

WORLD WATCH LIST 2023

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
32

Mozambique



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

Persecution of Christians in Mozambique is due to the following: i) Radical Islamic attacks have claimed the lives of many Christians; ii) The presence of drug cartels in some areas is making the lives of Christians, especially church youth workers, difficult; iii) The government is restricting freedom of religion. The war on the jihadists is also creating a new dimension whereby Christians are caught up in the ongoing conflict.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi

POPULATION

33,089,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

18,589,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



has attacked houses belonging to Christians in some parts of Cabo Delgado Province. Troops from other countries, particularly from Rwanda, are fighting alongside the Mozambican army to push back the jihadists. [About half of the population](#) remains below the poverty line, and around 45% of the population is under the age of 15.

The South Asian immigrant population and the northern provinces are predominantly Muslim, particularly along the coast, while some areas of the northern interior have a strong concentration of Christian communities. Christians are more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslims also live in these areas.

How the situation varies by region

Rights violations against Christians are most severe in the northern Cabo Delgado province, where Islamic State (IS) affiliated militants carry out violent attacks.

Who is affected?

Communities of expatriate Christians

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities

Historical Christians include the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox churches. They are frequently targeted by al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah militants.

Converts to Christianity

These include converts from Islam or traditional African religions and cross-denominational converts among Christian groups. Persecution is severe if the convert is from a Muslim background living in the Muslim-dominated north; such converts are likely to be targets for attacks by radical Muslims.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Non-traditional Christian communities include Baptists and Pentecostals. Due to their focus on evangelism, Christians in these churches are regularly threatened and attacked.

Context

Main Religions	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	18,589,000	56.2
Ethno-religionists	8,428,000	25.5
Muslims	5,859,000	17.7
Agnostics	123,000	0.4

Source²

Mozambique became independent of Portugal in 1975. The civil war ended in 1992 with a UN-negotiated peace agreement between the then-sole party, Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), and rebel Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) forces. This was followed by steady [economic](#) and political progress, undermined by the return of tensions and violence between FRELIMO and RENAMO since 2012. [Fighting erupted again](#) in 2019 when FRELIMO remained in power after [disputed election results](#).

Meanwhile, violent Islamist militants have been attacking civilians in the north. Christians have fled from their homes to avoid being targeted by jihadists. The Islamist group al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ) has called for the removal of Christian symbols and

¹ Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

² Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Islamic oppression:

Since 2017 there have been recurrent attacks against Christians by militants belonging to the IS-affiliated Islamist group, al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ), causing thousands to flee their homes. The capability and areas of influence of these militants continues to increase. Groups are supported financially by working with drug cartels, and through corruption involving some officials in the country.

Ethno-religious hostility:

In remote areas, adherents to indigenous beliefs see the rise of Christian evangelistic activities as a threat. As a result, clan leaders often complain about such church activities.

Dictatorial paranoia:

The government of Mozambique is not a true democracy. It is still repressive and puts pressure on some churches to support government policies. The Constitution bans all religious influence in public educational institutions. Some authorities also impose cumbersome registration requirements for religious groups.

Organized corruption and crime:

Mozambique has high levels of organized crime; drugs, arms, and illegal wildlife products such as ivory are widely traded at ports. The Islamist group al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah has been involved in illegal trade to fund the group's activities. Cartels threaten and commit violence against churches which are involved in work among youth and criminal gangs.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

The most common violations affecting Christian women and girls are sexual harassment, rape and forced marriage, with Mozambique having one of the highest rates of early marriage globally. This is attributed to the incursion of Islamic militants. Abduction is common in regions where jihadists and their cells exert influence. Girls are used for forced labor, with women abducted for sex and domestic chores. Converts from a Muslim or African traditional religion background are vulnerable to family pressures, such as forced marriage, divorce, denied inheritance, and loss of child custody.

- Abduction
- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Discrimination / harassment via education
- Economic harassment via work / job / business
- Forced marriage
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

MEN

Islamic oppression is the most common form of persecution for Christians in Mozambique, due to the role of Islamic insurgents. It is reported that Christian men and boys have been killed in attacks, or have lost their farmland and properties, leaving their families economically crippled. Young boys have also been forcibly recruited into militias. A country expert comments, 'every time the insurgents attack, they mainly target men and boys in order to recruit fighters from the community.'

- Economic harassment via work / job / business
- Military / militia conscription / service against conscience
- Violence – death



WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2023	32	68
2022	41	65
2021	45	63
2020	66	43
2019	65	43

Mozambique's score increased by three points compared to WWL 2022. This is mainly due to the pressure that has been mounting on Christians, particularly those living in the northern part of the country, where Islamic militants operate. Even though they have lost control of many towns and cities following a military operation by the Rwandan army and forces from the Southern African states, their influence remains very high.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **September 2022:** A violent [Islamist religious group](#) beheaded at least six people and shot an 83-year old-nun for faith-related reasons.
- Islamic militants kidnapped women and young girls in [Cabo Delgado](#). It has been reported that over 600 people have been abducted in the past four years and some of these are Christians, as confirmed by local researchers.
- Many churches and Christian properties have been [destroyed/damaged](#).

WWL Year	Christians killed	Christians abducted	Christians forced to marry	Christians internally displaced
2023	100*	100*	100*	1000*
2022	100*	10*	10	1000*

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - for full results see the violence section of the Full Country Dossier. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher.



Private life

In northern areas under the influence of Islamic militants, Christians (especially converts from a Muslim background) must hide their faith or risk attack or killing.

Family life

In the north, where jihadist expansion is occurring, raising children as Christians is dangerous, particularly in areas where government forces have been forced to withdraw. Even within the community and at school, Christians are victims of harassment and discrimination. Furthermore, in some areas where Catholics are dominant, children of evangelicals face similar challenges.

Community life

Christian women and girls are under threat of abduction by Islamist insurgents in the north. Often, abductions happen after villages have been raided. In Cabo Delgado, Christians have faced harassment for not meeting Muslim religious standard requirements, as perceived by the Islamist insurgents.

National life

In the north, many churches and Christian symbols have been vandalized. The government will hinder unwelcome church views on issues such as human rights, despite the church having played a significant role in the democratization process in the post-colonial era. The government is seeking a stricter form of control over religion through a new bill currently under discussion.

Church life

Christian preaching is often monitored by the authorities for signs of government criticism, and jihadists monitor all church activity in the north. The government has been deliberately slow in issuing church licenses and is discussing a new law to regulate religious affairs. Similar to the law in Rwanda, the government wants officially trained church leaders and seeks to avoid a proliferation of small church groups.



International obligations & rights violated

Mozambique has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
2. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
3. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
4. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Mozambique is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- In the north, Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian women are raped and abducted (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christian children are killed for their faith (CRC Art.2)
- Christian women are forcibly married (ICCPR Art. 23 and CEDAW Art. 16)
- Converts to Christianity suffer from discrimination and violence in the north (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 26)



Situation of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities (such as Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews) are very few in the country; most are expatriates. There is no specific form of persecution affecting these groups. A significant number of the population still follow traditional African religions. Most adherents live in remote parts of the country and there are no reports of persecution.



An outdoor refugee church in northern Mozambique.

Open Doors in Mozambique

Open Doors started support to the church in Mozambique in 2020. We focus on providing emergency support to Christians affected by increasing jihadist violence in the north through:

- Cross-cultural awareness training
- Persecution preparedness training
- Economic empowerment

About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the Full Country Dossier produced annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2023 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The Full Country Dossier for this country can be accessed [here](#) (password: freedom). The latest update of WWL methodology - as well as the complete WWL 2023 ranking and reports - can be found [here](#) (password: freedom).

Many photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
