



## NEPAL: Country Dossier

May 2018



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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# World Watch List 2018

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3	16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6	16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0	13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1	15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7	15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8	16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7	12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5	16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8	16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1	12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5	14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1	16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2	13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8	15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9	14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9	13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8	12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4	11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5	12.4	4.6	64		(not in WWL)		
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2	13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3	14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2	13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9	10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7	12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7	9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9	11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4	13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9	12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9	8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5	12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1	9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0	9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7	9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4	11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6	7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4	12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7	13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3	10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4	12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2	11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6	8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9	11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

## WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries<sup>1</sup>

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.4	13.9	0.4	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	11.7	9.5	10.0	8.1	11.6	2.8	54
53	Tanzania	10.1	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.0	3.9	53
54	Russian Federation	11.1	8.4	10.1	8.9	10.7	2.0	51
55	Morocco	10.4	11.5	7.6	8.8	12.0	0.6	51
56	Cuba	8.5	4.9	10.7	10.4	12.2	2.4	49
57	Uganda	10.9	8.7	9.5	8.7	4.8	3.9	46
58	Niger	9.9	9.7	9.0	7.0	7.1	2.6	45

<sup>1</sup> These countries reached a score of 41 points or more but did not receive enough points to be included in the WWL Top 50.

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## Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)<sup>1</sup> including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))<sup>2</sup>. Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)<sup>3</sup> and WWR staff.

NEPAL		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	64	25
WWL 2017	53	Not in Top 50
WWL 2016	53	Not in Top 50
Previously not in Top 50 since WWL 2007		

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

<sup>2</sup> WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

## WWL 2018: Keys to understanding NEPAL

### Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12511455>

### Recent country history

In 1994 a short-lived Communist government ruled. From 1995 to 2006 a violent Maoist insurgency dragged on seeking to abolish the monarchy. On 1 June 2001, there was a massacre in the royal palace. King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya and seven other members of the royal family were killed. The alleged perpetrator was Crown Prince Dipendra, who committed suicide. This outburst was alleged to have been Dipendra's response to his parents' refusal to accept his choice of wife. Nevertheless, there is speculation and doubts among Nepali citizens about who was truly responsible.

Following the carnage, King Birendra's brother Gyanendra inherited the throne. On 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra dismissed the entire government and assumed full executive powers to quash the Maoist insurgency, but this initiative was unsuccessful. In September 2005, the Maoists declared a three-month unilateral ceasefire to negotiate.

In response to the 2006 democracy movement, King Gyanendra agreed to relinquish sovereign power to the people. On 24 April 2006 the dissolved House of Representatives was re-instated. Using its newly acquired sovereign authority, the House of Representatives unanimously voted to curtail the power of the king and declared Nepal a secular state on 18 May 2006, ending its time-honored official status as a Hindu Kingdom. On 28 December 2007, a bill was passed in parliament to amend Article 159 of the constitution – replacing "Provisions regarding the King" by "Provisions of the Head of the State" – declaring Nepal a federal republic, and thereby abolishing the monarchy. The bill came into force on 28 May 2008. Since then Nepal is a federal secular parliamentary republic.

Nepal made international headlines when it was struck by two major earthquakes in April and May 2015, leaving an estimated 9,200 people killed and causing a damage of around ten billion USD, which was 50% of the country's annual GDP. What has been less reported, though, is the fact that the government promised to fund the reconstruction of temples destroyed, but not of church buildings which were destroyed as well. Nepal has been hovering at the threshold of the World Watch List for several years now but has not been ranked since 2007.

### The religious landscape

According to World Christian Database (WCD) Nepal has a population of 29,187,000. The biggest religion in the country is Hinduism, with 66.4% of the population. Hinduism has dominated Nepal for centuries. It started to develop between 500 and 300 BC and was the state religion until the country became a secular republic in May 2008.

Stimulated by the success of their counterparts in neighboring India, Hindu radicals have campaigned for the return of Hinduism as state religion. As in India, their activities have been violent. In Nepal, however, they have not succeeded in achieving their goals (so far).

[Christianity in Nepal](#) has been on the rise since the government adopted secular democracy in 2008.<sup>4</sup> Christian missionaries were previously banned from entering the country before the absolute monarchy came to an end in 2008, but it is now home to more than 8,000 Christian churches and over a million converts. Minority groups like the Dalits and the Kirats have particularly been drawn to Christianity. According to the Federation of National Christians in Nepal, Dalits make up 60% of all Christians in the country.

## The political landscape

Ever since 2008 when Nepal changed from monarchy to a federal republic (dividing the country into provinces/states), there has been political bickering between various parties. Instead of the planned 2 years, it took more than 7 years to write a new constitution which came into effect on 20 September 2015.

Nepal's parliament has a term of four years and has 601 members. Frequent changes in the government within the term of 2-3 years has been occurring ever since the nation abolished monarchy. The most recent parliamentary elections were held on 19 November 2013. Major parties in Nepal are the Nepali Congress with 207 seats, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) with 181 seats, and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN UML) with 82 seats. Hindu radical parties form only a small section of parliament. However, the major political parties such as Congress are also deep-rooted with the ethics and values of Hinduism. Many political parties recognize the great potential of the rapidly growing Christian community in Nepal. In May 2017 Christians were chosen as representatives of some local units in the first phase of local elections held for the first time in Nepal's history.

Nepal is governed according to the Constitution of Nepal, which came into effect on 20 September 2015. It defines Nepal as having multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural characteristics with common aspirations of people living in diverse geographical regions, and being committed to and united by a bond of allegiance to national independence, territorial integrity, national interest and prosperity of Nepal. However, despite Nepal being deemed secular, the new constitution curbs the freedom to proselytize and convert, regarding it as a punishable offence.

The government of Nepal has constantly to bear in mind the opinions of its two powerful neighbors: India and China. As both want Nepal in their sphere of influence, Kathmandu has to walk a tightrope in order to follow an independent course.

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.persecution.org/2016/12/06/christianity-continuing-to-grow-in-nepal-despite-persecution/>, last accessed December 2017.

## The socio-economic landscape

Economic development in Nepal has been complicated by the constant change in political scenarios which has ranged from absolute monarchy to being ruled by Communists. An isolated, agrarian society until the mid-20th century, Nepal entered the modern era in 1951 without schools, hospitals, roads, telecommunications, electric power, industry, or civil service. The country has, however, made progress toward sustainable economic growth since the 1950s with great improvement in living standards. The biggest challenges faced by the country in achieving higher economic development are the frequent changes in political leadership as well as corruption. Foreign aid to Nepal accounts for more than half of the development budget.

Agriculture remains Nepal's principal economic activity, employing about 65% of the population and providing 31.7% of GDP. Only about 20% of the total area is cultivable. Nepal's GDP is heavily dependent on remittances (29.1%) of foreign workers.

One remnant of the fact that Hinduism used to be the state religion is the caste system – a hierarchical stratification of 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”. Many Christians in Nepal are from Dalit background. Most Christians in Nepal belong to the lower social strata and have low incomes.

## Concluding remarks

Nepal is a poor, land-locked country, wedged between India and China, and its politics are deeply divided. Despite all the problems, however, Nepal is slowly making progress: the economy is gradually improving, the enormous poverty is disappearing little by little. And Christianity is growing rapidly. Radical Hindus are worried about this, because most converts to Christianity come from Hindu background. However, the number of reported violent incidents against Christians in Nepal is relatively low (i.e. when compared to India). In June 2016 [eight Christians<sup>5</sup>](#) were arrested on evangelizing charges, but they were acquitted in December. In late December 2016, [four Christians were convicted<sup>6</sup>](#) and sentenced to five years in prison under the charge of witchcraft in Nepal. In April 2017 the [Catholic Dhobighat cathedral<sup>7</sup>](#) in Kathmandu was set on fire. In general, though, it does seem that Christians are becoming an increasingly recognized minority in Nepal and since May 2017 Christians have been elected to local bodies.

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<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/12/07/news/3372/article.htm>, last accessed December 2017.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/witchcraft-accusation-lands-christians-jail/>, last accessed December 2017.

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/After-Kathmandu%E2%80%99s-Assumption-cathedral-hit-by-arson-attack,-Vicariate-holds-prayer-for-peace-40583.html>, last accessed December 2017.

## WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
29,187,000	1,172,000	4.0

Source: WCD, May 2017

### How did Christians get there?

The first record of a visit of a Christian missionary to Nepal dates back to 1628, when King Lakshminarasimha Malla received the Portuguese Jesuit Father Juan Cabral. He was awarded with a Tamra Patra, a copper plate, allowing him to preach Christianity. In 1661, Albert d'Orville, a Belgian, and Johann Grueber, an Austrian, visited Nepal as missionaries but did not stay long. The first attempt at a more permanent presence in Nepal was when Capuchin Fathers from Rome set up a mission station in Kathmandu in 1715 and lived amongst the people of Bhaktapur and Patan in the Kathmandu valley for over 54 years. After Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest in 1769, the Capuchin Fathers and 57 newly converted Newar Christians were exiled to Bettiah, India. From then until 1950, missionaries were banned from Nepal.

In the early 1950s missionaries were allowed to engage in development work, education and health care. During the 1970s and 1980s the churches started growing in Nepal. With this growth persecution grew too and in the 1980s hundreds of Nepalese Christian leaders were jailed; many prominent Christian leaders had to flee the country at that time. Due to violent street protests in 1990, the king bowed to pressure and agreed to a new democratic constitution. The Church also experienced some freedom after 1990.

With the move towards democracy beginning again in 2006 - and especially after Nepal officially became a secular state in 2008 - the new religious freedom contributed towards a proliferation of various Christian denominations and groups. Christians are now actively participating in the political and decision-making arena and Christmas is even an official government holiday. However, despite Nepal being deemed secular, the new constitution curbs the freedom to proselytize and convert, regarding this as a punishable offence. At the time of writing (July 2017) a bill proposing severe punishment for this is to be submitted to parliament in the near future.

While there were virtually [no Christians](#) in the country in 1951,<sup>8</sup> the census registered 458 after 10 years and 102,000 after forty years. According to the 2011 census, that number already hit 375,000 but church leaders have always alleged that the number of Christians in the country was greatly underestimated in the census which explains the vast difference to the WCD

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.persecution.org/2016/05/17/christian-community-in-nepal-growing-rapidly-despite-religious-tensions/>, last accessed December 2017.

estimate. What is clear is that the number of Christians in Nepal continues to grow at breath-taking pace.

## What church networks exist today? <sup>9</sup>

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
4,900	8,700	292,000	865,000	1,100	0	553,000	977,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

**The communities of expatriate Christians** are very small – mostly foreigners who reside in Nepal for their work. These communities are less than 1% of Nepal’s Christians. These communities have been less affected by Hindu nationalism in the past, but they do experience limitations, for example in outreach.

**The historical Christian communities** are also small: WCD reports that Orthodox and Catholic Christians together form only an estimated 1.2% of Nepal’s Christians. These communities have also been less affected by Hindu nationalism, mainly because they are hardly involved in evangelizing. However, their works through churches, educational institutions, chapels and development wings are being tightly under the government surveillance through various government body.

**The communities of converts to Christianity** are growing fast. Most converts have a Hindu background but there are also converts from Buddhism and minor traditional religions like Animism. It is impossible to tell them apart from the non-traditional Christian communities which they nearly always join. Therefore their numbers have been included with the non-traditional Christian communities. Converts to Christianity face huge pressure from their communities, radical Hinduist groups, local religious leaders and families.

**The non-traditional Christian communities** are by far the biggest group in Nepal. Most of these Christians have migrated from the north-eastern part of India who are Nepali speaking in origin. They experience most hostility because they are growing fast due to outreach activities and many Hindus feel threatened by this development.

<sup>9</sup> **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. **Evangelicals:** 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. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.



## Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others <sup>10</sup>
1,172,000	1,216,000	19,377,000	3,460,000	3,814,000	0	4,400	102,200

Sikh: 11,000 / Jain: 7,900      Source: WCD, May 2017

## Notes on the current situation

- Hindu nationalists oppose the idea of secularism, which in the South Asian context simply means pluralism and equal treatment of all religions. However, early in September 2015 Nepal's parliament voted to maintain its identity as a [secular nation](#) in a new constitution after years of contentious debate.<sup>11</sup> Hindu radicals bombed three churches in reaction.
- Despite the continuing unrest in the country (caused mainly by Hindu radicals), the number of reported violent incidents in Nepal is relatively low (compared to India).
- Banned from the Himalayan political scenario until 10 years ago, [Christians are now a growing political force](#) with Christians being chosen as representatives of some local units in the first phase of local elections held on 14 May 2017.<sup>12</sup>

## WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018** Points: 64 / Position: 25

WWL 2017 Points: 53 / Position: Not in WWL Top 50

WWL 2016 Points: 53 / Position: Not in WWL Top 50

## Where persecution comes from

Christians experience persecution from radical Hindus in various ways: Local and national authorities impose legal and other restrictions; local Hindu priests and Hindu radical movements carry out physical attacks against Christians; the local community often forms a hostile environment at the village level.

<sup>10</sup> This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/lawmakers-vote-for-secularism-in-nepal/74264>, last accessed December 2017.

<sup>12</sup> See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christians-in-Nepal-enter-politics.-First-Christian-woman-elected-40824.html>, last accessed December 2017.

## How Christians are suffering

All Christian communities in Nepal are experiencing some form of persecution, but at varying levels of intensity. Roman Catholic churches and churches where foreigners gather experience the least problems. Converts from Hinduism are put under most pressure as they are viewed as deviating from the faith of the ancestors. Converts and Protestant churches are particularly under pressure from family, friends, community and local authorities. From time to time Hindu radicals take advantage of the ongoing political instability by attacking Christians. Most of the time they get away with impunity.

There are also some legal restrictions at the national level. The 2015 Constitution declares that Nepal is a secular state, however it also clearly specifies that conversion to any religion other than Hinduism is not permissible and is in fact a punishable offence.

## Examples

- Christians in Nepal continue to struggle to obtain rights for a burial ground where they can legally bury their dead. Because of the lack of official burial grounds, Christians are often forced to bury their dead in forests illegally. At times, local Hindu radicals, enraged by the Christian burials, dig up the bodies and bring them back to the homes of the Christian families or even leave the bodies in the streets. Again, the Christian community is petitioning the government to allot them land to officially bury their dead, but the issue remains unresolved. (Source: [International Christian Concern](#)<sup>13</sup>)
- On 18 April 2017 "unknown persons" attempted to set the Catholic Cathedral in Kathmandu on fire. The fire damaged the priest's residence and the western part of the church. A car and two motorbikes were also completely burnt. No casualties were reported. (Source: [UCA News](#)<sup>14</sup>)
- Seven people, including proprietors of two private schools, were arrested on 9 June 2016 in Dolakha district, Nepal, accused of converting others to Christianity because they were distributing Bible handbooks to children. A few days later, on 14 June 2016, the authorities also took into custody Rev Shakti Pakhrin for his ties with the people already under investigation for proselytizing. They were all acquitted in December 2016. (Source: [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#)<sup>15</sup>)

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.persecution.org/2017/01/09/christians-in-nepal-continue-to-struggle-to-find-burial-grounds/>, last accessed 7 November 2017.

<sup>14</sup> See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/arson-attack-on-church-in-nepal/78977>, last accessed 7 November 2017.

<sup>15</sup> See: <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016-nepal-charikot>, last accessed 7 November 2017.

# WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018** Points: 64 / Position: 25

WWL 2017 Points: 53 / Position: Not in WWL Top 50

WWL 2016 Points: 53 / Position: Not in WWL Top 50

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## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 64 points Nepal ranks 25th on WWL 2018. This is an increase of 11 points compared to the WWL 2017 reporting period when Nepal did not make it into the Top 50. Persecution stems mainly from Hindu radicals, with ethnic tensions adding to the pressure in the background. The situation for Christians in Nepal deteriorated markedly in all *Spheres of life* and is due to a strong rise in *Religious nationalism*, with Hindu radicals becoming much more active. Government officials, Hindu priests, Hindu political parties and family, friends, and community have all stepped up pressure. In this context, the number of violent incidents also increased. There were reports on churches attacked, arrests, Christians being sentenced to jail, dozens of Christians were beaten up, and there were Christians who had to flee their homes and villages because of threats.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Nepal <sup>16</sup>	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Not at all
Religious nationalism	Very strong
Ethnic antagonism	Medium
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Weak
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Very weak
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

### Religious nationalism (Very strong):

Most of the persecution of Christians in Nepal comes from Hindu radical groups who want to turn Nepal into a Hindu state again. These radical Hindu groups have close ties with Hindutva groups in neighboring India. Persecution used not to be driven by government, but since 2015 a new constitution has been adopted, limiting freedom of religion. On 8 August 2017 the Nepalese parliament also passed anti-conversion legislation which was signed into law by the president on [16 October 2017](#)<sup>17</sup>. Another sign of a deteriorating situation for Christians.

### Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

From time to time there are tensions between the various ethnic groups in Nepal. In most cases, this is linked to *Religious nationalism*.

## Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Nepal	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Pressure on Christians is exerted by Hindu radicals in various ways: Local and national authorities (*Government officials* and *Political parties*) impose legal and other restrictions; local

<sup>16</sup> The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

<sup>17</sup> See: <http://www.csw.org.uk/2017/10/20/press/3763/article.htm>, last accessed 7 December 2017.

Hindu priests (*Non-Christian religious leaders*) and Hindu radical movements (*Violent religious groups*) carry out physical attacks against Christians, and local people (mobs consisting of the *Extended family* and *Normal citizens*) form a hostile environment at the village level. Parallel to this, Nepal is ethnically divided – *Ethnic group leaders* also exert pressure on converts because they deviate from the faith of the ancestors.

## Context

[Christianity in Nepal](#)<sup>18</sup> has been on the rise since the government adopted a secular democracy in 2008, a trend that has reportedly been driven by natural disasters and changes in society. Christian missionaries were previously banned from entering the country before absolute monarchy came to an end in 2008, but it is now home to more than 8,000 Christian churches and over a million converts. Minority groups like the Dalits and the Kirats have been drawn to Christianity since Nepal adopted a secular form of government in 2008. According to the Federation of National Christians in Nepal, Dalits make up 60 percent of all believers in the country.

The political map of Nepal has been quite helpful for the Christian minority in Nepal. First of all, fears that the new Constitution of Nepal would make the country officially Hindu again subsided when the Constitution was published in September 2015. Secondly, many political parties recognize the great potential of Christians (a rapidly growing community in Nepal) for their position. In May 2017 Christians were chosen as representatives of some local units in the first phase of local elections held for the first time in Nepal's history.

One remnant of the fact that Hinduism used to be the state religion is the caste system – a hierarchical stratification of society dating back many centuries. It can be compared to some extent to the class society that Europe had about seven centuries ago. Each human being is born into a specific caste and he can never escape from it. 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. Many Christians in Nepal are from Dalit background – the appeal of Christianity for them stems from the sense of acceptance they get from their co-believers. Most Christians in Nepal belong to the lower social strata and have low incomes.

Christians are not the only believers who are being persecuted in Nepal. Muslims are also targeted.

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<sup>18</sup> See: <http://www.persecution.org/2016/12/06/christianity-continuing-to-grow-in-nepal-despite-persecution/>, last accessed 7 December 2017.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians:

These are mainly foreigners in Nepal who have their own, isolated meetings. They are hardly active in evangelism. These churches have been less affected by Hindu nationalism in the past, but they will experience limitations, for example in outreach, when the country’s new Constitution is implemented.

### Historical Christian communities:

By far the largest and most important of these is the Roman Catholic Church, plus a few Orthodox communities. They tend to be inward-looking and not involved in evangelistic activities. As a result, these communities are hardly exposed to hostilities from radical Hindus.

### Communities of converts to Christianity:

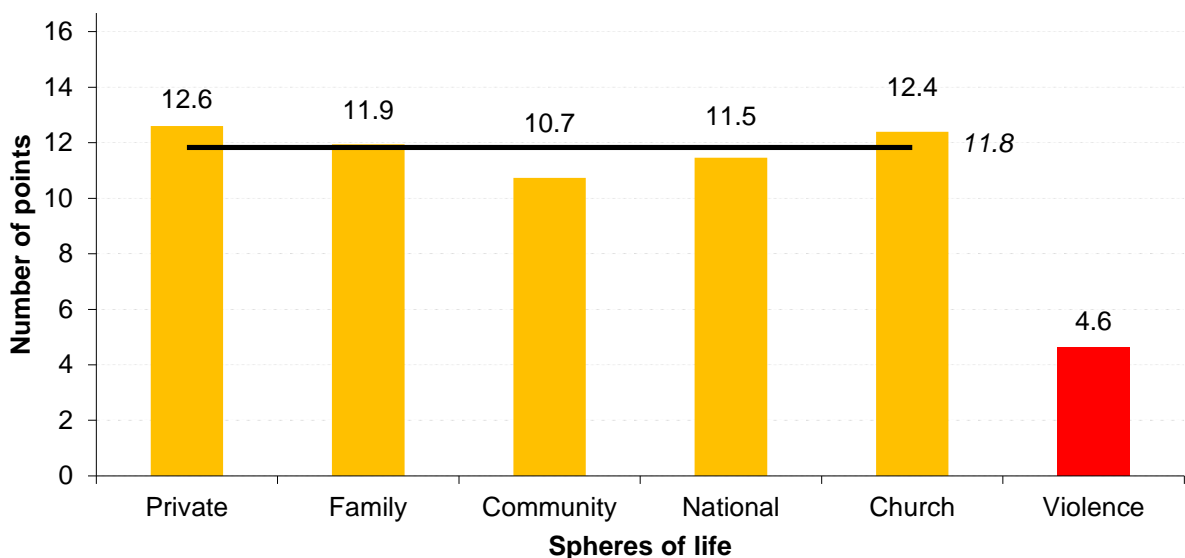
Christians from a Hindu background are the largest group of Christians in Nepal and their numbers have continued to grow spectacularly over the years. They are facing the highest levels of persecution of all Christian communities in Nepal, with much pressure coming from local government officials, Hindu priests, family and community.

### Non-traditional Christian communities:

The non-traditional Christian communities mostly consist of independent churches. Converts from Hinduism will usually go the churches belonging to this category. As these churches are also most active in evangelism they experience high levels of persecution.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Nepal



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Nepal shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nepal was 11.8, rising from 9.9 in WWL 2017 which points to an extreme deterioration in the situation for Christians.
- Pressure is highest in the *Private sphere of life* (especially for converts) with 12.6 points and in the *Church sphere* with 12.4 points. *Religious nationalism* has made life for Christians with a Hindu background more difficult and new legislation has imposed more restrictions on church life.
- The score for violence rose from 3.1 in WWL 2017 to 4.6 points. There were no killings but Christians were arrested and sentenced on various occasions.

**Private sphere:**

Converts always have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only Christians in their family. Opposition from family and community makes it dangerous to keep Christian materials, especially in the remote areas. If converts are living with devout Hindu families, Bibles and other Christian materials have to be hidden carefully and can only be read with much caution. There is much opposition towards sharing the Christian faith with family and friends. Christianity is considered a foreign religion especially attractive for low caste people. Known converts are often closely monitored and there have been reports that youth who had accepted Christian faith while studying in Kathmandu, have been called back to their villages by their families.

**Family sphere:**

Organizing a baptism has become much more risky as those Christians attending will be accused of proselytism according to the new constitution. Celebrating a Christian wedding faces the danger of being stopped; a wedding is frequently opposed by converts' families since it could strengthen the converts' new faith. Christian funerals are impossible as the churches are not given any burial grounds, so Christians are forced to either bury their deceased secretly or cremate them. Christian converts face opposition when trying to raise their children according to Christian beliefs. The hostility often arises from their own non-Christian spouse and also family members. Children of Christians, not just of converts, will be forced to learn non-Christian teachings and mocked by other children. Converts can be isolated from their families and reports from Western Nepal show that converts are sometimes forced to leave their family homes.

**Community sphere:**

Over the WWL 2018 reporting period, society became more opposed to Christians. Christians are viewed with dislike, as a result of which they are threatened or obstructed in their daily lives. Especially in rural areas, converts face strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors to recant their Christian faith. This is often accompanied by an intensive social boycott which includes private and business life. Children of converts often have to face discrimination by teachers and co-students in schools, especially if they deny taking part in the *Pooja*, an act of worshipping Hindu gods and goddesses.

**National sphere:**

The new constitution, referred to several times above, reads in Part III on Fundamental Rights on the paragraph on Religion: “5. Religion: Every citizen, having regard to the current traditions, may practice and profess his own religion as handed down from the ancient times. Provided that no person shall be entitled to change of his religion.” There are still plans pending to introduce a space for religious affiliation on the new national ID card, but the government has had to take care of priorities first. The media frequently portray the presence and continuing growth of Christianity as a result of mere bribing by foreigners. Acts of conversion are described as a trade of favors in the sense that the convert gets incentives for his decision. Christians are frequently the victims of smear campaigns and radical Hindu groups mislead society with false information and cause increasing mistrust. Perpetrators attacking Christians have frequently been left unpunished, whereas Christians falsely accused of crimes did not receive a fair trial.

**Church sphere:**

There is no legal recognition of churches. Church property is registered in the name of private persons only. There is no provision for registering churches. According to reports by locals from different sources, after the earthquake in April 2015 the government announced that it would help rebuild temples, mosques and Buddhist shrines, but did not include churches, which illustrates the bias against Christianity. Gatherings and church meetings were also disrupted, for example in the Dhading district. Church activities are and will be increasingly monitored in order to see if churches are converting people and whether therefore authorities or radical groups can act against them. The report by a Canadian satire magazine stating that the Gideons International would ship Bibles to Nepal instead of emergency aid in 2015 was taken seriously by radical Hindu groups in Nepal and in India alike, indicating that it is becoming increasingly risky to distribute Bibles and other Christian materials.

**Violence:**

Persecution in Nepal is increasing as Hindu radicals are stepping up their pressure against other religions. Violence is much lower than in India, but it is clearly increasing when compared with the WWL 2017 reporting period. No Christians were killed but it was reported that 47 Christians were seriously beaten and a Christian’s home damaged by an attack. 14 Christians had to go into hiding after threats. Local Nepalese Christians also reported that three churches were damaged by attacks. Seven Christians who were arrested in July 2016 were still in detention in October 2017 without formal charges. Four Christians were sentenced to five years’ imprisonment on 21 July 2017. No Christians were kidnapped or raped during the WWL 2018 reporting period, but five Christians were forced to marry. Further examples:

- Christians in Nepal continue to struggle to obtain rights for a burial ground where they can legally bury their dead. Because of the lack of official burial grounds, Christians are often forced to bury their dead in forests illegally. At times, local Hindu radicals, enraged by the Christian burials, dig up the bodies and bring them back to the homes of the Christian families or even leave the bodies in the streets. Again, the Christian community



is petitioning the government to allot them land to officially bury their dead, but the issue remains unresolved. (Source: [International Christian Concern](#)<sup>19</sup>)

- On 18 April 2017 "unknown persons" attempted to set the Catholic Cathedral in Kathmandu on fire. The fire damaged the priest's residence and the western part of the church. A car and two motorbikes were also completely burnt. No casualties were reported. (Source: [UCA News](#)<sup>20</sup>)
- Seven people, including proprietors of two private schools, were arrested on 9 June 2016 in Dolakha district, Nepal, accused of converting others to Christianity because they were distributing Bible handbooks to children. A few days later, on 14 June 2016, the authorities also took into custody Rev Shakti Pakhrin for his ties with the people already under investigation for proselytizing. They were all acquitted in December 2016. (Source: [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#)<sup>21</sup>).

## Gender profile of persecution

### Female:

Christian women and girls are also subjected to physical violence but it comes gradually after emotional and mental torture. In an initial phase, they are emotionally tortured by the immediate family members (e.g. husband, in-laws, parents). Gradually the mental and physical torture starts until finally they are regarded as social outcasts by the family and community. This makes them vulnerable and victims of sexual oppression.

Nepal is a patriarchal society where girls have less opportunities. Education and exposure to wider society is minimal as they are limited within the boundaries of home with a large amount of household duties. Those who become Christians do so mainly through witnessing healings and miracles in their own or closest family life.

### Male:

Most Christian men and boys are subjected to physical, mental and social forms of suffering as they are usually ostracized from family and society. They are also denied their ancestral property and even basic human rights such as citizenship by immediate family members and village level government units. Christian men mostly migrate to new cities or areas to start a new identity and are economically deprived in the first phases of persecuted life.

In many cases, Christian men and boys are the breadwinner of the family. After being persecuted, the family often suffers through a reduced income as the men and boys are severely beaten and socially ostracized. Often the local police administration takes the male Christians away for intensive and lengthy interrogation. Thus, when men and boys suffer the whole family is in trouble economically and insecure socially.

## Future outlook

<sup>19</sup> See: <http://www.persecution.org/2017/01/09/christians-in-nepal-continue-to-struggle-to-find-burial-grounds/>, last accessed 7 November 2017.

<sup>20</sup> See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/arson-attack-on-church-in-nepal/78977>, last accessed 7 November 2017.

<sup>21</sup> See: <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016-nepal-charikot>, last accessed 7 November 2017.

The adoption of the Constitution and anti-conversion law has legitimized the persecution of Christians where they are perceived as proselytizing. Moreover, with the Constitution adopting a secular stance, the pro-Hindu lobby has become more vocal and hostile in their demands for Nepal to be made a Hindu state. This has meant that there is a growing sense of antagonism towards Christians and other minorities from radical Hindus. One thing seems sure: Christians will be the religious minority most affected by the implementation of the 2015 Constitution as they are the strongest in reaching out to the Hindu majority.

## Policy considerations

Taking into account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors suggests the following policy recommendations. The international community should request the Nepalese government:

- to abolish Articles 156 and 160 which criminalize proselytization and conversion, since both these laws are curtailing the freedom of religion and are being used against Christians.
- to investigate and prosecute those responsible for attacking Christians, socially boycotting them and expelling them from their villages.
- to give official recognition to churches as religious institutions and to Christian rituals performed in the churches.
- to give the Christian community legal burial grounds.
- to give special instructions to the police and district administrations to ensure the safety of the churches.

## WWR in-depth reports

No in-depth reports on Nepal are currently available at:  
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

## Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Nepal available at:  
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

## World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/nepal/>

- [Nepal: Catholic church interior ‘entirely destroyed’ after arson](#)  
11 May 2018  
A Catholic church in Nepal’s western Banke District has been left badly damaged following an arson attack on 5 May 2018.
- [Nepal ‘should practise what it preaches’ as UN member](#)  
1 May 2018  
Nepal must address its own commitment to the protection of human rights, including freedom of religion and belief, says Christian Solidarity Worldwide.
- [Nepal to further tighten laws on religious conversion](#)  
6 April 2018  
According to myrepublica.com, Nepal is considering a new mechanism to “keep an eye on foreign nationals involved in illegal religious publicity and conversions”.
- [Nepal’s ‘opportunity’ to review religion laws](#)  
27 February 2018  
Being elected to serve on the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) gives Nepal an “opportunity for a fresh start” by reviewing its commitment to religious freedom.
- [Nepal PM ‘commits to address’ Christian concerns ahead of elections](#)  
8 November 2017  
Nepal’s Prime Minister has committed to addressing the Christian community’s concerns over religious freedom.
- [Religious freedom in Nepal ‘teetering on the edge’](#)  
23 October 2017  
Nepali president Bidhya Devi Bhandari last week signed into law a bill criminalising religious conversion and the “hurting of religious sentiment”.
- [Nepali Christians freed 9 months after conviction for ‘witchcraft’ of praying for mentally ill woman](#)  
26 September 2017  
Four Nepali Christians sentenced last year to five years in prison for “violence and witchcraft”, after praying for a mentally ill woman, have been released after their sentences were overturned.

- [Nepal criminalises conversions and ‘hurting religious sentiment’](#)  
22 August 2017  
Nepal’s Christian minority fears that, once presidential approval is given to the new bill approved by Parliament, the new law criminalizing religious conversion will be abused by those seeking to settle scores – as has happened frequently in neighboring India.
- [Nepal: Christian worker shot at Easter says he’s still fearful](#)  
14 July 2017  
Three months ago, on 16 April 2017, Christian worker Santosh Khadka was shot in Kathmandu while he was returning home from an Easter service. Local Christians say he was targeted because of his religious-freedom work.
- [Nepal’s Christians have to trek into mountains to bury their dead](#)  
23 March 2017  
As local residents object to any burial in their vicinity, churches in Kathmandu and surrounding areas have bought 130,000 square feet of land on a secluded mountain to build a cemetery. Only a 4x4 vehicle can reach the cemetery, but many will have to trek for one and a half hours on the steep, makeshift road, carrying the body.
- [Isolated, female and vulnerable to abuse: Christian nannies in the Gulf](#)  
8 March 2017  
Tens of thousands of young, unmarried women from India, the Philippines and Nepal work for Arab families in countries in the Arabian Peninsula.
- [Nepali church leaders found guilty of ‘witchcraft’ and ‘violence’ for helping mentally ill woman](#)  
22 December 2016  
A Nepali court has found four Christians guilty of ‘violence’ and ‘witchcraft’ against a severely mentally ill woman. The original arrests on 21 July 2016 followed an incident on June 6 involving Seti Pariyar who was sent by her father-in-law, who used to be a Christian, to a local church for healing prayer from apparently ‘being possessed by demons’.
- [UPDATE First religious freedom case under new Nepal constitution: all charges dropped](#)  
6 December 2016  
A court in Nepal has dropped a case against eight Christians, were charged with ‘proselytising’ – apparently outlawed in the new constitution – after giving out a pamphlet about Jesus in a Christian school, while helping children through the trauma of the 2015 earthquake.

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## Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Nepal> (password: freedom).

- [Nepal: New restrictions become law](#)

3 December 2017

The President of Nepal, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, has signed a new Criminal Code Bill into law, which establishes further constitutional protection for Hinduism (practised by 80% of the population). The new law restricts religious conversion and the “hurting of religious sentiment” or blasphemy.

- [Nepal: Christians enter politics](#)

25 June 2017

Banned from the Himalayan political scene until 10 years ago, Christians are now a growing political force.

- [Nepal: Christians under attack](#)

12 May 2017

On 16 April 2017, there was an attempted assassination of Santosh Khadka, the Office Secretary of the Federation of National Christian Nepal (FNCN) near the FNCN office in Kumaripati, Lalitpur.

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