

WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

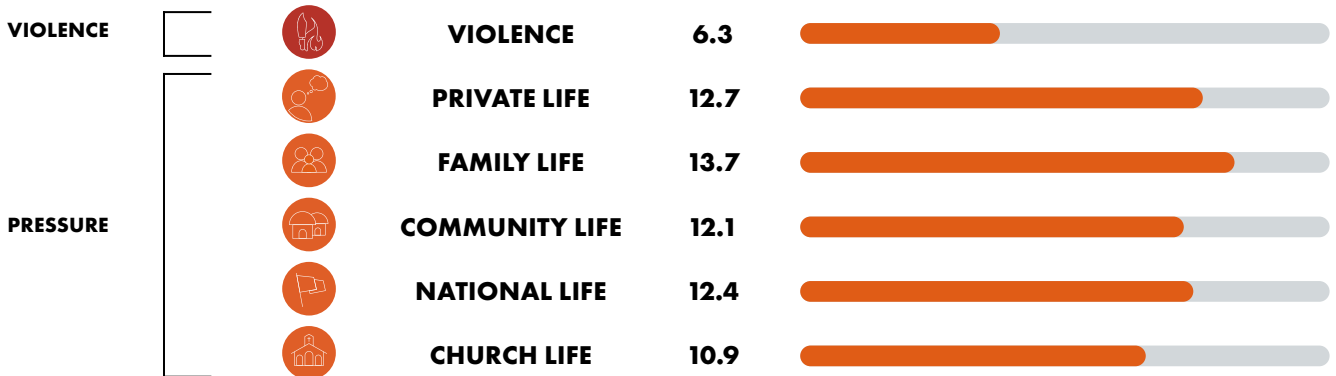
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

EGYPT

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
40



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

Most freedom of religion violations occur at the community level, such as Christian women being harassed in the street or Muslim mobs forcing Christians to move out after an alleged blasphemy accusation. Such incidents take place mostly in rural areas of Upper Egypt and in certain urban areas where Salafist movements are active. The President speaks positively about Egypt's historical Christian community, but weak law enforcement leaves them vulnerable to attack, with security services sometimes being complicit. Despite promises from the President that a church will be built in every new neighborhood, construction of new churches is restricted.

Christians with a Muslim background face enormous pressure from their families to return to Islam. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University (one of the most influential Islamic universities globally) has stated that Muslims may not convert to Christianity. Security services maintain a strong grip on converts from Islam to Christianity, regularly detaining them and forcing them into isolation. The state also makes it impossible for conversions to be officially recognized.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi

POPULATION

114,484,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

10,084,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



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Context

| Religious Context | Number of adherents | Percentage |
|-------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Christians | 10,084,000 | 8.8 |
| Muslims | 103,460,000 | 90.4 |
| Agnostics | 812,000 | 0.7 |
| Atheists | 120,000 | 0.1 |

Source²

Though Egypt is technically a democracy, the powers of the parliament have always been weak and, de facto, the president rules alone. The independence of the judiciary is limited, and it is not unusual for the government to simply ignore court rulings. With President el-Sisi sworn into power in 2014, the political situation in Egypt stabilized, but human rights have been experiencing a crisis. el-Sisi cracked down on opposition groups and thousands of his critics

have been arrested, tortured, disappeared and tried in military courts. Social media is monitored and criticism of the government or Islam is not tolerated.

Egypt is culturally conservative and seeks to be an influential center of Sunni Islam. In rural and impoverished areas in particular (where many Christians live), radical imams have significant influence. All over, there is considerable division between Christians and Muslims. Employment discrimination against Christians remains evident, especially regarding sensitive government positions. Christian businesses can be boycotted. Christians remain vulnerable to mob attacks, which can be triggered by a rumor of alleged blasphemy or the opening of a new church. Usually, the local authorities use so-called “reconciliation sessions” to resolve a conflict, which often result in Muslim attackers going free and a culture of impunity for violence against Christians.

According to the World Christian Database, 90% of Egyptians are Muslim, virtually all of them Sunni. Christians are especially concentrated in Upper Egypt and in large cities. More than 90% of Christians are Coptic Orthodox.

¹ Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

² Data source: Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

As per [Middle East Concern](#): “Egypt’s 2014 constitution establishes Islam as the State religion and the principles of Islamic law as the main source of legislation. It also provides that Christians and Jews may govern personal status and religious affairs according to their own codes. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It states that freedom of religion is absolute and guarantees freedom of religious practice in accordance with regulations, though this right is limited to adherents of the Abrahamic religions (i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Although religious conversion is not prohibited in codified legislation, conversion away from Islam is not allowed in practice.”

How the situation varies by region

Upper Egypt, the southern part of the country, is known to follow a more conservative form of Islam and is more radical than in the north. Most incidents and mob attacks take place in this region, with the Minya Governate having the highest number of attacks on Christians per capita. Attacks are carried out by radical Muslims, especially in the Nile Delta villages and towns. Radical Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood have nationwide support. Violent Islamist militants were only openly active in the north-eastern area of the Sinai Peninsula. In 2023, President el-Sisi claimed that terrorism had been defeated in the Sinai region (Ahram Online, 2 March 2023). Nonetheless, attacks continued and the region remains volatile, especially after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

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

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

90% of Egypt’s Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. There are also established Protestant and Catholic denominations. Despite a more inclusive national narrative, Coptic Christians face discrimination in education and government legislation that hinders essential aspects of church life. In general, Coptic Christians have been tolerated by the state and by the

Muslim majority because of their historical presence and significant size of several million.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

There is a small but growing number of Christian converts who experience severe violations, most often at the hands of family members. Relatives punish converts for abandoning the Islamic faith, often by means of beatings or house expulsion. In addition, they remain strictly monitored by the Egyptian intelligence services, which also regularly detain and abuse converts from Islam to Christianity.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

There are several Evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the country, some of them being second or third generations of converts from a Muslim background. Others come from an Orthodox background. They face pressure from both the Islamic society and the Coptic Orthodox Church.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Christians often feel like second-class citizens and discriminated against in their dealings with the state. The state is reluctant to respect and enforce the fundamental rights of Christians. There have been several major violent attacks against Christians in the recent past, perpetrated by militant Islamist groups. However, no such large scale attacks have occurred since 2018, although jihadists have killed and attacked Christians in recent years.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Egypt has a long tradition of authoritarian rule. Currently, Egypt is ruled by a civilian government led by former army chief Abdul Fatah el-Sisi. This government seems to regard basic human rights and democratic pluralism as a low priority in view of the huge current economic, political, social and security challenges. In this context, therefore, religious freedom for Christians is not fully guaranteed.

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONAL PROTECTIONISM

Especially in Upper Egypt and the Delta region, the Coptic Orthodox Church acts strongly against other denominations. Members of Orthodox congregations have been warned by their clergy not to have contact with other denominations, especially the Evangelicals. There have been cases in which families depending on financial and social services from the Orthodox Church have been deprived of those sources after attending a non-Orthodox church or allowing an evangelical pastor to visit them in their homes.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Young Christian women living in Egypt's rural areas can be targets for grooming and sexual harassment by men influenced by radical Islamic teaching. Many women are reported to be missing under unclear circumstances, including affairs with Muslim men in an environment with a strong honor/shame culture and a power imbalance between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority. Police response has often been complicit or apathetic and many women remain missing. Christian girls, often underage and from vulnerable families, are lured into marriage. Female converts from Islam may be locked in the home, physically beaten or even killed to defend family "honor." If married, they can easily be divorced and lose custody of their children.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied custody of children
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Targeted seduction
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

MEN

The number of Christians in senior military or government positions is minimal. Particularly in rural areas, young men struggle to find a job and their faith puts them in a disadvantaged position. The strain of these dynamics has reportedly caused higher rates of domestic violence and divorce. Perpetrators use these financial difficulties to convert younger men to Islam, luring them with financial incentives. Church leaders - most of whom are male - are particularly vulnerable to rights violations (including killings), in part as they are easily identifiable as Christians.

Male typical pressure points:

- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – death
- Violence – psychological

WWL 5 year trend

| WWL Year | Position on Open Doors World Watch List | Persecution rounded score out of 100 |
|----------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 2025 | 40 | 68 |
| 2024 | 38 | 68 |
| 2023 | 35 | 68 |
| 2022 | 20 | 71 |
| 2021 | 16 | 75 |

The overall score remained the same in WWL 2025: 68 points. The drop in violence score from 7.8 points to 6.3 was offset by the rise in average pressure which increased slightly from 12.1 points to 12.4 points in WWL 2025. The increase in average pressure is mainly caused by the deteriorating economic situation in combination with increased government pressure to keep control of the volatile situation, which exacerbated already existing power dynamics between Muslims and Christians. The drop in violence score is not outside the average violence pattern in the country, meaning that Egypt's Christians face a very high level of violence. At least 2 Christians were killed, while at least 46 were attacked, among other incidents. In addition, government pressure also further increased for Christian converts from a Muslim background, of whom numerous were arrested and physically abused by the Egyptian security services.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **December 2023:** Several houses belonging to Coptic Christians in Al-Azeeb in the Upper Egypt governate of Minya, were set on fire by a village mob. The attack followed after the Christian villagers received a permit to build a church and started to lay the foundations for the building (Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 20 December 2024).
- **January 2024:** On 6 January 2024 (the Coptic Orthodox Christmas Eve), a temporary church building was set on fire in Misha'at Zaafaranah, Abou Qarqas, Minya Governate (Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 11 January 2024). Five years before, early January 2019, the building was closed for security reasons by the police following mob violence and local Muslim villagers demanding that all church activities taking place in the building should cease.
- **April 2024:** On 13 April 2024, in the Imbaba district of Giza, Cairo, 34 year old father-of-two Walid Mamdouh was stabbed to death by a neighbor and his cousins in front of his wife and children. Walid objected to the dumping of waste in front of his shop by his attacker. The perpetrator is known to be an Islamic extremist and had previously caused trouble with Christians in the area (Copts United, 16 April 2024).

| WWL Year | Christians killed | Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed | Christians physically or mentally abused | Christians' private property damaged or confiscated |
|----------|-------------------|--|--|---|
| 2025 | 2 | 2 | 46 | 51 |
| 2024 | 3 | 3 | 44 | 23 |

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

A key ruling by the Cairo Administrative Court in 2008 stated that the freedom to practice one's religion is subject to certain limitations, and that conversion from Islam to another faith violates Islamic principles and is not allowed. Christians have been arrested or attacked by mobs after allegedly insulting Islam on social media. Accusations of blasphemy are easily made, so most Christians refrain from discussing their faith with people they do not know or trust. Social hostility towards converts is very high and even rumors of conversion can lead to mob violence, especially in rural areas. Conversion is seen to bring shame upon the family, who will often cast out converts and force them to recant. Many keep their faith a secret. Christians in Upper Egypt avoid using visible symbols, such as crosses in cars, due to fear of harassment. Most, if not all, Coptic Christians wear a tattooed cross on their arm, used for recognition to enter a church. However, it also makes them easily recognizable and vulnerable to discrimination.

FAMILY LIFE

It is not possible for converts from Islam to Christianity to change their religion on their ID cards. The registered religion of the father is automatically applied to the child, so children of converts are considered Muslim. Under Sharia law, a Christian man cannot marry a Muslim woman. The pressure from family to divorce a convert is high. Even if this does not happen, the convert will lose inheritance and guardianship rights according to Sharia law. Islam is dominant in the educational system. Most Coptic Christian children have Christian religion classes at school, but they still have to study Islamic literature and the Quran as part of the curriculum. At times, Christian religious classes are not provided and in some cases Christian students have to follow Islamic religious classes. This can be avoided at private Christian schools, but this is only financially possible for some.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Employment discrimination is widespread. Christians are not employed in the intelligence services, cannot serve in senior positions in the army and are under-represented in senior government positions. There has not been a single Christian player on the national football team in the last decade, although Christians constitute almost 9% of the population. Such discrimination has led to a high level of entrepreneurial activity among Christians, since they cannot rely on the state or private employers for jobs.

Pressure and discrimination against Christians is higher in poor and rural areas, especially in Upper Egypt. Local Islamist groups know where Christians



live and monitor them to make sure they don't evangelize or disrespect Islam. In recent years, several Christians have been attacked after allegedly insulting Islam or allegedly having a relationship with a Muslim woman. Police presence and government control is less strict in rural areas, and mob attacks often go unpunished. At state level, security and intelligence agencies spy on converts and try to force them to supply information on the activities of convert groups. Unveiled women, including Christian women, are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment.

NATIONAL LIFE

Article 64 of the Constitution states that "freedom of belief is absolute", yet converts from Islam are not protected. Recognized Christians are free to manage their own personal status laws and religious affairs, but Sharia law applies in cases between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. If converts try to change their religious registration, it is likely that the authorities will put them under surveillance and prosecute them under blasphemy laws. Alleged blasphemy and speaking against the government can lead to arrest, torture and imprisonment. Mistreatment of converts by family members is considered a family issue and can be carried out with impunity.

CHURCH LIFE

Churches rarely accept converts in order to avoid accusations of proselytizing from the government and society, which could lead to attacks or a church closure for "security reasons". It is common for the police and intelligence agencies to request a schedule of all events happening in the church. They have the authority to cancel events under the rationale of protecting national security. Plain clothes police sometimes attend church services to monitor what is said. Churches face opposition, even violence, when they try to legitimize their church building under the 2016 Church Construction Law. However, since the law's introduction, over 3,500 churches have been legitimized, which is generally seen as an unprecedented step in Egypt's history. Church events can be held outside, discreetly, in some regions, but many Christians refrain from organizing these as they could be construed as a challenge to Islam.

International obligations & rights violated

Egypt 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)

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

- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are often left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are arbitrarily accused and charged with blasphemy (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face discrimination in public and private employment because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles in obtaining permits for the construction of new buildings and receiving licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)
- Christian women, especially in rural areas, may be targeted, groomed, and forced into marriage with Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Christians are killed because of their faith by members of terrorist organizations (ICCPR Art. 6.1)

Situation of other religious minorities

Other religious groups facing intolerance, discrimination and persecution in Egypt include Shia and Sufi Muslims, Bahai, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. Shia Muslims are particularly targeted by Sunni militants, making it dangerous for them to worship and practice their faith openly. Mormons, Bahai and Jehovah's Witnesses are denied recognition by the authorities, making it difficult for them to have places of worship. The missionary zeal and corresponding activities of such groups are considered illegal and adherents face hostility from state officials and society, including Christian Egyptians. In addition, atheists are prone to violations, especially those active on social media networks.



Open Doors in Egypt

In cooperation with local churches and other partnering ministries, Open Doors is supporting the church in Egypt, of all denominations, through various ministry centers spread throughout the country from north to south. We serve different age groups through a variety of long-term programs, including youth ministry, literacy training and medical outreach.



ABOUT THIS BRIEF

- The content of this document is based on the more detailed WWL Persecution Dynamics per country published annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2025 Open Doors International.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the WWL Persecution Dynamics per country, accompanying Background Information per country and the latest update of WWL Methodology. These are also available at the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).
- The WWL 2025 reporting period was 01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024.

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.

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