

A group of young girls, likely refugees, are shown in an outdoor setting. They are wearing various colored headscarves (white, blue, brown, black) and jackets. Some are holding plastic bags, suggesting they are carrying belongings. The background is slightly blurred, showing trees and a fence. The overall tone is somber and documentary.

OpenDoors®

**WORLD WATCH LIST 2024**

Discover the most dangerous nations to follow Jesus.

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD WATCH LIST

Open Doors has been producing its annual World Watch List for over 30 years. While the research methodology has evolved over time, our purpose remains the same – we want to help you understand where your Christian brothers and sisters are suffering for their faith and help you to stand with the parts of the body of Christ that are hurting the most.

Across the world, more than 365 million Christians suffer high to extreme levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith in Jesus. That's 1 in 7 Christians worldwide.

## What Is Christian Persecution?

Christian persecution is any hostility experienced because of one's identification with Christ. This definition covers not just violence but also the full range of pressure experienced by Christians because of their faith in Jesus including hostile attitudes, words, and actions.

It can look different in every country, from rejection and isolation, to being denied access to basic needs like water, food, and health care. Some face violent abuse, imprisonment, and even death.

## What Is The World Watch List?

The World Watch List ranks the top 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The list is compiled by a group of experts, audited by an external organisation specialising in religious freedom, and checked for transparency. The World Watch List is the best and most authoritative list of its kind.

Through on the ground interviews and data analysis, the list provides an accurate picture of the difficulties persecuted Christians face worldwide. For each country, the list looks at the pressure and violence persecuted Christians endure in their public and private lives.

## What Makes The List Reliable?

The World Watch List is accepted as an authoritative study and is audited externally each year by the International Institute for Religious Freedom. The research for the World Watch List is undertaken by World Watch Research, the research department of Open Doors International.

The research team consists of one managing director, seven persecution analysts, and one editor, all with university degrees. Two of the team have or are completing PhDs. Five are lawyers with experience in the field of human rights, constitutional law, or governance. The persecution analysts collaborate closely with researchers and other experts operating at regional, national, and subnational levels.

## Why Does The World Watch List Matter?

In 1 Corinthians 12, we are reminded that when one part of the body of Christ suffers, all parts suffer with it (1 Cor 12:26). The World Watch List helps us to understand where the body of Christ is hurting most. It is the cornerstone of all our work, informing what countries we need to work in to strengthen the Church as they suffer persecution for following Jesus.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD WATCH LIST

### What Do The Scores Mean?

Each country's score is determined by measuring the intensity of persecution across two categories: **violence** and **pressure**. Pressure is measured in five spheres of life: church, national, community, family, and private. Examples of each have been provided below but are not the only ways Christians experience these types of pressure.

### VIOLENCE

Violence is defined as the deprivation of physical freedom or as serious bodily or mental harm to Christians or serious damage to their property and can occur in all spheres of life.

### CHURCH LIFE

The collective exercise by Christians of worship, life, service, and public expression of faith without undue interference. Persecution could involve requiring church registration, monitoring preaching material, harassment of leaders and their families, or restricting the printing or distribution of religious materials.

### NATIONAL LIFE

The interaction between Christians and the nation they live in, including rights and laws, the justice system, and public life. Persecution in this sphere could look like blasphemy accusations, unequal treatment in court, toleration of public disrespect, travel restrictions, or discrimination by authorities.

### COMMUNITY LIFE

Involves the workplace, business, health care, education, and local public life and civic order. Persecution in this sphere could include dress codes, monitoring, abduction, restricted access to community resources and/or health care, and employment or education discrimination or disadvantages.

### FAMILY LIFE

How much freedom has been restricted to live out Christian convictions within the family circle. Persecution in this sphere could involve forced allocations of religious identity, weddings, baptisms, burials, adoptions, child rearing, separation of families, pressure to divorce, or inheritance rights.

### PRIVATE LIFE

How much freedom is restricted when relating to God one-on-one in their own private space. Persecution in this sphere could restrict private worship, possession of religious material, or freedom of expression.

**TOTAL PERSECUTION  
SCORE = VIOLENCE +  
PRESSURE**

Each of these six types of persecution receive equal weighting and are added together to give a total score out of 100 (rounded to the nearest whole number after ranking).

# THE WORLD WATCH LIST 2024

The 50 most dangerous places to be a Christian.



# **BIGGEST SCORE INCREASES**

## BIGGEST SCORE INCREASES



## #21 LAOS

### SCORE

2024 Score: 75 (+7)

2023 Score: 68

### RANK

2024 Rank: 21 (+10)

2023 Rank: 31

The considerable increase in overall score was due almost completely to a sharp rise in the violence score from 5.0 points in WWL 2023 to 11.3 points. Although killings had not occurred for many years, four Christians were killed in the WWL 2024 reporting period. This had a chilling effect on the wider church (e.g., pastors deciding not to travel alone for ministry engagements but in pairs), which in turn increased the pressure scoring in some spheres of life.



## BIGGEST SCORE INCREASES



## #15 ALGERIA

### SCORE

### RANK

2024 Score: 79 (+6)	2024 Rank: 15 (+4)
2023 Score: 73	2023 Rank: 19

In Algeria, increases in pressure were most notable in the National and Church spheres of life. However, it was the rise in violence score which most influenced the overall rise in points: The violence score went up from 4.8 points in WWL 2023 to 9.8 points, mainly caused by an increased number of churches being closed or forced to cease all activity. At the same time, a greater number of houses and businesses of Christians were raided, with the increased pressure forcing many to relocate both inside and outside the country.



## BIGGEST SCORE INCREASES



## #30 NICARAGUA

SCORE	RANK
2024 Score: 70 (+5)	2024 Rank: 30 (+20)
2023 Score: 65	2023 Rank: 50

The upward trend in the country's persecution situation continued and was caused mainly by increases in pressure in all spheres of life. The deterioration of the rule of law in the country has become more evident through the combination of state power being firmly in the hands of President Ortega and the manipulation of the legal framework.

This has made it increasingly possible to silence civil society actors who do not align with the ruling party's interests. Thus, the harassment and attempt to suffocate the Church became more direct: Church leaders were prosecuted and imprisoned, and church life at both the individual and collective level became more restricted. This was particularly in retaliation for church and other Christian leaders who publicly called for the rule of law to be respected - especially during and after the election period - and who provided help for the most vulnerable in society, including those considered opponents by the ruling Sandinista Party.

# HIGHEST SCORES BY PRESSURE & VIOLENCE

## HIGHEST SCORES BY PRESSURE & VIOLENCE

### OVERALL TOP 10 SCORES

#	Country	Score/100
1	North Korea	96
2	Somalia	93
3	Libya	91
4	Eritrea	89
5	Yemen	89
6	Nigeria	88
7	Pakistan	87
8	Sudan	87
9	Iran	86
10	Afghanistan	84

### TOP 10 PRESSURE SCORES

#	Country	Score/83.3
1	North Korea	83.3
2	Yemen	83.3
3	Somalia	82.9
4	Libya	80.4
5	Afghanistan	79.7
6	Saudi Arabia	77.6
7	Maldives	77
8	Eritrea	76.6
9	Iran	75.4
10	Sudan	73.6

### TOP 10 VIOLENCE SCORES

#	Country	Score/16.7
1	Nigeria	16.7
2	Pakistan	16.7
3	India	16.5
4	Myanmar	16.1
5	Niger	15.9
6	Democratic Republic of the Congo	15.9
7	Cameroon	15.9
8	Uganda	15.9
9	Mali	15.6
10	Burkina Faso	15.6



# TRENDS IN PERSECUTION

The persecution of Christians can look different in every country, from rejection and isolation, to being denied access to basic needs like water, food, and health care. Some face violent abuse, imprisonment, and even death. Through on-the-ground interviews and data collection and analysis, the World Watch List research team have identified the following trends in Christian persecution in 2024.

# RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE INTENSIFIES AS SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA DESTABILISES

Violence targeting Christians has long been a defining characteristic of the persecution pattern south of the great desert. That trend intensified during the World Watch List 2024 reporting period. Driving the general rise in violence on the 2024 list was an increase in attacks on churches and Christian homes and businesses. Evidence of the increasing intensity could be found in, for example, Ethiopia, where the number of attacks on churches and public Christian properties such as schools grew sharply. The number of Christian-owned businesses burned, looted, or confiscated in Burkina Faso and Central African Republic surged.

Across the 26 Sub-Saharan countries with at least “High” overall levels of persecution, 4,565 Christians were killed because of their faith during the 12-month reporting period for the 2024 list, which concluded 30 September 2023. And, as in the previous year, Nigeria accounted for about 9 of every 10 of those religiously motivated killings.

Even when they are not specifically targeted for religious reasons, however, Christians throughout Sub-Saharan Africa are extra vulnerable within the region’s broader conflicts, such as those in Ethiopia, Sudan and Cameroon. Christians are soft targets that can be attacked with virtual impunity. This “persecution by convenience” severely restricts their future prospects and those of their families and future generations.





## VIOLENCE SURGES IN INDIA AHEAD OF ELECTIONS

Christians in India, the most populous nation on earth, have a breadth of experiences of persecution. The situation for Christians has been worsening rapidly in some parts of the country, and improving in others, so that when freedom of religion for Christians across the whole country is taken into account, the result is a score that increased by only one point. Beneath the total score, however, is evidence that for Christians, India is becoming more violent.

In 2022, the World Watch List counted 10 Indian Christians who had been killed because of their faith. On the 2023 list, the number was 17. On the 2024 list, 160 Christians have been killed for following Jesus. The epicenter of the surge in violence and displacement has been the northeastern state of Manipur, where hostilities between the majority Meitei and minority Kuki ethnic groups erupted in May 2023.

Increases were detected in other categories that help comprise the violence score: the number of attacks on Christian churches, schools, businesses, homes, and other institutions have all risen dramatically. More than 62,000 Indian Christians were forced to leave their homes during the 2024 reporting period. That was an exponential jump from 380 on the 2022 list and 834 on the 2023 list.





# CHURCHES UNDER UNPRECEDENTED ATTACK FROM GOVERNMENTS AND EXTREMISTS

In the 2024 reporting period, by far the largest number of churches closed down were “house churches” in China. This term in the Chinese context has often been misleading: although they initially began as small, unregistered house groups gathering for worship, many grew immensely, holding their meetings in public places with hundreds or even thousand attending. But that freedom is now over, due in part to the authorities taking advantage of measures enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic. House churches have now returned to their roots, splintered into a myriad of less visible house groups, many with little pastoral leadership and few resources.

In India, aggressive mobs perpetrate violence against churches, contributing to a sharp increase in attacks and forced displacements. In Algeria, only 4 churches out of 46 affiliated Protestant churches remained open, and several independent churches ceased meeting due to government pressure. In Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger, churches or public Christian properties are typically attacked by predominantly Islamic extremists who raid or invade Christian communities. In the 2024 reporting period, a very conservative estimate of churches and public Christian properties attacked or abandoned in these countries was 950. In Nigeria alone the number was 750.





# CHRISTIANS LESS AT HOME IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The Christian presence in the Middle East and North Africa faces increasing challenges. In Syria, a decade of civil war, coupled with a devastating earthquake, contributed to the decline of Christian communities. In Iraq, political turmoil, association of Christian identity with military force, and election reforms raise concerns for the already vulnerable Christian minority.

Lebanon, with a significant Christian population, witnessed a decline in privileges and influence in national life. Attacks on churches increase amid economic deterioration, prompting many Christians to contemplate leaving the country.

Algeria intensified its campaign against the Protestant church, closing affiliated churches and imprisoning leaders. The government's use of a 2006 law increases pressure, limiting the space for Christian life. Similar trends are observed in other North African countries like Libya and Tunisia.



Constantine, Algeria © Pexels



## A GLIMMER OF HOPE

Amidst the challenges, some positive developments surface. In Mali, a constitutional referendum recognises the Christian minority, signalling a potential return to civilian rule. In India, a change in government in Karnataka state brings promises of revising laws against Christian interests. Sri Lanka witnessed success in educating pastors to stand up for constitutional rights and preventing church closures. Iran, despite remaining largely closed to the gospel, is home to what many have reported as the “fastest growing church in the world”. In Laos, despite increased opposition, the growing church remains resilient.





**“WE BELIEVE THAT  
ANY DOOR IS OPEN,  
ANYTIME, ANYWHERE...  
TO PROCLAIM CHRIST.”**

**Brother Andrew**

Founder, Open Doors

There is nowhere too difficult, too dangerous, or too dark.  
We are committed to supporting those who are persecuted  
for following Jesus, and carrying out His commission, in the  
most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian.

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