



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

COUNTRY BRIEF: INDIA

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USCIRF's Mission

To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.

Systematic Violations and Deteriorating Religious Freedom

Overview

Religious freedom conditions in India remain on a downward trajectory in 2026. The Indian government has taken measures to implement discriminatory legislation directly impacting religious minority communities. Violent attacks against Christians, Dalits and Muslims also continue with little consequence or accountability. In its [2026 Annual Report](#), USCIRF recommended that the U.S. Department of State designate India as a Country of Particular Concern, or CPC. In May, USCIRF held a hearing entitled "[Deteriorating Religious Freedom Conditions in India](#)."

This report examines the systematic, ongoing, and increasingly egregious violations of religious freedom across India, including efforts to crack down on faith-based organizations and continued acts of transnational repression targeting religious minorities abroad.

Background

The majority of India's population is Hindu (78.9 percent), with minority Muslim (14.2 percent), Christian (2.3 percent), and Sikh (1.7 percent) communities. Smaller numbers of Parsis, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Jews also reside in India. While India's constitution provides protections for religious minorities, the implementation of national and state-level laws allows for severe restrictions on religious freedom across the country. Within Indian politics, the ruling BJP remains the most influential party. The BJP was established in 1980 as the political wing of the RSS, a Hindu nationalist organization. The RSS serves as the umbrella organization for dozens of affiliate groups, known as the "Sangh Parivar." The RSS's primary mission is to build a "Hindu Rastra," or Hindu state. While the RSS does not field political candidates, it does provide volunteers to campaign for the BJP, including current Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Since 2014, Prime Minister Modi's BJP has enforced policies that closely align with Hindutva ideology, or Hindu nationalism, discriminating and disenfranchising members of India's religious minority communities. This includes the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), the 1967 Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the 2019 Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Several states also maintain and enforce anti-conversion and cow slaughter laws, which impose harsh fines and lengthy prison sentences, often targeting religious minority communities.



Legal Framework

Anti-Conversion Laws

As of June 2026, 13 out of 28 Indian states have anti-conversion laws criminalizing religious conversion. These states include: Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. Many of these laws use vague language and include provisions for fines or imprisonment for those deemed to have engaged or participated in a religious conversion.

Maharashtra is the most recent state to pass an anti-conversion bill. In March, the state government passed the Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam 2026 (Religious Freedom Act 2026), which criminalizes religious conversions and mandates a minimum sentence of seven years' imprisonment. For individuals wishing to convert, the law requires them to obtain prior approval from the local government 60 days in advance. Similar to other states, this law further allows family members of the individual seeking religious conversion to object and file a complaint with the police. Such police reports are often used as intimidation tactics to target religious minority communities. In some cases, once a complaint is filed, those accused of religious conversions are typically detained and subsequently released from police custody within a few days. In other instances, the accused languish in pre-trial detention.

In April, the governor of Chhattisgarh passed an amendment, known as the Chhattisgarh Religious Freedom Bill 2026, replacing a 1968 anti-conversion

law. Under the new law, religious conversion is a recognized, non-bailable offence, including conversions made through social media. Conversions to Hinduism are exempt from punishment. In several instances, authorities arrested religious leaders in response to accusations of forced conversions. In May, for example, in Uttar Pradesh, police arrested two pastors, Pastor Vivek Kumar and Pastor Mohit Chaudhary, after receiving a complaint that they lured people from different cities to a Christian prayer meeting in Lucknow. The following month, the Uttar Pradesh government directed all state universities and colleges across the state to set up "anti-radicalization units" to curb "forced religious conversions" on campuses.

Cow Slaughtering Law

Beyond anti-conversion laws, several state governments increased efforts to impose bans on the slaughtering of cows, as they are considered holy in Hinduism. Under Article 48 of the Indian constitution, states are directed to "take steps ... prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves." As of 2026, 20 of 28 states criminalized cow slaughter. These bans impact Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and other communities, whose religious beliefs do not prohibit eating beef. In May 2026, during Eid ul-Adha, several state governments introduced legislation banning the slaughter and consumption of beef. For example, the Madras High Court ordered the state of Tamil Nadu to impose a ban on cow slaughter, ensuring that "no cow or calf is slaughtered on the eve of Eid, or any other day." The judges stated in their order that cow slaughter on Eid is "neither essential to nor necessarily required as part of the religious ceremony."

Similarly, in May, following the BJP's electoral victory in West Bengal, the Calcutta High Court upheld a ban on cow slaughter, insisting that it was not required for Eid celebrations. While the state has maintained a cow slaughter law, the West Bengal Animal Slaughter Control Act of 1950, the enforcement of this law only recently increased in 2026. In June a Muslim judge in Madhya Pradesh, Tabassum Khan, faced online harassment and death threats in response to her judgement convicting vigilantes for the lynching of a man accused of transporting cattle in 2022.

Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) on Religious Minorities

During the first half of 2026, the Indian government has continued to target religious minorities in matters related to citizenship, including voting rights. Through its implementation of the CAA nationally, the NRC in Assam, and a revision of voter lists, the Indian government has disenfranchised millions and forcibly deported thousands of Muslim citizens throughout 2026.

During the BJP's election campaign in the Muslim-majority state of West Bengal in March, India's election commission conducted a controversial revision of voter lists known as Special Intensive Revision (SIR) that dropped over nine million names from the 2026 voter rolls, disenfranchising millions of Muslims and other religious minorities from participating in elections. The BJP government justified this process as a way to prevent "infiltrators"—a derogatory term used predominantly to refer to Muslims—from voting in elections and to "purify" the electoral roll.

Following the BJP victory in West Bengal in May, the new state government began a crackdown to deport Muslim migrants to Bangladesh and announced the construction of "holding centers" to detain them. During these operations, hundreds of Bengali-speaking Muslim Indian citizens were also unlawfully expelled from the country. According to Bangladeshi border patrol, in the month of June, India's Border Security Force (BSF) attempted to push more than 200 people across the border, accusing them of being "Bangladeshi infiltrators." In some cases, women and children have been stranded at the India-Bangladesh border, preventing them from entering Bangladesh or from returning to India.

Impunity—or exemption from punishment, harm, or loss, as documented in USCIRF's 2026 Annual Report—is what has made the patterns of harm described above possible and persistent. Examples of impunity include

but are not limited to custodial deaths (e.g., 170 in 2025-2026) without disciplinary action; mob violence against Muslims and Christians without prosecution of perpetrators; demolition of religious sites before legal adjudication; and the enforcement of anti-conversion and cow slaughter laws by Hindu nationalist mobs without consequence. Structural accountability failures lead to further, unchecked oppression of religious minorities. The UN Special Procedures 2025 letter notes that impunity for religious freedom violations (among other violations) has generated cycles of repression in India.

Targeted Communities

Religious Minorities

During the first half of 2026, violent Hindu nationalist mobs conducted multiple attacks against religious minority communities, including Christians and Muslims. These mobs, often composed of dozens or, at times, hundreds of individuals, operate with impunity and under the guise of enforcement cow slaughter and anti-conversion laws. In the eastern state of Chhattisgarh, there were several reported instances of Hindu nationalist mobs attacking Christian communities and churches. In January, for example, a Hindu nationalist mob in Odisha attacked a pastor, Bipin Bihari Naik, accusing him of conducting religious conversions. The mob stormed Naik's home during a prayer meeting, beat him with sticks, and forced him to eat cow dung and drink sewer water. In March, 200 Hindu nationalists surrounded the home of a Christian family in Erramangi village in Chhattisgarh in an attempt to force them to "reconvert" to Hinduism. When the family refused, the mob stormed the home and tore it down. In May, a Hindu nationalist mob attacked a predominantly Christian village with sticks, bows and arrows, and machetes, injuring at least 25 worshipers, including a pastor's pregnant wife.

In May, alongside continued religious tensions in Manipur State, three Baptist pastors were killed in an ambush. The three pastors were returning home from an interchurch peace conference entitled, "focused on easing tensions between tribal Christian communities," in Manipur.

Dalits also faced harassment and ostracization. In April, for example, a Dalit couple was denied entry into a Hanuman Temple in Madhya Pradesh. While they were eventually allowed entry, the community later declared a social boycott of the Dalit family.

In addition to attacks against individuals, authorities demolished dozens of religious sites across India during the first half of 2026. In Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, local governments characterized at least 14 mosques and dargahs as “illegal structures” and facilitated their demolition. Additional Muslim religious structures were reportedly demolished in Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, and Maharashtra.

Crackdown on Civil Society

At the federal level, the Indian government took further steps to impede the operations of faith based organizations and civil society. The FCRA dictates how Indian organizations receive or use foreign funding. Since its introduction in 2010, the government has used the FCRA to target organizations providing services to religious minority communities, including churches, orphanages, and schools. Since 2010, approximately 22,000 organizations have had their FCRA licenses revoked, including faith-based organizations like World Vision, Compassion International, Church Auxiliary for Social Action, and the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

In March 2026, India’s Parliament introduced an amendment to the FCRA, which would have severe consequences on faith-based organizations’ ability to operate. The proposed 2026 amendment introduces Section 14B, which allows for the creation of a “designated authority” that would have the power to take over and manage organizations’ assets if their registrations are revoked, lapse, or fail to renew. The enforcement of this amendment risks the seizure of funds as well as the additional closure of faith-based organizations that cannot operate without foreign donations. The bill remains pending. In June, however, the Union Home Ministry adopted a separate set of rules, entitled the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Rules, further revising the FCRA amendment to ban foreign funding from being used for proselytization. The ministry issued an official gazette notice for the new rules, making it effective into law.

The government also routinely utilizes internet shutdowns as a tool to silence free speech, including about persecution as documented above (e.g., social media posts about mob violence or demolitions; calls for help during anti-minority riots). Access Now has named India the world’s largest offender regarding internet blackouts for six consecutive years. The 2026 Draft Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Second Amendment Rules

would substantially increase the ability to suppress free speech, including freedom of religion or belief. India’s press freedom ranking is 157 of 180 countries evaluated by Reporters Without Borders. India’s Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) ban of the release of the film *Satluj* demonstrates India’s religion-based censorship. The release of this biopic of Jaswant Singh Khalra, who in the 1990s documented the enforced disappearances, extrajudicial execution, and illegal cremations of thousands of Sikhs in Punjab by the government using their own records, has been banned by the CBFC for years. Released by the filmmakers in July of 2026 on a digital streaming platform, it was removed within 48 hours due to India’s “security concerns.”

Transnational Repression

Transnational repression as defined by the FBI is when foreign governments reach beyond their borders to intimidate, silence, coerce, harass, or harm members of their diaspora and exile communities in the United States. This includes harassment, intimidation, threats to family members in the country of origin, abusive legal practices (e.g., withholding passports and visas), attempted murder, and other acts that threaten U.S. sovereignty, violate U.S. law, and infringe on individuals’ rights and freedoms. The FBI has determined that the threat of transnational repression abroad continues, particularly for the Sikh diaspora. In February of 2026, Canadian authorities presented Sikh activist Moninder Singh with a “duty to warn” letter, citing a credible threat to his life. Singh has reportedly received three such warnings from authorities. Singh was an associate of Canadian citizen *Hardeep Singh Nijjar*, for whose 2023 assassination Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that there was a credible allegation of Indian involvement. The Department of Justice (DOJ) *indicted* Indian national Nikhil Gupta in a linked plot to assassinate a Sikh American citizen in New York, and in February of 2026, Gupta pled guilty in the Court of the Southern District of New York to working at the direction of an Indian Government employee to arrange the assassination. The assassination plot was coordinated with a former official of India’s Foreign Intelligence Agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), Vikash Yadav, and in its 2026 Annual Report, USCIRF recommended targeted sanctions against RAW. On July 7, 2026, the DOJ announced the coordinated *arrests of 24* individuals across multiple countries who were linked to India’s transnational repression of Sikhs. USCIRF has previously recommended that U.S. Congress should reintroduce and pass the Transnational Repression Reporting Act of 2024.



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FoRB Victims

Authorities continue to detain and imprison individuals for exercising their freedom of religion or belief, including religious leaders, members of religious communities, and advocates for religious freedom. In many cases, individuals face arrest, prolonged detention, imprisonment, or other forms of state persecution for peacefully practicing their religion, expressing their beliefs, or advocating for the rights of others. Many of these individuals are documented in USCIRF's Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#). This includes, for example, Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Jagtar Singh Johal, and Ali Khan Mahmudabad who were imprisoned under the controversial antiterrorism laws that India uses to suppress religious minorities.

Conclusion

Systematic and ongoing persecution of multiple minority groups including Christians, Dalits, Muslims, and Sikhs—including denial of citizenship and voting rights, enforcement of harsh anti-conversion and cow slaughter laws, restrictions on the activities of NGOs, censorship, and transnational repression—continue to impede religious freedom in India and diaspora communities. Hindu nationalist mob activity is rampant, and occurs with impunity, with little or no accountability for violent attacks against religious minority communities.

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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan legislative branch agency established by the U.S. Congress to monitor, analyze, and report on religious freedom abroad. USCIRF makes foreign policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief.