

WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

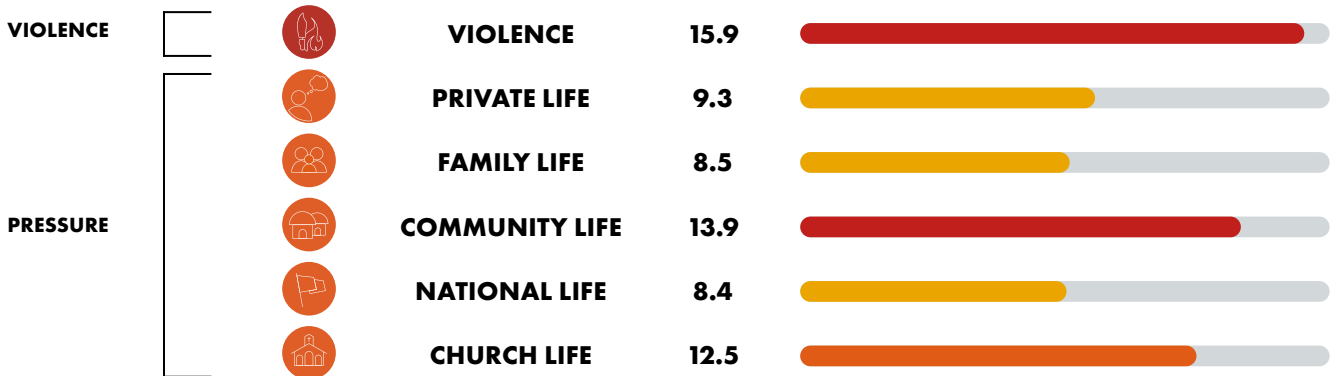
MOZAMBIQUE

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
37



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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

Persecution of Christians in Mozambique can be attributed to a complex set of factors, painting a grim picture for the future of religious freedom in the country.

Firstly, the presence of militant Islamists, particularly in the northern regions, has made life increasingly perilous for Christian communities. These extremists have unleashed a wave of violence, targeting Christian places of worship, abducting religious leaders and killing numerous believers. Their activities are not isolated but are part of a broader ideological campaign to impose a strict interpretation of Islamic law, making Christians a specific and vulnerable target.

Secondly, the influence of drug cartels exacerbates an already tense situation. Mozambique has become a significant hub for the international drug trade, and this has given cartels a vested interest in controlling various parts of the country. Church youth workers, who often act as community leaders advocating

for change, find themselves caught in a web of violence and intimidation. These criminal organizations view any form of organized social activity, including church activities, as a threat to their control over local communities.

Thirdly, the government’s stance on religious freedom further compounds the issue. Official policies and practices restrict the freedom to worship and express religious beliefs openly. Churches face administrative hurdles, there are barriers to religious education, and public expressions of Christian faith often lead to scrutiny and sometimes even arrest.

Finally, the ongoing war against jihadists adds another layer of complexity. As government forces engage in violent conflicts with radical groups, Christians find themselves caught in the crossfire. Not only are they targets of extremist violence, but they also suffer from the collateral damage wrought by military operations.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi

POPULATION

34,858,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

19,973,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



Context

| Religious Context | Number of adherents | Percentage |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Christians | 19,973,000 | 57.3 |
| Ethno-religionists | 8,443,000 | 24.2 |
| Muslims | 6,220,000 | 17.8 |
| Agnostics | 122,000 | 0.3 |

Source²

Mozambique became independent of Portugal in 1975. The civil war ended in 1992 with a UN-negotiated peace agreement between the then-sole party, Front for the Liberation of Mozambique

(FRELIMO), and rebel Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) forces. This was followed by steady [economic](#) and political progress, undermined by the return of tensions and violence between FRELIMO and RENAMO since 2012. [Fighting erupted again in 2019](#) when FRELIMO remained in power after [disputed election results](#). As [Human Rights Watch](#) pointed out, Mozambique’s legal and political landscape in 2024 remains characterized by significant challenges, including entrenched political dominance by the ruling party FRELIMO, pervasive corruption and ongoing security issues.

From October 2017 onwards, there have been recurrent attacks in the north by Islamic militants who have killed many Christians and burned down Christian homes. In addition, the Islamist group al-Sunnah wa Jama’ah (ASWJ) has called for the removal of Christian symbols and has attacked

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

houses belonging to Christians in some parts of Cabo Delgado Province. Christians have fled from their homes to avoid being targeted by jihadists. Although coalition forces from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Rwanda (together with advisors from other nations) had some success pushing the jihadists back, in January 2024, a series of coordinated assaults in the Mocímboa da Praia district led to the deaths of ten Christians and the destruction of over 200 homes, including a church. This violence was part of a broader campaign named “Kill Them Wherever You Find Them,” which was explicitly aimed at Christians and announced by the group’s spokesperson, Abu Hudhayfah Al-Ansar. [International Crisis Group](#) has noted (accessed 21 August 2024): “Mozambique’s northern province, Cabo Delgado, remains embroiled in conflict, largely due to the presence of the Islamic State-affiliated group, ASWJ (ISM). Despite efforts from the SADC and other foreign military forces, the insurgency has not been fully eradicated. The withdrawal of SADC forces (their mandate expired on 15 July 2024) and the recently concluded elections add layers of complexity to Mozambique’s security and political landscape.”

The South Asian immigrant population and the northern provinces are predominantly Muslim, particularly along the coast, while some areas of the northern interior have a strong concentration of Christian communities. In northern areas under the influence of Islamic militants, Christians (especially converts from a Muslim background) must hide their faith or risk attack or killing. Christians are more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslims also live in these areas.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022), there are Roman Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal and Anglican congregations (in descending order of denominational size) in the country.

How the situation varies by region

Rights violations against Christians are most severe in the northern Cabo Delgado province, and bordering areas where Islamic State (IS) affiliated militants carry out violent attacks.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

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

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Historical Christians include the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox churches. They are frequently targeted by al-Sunnah wa Jama’ah militants.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

These include converts from Islam or traditional African religions and cross-denominational converts among Christian groups. Persecution is severe if the convert is from a Muslim background living in the Muslim-dominated north; such converts are likely to be targeted for attacks by radical Muslims.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Non-traditional Christian communities include Baptists and Pentecostals. Due to their focus on evangelism, Christians in these churches are regularly threatened and attacked.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Since 2017 there have been recurrent attacks against Christians by militants belonging to the IS-affiliated Islamist group, al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ), causing thousands to flee their homes. The capability and areas of influence of these militants continues to increase. Groups are supported financially by working with drug cartels, and through corruption involving some officials in the country.

CLAN OPPRESSION

In remote areas, adherents to indigenous beliefs see the rise of Christian evangelistic activities as a threat. As a result, clan leaders often oppose such church action.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

The government of Mozambique is not a full democracy. It is still repressive and puts pressure on some churches to support government policies. The Constitution bans all religious influence in public educational institutions. Some authorities also impose cumbersome registration requirements on religious groups. The government restricts reporting of the situation of violence in northern Mozambique.

ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Mozambique has high levels of organized crime; drugs, arms, and illegal wildlife products such as ivory are widely traded at ports. The Islamist group al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah has been involved in illegal trade to fund the group's activities. Cartels threaten and commit violence against churches that are involved in work among youth and criminal gangs.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Common violations affecting Christian women and girls are sexual harassment, rape and forced marriage. This is attributed to the incursion of Islamic militants. During the WWL 2024 reporting period there have been numerous reports of abductions across areas of the country where jihadists and their cells exert influence. One country expert noted: "Christian girls were taken as war trophies." In addition to marriage, girls are also used for forced labor and sexual slavery. Converts from a Muslim or African Traditional Religion background are vulnerable to family pressures, such as forced marriage, denied inheritance and loss of child custody.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Forced marriage
- Trafficking
- Violence – physical
- Violence – sexual

MEN

Islamic oppression is the most common form of persecution for Christians in Mozambique, due to the role of extremist Islamic insurgents. It is reported that Christian men and boys have been killed in attacks, or have lost their farmland and properties, leaving their families challenged economically. Young boys have also been forcibly recruited into militias. A country expert comments: "young men are recruited to join the insurgents, older men are killed because they are regarded as weak and cannot join the insurgent's army."

Male typical pressure points:

- 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 |
|----------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 2025 | 37 | 68 |
| 2024 | 39 | 68 |
| 2023 | 32 | 68 |
| 2022 | 41 | 65 |
| 2021 | 45 | 63 |

Mozambique has consistently scored 68 points on the World Watch List over the past three years, reflecting a persistent level of hostility towards Christians, particularly in the northern region where jihadist activity remains entrenched. While the average pressure stayed as before at 10.5 points, the violence score rose from the extreme level of 15.0 points in WWL 2024 to 15.9 in WWL 2025. The presence of drug cartels in certain areas has further complicated life for Christians, particularly disrupting church initiatives aimed at engaging youth.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- January 2024 attacks in Mocímboa da Praia:** Over two weeks in January, Islamic State affiliated militants attacked several villages in the Mocímboa da Praia district. The attacks began on 3 January in the village of Ntotoe, where three Christians were killed, and more than 60 houses and a church were burned down. Subsequent attacks in Chimbanga and another village resulted in the deaths of six more Christians and the destruction of over 110 homes.
- IS campaign: “Kill Them Wherever You Find Them”:** The Islamic State’s “Kill Them Wherever You Find Them” campaign, launched on 4 January 2024, included brutal attacks specifically targeting Christians. The campaign was announced by the group’s spokesperson and resulted in widespread violence, with images of the killings and burning properties published in IS’s weekly magazine, Al-Nab.

| WWL Year | Christians killed | Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed | Christians abducted | Christians internally displaced |
|----------|-------------------|--|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2025 | 56 | 100* | 13 | 1000* |
| 2024 | 10* | 10* | 0 | 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

In northern areas under the influence of Islamist militants, Christians (especially converts from a Muslim background) must hide their faith or risk attack or killing.

FAMILY LIFE

In the north, where jihadist expansion is occurring, raising children as Christians is dangerous, particularly in areas where government forces have been forced to withdraw. Even within the community and at school, Christians are victims of harassment and discrimination. Furthermore, in some areas where Catholics are dominant, children of evangelicals face similar challenges.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christian women and girls are under threat of abduction by Islamist insurgents in the north. Often, abductions happen after villages have been raided. In Cabo Delgado, Christians have faced harassment for not meeting Muslim religious standard requirements, as perceived by the Islamist insurgents.

NATIONAL LIFE

In the north, many churches and Christian symbols have been vandalized. The government will hinder unwelcome church views on issues such as human rights, despite the church having played a significant role in the democratization process in the post-colonial era. The government is seeking a stricter form of control over religion through a new bill currently under discussion.

CHURCH LIFE

Christian preaching is often monitored by the authorities for signs of government criticism, and jihadists monitor all church activity in the north. The government has been deliberately slow in issuing church licenses and is discussing a new law to regulate religious affairs. Similar to the law in Rwanda, the government wants officially trained church leaders and seeks to avoid a proliferation of small church groups.

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

According to the [US State Department](#): In September, ISIS-M launched an attack on a village in Cabo Delgado's Mocimboa da Praia District, reportedly killing at least 11 Christians. According to survivors, the attackers separated villagers based on their names, identifying Christians and Muslims, and then opened fire on those they believed to be Christian. While ISIS-M propaganda claimed to specifically target Christians and Christian villages, reports indicate that the group often did not differentiate much among its victims. Media accounts highlighted that Muslim communities were also among those affected by the often indiscriminate attacks in rural areas.

A significant number of the population still follow traditional African religions. Most adherents live in remote parts of the country and there are no reports of persecution. Many are converting to Christianity.

Open Doors in Mozambique

Open Doors began support to the Church in Mozambique in 2020. We focus on providing emergency support to Christians affected by increasing jihadist violence in the north through:

- Cross cultural awareness training
- Persecution preparedness training
- Economic empowerment



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.

Many photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.

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