



# International Religious Freedom Report 2023

**For Prelims:** [USCIRE](#), International Religious Freedom Report 2023

**For Mains:** Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Religious Freedom in India and Relation Issues

## Why in News?

The government of India **rejected the recommendations of the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom's \(USCIRF\) 2023 report](#)**, calling it biased and motivated.

## What is 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**.
- It is **Headquartered in Washington DC**.
- **Established by the US government after the inaction of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), 1998** the recommendations of USCIRF are non-binding on the state department. IRFA provides that US policy includes condemning violations of religious freedom and assisting other governments in the promotion of this right.
  - Traditionally, **India does not recognize the view of USCIRF**.

## What are the Concerns Raised About India?

- **Concerns About Certain Laws and Policies:** The report highlights concern regarding certain laws and policies in the country that have been **criticized for their potential to discriminate on the basis of religion**.
  - These include laws related to conversion, interfaith relationships, hijab, and [cow slaughter](#), as well as the [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act, 2019](#) and the [National Register of Citizens \(NRC\)](#) All of these, it alleges, have **not impacted minorities in a favorable way**.
- **Measures Affecting Freedom of Expression:** It raises concerns about **alleged measures that may have impacted critical voices**, particularly those belonging to [religious minorities](#).
  - These include surveillance, harassment, property demolition, and detention under the [Unlawful Activities Prevention Act \(UAPA\), 1967](#). Some [Non-Governmental organizations \(NGOs\)](#) have also been subject to scrutiny under the [Foreign Contribution Regulation Act \(FCRA\), 2010](#).
- **India as a CPC:** It has **criticized the US State Department for not having designated India as a Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)** and has called for sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials.

- USCIRF has been **recommending India's designation as a country of particular concern since 2020** but it hasn't been accepted by the US government so far.

## What are the Recommendations of the Report?

- For 2023, based on religious freedom conditions in 2022, **USCIRF recommends that the State Department:**
  - **Redesignate as CPCs:** Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan;
    - **Designate as Additional CPCs:** Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, Syria, and Vietnam;
  - **Maintain on the Special Watch List (SWL):** Algeria and the Central African Republic (CAR);
    - **Include on the SWL:** Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Uzbekistan;
  - **Redesignate as Entities of Particular Concern (EPCs):** Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Houthis, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP also referred to as ISIS-West Africa), and Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).

## Criteria for Designation of Countries in Different Categories

- **CPCs:** When the government of the countries engage in or tolerate “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations” of the right to freedom of religion or belief under IRFA 1998.
- **SWL:** It is based on the governments’ perpetration or toleration of severe religious freedom violations.
- **EPCs:** For systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.



■ COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN			
Afghanistan	India	Pakistan	Turkmenistan
Burma	Iran	Russia	Vietnam
China	Nicaragua	Saudi Arabia	
Cuba	Nigeria	Syria	
Eritrea	North Korea	Tajikistan	
■ SPECIAL WATCH LIST COUNTRIES			
Algeria	Egypt	Kazakhstan	Turkey
Azerbaijan	Indonesia	Malaysia	Uzbekistan
Central African Republic	Iraq	Sri Lanka	

## What is the State of 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 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 interests of minorities.

**[Source: TH](#)**

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