

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

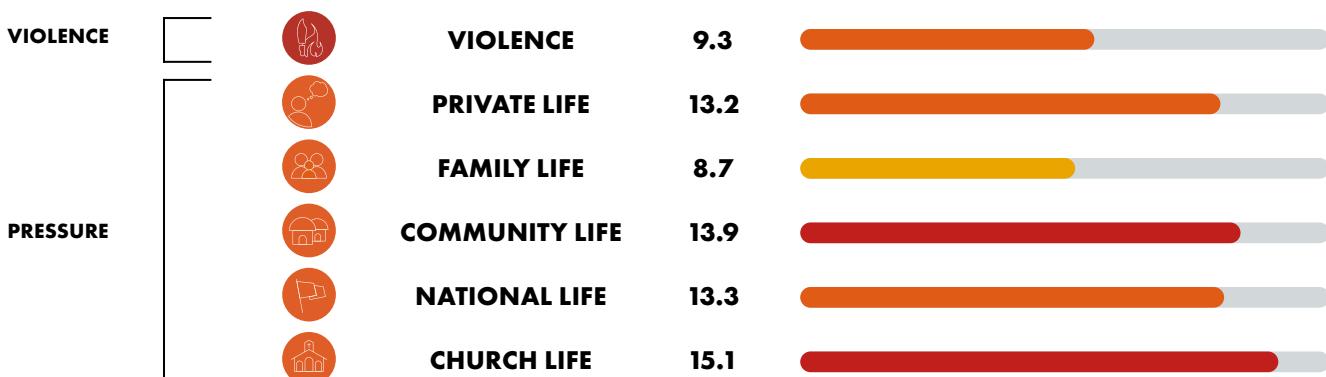
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
24

CUBA



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

Since 1959, Cuba has been governed by its Communist Party, which seeks to align religious institutions according to state ideology. The government systematically suppresses dissent, including voices from the Church. When church leaders or Christian activists criticize the regime, they face arbitrary arrests, smear campaigns, mobility restrictions, imprisonment, and harassment, often through “acts of repudiation” that may involve physical violence. To limit Church influence, authorities routinely deny registration of new churches, forcing many to operate illegally and exposing them to continuous sanctions. Church activities, especially those that benefit local communities, are closely monitored and often deemed contrary to state interests. Religious groups face severe penalties including permit denials, fines, property confiscation, demolition, church closures (including house churches), and legal action against leaders.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermudez

POPULATION

11,153,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

6,874,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Communist state



Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	6,874,000	61.6
Agnostics/Atheists	2,314,000	20.8
Hindu	23,500	0.2
Others	1,941,500	17.4
Total		100%

Source²

Cuba's 2019 Constitution reaffirmed the Communist Party's leading role and made Socialism irreversible. Miguel Díaz-Canel, unanimously elected by the Communist-led National Assembly in 2018, has continued the party's tight control since succeeding the Castro family ([LBBC, 27 July 2021](#)). In April 2023, he secured a second five-year term. Alongside the constitutional reform, updates to the Penal Code, Family Code, and other laws have further consolidated party control across government sectors.

Opposition is growing as policies have caused healthcare collapse, inflation, food and energy shortages, affecting 89% of the population ([OCDH, June 2024](#)). Protests have intensified; the July 2021 demonstrations met with severe repression, 1,397 arbitrary detentions, including 15 minors. In 2024 alone, human rights organizations documented 3,921 repressive actions, including 949 home detentions, 818 arbitrary arrests, and 786 abuses against political prisoners ([OCDH, 7 January 2025](#)).

In January 2025, a Vatican-mediated agreement prompted the release of 553 prisoners and a proposed removal of Cuba from the U.S. State Sponsors of Terrorism list. That initiative, however, was swiftly reversed by the succeeding U.S. administration. ([Reuters, 20 January 2025](#))

According to WCD 2025 statistics, 86.7% of Cuban Christians are Catholic, but other denominations maintain visibility, particularly Pentecostal churches. The Communist Party controls religious activity through the Office of Religious Affairs, which grants privileges to compliant groups while restricting independent churches ([OHCHR, 12 November 2020](#)). The Evangelical Alliance, formed in 2019, faces repression and official recognition denial. Independent churches are subject to worship restrictions, surveillance, arrests, and travel bans. Despite this, Pentecostal and other Christian denominations remain active in civil society and protests.

The 2022 Penal Code criminalizes religious expression opposing state ideology ([Gaceta Oficial, 1 September 2022](#)), with at least 996 religious freedom violations recorded in 2024 ([Evangelical Focus, 13 May 2025](#)). Religious leaders who advocate for human rights or pray for political prisoners face fines, imprisonment and harassment. In 2024, religious freedom violations included threats, arrests, summons, attacks, acts of repudiation, surveillance, abuse of political prisoners and defamation campaigns against religious leaders.

Although 533 prisoners were released in 2025, sentences remain, and many still face surveillance ([Panampost, 15 January 2025](#)).

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

In the reporting period, incidents of persecution against Christians were registered throughout the country, but particularly in the eastern provinces and Havana.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

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

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches face state surveillance and restrictions when materials or sermons contradict Communist ideology, support demonstrators, or engage in humanitarian aid. Some lack official recognition and face the same constraints and punitive measures as unregistered groups.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts from Santería or the Communist Party face rejection and reprisals if they join churches considered regime opponents or if they are led by pastors considered counter-revolutionaries. Authorities use intimidation to discourage conversion and limit church growth.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Pentecostal, Evangelical, and Baptist groups face serious barriers to legal registration. Their activities are routinely used as pretexts for fines or prosecution, while house churches remain permanently vulnerable and are subjected to systematic exposure to state reprisals.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

COMMUNIST AND POST-COMMUNIST OPPRESSION BLENDED WITH SECULAR INTOLERANCE

Since the 1959 Revolution, Cuba operates as a Communist state, with the 2019 Constitution further solidifying party control over all aspects of society. Religious institutions must align with Communist ideology or face repression through arbitrary arrests, surveillance, and restricted movement. During the 2022 Family Code debate, authorities scrutinized churches and faith-based organizations teaching the biblical model of family. Since its implementation, concerns have grown over increasing restrictions on religious expression, with Christian parents facing intimidation, fines, and legal threats, fueling fear of potential criminalization for resisting state ideological norms. Officials increasingly regulate preaching, particularly messages advocating peace, justice, or human rights in regions like Israel, Palestine, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Ukraine. Religious leaders challenging official narratives risk sanctions, defamation campaigns and ministry restrictions.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

This engine blends with Communist and Post-Communist oppression. With the Communist Party as the sole recognized political entity, challenges to its authority face hostility. Christians must often compromise beliefs to access basic services. Corruption, impunity, and absence of judicial independence reinforce the Communist party's absolute control over all aspects of society. No independent institution can enforce rule of law, leaving Christians without protection against state abuses. Churches face growing restrictions on religious expression and are under constant threat of retaliation, with expanded surveillance and systematic harassment when teachings are perceived as undermining state authority. These tactics reflect a broader strategy to neutralize independent religious voices, restrict their influence, and prevent faith-based movements from becoming platforms for social or political dissent.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Some Christian women report facing pushback when they publicly express faith-based pro-life views. Female activists who speak out against the government are typically fired, threatened and monitored. Police continue to mistreat and beat the “Ladies in White” (a group founded by the relatives of political prisoners) on their way to and from church services. According to a local expert, “Women from the Ladies in White group have been detained in deplorable conditions, lost their jobs and been threatened with not seeing their children.”.

Female typical pressure points:

- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – psychological

MEN

Christian men, particularly male church leaders, are more likely to be arrested or harassed as they often hold leadership positions and criticize government

behavior based on their Christian beliefs. The imprisonment of Christian men has a significant impact on their wives, children and communities. Children have witnessed their fathers being beaten and have been denied access to them. Within compulsory military service, Christian men are additionally vulnerable if their faith is discovered.

Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Travel bans/restrictions on movement
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal



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WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	24	73
2025	26	73
2024	22	73
2023	27	70
2022	37	66

The overall WWL score for Cuba remained unchanged at 73 points, with average pressure stable at a very high level (12.8 points), despite slight increases in the Family and Violence blocks. During the WWL 2026 reporting period, persistent acts of hostility targeted Christians who, based on their faith, hold dissenting or critical views of the regime and do not align with the interests of the dictatorial government, particularly leaders and members of non-affiliated churches. Repression remains systematic and its methods are continually adapted in line with the authorities' communist-inspired drive to maintain tight control over society; during the reporting period, this included an increase in reported attacks on churches and in Christians being pressured or forced to leave the country.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- 4 October 2024:** Two pastors were denied permission for a public religious gathering. Officials cited their unregistered status as grounds for restriction. Though willing to comply with requirements, the pastors noted the government's systematic refusal to grant legal recognition to independent churches.
- 29 November 2024:** Authorities issued a 72-hour eviction order to a Movimiento Apostólico pastor despite his property ownership. Officials stated he was unauthorized to use the space for worship. This movement has repeatedly reported restrictions on activities deemed illegal despite constitutional religious freedom guarantees.
- 18 February 2025:** State Security interrogated Catholic leaders Dagoberto Valdés and Yoandy Izquierdo about their doctoral studies ([Facebook post, 18 February 2025](#)). Authorities warned Valdés about his associations and pressured Izquierdo regarding his work with Convivencia (a Catholic-inspired center promoting studies and proposals on social, civic, and ethical issues in Cuba), part of systematic harassment against the independent Study Center.



WWL Year	Christians imprisoned or punished by government	Christians detained	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians forced to leave the country
2026	20	56	17	10
2025	28	69	13	6

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

Online religious expression faces strict monitoring and censorship. Under Decrees 370 and 35, Christians sharing faith content or criticizing government policies are labeled “traitors,” facing disruptions and fines. Since the 2021 protests, surveillance has intensified, prompting self-censorship. State control over telecommunications enables surveillance and limits access to religious content. Christians deemed critical of the regime experience house arrest, travel restrictions and arbitrary detention, often incommunicado. When detained, access to religious materials and prayer is frequently denied, undermining religious rights.

FAMILY LIFE

Cuban schools enforce Communist indoctrination, requiring students to chant Che Guevara slogans. The 2022 Criminal and Family Codes expand state control over parenting; the Family Code’s broad “psychological violence” definition potentially criminalizes religious teaching at home. Christian children face being labelled as “counter-revolutionaries,” bullying and isolation. Families rejecting state ideology face harassment, surveillance or retaliation. Some relocate to protect children from indoctrination; Christian detainees endure communication blackouts, severely straining families.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Government informants and neighborhood watch committees (CDR) monitor Christian activities. Believers at unauthorized gatherings or unregistered churches face surveillance and intimidation. Independent church members face job and benefit discrimination. Intelligence operations include

electronic surveillance and infiltration in churches, justified by “revolutionary values” or “subversive influence”. The education system limits academic access for dissenting Christian students. Members of unregistered communities face fines; nonpayment may trigger police summons or travel bans.

NATIONAL LIFE

The government’s legal framework, including Decrees 370/35 and the new Criminal/Family Code, criminalizes religious dissent. Surveillance targets religious leaders and human rights advocates labeled “subversives”. Christians exposing abuses face arrest, censorship, travel bans, or prosecution. During the Family Code referendum, Christian leaders endured smear campaigns for their biblical stance. Non-registered churches face intense scrutiny; those with global ties face barriers and “imperialist” accusations. The judiciary serves state interests, resulting in biased trials, forced confessions, and prolonged detentions, with international monitoring severely restricted.

CHURCH LIFE

Church registration remains highly restrictive; most recognized churches date from before 1959. Newer groups are denied recognition, labeled “illegal” and face fines, closures, or confiscation. Even recognized churches must seek approval for activities beyond worship. Church social projects risk “subversion” accusations. Since 2021, protests, religious leaders have been increasingly targeted as dissent instigators, with some properties seized for “national security” claims. Holy Week processions have been denied over “protest concerns”. Sermons on justice or human rights are monitored and humanitarian work obstructed to ensure state control over social aid.



International obligations & rights violated

Cuba 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](#))

**Cuba has signed the ICCPR but not ratified it*

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

- Christians are harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians are arrested for speaking up for their rights (ICCPR Arts. 9 and 19)
- If arrested, Christians experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian children are ostracized at school and pressured to abandon their faith (ICCPR Art. 18; CRC Arts. 14 and 24)

Situation of other religious minorities

Santería practitioners, particularly from the unregistered Free Yoruba Association, face severe government targeting. Several leaders received multi-year prison sentences after peaceful protests. Though Donaida Pérez Paseiro was released in January 2025, she faces employment mandates as a parole condition with threats of reimprisonment ([Marti Noticias, 5 March 2025](#)).



Open Doors in Cuba

Open Doors provides targeted assistance to strengthen the Church in the face of persecution, including:

- Provision of theological materials
- Prayer support
- Biblical training
- Financial assistance for basic needs
- Strengthening of faith under persecution



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 of the photos this dossier are for illustrative purposes.