

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

INDIA

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List India	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	83	10
WWL 2018	81	11
WWL 2017	73	15
WWL 2016	68	17
WWL 2015	62	21

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: 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”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding India

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12557384>

Recent country 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. It 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 tolerance. Traditionally, Hinduism and Buddhism (both of them stem from India) used to be regarded as peaceful. Since the 1990s Hinduism has taken on a much more violent character. The tolerance for dissent, minorities, or respecting religious and cultural diversity 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 bad reputation of ignoring atrocities committed by Hindu fanatics when he was Chief Minister of the 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 have been recorded per year.

The religious landscape

According to World Christian Database (WCD 2018) India has a population of 1,354,052,000, making it the second most populous country in the world after China. The biggest religion in the country is Hinduism, with 72.5% of the population. Hinduism has dominated India for centuries (it started to develop between 500 and 300 BC).

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 all 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.

The second biggest religion in India is Islam with 14.4% of the population. 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. India is home to more Muslims than neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Christianity is the next largest religion in India – it has 4.8% of the population. The group of Christians in India growing fastest are the non-traditional Christian communities (including converts to Christianity).

3.8% of the Indian population belong to so-called ethno-religionism. These are the traditional tribal religions, which predate the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism in the country. Buddhism only makes up 0.7% 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.

The political landscape

India is a complex political entity. It is a federation with a central government in New Delhi that has powers especially in foreign affairs, the army and economy. The country consists of 29 states and 7 union territories (areas ruled by the central government).

The constitution of India declares the country to be a secular state. Hindu radicals are calling to change this, by declaring Hinduism to be 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. In spite of the official secular stance in politics and the army, Hinduism often functions as the default religion. Christians and Muslims are at an obvious disadvantage. Despite the constitutional provision that India has religious freedom, each state defines its own policy regarding religion. Eight of them (Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan) have implemented so-called anti-conversion legislation, while the rest would witness the wide misuse of a type of blasphemy law of Indian Penal Code-295-A. In Arunachal Pradesh, the law exists on paper but has not been implemented. However, even in the states where this law has not been implemented, police have arrested Christians for evangelism activities.

Since May 2014 the central government of India is in the hands of the BJP. All over the country the level of impunity for Hindu radicals committing atrocities against religious and ethnic minorities has gone up. Christians are suffering more than ever from daily attacks.

Christians do not have a major political party (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 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.

Local police officers have a bad reputation for being corrupt. In the states and many other areas where the BJP forms the government, the police officers are known for not being neutral and often side with Hindu hard-liners. They take part in raids of Christian meetings, issue threats to Christians, refuse to register cases reported by Christians (FIR registrations), and give asylum to Hindu extremist persecutors. When Christians want to register a complaint, the local police will refuse to do so in 90% of the cases. They also have a reputation for brutality, beating and mistreating Christians who are in custody.

The socio-economic landscape

India used to be regarded as a developing country in the decades after it became independent in 1947, which was strengthened by the adherence of India's leadership to socialist principles. This has changed completely: Thanks to liberal policies in the 1990s, India now has one of the world's fastest-growing economies, even though the economic crisis of 2008-2014 affected this growth markedly. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as of [August 2018](#), the Indian Nominal GDP (in USD billions) is 2,602; it is the 7th-largest economy by market exchange rates. But the new wealth is not distributed equally: The gap between very rich and very poor is growing rapidly. Poverty is still high at 30%.

Christians tend to be in an unfavorable position as they are often lacking in education and hence often find themselves in the lower strata of society.

Bureaucracy and corruption are well-known factors all over India. On the one hand, 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 of the lower administration personnel whose income is low need the extra income from corruption to survive. Christians in India are constantly encountering these obstacles in almost every aspect of their lives.

Receiving financial support from abroad has been made very difficult in India. All gifts and support need to be reported to the tax office. The work of Christian NGOs has suffered from this. The majority of Christians are from the lower social strata, and many are poor. They have to face the daily challenges of discrimination, poverty, 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 most characteristic social feature of India is the caste system – a hierarchical stratification of Indian society dating back many centuries. According to 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 wanting 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. The abolishment of the caste system inside the Church is a major challenge which will have to be dealt with in the future.

The second major social problem for Christians in India is the presence of the Maoists, a.k.a. Naxalites. The Naxalites are a remnant of the period of the Cold War 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, or 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.

Another major social issue in India is the huge 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 every day and all over the country. Christians are often victims of these practices as the long lists of violent incidents published annually testify.

Women and girls in India are still 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. India has a growing female population deficit of 35 million. The media in India have reports on rapes of women every day. Police forces often do not show 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.

Concluding remarks

Since Narendra Modi came to power in May 2014 the level of religious persecution of Christians has gone up dramatically. Every year more violent incidents are registered, mainly because the government is looking the other way. There will be new elections in April and May 2019 (depending on the region) and Modi is definitely aiming for re-election.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding India

- The socio-economic landscape: August 2018
<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/08/07/NA080818-India-Strong-Economy-Continues-to-Lead-Global-Growth>
- The socio-economic landscape: Ghar Wapsi campaign
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/hindus-never-convert-people-says-indian-mp/>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
1,354,052,000	65,061,000	4.8

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

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.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: India	Christians	%
Orthodox	5,224,000	8.0
Catholic	20,620,000	31.7
Protestant	22,129,000	34.0
Independent	19,444,000	29.9
Unaffiliated	168,000	0.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-2,524,000	-3.9
Total	65,061,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	10,900,000	16.8
Renewalist movement	23,270,000	35.8

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: Believers 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.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

The communities of expatriate Christians are the smallest group - less than 1% of all Christians in the country. The biggest expatriate churches are formed by Afghan and Chin (from Burma) refugees. One example is the Afghan community that has a congregation in New Delhi. Most of the time, these congregations will not draw the ire of the Hindu extremists in India for two reasons: a) they have a very distinct ethnic membership and b) are not active in outreach among Indian nationals.

The historical Christian communities are the oldest group present in India. The biggest is the Roman Catholic Church. Various Orthodox churches also belong to this group like the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Then there are the Church of North India and the Church of South India – Anglican in origin. In total this group forms about 40% of the Christians in India. Although these churches are not active in outreach they do get attacked by Hindu extremists who vandalize churches, statues, grottos and crucifixes.

Converts to Christianity are the first target of radical Hindus. Converts from Hinduism bear the brunt of persecution in India and face harassment on a daily basis. The number of reported violent incidents is very high. Most converts form house-church congregations that are part of a Protestant group – it is therefore not feasible to make an estimate of their size.

The non-traditional Christian communities are the biggest group of Christians: They make up nearly 60% of the Christians in India and include an ever growing number of converts to Christianity. The non-traditional Protestants are found in more than 1,100 denominations, including Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Brethren, Full Gospel and Assemblies of God. They are regularly targeted by militant Hindus.

Religious context

Religious Context: India	Numbers	%
Christians	65,061,000	4.8
Muslim	195,379,000	14.4
Hindu	981,730,000	72.5
Buddhist	10,008,000	0.7
Ethnoreligionist	50,938,000	3.8
Jewish	11,300	0.0
Bahai	2,092,000	0.2
Atheist	2,187,000	0.2
Agnostic	16,104,000	1.2
Other	30,539,800	2.3

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.
Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

India has more than two thousand ethnic groups and every major religion is represented. Only the continent of Africa exceeds the linguistic, genetic and cultural diversity of the nation of India. Most used [languages](#): Hindi dialects (41.03%), Bengali (8.11%), Telugu (7.19%), Marathi (6.99%), Tamil (5.91%), Urdu (5.01%), Gujarati (4.48%), and Kannada (3.69%).

Notes on the current situation

- The Church's growth presents many needs especially in matters of discipleship and leadership development. The systematic targeting of the Church by radical Hindus also brings to surface other needs like preparing the Church to respond positively to the onslaught of persecution and a need for greater unity and cooperation between the various denominations.
- Hindus see Christians as a threat to the nation (because of their growth in numbers and strong presence in the tribal regions). The number of violent incidents in which Christians have been attacked has gone up dramatically since May 2014, when the BJP took over power and their candidate, Narendra Modi, became India's Prime Minister. Since the government refuses to take proper action, Hindu radicals feel they can attack Christians with impunity.
- Discrimination is very common in India, and it is based on the age-old caste system. It affects Christians all over India because most converts to Christianity come from the lower castes or from the Dalits.
- Christian NGOs are targeted for detailed interrogation by different Government departments (e.g. by the income tax office and intelligence bureaus) in attempts to find faults and accuse them of being involved in anti-national activity (especially concerning conversions to Christianity).
- There is a significant increase in the number of local pro-Hindu political groups and youth wings, plus an increased number of open meetings and camps where youngsters are educated in militant nationalism and are encouraged to display hatred towards other religions.
- There is an increasing emphasis on Hinduism in schools, and Hinduization of tribal people all over India.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- Religious context: [languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_India)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_India

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

What type of persecution dominates?

Religious nationalism: 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 can be seen in the activities of radical Buddhists in Ladakh, neo-Buddhism in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and radical Sikhs in Punjab.

Who is driving persecution?

The increasing influence of an intolerant form of Hinduism poses huge problems for Christians as the authorities are not preventing violence caused by local radical Hindu groups or angry mobs of villagers instigated by Hindu religious leaders. The local, state and national authorities are often dominated by the radical Hindu party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This means the Hindu radicals can act with virtual impunity.

What it results in

All Christians are experiencing persecution in India since Hindu radicals view them 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.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

India	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	10	12512	207	98	26
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	8	23812	635	34	24

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- On 19 June 2018, five Christian women (aged 20-35) were performing a street play in Jharkhand when they were abducted and then gang-raped in a forest on 19 June 2018. Police stated that the assault was also allegedly filmed on cell-phones. (Source: [UCAN](#))
- On 20 January 2018 the body of a Pastor Gideon Periyaswamy in Adaiyalachery (Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu) was found hung from the thatched roof of his house, a week after he complained to police about opposition from radical Hindus. (Sources: Open Doors research, [AsiaNews](#)).
- On 14 December 2017, a carol-singing group belonging to St Ephrem's Theological College in Satna, Madhya Pradesh, was detained by police. The group comprising 30 seminarians and two priests were arrested on the main road as they were moving to Christian institutions in Satna town singing carols, a normal activity during the Christmas season. The police detained them following a complaint from right wing Hindu activists, who accused them of being involved in religious conversion, a charge often leveled against Christians to target them. (Source: [International Christian Concern](#)).

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: UCAN
<https://www.ucanews.com/news/five-women-from-jesuit-school-gang-raped-in-india/82640>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: AsiaNews
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Tamil-Nadu,-Pentecostal-pastor-found-hanged.-He-had-received-threats-42889.html>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: International Christian Concern
<http://www.persecution.in/node/4496>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

India reaches rank 10 with a score of 83 points in WWL 2019. After India's notable rise in score in WWL 2018, it was hoped that the persecution of Christians by Hindu radicals would decrease in the WWL 2019 reporting period. But these hopes have been proved false: Hindu radicals have continued their attacks and even increased them. Elections are due to take place in India in May 2019 and it is to be expected that religious nationalism will reach new levels and that Christians and Muslims will be targeted even more than now. Thus, it may be that the small increase in score in WWL 2019 is simply a momentary 'calm before the storm'.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: India	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Very strong
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Weak
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Weak
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
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 (long version).

Religious nationalism (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 Radical Buddhists in Ladakh, forms of Neo-Buddhism in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and Radical Sikhs in Punjab. Since 2014 religious nationalism is also influencing tribal groups, causing them to consider their religions as also being related to Hinduism.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: India	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	WEAK	VERY STRONG	WEAK	VERY WEAK	WEAK	-	-	WEAK
Government officials	-	Strong	Weak	-	-	-	-	Weak
Ethnic group leaders	Very weak	Strong	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very weak	Very strong	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	Very strong	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very weak	Very strong	Weak	Very weak	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Weak	Strong	Weak	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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 (long version).

Drivers of Religious nationalism:

- *Government officials* at local levels may put huge amounts of pressure on Christians. It is not so much the central authorities in Delhi (as religion is mostly a state affair), though their attitude of looking away when atrocities occur anywhere in the country leads to an ever higher level of impunity. Most of the pressure from government officials comes from state authorities (in the states where the BJP forms the government) and from local authorities who may line up with local branches of Hindu radical groups.
- *Ethnic leaders* will most of the time put pressure on Christians for two reasons: leaving the culture of the ancestors and insulting the religion of the group (which is Hinduism).
- *Non-Christian religious leaders* are a main source for spreading anti-Christian sentiments among the Hindu masses. Examples are Yogi Adityanath (founder of Hindu Yuva Wahini which is responsible for the most attacks in U.P.), Sakshi Maharaj (MLA), Sadhvi Pragya, Sadhvi Prachi, Rajrajeshwaracharya, Narendra Maharaj etc. who are known for their constant and 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.

- *Various hardline Hindu groups* are active in India: BJP, 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*: 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, torching churches, damaging cemeteries etc.
- *Family members*: This is closely related to the previous point, but within the family context. Close relatives of converts will very quickly regard any conversion to Christianity as shaming the honor of the family and act accordingly.
- *Political parties*: The BJP is the political wing of RSS (a Hindu nationalist, paramilitary, voluntary organization known for its radical Hindu ideology) and has a majority in the political centre. It is the parent organization of all types of Hindu radicalism 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 (CM of Jharkhand), Adityanath (CM of U.P.), Manohar Lal Khattar (CM of Haryana), Rajnath Singh (Home Minister of India) and other BJP ministers of BJP 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.

Context

The centuries-old caste system is so deeply entrenched in the Indian psyche that it is almost impossible to get rid of it. Even belief systems that do not acknowledge the caste system (but doctrinally teach the equality of all human beings) are marred by the same system they fight against. Islam, Sikhism and Christianity are examples of this. Although the government has outlawed it, the mistreatment of the lower castes and untouchables (Dalits and Tribals) continues. Several observers even speak of a “racist” system.

Since May 2014 India is governed by a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As a result, radical Hinduism, which was already present under the previous government, has increased steadily. While the level of intolerance increased, and minorities were regularly attacked, the central government has refused to speak out against the atrocities – thus further encouraging the radical Hindus to step up their actions. The level of impunity is increasing and the number of violent attacks against Christians has reached alarming levels.

Since the second half of 2014 Hindu radicals launched a "home-coming" campaign (a.k.a. Ghar Wapsi), designed to lure Muslims and Christians back to the Hindu fold. Several campaigns have been held in which hundreds of people returned to Hinduism. The Ghar Wapsi campaign reached its peak in 2015 and early 2016, but has continued into 2018.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: There are several expatriate groups active in India. It is not only Westerners 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.

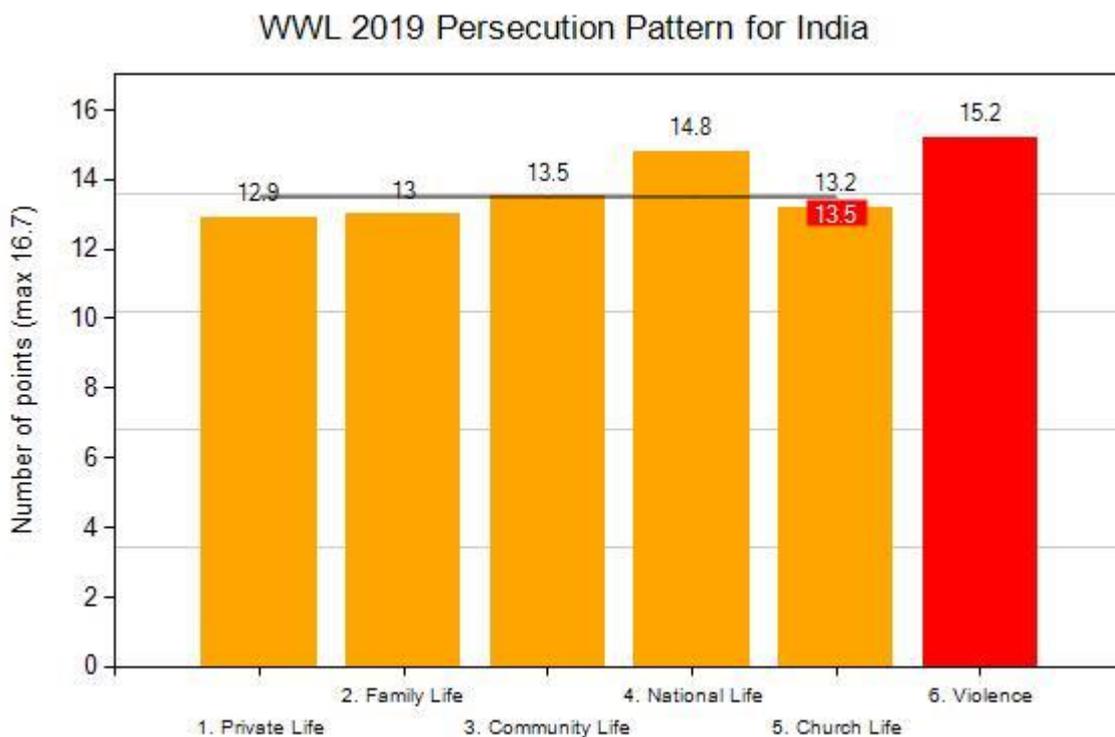
Historical Christian communities: These communities (e.g. the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican-based churches) bear witness that Christians have been in India for many centuries, with the (Orthodox) Kerala Mar Thoma Church established in the third century AD. These churches are not growing very fast because they are hardly active in outreach. Still, even this group of Christians is sometimes attacked by radical Hindus who vandalize churches, Jesus statues, grottos and crucifixes.

Converts to Christianity: Christian converts from a Hindu background bear the brunt of the persecution in India. These believers face harassment on an almost daily basis and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism. They are often physically assaulted, hospitalized and sometimes even killed. They live mostly in the countryside, 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 persecution 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 and face regular attack.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The Persecution pattern for WWL 2019 shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.5), rising from 13.2 in WWL 2018. Persecution by Hindu radicals has further increased, and this is reflected by (slightly) higher scores in all five *spheres of life*.
- 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 - for more details see below in the paragraph on *National life*.
- The score for violence is extreme, rising from 14.4 in WWL 2018 to 15.2 in WWL 2019. The reason for this rise is that more Christians were killed in India than last year.

Private sphere:

Conversion is not only socially opposed but also by law. Currently, anti-conversion laws are in force in seven states: Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Uttarakhand. When believers of any Christian group are suspected of outreach activities, their homes are often raided by both non-state actors and police if they receive a complaint. Materials found are destroyed or confiscated. Identifying oneself as a Christian can be risky and vicious threats through social media are commonplace. In the countryside, open signs of following a faith different to Hinduism (or Islam), will stimulate aggression as it will automatically be linked to evangelism or conversion. Private meetings for worship activities are not safe. Throughout the country local intelligence monitors all Christian activity. There has also been evidence that digital surveillance has been carried out on Christian leaders by Hindu radicals. Though the pressure on Christians is most evident in rural and semi-urban areas, instances of the same have also been reported in cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

Family sphere:

Not only children of Christians with a Hindu background, but also converts themselves were registered as Hindus during the 2011 census. It is quite difficult for converts and members of Protestant churches to hold a Christian wedding in their localities if radical Hindu groups are active there. Baptisms have been repeatedly hindered in villages, small towns and occasionally even in cities, especially at mass evangelistic and healing conventions. There have been cases reported from northern and central India of funerals of Christian converts being targeted by radical Hindus. In some cases they have forced family members to cremate the person according to Hindu rites. Christians cannot adopt children as per law. Christian children have been subjected to Yoga and *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Worship) at most major schools; attendance is compulsory. There have been instances in which Christians with a Hindu background have been attacked by their own parents and it has been alleged that some have even been killed by their parents. These incidents are never reported in mainstream media.

Community sphere:

Threats and obstructions for faith-related reasons have increased in intensity through the various radical Hindu hate campaigns and re-conversion movements across the country; this has become part of everyday life for all types of Christians. Christians who are part of a Hindu community cannot escape from certain obligations or standard ritual practices. Pressure to renounce the Christian faith comes from all sides and is done very systematically; Hindu fundamentalists threaten believers with physical harm and Hindu priests try to indoctrinate Christians by broadcasting loud chanting and worship in the community. Social discrimination (sometimes organized) is very common against Christian employees

both in government and private sectors, e.g. promotions are denied for frivolous reasons. The corruption in the system makes it worse.

National sphere:

A debate is in progress about implementing anti-conversion legislation at national level. Registering conversion to the Christian faith is hindered most in tribal areas. Christians are often discriminated against when dealing with the authorities. There are some Christians employed by local authorities, but if their boss is a Hindu nationalist, they may miss out on possible promotion. And those converting to Christianity may well lose their jobs. The media is dominated by over 90% Hindu high caste people and has always been biased against Christians. For Hindu political-religious groups, targeting independent pastors and church activists under the infamous "blasphemy" laws is the norm. Few have been punished for crimes against the Christian community – impunity has become the norm. The pressure on Christians is always there - both in urban and rural areas. The severity of violence, however, depends upon whether a Christian is actively speaking about his/her faith. Anyone talking about the Christian faith to non-Christians will always be monitored and targeted.

Church sphere:

Hindu groups monitor and disrupt churches regularly. The construction of new churches is often met with strong opposition in rural and even urban areas. Another issue is that many older church buildings cannot be renovated because of corruption and administrative red-tape. Activities outside church premises are almost always understood to be efforts aiming at outreach and conversion. When Christians are attacked, the perpetrators often focus on the leaders and pastors and beat them severely to make an example of them. The distribution of tracts and Bibles is hindered by local Hindu radicals in rural areas, and sometimes even in cities, as this is directly connected to outreach and conversion. India has not issued missionary visas since the late 1960s. Not only foreign Christian missionaries are not allowed in the country, but there are also ever increasing difficulties for foreign NGO workers and journalists to obtain visas. Acts of vandalism, desecration and the destruction of Christian symbols happen quite often, mainly in rural and semi-urban areas. Pastors and missionaries visiting churches have been routinely questioned by the police (together with hosts and participants).

Violence:

Persecution in India is extremely violent. The number of reported incidents is very high, but it should be noted that this is just the tip of the iceberg – many incidents are not reported in the media or recorded by researchers. In the WWL 2019 reporting period, at least 10 Christians were killed for their faith and at least 98 (house) churches were attacked and damaged. About 200 Christians were detained in India, while 7 Christians from Kandhamal are sentenced to life imprisonment. According to information from church partners, about 12,512 Christians were physically attacked. At least 26 houses or properties of Christians were attacked and damaged. At least 1,932 Christians were forced to flee their homes. In all cases the actual numbers will be much higher.

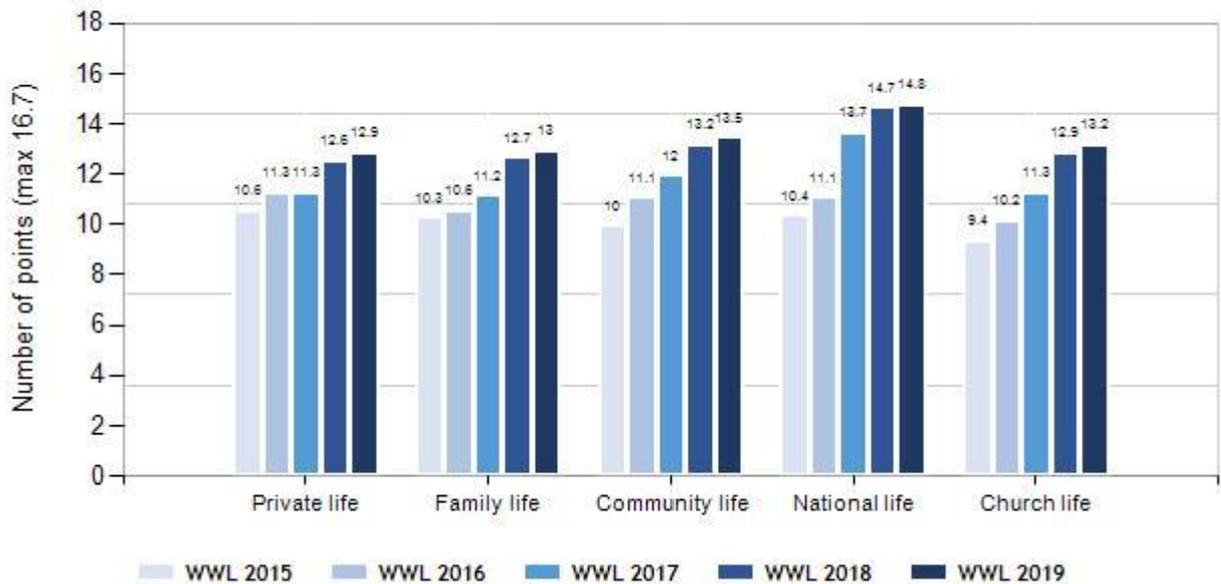
For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

The three graphics below illustrate how the situation for Christians in India has deteriorated markedly since WWL 2015, which was the reporting period in which Narendra Modi became prime minister in May 2014. The rise in the level of violence has been widely reported in international media - the number of violent incidents against Christians has more or less exploded. But the graphics indicate that

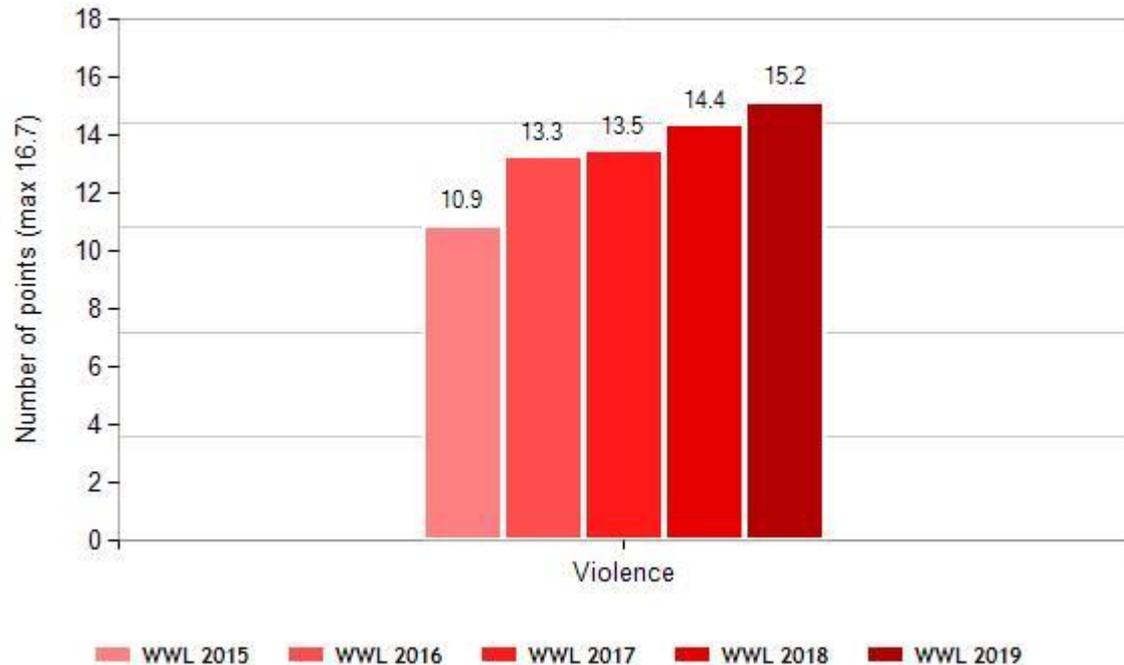
the increasingly difficult position of Christians in India is not limited to just that. In all *spheres of life*, the score for pressure has gone up - there are no exceptions. On the one hand this is caused by the increasing pressure on Christians resulting from the higher number of incidents, but on the other hand this is also the effect of more and more parts of India coming under the rule of the Hindu radical BJP party. The oppression of Christians goes much deeper than simply the suffering caused by violent incidents. Christians have experienced and are still experiencing growing restrictions in their private lives, pressure from family, friends and the community, but also at the national level and in Church life.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for India (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: India	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	13.5
2018	13.2
2017	11.9
2016	10.9
2015	10.1

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for India (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

The forms of persecution women and girls are particularly subject to are molestation, rape, physical and verbal abuse; attempted murder; being forced to participate in Hindu rituals; isolation for faith and expulsion from home/village. India is a religiously diverse and democratic society with a constitution that in theory 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 are ancient traditions which are by nature patriarchal and exploitative of the weaker class of society. Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, has announced the launch of “bahu lao-beti bachao” campaign. Under it, they “protect Hindu boys who marry Muslim or Christian girls” and create awareness among Hindu families “to protect their girls from falling in love or getting married to Muslim or Christian boys”. The females of the lower strata have always been exploited by the high caste Hindu who mostly hold the RSS’s ideology today. Many women from this lower caste community have turned to Christianity; this makes them a double target for hate - for being Dalit and now Christian.

Male:

The forms of persecution Christian men and boys are particularly subject to are brutal beatings amounting to attempted murder; legal charges; arrest on charges; social discrimination. They are subjected to various forms of persecution such as: expulsion from home; social boycotts; being fined for conversion; denied drinking water; deprived of government benefits; false charges of forcing people to convert to Christianity; loss of assets.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Hindu radicals have called both Islam and Christianity foreign religions which should eventually be thrown out of the country. Therefore, Muslims experience similar treatment as Christians do at the hands of Hindu extremists. Buddhists and Sikhs are much better accepted by Hindu radicals, as these religions originate from the territory of India.

Examples of persecution of other religious groups:

- Three Muslim clerics were assaulted by Hindus on a moving train on 22 November 2017, when they were returning from Delhi to their village in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat. (Source: [NDTV](#)).
- On 25 March 2018, clashes between supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party and those of an opposition party in Assam snowballed into Hindu-Muslim rioting, with three people killed and dozens injured over two days of violence. (Source: [Reuters](#)).
- On 18 June 2018, a 45-year-old Muslim cattle trader was beaten to death by a mob of Hindu fanatics in Bajera Khurd village in Uttar Pradesh. Self-appointed cow vigilantes who roam Indian villages to protect Hindus' holy cows attacked the Muslim after rumors spread that he was smuggling beef in his vehicle. A month later, on 21 July 2018, a mob beat a 28-year-old Muslim man to death claiming he was smuggling cows for slaughter. (Source: [AFP](#))

Future outlook

The political outlook: Since May 2014 Hindu radicals have taken over politics in India and have steadily expanded the areas under their control. In May 2019 there will be new elections in India. Due to his immense popularity, it may be expected that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will win these.

The outlook for Christians - viewed through the lens of Religious nationalism: Hindu radicals are constantly stepping up their violence against Muslims and Christians. In the past large-scale pogroms cost many Muslims and Christians their lives, and militant Hindus will not shy away from planning more such attacks. So far, Hindu radicals have been able to carry out their atrocities with impunity, and if Modi will win the May 2019 elections, it may be expected that the Hindus will feel encouraged to even step up their violence.

Conclusion: With the upcoming elections, it is to be expected that religious nationalism will increase and that Christians and Muslims will be targeted even more than now.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution of other religious minorities: NDTV
<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/3-muslim-clerics-attacked-on-moving-train-in-uttar-pradesh-baghpat-1779037>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Reuters
<https://www.yahoo.com/news/trouble-hindu-festival-india-triggers-clashes-muslims-three-102649837.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: AFP
<http://india.ucanews.com/news/indian-muslims-fear-for-lives-as-lynchings-continue/37866/daily>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

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