

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

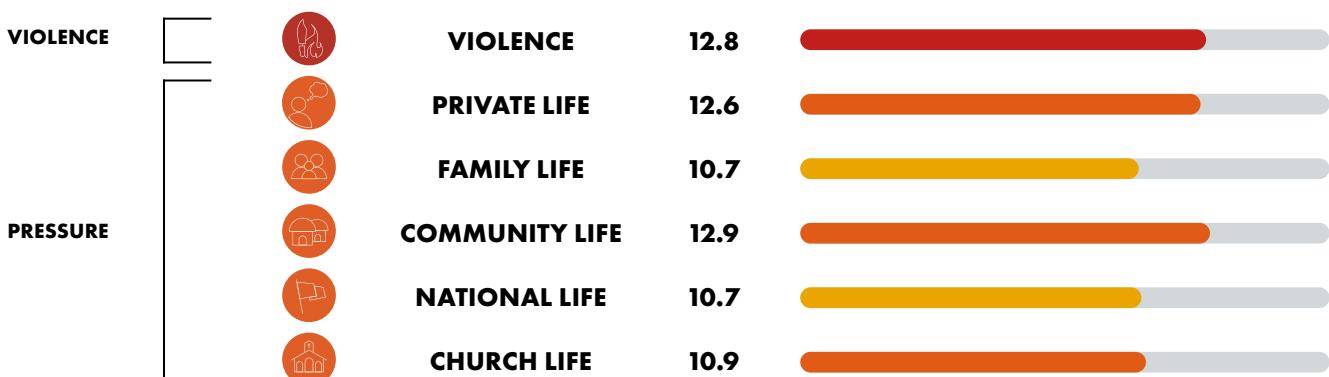
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**33**

## BANGLADESH



### 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 ( $6 \times 16.7 = 100$ ).

### Key findings

Bangladesh's minority Christian community is under increasing pressure amidst uncertainty. Converts from four different religious backgrounds (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and tribal) suffer the most severe restrictions, discrimination and attacks. They often gather in small house churches or secret groups due to fear of attack. Churches active in outreach to the Muslim majority face persecution, but even historical churches like the Roman Catholic Church are facing increased hostility. Tribal Christians face double vulnerability (belonging to both ethnic and religious minorities) and struggle with land grabbing issues and violence. Amongst the one million Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar, converts to Christianity face death threats and strong pressure from their community. The interim government, set up following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's departure in 2024, has been led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus however his commitment to minority rights risks being overwhelmed by the challenges the country faces and Islamist groups' maneuvers before promised elections ([International Crisis Group, 30 January 2025](#)).

## Quick facts

### LEADER

President Mohammad Shahabuddin Chuppi

### POPULATION

176,422,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

950,000 (Open Doors estimate)

### MAIN RELIGION

Islam

### GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary Republic



## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	950,000	0.5
Muslims	156,582,000	88.75
Hindus	16,397,000	9.3
Others	2,493,000	1.45
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>1</sup>

Bangladesh is a relatively young state, having achieved independence by war from Pakistan in 1971. Since then, there have been several periods of political instability, with civilian governments and military rule having taken turns in power and elections that are regularly accompanied by violence. Almost 90% of the country's population is Muslim, mostly Sunni. Historically, relations between the Christian community and the government have been good. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina even appointed a Catholic woman as her personal assistant in July 2014. However, the erosion of civil liberties, the increasing influence of violent radical Islamism in recent years and the violent unrest in 2024 have made Christians more vulnerable.

This August 2024 violent protests led to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who had ruled the country since 2009 in an increasingly authoritarian way, being ousted. Hasina fled to neighboring India, and an

interim government was formed under Mohammed Yunus, a Nobel Prize winner. However, his government has struggled to deliver on expectations, including stemming the tide of increasing violence against minorities, while different parts of society, particularly Islamist groups, position themselves ahead of the elections, promised between December 2025 and June 2026.

While the Christian population is small (about 0.5% of the population), it numbers nearly a million and is diverse, with about half Roman Catholic. Protestants are also found throughout the country but are strongest in the ethnic minority tribal regions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Protestant groups include Baptist, Brethren, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventists, Assemblies of God and the Church of Bangladesh (a union of Anglicans and Methodists).

While Bangladesh is largely ethnically homogenous—with 98% of the population being Bengali—minorities like the Chakma exist as well. Additionally, there are the “Hill Tribe People” in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (e.g. Garo, Santal and the Bawm) including a large number of Christians. The Hill Tribe People are neglected and discriminated against by the authorities and harassed by the majority community, e.g. land-grabbing, including the destruction of houses and fields.

<sup>1</sup> Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025 – adapted to incorporate OD-estimate

## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### DIKTATORIAL PARANOIA, BLENDED WITH ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Politics in Bangladesh was traditionally dominated by hostility between the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party, though both parties have increasingly courted Islamist groups. Although Christians and other religious minorities have enjoyed more freedom than in many other Muslim countries, increasing political instability and violence mean Christians often find themselves scapegoated, including in the latter years of the Sheikh Hasina government, when she spread rumors of a Western plot to carve out a Christian nation in the south of the country. Additionally, the escalation of the conflict between Hamas and Israel has aggravated tensions between Muslims and Christians, with Bangladeshi Muslims identifying with the Muslim Palestinians, and Christians being assumed to be on the side of Israel.

### RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM – BUDDHISTS AND HINDUS, BLENDED WITH ETHNO-RELIGIOUS HOSTILITY AND CLAN OPPRESSION

There are almost twice as many Buddhists and more than 10 times as many Hindus as Christians. Buddhists are mostly among the indigenous people groups bordering India and Myanmar. In recent years, an increasing number of tribal Chakma (Buddhist) have converted to Christianity. Converts experience pressure from the local community, Buddhist and tribal leaders and radical Buddhists aim to resist Christianity. In most Hindu communities, leaders and families put pressure on Christian converts to return to Hinduism.



## How the situation varies by region

Bangladesh's northern region, with the Chittagong Hill Tracts and its many ethnic minorities, is a hotspot for rights violations against Christians perpetrated both by the Muslim majority and the Buddhist minority. Another hotspot developed when Bangladesh became host to more than a million Muslim refugees from Myanmar. Most are located in Cox's Bazar district, at the south-eastern tip of Bangladesh. The refugee camps are home to a tiny minority of Rohingya converts to Christianity who face increasing pressure and violence but have no means of escape.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

This group includes embassy personnel and foreign workers from the important textile sector. They are monitored and sometimes threatened by radical Islamist militants. This community also includes Christians amongst the Rohingya refugees.

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This group includes the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Bangladesh. They are increasingly threatened and watched.

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

This category includes converts from a variety of backgrounds: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Tribal. They are facing the strongest persecution, not least from their own families and communities, and often gather secretly.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This group includes Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations. The Assemblies of God, for example, mainly gather for worship in house churches. They are frequently threatened and, at times, violently attacked.



## How are men and women differently affected?

### **WOMEN**

Bangladesh is a patriarchal country, with entrenched class structures and one of the world's highest child marriage rates. Christian women and girls—especially converts—are vulnerable to harassment, ostracism, humiliating rituals, sexual assault, rape, forced marriage, or house arrest. Much of their persecution is “invisible,” involving mental abuse, isolation, and shame-based control. Authorities often fail to act, fueling impunity. Refugee camps are especially dangerous: Rohingya Christian women and girls face abduction, beatings, forced conversion, and coerced marriage. Shortages of aid deepen their precarious situation, leaving them highly exposed.

#### **Female typical pressure points:**

- Abduction
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Targeted seduction
- Violence – physical
- Violence – sexual

### **MEN**

In Bangladesh's male-oriented culture, men often convert first and so face persecution first. Following the 2024 resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, political upheaval has intensified pressure. Christian men and boys endure public beatings, torture, false accusations, and social ostracism from authorities and community members. Some are accused of fabricated drug or bribery charges, while ethnic minority men, such as the Bawm, are targeted in anti-insurgency operations. Church leaders remain especially at risk of arrest. As household providers, men's loss of work or imprisonment leaves families vulnerable and destabilized.

#### **Male typical pressure points:**

- Abduction
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- False charges
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological



## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	33	71
2025	24	74
2024	26	71
2023	30	69
2022	29	68

The decrease of three points this year follows the increase of three points last year, and in both cases, this is due to the change in violence scores. In this previous reporting period, there were increased attacks on churches and Christian institutions as part of the wider unrest in August 2024, and the army's anti-insurgency against the Bawm. In this reporting period, there were fewer cases of violence, but the increased scores in private, family, community and church life reflect the long-term trend of increasing pressure on and threats against Christians. The lower score in national life reflects how the interim government has brought some stability and acknowledged minority rights; however, indications are that threats to Christians could increase significantly in future years.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

- November 2024:** Two Christians from a Muslim background were attacked while attending their church after being confronted by a group of local Muslims who demanded they stop church services. Now, the 26 families from the church are in hiding, living in fear of further attacks.
- 24 December 2024:** Seventeen houses belonging to Christian community members were torched by unknown attackers on Christmas Eve in Bangladesh's Bandarban region ([The Daily Star, 26 December 2024](#)).
- March 2025:** Two believers were arrested in northern Bangladesh for spreading blasphemy against Islam and converting people to Christianity by offering bribes and money.
- 17 July 2025:** A member of Bangladesh's indigenous Bawm community died in hospital after more than a year in detention without formal charges or trial ([BorderLens, 22 July 2025](#)). The Bawm are Christian and subject to a harsh crackdown by the Bangladeshi army against the armed insurgency group, the Kuki-Chin National Front.



WWL Year	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians detained	Houses or property of Christians attacked
2026	3	10	27	25
2025	13	14	151	64

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period – for full results see the violence section of the country's corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. 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. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*.

## PRIVATE LIFE

It can be difficult for Christians to practice their faith privately. Converts live in fear and often prefer to keep their conversion secret from their family. Those who choose to identify themselves are regularly harassed, bullied and threatened. It can be risky to meet other Christians due to family pressure and societal monitoring.

## FAMILY LIFE

The right to raise a family according to one's own religious beliefs is not always upheld for Christians. Christian ceremonies are frequently disrupted by mob violence. For students who are Christian or children of converts, the educational bias towards Islamic studies in the curriculum is strong. There is also frequently a lack of Christian teachers. Children of converts are forced to continue attending Islamic classes and use Islamic textbooks.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Given their small numbers, Christians are often at the mercy of the surrounding community in terms of social and economic security. Radical Islamist pressure can encourage the community to be hostile towards Christians and encourage them to renounce their faith. Radical Islamist groups target vulnerable families and attempt to extort their conversions through promises of money, food and education for their children. Mob violence targeting groups of converts has also increased in recent years. Officially, Article 28 (1) of the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh

proclaims, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth," and Article 29 ensures equality of opportunity in public employment. However, in practice, minorities face widespread discrimination.

## NATIONAL LIFE

Article 41(1)(a) of the Bangladesh Constitution protects the citizen's fundamental right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion. For any Christian, Buddhist or Hindu who wishes to become Muslim, this procedure is almost a formality. In contrast, Muslims wishing to become Christians encounter pressure from the lawyer taking the case, who sometimes even refuses (illegally) to register the conversion.

The overthrow of the Prime Minister and associated disorder directly impacted Christians, though long-term protection of minority religious rights will depend on what kind of government emerges.

## CHURCH LIFE

Increasing hostility towards Christians in recent years has made building and maintaining a vibrant church community an arduous task. Many radical Islamist groups monitor Christian churches, harassing and threatening violence against those they suspect of proselytization. Converts from Islam also face heavy scrutiny from their family and wider community authorities. Many church leaders are afraid to baptize converted Muslims for fear of violent reprisals.



## International obligations & rights violated

**Bangladesh has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:**

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

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families, threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

## Situation of other religious minorities

Despite the government expressing its commitment to protecting minorities, there are reports of killings. For example, a Hindu man allegedly posted insulting comments about the Quran on Facebook, prompting a mob of Muslim men to break down the door to his house, steal his possessions and burn part of the house before attacking other houses ([Al Jazeera, 12 December 2024](#)). Ahmadiyya Muslim communities still experience physical attacks and vandalism ([UNCIRF, March 2025](#)).



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## Open Doors in Bangladesh

Bangladesh was founded as a secular state, but at the same time, it states that Islam is the state religion, and Muslims are in positions of leadership, both politically and socially. As a result, the church faces persecution and ostracism from its majority Muslim community, especially in villages.

Therefore, the scope of Open Doors' work to strengthen the church includes the following:

- Discipling and equipping Christians on how to respond biblically to persecution and be obedient to God, especially the Great Commission
- Providing local language Bibles and other Christian literature
- Providing assistance through literacy and socio-economic empowerment
- Providing immediate relief to victims of persecution



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## ABOUT THIS DOSSIER

- The content of this Country Dossier is based on detailed analysis carried out by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. This dossier may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2026 Open Doors International.
- All 50 Country Dossiers – along with the latest update of WWL Methodology – can be accessed [here](#).
- The WWL 2026 reporting period was 01 October 2024 - 30 September 2025.

*A few photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.*