

USCIRF–RECOMMENDED FOR COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN (CPC)

KEY FINDINGS

In 2023, religious freedom conditions in India continued to deteriorate. The government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), reinforced discriminatory nationalist policies, perpetuated hateful rhetoric, and failed to address communal violence disproportionately affecting Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, Jews, and Adivasis (indigenous peoples). Continued enforcement of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and anti-conversion and cow slaughter laws resulted in the arbitrary detention, monitoring, and targeting of religious minorities and those advocating on their behalf.

Both news media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reporting on religious minorities were subjected to strict monitoring under FCRA regulations. In February 2023, India's Ministry of Home Affairs suspended the FCRA license of the Centre for Policy Research, an NGO dedicated to reporting on social issues and state capacity, including discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities. Similarly, authorities raided the offices and homes of NewsClick journalists, including Teesta Setalvad for her reporting on anti-Muslim violence during the 2002 Gujarat riots.

In 2023, NGOs reported 687 incidents of violence against Christians, who continued to be detained under various state-level anti-conversion laws. In January, Hindu mobs attacked Christians in Chhattisgarh in eastern India, destroying and vandalizing churches and attempting to "reconvert" individuals to Hinduism. An estimated 30 people were beaten for refusing to renounce their faith. The same month, two Christians were detained without bail, accused of forcibly converting individuals of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes.

In June 2023, more than 500 churches and two synagogues were destroyed and over 70,000 people displaced during clashes in Manipur State. Home Minister Amit Shah received widespread criticism, including by United Nations (UN) experts, for his delayed response to the violence. Similarly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi

faced a vote of no confidence for his administration's lack of response to the ongoing conflict. In August, India's Supreme Court called for an investigation of the violence, arguing that police had "lost control over the situation."

In December, the Indian Supreme Court upheld the government's 2019 revocation of Article 370, dissolving special status and autonomy to the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir. Indian authorities continued to detain and harass Kashmiri journalists, religious leaders, and human rights defenders. Journalist Irfan Mehraj was arrested in March for his reporting on marginalized religious minorities.

Throughout the year, violence against Muslims and their places of worship continued. Several mosques were destroyed under police presence and vigilantes attacked Muslims under the guise of protecting cows from slaughter, deemed illegal in 18 states. In Haryana's predominantly Muslim Nuh district, communal violence erupted following a Hindu procession in July, where participants carrying swords chanted anti-Muslim slogans. A Muslim tomb and mosque were torched, resulting in the death of at least seven individuals, including Imam Mohammad Hafiz. The violence was in part initiated by "Monu Manesar," a well-known cow vigilante accused of murdering two Muslim men in January for allegedly transporting cattle. Manesar, who has garnered support from the BJP, publicly called for individuals to participate in the Hindu procession. The same day, an Indian railway guard killed three Muslim men inside a train to Mumbai. The perpetrator reportedly asked the victims their names, which indicated their religious identity, before killing them.

Indian authorities also increasingly engaged in acts of transnational repression targeting religious minorities abroad. In September, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged Indian authorities' involvement in the killing of Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, which was followed by a plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States in November.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Designate India as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals' assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities, citing specific religious freedom violations;
- Incorporate religious freedom priorities into bilateral and multilateral forums and agreements, such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral;
- Encourage the U.S. Embassy and consulates to strengthen engagement with religious communities, local officials, and law enforcement and to facilitate meetings with prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders; and
- Encourage review by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to ensure that international recommendations to prevent terrorist financing are not misused by Indian authorities to detain religious minorities and those advocating on their behalf.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Raise religious freedom and issues affecting religious minorities in India through hearings, briefings, letters, delegations, and other activities; and
- Condition financial assistance and arms sales to India on improved religious freedom conditions and include measures for additional review and reporting.

Background

India is the world's most populated country, with an estimated 1.4 billion people. The majority of its [population](#) is Hindu (79.8 percent) with minority Muslim (14.2 percent), Christian (2.3 percent), and Sikh (1.7 percent) communities. Smaller religious groups include Buddhists, Jains, Baha'is, Zoroastrians (Parsis), and an [estimated](#) 6,000 Jews. India's constitution establishes a secular and democratic state, with Article 25 granting freedom of conscience to all. Section 295 of India's Penal Code criminalizes the destruction or damage of houses of worship. In 2023, the Indian government introduced three bills to [reform](#) the country's criminal code, which could target religious minorities by expanding police powers for "preventative action" and punishments for acts of terrorism.

Violence against Religious Minorities in Manipur

In May, clashes between tribal Kuki and Meitei communities erupted in India's northeastern state of Manipur. Violence began after Manipur's High Court requested that the state government consider providing [Scheduled Tribe](#) status to the majority Hindu Meitei people, granting them expanded access to certain benefits. Manipur's minority Christian Kuki community protested that the move would weaken their political and economic status.

Months of ongoing violence resulted in the destruction of thousands of homes, targeted attacks on places of worship, and the displacement of over 70,000 individuals. Approximately 400 churches belonging to both Meiteis and Kukis were destroyed, and many others looted, illustrating a clear religious dimension to an ethnic conflict. Reports [indicated](#) that two synagogues belonging to the Bnei Menashe community were damaged. Acts of sexual violence, including gang rape [targeting](#) Kuki women by Meitei men, were widely reported and articulated in an August [letter](#) by UN special rapporteurs. UN experts further expressed concern about the role of hate speech and disinformation in inciting violence against the Kuki population. Eyewitness [accounts](#) indicate that Hindu nationalist officials pressured Meitei Christian leaders to [renounce](#) their faith and observe the indigenous Meitei religion, Sanamahism.

Citizens [accused](#) the central government and Manipur police of failing to protect places of worship or dispel communal violence. Prior to the outbreak of violence in May, authorities [destroyed](#) three churches in Imphal, claiming they were illegal. Following clashes in May, Union Home Minister Amit Shah [stated](#) that law enforcement had executed 40 members of the Kuki community deemed as terrorists—charges that Kukis [dispute](#).

Anti-Conversion Laws

While India's constitution protects the right to publicly share one's faith, 13 out of India's 28 states continued to enforce [anti-conversion](#)

[laws](#) in 2023. Such laws make it difficult for people to convert from Hinduism to another religion and use broad language that leads to the targeting of religious minorities. In January, the state of Himachal Pradesh enacted an [amendment](#) to its Freedom of Religion Act, redefining "mass conversion" as involving two or more people and barring members of Scheduled Tribes and Schedule Castes from obtaining certain benefits if they choose to convert from Hinduism. Throughout 2023, a number of religious minorities were detained under state-level anti-conversion laws. In Chhattisgarh, where a third of the population [identifies](#) as Adivasi and less than two percent Christian, 13 pastors were [arrested](#) for allegedly forcing Adivasis to convert to Christianity. In Uttar Pradesh, 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.

Anti-conversion laws increasingly included provisions designed to prevent interfaith marriages and so-called "love jihad." "Love jihad" is a derogatory term used to describe the alleged occurrence of Muslim men marrying Hindu women for the purpose of conversion. In June, the state government of Maharashtra [created](#) a 13-member panel to "investigate" interfaith marriages. Additionally, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a right-wing Hindu nationalist group, [launched](#) a national 11-day "awareness campaign" claiming that interfaith marriage was a form of forced religious conversion.

Key U.S. Policy

The United States and India continued to maintain strong bilateral ties in 2023. In March, the U.S. Senate [confirmed](#) Eric Garcetti as the U.S. Ambassador to India, filling the post after 20 months of vacancy. In fiscal year 2023, the U.S. government [obligated](#) \$130 million for programs in India.

In June, President Joseph R. Biden [hosted](#) Prime Minister Modi for a state visit, where he [addressed](#) a joint session of Congress for the second time during his tenure. In a joint press conference, Prime Minister Modi failed to answer a question about his government's treatment of religious minorities. In September, President Biden traveled to India for the G20 summit, during which he reportedly raised issues of human rights in private meetings with Prime Minister Modi.

In November, U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin visited India for diplomatic dialogue on defense cooperation. The same month, the U.S. Department of Justice released an [indictment](#) against an Indian government employee for his alleged involvement in the attempted assassination of a Sikh activist on U.S. soil. U.S. officials announced their expectations of the Indian government to conduct a full investigation into the accusations. In a December hearing, members of the U.S. Congress [reiterated](#) concern about India's involvement in acts of transnational repression. Also in December, the U.S. Department of State failed to [designate](#) India as a CPC despite major [religious freedom concerns](#).

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Issue Update:** [India's State-Level Anti-Conversion Laws](#)
- **Hearing:** [Advancing Religious Freedom within the U.S.- India Bilateral Relationship](#)
- **Podcast:** [Violence against Tribal Christians in Manipur, India](#)
- **Press Release:** [USCIRF Deeply Concerned by India's Transnational Repression against Religious Minorities](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief Victims List:** [India](#)