



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

USCIRF HEARING SUMMARY:

May 2026

DETERIORATING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONDITIONS IN INDIA

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Asif Mahmood
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Commissioners

Mohamed Elsanousi

Maureen Ferguson

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USCIRF's Mission

*To advance international
freedom of religion or
belief, by independently
assessing and unflinchingly
confronting threats to this
fundamental right.*

On May 7, 2026, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) held an in-person hearing entitled *Deteriorating Religious Freedom in India*. USCIRF Chair Vicky Hartzler and Vice Chair Asif Mahmood led the hearing, featuring testimony from academic experts, civil society members, and former U.S. government officials. Witnesses examined the legal, political, and societal structures that allow for severe religious freedom violations in India, including the use of anti-conversion laws, citizenship laws, and targeted violence toward religious minority communities. Commissioners Mohamed Elsanousi, Stephen Schneck, and Rachel Laser also participated in the hearing.

Chair Hartzler opened the hearing by introducing the witnesses and providing an overview of the religious freedom violations in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). She highlighted the use of anti-conversion laws and vigilante violence disproportionately impacting Christians and Muslims. She also explained the Indian government's use of the Financial Contributions Regulation Act (FRCA) and its proposed amendments to target faith-based organizations.

Vice Chair Mahmood discussed the Indian government's deportation of Muslim citizens and refugees under the guise of enforcing citizenship laws. Additionally, he emphasized that a number of religious minorities remain imprisoned for their beliefs or for advocating on behalf of religious freedom. He noted the Indian government's use of transnational repression to target religious minority communities abroad.

Ambassador Stephen Rapp, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, discussed the current state of religious freedom in India through the lens of an atrocity prevention framework. In doing so, he summarized the key findings from the Independent Panel of Experts' recent report on India, including the role of nonstate actors like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in propagating hateful rhetoric directed at religious minority communities in the states of Assam and Uttar Pradesh. He additionally described the phenomenon of "encounter killings" by police, which disproportionately target religious minorities.

Dr. Angana Chatterji, University of California, Berkeley, provided an overview of the ways in which the Indian government perpetuates Hindu nationalist policies to disenfranchise and marginalize religious minority communities. Her testimony highlighted the use of anti-conversion laws and the enforcement of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in Assam.

[Raqib Naik](#), Founder and Executive Director of Center for the Study of Organized Hate, discussed the proliferation of state-led violence toward religious minority communities in India and offered several policy-focused recommendations, including imposing targeted sanctions on Indian officials complicit in religious freedom violations and transnational repression. He further emphasized the importance of examining the role of private companies involved in the systematic destruction of minority homes and houses of worship across India, and he recommended USCIRF consider the role of U.S.-based social media companies whose platforms are used to incite violence toward Muslims and Christians in India.

[Arjun Sethi](#), Professor at Georgetown University Law Center, discussed the role of transnational repression by the Indian government, including the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada and attempted assassination of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States. He emphasized that these attacks are part of a larger, systematic pattern by the Indian government to silence religious minorities abroad, mirroring India's domestic policies targeting religious freedom. He noted that the space for civil society is shrinking in India and the ruling BJP utilizes a vast network of social media workers to spread disinformation.

[David Curry](#), President of David Curry and Associates, provided an overview of religious freedom challenges for India's Christian communities. He examined the use of the FCRA to hinder or severely limit the operations of faith-based organizations, including Christian ministries, charities, dioceses, and schools. He further explained the use of anti-conversion laws to target Christian communities and restrict their ability to practice their faith. Such a political and legal environment, according to Curry, contributes heavily to mob violence.

Following the witness testimonies, Chair Hartzler led a question-and-answer session in which witnesses further examined the role of nonstate actors in perpetrating religious freedom violations and potential policy options for the U.S. government. Witnesses reinforced the importance of designating India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and imposing targeted sanctions to hold individual actors accountable. They further stressed the need for Congress to introduce and pass legislation related to transnational repression and to invoke the Armed Export Control Act to cease arms transfers until the Indian government improves religious freedom conditions. Additionally, witnesses expressed concern that many BJP-governed states in India are following a pattern of stripping citizenship from religious minority communities under the CAA. The witnesses also highlighted the relationship between India's caste system and religious freedom and the importance of U.S. government officials advocating for religious freedom as part of diplomatic engagements.

Chair Hartzler concluded the hearing by thanking witnesses for their testimony.



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