

Anti-conversion laws in West Bengal

Local churches have been attacked, and pastors and church members intimidated, following a string of anti-conversion laws.



On 9th May 2026, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, a right-wing Hindu nationalist party) formed a government in West Bengal—its first since India’s independence in 1947. Following the election, the BJP announced plans to introduce a controversial ‘anti-conversion’ law which has already impacted Gospel work in other areas of the country.

The BJP is the largest party in India, directly governing 16 of India’s 28 states—West Bengal being the 16th—as well as exercising control in additional states through coalition governments.

The BJP’s philosophy is one of cultural nationalism, national unity, and ‘Integral Humanism’—the belief that India’s development should reflect its indigenous culture and traditions, rather than relying on imported Western ideologies.

While the party officially supports equal treatment of all religions, its actions and policies are shaped by the conviction that India is fundamentally a Hindu country, and should remain so.

Anti-conversion laws enacted

In this context, the BJP has enacted a series of anti-conversion laws (styled as ‘freedom of religion’ laws) across many of the states it controls.

These laws exist ostensibly to prevent conversions through force, fraud, inducement or exploitation. The BJP claims that Christian missionary activity, including benevolent ministry, amounts to conversion through inducement, particularly amongst poor tribal communities.

Article 25 of India’s constitution protects freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, but the Supreme Court has ruled that ‘propagation’ does not include a right

to convert another person by force, fraud or inducement. This ruling gives anti-conversion laws free reign.

Anti-conversion laws are on the statute books in 10 of the 16 BJP-governed states, with Maharashtra state becoming the tenth in August.

In June 2026, the BJP announced that it intended to introduce an anti-conversion law in West Bengal, citing border infiltration, demographic change and the preservation of Bengali cultural identity.

Similar laws in other states carry sentences of 7 years to life imprisonment, as well as fines of up to 2.5 million rupees (around £20,000) depending on the severity of the charges.

Increasing hostility towards believers

The outcome of these laws is an environment that is increasingly hostile to evangelism, and a culture of persecution against churches and pastors by local actors.

Persecution is intensifying in West Bengal, including the vandalism of a church under construction in Sonarpur, 20 miles south of Kolkata.

While church members were carrying out painting work, around 100 people entered the building, intimidated the congregation, and proceeded to inflict damage on the structure. The mob claimed that the church had been converting people by force.

There are unverified reports of other attacks in secular news outlets, all of which follow a similar pattern: church meetings are interrupted, church members are intimidated and property damaged, and rumours of forced conversions are circulated in order to undermine any response from Christians.

Police are reported to be unhelpful, and may even have placed pastors into custody when they have complained.

Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the new law, but it is difficult to prove that conversions are voluntary. Some churches have implemented ‘declaration of consent’ forms to be filled out by all church members and new converts, as evidence that people have not been coerced.

This growing threat represents a direct barrier to the free offer of the Gospel, persuasively preached in order to reason with lost, hardened souls.

Direct reports from the region

Jyoti Chakravartty reports from Kolkata: “Our state, West Bengal, has never seen such brutal attacks on the Christian community. Many churches have ceased their outreaches, and many Bible colleges and schools have ceased their courses.

“In general, there is a growing hatred against evangelical Christians. People do try to avoid communicating with us. The Lord has been good thus far; we pray that the Lord will be gracious to us to finish the race well.”

From the Kolli Hills region in the southern state of Tamil Nadu (not BJP-controlled), Tabernacle-supported pastor Thomas Edison comments: “There is a growing atmosphere of intimidation, particularly where allegations of forced conversion are used to disrupt evangelistic and church activities.

“Wherever the BJP is in power, anti-conversion laws are being enacted. Many Christians are being attacked, particularly by people belonging to Hindu nationalist groups. Churches and places of worship are being vandalized, and pastors are being assaulted.

“These laws are also being misused by some people to express their opposition and hostility toward Christians.

“Even here in our state, we face opposition and struggles, though not to the same extent as in BJP-ruled states. Nevertheless, we do not have the same freedom for street preaching that we had in the early days.

“Please continue to pray for our nation, India. In the midst of these persecutions and struggles, pray that we may continue to be a faithful witness for the Lord and stand firm in our faith.”



Pastor Thomas Edison and his family

Dr David Elangovan, another Tabernacle-supported pastor in Tamil Nadu, says: “This present BJP government is trying to implement the anti-conversion law in almost every state.

“Even before the law was enacted already there are so many incidents in which the churches, pastors and the people were attacked by the Hindu fanatics. The situation is grave.

“Already, evangelism is prevented, even in Tamil Nadu. Open air preaching cannot be done freely. In Tamil Nadu also, conducting any evangelical meeting or Christian meeting in the Christian institutions is not allowed.”



Dr David and Mrs Naomi Elangovam

In late July the church of a pastor in Chhattisgarh state (who is a student of the online London Reformed Baptist Seminary course) was attacked during a worship service by Hindu radicals. There

were about 70 people worshipping at the time. The attackers destroyed the pastor’s car and then came in and threatened him and wanted to beat him. The police were called and they protected him, but then they arrested him. He was falsely charged with disturbing the peace, bringing knives, and anti-conversion violations.

No action was taken against his attackers. He was held in prison for 3 days before being released on bail.

The church building has been closed by the authorities, but they are holding meetings in people’s homes. The church is praying about the situation. They support their pastor, but he incurred debts arising from the costs of the bail, and legal fees. The Tabernacle has provided help with these costs. The church has members who were Hindu but are now strong in their Christian faith.

Urgent prayer needed for India

Christianity is very much a minority religion in India. According to a 2011 census, Christians (or those who identify as Christian) make up 2.3% of the population. In West Bengal it is even lower, at less than 1% of the population.

There is great need, and an immense opportunity for Gospel work in this country, coupled with severe opposition. The Lord’s people face humanly insurmountable barriers, but “with God, all things are possible.”

If the Lord’s people raise this situation before him, we know that he will answer at the right time and in the best way for the cause of the Gospel.

Please pray for:

- A change in government to a ruling party that supports true freedom of religion and does not hinder persuasive evangelistic preaching and witness.
- Strength and courage for those believers, pastors and churches who face attack, intimidation and opposition.
- Wisdom for pastors and evangelists, to know how best to reach the lost in this current climate.
- Relief and comfort for those who are suffering.

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