

india

PERSECUTION 101



india

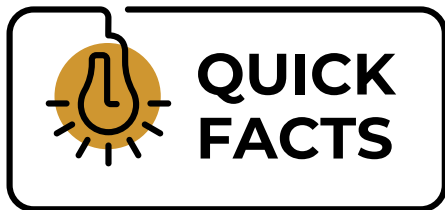
PERSECUTION 101

Christians and Muslims in India are increasingly finding that the world's largest democracy—and recently the world's largest country overall—is no friend to religious freedom

India is often celebrated for its status as the world's most populous democracy. Though true, this factoid does little to protect the millions of non-Hindu religious minorities that call India home. In recent years, religious freedom in the country has rapidly deteriorated in a slide led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the large cohort of Hindu nationalists he encourages and leads.



A pastor leads a small congregation



TYPES OF PERSECUTION

Mob Violence

Communal-level groups violently harassing and attacking Christian churches, pastors in remote areas of the country

Government Abuse

In a dozen states around the country, laws claiming to prohibit forced conversions criminalize sharing the gospel

Barriers to Conversion

Across India, poor Christians and Muslims are prohibited from receiving government benefits available to similarly-situated Hindus, creating a very real barrier to conversion

Social Pressure

Religious minorities across the country are ostracized by their communities, in some instances not even being allowed to drink the same water or bury their dead in the community



Type of Government

Federal Democracy



Chief Executive

Narendra Modi of the BJP party
(since May 2014)



Total Population

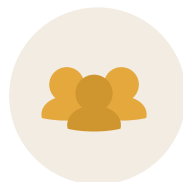
Approx. 1.4 billion
(2023 estimate)



Religious Demography

79.8% Hindu - approx. 1.1 billion
14.2% Muslim - 199 million
2.3% Christian* - 32 million

* Official 2011 U.S. Government estimate. Various legal barriers to conversion likely inflate the official number of Hindus and deflate the number of religious minorities



Ethnic Demography

72% Indo-Aryan
25% Dravidian
3% other

ICC IN INDIA

A tiny minority in an increasingly radicalized country, Christians in India often face severe pressure from their own neighbors. Though not universal, there is widespread animosity in India toward Christians for their belief in what is thought of as a foreign religion. Consequently, ICC works with many believers who face communal pressure and even violent mob attacks. In an increasingly common pattern, mobs gather on Sundays to storm local church services and turn pastors in to the authorities for supposed forced conversion activity.

ICC helps these pastors and their congregations by facilitating the paying of legal fees, delivering food aid to prisoners and their families, and helping Christians develop sustainable livelihoods. In addition to this reactive aid, ICC also trains pastors to avoid persecution in the first place and respond effectively when it does happen. These persecution preparedness trainings have equipped hundreds of pastors across India and continue to have an impact long after they are concluded.

Political Backgrounder for Religious Freedom Issues in India

As it fights for greater influence on the international stage, the Indian government seems to be trying to burnish its reputation as a land of welcome and inclusion. Following the lead of Gandhi, the narrative goes, India today is a melting pot of social and religious inclusion.

Sadly, this narrative bears little semblance to reality.

Modern-day India is awash with religious animosity and the political repression of disfavored religions. Its leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has a tenuous relationship at best with Gandhi's legacy of tolerance. Instead, Modi peddles extremist Hindu nationalism and a political philosophy that leaves little room for Christians and other religious minorities.

Hindu nationalists attacking Christian churches and pastors enjoy nearly complete immunity from the Modi-led government as they harass and even kill—they routinely walk free while the survivors of their attacks face trumped-up criminal charges. Less than 150 violent attacks against Christians were recorded in 2014, the year Modi came to power. That number has risen in the years since, with 2022 seeing an all-time reported high of over 600 incidents, according to civil society leaders in India. In less than 40 of those cases were any charges filed against the attackers while in over 100 charges were filed against the victim.

Charges against the victims of these mob attacks often center around the idea that they were forcibly converting someone to Christianity. Twelve states have laws outlawing forced conversions, but these laws are phrased to include nearly all minority religious activity, including preaching and community outreach programs. Consequently, vigilante groups feel emboldened to stop church services and other gatherings, often with violence.

In a subtler move to suppress conversion from Hinduism, the Indian government decades ago made Christians and Muslims ineligible for Schedule Caste benefits, a social welfare program which hundreds of millions of Indians depend on for survival. Though some Christians can afford to declare their faith publicly and lose their benefits, many more cannot and are forced to live their faith secretly and in fear.

The U.S. is hesitant to push India on human rights concerns because India is an important strategic partner for the U.S. given its proximity to China and the significant economic weight it can lend to the U.S. in its competition with China. The issue of religious freedom has long been a sore point between the two countries, with India regularly expressing outrage at U.S. criticism of its deteriorating record and the U.S. alternately criticizing India for its record on religious freedom and heaping on praises for being a democracy.



U.S. GOVERNMENT DESIGNATIONS

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
2001	Special Watchlist*	None
2002	Special Watchlist*	None
2003	Country of Particular Concern	None
2004	Country of Particular Concern	None
2005	None	None
2006	None	None
2007	None	None
2008	None	None
2009	None	None

* Called the USCIRF Watchlist at this time

** Called Tier 2 at this time

U.S. GOVERNMENT DESIGNATIONS CONT.

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
2010	Special Watchlist*	None
2011	Special Watchlist*	None
2012	Special Watchlist*	None
2013	Special Watchlist**	None
2014	Special Watchlist**	None
2015	Special Watchlist**	None
2016	Special Watchlist**	None
2017	Special Watchlist	None
2018	Special Watchlist	None
2019	Special Watchlist	None
2020	Country of Particular Concern	None
2021	Country of Particular Concern	None
2022	Country of Particular Concern	None
2023	Country of Particular Concern	None

* Called the USCIRF Watchlist at this time

** Called Tier 2 at this time

