

World Watch Research

Nepal:

Background Information

September 2024



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Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Contents

Copyright and sources	1
Map of country	2
Recent history	2
Political and legal landscape	3
Religious landscape.....	7
Economic landscape.....	8
Social and cultural landscape.....	10
Technological landscape	12
Security situation	13
Christian origins	13
Church spectrum today.....	14
Further useful reports.....	15
External Links	15

Copyright and sources

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Nepal: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
31,240,000	1,678,000	5.4

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

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 Maoists 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. Nepal has been hovering above and below 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](#)).

Politics are unstable in Nepal: On 1 July 2024, for the third time in 2024, there was a change of government without elections (see below: *Political and legal landscape*). The next official election will be held in 2027.

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." The change of leadership had no major consequences for the country (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 10 October 2022](#)).

A good indication for the political instability in Nepal occurred on 20 May 2024 when Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal faced the fourth vote of confidence since his appointment in December 2022 (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 17 May 2024](#)). Then, on 1 July 2024, there was again a sudden change of government without elections (for the third time in a year) caused by coalition defections. Now ex-Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre found himself out of a job after his coalition partner the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) joined hands with the Nepali Congress (NC) to form a new government. According to the deal, K P Oli of the UML and Sher Bahadur Deuba of the NC are to take turns being prime minister for 18 months each until the next official election in 2027 is held (Source: [Nepali Times, 2 July 2024](#)).

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.

Pro-Hindu nationalism

There are several political parties aiming to restore the Hindu Kingdom that Nepal was before 2008. Until recently, the Christian minority in Nepal was protected from state-sanctioned discrimination and violence. However, the tide is turning as the persecution that Indian Christians have known for some time has begun to seep across the border. There is evidence suggesting that funds have been sent directly from the Hindu nationalists controlling India into Nepal, resulting in increased violence toward religious minorities. Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists have seen their places of worship and believers targeted by the Hindu majority. This growing pro-Hindu nationalism was particularly evident when protesters in April 2024 marched on the parliament building in Kathmandu, airing their demands for their country to be returned to the monarchy and a Hindu state. The demonstrations turned violent as

protestors clashed with police, resulting in several serious injuries. Since the April 2024 march, many in the inside and outside of Nepal have expressed concern over the growing Hindu nationalist tendencies (Source: [International Christian Concern, 19 April 2024](#)).

Other reports

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Nepal](#)):

- “The constitution establishes the country as a "secular state" but defines secular as the "protection of religion and culture handed down from the time immemorial." It provides for the right of citizens to profess and practice their 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 groups as religious institutions, except for Buddhist monasteries. It is not mandatory for Buddhist monasteries to register with the government, although doing so is a prerequisite for receiving government funding for maintenance of facilities, skills training for monks, and study tours. A monastery development committee under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation oversees the registration process. Registration requirements include providing a recommendation from a local government body, information on the members of the monastery's management committee, a land ownership certificate, and photographs of the premises.”
- “Legal experts and leaders of religious minority groups continued to state the constitutional language on protecting religion "handed down from time immemorial" and the prohibition on conversion were intended by the drafters to mandate the protection of Hinduism. Christian religious leaders continued to state the emphasis placed on this language by some politicians who favored reestablishing the country as a Hindu state continued to negatively affect public perception of Christians and Christianity.”
- “Religious leaders stated the requirement for Christian NGOs to register annually with local government authorities placed their organizations at political risk. Civil society organizations reported religiously affiliated organizations, including several with long histories of work in the country, had difficulty renewing their registrations. During the year, multiple religiously affiliated organizations reported lengthy delays, onerous requests for changes beyond those necessary to meet the requirements of the law, and lack of transparency when renewing or registering their organizations. Some of these organizations said they were reluctant to provide more specific examples due to fear of government reaction.”

International Christian Concern released [a report outlining the declining state of religious freedom in Nepal](#) on 9 November 2023:

- “Through a combination of legally repressive laws and social norms that sideline minority communities, Nepal is a difficult place to live for those outside of the Hindu faith.”
- “Christians and other religious minorities face the combined threat of social attack and legal ostracization in a system that fails to treat them as equal members of society.”

- “Nepal's General Code contains strict prohibitions against proselytization, an act punishable by up to six years imprisonment and deportation in the case of a foreigner. The National Penal Code of 2017 similarly criminalizes the sharing of one's faith, and the Nepalese Constitution says that 'no person shall ... convert a person of one religion to another religion' or 'disturb the religion of other people'.”

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.

According to the [Kathmandu Post, reporting on 13 April 2024](#):

- The Ministry of Home Affairs instructed all 77 district administration offices on 7 April 2024 to rein in religious conversion and asked them to track the movement of foreign nationals inside the country without permits. Various individuals and organizations are allegedly holding meetings to promote religious conversion - including foreign nationals. Pro-Hindu groups have become concerned about the growing cases of forced conversion in Nepal from Hinduism to other religions; a senior home ministry official stated: "Since it is the job of the state to protect the constitution, we, despite the secular nature of the country, sent a circular to stop such illegal activities."

Gender perspective

As explained by [Human Rights Watch 2024, Nepal country chapter](#):

- "Nepal’s citizenship law still discriminates against women, even after being amended in 2023 to recognize the citizenship of many who had previously been denied documentation. The children of single Nepali mothers can receive citizenship only if the mother declares that the father cannot be identified. If the declaration is alleged to be false, she can be criminally prosecuted. Children of a Nepali woman and a foreign father can only receive a category of citizenship that excludes them from holding high office. These restrictions do not apply to Nepali fathers."

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 Nepal). 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	1,678,000	5.4
Muslim	1,295,000	4.1
Hindu	20,080,000	64.3
Buddhist	3,842,000	12.3
Ethnic religionist	4,188,000	13.4
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	4,500	0.0
Atheist	17,100	0.1
Agnostic	95,400	0.3
Other	40,900	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

According to the World Christian Database (accessed May 2024) 64.3% of the population of Nepal is Hindu. 13.4% are ethno-religionist and 12.3% of the population are Buddhist. Christians in Nepal make up 5.4% of the population, numbering well over 1.6 million.

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.

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Nepal](#)):

- “Leaders of the RPP [Hindu nationalist party] outside of parliament continued their calls for reestablishing Hindu statehood, which was constitutionally abolished in 2007 in favor of a secular democracy, and advocated strong legal action against those accused of killing cows. In an article in online news outlet The Diplomat, Nepalese scholar Santosh Sharma Poudel said that while the RPP led the calls for a Hindu state, Hindu nationalism was growing throughout the country's political system. According to Poudel, both of the previous two prime ministers, for example, despite coming from parties that officially embraced secularism, participated in high-profile public Hindu ceremonies in Nepal and India. Also, additional Hindu nationalist groups had arisen in recent years, and some formed common fronts to advance their cause. Even in the staunchly pro-secular Nepali Congress party, approximately half of its representatives supported a Hindu state in a 2018 signature campaign, according to Poudel. Leaders of the Hindu nationalist movement, he said, had tried to portray religious freedom and secularism in the country as 'Western influences'. Civil society leaders said some external Hindu nationalist activists continued to influence politicians in Nepal to support reversion to a Hindu state.”

Economic landscape

Nepal is one of the least developed countries in the world and relies extensively on remittances from workers abroad and on foreign aid. Agriculture remains Nepal's principal economic activity, but only about 20% of the total area is cultivable.

According to the [World Bank data for Nepal](#) (accessed 23 May 2024):

- **GDP (current US\$):** 40.83 billion (in 2022)
- **GDP growth (annual %):** 5.6% (in 2022)

According to the [World Factbook Nepal](#) (accessed 28 August 2024):

- Nepal is a “low-income South Asian economy; post-conflict fiscal federalism increasing stability; COVID-19 hurt trade and tourism; widening current account deficits; environmentally fragile economy from earthquakes; growing Chinese relations and investments”
- **Remittances:** 26.89% of GDP (2023 est.)
- **Inflation:** 7.11% (2023 est.)
- **Unemployment rate:** 10.69%
- **Youth unemployment rate (ages 15-24):** 20.4% - male: 18.7% / female: 23.3%

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](#)).

At the end of April 2023 Nepal plunged into its first recession in six decades as economic output continued to be weighed down by inflation and political instability. Economists warn that the country, which is aiming for middle-income status in the next three years, will have a hard time getting out of the slump as political uncertainty, corruption and market vulnerability go deep (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 30 April 2023](#)).

Nepal's economy is currently characterized by two aspects. On the positive side, there are external factors bringing income such as remittances, foreign exchange reserves and tourism. However, due to low production and demand, unemployment numbers have increased. Frustration is growing in the business and professional sectors, and hoards of young people are leaving the country for better opportunities abroad (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 20 December 2023](#)).

Slow growth, stagnant wages, high inflation, inadequate investment, low private sector confidence, growing corruption and scandals, the exodus of youth to foreign countries and abrupt changes in policies. These are the characteristics of the economy that Nepal is experiencing. The government targets a six percent economic growth this fiscal after suffering one of the lowest growth rates—at 1.9 percent—last fiscal year. On 20 September 2023, the Asian Development Bank projected Nepal to grow by 4.3 percent in the current fiscal year ending mid-July 2024, down from the earlier forecast of 5 percent. On 3 October 2023, the World Bank said Nepal's economy will grow by 3.9 percent in the current fiscal year (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 4 October 2023](#)). The World Bank provided an update in April 2024. Nepal's economy is projected to grow at a snail's pace this fiscal year amid eroding private sector confidence, following political uncertainty, corruption scams, market anomalies and climate threats. The World Bank predicted that the country's economy would grow 3.3 percent in the fiscal year 2023-24, ending mid-July, up from last year's 1.9 percent (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 3 April 2024](#)).

Gender perspective

The female labor force participation rate is 82.8%, just shy of 85.1% for men ([UNDP, Nepal Annual Report 2020](#)). This soars above the global female employment rate which sits at 46% ([World Bank data](#), accessed 23 May 2024). 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 [World Factbook Nepal](#) (accessed 22 May 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Chhettri 16.5%, Brahman-Hill 11.3%, Magar 6.9%, Tharu 6.2%, Tamang 5.6%, Bishwokarma 5%, Musalman 4.9%, Newar 4.6%, Yadav 4.2%, Rai 2.2%, Pariyar 1.9%, Gurung 1.9%, Thakuri 1.7%, Mijar 1.6%, Teli 1.5%, Yakthung/Limbu 1.4%, Chamar/Harijan/Ram 1.4%, Koiri/Kushwaha 1.2%, other 20% (2021 est.) note: 141 caste/ethnic groups were reported in the 2021 national census
- **Main languages:** Nepali (official) 44.9%, Maithali 11.1%, Bhojpuri 6.2%, Tharu 5.9%, Tamang 4.9%, Bajjika 3.9%, Avadhi 3%, Nepalbhasha (Newari) 3%, Magar Dhut 2.8%, Doteli 1.7%, Urdu 1.4%, Yakthung/Limbu 1.2%, Gurung 1.1%, other 8.9%; note - 123 languages reported as mother tongue in 2021 national census; many in government and business also speak English (2021 est.)
- 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:** 21.9% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 71.2% (male: 81%, female: 63.3%) (2021)

According to the [UNDP Human Development Report Nepal](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.601 (0.562 for females, 0.635 for males), ranking 146 (2022)
- **Total population:** 30.5 million (2022)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 70.5 years (72.4 for females, 68.6 for males) (2022)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 12.6 years (12.8 for females, 12.5 for males) (2022)
- **Gender inequality index:** 0.495 (2022)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 27.9, Male: 55.0 (2022)

According to [HRW 2024, Nepal country chapter](#) (accessed 22 May 2024):

- “Although it had fallen steadily before 2020, the maternal mortality rate in Nepal remains high and increased because of lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic. The government announced health budget cuts that officials said would impact services, most affecting women from disadvantaged social groups.”
- “Nepal continues to have a high rate of child marriage, although the law requires both men and women to be at least 20 when they marry. According to UNICEF, 33 percent of girls and 9 percent of boys are married before the age of 18. The rate of child marriage is believed to have increased during the pandemic.”
- “Although the statute of limitations for prosecuting rape allegations was extended in 2022 to two years (or three years if the victim is a child), it remains too short and an obstacle to justice.”

Poverty

In October 2022 media in Nepal reported that the country was suffering from serious hunger problems (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 20 October 2022](#)). Nepal has failed to bring down the poverty rate in the past 12 years; The Fourth Nepal Living Standards Survey 2022-23 report released by the National Statistics Office in February 2023 revealed that as many as 20.27% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2023 compared to 25.16% in 2011 (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 13 February 2024](#)). Additionally, the Pension Management Office has sought an additional Rs25 billion from the finance ministry as the allocated budget will not be enough to pay the retired government employees from April 2024 onwards. The government had allocated Rs52 billion in its budget, but it will require as much as Rs77 billion to pay to pensioners for the entire fiscal year (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 7 March 2024](#)).

Children out of school

There are hundreds of children who are either out of school or do not attend class regularly. While girl students outnumber boys in the community schools, the girls often do not attend school regularly. "The poverty-stricken people enroll their children, mainly daughters, in the community schools. If possible, they send their sons to private schools. Dropout rates and irregular attendance are high among daughters," said Jagat Rawal, education unit chief of Mangalsen Municipality. According to his report, daughters are often forced to carry out household chores, so it is difficult for them to attend classes regularly (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 22 May 2024](#)).

Gender perspective

The Nepal Human Rights Year Book 2023, published by Informal Sector Service Centre (Insec), documented 4,228 victims of women's rights violations in Nepal in 2022. The report documents 605 incidents of rape, 145 cases of attempted rape and 42 incidents of sexual abuse. In 2021, there were only 3,417 such victims in total, up from 2,606 in 2020 (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 8 March 2023](#)).

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. 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 [DataReportal Digital 2024: Nepal](#) (23 February 2024) / Survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** 49.6% penetration
- **Social media usage:** 43.5% of the total population (male: 56.4% / female: 43.6%)
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 120.6% of the total population. 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: May 2024):

- “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.”
- “BuddeComm notes that the pandemic continues to have a significant impact on production and supply chains globally. During the coming year the telecoms sector to various degrees is likely to experience a downturn in mobile device production, while it may also be difficult for network operators to manage workflows when maintaining and upgrading existing infrastructure. Overall progress towards 5G may be postponed or slowed down in some countries.”
- “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. However, the crucial nature of telecom services, both for general communication as well as a tool for home-working, will offset such pressures.”

Internet access in Nepal is not restricted or hindered by government authorities; however, the vulnerability of Nepal’s Internet access became visible in December 2023, when Indian companies Tata and Airtel warned that they would suspend the supply of Internet bandwidth to Nepal due to payment defaults by privately-owned Nepali internet service providers (ISPs). The ISPs have not settled the dues for the past 10 months and the Indian companies had written to them about it multiple times. (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 12 December 2023](#)) This problem has continued in 2024. Chaos ensued on 2 May 2024 when internet services across the country were abruptly interrupted for several hours. This happened after Indian telecommunications company Airtel stopped upstream services to Nepali

private-sector internet service providers (ISPs) over non-payment of dues, throwing the country into a communications crisis. (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 3 May 2024](#))

Christians in Nepal can freely access the Internet and foreign Christian websites. The Nepalese Christian website "[Nepal Church](#)" (last accessed 28 August 2024) 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, relations 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, Prime Minister 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](#)).

In December 2022 Nepal and India signed a number of agreements that decreased tensions (Source: [Kathmandu Post, 13 December 2022](#)).

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	7,800	0.5
Catholic	8,100	0.5
Protestant	434,000	25.9
Independent	1,212,000	72.2
Unaffiliated	16,600	1.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	1,678,500	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	698,000	41.6
Pentecostal-Charismatic	1,208,000	72.0

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

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. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

According to the World Christian Database (accessed May 2024), the largest denominations in Nepal are:

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

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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

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