

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in India continued to deteriorate as the government introduced and enforced new legislation targeting religious minority communities and their houses of worship. Several states undertook efforts to introduce or strengthen anti-conversion laws to include harsher prison sentences. Indian authorities also facilitated widespread detention and illegal expulsion of citizens and religious refugees and tolerated vigilante attacks against religious minority communities.

Throughout the year, Hindu nationalist mobs across several states harassed, incited, and instigated violence against Muslims and Christians with impunity. In March, violence erupted in Maharashtra after a hardline Hindu nationalist group, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), called for the removal of the tomb of Aurangzeb, a 17th-century Mughal ruler. Subsequent riots injured dozens of people and resulted in a curfew, fueled by rumors from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) officials that Qur’ans were desecrated in VHP-led protests. In June, a Hindu nationalist mob attacked 20 Christian families in Odisha after they refused to convert to Hinduism. The attacks, which did not prompt police intervention, left eight people injured and hospitalized.

In April, three gunmen attacked a group of predominantly Hindu tourists in the Muslim-majority territory of Kashmir, killing 26 people. The perpetrators reportedly asked the victims to recite the Kalma, an Islamic verse, and killed those who were unable to do so. The attack sparked a five-day conflict between India and Pakistan and intensified anti-Muslim sentiment in India, including targeted attacks. Muslims were reportedly killed in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh in alleged hate crimes following the attack. In Uttar Pradesh, self-professed members of a Hindu nationalist group reportedly shot and killed a Muslim restaurant worker, vowing to avenge those killed in the Kashmir attack. The Indian government also seized the

aftermath of the attack to justify deportations of religious minorities it considers “illegal” migrants.

In May, Indian authorities detained 40 Rohingya refugees, including 15 Christians, all of whom were transported into international waters near the coast of Burma and forced to swim to the Burmese shore with nothing more than life vests. In July, Indian authorities expelled hundreds of Bengali-speaking Muslims from Assam to Bangladesh despite being Indian citizens. Officials from the ruling BJP accused those expelled of being Muslim “infiltrators” from Bangladesh, threatening India’s national identity. To further facilitate the crackdown in alleged “illegal migration,” the government passed a new set of rules and orders for the Foreigners Act in September. The order expands the authority of Foreigner Tribunals to issue arrest warrants and send those suspected of being “foreigners” to holding centers without due process.

Throughout the year, the government also continued to target houses of worship to bring them under state control. In May, India’s Parliament passed the Waqf Bill, which adds non-Muslims to the boards that manage Waqf land endowments that are traditionally staffed by Muslims. These endowments include religious sites, such as mosques, seminaries, and graveyards. In response to the bill, deadly protests erupted in the state of West Bengal, leaving three people dead. In September, the Supreme Court suspended key provisions of the bill, including one in which the government can decide whether a disputed property is Waqf or not. The court further limited the number of non-Muslim members of the federal board to four. The same month, Uttarakhand’s legislative assembly passed the State Authority for Minority Education (USAME) Act, which dissolves the Madrasa Board and brings madrasas and other educational institutions for Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians under state control.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Designate India as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Press India to allow US government entities such as USCIRF and the U.S. Department of State to conduct in-country assessments of religious freedom conditions;
- Impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities, such as India’s Research and Analysis Wing and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), for their responsibility and tolerance of severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ or entities’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States;
- Link future U.S. security assistance and bilateral trade policies with India to improvements in religious freedom; and
- Enforce Section 6 of the [Arms Export Control Act](#) to halt arms sales to India based on continued acts of intimidation and harassment against U.S. citizens and religious minorities.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Reintroduce and pass the [Transnational Repression Reporting Act of 2024](#) to require the annual reporting of acts of transnational repression by the Indian government targeting religious minorities in the United States.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- Issue Update: [Systematic Religious Persecution in India](#)
- Spotlight Podcast: [The State of Religious Freedom in India](#)
- Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2

Background

India is the world's most populous democracy, with an estimated population of 1.4 billion. The majority of the 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. Article 25 of India's constitution guarantees freedom of conscience for all citizens, including the right to practice and profess their religion. Since 2014, however, the ruling BJP has implemented strict legislation and policies targeting religious minority communities.

Enforcement of Laws Restricting Religious Freedom

The Indian government enforces numerous discriminatory laws targeting religious minorities, including the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), the 1967 Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the 2019 Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the 2025 Waqf Bill, and the 2025 Immigration and Foreigners Bill. Article 295A of the Penal Code functions as a blasphemy law by criminalizing actions deemed to "outrage religious feelings."

Additionally, 12 out of 28 states maintain anti-conversion laws. In 2025, several state governments strengthened or introduced new laws to include harsher penalties and broader definitions of "religious conversion." In March, Arunachal Pradesh began pushing for the implementation of a decades-dormant anti-conversion law. This was met with widespread protests by hundreds of thousands of Christians.

In August, Uttarakhand state passed an anti-conversion law that criminalizes digital speech about religion. The new law increases the jail term for "illegal conversions" from 10 to 14 years. Similarly, Rajasthan state adopted legislation to include life imprisonment as possible punishment for conducting religious conversions. The law requires individuals to give the government two months' notice if they plan to change their religion voluntarily. It also requires the "converter" to give a month's notice if they perform a religious conversion. Failure to do so may result in three years' jail time.

In July, Maharashtra state announced plans to introduce in December a tougher law to prevent religious conversions. Similarly, Chhattisgarh state announced in October that a proposed new anti-conversion law would target faith healing meetings. The same month, Assam state announced it would introduce legislation to curb so-called "love jihad," a derogatory term for conversions occurring in the context of interfaith marriages. Following the submission of several petitions against anti-conversion laws, the Supreme Court announced in September that it would give the nine states facing legal challenges four weeks to provide replies and motions justifying their anti-conversion laws, with hearings to follow. In November, the Supreme Court issued a notice to Rajasthan state, directing the government to respond to a constitutional challenge against its anti-conversion law. The same month, Indian officials reportedly denied a visa to American Christian evangelist, Reverend Franklin Graham.

Throughout 2025, violent mobs attacked Muslims under the guise of protecting state-level cow slaughter laws. In May, vigilantes violently attacked four men whom they accused of transporting beef in Uttar Pradesh. In June, police arrested 16 people in Assam for

allegedly "illegally" slaughtering cows during Eid-ul-Adha. While cow slaughter is not illegal in the state, the 2021 Assam Cattle Preservation Act prohibits cow slaughter and beef sales in areas that have a Hindu, Sikh, or Jain majority. Following the arrests, Assam's chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, declared that the government would tighten enforcement of the Act.

Imprisonment of Religious Minorities

In 2025, authorities detained individuals accused of conducting "forced conversions." In October, police arrested a U.S. citizen, James Watson, and two Indian nationals, Ganpati Sarpe and Manoj Govind Kolha, accused of converting Hindus to Christianity in Maharashtra. The men were charged with "hurting religious sentiment" and for violating the state's anti-black magic law, luring individuals to convert by promising "miracle cures" and prosperity.

In addition, the government continued to wield antiterrorism laws to imprison religious minorities and those advocating on their behalf. [Umar Khalid](#), [Sharjeel Imam](#), and several others involved in the 2020 CAA protests remained in prison for the fifth year without trials. Similarly, while a district court acquitted [Jagtar Singh Johal](#) in March of "conspiracy" charges and being a member of a "terrorist gang," he remains imprisoned in solitary confinement under eight additional charges. Johal, a British citizen, was arrested in 2017 for his religious freedom work.

In May, authorities arrested a Muslim university professor, [Ali Khan Mahmudabad](#), under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (India's Criminal Code) for his comments on social media about Kashmir and subsequent attacks against Muslims in India. The complaint, filed by a junior BJP member, accused Mahmudabad of "insulting religious beliefs." In September, police arrested dozens of individuals for displaying "I love Muhammad" posters across Uttar Pradesh. Local Hindu groups objected to the posters, resulting in widespread protests across several states. In Kashipur, police registered a case involving 401 Muslims.

Key U.S. Policy

The U.S. government continued diplomatic engagement with India. In February, President Donald J. Trump [hosted](#) Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an official state visit to Washington, DC. Religious freedom remained absent from public discussion.

In April, Vice President JD Vance conducted a state visit to India and met with Prime Minister Modi to discuss a trade deal. This visit coincided with the deadly attack in Kashmir, which India alleged was carried out by those from Pakistan. Following the attack, President Trump posted on social media affirming that the United States would continue offering its full support to India. Secretary of State Marco Rubio held separate conversations with Indian and Pakistani officials, urging them to "maintain peace." In May, President Trump offered to mediate with both India and Pakistan on a Kashmir "solution."

The same month, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held a [hearing](#) on transnational repression, which included testimony highlighting acts by the Indian government to target religious minorities abroad. In August, President Trump nominated Sergio Gor to be the U.S. ambassador to India; he also appointed Gor to be the U.S. special envoy for South and Central Asia.