

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

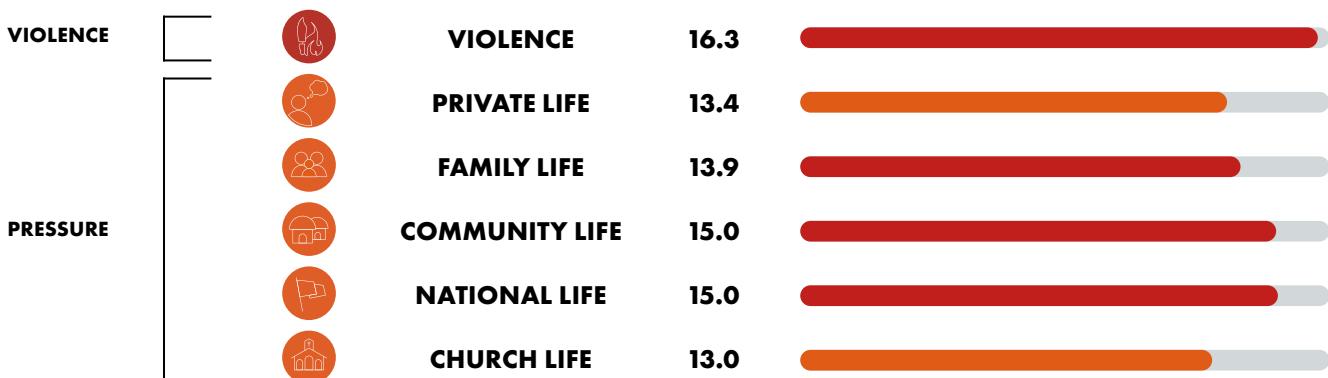
WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
8

PAKISTAN



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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

Christians have been a small minority in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan since independence in 1947. Historical churches retain limited freedom but remain under heavy surveillance and occasionally suffer violent attacks, particularly those active in outreach. Pakistan's blasphemy laws are increasingly being used to intimidate the Christian community and accusations of blasphemy are used for settling scores, entrapment, land grabs and keeping Christians marginalized. Weak government and the growing influence of extreme Islamist groups mean that Christians have limited protection from the law. Most Christians descend from an 'untouchable' caste of sweepers and continue to face institutionalized discrimination. Many live in poverty and remain trapped in bonded labor. Girls are especially at risk of forced conversion, child marriage, and illegal detention by employers. Christians with a Muslim background suffer the brunt of religious freedom violations both from radical Islamist groups (who see them as apostates) and from their families, friends and neighbors who see conversion as a shameful act of betrayal.

Quick facts

LEADER

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif

POPULATION

249,949,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

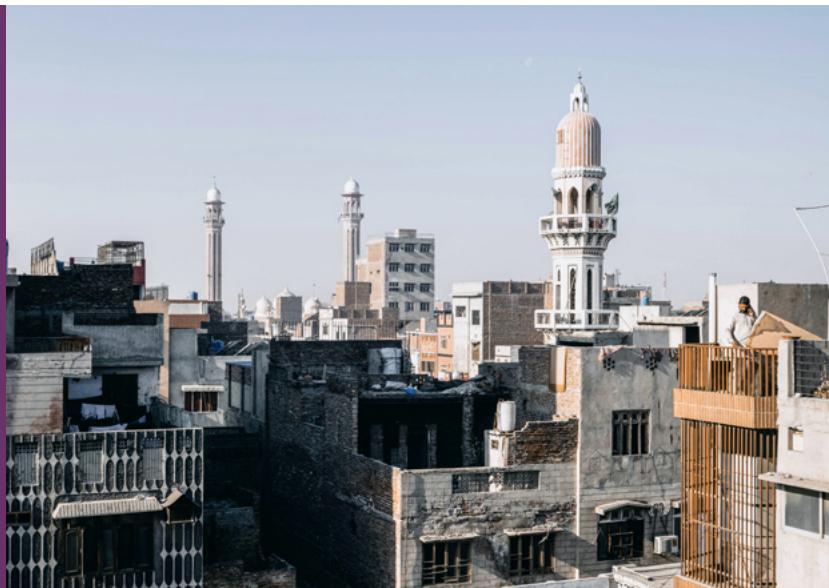
4,785,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Federal Parliamentary Republic



Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	4,785,000	1.9
Muslims	238,163,000	95.3
Hindus	3,479,000	1.4
Others	3,522,000	1.4
	Total	100%

Source²

Pakistan's volatile politics, weak civilian governance, periodic military control, increasing tensions with India and rising populism has left minorities vulnerable. Christians in Pakistan, comprising just 1.8% of the population, are particularly marginalized. 96% of the population is Muslim, of which the majority follow the Sunni tradition. According to the constitution, the right to free speech is subject to the restrictions necessary to ensure "the glory of Islam."

Blasphemy laws are increasingly used to disproportionately target Christians. The allegations are often false, used as a pretext for settling scores, for the entrapment of Christians ([Christian Daily International, 13 March 2025](#)) or for economic reasons, including forced evictions ([Human Rights Watch, 9 June 2025](#)). The penalties for those convicted are severe, including death, though the mob violence these cases can provoke have a wider impact, as illustrated by the 2023 Jaranwala attacks

in which over 25 churches were attacked and homes destroyed. Two years on, and the government has been unwilling to prosecute those involved ([Christian Daily International, 6 June 2025](#)).

While there remains some protection under the law for Christians, their underrepresentation in politics, the law and wider public life means they are often unable to exercise those rights, particularly at the local level. Christians in general have low levels of education and status in society, as most come from the 'Chuhra' untouchable caste of road sweepers, and Christians typically occupy lower-status jobs, including cleaners, sanitation work or as bonded laborers in brick kilns, with many Christians trapped in debt.

Legal and cultural norms also reinforce gender inequality, with Christian girls vulnerable to abduction, and forced conversion and marriage. In May 2025, the parliament passed the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Act, which raises the minimum legal age for marriage to 18. It only applies to Islamabad so far and is unlikely to extend to all the provinces. The experience of Sindh province suggests legislation is only the beginning, with the underlying vulnerability of Christian girls remaining as long as their families are trapped in poverty ([Girls Not Brides, 11 July 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

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION BLENDED WITH ETHNO-RELIGIOUS HOSTILITY

Pakistan has many radical Islamist groups with close ties to government bodies who represent an Islamist populism that considers Christians infidels. Recently, a proposed investigation into the misuse of blasphemy laws was met with social media campaigns and public statements framing any investigation as an attack on Islamic values ([Christian Daily International, 25 July 2025](#)). These groups' ability to instigate mob violence means they have great influence over the justice system.

ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Pakistan scores very poorly in corruption indexes (129 out of 142 in the Rule of Law Index ([World Justice Project, 2024](#)) across all sectors of society. Organized crime is a big problem in urban and tribal areas and is frequently connected to violent Islamic militancy. Bonded labor is still a widespread form of slavery, affecting thousands of Christians in rural areas. Laborers become trapped, unable to repay their loans due to high interest rates. Land grabbing also takes place; churches are expropriated, and Christians are chased away from their land.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Prime Ministers are often in a weak position, including the current one, who is contending with strong opposition from the ousted former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the masses he is able to mobilize, assertive radical groups and a powerful independent army with whom it must remain on good terms. As Prime Ministers seek to maintain power, Christians easily become political pawns. They can be courted by the government and army to stay in power or discriminated against if that is beneficial.

How the situation varies by region

Most Christians live in Punjab Province, and most incidents of persecution, discrimination and intolerance occur there. However, next to Punjab, the province of Sindh is also notorious for being a hotspot for bonded labor, affecting many Christians. In the other two provinces, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, there are fewer Christians, but their isolation means that they are also subject to increasing violence.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Expatriate Christians, who are largely based in cities, can practice their faith, but still experience pressure.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The two main historical churches are the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan (formed by the merger of Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran and United Reformed churches in 1970). They face increasing levels of monitoring and hostility, including abductions or forced conversions of their members and land grabs.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Christians with a Muslim background suffer the greatest religious freedom violations from radical Islamist groups and from their families, friends and neighbors. There is also a small community of converts from a Hindu background.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal groups are frequently harassed and attacked, especially when they are active in outreach among Muslims.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Christian women and girls in Pakistan face severe gender-specific persecution. Christian girls are abducted, raped, and forced to convert and “marry” their abductor, with victims as young as seven, including girls with disabilities. Families often never see them again, while the police rarely act and the courts frequently fail victims. Survivors endure shame, PTSD, and social stigma in Pakistan’s honor-based culture. Christian women are also targeted with acid attacks, workplace harassment, blasphemy allegations, and honor killings. Many remain trapped in debt-bonded labor, such as brick-kilns, where they face additional sexual violence and exploitation.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family/house arrest
- Trafficking
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

MEN

Christian men in Pakistan live under the constant threat of blasphemy allegations, false imprisonment, torture, and execution. Murders are common if men are accused of insulting Islam, while entire families suffer the fallout of false charges. Christian men and boys are compelled to take low-status or hazardous jobs, often labelled “Chura” (filthy), or trapped in bonded labor such as brick-kilns. Some conceal their faith to avoid losing jobs or facing charges. Reports of sexual abuse of boys are rising, with victims silenced by fear and shame.

Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- False charges
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual



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WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	8	87
2025	8	87
2024	7	87
2023	7	86
2022	8	87

The overall score remains the same with minor variations in the different spheres. This reflects how the situation remains very difficult for Christians, with the main contributors to persecution (the blasphemy laws and economic and social marginalization of Christians) deeply entrenched. There were fewer headline-grabbing incidents of persecution this year (compared to the 2023 Jaranwala attacks) but in total, there were more Christians killed. The pressure and violence remain pervasive with Christians across the country vulnerable.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- 8 January 2025:** A 12-year-old Christian girl was abducted, forcibly converted and married to a 35-year-old Muslim man and was only recovered by the police two months later ([Morning Star News, 10 March 2025](#)).
- 19 July 2025:** A man in Lahore was arrested and charged with blasphemy after complaining about being overcharged in a grocery shop. He was beaten by police who wanted him to confess ([Morning Star News, 21 July 2025](#)).
- 26 July 2025:** A Christian sanitation worker was seriously injured after being hit by a brick for allegedly refusing to remove personal debris belonging to an influential local. ([Pakistan Christian Post, 28 July 2025](#)).
- 16 August 2025:** A Christian laborer in Sialkot district, Punjab, was stabbed to death after trying to rescue a Christian boy, who was being threatened by two Muslim men ([Worthy News, 24 August 2025](#)).



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WWL Year	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians raped or sexually assaulted	Christians forced to marry
2026	24	12	100*	100*
2025	14	40	100*	100*

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

Blasphemy laws make it dangerous to share one's faith with Muslims. Even Facebook posts can be risky if the content is seen as challenging Islamic values. For example, in March 2025, a 24-year-old sweeper, Arsalan Gill, was taken into custody after returning home from work and charged with sharing blasphemous content on Facebook groups. It is dangerous for Pakistani Christians to keep Christian materials beyond their immediate personal use, as they could be suspected of evangelizing Muslims. Displaying Christian symbols or having a Christian name can trigger discrimination or vandalism of property.

FAMILY LIFE

In small towns and remote villages, Christian children have to attend Islamic teaching at the local madrassa while Christian teaching is restricted to Sunday services. Christian parents try to prevent their children from speaking about their faith since they could be pressured to "come back" to Islam. At school, Christian children are often not allowed to use the same water fountain as their Muslim classmates to avoid "defiling" the drinking water. Children are often bullied, and many are asked to clean the latrines or sweep the floor, as Christians are commonly perceived as being sweepers. Some school books incite hatred against Christians. The new school curriculum further Islamizes education and educates children that adherents of other religions are inferior.

COMMUNITY LIFE

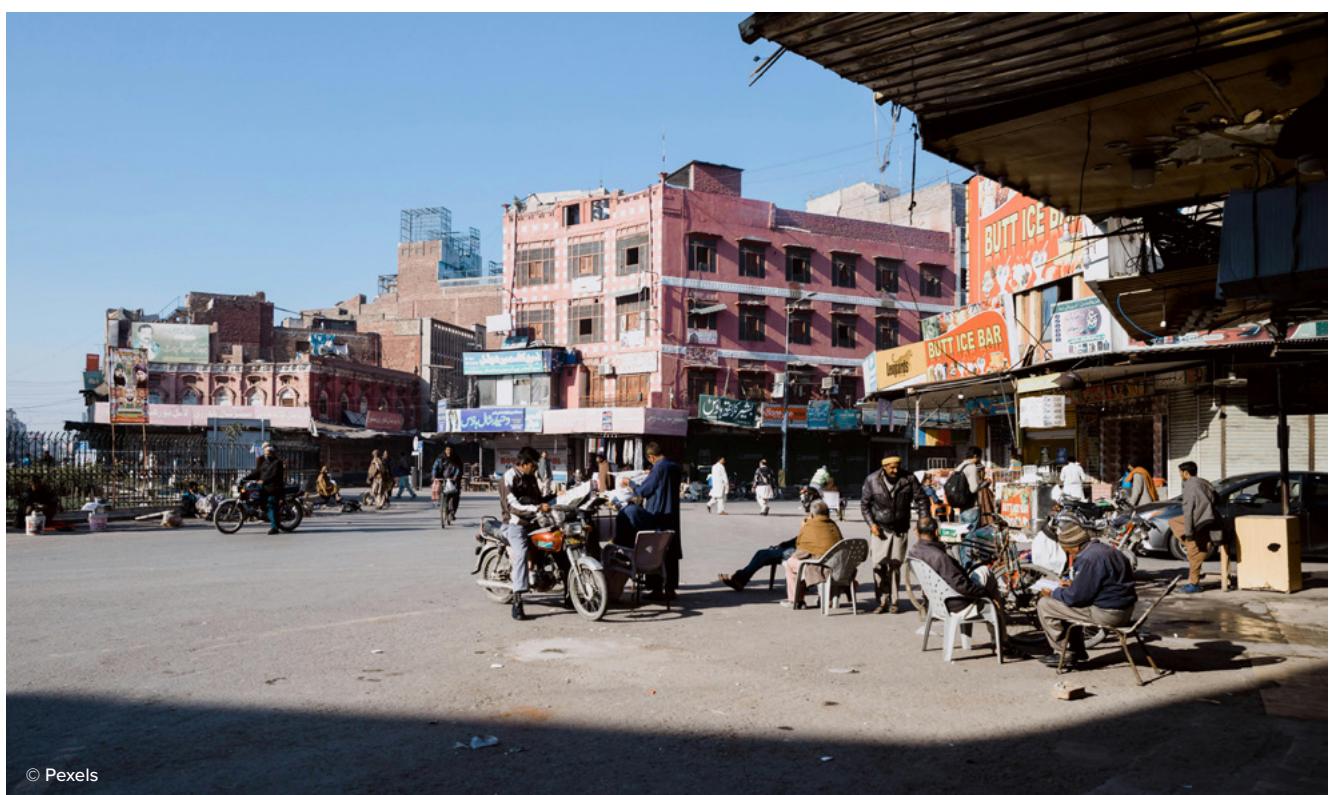
Christians are monitored by the State and increasingly by non-state actors. In workplaces, the pressure against Christians is often so great that they have to change jobs multiple times to avoid being forced to convert to Islam. No matter their qualifications, believers are often reduced to low-level jobs. Outside of public offices, businesses and farms run by Christians are boycotted and sometimes destroyed by Muslims.

NATIONAL LIFE

Pakistan adopted an Islamic Constitution in 1973 and Sharia law in its civil code. The recent Islamization process began with the 1986 introduction of blasphemy laws, which affect minorities and are often used for settling personal scores. Christians are underrepresented in the political arena and their views are often ignored. Politicians deny that it is necessary to protect religious minority girls from abductions and forced conversion/marriage.

CHURCH LIFE

Church activities are monitored. Security guards are provided by the authorities, but they also listen, report and likely pass intelligence on to radical Islamist groups. Despite the State's promise to protect churches, attacks are common, and perpetrators are rarely brought to justice. Advocacy for oppressed minorities is seen as a challenge to the government.



International obligations & rights violated

Pakistan 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](#))

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

- Christians are pressured by their community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian women and girls are abducted, raped and gang-raped (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christian girls are forced to marry their abductor and converted by force (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Christian girls are trafficked into slave labor and the sex trade (CRC Art. 34 and ICCPR Art. 8)
- Christians are falsely accused, charged with blasphemy and sentenced to death (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christians are assumed to take jobs that are considered “dishonorable” and “low” because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26 and ICESCR Art 11)

Situation of other religious minorities

Religious freedom further deteriorated in 2025 for minority groups, with Hindus, Shi'a and Ahmadi Muslims continuing to experience prosecutions for blasphemy whilst also suffering violence at the hands of mobs as well as the police ([USCIRF, March 2025](#)). Most of those accused of blasphemy are Muslims (70%) and Ahmadi (14%) ([Centre for Social Justice, March 2025](#)). Forced conversions also significantly affect Hindu girls.



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Open Doors in Pakistan

Open Doors does not have a presence in Pakistan but supports a number of partners in the Gulf region who work through churches to help persecuted believers. That work includes:

- Biblical literacy and leadership training
- Education, health and relief work
- Peace-building initiatives
- Support groups and vocational training for women
- Livelihood projects
- Vocational training for men
- Research and advocacy support to local churches



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.