



Violence and Discrimination Against Christians in India

Key Points

In 2023 alone, there were 687 reported incidents of violence against Christians in India.

Indian officials consistently downplay violent attacks against religious minorities and fail to take adequate steps to protect them. In some cases, local authorities participate in the targeting of minorities.

Anti-conversion laws, which exist in 12 of India's 28 states, disproportionately target Christians and Muslims.

Over 855 people were detained under charges of illegal conversion between 2020 and 2023.

Christians and Christian institutions are discriminated against, socially ostracized, and marginalized to varying degrees across India.

Religious freedom conditions in India are troubling and, at times, life-threatening for Christians and other minorities. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) states, “[I]ndividuals have been killed, beaten, and lynched by vigilante groups.”¹

When engaging with the Indian government, the United States should address the disturbing rise in attacks on Christians and other religious minorities that has occurred since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose to power.²

Violence Against Christians

Christians endure physical attacks from mobs; destruction of their property, homes, and churches; sexual assault; and legal

prosecution and imprisonment based on false charges or for doing normal religious activities. In one example reported by International Christian Concern, on Christmas Day 2024, “two women and a man were beaten up severely for alleged conversion activities in Balasore district. Then, the women were tied to a tree and were forced to chant the names of Hindu gods and goddesses.”³

Christian homes and villages have been burned to the ground. *Christianity Today* reported that violence against a Christian tribal village in Chhattisgarh sent 2,500 people fleeing. A local pastor said, “Their homes were looted, animals were stolen, and crops were confiscated.”⁴

According to USCIRF, NGOs reported 687 incidents of violence against Christians in 2023 alone.⁵ On July 19, 2023, a brutal video depicting the assaults of two Christian women who were dragged around naked by a mob before being sexually assaulted made global headlines.⁶ Churches and religious institutions, including schools, also face harassment and violence. For example, in February 2023, a group of Hindus entered a Catholic school in Assam and demanded the teachers stop using Christian images and symbols.⁷

Recently, one Hindu leader openly called for the slaughter of Christians and the assault and humiliation of Christian women, saying: “Wherever you see Christian people, enter their houses and kill everyone. No one should be able to escape,” and “We will play with the honor of their daughters-in-law and daughters, we will do obscene acts with them in the public square.”⁸

According to Open Doors, a Christian persecution watchdog, Hindu mobs have been able to attack Christians “with impunity as the BJP government in New Delhi and various states appears to be sympathetic to such hostility.”⁹ Indian officials consistently downplay violent attacks against both Christians and Muslims and fail to take adequate steps to protect religious minorities. In some cases, local authorities participate in the targeting of minorities.

Anti-Conversion Laws

Anti-conversion laws, which exist in 12 of India's 28 states, carry penalties ranging from hefty fines to life imprisonment and disproportionately target Christians and Muslims. These laws are supposedly intended to prevent people from being tricked or "induced" into changing their faith. However, these laws end up discouraging the sharing of one's faith, as ordinary evangelism can lead to legal action on the grounds that it constitutes "tricking" people into "fraudulent" conversions.¹⁰

According to USCIRF, in the state of Uttar Pradesh alone, "as of May 2023, over 855 people were reported to have been detained under charges of illegal conversion since the promulgation of the state's anti-conversion law in 2020."¹¹

Marginalization

Christians and Christian institutions are discriminated against, socially ostracized, and marginalized to varying degrees across the country. The government monitors church activities and often imposes restrictions on foreign funding, invitations for foreign missionaries, and other church activities.¹²

Additionally, Christians have repeatedly encountered difficulties when trying to bury their dead alongside Hindu neighbors. In a recent case, the Supreme Court of India instructed the state of Chhattisgarh to demarcate exclusive burial sites for Christians after local authorities prevented a Christian man from burying his deceased father.¹³

Conclusion

India often bills itself as the world's largest democracy. Meanwhile, Christians and Muslims—particularly in more rural areas—continue to face harsh discrimination and brutal physical violence that ought to be unacceptable in any nation, especially a democratic one.

As the United States engages with India as a strategic partner, the U.S. government should raise these human rights concerns and encourage the Indian government to 1) take concrete measures to protect Christians and other minority groups from violence and 2) repeal laws that violate religious freedom.

¹ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “USCIRF Releases Report on India’s Collapsing Religious Freedom Conditions,” October 2, 2024, <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-releases-report-indias-collapsing-religious-freedom-conditions>.

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “India – Intolerance Winning Over Secularism?”, fact sheet, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/2024-05-Religious%20Freedom-Background-India-Intolerance%20Winning%20Over%20Secularism.pdf>.

³ “Hindu Nationalists Disrupt Christmas Services Throughout India,” International Christian Concern, December 28, 2024, <https://www.persecution.org/2024/12/29/hindu-nationalists-disrupt-christmas-services-throughout-india/>.

⁴ Surinder Kaur, “Extremists Are Destroying Indian Christians’ Homes and Shattering Their Lives,” *Christianity Today*, July 24, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2023/07/christian-persecution-internally-displaced-persons-india/>.

⁵ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “2024 Annual Report,” May 2024, 30, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/USCIRF%202024%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

⁶ “India’s Modi breaks silence on ethnic violence in Manipur after video shows women being paraded naked,” *MSNBC News/Associated Press*, July 21, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/indias-modi-breaks-silence-ethnic-violence-manipur-video-shows-women-p-rcna95467>.

⁷ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “USCIRF Releases Report on India’s Collapsing Religious Freedom Conditions,” press release, October 2, 2024, <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-releases-report-indias-collapsing-religious-freedom-conditions>.

⁸ Chhattisgarh Christian Forum, “Shankaracharya Avimukteshwaranand, CG Govt Plan A Christian Genocide As Claimed By Adaesh Soni,” YouTube video, February 3, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdwXeulcHow>.

⁹ Open Doors International, “India: Persecution Dynamics,” report, December 2024, 24,

https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/India-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

¹⁰ Family Research Council, “Criminalizing Conscience: The Status of Apostasy, Blasphemy, and Anti-Conversion Laws Around the World,” report, November 2020, <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF19D40.pdf>.

¹¹ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “2024 Annual Report,” 31.

¹² Open Doors International, “India: Persecution Dynamics,” 20.

¹³ “Supreme Court of India Orders Chhattisgarh to Demarcate Burial Sites for Christians,” International Christian Concern, February 5, 2025, <https://www.persecution.org/2025/02/05/supreme-court-of-india-orders-chhattisgarh-to-demarcate-burial-sites-for-christians/>.