

The beautiful nature-filled country of Nepal currently suffers from the outcomes of the 8.1  $M_w$  devastating earthquake in 2015, controversy over decade-long civil war, and riots from dissatisfied religious groups of the new constitution. With over 300,000 houses destroyed and huge controversy against the religious portions of the new constitution, Nepal is stuck in a loop of violence and poverty. A violent decade-long revolution between the Maoists and the government brought about the writing of Nepal's new constitution, ending its 239 yearlong Hindu monarchy and becoming a secular republic. Nepal's new constitution declares secularism in the country, promoting outrage of all religious groups. *Even though Nepal's new constitution ended the violence of the decade-long revolution, religious protests provoked through the statement of secularism and the banning of conversions are leading Nepal to another impending civil war between religious groups and revolution against the government. The religious majority, Hindus, protest to regain the previous identity of a Hindu country, while religious minorities face Hindu protestors' violence, threatening of their faith, and prejudice.*

Before controversy began due to the establishment of the new constitution, tensions were already present between religious majorities and minorities. The new constitution only further intensified these tensions. A documented account in 2009 and 2012 stated that the Nepal Defense Army (NDA), run by Hindu organization, ordered Christians to stop their religious activities. According to the leader of the defense army, "Nepal [was] a Hindu nation and Christians and Muslims [were] not welcome." On May 23, 2009, the NDA attacked the capitol's Catholic church by throwing an explosive device within it, injuring 14 and killing 2. Later in 2012, Catholic churches continued to received threats. Sundar Thapar, leader of the Federation of National Christians-Nepal (FNCN), reported that Hindu extremists threatened him to leave Nepal

or else they would plant a bomb within his church. The tensions between religious majorities and minorities severely threatened the safety of religious minorities, further contributing to the violence by protests on the topic of secularism in the new constitution.

The new constitution sparked outrage in both religious minorities and majorities, promoting uprising against the government. Controversies within this new constitution sparked mainly around the religious portion of the constitution. One main controversy revolved around the newly proposed secularism aspect. Before the new constitution was written and established, Nepal was the only Hindu monarchy in the world. The new constitution stated that Nepal was no longer a Hindu nation; Nepal was officially a secular country. With more than 80% of its population of Hindu religion, many were angered by this new declaration. Hindus advocated for the preservation of the traditional Hindu religion. The new constitution also stated that people had the right to religious freedom, stating that everyone could follow the religion of their choice and share their religion through words and actions; however, the banning of conversions was also stated, promoting even more controversy. The law says, "...no one shall attempt to change or convert someone from one religion to another, or disturb/jeopardize the religion of others, and such acts/activities shall be punishable by law." First, many believed that religious freedom should include the right to convert or persuade other people into their religion. Therefore, the constitution was contradicting itself. Secondly, this clause could have implied that forceful conversions were punishable by law. However, it could have also implied that anyone who spread or merely talked about their faith to a person of a different religion could be accused of forceful conversion and punished. This contradicts the right to free expression. Secularism and the banning of conversions were the two main topics causing protests, debates, and violence against the new constitution.

Nepal's religious majority (81% of the population) Hindus were outraged after secularism was announced within the new constitution. They desired to preserve the Hindu religion within Nepal. Two-thirds of the government voted against the proposal of maintaining Nepal as a Hindu nation. Their outrage resulted in riots: both verbally and physically. One Hindu said, "[This was] the birth place of Lord Buddha, Mount Everest. Nepal must preserve [Hinduism]." In aims of proving that Nepal should be a Hindu nation, Hindus began targeting churches, especially those of religious minorities, to rid of any other minor religions. In one of these violent acts, police officers were prompted to threaten the protestors. In one incident, four ended up dead including a 4-year-old boy from the firing of rubber bullets. Some Hindus even threatened suicide: Kali Baba, a strong Hinduism follower, threatened to burn himself if Nepal did not become a Hindu nation. With the declaration of secularism and the withdrawal of Nepal's Hinduism name, violence and anger sparked within the Hindu community against the government

Not only were Hindus angered, religious minorities were also put in danger and outraged by the new constitution. They were targeted through violence and prejudice from Hindus and the government. Specifically, for the Christian minority, over the last 50 years, the Christian population has doubled or tripled annually due to the increased number of converts, but they still only consist of 1.4% of the population. Christians relied on spreading their religion and converts to sustain within the Nepali community. After the banning of conversions was declared, Christians voiced their disagreements against the banning of conversions. The chairman of Christian Solitary Worldwide, Tanka Sabedi said, the "Nepali government [has] taken a regressive step as this law severely restricts our freedom of expression and our freedom of religion or belief." Lokmani Dhakal, a Christian in the Nepal Constituent Assembly also voiced

his anger by saying, “Without freedom to speak about one’s faith, what [was] the meaning of religious freedom? Christians also faced the Hindu violence and protestors. Due to the Hindus anger against secularism and wanting to prove their country as solely a Hinduism country, some released their anger by burning Christian churches. In one specific incident in Kathmandu, Nepal, Father Ignatius Rai reported that an incident occurred where the western part of the church and the priest’s home were burned. With the banning of conversions and addition of secularism, Christianity voiced their disagreements against banning conversions and faced violence from Hindu protestors. Together, this increased tension not only between Christians and the government, but also between Christians and Hindus.

Another religious minority facing threats were the Muslims, 4% of the population. After the declaration of secularism, Muslim leaders stated that the new constitution added insecurity to the Muslim population. Babu Khan Pathan said, “Turning the country secular [was] nothing but a design to break the longstanding unity among Muslims and Hindus.” According to the Himalayan times, over 80% of Muslims advocated against Nepal being a secular state. By adding secularism, the previously peaceful relationship between the Hindus and Muslims was gone, leading to more violence. Muslims, similar to other religious minorities, now faced the violence of Hindus, leading to increased tension between the religious groups.

The addition of secularism and banning of conversions calls for the disaster of the Nepalese. The dissatisfaction of both religious majorities and minorities against the new constitution will lead to conflict against the government. Increased violence between religious majorities and minorities also eventually will lead to civil war. Though the new constitution aimed to improve the country of Nepal, it only provoked more anger and violence. The new

constitution ended the one decade-long civil war, but the violent protests and dissatisfaction will only lead to another impending civil war and revolution.

## Works Cited

- Al Jazeera. "Timeline of Nepal's Civil War." *Israeli–Palestinian Conflict | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 8 Apr. 2008, [www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2008/04/2008615165932572216.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2008/04/2008615165932572216.html).
- "Arsonists Attempt to Set Fire to Cathedral in Nepal's Capital." *Crux*, Crux, 20 Apr. 2017, [cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/04/20/arsonists-attempt-set-fire-cathedral-nepals-capital/](http://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/04/20/arsonists-attempt-set-fire-cathedral-nepals-capital/).
- Gill, Peter. "As Nepal Strives to Become More Inclusive, Are Muslims Being Left Behind?" *World Politics Review*, World Politics Review, 30 Jan. 2018, [www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/24085/as-nepal-strives-to-become-more-inclusive-are-muslims-being-left-behind](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/24085/as-nepal-strives-to-become-more-inclusive-are-muslims-being-left-behind).
- Kim, Christine. "Proposed Constitution Threatens Religious Freedom in Nepal." *Christianity Daily*, Christian Daily, 22 July 2015, [www.christianitydaily.com/articles/5054/20150722/proposed-constitution-threatens-religious-freedom-nepal.htm](http://www.christianitydaily.com/articles/5054/20150722/proposed-constitution-threatens-religious-freedom-nepal.htm).
- "Nepal Celebrates New Constitution amid Protests #NepalConstitution." *Seek Justice, Defend Human Rights, Poverty, Oppression - Gospel for Asia Special Report - Gospel for Asia*, Gospel of Asia, 24 Sept. 2015, [www.gfa.org/nepal/constitution/](http://www.gfa.org/nepal/constitution/).
- Parajuli, Kalpit. "Hindu Extremists Threaten Nepali Christians." *CHINA*, Glacom, 1 June 2009, [www.asianews.it/news-en/Hindu-extremists-threaten-Nepali-Christians-15401.html](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Hindu-extremists-threaten-Nepali-Christians-15401.html).
- Phuyal, Hari. "Nepal's New Constitution: 65 Years in the Making." *The Diplomat*, The Diplomat, 18 Sept. 2015, [thediplomat.com/2015/09/nepals-new-constitution-65-years-in-the-making/](http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/nepals-new-constitution-65-years-in-the-making/).

Rio Ribaya Tue 11 Aug 2015 15:03 BST. "Christianity Facing Threat of Being Rendered Illegal under Nepal's New Constitution." *Christian News on Christian Today*, Christian Today, 11 Aug. 2015, [www.christiantoday.com/article/christianity-facing-threat-of-being-rendered-illegal-under-nepals-new-constitution/61589.htm](http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christianity-facing-threat-of-being-rendered-illegal-under-nepals-new-constitution/61589.htm).

Sharma, Gopal. "Protesters March in Nepal to Demand Charter Drop the Term 'Secular'." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 5 Aug. 2015, [www.reuters.com/article/us-nepal-protests-secularism-idUSKCN0QA1N620150805](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nepal-protests-secularism-idUSKCN0QA1N620150805).

Shellnutt, Kate, et al. "Nepal Criminalizes Christian Conversion and Evangelism." *Christian History | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church*, Christian History, [www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/october/nepal-criminalizes-conversion-christianity-evangelism-hindu.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/october/nepal-criminalizes-conversion-christianity-evangelism-hindu.html).

Subedi, Rhema. "Criminal Code 2074 Enacted by the President." *NepalChurch.com*, [nepalchurch.com/14432/criminal-code-2074-enacted-by-the-president/](http://nepalchurch.com/14432/criminal-code-2074-enacted-by-the-president/).

TNM Staff Follow @thenewsminute. "Muslims in Nepal Ask for a Hindu Nation, Say No to Secularism." *The News Minute*, The News Minute, 13 Oct. 2015, [www.thenewsminute.com/article/muslims-nepal-ask-hindu-nation-say-no-secularism-33079](http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/muslims-nepal-ask-hindu-nation-say-no-secularism-33079).