

World
Watch
Research

Nepal: Full Country Dossier

February 2023



OpenDoors

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Nepal

Brief country details

Nepal: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
30,226,000	1,380,000	4.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Nepal: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	61	55
WWL 2022	64	48
WWL 2021	66	34
WWL 2020	64	32
WWL 2019	64	32

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019–2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Nepal: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Religious nationalism	Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Ethnic group leaders
Clan oppression	Violent religious groups, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Converts from Hinduism are put under most pressure as they are viewed as deviating from the faith of the ancestors. Converts (and members of Protestant churches) experience pressure from family, friends, community and local authorities. Roman Catholic churches and churches where foreigners gather experience the least problems. From time to time Hindu radicals take advantage of the ongoing political instability by attacking Christians - mostly with impunity. There have been reports of churches being attacked, of Christians being beaten, arrested and given prison sentences. There were also Christians who had to flee their homes and villages because of threats. In addition, there are legal restrictions at the national level - for instance, the 2017 anti-conversion legislation (see below: *Political and legal landscape*).

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Nepal has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Nepal is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face discrimination in the workplace because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by the authorities and surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **22 November 2021:** Pastor Keshav Raj Acharya of the Abundant Harvest Church in Pokhara, Nepal, was found guilty of proselytization by the Dolpa District Court. He was immediately arrested and placed in prison. (Source: [CSW, 23 November 2021](#)) On 30 November 2021, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment for violating Nepal's anti-conversion law. (Source: [International Christian Concern - ICC, 30 November 2021](#)) However, on 19 December 2021, he was released on bail pending appeal. (Source: [Human Rights Without Frontiers, 11 February 2022](#)) On 13 July 2022 Pastor Acharya was sentenced to one year in prison by Nepal's High Court. (Source: [Asia News, 22 July 2022](#))

Specific examples of positive developments

- **18 November 2021:** The higher court in Pokhara district, about 200 kilometers from capital Kathmandu, accepted a bail petition and ordered the release of two South Korean nuns along with two other South Korean Christians. (Source: [Asia News, 22 November 2021](#))
- **8 December 2021:** The government has decided that property tax will not be levied on religious institutions such as temples, churches, monasteries and mosques. The Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration issued a circular stating that property tax was not to be levied on the houses and lands of religious institutions as per Sub-section 5 of Section 55 of Local Government Act 2074 (including amendments to some Nepali Acts made by Act 2075). (Source: [Nepal Church, 8 December 2021](#))
- **24 December 2021:** The government declared Christmas a public holiday. (Source: IRFR 2021)
- **19 April 2022:** At the Easter Festival, organized by the National Church Fellowship of Nepal (NCS), Nepal Christian Society (NCS) and National Christian Federation of Nepal (FNCN) at the Nepal Pragya Pratisthan in Kamaladi, the General Secretary of Nepal Christian Society (NCS) Dilliram Poudel welcomed the wave of unity in the churches of Nepal. (Source: [Nepal Church, 20 April 2022](#))

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: CSW, 23 November 2021 - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2021/11/23/press/5488/article.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: International Christian Concern - ICC, 30 November 2021 - <https://www.persecution.org/2021/11/30/pastor-nepal-sentenced-two-years-prison-violating-anti-conversion-law/>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Human Rights Without Frontiers, 11 February 2022 - <https://hrwf.eu/nepal-pastor-keshav-released-on-bail-pending-appeal-after-being-sentenced-to-2-years-in-prison/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Asia News, 22 July 2022 - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Nepali-Christian-clergyman-gets-one-year-in-prison-for-proselytising-56323.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Asia News, 22 November 2021 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/South-Korean-nuns-arrested-for-'illegal-conversions'-in-Pokhara-released-on-bail-54557.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Nepal Church, 8 December 2021 - <https://nepalchurch.com/25512/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Nepal Church, 20 April 2022 - <https://nepalchurch.com/26021/>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Nepal

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 268-270)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	23 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12511455	23 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/NPL	23 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nepal/	23 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/nepal	23 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.40)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	23 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	23 June 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Nepal not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/nepal/freedom-world/2022	23 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Nepal not included	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/nepal	23 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#np	8 February 2023
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/nepal	23 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/nepal	23 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/NPL	23 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nepal/	23 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Nepal not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nepal	23 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yin=nzm=ncountry=NPL	23 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 12-13)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/5d1783db09a0e09d15bbcea8ef0ccc0b-0500052021/related/mpo-sar.pdf	23 June 2022

Recent history

In 1994 a short-lived Communist government ruled in Nepal. 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 in which 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 Mao-

ists 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 ([Fides, 5 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. Until WWL 2018, Nepal had been hovering at the threshold of the World Watch List Top 50 for several years.

In May 2020 India inaugurated a new 80 km-long road in the Himalayas, connecting India to the border with China at the Lipulekh pass. The Nepali government protested, contending that the road crosses territory that it claims and accused India of changing the status quo without diplomatic consultations. Prime Minister Oli made it clear that these areas were Nepali (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 29 May 2020](#)).

Political and legal landscape

Since 2008, when Nepal changed from being a monarchy to a federal republic (dividing the country into provinces), there has been much argument between the various political 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. In the Preamble of the [2015 Constitution of Nepal](#), Nepal is defined as having "multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural characteristics". Despite being officially secular, the 2015 Constitution curbs the freedom to proselytize and convert, regarding it as a punishable offence. Article 26 of the Constitution states: "No person shall, in the exercise of the right conferred by this Article convert another person from one religion to another or any act or conduct that may jeopardize other's religion and such act shall be punishable by law." This means conversion is forbidden and this affects Christian evangelism greatly. On 8 August 2017 the Nepalese parliament also passed anti-conversion legislation which was signed into law by the president on [16 October 2017](#). (Source: CSW, 20 October 2017).

The new criminal code of Nepal, which came into effect in August 2018, also prohibits religious behavior that disrupts public order or goes contrary to public morality. Hence, while the law generally remains positive, there is always the possibility that these new provisions can be used to target and punish members from minority groups.

The parliamentary elections held on 26 November and 7 December 2017 resulted in a political deadlock between the governing Nepali Congress Party and the winning left-wing coalition.

Hindu radical parties form only a small section of parliament. However, the major political parties such as the Congress Party are also deeply rooted in 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.

Although all power has been removed from the monarchy, as far as real democracy is concerned, it is still a long way off. Nepal is lacking a strong government and political alliances tend not to last. An internal conflict in the Communist Party continued to lame the government for many months. (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 10 July 2020](#)) In December 2020, Prime Minister Oli issued a decree to dissolve the Lower House of parliament. (Source: [International Crisis Group, 25 January 2021](#)) Instead of ending the political instability, however, the move led to political rifts in various political parties, to inaction in the Upper House and to a judiciary that failed to take up its responsibility. (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 8 June 2021](#)) In June 2021 Prime Minister Oli suffered another setback: The Supreme Court annulled the appointment of 20 of his ministers. (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 23 June 2021](#)) On 12 July 2021 Nepal's Supreme Court's restored Nepal's Parliament for the second time after it was dissolved by the prime minister. Unexpectedly, the Supreme Court also ordered Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress to succeed Oli as prime minister. (Source: [Nepali Times, 12 July 2021](#))

General elections took place in November 2022 with no party emerging as a clear victor. As reported by [WIO News on 5 January 2023](#): "After the Nepal elections, everyone anticipated that the ruling coalition of the Nepali Congress and Maoists would join hands. However, this partnership broke up on the issue of who would take the helm as prime minister. Eventually, the former Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' became the prime minister in a coalition with former rival KP Sharma Oli."

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

Other reports

The US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "The constitution establishes the country as a 'secular state' but defines secular as 'protection of religion and culture handed down from the time immemorial'. It provides for the right to profess and practice one's own religion. The constitution prohibits converting persons from one religion to another and prohibits religious behavior disturbing public order or contrary to public health, decency, and morality. The law prohibits both proselytism and 'harming the religious sentiment' of any caste, ethnic community, or class."
- "The law does not provide for registration or official recognition of religious organizations as religious institutions, except for Buddhist monasteries." All other religious groups must register as NGOs or nonprofit organizations to operate legally.

- "Religious leaders said the requirement for NGOs to register annually with local government authorities placed their organizations at political risk. Civil society organizations reported that religiously affiliated organizations, including several with long histories of work in the country, had difficulty renewing their registrations. During the first six months of the year, multiple religiously affiliated organizations reported lengthy delays, onerous requests for changes beyond those necessary to meet the requirements of law, and lack of transparency when renewing or registering their organizations."
- "Civil society leaders said influence from India's ruling party, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and other Hindu groups in India continued to pressure politicians in Nepal, particularly from the RPP, to support reversion to a Hindu state."

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, [General Briefing: Nepal](#), 22 March 2022:

- While Article 26 of the Nepali Constitution states that "each person shall be free to profess, practice and preserve his religion according to his faith," Article 26(3) states that to "convert another person from one religion to another or any act or conduct that may jeopardize other's religion is punishable by law." These clauses endanger both FoRB and freedom of expression.
- Although the constitution recognizes Nepal as a secular state, the current definition of secularism is restrictive, inconsistent with the international human rights framework, prejudiced against minority religions, and legitimizes discrimination on the basis of religion. Article 4 of the constitution explains 'secular' as "religious, cultural freedoms, including protection of religion, culture handed down from the time immemorial." A past Supreme Court judgement has interpreted this to mean protection of Hinduism.
- Nepal's penal code contains provisions that severely restrict FoRB:
 - Section 155 concerns "damaging or injuring or, in any way, defiling, destroying or polluting any place of religious worship with the intent of insulting the religion or religious feeling." Local sources report that in incidents where unidentified perpetrators damage shrines in Hindu temples, Christians are blamed, leading to negative feelings towards Christians.
 - Section 156 criminalizes the "outraging" of religious sentiments. This is poorly defined and widely misused to settle personal scores, target religious minorities or to further extremist agendas.
 - Section 157 states that "no one should create obstacles knowingly in the religious tradition of other faith being practiced since ancient times," which can be interpreted as referring to Hinduism, considered by many to be the oldest religion.
 - Section 158 criminalizes "conversion." This could be invoked against a wide range of legitimate expressions of religion or belief, including the charitable activities of religious groups, or merely speaking about one's faith.

Gender perspective

Nepal's legislation contains provisions that discriminate against women, including not being able to transmit citizenship through marriage and to their children (HRW 2022 country chapter). In 2021, a proposed new law to limit women's freedom of travel was met with widespread criticism ([The Guardian, 17 February 2021](#); [HRW, 11 February 2021](#)). Despite laws and policies aimed at

eradicating child marriage, the practice remains prevalent, with 40% of girls and 10% of boys marrying by the age of 18 ([Girls Not Brides](#), 2022). Rape and domestic violence are illegal, but there is no specific law addressing violence against women. According to [HRW 2021 country chapter](#): "Legal gaps and lack of political continued to mar accountability for sexual violence, especially for victims from minority communities".

Religious landscape

Nepal: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	1,380,000	4.6
Muslim	1,271,000	4.2
Hindu	19,789,000	65.5
Buddhist	3,681,000	12.2
Ethno-religionist	3,949,000	13.1
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	4,600	0.0
Atheist	16,400	0.1
Agnostic	90,200	0.3
Other	43,500	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2022) 65.5% of the population of Nepal is Hindu. 13.1% are ethno-religionist and 12.2% of the population are Buddhists. Christians in Nepal are 4.6% of the population.

Hinduism is the dominant religion in Nepal and there are also predominately Buddhist ethnic groups. 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.

For centuries, Dalits have been exploited socially and economically, and many have been attracted to Christian faith in recent years. Re-conversion campaigns (like the Ghar Wapsi movement in India) have not been particularly successful, and so Hindu extremists - who aim to make Nepal a Hindu nation - find other ways to put pressure on Christians.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank data profile:

- **GDP (current US\$):** 36.29 billion (in 2021)
- **GDP growth (annual %):** 4.2% (in 2021)

Nepal is still one of the least developed countries in the world and relies extensively on foreign aid. In 2020, Nepal's economy came to a standstill due to the COVID-19 lockdown measures. According to the World Bank ([Press Release, 8 October 2020](#)): "Nepal's economy is projected to grow by only 0.6 percent in 2021, inching up from an estimated 0.2 percent in 2020 as lockdowns caused by COVID-19 disrupt economic activity, especially tourism". The economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and the impact on livelihoods across Nepal was most acute for informal workers. Informal businesses make up around 50% of enterprises in Nepal and are the main source of income for most of the labor force ([Kathmandu Post, 9 October 2020](#)).

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, electrical power, industry or civil services. The country has, however, made progress toward sustainable economic growth since the 1950s with great improvement in living standards. 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 guest workers abroad which have brought billions of dollars into the country over the years. There was steep decline in remittances when the COVID-19 crisis significantly interrupted the world economy.

In 2022, Nepal faced the hard reality of a full-blown economic crisis with rising Inflation. To prevent the depletion of foreign exchange reserves, the government restricted imports, which consequently reduced tax revenue. The market is cash strapped, banks face a liquidity crisis because of loans to unproductive sectors. All this is not sudden. It was decades in the making. Successive governments failed to invest in manufacturing and agriculture to create jobs at home, and instead ran the country on revenue from taxes on imports. (Source: [Nepali Times, 20 May 2022](#))

Gender perspective

The female [labor force participation](#) rate is 82.8%, just shy of 85.1% for men (UNDP, 2020, p.363). This soars above the global female employment rate which sits at 46% (World Bank data profile). However, many women are restricted to the 'informal' sector and due to inequality at home, women may be far from experiencing economic independence ([Nepali Times, 8 March 2021](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA World Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Chhettri 16.6%, Brahman-Hill 12.2%, Magar 7.1%, Tharu 6.6%, Tamang 5.8%, Newar 5%, Kami 4.8%, Muslim 4.4%, Yadav 4%, Rai 2.3%, Gurung 2%, Damai/Dholii 1.8%, Thakuri 1.6%, Limbu 1.5%, Sarki 1.4%, Teli 1.4%, Chamar/Harijan/Ram 1.3%, Koiri/Kushwaha 1.2%, other 19% (2011 estimate).
- **Main languages:** Nepali (official) 44.6%, Maithali 11.7%, Bhojpuri 6%, Tharu 5.8%, Tamang 5.1%, Newar 3.2%, Bajjika 3%, Magar 3%, Doteli 3%, Urdu 2.6%, Avadhi 1.9%, Limbu 1.3%, Gurung 1.2%, Baitadeli 1%, other 6.4%, unspecified 0.2%; note - 123 languages reported as mother tongue in 2011 national census; many in government and business also speak English (2011 est.)
- **Urban population:** 21.5% of total population (2022)
- **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male: 78.6%, female: 59.7%) (2018)

According to the UNDP's Human Development Indicators HDI: (accessed 8 August 2022)

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.602 (0.581 for females, 0.623 for males), ranking 142
- **Total population:** 28.6 million (2019)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 70.8 years (72.2 for females, 69.3 for males) (2019)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 12.8 years (13.0 for females, 12.6 for males) (2019)
- **Gender inequality index:** 0.452 (2019)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate:** Female: 82.8, Male: 85.1 (2019)

According to HRW 2022 country chapter:

- "Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia, with 33 percent of girls marrying before 18 years and 8 percent married by age 15. Among boys, 9 percent marry before the age of 18. This situation worsened during the pandemic, as children were pushed out of education and families faced increased poverty. Nepal's 2006 Citizenship Act, as well as the 2015 constitution, contain provisions that discriminate against women. A draft bill to amend the Citizenship Act, first presented to parliament in 2018, retains several discriminatory provisions. In September 2020, three UN human rights experts wrote to the government raising concerns that "the bill would continue to discriminate systematically against women, regarding their ability to transmit citizenship through marriage and to their children." Due to flawed citizenship laws, an estimated 5 million people are forced to live without citizenship and are at risk of statelessness."
- "Caste-based violence and discrimination against Dalits are rarely investigated or prosecuted, despite the adoption of the Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability (Crime and Punishment) Act in 2011."

Effect of COVID-19

Like other communities, Christians were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Churches lost a lot financially and many churches renting properties for worship were forced to close down. A number of church leaders also died. (Source: [UCA News, 12 October 2021](#))

Gender perspective

In Nepal, harmful stereotypes and cultural practices serve to disempower women ([CEDAW, 2018](#)). This is particularly evident upon inspection of the [sex ratio at birth](#) (106.5 boys for every 100 girls born as of 2020) which points to a strong preference for sons (Our World in Data, 2022). Forced marriages – primarily of women and girls – reportedly occur "to protect family honor, prevent 'unsuitable' relationships and control female behavior" ([OECD, 2019](#)). Domestic violence levels also threaten the safety of women and girls, a threat which reportedly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns ([VOA News, 10 July 2020](#)).

Nepal remains one of the top 10 countries with a high prevalence of child marriages among boys and studies indicate higher rates of depression and suicide among child grooms than child brides ([NPR, 2 January 2022](#))

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 73.0% penetration (survey date: July 2022)
- **Facebook usage:** 52.8% penetration (survey date: July 2022)
According to [NapoleonCat \(January 2023\)](#), 57.3% of Facebook users in Nepal are registered as male, while 42.7% are women.

According to World Bank data profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 131.2 per 100 people (2020).
According to a [2020 article in the British Medical Journal](#), the gender gap in mobile phone ownership is high, at 24%. This suggests that it may be harder for female converts to access digital Christian resources and community.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (publication date: February 2023):

- "In relation to its telecom sector, Nepal has several topographical and economic constraints which have impeded efforts to expand network infrastructure and improve the quality of service for end-users."
- "The fixed line market remains underdeveloped, and as a result most traffic is channeled via mobile networks. Fixed broadband penetration remains very low, though to address this the government has initiated several programs as part of the Digital Nepal Framework and the wider Optical Fibre Backbone Network Expansion Project, started in 2012. Supported by the Rural Telecommunications Development Fund, the programs include building out fibre backbone infrastructure and using this to provide broadband to schools and community centres nationally."
- "Telcos have also invested in fibre networks, and competition in the market is intensifying. Cheap fibre-based services launched by CG Net in mid-2021 prompted responses from other ISPs to provide faster and more competitively priced offers."
- "Nepal's mobile market is relatively developed, with a focus on LTE. In 2021, the regulator considered a range of spectrum bands which could be used for 5G, while Nepal Telecom was charged with trialing services in five cities."

- "On the consumer side, spending on telecoms services and devices is under pressure from the financial effect of large-scale job losses and the consequent restriction on disposable incomes."

Christians in Nepal can freely access the Internet and foreign Christian websites. The Nepalese Christian website "[Nepal Church](#)" (last accessed 8 February 2023) operates without hinderance and many of its pages are in the local language.

Security situation

In May 2020 a dispute with India erupted over a 17 km stretch of Nepalese border (Al-Jazeera, 29 May 2020). However, in general, relationships with India have continued to gradually recover from its all-time low in 2015. In terms of regional cooperation, Nepal's relationship with China is also improving.

The monarchy and Congress-led governments relied on financial and other support from India, while Maoist-led governments put more emphasis on improving cooperation with China and increasing economic support from Beijing. By shifting back and forth between India and China, Nepal has seemingly adopted a policy of playing these two regional powers off against one another. This policy recently came under strain following further border disputes with both China and India. Nepal remains caught between these two major regional powers and is largely unable to defend itself. After a decline in economic cooperation with India, which resulted in greater economic cooperation with China, Nepal is once again cooperating with India. (Source: [Bertelsmann Stiftung Nepal Country Report 2022, 8 March 2022](#))

Examples of the attempts to improve ties with both China and India began to show in early 2022. From 25-27 March 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi visited Nepal to improve trade and ties (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 21 March 2022](#)). Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba met his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on 2 April 2022 during a three-day visit to New Delhi and signed a series of agreements to enhance their ties. At the same time, Nepal has been deepening relations with India's rival, China (Source: [Associated Press, 2 April 2022](#)). On 16 May 2022, Modi visited Nepal. The Indian prime minister's visit took place in the wake of a series of visits to Kathmandu by officials from the USA, UK and China. Observers and analysts say the visit from Delhi may look purely like a religious one, but it did hold strategic significance. (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 16 May 2022](#))

Trends analysis

1) Christianity has been growing rapidly

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 improving and the high level of poverty is being reduced little by little. Christianity is growing rapidly, which is a cause of concern for radical Hindus since most converts to Christianity come from a Hindu background.

2) Hindu radicals have been able to attack non-Hindus with impunity

Compared to its neighbor India, the number of reported violent incidents against Christians in Nepal is relatively low, but has been increasing. In the past months and years there have been threats, arrests, physical harassment, churches and homes of Christians damaged and foreign Christians expelled. Under the current circumstances, Hindu radicals have been able to continue and increase their attacks against non-Hindus with impunity. So far, the government of Nepal has undertaken no measures to counter this.

3) The political situation remains unstable

Observers are waiting to see whether the recent levels of political instability will continue. In 2020, a split within the Communist party seriously affected the coalition government which took power in 2018. This did not change even after Prime Minister Oli was removed from office by the Supreme Court in July 2021 and was replaced by Congress party leader Deuba. The ruling coalition that took over power after parliamentary elections in November 2022 does not yet generate confidence that the period of political instability is over.

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- Political and legal landscape: HRW 2021 country chapter: - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/nepal>

- Economic landscape: Press Release, 8 October 2020 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/08/covid-19-impact-on-nepals-economy-hits-hardest-informal-sector#:~:text=KATHMANDU%2C%20October%208%2C%202020%E2%80%94%20Nepal%E2%80%99s%20economy%20is%20projected,latest%20South%20Asia%20Economic%20Focus%20Beaten%20or%20Broken%3F>.
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WWL 2023: Church information / Nepal

Christian origins

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 there was significant church growth in Nepal. With this growth, persecution grew too and in the 1980s hundreds of Nepalese Christian leaders were imprisoned; 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. Further, in August 2017 anti-conversion legislation was signed into law, and the new criminal code which came into effect in August 2018 also prohibits religious activities deemed by the authorities to be against public order or morality.

Theological education is not well established in Nepal, except for a few Bible schools. As a result, most of the Nepali Christian students go to India for higher theological education.

While there were very [few Christians](#) in the country in 1951, the census registered 458 after 10 years and 102,000 after forty years (Breakpoint, 12 May 2016). According to the 2011 census, that number already reached 375,000. However, 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 estimate. What is clear is that the number of Christians in Nepal continues to grow at a fast rate.

Church spectrum today

Nepal: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	5,600	0.4
Catholic	7,700	0.6
Protestant	300,000	21.7
Independent	1,055,000	76.4
Unaffiliated	11,300	0.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	1,379,600	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	551,000	39.9
Renewalist movement	939,000	68.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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:** Christians 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. **Evangelical movement:** 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. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

According to the World Christian Database (accessed April 2022), the largest denominations in Nepal are:

- Independents / Hindu background Christians
- National Church Fellowship of Nepal
- Churches of Nepal
- Other Protestants

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no hotspots of persecution of Christians in Nepal, but pressure on converts is stronger in the countryside than in urban areas.

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. The Constitution of Nepal has created difficulties for expatriate Christians, since foreign missionaries are not allowed to enter Nepal for religious purposes. If foreign visitors are found to be involved in evangelistic activities, they are immediately deported back to their respective home country.

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

Converts to Christianity: Christians from a Hindu background make up 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 Christians in Nepal, with much pressure coming from local government officials, Hindu priests, family and community.

Non-traditional Christian communities: These mostly consist of independent churches. Converts from Hinduism will usually go to churches belonging to this category. As these churches are also very active in evangelism, they experience high levels of persecution.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: few Christians - <https://www.breakpoint.org/faith-rise-nepal/>

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Nepal

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Nepal: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	61	55
WWL 2022	64	48
WWL 2021	66	34
WWL 2020	64	32
WWL 2019	64	32

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Nepal's fall in total score was due to a decrease both in the pressure and violence scores. Converts from Hinduism are put under most pressure as they are viewed as deviating from the faith of the ancestors. The biggest pressure comes from radical Hindus and is highest in the *Private, National and Church spheres of life*. Violence by radical Hindus targeting Christians continued with churches being damaged, Christians being arrested, physically harassed and being forced to leave their homes. Most of the persecution of Christians in Nepal comes from Hindu radical groups who want to turn Nepal back into a Hindu state, but since the adoption of the new Constitution in 2015, the government is also applying pressure.

Persecution engines

Nepal: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Strong
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Weak
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very weak
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Religious nationalism - Hindu (Strong)

Most of the persecution of Christians in Nepal comes from Hindu radical groups who want to turn Nepal back into a Hindu state. 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. As mentioned above in *Political and legal landscape*, anti-conversion legislation was signed into law in 2017. Another sign of a deteriorating situation for Christians.

Clan oppression (Strong) - blended with Religious nationalism - Hindu

In the context of Nepal, most Christians are from Hindu background. Thus, it is extremely difficult for single believers to practice Christian worship who are from a radical Hindu family or community. If a convert from a radical Hindu family is found to be practicing Christian worship, he or she is likely to face pressure and violence and be expelled from their home. Furthermore, they are not allowed to inherit property.

Drivers of persecution

Nepal: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	WEAK	STRONG	-	STRONG	-	WEAK	VERY WEAK	VERY WEAK	-
Government officials	-	Strong	-	Medium	-	Very weak	-	Very weak	-
Ethnic group leaders	-	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Weak	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	-	Strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	Weak	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	Very weak	Very weak	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Weak	Strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	Medium	-	-	-	Weak	-	Very weak	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

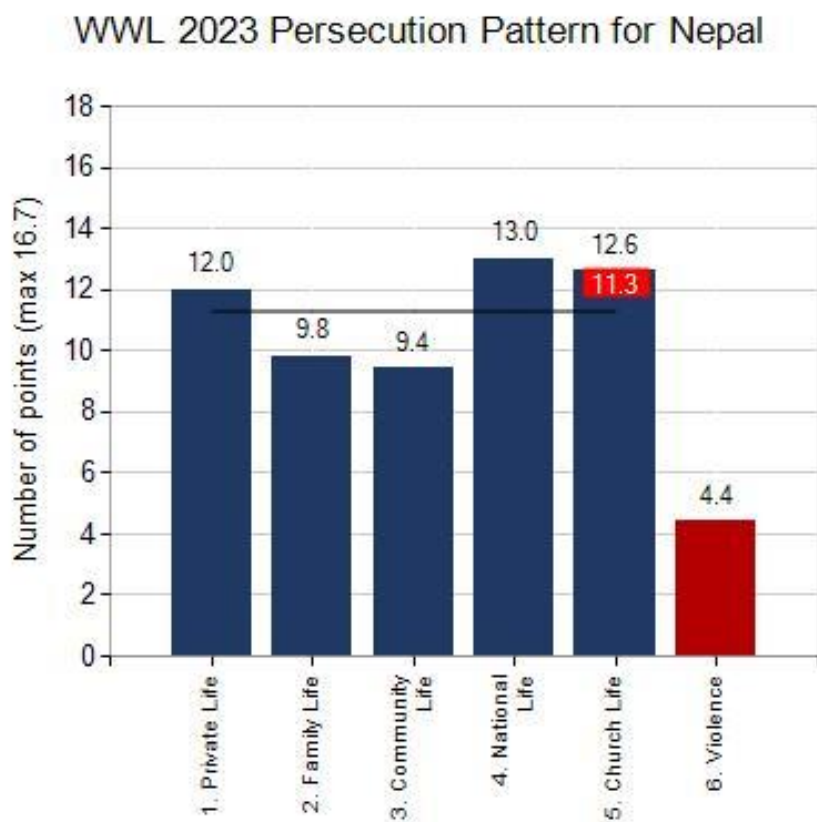
Drivers of Religious nationalism - Hindu:

- **Government officials (Strong):** At the national level, the anti-conversion legislation puts government officials against Christians. At the national level, and at the local (and maybe also at provincial) level government officials have connections to the Hindu community. They may impose restrictions on religious freedom. This can lead to the arrest and harassment of Christians.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Hindu leaders will at any level (local, provincial and national) try to exert influence and restrictions on other religions. As a result, the level of violence has gone up in Nepal in recent years.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** There are several Hindu radical groups and parties that are influenced by their counterparts in India. Their activities and influence is growing.
- **Extended family (Strong):** Converts to Christianity are often under intensive pressure from their families to return to the faith of the ancestors.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Medium):** Especially in the northern and extreme southern regions of Nepal ethnic group leaders have displayed religious intolerance. This has resulted in several incidents targeting Christian evangelists, pastors or newly planted churches.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** At the community level especially, Hindus will impose pressure on converts and other Christians.
- **Political parties (Medium):** There are at least two Hindu political parties in the national parliament in favor of turning Nepal into a Hindu nation again.

Drivers of Clan oppression, often blended with Religious nationalism:

- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** Tribal Hindu leaders, especially in the northern and extreme southern regions of Nepal, have displayed religious intolerance. This resulted in several incidents targeting Christian evangelists, pastors or newly planted churches. This is strongly linked to *Religious nationalism*.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** There are a number of Hindu radical groups and parties that are influenced by their counterparts in India. In their eyes, Christianity is a religion that should not exist in Nepal.
- **Extended family (Strong):** Converts to Christianity are often under intensive pressure from their families to return to the faith of the ancestors.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Local government agents (at the community level) will oppose Christian activities in their areas.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** At the community level, ordinary Hindu citizens will impose pressure on converts and other Christians.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Nepal shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (11.3 points), slightly lower than in WWL 2022 (11.7 points). Hindu pressure on Christians (especially against converts) is present at all levels of society, ranging from the personal level all the way up to the national and church levels. Christians experience opposition to conversions and baptisms constantly. Anti-conversion legislation has been imposed since 2017.
- The three spheres of life with the highest scores are *National*, *Church* and *Private spheres of life*. These are the spheres where Hindu pressure is most visible.
- The score for violence reached 4.4 points in WWL 2023 (a decrease from 5.2 points in WWL 2022).

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

Speaking about Christian faith outside the immediate family is regarded as a form of evangelism by Hindus. Members of the extended family, friends and the community will oppose Christians who do this; the latter need to be very careful.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to own or keep Christian materials. (3.25 points)

The family, friends and community members have stepped up their opposition to Christians owning religious materials. At first this happened primarily in the countryside and affected mostly converts, but since the past few years this has become more widespread. Now it also affects other Christians all over Nepal as these materials are usually considered as evangelism materials by Hindu radicals.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.25 points)

Revealing one's Christian faith is equal to evangelism in the eyes of Hindu radicals. This will be opposed, sometimes violently. At first this was limited to family homes in the countryside, but today social media have taken the issue all over Nepal.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)

Hindu aversion of conversion to Christianity is growing in Nepal. Under the influence of Hindu radicals in India, Hindus in Nepal are becoming more hostile towards converts and any Christians active in evangelism. Because of this growing aversion, the Constitution of Nepal was adapted in 2015 with Article 26 effectively forbidding conversion by law.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (4.00 points)

The Hindu and Buddhist tradition in Nepal is to cremate people when they die. There are no common burial grounds so the only places where Christians can be buried is in very few privately owned places - but even then there will be opposition from locals. Some families travelled to India to conduct burials of Catholics who had died in Nepal.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)

Baptism is regarded as the final sign that one has left Hinduism to become a Christian. Many Christians realize that baptisms can lead to strong reactions from the family and community and will either refrain from being baptized or have this done secretly. Pressure on Christians has grown to such an extent that baptismal services are held in secret in churches.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)

Even though the country is now officially secular, Hindu practices and customs are deeply embedded in the education system. Children of non-Hindu faiths will routinely find themselves participating in Hindu customs as part of school activities. For instance, the daily prayers in schools are recited to a Hindu goddess of learning, Saraswati. The school curriculum teaches about Hindu festivals and cultural practices. There is no government agenda as such to establish a Hindu monopoly through these activities, however the all-round presence of a majority religion or culture in day-to-day life and the inability of schools to develop an inclusive outlook can lead children from religious minorities to feel alienated.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

Some children of Christian parents face difficulties or harassment from their friends. Other children refuse to play with them where parents have told them not to mix with Christian children. Relatives and neighbors may also discriminate against them by not showing so much love for them as they did before the family became Christian.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

At the community level, Christians (especially converts) are often threatened by their family or members of the community. Christian house meetings are regularly disturbed and obstructed. Single Christians are often harassed for not following the Hindu tradition and rituals.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christians in government service, and especially those in the armed forces, have been discriminated against. Christians in public jobs in general are not given a fair opportunity in employment, let alone in getting promotion. Private non-Christian organizations also discriminate against Christians as regards employment and promotion. Instead, less qualified Hindus (or people of another religion) are given the opportunities that arise.

Block 3.4: Christians have been hindered in sharing community resources. (3.00 points)

In some rural areas Christians are socially boycotted and are not allowed to use community resources. In one such recent case, the Buddhists living in an earthquake-displacement camp did not allow Christians to share water from the same supply system, and two separate supplies had to be created. In two villages near Lamjung, Christians were not allowed to take water; there are many such villages.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Local police and councils often force Christians to come to their offices for questioning. They are asked to report about their church activities.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)

Nepal is a secular state and the Constitution guarantees religious freedom, which means people can practice their religion and culture freely. However, conversion from one religion to another is prohibited. The new criminal code of Nepal, which came into effect in August 2017, also prohibits religious behavior that disrupts public order or goes contrary to public morality. Hence, while the law generally remains positive, there is the possibility that these new provisions can be used to target and punish members of minority groups.

Block 4.14: Those who have caused harm to Christians have been left unpunished. (3.75 points)

No action is taken against those who harass or intimidate Christians. This is especially true in the case of Hindu extremist elements. This is even more so at the local level.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations and/or political parties have been hindered. (3.50 points)

New regulations have been introduced regarding NGOs. According to these regulations, NGOs require approval for each project that they run. Local authorities will be required to ban any projects which look as if they might involve proselytizing. For instance, Christian organizations have been forced to remove any biblical or Christian words from their documentation prior to applying. Those who did not do so were unable to acquire registration. Christian NGOs face harassment by local authorities who often claim that they engage in unethical conversion.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (3.50 points)

Most national media in Nepal are biased against Christians. However, there is no blatant media propaganda or whipping up of hate and paranoia against Christians as in some other countries. However, there is a tendency to portray evangelical groups as luring innocent villagers with money and false promises. Conversion is shown in a very negative light. Such unfavorable representation helps to stereotype Christians and elicit negative attitudes towards them. (Such negative depiction has also found its way into international media. While such stories may be based on facts, such selective reporting presents a highly distorted picture.)

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)

There is no legal recognition of churches in Nepal. Church property is registered under the name of private persons or NGOs. There is no provision for registering churches.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (4.00 points)

Christian NGOs and other social service organizations have come under heavy restrictions. Pressure is especially focused on charitable work as there is always the suspicion of conversion activities taking place. There are examples of organizations that were requested to remove Christian references in their documents, including prefaces stating which Christian communities originally founded the charity.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

Conversion is strictly forbidden (see above: 1.1). Integrating converts into a church is therefore also forbidden. Apart from the legal aspect, there is also family and community pressure against converts and the churches accepting them.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.75 points)

If the instigators of persecution are government officials or police (mostly from the local level) it is of little use speaking out against them as this might result in heavier punishment. If the instigators are Hindu radicals or local community members there is also little point in speaking out as most of these people have strong ties with those in power.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol “x” in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Nepal: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2	How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	4	5
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	9	7
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	1	0

6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	2	0
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	82	33
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10	How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	4
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	16	10 *
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	10

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Churches and public Christian properties attacked:** At least 4. Example: A social organization called 'Mountain Child', which is providing educational services in seven wards of Chumanubri village in Gorkha, was suspended for six months after a complaint was lodged against the organization at the Home Ministry for preaching Christianity. Because of this, three primary schools have been closed since 10 January 2022.
- **Christians detained:** 2 Korean nuns were arrested in Pokhara and one Christian boy was arrested in Banke. One pastor from Mugu was also kept in detention while his case was decided by the district court.
- **Christians sentenced:** On 13 July 2022 Pastor Keshav Acharya was sentenced to one year by Nepal's High Court.
- **Christians sexually harassed:** A young Christian woman was sexually harassed by her father on 16 May 2022.
- **Forced marriage of Christians:** On 8 May 2022, a Christian girl was forcefully married by her father and brothers to a Hindu man. She is now not allowed to practice her faith at home and is not allowed to attend church because her husband's family is Hindu.
- **Christians attacked:** There were 82 cases of physical abuse (including death-threats).
- **Christians forced to leave their homes:** 3 incidents were noted where 16 Christian people were forced to leave either their homes or villages.

5 Year trends

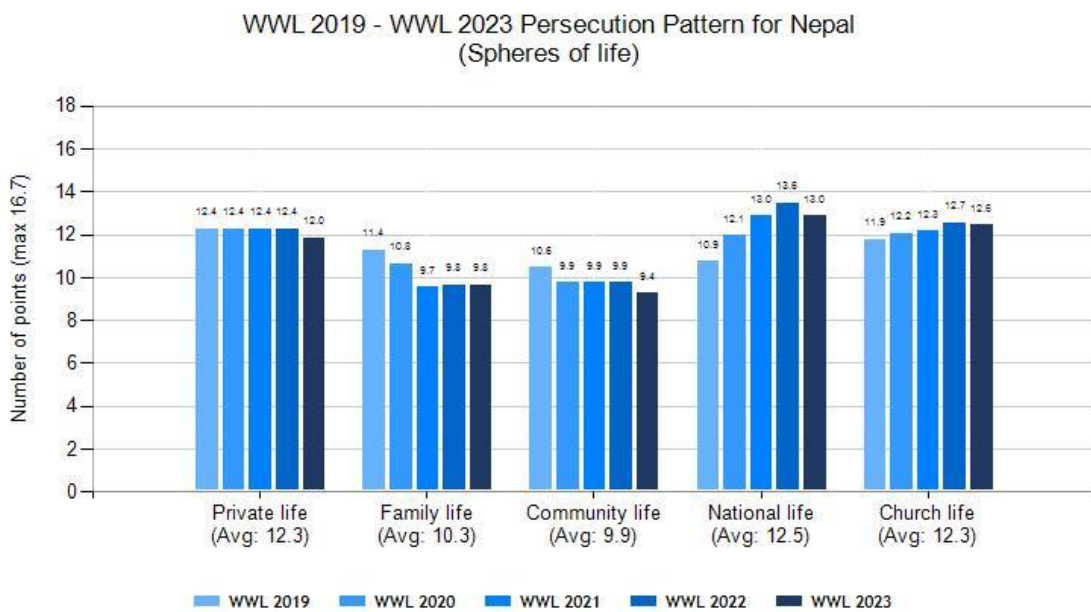
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Nepal: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	11.3
2022	11.7
2021	11.4
2020	11.5
2019	11.4

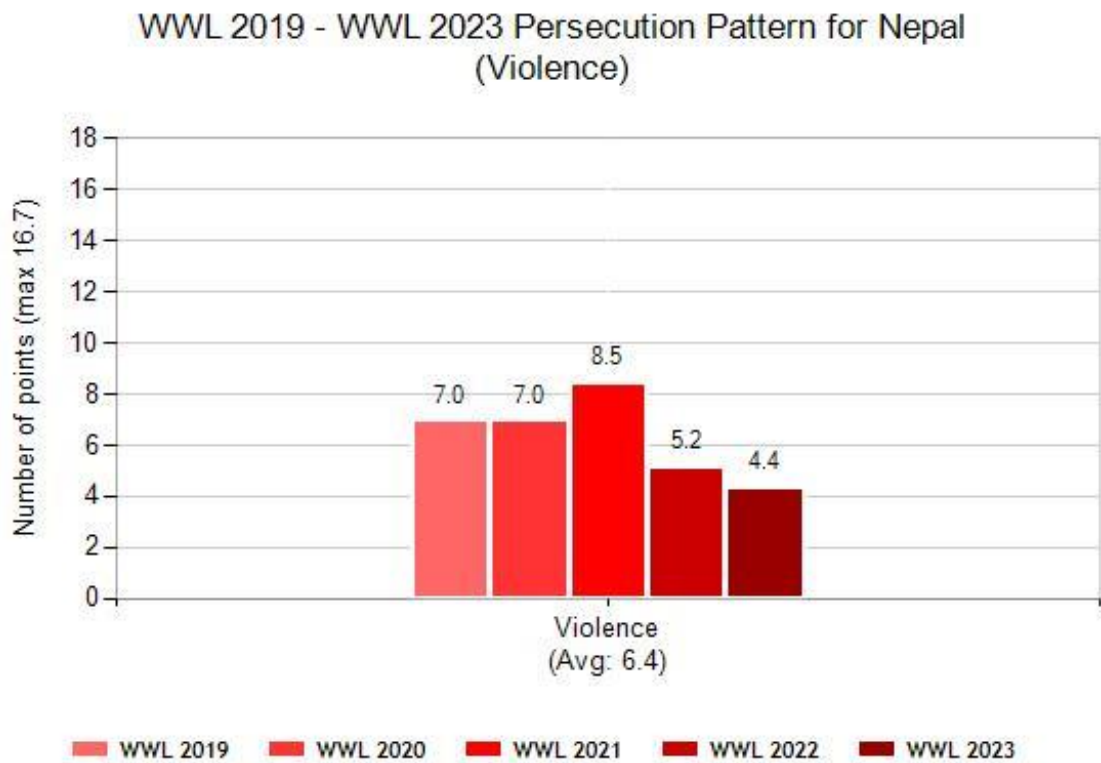
The average pressure on Christians in Nepal has remained more or less stable within the range 11.3 - 11.7 points. Hindu pressure on Christians in Nepal is within the range 'very high' but it is still much lower than in neighboring India.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the past five WWL reporting periods, pressure has been highest in the *National, Private and Church spheres of life*. This is still the case even when in WWL 2023 the scores were lower than in previous years. The political turmoil in Nepal since 2022 has meant a decrease in state pressure. Oppression from radical Hindus and Maoists also became less violent.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Violence against Christians in Nepal had been on the increase in the WWL 2019 - WWL 2021 reporting periods, aided by the effect of anti-conversion legislation passed in 2017. However, the score went down in WWL 2022 and WWL 2023, due to fewer reports of incidents.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – verbal
Technological	-

Although the multi-cultural society of Nepal was granted religious freedom in the 2015 Constitution, anti-conversion and blasphemy laws continue to remain in place. It is dangerous for converts to Christianity to reveal their faith. When their faith becomes known, female converts face a variety of forms of pressure. “Initially they are emotionally tortured,” a country expert explains, “then gradually physical torture starts to take place. Finally, they are subjected to being social outcasts from the family and community.” The immediate family members of

female Christian converts may lock them up at home, often depriving them of basic needs and financial support.

On rare occasions, families make premarital arrangements to marry their daughters to a non-Christian man. This is done in order to save their family's reputation. Within such marriages, women are highly pressurized to leave their Christian faith. If a woman is already married at the point of conversion and her husband is not supportive of her faith, she is unlikely to be aware of the legal possibilities of defending herself and her children and may be divorced.

In the historically Hindu nation and culturally patriarchal society of Nepal, women and girls have less ability to exercise their rights. Perhaps the most difficult aspect is the persistency of the harassment for those who convert to Christianity, be it physical, emotional or sexual harassment.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied citizenship; False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – verbal
Technological	-

Christian men and boys are most vulnerable to persecution if they are recent converts, in public service, or church leaders of independent churches. Recent converts are particularly vulnerable to physical and mental abuse from family and society, and are made to feel like social outcasts. Converts are occasionally denied access to ancestral property by immediate family members and denied basic legal rights to a birth certificate and citizenship by local government administrators. Furthermore, known converts face harassment in public places such as markets and the workplace. Male converts usually migrate to new cities or areas to set up afresh and avoid economic deprivation. Men and boys have also been victims of false charges and accusations, which have resulted in imprisonment on rare occasions.

According to Nepali law, citizens cannot be barred from public office because of their religious beliefs. However, Christians in public service, especially in the armed forces, have complained that in actual practice they are denied promotion because of their faith. In rural areas, it is reported that Hindus obstruct Christians from being a part of communal and other public forums. In the Nepalese army, government positions and police, Christians are obliged to participate in worship to Hindu gods and observe Hindu festivals. This includes eating food offered to idols or putting vermilion powder on their heads during the Hindu festivities.

Local independent church pastors and leaders are the main targets of harassment for faith related reasons. Hindu radicals will focus their attacks on church leaders firstly to set an example to other Christians in the area, and secondly because they are regarded as being the main actors behind the increasing numbers of Christian conversions. A country expert explains: “Ethnic group leaders, especially in the northern and extreme southern regions of Nepal, have displayed religious intolerance. This resulted in several incidents, which were aimed to persecute Christian evangelists, pastors or newly planted churches.” Pastors are also [falsely accused](#) of crimes, threatened with physical assault and on some occasions, forced to leave their communities (BBC News, 14 January 2023). Exemplifying the dangers, in May 2021, a church leader was falsely accused of drug smuggling and was kept in custody for 48 days where he was physically and mentally abused by police. Because of the severity of the beating, he became paralyzed.

When men and boys are severely beaten and socially ostracized, they have fewer economic opportunities for supporting their family. Most men and older boys are the providers for the family, so this form of discrimination means that the whole family faces both economic troubles and social insecurity.

Persecution of other religious minorities

As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "According to the Center for Education and Human Resource Development, the number of madrassas registered with district education offices remained unchanged at 911. Some Muslim leaders stated that as many as 2,500 to 3,000 full-time madrassahs continued to be unregistered."
- "Proselytizing cases from 2020 against six of seven Jehovah's Witnesses, including two US citizens, remained pending at year's end [2021], but none were in custody."
- "Tibetan community leaders again said government authorities generally permitted them to celebrate most Buddhist holidays in private ceremonies but prohibited the public celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday and continued to curtail their ability to hold other public celebrations. During the year, police surveillance of Tibetans remained high and, in some cases, the number of security personnel monitoring Tibetans and the scrutiny of Tibetan cultural and religious celebrations, particularly those involving the Dalai Lama, increased."
- "Hindu priests and 'high-caste' residents continued to discriminate against Dalits, as members of a 'lower' caste. On October 14 [2021], Bhim Bahadur Bishwakarma was beaten to death for trying to enter a temple that barred Dalits. The attack took place during the Dashain holiday in the city of Bharatpur, Chitwan District, Bagmati Province."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Religious nationalism - Hindu

Pressure to turn back history and make Nepal a Hindu country again is growing. The current government has already implemented anti-conversion legislation. In the last two years, Hindu radicals have stepped up their activities against non-Hindus - also with support from radical Hindu movements based in India. It is to be expected that radical Hindus will increase their activities in Nepal. The influence of this Persecution engine is therefore expected to grow.

Clan oppression (often blended with Religious nationalism)

Since most Christians in Nepal are from a Hindu background and since anti-conversion legislation has been in force since 2017, it may be expected that pressure from clan elements (families, friends, and communities) on Christians will remain high. It will be of no surprise, if this pressure increases in the coming years.

External Links – Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution / Male: falsely accused - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-64235873>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Nepal>