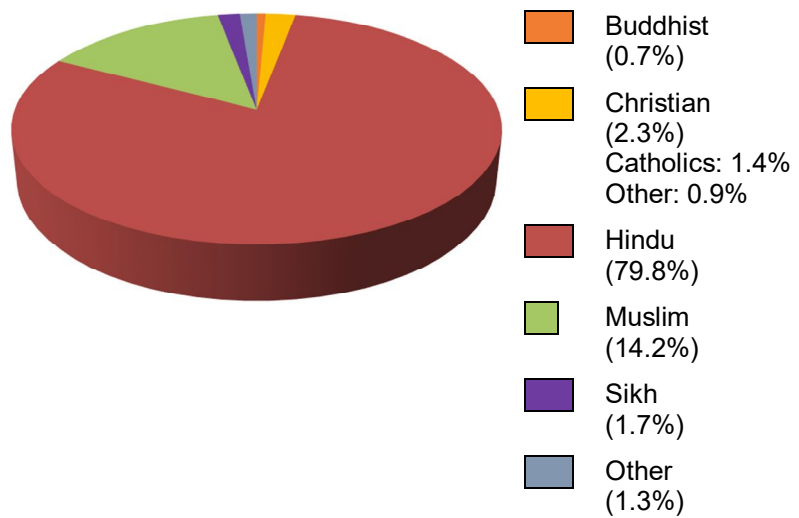


# INDIA



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<b>Area:</b> 3.1 million km <sup>2</sup>	<b>Population<sup>1</sup>:</b> 1.21 billion	<b>Political system:</b> Democracy	<b>Major Language(s):</b> Hindi, English
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## Introduction

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his fourth visit to the United States since coming to power in May 2014. Speaking at a special joint session of Congress, the Indian leader praised the virtues of the world's "largest democracy" before the elected representatives of "its oldest", which is how he described the two countries' political systems. Mr Modi was particularly insistent on the fact that freedom of religion was enshrined in the Constitution of the Indian Union and that his country was "a modern nation with freedom, democracy, and equality as the essence of its soul."<sup>2</sup>

"For my government, the Constitution is its real holy book. And, in that holy book, freedom of faith, speech and franchise, and equality of all citizens, regardless of background, are enshrined as fundamental rights," the prime minister said, adding, "all the 1.25 billion of our citizens have freedom from fear, a freedom they exercise every moment of their lives."<sup>3</sup>

Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking before the U.S. Congress in 2016 stands in stark contrast to the Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi of 2005 when a U.S. law made "any government official who was responsible for – or directly carried out at any time – particularly severe violations of religious freedom ineligible for a visa".<sup>4</sup> Back then, a report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRCF) said that Mr Modi had played a role in the pogroms that saw Muslims attacked without any real opposition from Gujarat State authorities.

Still, despite the spectacular Indo-American rapprochement, relations are not all plain sailing. In March 2016, India refused to grant a visa to the members of a USCIRF delegation on the grounds that its 2015 report stated that religious violence was up in India over the previous three years.<sup>5</sup> The visa refusal did not prevent the Commission from writing in its 2016 report, released in May of this year, that India was on a "negative trajectory" with respect to religious freedom.<sup>6</sup> "Minority communities, especially Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs, experienced numerous incidents of intimidation, harassment, and violence, largely at the hands of Hindu nationalist groups," the report said.<sup>7</sup>

India does not have an official state religion. The law requires that public institutions treat all religions on the same plane. However, legal requirements notwithstanding, the religious make-up of Indian society – the changing proportion of Hindus as opposed to those of other faiths – is politically very relevant. The release on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2015 of census data on religion from 2010-2011<sup>8</sup> sparked a lively debate.<sup>9</sup>

### **Hindus below 80 percent of the population**

Overall, the data showed a proportional decline for Hindus, an increase for Muslims and no change for Christians.<sup>10</sup> For the first time since independence in 1947, Hindus dropped below 80 percent, to 79.79 percent. Overall, that represents 966 million Hindus out of a total population of 1.2 billion, up by 16.76 percent from the 2000-2001 census period. In the same decade, the overall growth of the total population was 17.7 percent. Muslims are a distant second with 14.2 percent of the Indian population or 172.2 million, up by 24.5 percent. Further behind, in third place, Christians officially number 27.8 million. In ten years, their number rose by 15.5 percent, slightly below the national average, which explains why Christians are still 2.3 percent of India's population.<sup>11</sup> Other religious minorities include 20.8 million Sikhs, 8.4 million Buddhists and 4.5 million Jains. Finally, an additional 10.1 million belong to other religions, like the Parsees (Zoroastrians), Jews, Baha'is, etc.

The fact that Hindus dropped below the 80 percent mark sparked a lot of discussions and comments. Right-wing Hindu nationalist movements see it as justification for their struggle for a Hindu-centred India. Conversely, representatives of religious minorities strongly condemned repeated attacks against them.

Over the previous decade, especially in states ruled by Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP), Madhya Pradesh for example, Christian missionaries have been accused of converting indigenous groups and Dalits (formerly known as untouchables). This in turn has led to the adoption of anti-conversion laws. "I want to ask all those who accused us of converting gullible people to Christianity: where are those whom we converted," said Archbishop Leo Cornelio of Bhopal.<sup>12</sup> According to the Catholic prelate, these accusations are meant to create divisions between different religious communities; Christians and Muslims are perceived and described as a threat to Hindu political interests. "They will not hesitate even to disown the census and still continue to create communal discord," he said. For Navaid Hamid, secretary of the South Asian Council for Minorities (SACM), "Muslims in India can never outnumber the Hindu community until and unless some 30-40 percent of Hindus convert to Islam, which is unimaginable."<sup>13</sup>

### **Constitutional and legislative provisions: towards a Union anti-conversion law?**

As Mr Modi said to the U.S. Congress, India's Union Constitution guarantees religious freedom. Article 25, paragraph 1, of the constitution states that "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion." According to Article 27, "no person shall be compelled to pay any taxes [...] for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination. Article 28 provides that "no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds", and in accordance with Article 26 of the constitution, which concerns group rights, "every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes" as well as "own, acquire, and administer property." Article 29 states that any section of the citizens has the right to preserve their distinctive customs and languages. According to Article 30, "all minorities, whether based on religion or language, have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice."<sup>14</sup>

Within the Union's constitutional framework, the central government can impose some limitations, particularly with respect to the ties religious communities can have with foreign countries. Hence, for many years, Indian authorities have virtually stopped granting visas to missionaries.<sup>15</sup> Those already in the country for a long time can renew their residence and missionary activity permit each year, but only under exceptional circumstances do Indian authorities grant visas to new

missionaries. Similarly, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act is meant to control foreign funding for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with Christian or Muslim organisations regularly penalised.<sup>16</sup>

From a legislative standpoint, conversion holds centre stage in the public discourse. Since coming to power in New Delhi in May 2014, Mr Modi has been careful not to give an opinion directly on this very sensitive issue in a country where BJP officials openly promote Hindutva, an ideology that defines Indian nationhood as essentially Hindu. His ministers, however, have repeatedly expressed support for measures to “protect the Hindu religion”, ostensibly threatened by the rise of religious minorities, Muslims and Christians in particular. In December 2014, the Parliamentary Affairs minister caused a sensation when he called for a vote on an anti-conversion law<sup>17</sup> in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015, the Union Home Affairs Minister, Rajnath Singh, brought the issue back into the spotlight by calling for a “national debate” on the issue of conversion and insisting on the need for a nation-wide anti-conversion law.<sup>18</sup>

On 15<sup>th</sup> April, a legal opinion from the Union Law and Justice Ministry put a stop to the central government’s ambitions in this area.<sup>19</sup> Ministry jurists said that any central government legislation that restricts the right to change religion goes against the provisions of the Constitution of the Indian Union, which states that the area falls under the jurisdiction of the Union’s states and territories, not the central government.

Anti-conversion legislation has been a much-debated issue at the national level for some time, and is closely tied to the BJP, or more precisely its predecessor, the Janata Party (People’s Party).<sup>20</sup> In 1978, a member of the Janata Party, in power since defeating the Congress Party in 1977, tabled the Freedom of Religion Bill in the Lok Sabha. It failed, but it was revived in 1999 when then-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, at the helm of a BJP administration (1998-2004), claimed that a series of attacks against Christian churches in Gujarat were sparked by Hindus converting to Christianity and that social harmony would be better protected if an anti-conversion law was passed. Gujarat, which was then governed by Mr Modi, passed an anti-conversion law but the proposal failed at the Union level.

Today, seven of India’s 29 states (and seven territories) have adopted anti-conversion laws. Before Gujarat, the legislative assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa (Odisha), Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan passed such laws. Himachal Pradesh followed, as did the southern state of Tamil Nadu (home to a large number of Christians, the law here was quickly repealed). In each case, anti-conversion laws, which punish conversions obtained by “force” or “fraudulent means”, are based on the notion of protecting “public order”, an area under state jurisdiction.<sup>21</sup>

For opponents to a possible national anti-conversion law, New Delhi’s plans are disturbing. The move “clearly shows the mischievous intentions of the central government to cap the freedom of religion and freedom to follow a faith,” said Navaid Hamid, secretary of the South Asian Council for Minorities. For the Muslim official, the BJP-led government “does not believe in the constitution. It has a desire to crush all the fundamental rights of minorities. The government is working on a sectarian, anti-women, anti-minority agenda, which is taking the country backwards.”<sup>22</sup>

For Christian officials such as Fr Paul Thelakkat, spokesperson for the Syrian Catholic Church in Kerala, laws restricting conversion are not needed in India, at neither state, nor national levels. “There are enough laws in this country to punish those who violate public order and social harmony,” he added. In his critical view, fear that Hinduism will become a minority religion is what drives Hindu nationalists. The priest said: “It is a pity that Hindu leaders have no faith in the truth and strength of their own religion. The BJP believes that the Hindu religion will not survive in relation to other religions. So they are trying to fence their own religion by laws.”<sup>23</sup>

## Incidents

### Violence against religious minorities

Since the BJP came to power in New Delhi two years ago, violence against religious minorities has increased. Based on a report from the India Home Affairs Ministry, the USCIRF noted that in 2015, communal violence increased by 17 percent with 97 people killed and 2,246 injured.<sup>24</sup> In the case of Christians, there is a visible surge, from 120 in 2014 to 365 major attacks on Christians and their institutions in 2015. That is one per day in a country where Christians are a very small minority.<sup>25</sup>

### More frequent, violent and widespread attacks

Given the constraints of this report, it is impossible to provide a complete list of the incidents of violence against religious minorities. Hence, only some cases will be cited to illustrate the current climate.

In the state of Chhattisgarh, attacks were directed at Christian Dalits or tribal communities. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 2016, in Dantewada District, two Christians in the village of Dhurly were forced to sign a declaration renouncing the Christian faith. Before that, on 29<sup>th</sup> April, six Christian families from the Gond tribe had to flee Katodi, a village in the Kanker District, after neighbours threatened to kill them if they did not convert to Hinduism. According to Monsignor Sebastian Poomattam, vicar general of the Catholic Archdiocese of Raipur, capital of Chhattisgarh, “these attacks are part of a clear strategy, which seeks to promote Hindu ideology and eliminate religious minorities, including Christians, from the region.”<sup>26</sup> The same scenario can be seen in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand. On 8<sup>th</sup> May 2016, 16 Christian Dalits, including women and children, had to flee their village hastily in Palamu District after they were beaten for refusing to renounce their Christian faith. Naresh Bhuiya, one of the 16 Dalit victims, said: “They wanted us to say ‘Jai Shri Ram’ (Hail Lord Ram!) to greet the Hindu god Ram. When we refused, they tied our hands and feet and beat us mercilessly.”<sup>27</sup> Worse still, two days earlier, in the village of Kadma, Kunti District, Soreng Abraham, pastor with the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church, was found dead, his body showing multiple injuries.<sup>28</sup> Yet Kunti is one of Jharkhand’s most Christian districts, at 25 per cent the local population of 532,000. Since the BJP came to power, Christians have faced a rising wave of violence<sup>29</sup> – much of it going unpunished.

In recent years, reports have suggested that anti-Christian attacks have been concentrated in the northern half of the country. However, serious incidents have also occurred in the south, where Christians are more numerous. On 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016, three lay Catholics and Father Jose Kannumkuzhy, 49, treasurer of the Syro-Malabar Diocese of Ramanathapuram, were attacked by 30 suspected Hindu extremists. The incident took place as the four walked towards their car parked outside the Coimbatore police station.<sup>30</sup> A spokesman from the diocese said that the priest and the lay people “were dragged and beaten for 2.5 kilometres before they were brought back to the police station. Neither those who saw this, nor the police intervened. The latter did not even call for an ambulance.”<sup>31</sup>

Two other cases are indicative of the increasing violence of anti-Christian attacks. On 13<sup>th</sup> March 2015, a Catholic religious Sister in her 70s was gang raped in the state of West Bengal in her convent, the Convent of Jesus and Mary, near the town of Ranaghat, a few kilometres from Kolkata. However, the police described the attack as “a burglary”, although they did note that the attackers vandalised and desecrated the church, tore up Bibles, smashed statues and took the ciborium (sacred vessel) with the consecrated hosts.<sup>32</sup> Three months later, on the night of 19<sup>th</sup> June, another Catholic religious Sister was raped by two men. She was working as a nurse at a Church-run care facility in Raipur, capital of Chhattisgarh (central India). The Sister, 47, comes from Kerala, southern India, and is a member of the Congregation of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate. A registered nurse, she ministered at the Christ Help Centre, a small clinic in Raipur. “Breaking into a Christian medical centre, the identification of a religious person and the

assault show that it was religiously motivated,"<sup>33</sup> said John Dayal, spokesperson for the United Christian Forum.

#### A Muslim killed on suspicion of eating beef

On 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015, in the village of Bisahra, about 60 kilometres south of the national capital of New Delhi, Akhlaq Ahmed, a 52-year-old Muslim man, was lynched to death by a group of Hindus who suspected him of having killed a cow and eating its meat during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. "A group of Hindu men barged into the house and dragged my husband and younger son outside alleging that the meat we had stored and consumed in the house was beef," said Ikrana Ahmed, the victim's wife. The two men were beaten with bricks and sticks. "My husband died on the spot and my 22-year-old son was critically injured," she added. Her mother-in-law was also hit in the face.<sup>34</sup>

The murder occurred in Uttar Pradesh, one of the states in the "Hindi Belt", the country's Hindu Heartland, where, according to Hindu religious beliefs, the cow is a sacred animal. Twenty-four of India's 29 states have specific regulations banning cattle slaughter or beef sales, imposing fines on violators. In New Delhi for example, the slaughter of a cow is punishable by five years in prison and a fine of 10,000 rupees (€136, US\$148). In early 2015, the states of Maharashtra<sup>35</sup> and Haryana also banned beef sales.

In March 2015, Union Home Affairs Minister Rajnath Singh, a member of the BJP, urged the government to impose a nation-wide ban on cattle slaughter and beef sales. He said: "Cow slaughter cannot be accepted in this country. We will make all-out efforts to ban slaughter of cows."<sup>36</sup> A few months later, the state of Jammu and Kashmir imposed a complete ban on beef sales.<sup>37</sup> In this predominantly Muslim state, the BJP is part of the ruling coalition.

The issue of beef (or sacred cows) appears as a never-ending issue, used for political purposes.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, for Hindu nationalists, the sacred cow is a symbol of national independence; slaughtering them is thus considered a sin, a "national crime". According to them, it is under the influence of colonisers – from the Muslim Mughal to European colonialists – that cow slaughter was introduced in India. Hence, India's independence cannot be complete until slaughter is entirely prohibited.

"The government will do better if it directs its attention toward much larger national issues rather than making laws on the diet of the people," said Cardinal Baselios Cleemis Thottunkal of Trivandrum, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI).<sup>39</sup> Any ban would disproportionately affect India's religious minorities (Muslims, Christians) and the poor (Dalits, tribal people) because beef, aka "the poor man's protein", is cheaply available.

For many, a ban on beef consumption would make Hindu culture compulsory. "How could anything which is lawful in our religion be declared unlawful by any government? We are living in a secular country where every person has a right to practice his or her religion. Beliefs cannot be forced on anyone," said Moulana Javid Ahmad, a Muslim cleric in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>40</sup>

#### Questioning Mother Teresa's works

"It's good to work for a cause with selfless intentions. But Mother Teresa's work had [an] ulterior motive, which was to convert the person who was being served to Christianity," said Mohan Bhagwat, head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Corps) on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015 in Rajasthan.<sup>41</sup> The leader of the Hindu nationalist organisation spoke in Bajhera, a village near Bharatpur where an NGO, Apna Ghar (Our House), had opened two facilities for poor children and women in need. "The question is not about conversion but if this (conversion) is done in the name of service, then that service gets devalued," he said. By contrast, "here (at the NGO), the objective is purely service of poor and helpless people".<sup>42</sup>

Raising doubts about the Catholic nun (1910-1997) sparked an almost immediate response from India's Catholic Bishops. In a press release dated 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015, the Indian episcopate denounced with "concern and distress" the attempt to cast "aspersion on the saintly person of Mother Teresa" and attribute "ulterior motives to her life-long humanitarian services to the poor and the sick [. . .]. Mother Teresa never had any hidden agenda nor did she ever use her services as a cover up for conversion. She always maintained that her main concern was to ease the suffering of people and to help the poor and the suffering to lead a life of relief and self-respect. To the repeated questions, as to what was her motive for such a self-effacing service to the poor and to the suffering, her consistent reply was to help the Hindu, live [as] a better Hindu, the Muslim, [as] a better Muslim and the Christian, [as] a better Christian with proper human dignity," said the statement, which also noted that the Nobel Peace Prize (in 1979) and India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna (in 1980), were given to the nun, who was proclaimed blessed in 2003 by Pope – now Saint – John Paul II.<sup>43</sup>

The Catholic Church was not alone in defending the memory of Mother Teresa. In the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> February, Delhi's chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, tweeted the following words: "I worked wid (sic) Mother Teresa for a few months at Nirmal Hriday ashram in Kolkata. She was a noble soul. Pl spare her."<sup>44</sup> Head of the anti-corruption party *Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP, Common Man Party), Arvind Kejriwal on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2015 delivered a resounding defeat to the BJP in Delhi Assembly elections.<sup>45</sup>

A little over a year later, on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Yogi Adityanath, a BJP member of the Union Parliament, said, at a Hindu religious gathering in Uttar Pradesh, <sup>46</sup> "[Mother] Teresa was part of a conspiracy for [the] Christianization of India. Incidents of Christianization had [sic] led to separatist movements in parts of the north-east, including Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland." Again, the reaction of India's Catholic Bishops was swift. Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas of Ranchi and CBCI secretary-general, called on the Government of India to "take action against him (Yogi Adityanath) and prove its sincerity towards minorities." As the date of Mother Teresa's canonisation approaches (4<sup>th</sup> September 2016), the prelate said he wanted the government to take action against comments "that are meant to spread hatred."<sup>47</sup>

### **Prospects for freedom of religion**

In the "world's largest democracy", various institutions and civil society continue to play a role in defending Indians' fundamental rights. The Gulbarg Society affair was one of the triggers of Gujarat's 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms. In February of that year, 69 bodies were found in Gulbarg Society, a Muslim neighbourhood in Chamanpura, Ahmedabad, after a Hindu mob attacked it. The violence was sparked by the death of 59 Hindu pilgrims killed in a train fire caused by Muslims. Of the 66 people prosecuted in connection with the Gulbarg Society massacre, 42 were discharged. Finally, after 14 years of proceedings, the remaining 24 defendants were sentenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016: 11 received life in prison, while the others received sentences ranging between seven and 10 years. A Special Trial Court rendered the verdict.<sup>48</sup>

"Thursday's conviction of 24 people involved in the Gulbarg Society massacre should tell us how integral a vibrant civil society is to the functioning of a democracy," wrote Indian daily *Firstpost* on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2016.<sup>49</sup> "Fourteen years of painstaking work in the face of innumerable risks and threats have finally delivered to the survivors some sense of justice," the paper added. By supporting the families for all those years, Indian civil society deserves credit for the outcome.

Nonetheless, seen from abroad, the foundations of Indian democracy and respect for minority rights seem seriously threatened by the backers of Hindutva ideology, who are currently in power. Campaigns by the BJP and "pro-Hinduisation" organisations such as the RSS that support it are a source of major concern, because they lead Hindu extremists to carry out violent acts against religious minorities. On an official visit to India in January 2015, US President Barack Obama did not hesitate, despite the spectacular warming of relations between the two countries, to warn Indians. On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2015, in an address to students in Delhi, he spoke about religious

freedom and non-discrimination, castigating fundamentalism and noting that India's constitution and democracy enshrine equality for everyone, irrespective of social class, religion, gender or ethnicity. He said: "India will succeed so long as it is not splintered along the lines of religious faith, as long as it is not splintered along any lines, and it is unified as one nation."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Census of India, 2011. Population by religious community, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html>

<sup>2</sup> *The Indian Express*, "PM Narendra Modi's speech in US Congress: Read the full text," 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/prime-minister-narendra-modi-us-congress-speech-2842046>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *The Washington Post*, "Once banned from the U.S., India's Modi set for historic address to Congress," 6<sup>th</sup> June 2016 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/06/from-pariah-to-capitol-hill-narendra-modis-extraordinary-rise>

<sup>5</sup> *The Indian Express*, "India denies visa to members of US religious commission," 4<sup>th</sup> March 2016 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-denies-visa-to-members-of-us-religious-commission>

<sup>6</sup> *The Indian Express*, "Religious freedom in India on 'negative trajectory': USCIRF," 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2016 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/religious-freedom-india-uscirf-report-intolerance-2781355>

<sup>7</sup> *The USCIRF 2016 Annual Report*, page 159, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202016%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Census of India, 2011. Population by religious community. <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html>

<sup>9</sup> *FirstPost India*, "Religion in numbers: What 2011 Census reveals about India's communities," 27<sup>th</sup> August 2015 <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/religion-in-numbers-what-the-2011-census-revealed-about-trends-across-indias-communities-2408740.html>

<sup>10</sup> *Eglises d'Asie*, "Recensement 2011: le nouveau visage religieux de l'Inde" (Census 2011: India's new religious face), 28<sup>th</sup> August 2015 <http://eglasiemepasie.org/asi-du-sud/inde/2015-08-28-recensement-2011-le-nouveau-visage-religieux-de-l2019inde/>

<sup>11</sup> Geographically, India's religious communities are not evenly distributed across the country. Almost half of all Indian Christians are concentrated in five southern states. The 2011 census shows that out of 27.8 million Indian Christians, 12.8 million (46%) live in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The other strong geographical concentration of Christians is in the northeast of the country. Some 28.1% of Indian Christians live in the seven states of the country, east and north of Bangladesh (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura). The last major concentration of Christians is in Goa, a small state on India's south-west coast, home to 1.3% of all of India's Christians.

One consequence of this unequal distribution is that Kerala alone is home to almost as many Christians (22.07%) as the northern two-thirds of the country (25%). After Kerala comes the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu with 15.88% of Indian Christians.

For some observers, whilst these figures show that Hindu extremists' much vaunted fear of "Christianisation" does not stand scrutiny, they say nothing about potential census distortions. In fact, during the run-up phase to the 2011 census, the leaders of Christian churches noted that the Christian population was underestimated in official statistics. They explained that this lower number was largely due to the fact that many Christian Dalits (formerly known as untouchables) feel compelled to register as Hindus, either to escape reprisals in the regions where they are persecuted, or avoid losing benefits related to affirmative action measures in favour of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Christians and Muslims are excluded, ostensibly because this status is not recognised in their religions). Yet, Dalits represent more than 60% of India's Christian community.

Thus, under-reporting explains why the figure of 27.8 million Christians in the 2011 census falls short of what Christian leaders report. The Catholic Church claims 17 million baptised members (12 million Latin Catholics, 4.5 million Syro-Malabar Catholics and 0.5 million Syro-Malankara Catholics), whilst the National Council of Churches in India, an association of 29 Protestant and Orthodox Churches, claims 13 million.

<sup>12</sup> *Ucanews*, "New data disproves conversion allegations: Indian Christians," 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015 <http://www.ucanews.com/news/new-data-disproves-conversion-allegations-indian-christians/74150>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Constitution of the Indian Union, <http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/coi-4March2016.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> *Outlook*, "Catholic Priests from Vatican Denied Indian Visa," 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015 (<http://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/catholic-priests-from-vatican-denied-indian-visa/293276> )

<sup>16</sup> *The Times of India*, "Rights group lobbied with EU to push Modi on FCRA," 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2016 (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Rights-group-lobbied-with-EU-to-push-Modi-on-FCRA/articleshow/51655287.cms> )

<sup>17</sup> *Eglises d'Asie*, "Le gouvernement BJP défend les conversions de masse à l'hindouisme" (BJP government defends mass conversions to Hinduism), 15<sup>th</sup> December 2014 (<http://eglasiemepasie.org/asi-du-sud/inde/2014-12-15-le-gouvernement-bjp-defend-les-tres-controversees-conversions-de-masse-a-lhindouisme> )

<sup>18</sup> *Eglises d'Asie*, "Le gouvernement relance le débat sur la mise en place d'une loi anti-conversion au plan fédéral" (Government reopens debate Union anti-conversion law), 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2015 <http://eglasiemepasie.org/asi-du-sud/inde/2015-04-22-le-gouvernement-relance-le-debat-sur-la-mise-en-place-d2019une-loi-anti-conversion-au-plan-federal/>

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- <sup>19</sup> *The Deccan Herald*, "National anti-conversion law not tenable: Law Ministry," 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015 (<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/471944/national-anti-conversion-law-not.html>)
- <sup>20</sup> *The Hindu*, "Conversion and freedom of religion," 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2014 (<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/conversion-and-freedom-of-religion/article6716638.ece> )
- <sup>21</sup> *Eglises d'Asie*, "La liberté religieuse en Inde" (Religious freedom in India), 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014 <http://eglasie.mepasie.org/asie-du-sud/inde/2014-04-17-pour-approfondir-la-liberte-religieuse-en-inde>
- <sup>22</sup> *Ucanews*, "India's debate on anti-conversion law deepens," 17<sup>th</sup> April 2015 <http://www.ucanews.com/news/indias-debate-on-anti-conversion-law-deepens-/73408>
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> USCIRF, *India Report*, p. 7, published on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2016, [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_Tier2\\_India.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_Tier2_India.pdf)
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Eglises d'Asie*, "Multiplication des attaques antichrétiennes : « une stratégie des extrémistes hindous visant à éradiquer les minorités" (Multiplication of anti-Christian attacks : 'Hindu extremists pursue strategy aimed at eradicating minorities), 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016 <http://eglasie.mepasie.org/asie-du-sud/inde/2016-05-25-multiplication-des-attaques-antichretiennes-ab-une-strategie-des-extremistes-hindous-visant-a-eradiquer-les-minorites-bb/>
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
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