



International Religious Freedom Report 2021

Why in News

The **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** has recommended for the [second year in the row](#) to put India on a list ('Countries of Particular Concern' or CPCs) for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020.

- Earlier, the US State Department, in its [2020 Human Rights Report](#), pointed out several Human Rights Issues in India.

Key Points

▪ About the USCIRF:

- USCIRF is **an independent, bipartisan US federal government commission**, dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- It is **an advisory body to the US Congress**.
- **USCIRF's 2021 Annual Report** assesses religious freedom violations and progress during calendar year 2020 in 26 countries and makes independent recommendations for US policy.
- It is **Headquartered at Washington DC**.

▪ About the Report:

- The Report's **primary focus is on two groups of countries:**
 - **"Country of Particular Concern (CPC)"** is a designation by the US Secretary of State of a nation engaged in severe violations of religious freedom under **IRFA (International Religious Freedom Act of 1998)**.
 - A **"Special Watch List" country** is one that is deemed not to meet all of the CPC criteria but engages in or tolerates severe violations of religious freedom.
- The Report **also includes USCIRF's recommendations of violent nonstate actors for designation by the US State Department as "entities of particular concern,"** or EPCs, under IRFA.

▪ Latest Recommendations of USCIRF:

◦ For the CPC List:

- Recommendations for the CPC list are **Russia, Syria and Vietnam and India**.
- **Countries already on the CPCs list** and recommended by USCIRF for re-designation are Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

◦ For A Special Watch List:

- Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Turkey and Uzbekistan are recommended for a 'Special Watch List', along with Cuba and Nicaragua, both of which were already on the list for 2019.

◦ For EPCs:

- Recommends **seven non-state actors** for redesignation as “entities of particular concern” (EPCs)—[al-Shabaab](#), [Boko Haram](#), [the Houthis](#), Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), and the [Taliban](#).

India’s Case

▪ Areas of Concern Highlighted :

- **Passage of the Religiously Discriminatory [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act, 2019 \(CAA\)](#):** CAA fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from South Asian countries meeting certain other criteria.
- **[Delhi Riots](#):** The report mentions the attack that took place on religious minorities during Delhi riots by the religious majority population in February 2020.
- **[National Register of Citizens \(NRC\)](#):** The consequences of exclusion - as exemplified by a large detention camp being built in Assam - are potentially devastating.
- **[Anti-Conversion Laws](#):** Despite India’s constitutional protections for religious freedom, **approximately one-third of India’s 28 states limit or prohibit religious conversion** to protect the dominant religion from perceived threats from religious minorities.
- **Disinformation and Incitement of Violence:** Government officials and nonstate actors **continued to use social media and other forms of communication to harass and spread hatred and disinformation** against minority communities, including Muslims, Christians, and Dalits.
 - The **fervor around cow slaughter continues** to take root in policy, in December, the state of Karnataka revised an earlier bill to impose fines and imprisonment for the transport, sale, and purchase of cattle for slaughter.
- **Religious Freedom in Jammu and Kashmir:** In Muslim-majority [Jammu and Kashmir](#), restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly negatively impacted religious freedom, including the observance of religious holy days and the ability to attend prayers.
 - The **shutdown of the internet for nearly 18 months**—the longest-ever shutdown in any democracy—and other restrictions on communications caused significant disruption and limited religious freedom.
- **Closing Space for Civil Society:** Government officials used the [Unlawful Activities Prevention Act \(UAPA\)](#) and other statutes to detain advocates, media, and academics, including religious minorities.
 - In September 2020, the [FCRA \(Foreign Contribution Regulation Act\)](#) was amended to place further restrictions on NGOs, including reducing the amount of foreign funds that could be used for administrative expenses and requiring that accounts be held in a government-designated bank.

▪ Recommendations of USCIRF:

- It has recommended the US administration **to impose targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities** for ‘severe violations of religious freedom’.
- Condemn ongoing religious freedom violations and support religious organizations and human rights groups being targeted for their advocacy of religious freedom.
- The US administration **should promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums** “such as the ministerial of the [Quadrilateral \(the Quad\)](#).”
- The US Congress should **raise issues in the US-India bilateral space**, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters and constituting Congressional delegations.

Freedom of Religion in India

- Freedom of religion in India is **a fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25-28** of the Constitution of India.

- **Article 25** (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion).
 - Article 26 (Freedom to manage religious affairs).
 - Article 27 (Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion).
 - Article 28 (Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions).
- Further, Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution deal with the protection of interest of minorities.

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PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/international-religious-freedom-report-2021>

