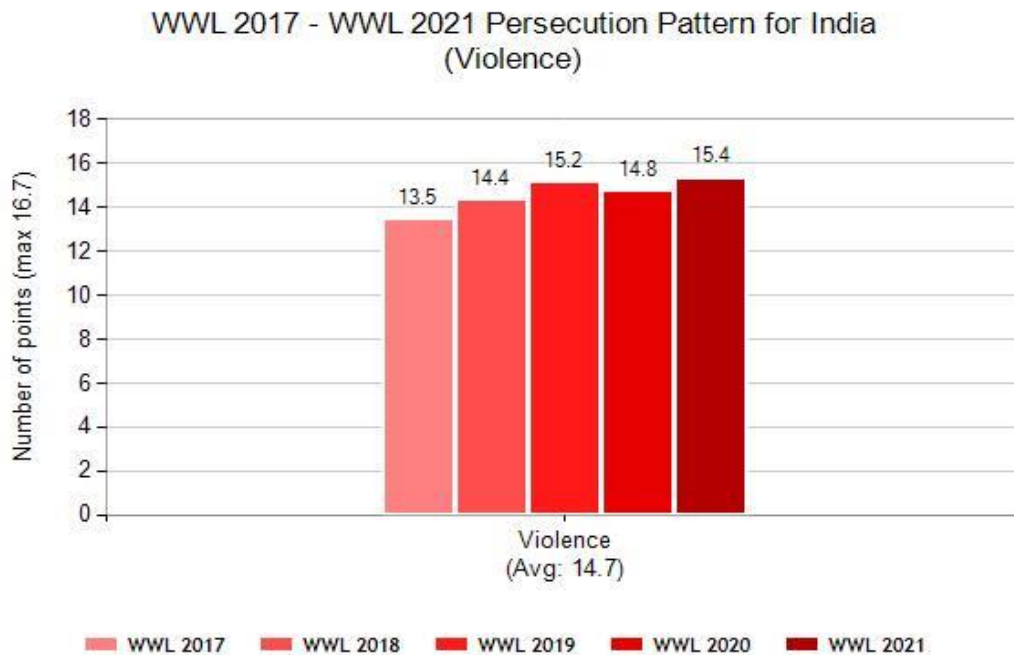
## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the past five years the scores for pressure in most of the five spheres of life have (with very few minor exceptions) constantly risen. This means that the situation for Christians in the country has been deteriorating constantly. The *spheres of life* where the situation is most precarious are *Community*, *National* and *Church 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 high - it has never been lower than 11.3 points. Over the past five years the score in this sphere of life has constantly increased. This is an indication of pressure exerted especially on converts.
- Pressure in *Family life* has seen a little different development. It started at 11.2 points in WWL 2017, and increased to 13.0 in WWL 2020. In WWL 2021 it was a fraction lower at 12.9 points. Pressure from family on converts has always been very high.
- Pressure in *Community life* has been going up from 12.0 in WWL 2017 to 13.5 points in WWL 2019. Since then the average pressure level in this sphere has been constant. This sphere of life includes pressure on converts, but also on other Christians at the community level.
- Over the past 5 years pressure in *National life* has gone up. In WWL 2017 it was 13.7 points, and in WWL 2020 it stood at an extremely high level of 15.0 points. In WWL 2021 the score dropped a fraction to the still extreme level of 14.9 points. The score of this sphere of life his reflects the pressure from Hindu radicals on Indian society as a whole.
- The average pressure level in *Church life* mirrors what happened in the *National sphere*. The level has constantly risen during the past five years. This is an indication that state pressure on the Church is not 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 a new record high of 15.4 points in WWL 2021.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to social community/networks
Denied communal resources
Denied inheritance or possessions
Forced divorce
Forced marriage



Forced out of home – expulsion
Forced to flee town/country
Imprisonment by government
Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Rape explicitly mentioned
Sexual exploitation not explicitly mentioned
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – Verbal

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.

Women and girls are expected to be meek and emotional subjects, so persecution of Christian women and girls is often targeted at their body through molestation, rape and other forms of sexual harassment. As a country expert explained, rape is used as a weapon to “settle scores”. Daughters, sisters and wives of pastors are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, and verbal slurs. Sexual attacks serve to shame the family; this can add psychological abuse for women and girls, as her sexual purity connotes the honor and prestige of her family. Girls are especially vulnerable; according to a World Vision India [survey](#), one in two children between the ages of 12 and 18 is a victim of sexual abuse (Hindustan Times, 16 May 2017)

For those in Christian communities, young Christian women in tribal areas may be subjected to sexual predation of various forms, with targeted trafficking reported.

Physical attacks on Christian women have included acid attacks, brutal beatings and killings.

First generation Christian women 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 RSS’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

Male Pressure Points
Denied access to social community/networks
Denied communal resources
Denied food or water
Denied inheritance or possessions
Discrimination/harassment via education
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. 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). Violations against men include various forms of beating, killings and emotional torture such as being forced to watch torture carried out on family members. Church leaders are particularly vulnerable; being a pastor continues to be understood 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, verbally harassed and possibly forced to leave the village. 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. Such pressures in the workplace have, according to a country expert, been getting worse over the past five years. Economic deprivation also takes the form of denial of legal inheritance for converts, and unjust fines. As men are the main providers this can throw the whole family into poverty.

False charges are often brought against men, such as accusations of 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.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department’s IRF 2019 report](#) (pages 174-181):

- There were reports of religiously motivated killings, assaults, riots, discrimination, vandalism, and actions restricting the right of individuals to practice and speak about their religious beliefs. According to Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) data, 7,484 incidents of communal violence took place between 2008 and 2017 in which more than 1,100 people were killed. MHA data for 2018-2019 was not available, but incidents of communal violence continued through the year. On June 18, a mob in Jharkhand killed Muslim Tabrez Ansari after forcing him to declare allegiance to Hindu deities. NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that through 2019, Hindu groups characterized as extremist, some of which, according to HRW, had links with BJP supporters, continued to perpetuate mob violence against minorities, especially Muslims, amid rumors they traded or killed cows for beef.
- According to NGO Hate Crime Watch, 123 incidents of cow-related mob violence, in which Muslims comprised 50 percent of the victims, took place between 2010 and the first half of 2019. Lower-caste Hindus were also victims of cow vigilantism. Hate Crime Watch reported 10 cow vigilante attacks, with one person killed between January and

June. On April 10, Prakash Lakda of Jurmu village in Jharkhand was killed by a mob, and three others seriously injured, reportedly for butchering a dead ox. All four victims were Christians who were Scheduled Tribe members.

- On September 22, according to media reports, individuals from Suari Village in the Khunti District of Jharkhand beat three tribal Christians suspected of selling beef in the village market. One died in the hospital, while the other two sustained serious injuries. Media reported that local police arrested several individuals following the attack. Amnesty International (AI) in October recorded 72 incidents of mob violence in the first half of the year, of which 37 were directed at Muslims. AI recorded 181 alleged hate crime incidents overall in the first half of the year, compared with 100 during the same period in 2018.

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.

Examples of violations of religious freedom:

- On Monday 9 December 2019 India's Lok Sabha (Lower House) passed the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 (CAB), which will grant citizenship to religious minorities from neighbouring countries but controversially excludes Muslims. Father Cedric Prakash, a Jesuit priest and a human rights activist in India, said: "This act of the government is another nail in the coffin of India's Constitution and our democratic framework. Whilst assuring citizenship to all undocumented person except those of the Muslim faith, the CAB risks tearing the country apart, reopening unhealed wounds of the Partition and ultimately destroying the secular and democratic tenets of our revered Constitution. Already millions of people all over the country are protesting against it. The Bill must be withdrawn immediately and the Upper House should not pass it." (Source: [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#), 11 December 2019)
- An independent investigation into attacks on Muslims by Hindu mobs in Delhi in February 2020 found that police were complicit in and even abetted the violence. The attacks came after weeks of peaceful protests against the Indian government's discriminatory citizenship policies. Witnesses say that when they asked police for help during the violence, they refused, saying "they had no orders to act". (Source: [Human Rights Watch](#), 17 July 2020)
- There are cow protection laws in the northern Indian state of Haryana. Hindutva cow vigilantes attacked a Muslim man suspected of transporting beef on the eve of Eid on 31 July 2020. Police and people watched without intervening. (Source: [UCAN](#), 4 August 2020)

## 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-maneuvering 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 Islam and Christianity from India by 2021 - <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>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: AsiaNews - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Orissa,-five-Christians-accused-of-guru-Laxamananda-murder-released-on-bail--48656.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: survey - <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/one-in-every-two-children-victim-of-sexual-abuse-says-survey/story-spc4MsZTJsmjyrlTZJep7L.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department’s IRF 2019 report - <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Christian Solidarity Worldwide - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/12/11/press/4502/article.htm>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/17/indias-police-found-complicit-anti-muslim-mob-violence>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: UCAN - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/cow-vigilantes-attack-muslim-driver-in-india/89020>

## 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:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=India>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/India>