

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

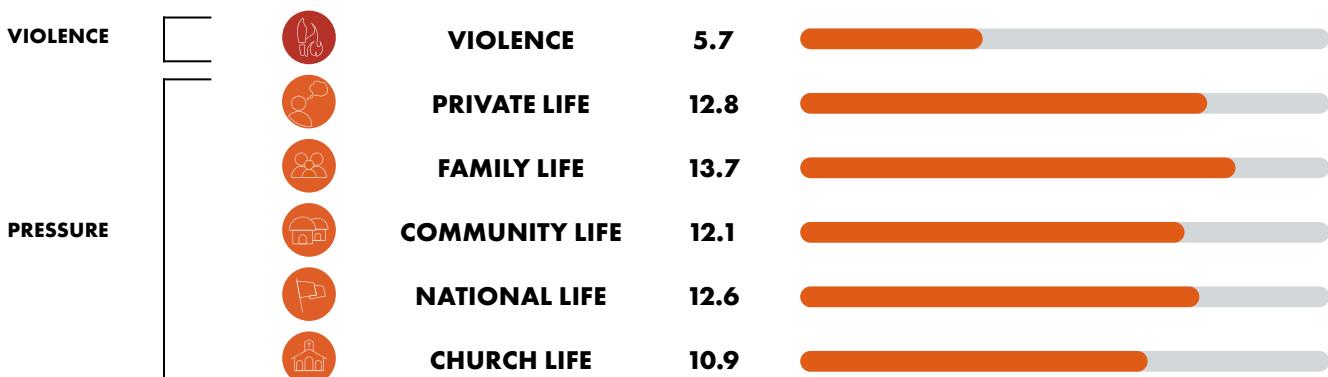
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
42

EGYPT



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

In Egypt, most religious freedom violations happen within local communities. These include Christian women being harassed or mobs forcing Christian families to leave after someone is accused of blasphemy. These incidents mostly occur in rural parts of Upper Egypt and in poorer urban areas, especially where Islamist radicals are active. The President of Egypt speaks positively about the country's historical Christian community, but weak law enforcement leaves them vulnerable to attack, with security services sometimes being complicit. Despite promises from the President that a church will be built in every new neighborhood, construction of new churches is restricted. Christians converts from a Muslim background face enormous pressure from their families to return to Islam. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University (one of the most influential Islamic universities globally) has stated that Muslims may not convert to Christianity. Security services maintain a strong grip on converts from Islam to Christianity, regularly detaining and abusing them and forcing them into isolation. The state also makes it impossible for conversions to be officially recognized.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi

POPULATION

116,275,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

10,184,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	10,184,000	8.8
Muslims	105,097,000	90.4
Agnostics/Atheists	987,000	0.8
Others	8,800	0.0
	Total	100%

Source²

Egypt has been home to one of history's earliest influential civilizations: the ancient Egyptians followed by periods of foreign rule including the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. After centuries as a center of Christianity under Byzantine rule, the arrival of Arab Muslim forces in the 7th century marked the beginning of Egypt's gradual transformation into a predominantly Islamic society, with Arabic eventually replacing Coptic and Greek as the main language.

The Coptic Orthodox Church traces its origins to the apostle Mark. Particularly in Alexandria, a vibrant theological tradition developed and produced influential figures like church father Athanasius, eventually becoming a center of monasticism. The church endured severe persecution under Roman rule and later faced challenges under both Byzantine and Islamic rule, leading to a focus on survival over public engagement. Since Egypt's 1952 Revolution, Christians have faced intermittent, localized persecution. Today, over 90% of Egyptian Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, though Roman Catholic,

Anglican, Presbyterian, and other independent churches have also established a presence.

Though Egypt is technically a democracy, the powers of the parliament and judiciary have always been weak and de facto, the president rules alone. Since President el-Sisi took power in 2014, Egypt's political situation has become more stable, but the human rights situation has sharply deteriorated ([HRW 2025](#)). Social media is monitored, and criticism of the government or Islam is not tolerated.

Egypt is culturally conservative and seeks to be an influential center of Sunni Islam. In rural and impoverished areas in particular (where many Christians live), radical imams have significant influence. All over, there is considerable division between Christians and Muslims. Employment discrimination against Christians is still common, especially when it comes to sensitive government jobs. Christian businesses can be boycotted. Christians remain vulnerable to mob attacks, which can be triggered by a rumor of alleged blasphemy or the opening of a new church. Usually, the local authorities use so-called "reconciliation sessions" to resolve a conflict, which often result in Muslim attackers going free and a culture of impunity for violence against Christians.

Given the sectarian context, it comes as no surprise that there is no room for converts from Islam to Christianity. They face very high levels of family, community, and state pressure, including abuse, surveillance, and arrest.

¹ Gina A. Zurlo, ed., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

² Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

How the situation varies by region

Christians in Egypt mostly live in southern Upper Egypt and major cities. The south is more religiously conservative, with most mob attacks occurring there, particularly in Minya, which records the highest rate of assaults per capita. Other attacks are often carried out by radical Islamists groups. Groups like the Muslim Brotherhood retain nationwide support, while violent militants operate mainly in Sinai. Though President el-Sisi declared terrorism defeated in 2023, the region remains volatile, especially after the Israel-Hamas war.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

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

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Despite a more inclusive national narrative, Coptic Christians face discrimination in education and government legislation that hinders essential aspects of church life. In general, Coptic Christians are being tolerated by the state and by the Muslim majority because of their historical presence and significant size of several million.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

There is a small but growing number of Christian converts who experience severe violations, most often at the hands of family members. In addition, they remain strictly monitored by the Egyptian intelligence services, which also regularly detain, and abuse converts from Islam to Christianity.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

There are several Evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the country, usually coming from an Orthodox background. They face pressure from both the Islamic society and the Coptic Orthodox Church.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Christians often feel they are treated as second-class citizens and face unfair treatment when dealing with the state. The state is reluctant to respect and enforce the fundamental rights of Christians. There have been several major violent attacks against Christians in the recent past, perpetrated by militant Islamist groups. However, no such large-scale attacks have occurred since 2018, although jihadists have killed and attacked individual Christians in recent years.

DICTIONARIAL PARANOIA

Egypt has a long tradition of authoritarian rule. Currently, Egypt is ruled by a civilian government led by former army chief Abdul Fatah el-Sisi. This government seems to regard basic human rights and democratic pluralism as a low priority in view of the huge current economic, political, social, and security challenges. In this context, therefore, religious freedom for Christians is not fully guaranteed.

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONAL PROTECTIONISM

Especially in Upper Egypt and the Delta region, the Coptic Orthodox Church acts strongly against other denominations. Members of Orthodox congregations have been warned by their clergy not to have contact with other denominations, especially the Evangelicals. There have been cases in which families depending on financial and social services from the Orthodox Church have been deprived of those sources after attending a non-Orthodox church or allowing an evangelical pastor to visit them in their homes.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Christian women in Egypt, particularly in rural areas, face grooming, forced conversion, and sexual harassment, often within an honor/shame culture that stigmatizes their families. Some are stripped, beaten, or abused publicly, while perpetrators frequently enjoy impunity, leaving victims silenced and fearful. Coptic women face constant harassment for not veiling. Girls from vulnerable families are lured into early marriages with Muslim men, pressured to convert. Female converts from Islam are most at risk: they may be locked up, beaten, killed for “honor,” divorced, and lose custody of children.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied custody of children
- Denied legal ability to marry a Christian spouse
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Targeted seduction
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological

MEN

Christian men in Egypt face systemic discrimination, with few in senior military or government roles. In rural areas, unemployment and bias against Christian names leave young men disadvantaged and vulnerable to financial incentives to convert to Islam. Economic strain undermines family stability, contributing to domestic violence and divorce. Conscripts face pressure to renounce their faith. Church leaders, almost all male, are easily targeted for harassment, killings, or attacks on their families. Extremist violence and the killing of clergy have fueled fear and emigration.

Male typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Forced out of home/expulsion
- 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	42	68
2025	40	68
2024	38	68
2023	35	68
2022	20	71

The overall score remained the same. The violence score decreased from 6.3 to 5.7 points. The country witnessed less sectarian violence overall, yet this appears to be the result of coercive state control rather than genuine coexistence. Scores in the Private and National spheres of life increased slightly, driven by a rise in reported public inciting speech, on social media influencers, and continued strong pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- 3 June 2025:** Nadia Youssef Nakhnoukh, aged 52, was killed in broad daylight by a Muslim neighbor in Ezbet, Assiut Governorate, Upper Egypt. The murder followed years of sectarian harassment.
- Church properties violations:** In Rashid, Beheira Governorate, the authorities demolished a church's newly built cemetery wall despite a valid permit, later reissuing approval without explanation. In Warraq, Giza Governorate, a Muslim man seized church land, built illegal shops, and faced no removal despite legal proceedings.
- Sectarian violence:** In May 2025, mob violence took place in Manshiyat Al-Hawasliya, Minya governate. A Coptic villager's mobile station installation led to a quarrel after which a violent mob wounded at least five Copts and damaged and looted at least nine houses.
- Communal violence:** Several other incidents were reported, including the pelting of a young Christian girl in Alexandria during Ramadan because she was eating in public. Several other killings occurred, but it remains unclear if they were faith related.



WWL Year	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians' private property damaged or confiscated
2026	14	1	2	22
2025	46	2	2	51

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

Christians in Upper Egypt often avoid visible symbols, such as car crosses, fearing harassment. Most Copts bear a tattooed cross marking their faith, but it also exposes them to discrimination. Arrests and mob attacks have followed alleged online insults to Islam, with blasphemy accusations easily invoked. As a result, Christians usually conceal their faith from outsiders. A 2008 Cairo Administrative Court ruling reinforced the ban on converting from Islam, viewed as violating religious principles. Converts face severe social hostility and family rejection. In rural areas, mere rumors of conversion can trigger attacks, forcing many to practice in secrecy.

FAMILY LIFE

Coptic Christians in Egypt face challenges in education, often being required to study Islamic content, with Christian classes sometimes unavailable unless they can afford private schooling. Converts from Islam to Christianity encounter even greater difficulties as they cannot change their religion on official ID cards, and their children are automatically registered as Muslim. Under Sharia law, converts lose inheritance and guardianship rights, and face strong family pressure to divorce if married. These factors contribute to significant legal and social discrimination against both groups.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christians in Egypt face significant employment discrimination, being largely excluded from intelligence services, senior military roles, and high government positions. Despite making up nearly

9% of the population, no Christian has played on the national football team in the past decade. This marginalization has fostered strong entrepreneurial activity within the community. Discrimination is more severe in poor and rural areas, especially Upper Egypt, where Christians are closely monitored by local Islamist groups. Attacks and harassment often go unpunished due to weak law enforcement.

NATIONAL LIFE

Christians in Egypt face restricted religious freedom despite constitutional guarantees. While recognized Christians can manage personal status laws, Sharia applies in mixed cases. Converts from Islam risk surveillance, prosecution, and accusations of blasphemy when seeking registration changes. Alleged criticism of Islam or the government can bring arrest, torture, or imprisonment. Converts also endure family mistreatment, seldom addressed by authorities, while state security agencies closely monitor them and pressure individuals to reveal information on conversion networks.

CHURCH LIFE

Churches in Egypt remain cautious about accepting converts to avoid accusations of proselytizing, which can provoke attacks or forced closures. Police and intelligence agencies closely monitor activities, sometimes canceling events for “security” reasons. Legalization efforts under the 2016 Church Construction Law often face resistance, though over 3,600 churches have been approved. Many activities outside church walls are kept quiet to avoid provoking tensions.



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International obligations & rights violated

Egypt 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](#))

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

- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are often left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are arbitrarily accused and charged with blasphemy (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face discrimination in public and private employment because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles in obtaining permits for the construction of new buildings and receiving licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)
- Christian women, especially in rural areas, may be targeted, groomed, and forced into marriage with Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Christians are killed because of their faith by members of terrorist organizations (ICCPR Art. 6.1)

Situation of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities in Egypt, including Shia and Sufi Muslims, Baha'i, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Ahmadis, and atheists, face intolerance and discrimination. Shia Muslims are especially targeted by Sunni militants, making open worship dangerous.

Baha'i, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses lack official recognition, preventing them from establishing places of worship. Missionary activities are illegal, and adherents face hostility from both state officials and society. In addition, atheists are prone to violations, especially those active on social media networks.



Open Doors in Egypt

In cooperation with local churches and other partnering ministries, Open Doors is supporting the church in Egypt, of all denominations, through various ministry centers, spread out throughout the country from north to south. We offer many activities, some of which are as follows:

- Family ministry retreats and families counseling
- Seminars for men
- Awareness and empowerment courses for women and girls and Bible study groups
- Child apologetics
- Youth ministry: Discipleship groups & discipleship leadership training
- General education: Children's educational support programs in rural areas and villages
- Literacy training: Literacy classes for women and girls in villages
- Advocacy
- Leadership development: Empowering and encouraging local church pastors and leaders through regular face-to-face visits, and leadership seminars
- Medical outreach
- Widows' ministry



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.

Most photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.