

# Haryana's anti-conversion law

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## Key features of the draft bill-

- It seeks **to prohibit religious conversions effected through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement, marriage** or by any other fraudulent means making it an offense.
- It provides **greater punishment** for such conversions in case of minors, women, scheduled castes and tribes.
- It provides that the **burden of proof lies on the accused carrying out the conversion.**
- As per the draft bill, **every individual converting from one religion to another shall submit to the prescribed authority a declaration that the conversion affected through was not misrepresentation, use of force, under threat, undue influence, coercion,** allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage and such authority shall make an inquiry in such cases.
- The proposed Bill will also have **a provision for declaring null and void any marriage** that is found to have been solemnized by concealment of religion.

## List of other states with similar laws-

- **Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have laws restricting religious conversion.**

- Penalties for breaching the laws can range from monetary fines to imprisonment, with punishments ranging from one to three years of imprisonment and fines from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 50,000.
- Some of the laws provide for stiffer penalties if women, children, or members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) are being converted.
- Some other States, including Manipur, are reportedly “considering similar laws.”
- **Odisha was the first State to enact anti-conversion legislation**, the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967. Madhya Pradesh enacted the same the following year.

### **Constitutional provisions-**

- The **right to freedom of religion is guaranteed under Articles 25, 26, 27 and 28** of the Constitution.
- The objective of this right is to sustain the principle of secularism.
- The Constitution confers on each individual the fundamental right to profess, practice and propagate his religion.

### **Similar initiatives at central level-**

- **In post-Independent India, the first Indian Conversion (Regulation and Registration) Bill was introduced in 1954**, which sought to enforce “licensing of missionaries and the registration of conversion with government officials.” This bill was rejected.
- This was followed by the introduction of the **Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill in 1960**.
- The bill was aimed at checking conversion of Hindus to ‘non-Indian religions’ which, as per the definition in the Bill, included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism.
- The **Freedom of Religion Bill in 1979**, sought “official curbs on inter-religious conversion.”

- These bills fell through for want of majority approval.