

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

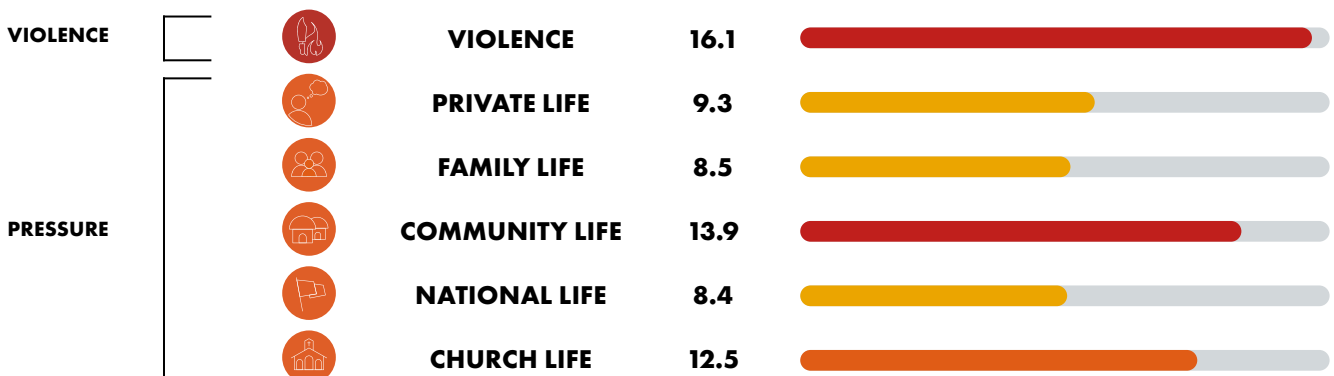
MOZAMBIQUE

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
39



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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 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

The persecution of Christians in Mozambique stems from a complex convergence of jihadist insurgency, organized crime, state repression, and unresolved post-conflict trauma. In northern Cabo Delgado, Islamist militants linked to Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) emerged from local Islamist militias known as Ahlu-Sunna wa Jama'a (ASWJ) or Al-Shabaab (not linked to the Somali group)- have launched systematic attacks on churches and Christian communities—burning villages, abducting clergy, and executing civilians. These acts aim to impose a radical religious order hostile to Christianity. Mozambique is also a major transit hub for drug trafficking. Criminal networks, embedded in local structures, target church-affiliated youth leaders and community advocates who challenge impunity. Church initiatives are met with threats, surveillance, and violence. The state's fragile post-war institutions further fail to protect religious freedom. Constitutional guarantees are undermined by weak enforcement, bureaucratic obstruction, and growing suspicion toward civic and religious engagement. In conflict zones, government counterinsurgency efforts have displaced civilians and disrupted worship.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Daniel Francisco Chapo

POPULATION

35,835,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

19,937,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



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Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	19,937,000	55.6
Ethnic religionists	9,325,000	26.0
Muslims	6,345,000	17.7
Others	228,000	0.7
	Total	100%

Source²

Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975. Although independence was followed by a devastating civil war between the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the rebel Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), peace was formally established in 1992 through a UN-mediated agreement. The post-war period brought relative political and economic stability, but tensions reemerged—particularly after 2012—culminating in renewed armed clashes following the disputed 2019 elections. These developments have weakened the democratic consolidation. As documented in the 2024 Human Rights Watch report, Mozambique continues to experience entrenched FRELIMO dominance, high levels of corruption, and significant insecurity, particularly in the northern regions.

Since October 2017, Cabo Delgado province has endured a violent insurgency led by the Islamic State-affiliated al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ), also known as Islamic State Mozambique (ISM). These militants have explicitly targeted Christian communities—burning churches, destroying homes, and executing

civilians. In January 2024, a coordinated assault in Mocímboa da Praia district, described by ASWJ as the “Kill Them Wherever You Find Them” campaign, resulted in at least ten Christian deaths and the destruction of over 200 homes and a church.

While military interventions from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Rwanda, and international partners have pushed back insurgents in key areas, they have not defeated the movement. The withdrawal of SADC forces in July 2024, following the expiration of their mandate, has left a security vacuum. With national elections recently concluded and foreign troops departing, Christian communities in affected areas face heightened risks.

Religious demographics in Mozambique are geographically varied. Northern coastal areas are predominantly Muslim, while the northern interior and much of the central and southern regions are Christian-majority. Christians in insurgent zones, particularly converts from Islam, often practice their faith in secret due to the risk of abduction or execution. Meanwhile, southern regions generally experience greater religious coexistence, though tensions occasionally surface.

According to the 2024 U.S. State Department International Religious Freedom Report, Mozambique is home to diverse Christian denominations, including Roman Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal, and Anglican communities. Yet in the north, where insurgents operate and state authority is limited, Christians remain especially vulnerable to violence and systemic neglect.

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

The severity of rights violations against Christians in Mozambique varies significantly by region, with the northern province of Cabo Delgado being the epicenter of violence. In this area, Islamic State-affiliated militants have carried out brutal attacks on Christian communities, including church burnings, abductions, executions, and the destruction of entire villages.

In central Mozambique, while the presence of militants is less concentrated, spillover violence and radicalization have begun to affect Christian communities, particularly in isolated rural areas. Access to churches and religious gatherings is increasingly restricted due to fear of attack.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Not included in World Watch List (WWL) scoring, but vulnerable in conflict-affected areas, especially to abduction.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox churches form the historical Christian base. They are frequent targets of al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ) militants, especially in northern provinces. Churches have been destroyed and clergy attacked.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Includes converts from Islam, traditional African religions, and across Christian denominations. Muslim-background believers in the north face severe persecution, including family rejection, social isolation, and threats from extremists.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Pentecostal and Baptist groups often face hostility due to evangelism. Their worship gatherings and leaders are targeted, particularly in insurgent-controlled regions. Public expression of faith is risky, and many are forced underground.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Since 2017, Islamist insurgents affiliated with the Islamic State—mainly ASWJ, or Islamic State Mozambique (ISM)—have waged a brutal campaign in Cabo Delgado. Christians are directly targeted: churches are burned, civilians executed, and entire communities displaced. ASWJ draws financial support from alliances with transnational drug cartels and benefits from corruption among local officials. Its ideological aim—to impose a caliphate governed by strict Sharia—labels Christians as enemies, not collateral victims.

CLAN OPPRESSION

In rural areas where traditional religions remain strong, evangelism is viewed as a threat to clan identity and ancestral customs. Christian converts are sometimes excluded or harassed by clan leaders who see their faith as undermining their authority. While not always violent, this resistance fosters community-level discrimination.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Mozambique's centralized political system, dominated by FRELIMO, restricts dissent. Churches that speak out about governance or human rights may face surveillance, pressure to conform, or administrative barriers. Religious groups encounter obstacles to registration and public criticism by Christian leaders can result in subtle coercion.

ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Mozambique is a hub for narcotics, arms, and wildlife trafficking. Criminal networks often overlap with insurgent actors like ASWJ, who fund their operations through smuggling. Churches involved in youth work or anti-trafficking campaigns are viewed as threats by these groups. Christian leaders, especially pastors and activists, are frequently harassed, abducted, or attacked for challenging criminal control in their communities.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Christian women and girls are severely impacted by militant violence in northern Mozambique; they face abduction, forced marriage, rape and sexual slavery, with some victims as young as seven. Many are displaced, exposing them to further abuse, trauma, trafficking, and loss of education. In Muslim-majority regions, they face enforced Islamic dress codes and barriers to schooling. Converts from Islam or African Traditional Religions are pressured into forced marriage, denied inheritance, or lose custody of children. Such persecution destabilizes families and weakens Christian communities across the country.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Forced marriage
- Forced to flee town/country
- Trafficking
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

MEN

Islamist insurgency continues to drive persecution against Christian men and boys in northern Mozambique. Many are killed if they refuse to renounce their faith, while others are displaced, losing their homes and farmland. Boys are at risk of forced recruitment into militias, while older men are often executed. Converts face divorce, expulsion, violent attacks and, sometimes death. Church leaders, mostly men, are targeted by both militants and government harassment, creating a leadership vacuum that leaves many congregations vulnerable and without pastoral care.

Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- 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
2026	39	69
2025	37	68
2024	39	68
2023	32	68
2022	41	65

Mozambique scored 69 points, a one-point rise from the WWL 2025 score. The increase stems entirely from the violence sphere, reflecting the persistent instability in the country’s north. Christians in Mozambique live with a layered set of pressures. In Cabo Delgado, the primary threat comes from ISIS-Mozambique, the insurgent group responsible for repeated attacks, village raids, abductions, and coercive control over communities. Their operations have destabilized large pockets of the province and created an atmosphere where Christian identity can draw targeted hostility. Beyond the insurgency, Christians also struggle with the wider climate of organized crime and corruption, and a government posture marked by authoritarian paranoia. These forces squeeze religious communities in different regions of the country, limit their freedom to operate openly, and expose them to arbitrary interference by local authorities or criminal networks that operate with impunity.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **25 October 2024:** Armed Islamist militants attacked Nkoe village in Macomia district, burning churches, Christian properties and killing several Christians. The following day, in Mandela village, three Christians were beheaded in an act meant to terrorize local believers and force them to abandon their faith.
- **3 May 2025:** Militants launched a large-scale assault on Mucojo, a Christian-majority coastal town in Cabo Delgado. Armed Islamist insurgents burned at least three churches, destroyed over 50 Christian homes, and looted Christian-owned shops. At least four Christians were killed, and dozens fled to escape execution.



- **22 July 2025:** Islamist extremists entered Intutupue village and beheaded five Christians, accusing them of refusing to submit to jihadist rule. The attackers declared the killings a warning to other Christian communities in Cabo Delgado.

WWL Year	Christians abducted	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians internally displaced
2026	100*	88	49	10,000*
2025	13	56	100*	1,000*

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

In northern Mozambique, where Islamist insurgents hold significant influence, Christians—especially Muslim-background converts—must conceal their faith to survive. Open expressions of Christianity, such as prayer or church attendance, risk triggering surveillance, threats, or execution. Converts face the highest danger, often hiding their beliefs even from family, as their religious identity remains deeply tied to loyalty to Islam and communal cohesion.

FAMILY LIFE

Radicalization in the north has made it hazardous to raise children as Christians. In areas lacking state control, Christian families face school-based discrimination, community exclusion, and pressure to adopt Islamic practices. Parents fear harassment and harm. In some Catholic-majority zones, Evangelical families report intra-Christian tension and marginalization, adding another layer to religious pressures.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christian women and girls are at acute risk of abduction, forced marriage, and trafficking during militant raids. In Cabo Delgado, failing to comply with

Islamist norms—such as dress codes or participation in rituals—can result in punishment, fostering fear and community fragmentation.

NATIONAL LIFE

Although the constitution guarantees religious freedom, the state has grown more controlling toward religious institutions. In the north, churches and Christian symbols are targeted by both militants and opportunists exploiting lawlessness. Nationally, church influence on issues like corruption and human rights has triggered pushback. A bill under discussion seeks tighter regulation of religious life.

CHURCH LIFE

Churches are monitored by insurgents and state actors. Proposed legislation would impose licensing barriers, require a certain level of theological training for clergy, and restrict independent churches—signaling increased state control over religious expression and dissent. Yet, a national accord with the Holy See grants the Catholic Church legal status, authority over its internal governance and appointments, and exclusive control of ecclesiastical boundaries, while requiring its representatives to register with the government to enjoy these rights.



International obligations & rights violated

Mozambique has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under 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

Smaller religious minorities—such as Hindus, Buddhists, adherents of Baha'i faith and Jews—face a quiet but persistent set of challenges. They often experience bureaucratic delays in registration, limited access to land for worship, and social invisibility. In some areas, particularly where dominant religions exert strong influence, religious minorities report difficulties obtaining permits for religious events or establishing schools. Many minorities operate without formal protection or meaningful engagement in the national religious dialogue.



Open Doors in Mozambique

Open Doors started support to the Church in Mozambique in 2020 and work includes:

- Cross-cultural awareness training
- Persecution preparedness training
- Strengthening the church's prophetic voice



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.

Some photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.