



Image: Ismael Martínez Sánchez / ACN

INDIA

During the period under examination, attacks on Christians were reported in 24 of India's 29 states. According to one calculation, there were 440 anti-Christian incidents in 2017, 477 in 2018 and 117 in the first quarter of 2019.¹ Attacks include the killing of converts² and sexual violence, such as the gang-rape of five women working for a Christian NGO in Jharkhand.³ More than 100 churches closed in 2018, because of extremist attacks or intervention by authorities.⁴ According to one study, not only has communal violence remained high, but the failure of authorities to address attacks on religious minorities has engendered a climate of impunity.⁵ “[G]roups and organizations wishing to promote cultural and religious nationalism are becoming bolder,” said Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas of the Indian Catholic Bishops’ Conference.⁶ Census data showing the number of Hindus has fallen below 80 percent sparked concern among nationalists who believe forced conversions are changing society. During May 2018 elections in Karnataka, a fake letter from Archbishop Machado of Bangalore circulated, claiming the Catholic Church was planning to proselytize the Lingayat Hindu community.⁷ Nine of India’s 29 states have laws “restricting religious conversions.”⁸

1. Persecution Relief, Report 2017, p. 5; Persecution Relief, Report 2018, p. 22; Persecution Relief, 1st Quarter Report 2019, p. 4.
2. “Two Christians Killed in Separate States in India,” *Morning Star News*, February 26, 2019, <https://morningstarnews.org/2019/02/two-christians-killed-in-separate-states-in-india/> (This and all sites below for India country profile accessed June 10, 2019, except where stated).
3. Byarshadr Zargar, “5 female activists gang-raped at gunpoint, Indian police say,” *CBS*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/india-activists-gang-rape-gunpoint-sexual-attack-human-trafficking-jharkhand/> (accessed February 4, 2019).
4. Abbie Llewelyn, “Christianity Crackdown: Hindu extremists Attack Indian believers – 100 churches Shut Down,” *Daily Express*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1105848/india-news-Christian-persecution-hindu-shut-church-violence-christianity-crackdown>
5. Center for Study of Society and Secularism & Minority Rights Group International, *A Narrowing Space: Violence and discrimination against India’s religious minorities*, June 2017, p. 2.
6. “India,” *Religious Freedom in the World report 2018*, Aid to the Church in Need, https://religious-freedom-report.org/pdf_en/?pais=414
7. *Ibid.*
8. US Department of State, “India,” *International Religious Freedom Report 2018*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/india/> (accessed June 21, 2019).
9. “Violence against Christians Ratchets Up in Southern India,” *Morning Star News*, October 9, 2018, <https://morningstarnews.org/2018/10/violence-against-christians-ratchets-up-in-southern-india/>
10. “House Church in India’s Chhattisgarh State Attacked by Mob of Hindu Radicals,” *International Christian Concern*, February 23, 2019, <https://www.persecution.org/2019/02/23/house-church-indias-chhattisgarh-state-attacked-mob-hindu-radicals/> (accessed September 11, 2019).
11. “Officials Destroy Christian School, Hostel – and Founder’s Home – in Eastern India,” *Morning Star News*, June 6, 2019, <https://morningstarnews.org/2019/06/officials-destroy-christian-school-hostel-and-founders-home-in-eastern-india/> (accessed September 11, 2019).

SEPTEMBER 2018

An elderly Christian woman was beaten in Veppur village, Tamil Nadu, on the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi (September 13th). Four worshippers from a group carrying a statue of Ganesha stopped her, saying that, by walking on the road, she had made it impure and defiled the festival. They hurled stones at Christians who tried to rescue her – 10 suffered minor injuries. One resident said: “They tell us, ‘We belong to [Hindu extremist group] RSS, and you are Christians. We cannot both walk on the same road...’”⁹

FEBRUARY 2019

A 40-strong mob attacked Philadelphia Church, Karkeli village, near Chhattisgarh State’s capital, Raipur, on February 3rd. Worshippers were beaten with sticks – 15 required hospital treatment. Politicians were accused of inciting villagers to attack the church. According to reports, Hindu villagers cut Christians off from the village’s water supply, banned them from burying their dead, and refused to give them jobs after they declined to participate in Hindu practices. Police investigating the attack allegedly told Christians they would be driven out if they continued to preach.¹⁰

MAY 2019

Local officials sent 50 workers to demolish a Church-run school and hostel for tribal children near Lichapeta village, Odisha State. Headmaster Vijay Kumar Pusuru said: “When we protested peacefully, they beat us.” Problems started after a leader of the local Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) group alleged the school was evangelizing the children – a claim Pusuru denies. Demolition was ordered after authorities “lost” the papers relating to the school’s land allotment application. 100 of the school’s 250 pupils lived in the hostel, with 12 children left homeless by the hostel’s destruction taken into care.¹¹