

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

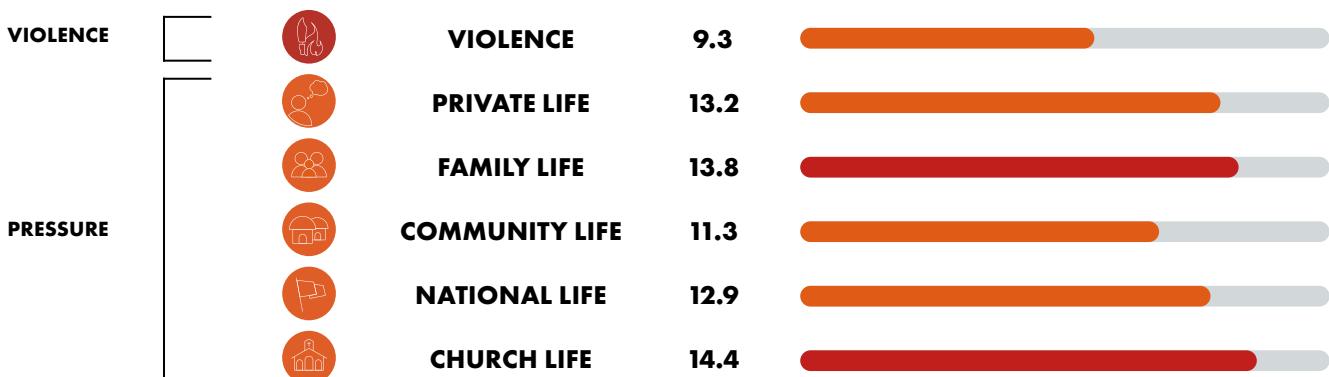
WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
23

MOROCCO



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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

Moroccan Christians, especially the young, face intense family pressure, forced isolation, expulsion from home, physical violence and even superstitious treatment by imams. While some judges might occasionally side with a convert in court cases, family pressure regularly forces Moroccan converts to be separated from their families. Communal pressure, especially in rural areas, can deeply affect Moroccan Christians, causing them to lose their jobs and force them to move. While the government may engage with advocates for the rights of Christians, they are also being monitored by the government for their activities. Recently, an increasing number of Christian leaders have come under heightened scrutiny and questioning from security agencies. In addition, several Christians have been pressured to report on their own communities. A recurring problem for Christians who are open about their faith relates to Article 220 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes 'shaking the faith of a Muslim'. This puts both Moroccan and foreign Christians who evangelize at risk of arrest.

Quick facts

LEADER

King Mohammed VI

POPULATION

38,571,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

37,400¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy



Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	37,400	0.1
Muslims	38,439,000	99.7
Agnostics/Atheists	51,990	0.1
Others	43,100	0.1
Total		100%

Source²

Morocco sits at a historical crossroads between Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab world and Europe. While the coastal areas have been conquered by different civilizations, the inland developed a strong indigenous Amazigh ('Berber') identity, with their own customs and languages.

Islam arrived in the 7th century with the Arab invasion of the Maghreb region, but the Umayyad Caliphate was soon ousted following the Berber Revolt (740-743). Several independent dynasties have ruled Morocco since with the current Alawi dynasty being in power since the 17th century. The monarchy claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad, reinforcing the religious legitimacy of the state. Islam is currently the official state religion, dominated by the Maliki school of Sunni jurisprudence and with 99% of the population adhering to it.

Previously, Christianity became very prominent in areas like Tangiers, Rabat and Fez when the region

was part of the Roman Empire. By the end of the 4th century, Christianity was firmly established in Roman areas of Morocco and had begun spreading among Amazigh tribes. Over time, however, policies of Islamization sharply reduced the Christian population, leaving only a small and vulnerable minority. In 1912, Morocco became a French Protectorate after which thousands of both Catholics and Protestant Christians settled in Morocco. Since Morocco's independence in 1956, most Europeans and their churches have largely departed. Today, the expatriate Christian community consists of several thousand members, mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa, in addition to several thousand Moroccan Christians.

Since independence, the country has maintained relative stability and prosperity. When the Arab Spring reached Morocco in 2011, the government was able to use constitutional reforms to avoid the political upheaval that engulfed much of the rest of the Arab world. However, grievances and discontent remain strong in the northern Rif region where the mainly ethnic Berber population believe they are marginalized and neglected by the government. Although Morocco regularly holds multiparty elections, the political scene is dominated by the King and many civil and political rights are limited in practice (Freedom House 2025).

Morocco is socially conservative, but the country's elite promotes "Moroccan Islam," which aims to keep society away from extremist influences. There is a strong Arab youth culture,

¹Gina 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

and society is also influenced by the large Moroccan population living in Europe.

Christians in Morocco, especially converts from a Muslim background, are careful about their social media postings. Criticizing Islam or the religious authority of the king can lead to arrest and detention, as well as social hatred. Most Christians in Morocco use a pseudonym to post Christian material. On the positive side, with the rise of Internet access and social media, many converts to Christianity can now find fellowship online, despite being geographically isolated.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Authorities confiscate Arabic Christian literature, ban cooperation with foreign Christians, especially for evangelization, and make it nearly impossible for Christians from a Muslim background to obtain recognized places of worship. Converts from Islam face pressure from family and community over their new faith.

DIKTATORIAL PARANOIA

The Moroccan government views the church, especially activities involving converts, with suspicion. Moroccans are expected to be loyal to Islam, the king and country. In the past, the authorities have accused Christians of being disloyal to the king and have deported many foreign Christians without due process. One reason for such government action may be the fear of radical Islamist groups; by appeasing them, the government tries to prevent any unrest.

How the situation varies by region

The population in rural areas is known to be conservative; most violations take place in the predominately Berber-populated north-east of the country, the Atlas Mountains and the south-eastern desert area. Most converts to Christianity live in urban areas, where it is easier to escape family and community pressure.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Expatriate Christians, both Western and Sub-Saharan African, are often under surveillance and risk deportation if suspected of evangelism. However, they enjoy relative freedom. Christians from Sub-Saharan Africa, typically Pentecostal, are usually marginalized and discriminated against. The majority of Christians in Morocco are expatriate Roman Catholics. Recognized churches for expatriates exist only in major cities. Indigenous Moroccan Christians are not allowed to join these congregations.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background meet in house churches as they cannot obtain permission to use official churches. Converts face pressure from family and society to renounce their faith, though the level of tolerance is higher in urban areas. They tend to be monitored and risk violations if they evangelize.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Cultural expectations bind women to domestic duties, especially in rural areas. Converts from Islam are most vulnerable to persecution, particularly in the domestic sphere. They risk arbitrary divorces, denied access to children, domestic confinement and forced marriage. Gaining access to Christian religious materials is difficult, and rural Christians must adhere to religious clothing and rites. Rape and sexual harassment is a taboo area associated with family honor, making it a powerful tool for religious coercion. Sub-Saharan migrant women are also at risk of sexual harassment in Morocco.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied access to Christian religious materials
- Denied inheritance/possessions
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

MEN

Christian converts are among the most vulnerable in Moroccan society, perceived as having brought shame upon their families. Domestically, family ostracization, denied financial support and inheritance, and abandonment by his wife are likely. If single, there may be pressure to marry a Muslim, though this affects women more. Publicly, men may be interrogated, beaten or imprisoned. The severity of backlash after conversion depends on his social position and political standing. Employment pressure is key, as men are usually the main family providers. Men are more likely than women to be targeted for government interrogation and arrest, especially if they are a church leader. Every year there are reports of a handful of arrests (short-term detainment and interrogation) of Christian men.

Male typical pressure points:

- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological;
- Violence – verbal



WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	23	75
2025	21	74
2024	24	71
2023	29	69
2022	27	69

The overall rounded score rose 1 point. Although pressure remained stable at a very high level, the violence score rose from 8.3 to 9.3 points. A greater number of church gatherings were forced to stop meeting, especially among Sub-Saharan African migrant churches. Reports also indicated increased monitoring and interrogations of church leaders.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- The monitoring and questioning of Moroccan Christians, especially leaders, by the Moroccan police continued throughout the WWL 2026 reporting period. Although no Christian has been prosecuted, these summons have a chilling effect, stigmatizing Moroccan Christians both in front of their families and communities. The pervasive monitoring forces many Moroccan Christians into self-censorship.
- Several house churches of Sub-Saharan African Christians were forced to stop meeting by the police. Those churches are regularly forced to move their meeting places following neighborhood complaints, police visits or a landlord evicting them. This has also happened to house churches of Moroccan Christians.
- Several cases of forced marriage were reported. In addition, several converts from Islam to Christianity, mainly young women, were relocated against their will. Other Moroccan Christians were divorced by their spouses, usually under family pressure, and even losing access to their children.



WWL Year	Christians abducted	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians detained
2026	6	11	48	22
2025	12	7	75	17

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 is risky for both local and expatriate Christians to speak about their faith publicly with those outside their immediate family. Doing so carries the risk of being charged with “shaking the faith of a Muslim” under Moroccan law. Community members can sometimes react violently when seeing a convert display a Christian symbol or discuss their faith and many converts are afraid to share their new faith.

FAMILY LIFE

Intermarriage between Muslim women and Christian men is prohibited by law. Children of Christians, especially Moroccan, are likely to face discrimination and harassment from peers, as well as isolation from the wider community. Pressure is intentionally placed upon Moroccan Christian families to force either assimilation or emigration.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christianity is seen as standing outside the traditional Moroccan identity. It is stigmatized as the faith of imperialists and considered a threat to the ‘social fabric’ of society. On this justification, Moroccan security services monitor local and expatriate Christians’ activities. They also prohibit the organization of any groups who identify as overtly “Christian” for fear of evangelism. For Christians with a Muslim background, societal pressure also makes it difficult to raise their children as Christians. Such pressure could, for

instance, take the form of bullying at school or Islamic instruction without parental consent.

NATIONAL LIFE

Politically, the situation for Christians in Morocco is difficult, as the Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion. Civil society organizations with clear Christian convictions, or which aim to defend the rights of Moroccan converts, are viewed with suspicion by the security apparatus, although some groups have been invited by government linked institutions to share their concerns. Christian evangelism is banned, and those who engage in it could be accused of “shaking the faith of Muslims” as noted above in the Private Life section and risk criminal liability.

CHURCH LIFE

Christian activities are often seen as proselytization, limiting communities’ ability to grow and thrive. Nonetheless, Sub-Saharan African pop-up churches are present in many cities, relocating as their congregations move, whether due to migration or because they are compelled to relocate by neighborhood tensions or police pressure. Expatriate churches are monitored to ensure that Moroccan nationals do not attend their services. Moroccan Christians are not permitted to establish their own churches. This is reinforced by the government’s refusal to allow the display or sale of Bibles, which it views as tools for proselytizing.



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International obligations & rights violated

Morocco 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](#))

Morocco 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, and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Women converts are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs. (ICCPR Art. 23.3 and CEDAW Art. 16).
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- 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)

Situation of other religious minorities

Judaism is the only minority religion officially recognized in the Constitution, and Jews have their own religious courts for family matters. Although Islam is the official religion of the state, *de facto* only Sunni (Maliki) Islam is socially acceptable. Shia Muslims, Ahmadi Muslims and adherents of Baha'i face government restrictions that make it nearly impossible for them to openly practice their faith. Atheists and atheism are suppressed by both society and the government. Several known atheists and citizens who openly spoke negatively about Islam have received death threats and were harassed by the government.



Open Doors in Morocco

In cooperation with local partners and churches, Open Doors is supporting the church in North Africa through the following activities:

- Leadership: We organize leaders retreats, leadership training and mentoring
- Discipleship: We provide encouragement through face-to-face visits, discipleship training, theological initiatives, persecution preparedness training and distribute Bibles and Christian literature
- Ministry: We provide trauma counseling training for women, legal aid for persecuted Christians, and practical support. We also organize women's support groups, family conferences, and pre-marriage courses to strengthen relationships and community resilience
- Livelihood: We offer micro-loans to start small businesses, vocational training, medical help and relief items
- Raising prayer support for believers in Morocco



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.

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.