



# WORLD WATCH LIST 2019

The 50 countries where it's most dangerous to follow Jesus





## The 50 countries where it's most dangerous to follow Jesus

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# WORLD WATCH LIST

2019



## A letter from David Curry, CEO

Each year, the World Watch List comes out and a new conversation begins. We answer questions and write articles. We host a media briefing and produce the booklet you hold in your hands. We're thankful for the coverage, glad to have the support of people who care about the annual list and proud of the work we do to share these rankings with the world.

But in reality? Those are secondary blessings. The point of the World Watch List is to shine a light on the strength and the suffering of the family of God around the world—to drive all of us to our knees in prayer and then to our feet to stand with our brothers and sisters.

The rankings and the numbers are important. But please remember these numbers represent real people and every data point represents Christians, like you and me, who are following Jesus—and suffering because of it.

This year, we noticed how Christian women are especially targeted around the world. Often, they are culturally discriminated against because they are women—and when it's discovered they follow Jesus, the suffering can be even worse. These numbers don't always show us their stories; we promise to bring you these important testimonies throughout 2019.

The World Watch List also helps us understand and see where God is at work. Because in every country, no matter how challenging, there are Christians seeking after God. They are preaching about and living for Him, no matter what. What a powerful testimony!

So please, join us in prayer that the World Watch List 2019 would mobilize believers to stand in unity with their persecuted family all around the world.

May God richly bless you,

David Curry  
President/CEO  
Open Doors USA



# OUR STORY

*Open Doors exists to strengthen the Church to be the Church in the most hostile places.*

In over 60 countries, Open Doors supports persecuted Christians by providing Bibles, emergency aid, discipleship training, vocational instruction, trauma counseling, advocacy and many other kinds of support. The goal? To let our brothers and sisters know they're not alone. Open Doors exists to allow the church, no matter where it is, to be the Church.

**At Open Doors, we're committed to those who suffer for following Jesus, and we believe the persecuted Church is part of the DNA of every Christian.**

Our ministry was launched by a courageous man from the Netherlands named Brother Andrew. Many people know Brother Andrew from his most well-known book, *God's Smuggler*, which tells stories of his secret missions to carry Bibles into hostile regions—and how God opened the doors to do so.

Throughout his life, Brother Andrew has taken great risks to bring the gospel into communist countries during the height of the Cold War, delivering Bibles to Christians who most needed God's Word. Brother Andrew believed no door is closed to us when we preach the gospel—and that same passion is embedded in our ministry.

Today, Open Doors continues Brother Andrew's mission—serving persecuted Christians where faith costs the most, helping them in the ways they tell us they most need.

We're present—on the ground—and understand the full story, not just sound bites or secondhand reports. We pull back the curtain to inspire and invite others—people like you—to be part of the amazing story God is writing for His Church.

Because of our frontline access, we are uniquely set up to connect you with your persecuted family.

Persecuted believers—like Hamid in the Middle East (p. 19), Yusuf in the Horn of Africa (p. 62) and an unnamed Christian in Pakistan (p. 29)—know God is in control and at work, even as they see pressure and pain. These stories are just snapshots of the difficulties faced by Christians around the world—and snapshots of God's faithfulness in the middle of suffering.

We want believers to know they're not alone—that the worldwide Church stands with them.

This is our family. This is our responsibility. This is our mission.

Will you join us?

*"Our very mission is called 'Open Doors' because we believe that any door is open, anytime and anywhere ... to proclaim Christ."*

—BROTHER ANDREW

# ABOUT THE WORLD WATCH LIST



## What is the World Watch List?

The World Watch List is an annual report on the global persecution of Christians ranking the top 50 countries where Christians are persecuted for their faith. Released at the beginning of each year, the list uses data from Open Doors field workers and external experts to quantify and analyze persecution worldwide.

## How are the countries ranked?

Countries are ranked by the severity of persecution of Christians, calculated by analyzing the level of violent persecution plus the pressure experienced in five spheres of life. For the detailed methodology, visit [ODUSA.org/WWLMethodology](https://www.odusa.org/WWLMethodology).

## RANKING METHODOLOGY:



### Pressure

Degree of pressure in five spheres of Christian life



Church life

+



National life

+



Community life

+



Family life

+



Private life

Max score  
per sphere  
= 16.7



### Violence

Amount of violent incidents against Christians and the Church



Violence Max score = 16.7



MAX  
SCORE  
= 83.3

+



MAX  
SCORE  
= 16.7

=

RANK  
#

MAX  
SCORE  
= 100



# Trends in Global Persecution

## 1. The shocking reality of persecution against women.

In the 2019 World Watch List reporting period, there were shocking details about the persecution experienced by Christian women. In many places, they experience a “double persecution”—one for being a Christian and one for being a woman. Even in the most restricted circumstances, gender-specific persecution is a key means of destroying the minority Christian community. This kind of persecution is difficult to assess because it is complex, violent and hidden—in many cultures where women are specifically targeted, it is difficult if not impossible to report accurate numbers.

## 2. Islamic oppression continues to impact millions of Christians.

In seven out of the top 10 World Watch List countries, the primary cause of persecution is Islamic oppression. This means, for millions of Christians—particularly those who grew up Muslim or were born into Muslim families—openly following Jesus can have painful consequences. They can be treated as second-class citizens, discriminated against for jobs or even violently attacked.

## 3. The world’s two most highly populated countries rise on the World Watch List.

For the first time since the start of the World Watch List, India has entered the top 10. Additionally, China jumped 16 spots, from 43 to 27. Each of these

countries is home to more than a billion people, so these trends are distressing. Hindu nationalists in India continue to attack Christians with what seems like no consequences, and in China, the increased power of the government and the rule of Xi Jinping continue to make open worship difficult in some parts of the country.

## 4. The spread of radical Islam across sub-Saharan Africa.

While the violent excesses of ISIS and other Islamic militants have mostly disappeared from headlines from the Middle East, their loss of territory there means that fighters have dispersed to a larger number of countries not only in the region but, increasingly, into sub-Saharan Africa. Their radical ideology has inspired, or infiltrated, numerous splinter groups such as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a deadly group that broke away from Nigeria’s Boko Haram that also enslaves Christian women and girls as an integral part of their strategy.

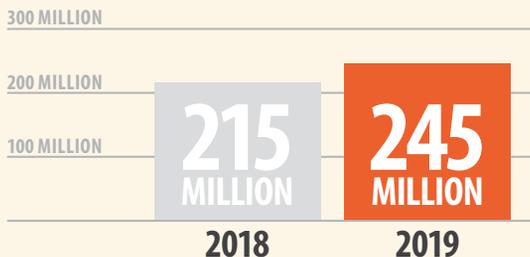
## 5. More laws added to control religion.

State authoritarianism is increasing in many parts of the world, supported by the ever-spreading availability of personal digital technology, which governments can increasingly track through facial recognition, electronic chips and so on. Places like Vietnam, Myanmar, China and North Korea all saw increases in stricter state control of religious rights.

# PERSECUTION BY THE NUMBERS

≈14%

The rise in the number of Christians in the top 50 countries on the World Watch List who experience high levels of persecution.



1 in 9 Christians experience high levels of persecution worldwide.



During the World Watch List 2019 reporting period, in the top 50 countries:

4,136

Christians were killed for faith-related reasons. On average, that's 11 Christians killed every day for their faith.

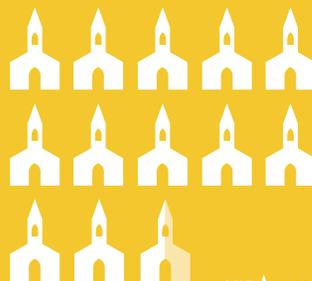


2,625

Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned.

1,266

churches or Christian buildings were attacked.



ONE  = 100

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2019



As you read through the 2019 World Watch List, you'll see themes and stories from the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian, in addition to information about how you can pray for each country. We hope these details will help you understand the situations your Christian family faces across the globe—and, most importantly, we hope these critical insights will help fuel your prayers for the worldwide Church.

1

# North Korea

**Source of persecution** Communist and post-communist oppression

**Population** 25,611,000

**Christians** 300,000

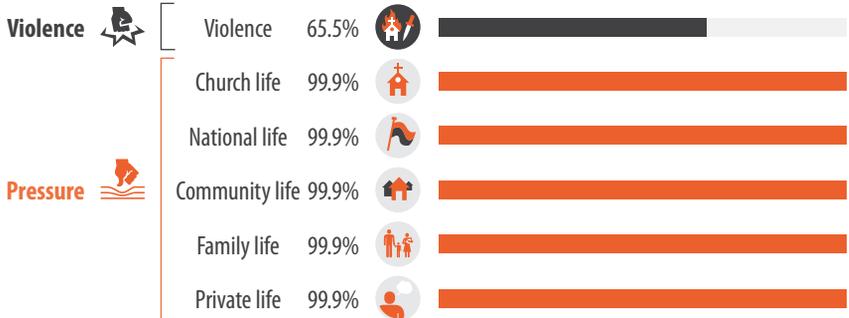
**Main religion** Atheism/traditional beliefs

**Government** Communist dictator

**Leader** Kim Jong-un

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data

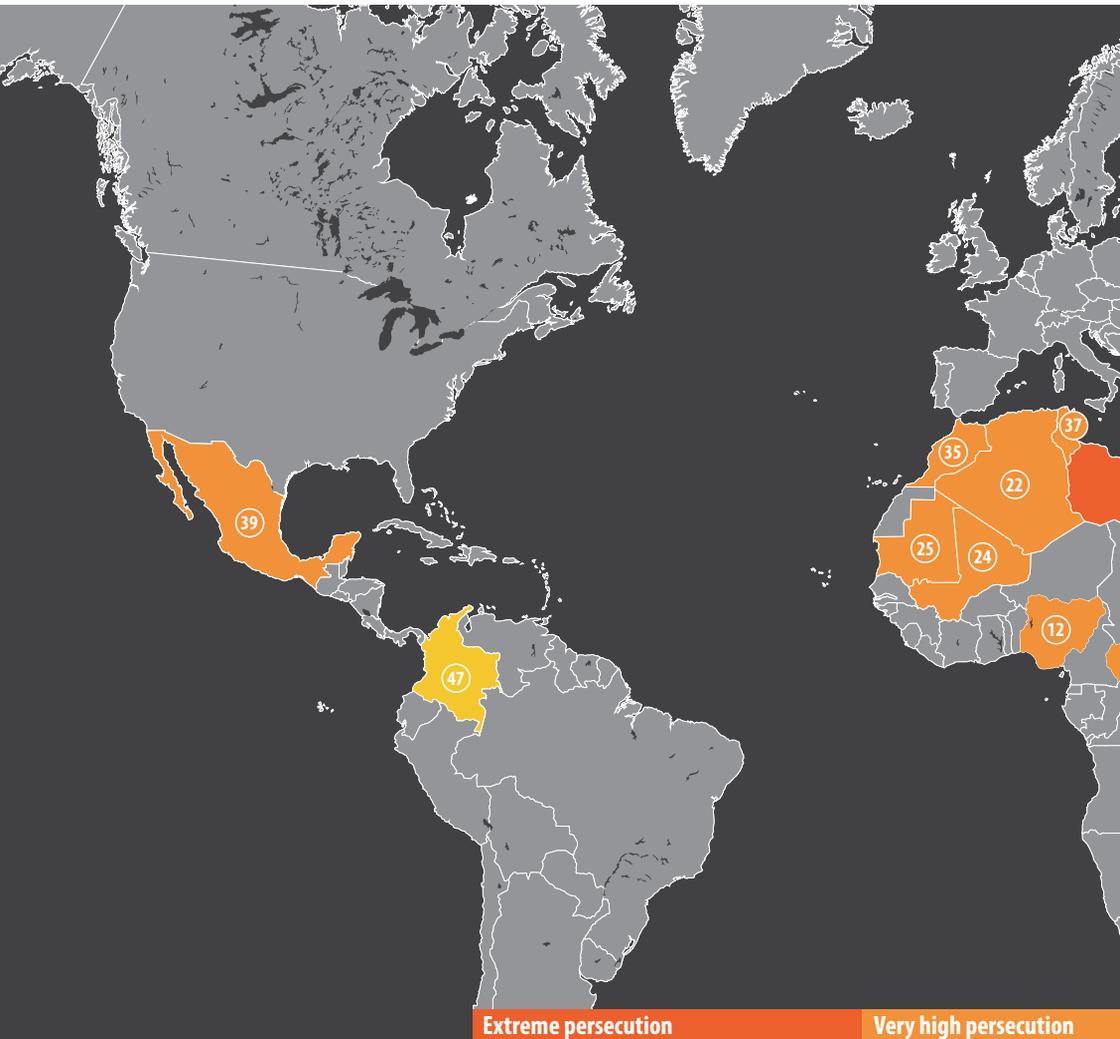


## Never-ending pressure and violence

The primary driver of persecution in North Korea is the state. For three generations, everything in the country has focused on idolizing the Kim family. Christians are seen as hostiles to be eradicated. There was hope that new diplomatic efforts in 2018—including the 2018 Winter Olympics—would mean a lessening of pressure and violence against Christians, but so far that has not been the case. Kim Jong-un has maintained tight control over the populace, and dissent or worshipping anything else is not tolerated.

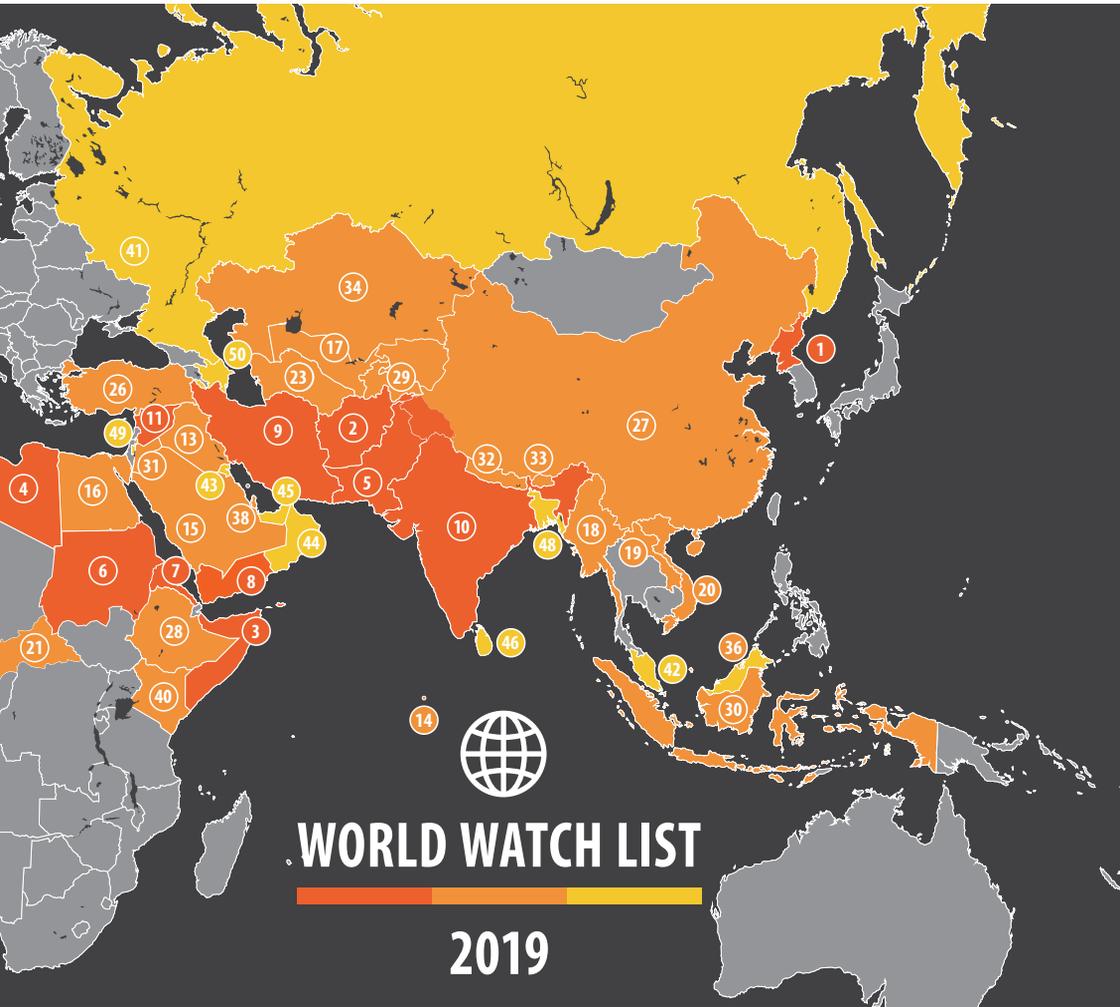
## Prayer points

- Pray that new diplomatic efforts will pay dividends, and will lead to a softening of the North Korean government toward its people.
- The situation for Christians is vulnerable and precarious. They face persecution from state authorities and their non-Christian family, friends and neighbors. Pray for their protection.
- Pray for strength and courage for Christians who suffer in prisons, labor camps and remote areas.


**Extreme persecution**
**Very high persecution**

## The 50 countries where it is most dangerous to follow Jesus:

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1 North Korea | 11 Syria        |
| 2 Afghanistan | 12 Nigeria      |
| 3 Somalia     | 13 Iraq         |
| 4 Libya       | 14 Maldives     |
| 5 Pakistan    | 15 Saudi Arabia |
| 6 Sudan       | 16 Egypt        |
| 7 Eritrea     | 17 Uzbekistan   |
| 8 Yemen       | 18 Myanmar      |
| 9 Iran        | 19 Laos         |
| 10 India      | 20 Vietnam      |



# WORLD WATCH LIST

## 2019

### High persecution

- |                             |               |                            |
|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| 21 Central African Republic | 31 Jordan     | 41 Russian Federation      |
| 22 Algeria                  | 32 Nepal      | 42 Malaysia                |
| 23 Turkmenistan             | 33 Bhutan     | 43 Kuwait                  |
| 24 Mali                     | 34 Kazakhstan | 44 Oman                    |
| 25 Mauritania               | 35 Morocco    | 45 United Arab Emirates    |
| 26 Turkey                   | 36 Brunei     | 46 Sri Lanka               |
| 27 China                    | 37 Tunisia    | 47 Colombia                |
| 28 Ethiopia                 | 38 Qatar      | 48 Bangladesh              |
| 29 Tajikistan               | 39 Mexico     | 49 Palestinian Territories |
| 30 Indonesia                | 40 Kenya      | 50 Azerbaijan              |

2

# Afghanistan

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 36,373,000  
**Christians** Thousands  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Islamic republic  
**Leader** President Ashraf Ghani

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data

**Violence** 

Violence 63%  

Church life 99.9%  

National life 99.9%  

**Pressure** 

Community life 99.9%  

Family life 99.9%  

Private life 99.9%  

## Where Christianity is not permitted to exist

Afghanistan is an Islamic state by constitution, which means government officials, ethnic group leaders, religious officials and citizens are hostile toward adherents of any other religion. This means any expression of any faith other than Islam is simply not permitted to exist. Additionally, to convert to a faith outside Islam is tantamount to treason because it is seen as a betrayal of family, tribe and country.

## Prayer points

- Christian converts from Islam face strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors and can even be attacked. Pray for these believers to have courage and protection.
- The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan does not allow conversion from Islam. Please pray for a softening of the country's leadership and local rulers.
- Pray for isolated believers in Afghanistan, many of whom are totally cut off from any other Christians.



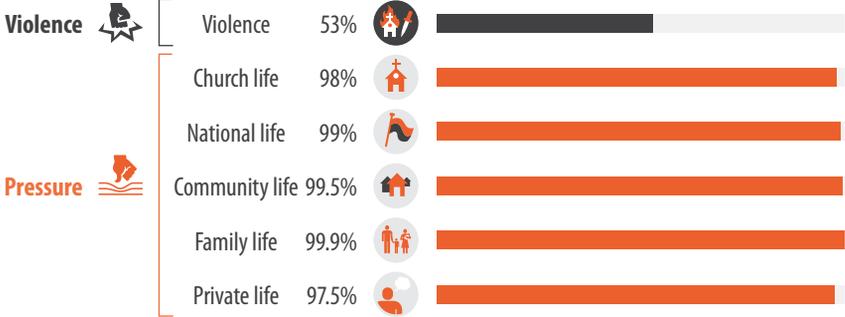
3

# Somalia

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 15,182,000  
**Christians** A few hundred  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Federal republic  
**Leader** President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### A life of violence and isolation

Estimates suggest that 99 percent of Somalis are Muslims, and any minority religions are heavily persecuted. The Christian community is small and under constant threat of attack. Sharia law and Islam are enshrined in the country’s constitution, and the persecution of Christians almost always involves violence. Additionally, in many rural areas, Islamic militant groups like al-Shabab are *de facto* rulers.

### Prayer points

- Somali Christians often must hide their faith to stay safe. Pray for the safety and discipleship opportunities for these isolated believers.
- Pray for Christians who convert from Islam, that they will be protected from violence and oppression.
- Pray for the government of Somalia, that its leaders will be open to the truth of the gospel.



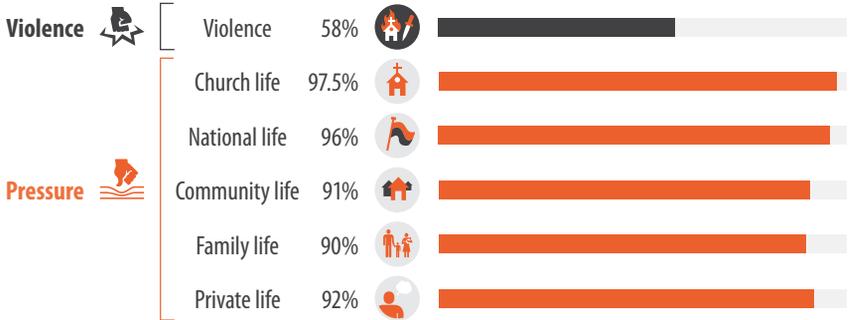
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# Libya

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 6,471,000  
**Christians** 37,900  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Transitional  
**Leader** Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Chaos and violence for Christians

After the ouster of former dictator Muammar Gaddafi, Libya plunged into chaos and anarchy, which has enabled various Islamic militant groups to control parts of the country. Converts to Christianity face abuse and violence for their decision to follow Christ. Libya is also home to many migrant workers who have been attacked, sexually assaulted and detained, which can be even worse if it is discovered they are Christians.

## Prayer points

- Pray for the isolated Christian converts in Libya, that they would find other believers and be encouraged in their faith.
- Pray for the protection of migrant workers, especially for those who are Christians and face double persecution.
- Pray for stability in Libya, and that the rule of law would improve and enable more rights for religious minorities.



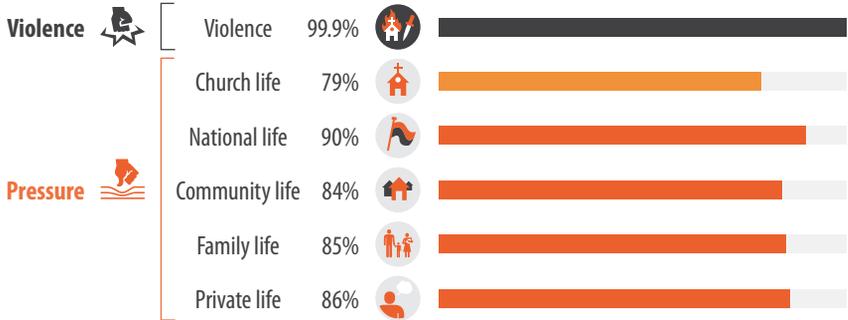
5

# Pakistan

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 200,814,000  
**Christians** 3,981,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Federal republic  
**Leader** Prime Minister Imran Khan

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Open discrimination and violent attacks

Under Pakistan’s notorious blasphemy laws, Christians continue to live in daily fear they will be accused of blasphemy—which can carry a penalty of death. Additionally, radical Islamists seem to be gaining more political power, and the new ruling government must maintain good diplomatic relationships with some radical groups. Christians are largely regarded as second-class citizens, and conversion to Christianity from Islam carries a great deal of risk.

## Prayer points

- Pray for Pakistani converts from Muslim backgrounds who suffer the brunt of the persecution in Pakistan. Radical Islamist groups see them as apostates, and their family, friends and neighbors see their conversion as shameful to the community.
- Pray for Christians accused under blasphemy laws, that they would not face violence or mob “justice” and that they would stand strong in the midst of great risk.

# North Korea

## “You don’t know what it is like to go hungry”

The situation in North Korea, ranked #1 on the World Watch List for the last 18 years, remains bleak.



“In winter, everything is frozen and there’s nothing to eat,” says a source inside North Korea. “People are suffering [from] severe starvation and hunger. **Most people suffer from malnutrition.**”

“We also suffer from corruption, endless looting and social instability,” says another source. “Cholera is fast spreading due to impure water and bad hygiene. People dying of starvation—and from various diseases—are increasing day by day.”

While we can’t tell you how we deliver assistance, Open Doors provides tens of thousands of Christians with food, medicine and clothes. The Christians who receive it say they see this support as a lifeline.

Recently, Open Doors had to make some difficult choices on a budget for North Korea. We proposed to North Korean church leaders that maybe we could slightly reduce the amount we spent on food. They sent us a dramatic message: “Please, make any choice you need to make. You can stop with any other activity, but please, **do not reduce the amount of food you send us.** You don’t know what it is like to go hungry.” After hearing this, we decided not to decrease the amount but rather to increase it.

Our food delivery has made North Korean Christians realize they are not alone. “The fact that you are able to support us is proof that God exists,” says one leader. “Thanks to you, we know **He has not forgotten us.** He has opened the door for us to be connected to many supporters abroad.”

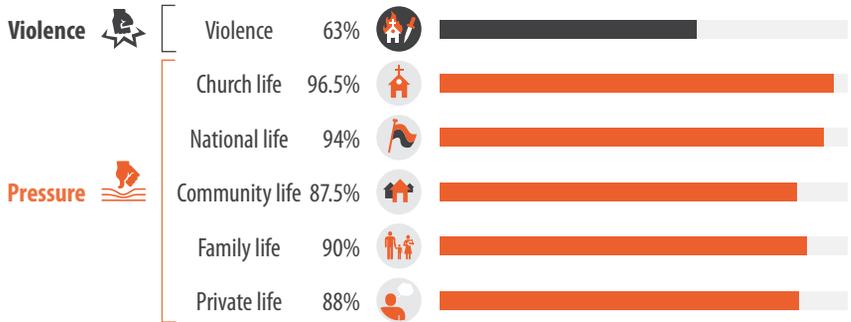


# Sudan

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 41,512,000  
**Christians** 1,910,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### A dictator propping up one religion

Sudan has been ruled by the authoritarian government of President al-Bashir since 1989. The country has been ruled as an Islamic state with limited rights for religious minorities and heavy restrictions on freedom of speech and press. Christians face discrimination and pressure—multiple church buildings were demolished in 2017 and 2018, leaving some Christians without a place to worship. Christian converts from Islam are especially targeted for persecution.

### Prayer points

- Pray for opportunities for Christians to have places of worship without fear of destruction.
- Pray for converts to Christianity, that they would be able to stand strong in the face of accusations of betrayal.
- Ask God to work in the hearts of Sudanese government leaders—convicting them to seek justice and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.



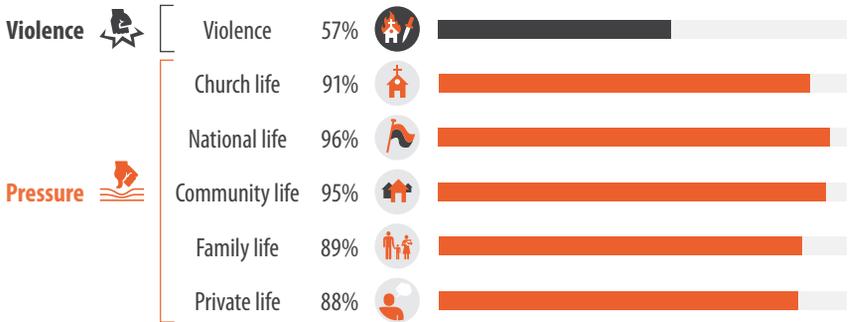
7

# Eritrea

**Source of persecution** Dictatorial paranoia  
**Population** 5,188,000  
**Christians** 2,474,000  
**Main religion** Islam/Christianity  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Isaias Afwerki

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Horrific prisons and human rights atrocities

Since 1993, President Afwerki has overseen a brutal authoritarian regime that rests on massive human rights violations. In 2018, there were raids on churches, and hundreds of Christians were imprisoned in inhumane conditions. Additionally, there are estimates that other Christians are currently in Eritrea's vast prison network, but no one knows how many there are or if they are still alive.

## Prayer points

- Thousands of Christians have been imprisoned in Eritrea over the last decade. Pray for endurance for brothers and sisters detained in horrific conditions, and ask God to give them perseverance in their faith.
- Pray for President Afwerki, that God would work in his heart and reveal the truth of the gospel.
- Pray for cooperation among the Christians of Eritrea, that they would be one.



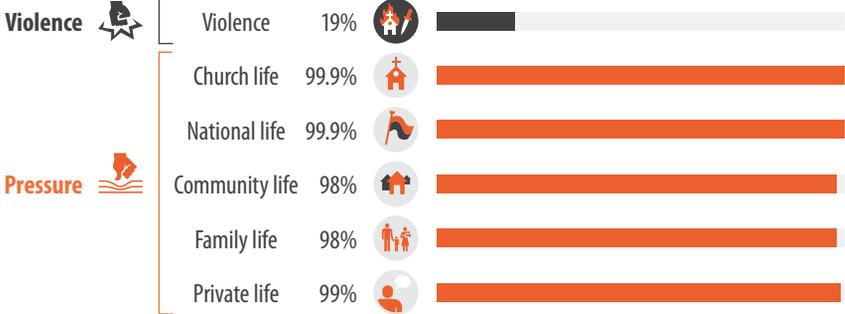
# 8

# Yemen

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 28,915,000  
**Christians** A few thousand  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Transitional  
**Leader** President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### War and uncertainty combine with strict Islamism

An ongoing civil war in Yemen has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent memory, making an already difficult nation for Christians even harder. The chaos of war has enabled radical groups to take control over some regions of Yemen, and they have increased persecution against Christians. Even private worship is risky in some parts of the country. Converts to Christianity from Islam face additional persecution from family and society.

### Prayer points

- Pray that God would inspire forces in Yemen to solve their conflict through peaceful means.
- The instability in Yemen has created a refugee, food and healthcare crisis. Ask God to help provide food, clean water and safety to the people of Yemen.
- Pray that the secret believers from Muslim backgrounds will have courage and perseverance in their faith.

9

# Iran

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 82,012,000  
**Christians** 800,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Theocratic republic  
**Leader** Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data

**Violence** 

Violence 62%  

Church life 99%  

National life 95%  

**Pressure** 

Community life 86%  

Family life 85.5%  

Private life 84%  

## Illegal to convert, illegal to preach

Christians are forbidden from sharing their faith with non-Christians. Therefore, church services in Persian, the national language, are not allowed. Converts from Islam face persecution from the government; if they attend an underground house church, they face the constant threat of arrest. Iranian society is governed by Islamic law, which means the rights and professional possibilities for Christians are heavily restricted.

## Prayer points

- Any Muslim who leaves Islam faces a charge of apostasy and can be thrown in jail or worse. Pray that the laws will change, allowing for freedom of religion.
- Pray for secret believers who meet in house churches, that they will be protected and will be faithful witnesses to the surrounding culture.



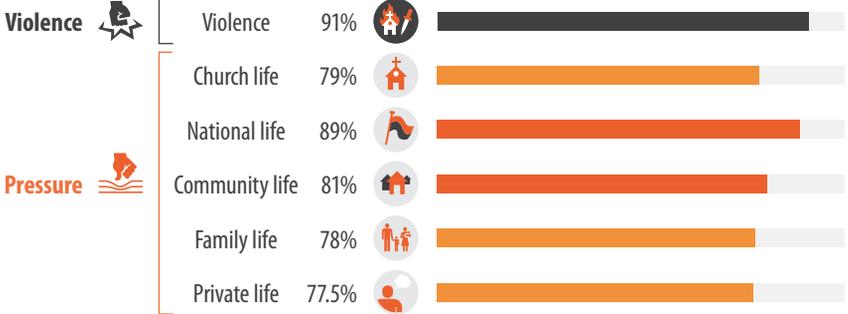
10

# India

**Source of persecution** Religious nationalism  
**Population** 1,354,052,000  
**Christians** 65,061,000  
**Main religion** Hinduism  
**Government** Federal republic  
**Leader** Prime Minister Narendra Modi

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### India continues its violence against Christians

Christians have been targeted by Hindu nationalist extremists more each year. Since the current ruling party took power in 2014, attacks have increased, and Hindu radicals believe they can attack Christians with no consequences. The view of the nationalists is that to be Indian is to be Hindu, so any other faith—including Christianity—is viewed as non-Indian. Additionally, in some regions of the country, converts to Christianity from Hinduism experience extreme persecution, discrimination and violence.

### Prayer points

- Pray for Christian converts from Hinduism who are forcefully pressured to return to their national religion.
- Pray with Christians in India for God’s provision and protection as they preach the gospel in places with anti-conversion laws.
- Pray for the government of India, that they would open to religious liberty.



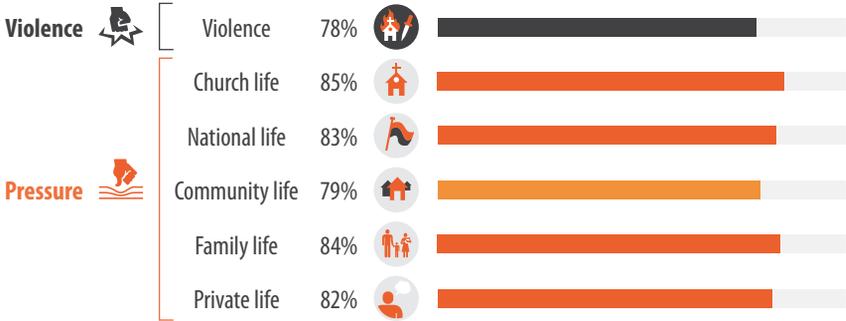
11

# Syria

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 18,284,000  
**Christians** 814,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Bashar al-Assad

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Where chaos means pain

In 2018, pressure decreased on Christians overall—unfortunately, it was accompanied by a spike in violence against Christians, particularly in rebel-held areas. The country’s ongoing civil war has left it in turmoil, and Christians have not been spared from that suffering. Additionally, they are at risk if forces antagonistic to Christianity rule their home regions. Even in more secure parts of Syria, Christians who have converted from Islam face pressure and discrimination from their communities.

### Prayer points

- Pray for peace for Syria. The war is complex, and ordinary people are suffering greatly. Pray for a true resolution.
- Pray for Christians living in regions ruled by rebel groups who violently oppress Christianity. Pray for strength and hope.
- Pray for the Syrian government and for rebel leaders, that they will turn to Jesus as Lord.

# Iran

## Hamid's story

For youth in Iran, following Jesus comes with a cost. **"All of them are discriminated against if it's discovered that they are Christians,"** says Hamid, a Christian in his twenties who supports the house church movement in Iran. "Some youth have to deal with stronger forms of persecution—their families don't agree with their new faith and are violent toward them."

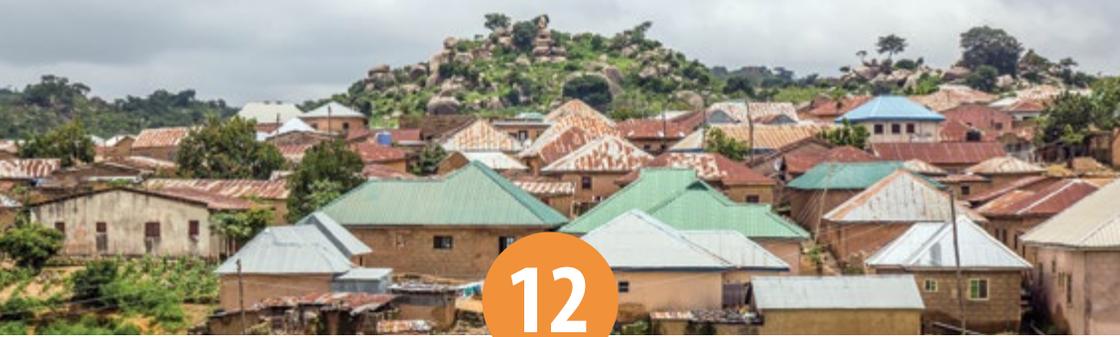
Hamid had to leave Iran at age 15. His family was involved in ministry among Muslim-background believers, which led to serious threats directed at his father. Living abroad, he is in regular contact with young Iranian believers through internet and secret meetings.

Additionally, Christians who are part of unregistered churches face the constant threat of raids and arrests. "After an arrest, the whole church is startled," Hamid explains. "The arrested persons can't come back to church because they will jeopardize the security of the whole church. This means that young people often have to **say goodbye to people they have grown to feel connected with**. Sometimes, their whole church ceases to exist."



And yet, Hamid sees God doing amazing things among the young Christians of Iran. "There are three things that always inspire me about the youth in Iran," Hamid says. "First, their passion for the Lord and how important this relationship with the Lord is to them. Second, I am always amazed by the level of and questions they ask. Finally, most of them have a vision in their mind and are happy to pay the price to move toward their vision.

"Pray for their protection, and pray they find their identity in Christ. Pray for the assurance that **they aren't forgotten by other Christians**, even though they might feel isolated at times."



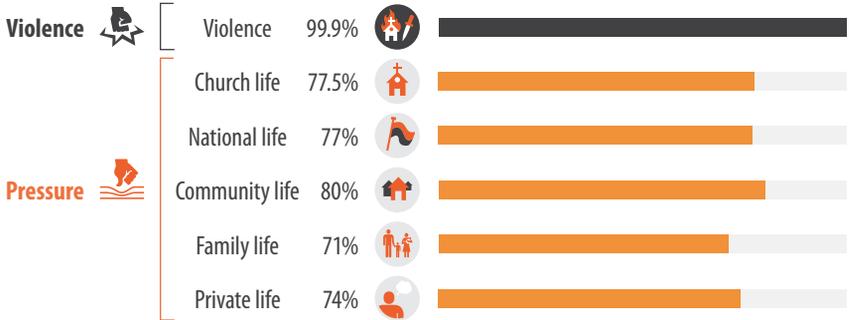
12

# Nigeria

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 195,875,000  
**Christians** 91,122,000  
**Main religion** Christianity/Islam  
**Government** Federal republic  
**Leader** President Maj. Gen. (ret.) Muhammadu Buhari

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Seemingly constant violence

Nigeria's score for violence has stayed as high as possible, primarily due to the increased attacks on Christian communities by militant Fulani herdsmen. These attacks claimed the lives of hundreds of believers during the reporting period, and villages and churches burned to the ground. Additionally, in parts of northern Nigeria, Christians are treated as second-class citizens. Christians from Muslim backgrounds face persecution from their own families.

## Prayer points

- Pray for Christians in the middle of Nigeria, who are facing increased hostility and attacks from Hausa-Fulani Muslim militant herdsmen.
- Pray for Fulani militants, the members of Boko Haram and other extremist groups. Pray that God will touch their hearts with His truth.
- Often, the government of Nigeria has been accused of being slow or unwilling to address attacks against Christians. Pray for courage and for peace.

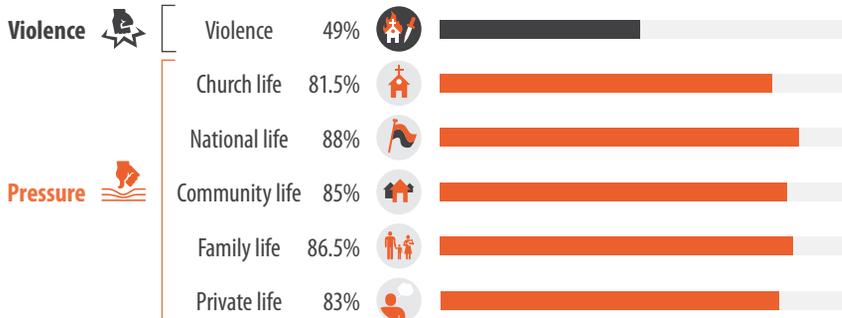
13

# Iraq

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 39,340,000  
**Christians** 225,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Federal republic  
**Leader** Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Rebuilding but not recovered from Islamic extremism

In Iraq, the territorial defeat of ISIS reduced the level of persecution across the country. However, threats from extremist groups make it difficult for returning Christians to feel safe and secure. In fact, the number of Christians killed during the reporting period slightly increased, and Christians continue to be physically or mentally harmed, threatened and harassed. This is especially true for Christians from Muslim backgrounds.

## Prayer points

- Pray for the next generation of Christians in Iraq to find hope and security to remain in their country as salt and light.
- Thank God for the many internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been able to return to their villages and rebuild their homes in the Nineveh Plain.
- Pray for priests and pastors ministering in Iraq, that they might be living examples of Christ's presence.

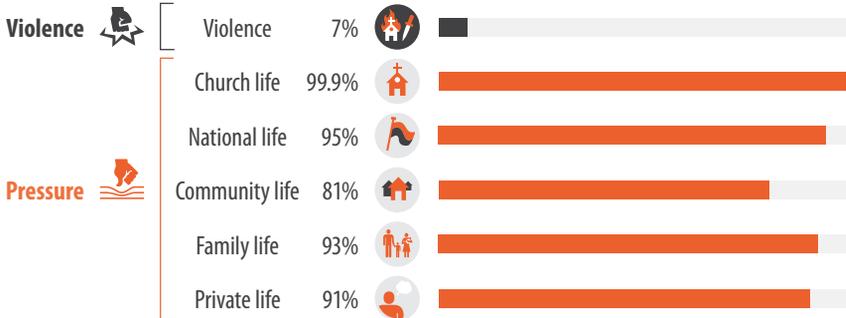
14

# Maldives

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 444,000  
**Christians** A few thousand  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Radical Muslims control society

The government insists that the country has to be run according to conservative Islamic tenets. Religious freedom does not extend to citizens, but expatriate Christians are allowed to practice their faith in the utmost privacy. Radical Islamic preachers exert strong control over social life, making it impossible for Christians to publicly acknowledge their Christian faith due to fear of being monitored and arrested.

## Prayer points

- Pray that street gangs, who are often aligned with radical Muslim leaders, stop targeting Christians with violence.
- Pray that Christians would have access to Bibles, which must remain hidden due to risk of imprisonment.
- Pray the government will back away from its insistence that a person can only be Maldivian if they believe in Allah.

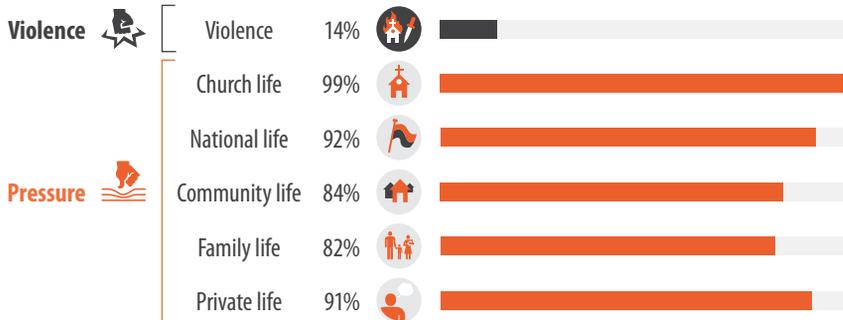
15

# Saudi Arabia

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 33,554,000  
**Christians** 1,419,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Absolute monarchy  
**Leader** King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Strict Islamic system

The state creates and maintains a strict Islamic system that treats Christians as second-class citizens and denies places of worship to any other religion than Islam. The few Saudi Christians from a Muslim background face even more pressure. Nevertheless, the small number of Saudi Christians increased over 2018. They are also becoming bolder, sharing their Christian faith with others on the internet and Christian satellite TV channels.

## Prayer points

- Pray that Saudis who recently embraced the truth of the gospel would become strong and mature in the Lord.
- Pray that Christian Saudis will find ways to share the truth with their own family members.
- Ask God to strengthen this growing church and give believers both boldness and discernment in the face of intense Islamic oppression.



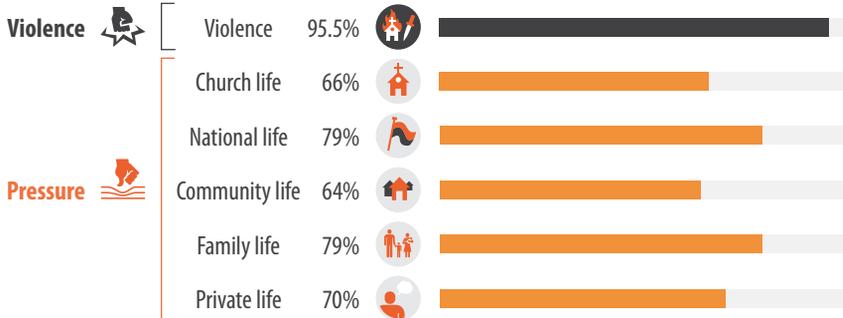
16

# Egypt

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 99,376,000  
**Christians** 9,937,600  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Multi-faceted persecution

Egyptian Christians suffer from persecution in various ways. Those with Muslim backgrounds face enormous pressure from immediate and extended families to return to Islam. Severe restrictions on building or securing places for worship prevent Christians from congregating, in addition to hostility and violence toward believers who do gather. In recent years, Islamic extremist groups have targeted Christians and churches in numerous violent and deadly acts of persecution.

## Prayer points

- Pray with Christian converts who are disowned and rejected by their families for leaving Islam. Ask God to provide for their needs and bring them comfort.
- Pray with Egyptian Christians for boldness and passion as they continue to build the church in the face of discrimination, loss and violence.
- Pray that God would bring even the leaders of Islamist extremist groups to Christ, that they might be used for His purposes.

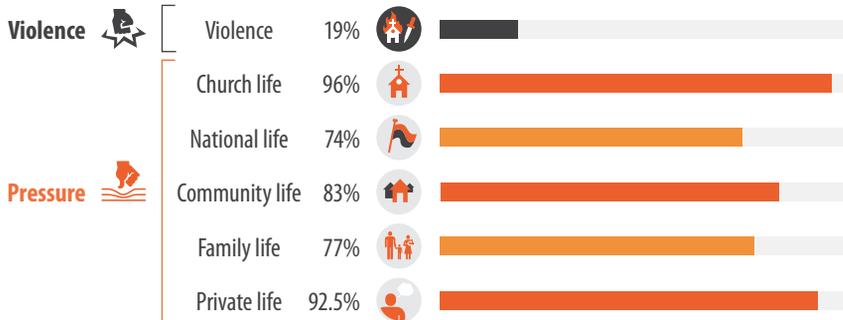
17

# Uzbekistan

**Source of persecution** Dictatorial paranoia  
**Population** 32,365,000  
**Christians** 349,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Shavkat Mirziyoyev

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Living under an authoritarian regime

Uzbekistan continues to be the Central Asian country with the most severe religious freedom restrictions. The police, secret service and *mahalla* local authorities strictly monitor religious activities, with state authorities regularly raiding non-registered churches. In general, the Islamic culture makes life for Christian converts particularly difficult, but indigenous Christians with a Muslim background bear the brunt of persecution from the state and family, friends and community.

## Prayer points

- Pray with Christian converts for protection and courage to live life as Christians in the hostile Muslim society.
- Pray with Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals who are threatened, raided, fined and arrested. No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed.
- Pray with believers who are living under house arrest, ridiculed and often attacked by their families.



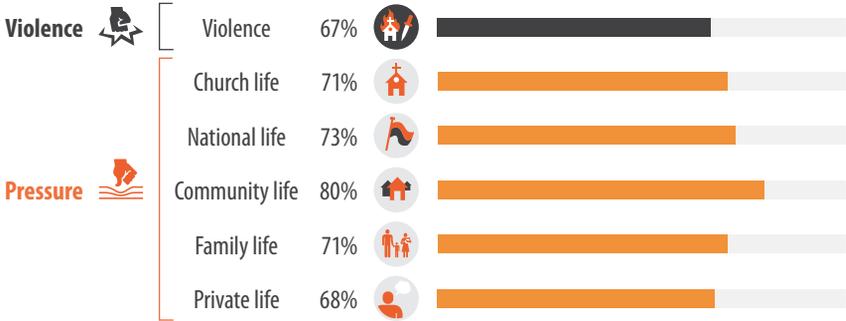
18

# Myanmar

**Source of persecution** Religious nationalism  
**Population** 53,856,000  
**Christians** 4,342,000  
**Main religion** Buddhism  
**Government** Parliamentary republic  
**Leader** President Win Myint

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Humanitarian and religious crises

Over the last year, Myanmar Christians have seen their churches closed and burned as the communist-inspired UWS Army also detained and abducted believers, including forcibly recruiting more than 40 Bible students into its ranks. More than 100,000 Christians live in IDP camps, deprived of access to food and health care. And radical Buddhist monks have invaded church properties and built Buddhist shrines on church premises.

### Prayer points

- Pray with persecuted Christian minorities, that they would sense millions of Christians around the globe lifting them up.
- Pray with Myanmar Christian women as they participate in discipleship workshops. Ask God to show them His Word in relevant ways.
- Christian converts face strong pressure to recant their faith. Pray these believers would have courage in the face of persecution.



Photo by Francisco Anzola

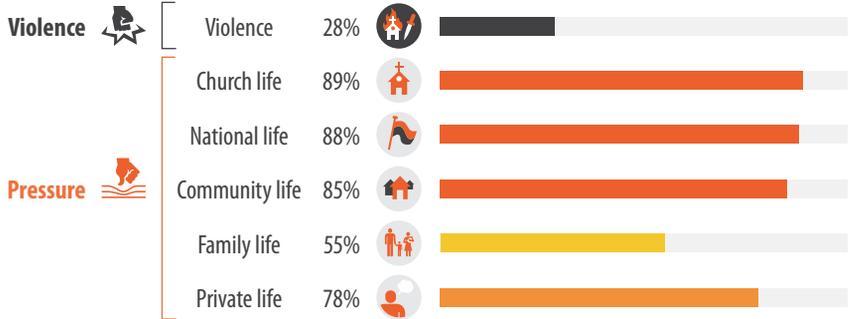
# 19

# Laos

**Source of persecution** Communist and post-communist oppression  
**Population** 6,961,000  
**Christians** 225,000  
**Main religion** Buddhism  
**Government** Communist state  
**Leader** President Bounnhang Vorachith

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Communism and violence increasing

In one of the world's poorest countries, communism is growing bolder again, as authorities heavily monitor all religious activities, including those of registered Christian churches. House churches are forced to operate illegally. Violence against Christians increased in 2018 with provincial and local authorities often cooperating with community leaders like Buddhist monks to pressure Christians, especially converts.

### Prayer points

- Pray for protection of Laotian Christians as violence against them increases. Ask God to give them discernment as they pursue Him.
- Pray for religious freedom to increase and that house churches would be able to register and operate legally.
- Pray that Christians would have wisdom in witnessing to their Buddhist neighbors and family. Pray their efforts would be well received.



\*Photo by Francisco Anzola

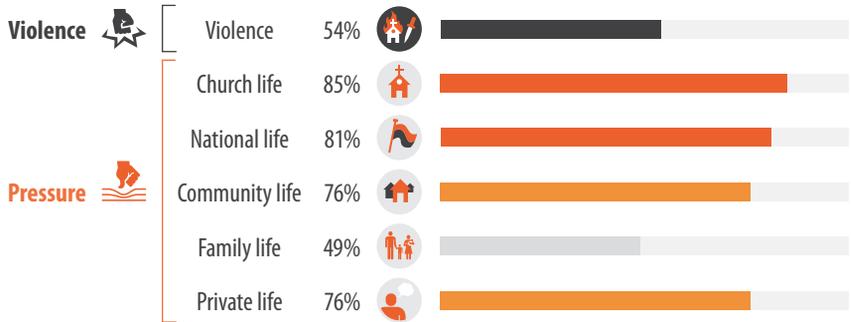
20

# Vietnam

**Source of persecution** Communist and post-communist oppression  
**Population** 96,491,000  
**Christians** 8,555,000  
**Main religion** Buddhism  
**Government** Communist state  
**Leader** President Nguyễn Phú Trọng

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Governmental paranoia, ethnic tensions

The Christian minority in Vietnam endures both state and tribal persecution. Seeing them as traitors to their cultural identity, village leaders exclude Christians. On the government side, historically, Christian communities have more freedom—but if they become politically active, they are targeted by authorities. And in the rural areas of central and northern Vietnam, converts from folk religion and non-traditional Protestants are intensely persecuted.

### Prayer points

- Pray with disciple leaders to nurture the many ethnic minorities coming to faith in rural areas.
- Pray for protection for church leaders who face persecution from both their family and state authorities.
- As the Christian minority grows, the government works hard to monitor churches. Pray for a loosening of restrictions and increased freedom.

# Pakistan

## A letter from an anonymous Christian

Not too long ago, I went for a walk around the corner from our church. It was cold, and I was hungry. I wanted some lentils and rice. A man sold it next to the road from his food cart. I went to the cart and asked for a plate. While I was searching for the money in my wallet, the man who owned the cart recognized me. "Are you one of those who go to that church?" he asked.

I was so pleased he recognized me as a member of the church. The pleasure was short lived. When I said yes, he slammed the plate down and told me to go and get a plastic bag. "I cannot let you eat off my plate," he said. "Others have to eat on this. **I cannot let you defile my plates.**"

My heart was so broken. I left the food there and walked home, crying. I felt sad ... and silly.

As Pakistani Christians, we all know where we belong in this society, and yet at the age of 26 it still hurt me so much. I felt homeless, even though my home was around the corner. I felt like a nobody, even though my parents and friends were all around me. **I felt rejected**, even though I knew Christ died for me.

But this is where I heal: when I am able to show my love for others and demonstrate Jesus through the pain. Please pray we will continue to reach out to the rejected, the dispossessed and the lonely. This is the story of nearly 15 million people who are called Christians in Pakistan. **I am their story. They are my story.**

Thanks to your prayers and support, **you are part of our story.**



21

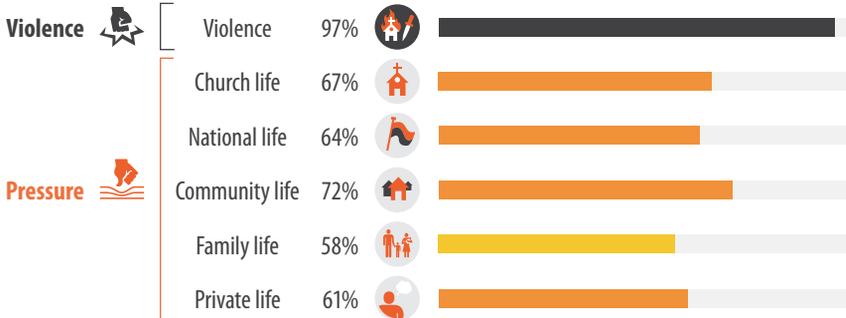
# Central African Republic

(CAR)

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 4,737,000  
**Christians** 3,456,000  
**Main religion** Christianity  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Faustin-Archange Touadéra

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Threats from jihadist and criminal groups

Over the last year, the situation has worsened for CAR Christians who face intensifying pressure from Muslims. Christians are also threatened by jihadists and criminal groups in the country whose actions often overlap. And Christian civilians are still caught in the violent conflict between the mainly Muslim Seleka and self-defense militant groups called anti-Balaka. CAR continues to be mired in anarchy.

## Prayer points

- Pray with Christians targeted by Fulani militants and Muslim terrorists. Pray that they will know God's peace and provision in the midst of earthly chaos and loss of possessions.
- Pray for the wisdom of pastors as they minister to their congregations in the face of violence and ongoing bloodshed.
- Pray that the eyes and hearts of jihadists, criminal groups and Fulani militants will be opened to Jesus.

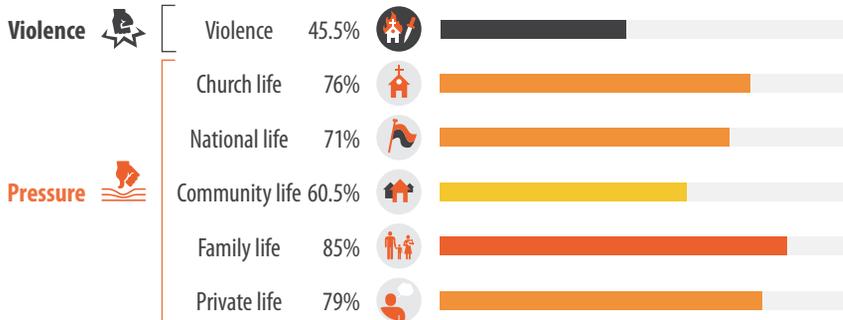
22

# Algeria

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 42,008,000  
**Christians** 125,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Abdelaziz Bouteflika

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Numerous church closures and Muslim backlash

Over the last year, Algeria has seen an increasing number of churches closed. At the same time, Christian converts have become more open about their faith, leading to a backlash by Muslim families and the intolerant society. Laws regulating non-Muslim worship, banning conversion and prohibiting blasphemy make proselytizing and public expression of the Christian faith dangerous as well.

## Prayer points

- Pray with pastors whose churches have been closed, that they would continue to follow the calling God has given them.
- Pray that new believers will stand strong, continuing to be bold, yet discerning, in their witness.
- Pray for protection for Christians who are persecuted by their families and Muslim society.

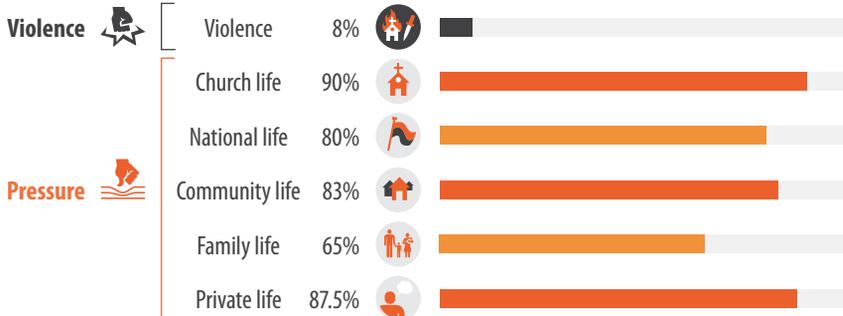
23

# Turkmenistan

**Source of persecution** Dictatorial paranoia  
**Population** 5,851,000  
**Christians** 69,800  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Always being watched

Turkmenistan is extremely repressive for religious minorities. The police, secret services and local authorities monitor religious activities, raid non-registered churches and infiltrate church services. The Islamic culture makes life for converts to Christianity particularly difficult, and the government restricts Christian materials. Given increased nationalism and the views of the dictatorial president, the pressure on Christians in this former Soviet republic will likely remain high.

## Prayer points

- Turkmenistan is considered one of the most restrictive countries in the world. Pray for increased freedoms in the country.
- Pray for believers who are former Muslims. They are fiercely pressured to return to Islam. Pray for protection and endurance.
- Pray for those who are monitoring Christians to encounter the gospel in miraculous and Kingdom-building ways.



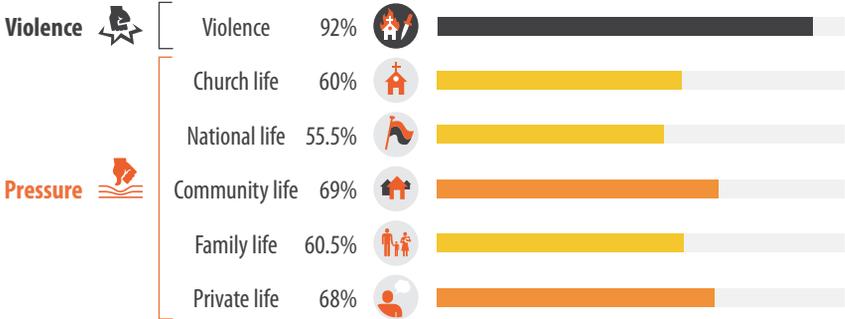
24

# Mali

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 19,108,000  
**Christians** 425,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Semi-presidential republic  
**Leader** President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Intensifying violence

While the majority of Malians traditionally practice a relatively tolerant version of Islam, the West African country has become increasingly militant. In the northern part of the country especially, this intolerance has resulted in increasing violence against Christians from jihadist and criminal groups that have a vested interest in keeping the country mired in chaos and instability.

### Prayer points

- Driven by terrorist attacks, violence in Mali has increased substantially. Pray for peace over this country.
- Pray with Christians who have been displaced from their homes in northern Mali by Islamic militants.
- Pray with new believers who left Islam to follow Jesus. They report it is becoming increasingly difficult to practice their faith.



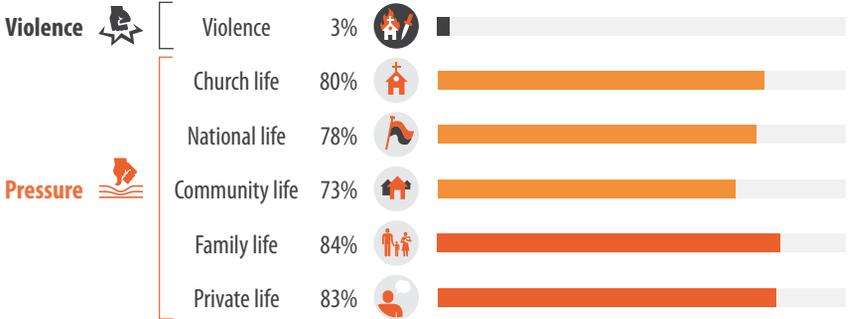
25

# Mauritania

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 4,540,000  
**Christians** 10,100  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Hatred toward non-Muslims

The “Islamic Republic of Mauritania”—the autocratic government of Africa’s 11th largest country—often acts as protector of the Islamic religion. As a result, the state is a major source of persecution. Radical Islamic preachers and militants contribute to the radicalization of society, fueling antagonism and hatred toward non-Muslims. Additionally, a caste system marginalizes darker-skinned Mauritians and those who do not adhere to Islam.

### Prayer points

- Pray for illiterate believers of Mauritania as they seek God with limited access to Scripture.
- Pray for new business initiatives in Mauritania intended to financially help believers while also disciplining them.
- Pray for forgiveness and change in unjust social structures and attitudes in this racially divided time in Mauritania’s history.



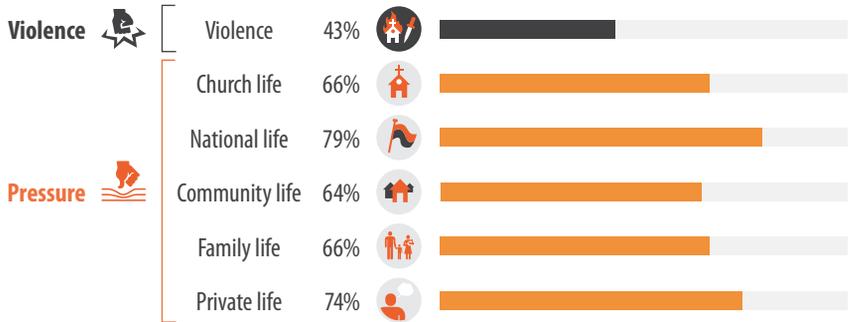
26

# Turkey

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 81,917,000  
**Christians** 194,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Parliamentary republic  
**Leader** President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Increasing dictatorial power

Over the last year, the situation in Turkey has deteriorated significantly for Christians as President Erdogan's powers grow. Churches there try to maintain a low profile, especially after the two-year case of U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson who was unjustly jailed there and released in late 2018. Religious nationalism continues to grow to new heights.

### Prayer points

- Pray with persecuted believers, that they would put all their hope and trust in God.
- Pray with Christians who left Islam to follow Jesus. Ask God to give them discernment and words to minister graciously and wisely to their families and neighbors.
- Pray for those who are labeled and treated as traitors after embracing the Christian faith.



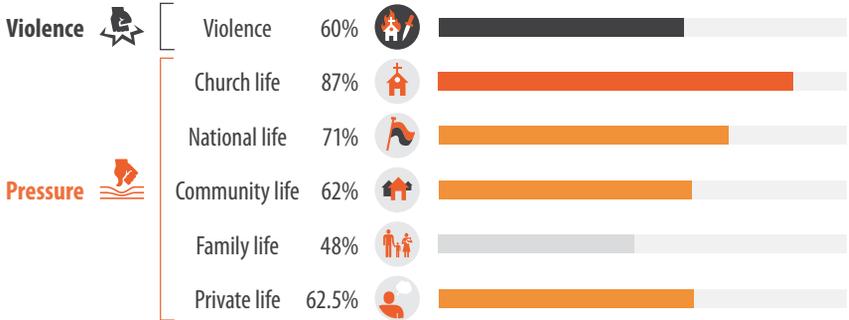
27

# China

**Source of persecution** Communist and post-communist oppression  
**Population** 1,415,046,000  
**Christians** 97,200,000  
**Main religion** Atheism/other  
**Government** Communist state  
**Leader** President Xi Jinping

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Crackdowns on religious freedom

The management of religious affairs lies with the Communist Party now, not just with government, and Christians are feeling this strongly. Crackdowns against Christians happen country-wide and in both state-approved and non-registered churches. The youth are increasingly being removed from church life, worship is monitored via CCTV and spies, and teachers and medical workers are told they are not allowed to have any religious affiliation.

## Prayer points

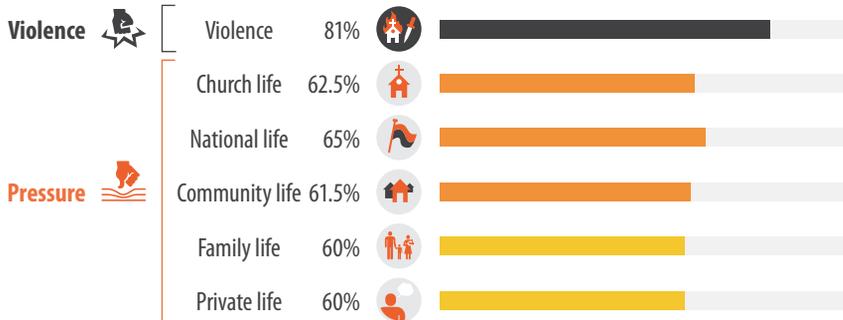
- Pray for the growth of believers from minority people groups that are from Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds.
- Pray for Chinese Christians to stand strong amidst tightening religious restrictions and to engage in cross-cultural missions effectively.
- Pray that Christ will reveal Himself to government officials who seek to control the church.

# Ethiopia

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 107,535,000  
**Christians** 64,037,000  
**Main religion** Christianity  
**Government** Federal republic  
**Leader** President Sahle-Work Zewde

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Expanding Islam and Christian targets

In Ethiopia, radical Islam is growing at the local, regional and national levels. Particularly in the rural areas, where Muslims are the majority, Christians are harassed and often denied access to communal resources. The new prime minister has spurred hope for Christians regarding the future of Ethiopia, but the government is not in control of the entire country. In those areas where control is lacking, Christians are still targeted.

## Prayer points

- Pray for the government to investigate violence perpetrated against Christians and bring those who are responsible to justice.
- Pray for greater freedom for the Church in Ethiopia, and for God to reveal His truth to Ethiopian government officials.
- Christians are often denied resources and discriminated against when looking for work. Pray the Lord would provide for persecuted believers.

29

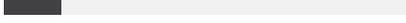
# Tajikistan

**Source of persecution** Dictatorial paranoia  
**Population** 9,107,000  
**Christians** 61,700  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Emomali Rahmon

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data

**Violence** 

Violence 14%  

Church life 77%  

National life 73%  

**Pressure** 

Community life 70%  

Family life 71%  

Private life 82.5%  

## Restrictions and raids

Tajikistan's government imposes restrictive legislation, and local authorities monitor religious meetings, detain believers, raid church meetings and confiscate religious materials. The government puts heavy pressure on all "deviating" groups, including Christians. By tightening existing laws and strictly enforcing them, the government puts additional pressure on the Christian minority. Another source of persecution comes from the Muslim community that objects to Christians evangelizing among Muslims.

## Prayer points

- Pray for bold faith for Christians who are under surveillance by authorities and are beaten and pressured to renounce their faith.
- Pray for church leaders who are faced with the stress and anxiety of raids and arrests. Ask God to give them courage, wisdom and discernment.
- Pray that governmental pressure would lessen and the country would become more open to Christianity.

# Eritrea

## Surviving by the grace of God

Aster\* is married and is the mother of four. Sadly, her pastor-husband was imprisoned for worshiping outside of state-recognized churches in Eritrea. “We lived with love and served the Lord together,” Aster recalls. “We were full of happiness and joy.”

Since then, however, the responsibility to provide for her family has fallen squarely on Aster’s shoulders.

With the pressing needs of their family, they had no way to financially prepare for her husband’s arrest. “We had nothing at that time,” Aster remembers. “Even the rent was not paid, and we had no savings. I was very worried and felt so alone. **It felt like I was the only one** who knew what I was going through.”

She and her children continue to face social pressure for their faith in Christ. “My oldest child is always bullied and insulted about her faith,” Aster says. “She was given three warnings from the school for sharing her faith and she was told not to talk to any children even during school breaks.”

But that’s not the full story. “I am still standing, by the grace of God,” Aster testifies.

She has most felt His grace through the help the Lord sent her through her church family (which has been enabled, in part, by Open Doors’ support). “Had it not been for that, I don’t know what would have become of us,” Aster says.

For Aster, seeing her children experience God’s grace has kept her happiness alive. “**God has taught us a lot.** We continued the Bible study my husband started before he went to prison,” she says. “We want you to pray for our suffering to end and for courage to overcome all the problems we face. Pray fervently that we get to worship God freely in our country. **Keep praying for us.**”

*\*Name changed to preserve security.*



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# Indonesia

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 266,795,000  
**Christians** 32,379,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** Joko Widodo

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data

**Violence** 

Violence 72%  

Church life 56%  

National life 61%  

**Pressure** 

Community life 68%  

Family life 66%  

Private life 64%  

## Violence and the influence of radical Islam

Attacks against three churches in Surabaya in May almost doubled the violence score for 2018. In Indonesia, conservative Muslim political parties and radical Islamic groups exert significant influence, resulting in Sharia-inspired policies and public opinion that opposes Christianity. While the government tightens the country's blasphemy laws, most problems for believers come from confrontations with radical Islamic groups.

## Prayer points

- Pray God would do an amazing work in Indonesia—home to the largest percentage of Muslims in the world—and reach many more people with the gospel.
- Pray for Christian children in public schools in strong Islamic regions who experience discrimination.
- Pray for Christian converts from Islam who are pressured to renounce Jesus.

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# Jordan

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression

**Population** 9,904,000

**Christians** 130,000

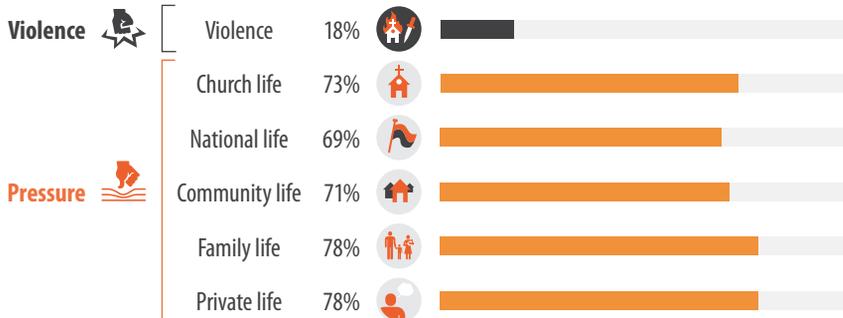
**Main religion** Islam

**Government** Parliamentary constitutional monarchy

**Leader** King Abdullah II

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Persecution of the converted

Converts to Christianity from Islam experience a great deal of persecution from all parts of Jordanian society, usually beginning at home—which can include serious violence and even killing. Radical Islamic movements are also a source of persecution for Christians and Jordanians of other religious faiths.

Christians in Jordan who belong to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom but still experience discrimination.

## Prayer points

- Pray for wisdom and courage for believers to be true disciples as a small minority in a Muslim-dominated culture.
- Pray for Christian converts interrogated by police and abused by family members. Pray the Lord would provide protection and healing.
- Pray that Muslims would be overwhelmed by the love of their Christian neighbors and begin to ask questions that draw them toward Christ.

32

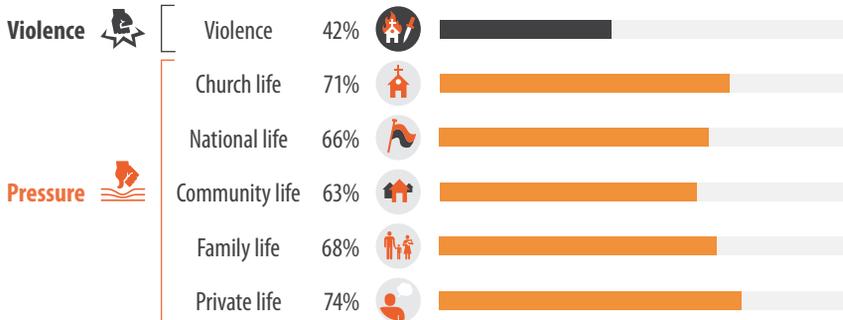
# Nepal

Photo by Francisco Anzola

**Source of persecution** Religious nationalism  
**Population** 29,624,000  
**Christians** 1,225,000  
**Main religion** Hinduism  
**Government** Federal republic  
**Leader** President Bidhya Devi Bhandari

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Religious nationalism and intense pressure

Most of the persecution of Christians in Nepal comes from Hindu radical groups. Christian converts from Hinduism are put under intense pressure for betraying the faith of their ancestors. At times, Hindu radicals take advantage of the ongoing political instability by attacking Christians—often with impunity.

Churches where foreigners gather experience the least persecution, while converts and Protestant churches are under higher levels of pressure.

## Prayer points

- Pray with converts from Hinduism, who experience persecution from their family and community and are at risk under restrictive laws. Pray for their protection and discernment to know when and where to share their faith.
- Pray with Hindu Christians who face the ever-present threat of violence and attacks from Hindu radicals. Pray for safety and for them to sense God's presence and love for them.



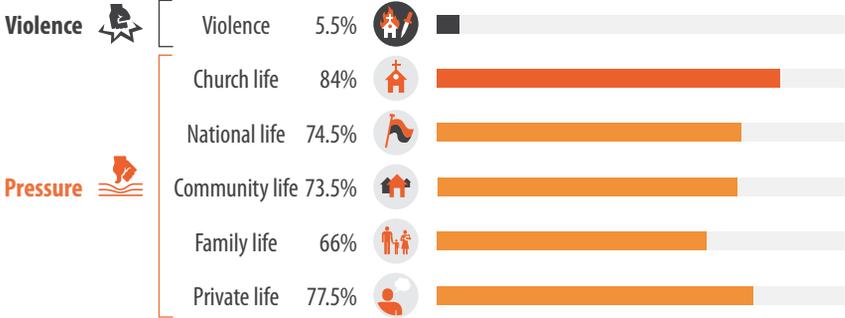
33

# Bhutan

**Source of persecution** Religious nationalism  
**Population** 817,000  
**Christians** 30,000  
**Main religion** Buddhism  
**Government** Constitutional monarchy  
**Leader** King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Buddhist nationalism makes no room for Christianity

Buddhism is part of the national fabric of Bhutan, and no Christian congregation has ever been allowed to build a church structure. The government is intent on maintaining a strong national identity and unity by suppressing “foreign” elements, including Christianity.

According to the government, the definition of Bhutanese identity is Buddhism, and it works to eliminate groups perceived as threats. Due to this, all Christian fellowship remains underground.

### Prayer points

- Pray God will protect and strengthen believers who violate anti-conversion law by leaving the Buddhist faith.
- Buddhism is enshrined in Bhutan’s constitution. Pray the Holy Spirit would loosen the hold of Buddhism on the country.
- Pray with Christian converts who face strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors to recant their faith.

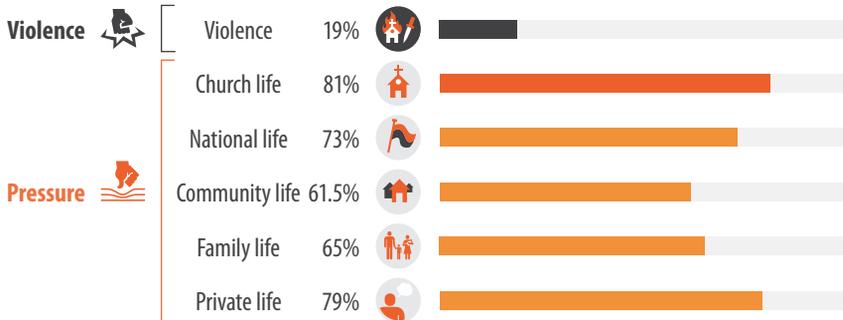
34

# Kazakhstan

**Source of persecution** Dictatorial paranoia  
**Population** 18,404,000  
**Christians** 4,576,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Nursultan Nazarbayev

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Surveillance, raids and detentions for Christians

In Kazakhstan, indigenous Christians from Muslim backgrounds bear the brunt of the persecution at the hands of authorities, families, friends and communities. The government is constantly working to maintain and increase its control over society, using surveillance, raids and detentions. Christians face nearly constant surveillance, and the threat of militant Islam is used as an excuse to restrict freedoms, resulting in worsening conditions for the Christian minority.

## Prayer points

- Pray for Kazakh believers and for church leaders, especially those pastors who lead secret churches and believers who converted from Islam. Pray for their security amid increasing restrictions and government control.
- Pray for Christians who are beaten and imprisoned for leaving Islam and turning to Christ.
- Pray for government authorities who seek to suppress or eradicate Christianity.



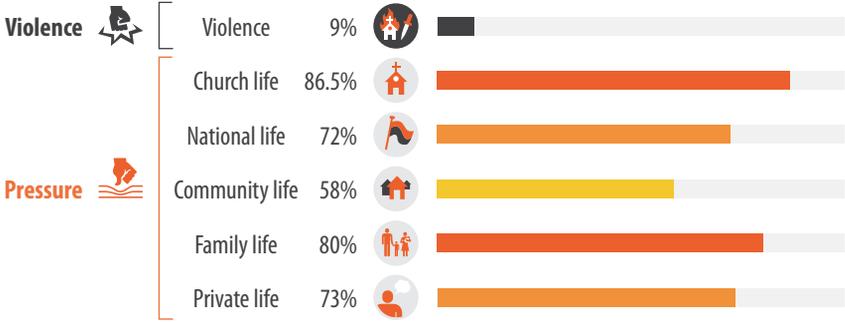
35

# Morocco

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 36,192,000  
**Christians** 31,400  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Constitutional monarchy  
**Leader** King Mohammed VI

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### An incomplete tolerance

Although Morocco is considered to be relatively tolerant, Christians suffer persecution from both the state and society. There are restrictions imposed by the state on Christians, such as confiscation of Christian materials written in Arabic, restrictions on evangelization and difficulty getting places of worship for believers from a Muslim background. Radical Muslims within the general populace also put pressure on Christians. In rural areas, pressure from family and community can also be considerable.

### Prayer points

- Pray for an openness for Christians to be able to practice their faith in peace, even if they are from a Muslim background.
- Pray for Christians who have difficulty finding a church building, that they would not be discouraged or lose their zeal for their church community.
- Pray that tolerance and peace would increase in Morocco.



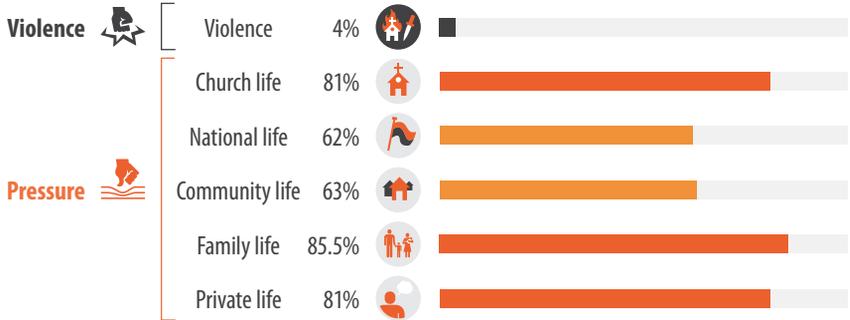
36

# Brunei

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 434,000  
**Christians** 57,400  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Sultanate  
**Leader** Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Sharia law and illegal conversions

In Brunei, conversion from Islam is illegal, so Christian converts are pressured to return to their former faith. When one family member converts to Christianity, families are forced to split up, making expression of the Christian faith an incredibly difficult decision. All of society is impacted by the continued introduction of Sharia laws—including Christians who are forced to adhere to Islamic customs and rites.

## Prayer points

- Pray that God will give Christians wisdom and courage to stand out as lights for Christ in this strict Islamic culture.
- Pray for underground believers who feel persecution strongly because the country is so small, and there is nowhere to run if their faith in Christ is exposed.
- Pray for Muslims who turn to Christ and now face strict punishment under Sharia law.



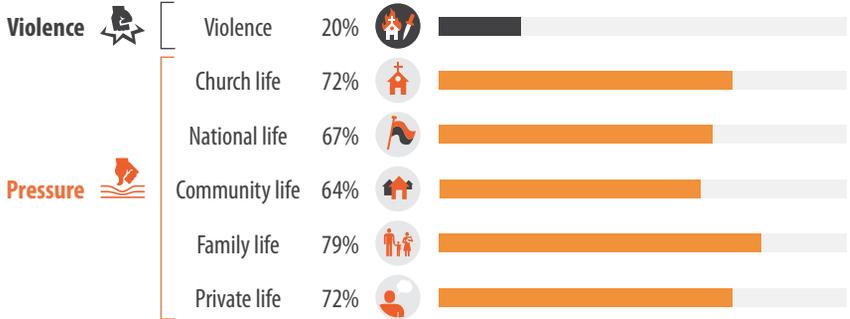
37

# Tunisia

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 11,659,000  
**Christians** 23,700  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Parliamentary republic  
**Leader** President Beji Caid Essebsi

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Hostility and pressure in Islamic society

For Christians in Tunisia, life within Islamic society comes with hostility and daily pressure. And the threat of Islamic militant activity—especially by those returning from fighting with ISIS—is still worrying, with one suicide-attack on a police station in Tunis in September and a major attack in the border region with Algeria in July 2018. Foreigners enjoy more freedom but are not permitted to evangelize.

## Prayer points

- Pray for persecuted Christian youth, especially those who face pressure from non-believing family members when they want to marry.
- Pray persecuted believers will feel God's presence. Many lose hope and don't know how to move forward with their lives.
- Pray the Lord will hinder the plans of Islamic extremists and draw them to Jesus.



38

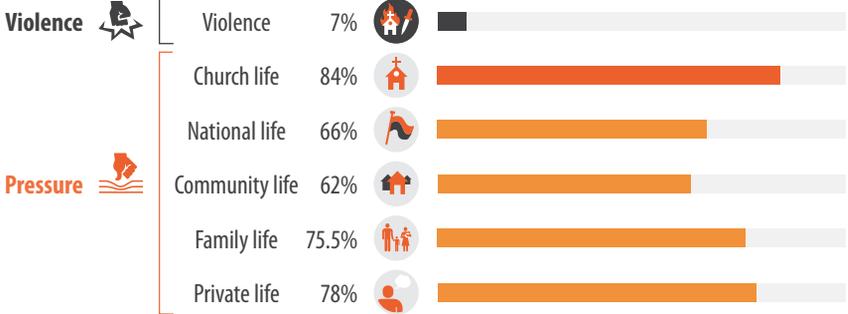
# Qatar

Photo by Francisco Anzola

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 2,695,000  
**Christians** 220,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Absolute monarchy  
**Leader** Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### Sharia law rules life and community

Conservative Islamic norms bind Qatar's society. Christians experience persecution at all levels of society: The government, the local community and even one's family can be dangerous for Christians, especially for converts from Islam to Christianity. Islam is seen as the only acceptable faith, and Sharia law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. Evangelism is outlawed and can lead to a lengthy prison sentence.

### Prayer points

- Due to political differences with Saudi Arabia and its allies, Qatar has become more isolated. Pray that ways will be found to encourage believers who feel confined and alone.
- Pray for Christian migrant workers to show the love of Christ to employers who abuse them.
- Pray for Christian converts who feel they cannot share their faith with Muslim family members.

39

# Mexico

**Source of persecution** Ethnic antagonism

**Population** 130,759,000

**Christians** 125,347,000

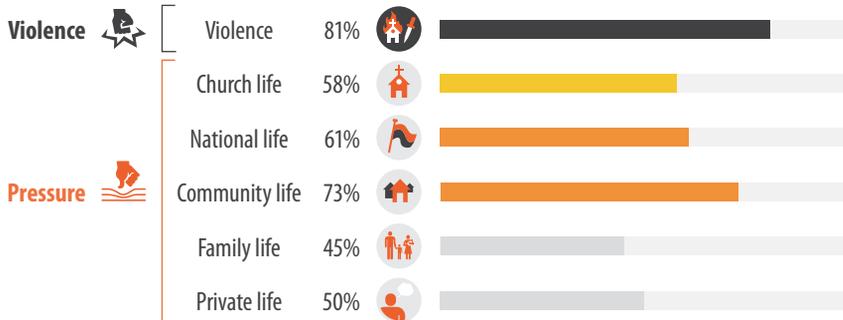
**Main religion** Christianity

**Government** Federal republic

**Leader** President Andrés Manuel López Obrador

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Organized crime goes unfronted

Due to the government's inability to confront violence, some Christians feel forced to implement their own security strategies, including engaging leaders of criminal groups themselves. Organized crime primarily targets priests and pastors, while indigenous power holders pressure Christians through fines, denying basic community service and imprisonment. The State Attorney General in Guerrero has falsely implied priests were engaged in criminal activity, further inflaming religious tensions.

## Prayer points

- Pray the international community will cooperate with indigenous authorities to protect the freedoms of members of all faiths, including Christians.
- Pray the government will confront corruption within its own ranks, so it will be more effective in addressing widespread violence.
- Pray churches find ways to ensure the safety of their leaders in violent environments that are largely controlled by drug cartels.



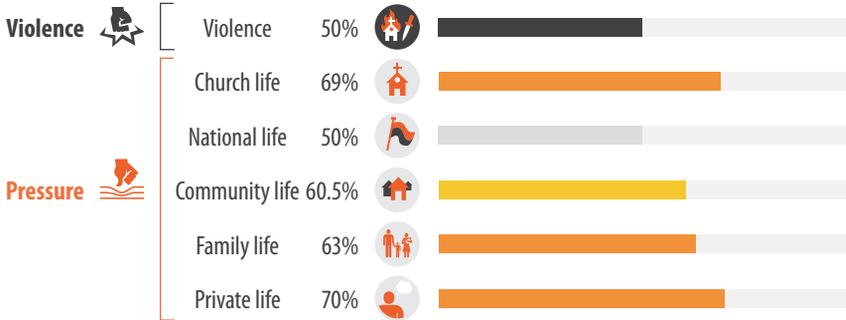
40

# Kenya

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 50,951,000  
**Christians** 41,650,000  
**Main religion** Christianity  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Government seeks to eliminate Christianity

Inspired by Islamic radicals in Somalia, Muslim politicians have made it their agenda to eliminate Christianity. Officials often demand churches do things that are not in line with their faith, while militants viciously carry out suicide bomb attacks and other brutal acts against those considered to be the enemies of Islam. Due to corruption inside the government agencies, those operating against Christians tragically often enjoy impunity.

## Prayer points

- Pray for believers who risk being attacked by their own family members and neighbors if their conversion is revealed.
- Pray the government will keep their vows to bring perpetrators of violence against Christians to justice.
- Pray for Christian leaders who knowingly take on great risk to operate churches or share their faith.

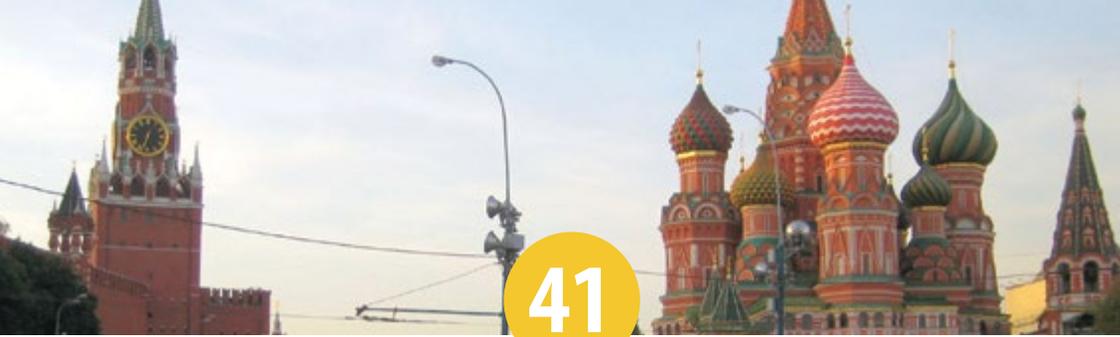


Photo by Francisco Anzola

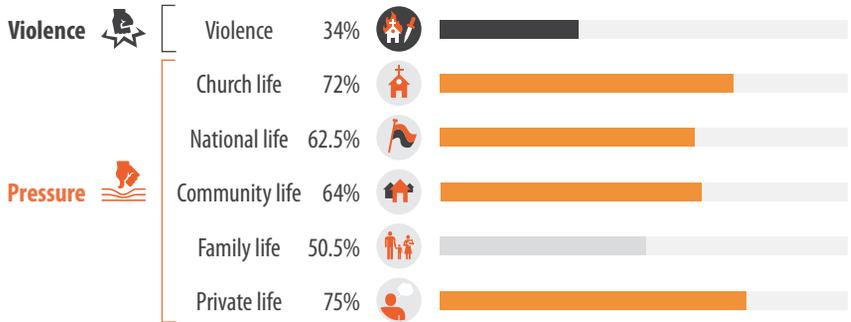
41

# Russian Federation

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 143,965,000  
**Christians** 118,127,000  
**Main religion** Christianity  
**Government** Semi-presidential federation  
**Leader** President Vladimir Putin

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Regional persecution, state control

Christians in parts of Russia dominated by Islam report the highest level of persecution. Often, Christians who have converted from Islam face pressure and discrimination from their families, communities and surrounding cultures. Additionally, an increase in state control has resulted in more tight controls for any Christian denomination seen as non-Russian, which means evangelical churches are often regarded with suspicion. More restrictive legislation on religious freedom continues to be passed by the government.

## Prayer points

- Pray for the unity of Christians in Russia, that they would break through denominational differences and work together for the Body of Christ.
- Pray for Christians from a Muslim background living in parts of Russia that are mostly Muslim. Pray for protection and strength to persevere.
- Pray for the government of Russia, that they would seek the common good of all people and all faiths.

42

# Malaysia

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression

**Population** 32,042,000

**Christians** 2,946,000

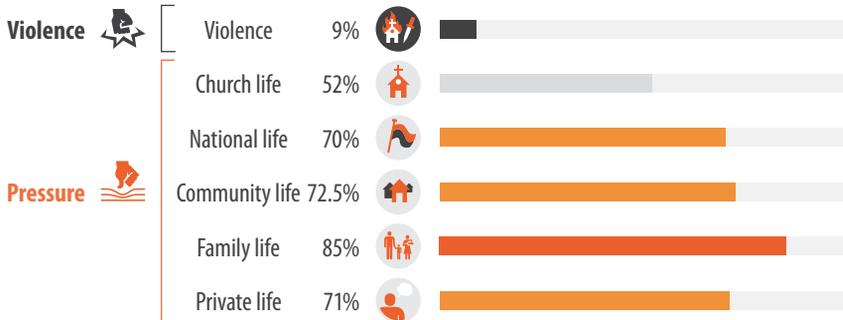
**Main religion** Islam

**Government** Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy

**Leader** King Muhammad V

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## A cautious hope

Christians and other minorities are hopeful that life under their new, more moderate government will improve. However, the Constitution still prohibits converting from Islam to other religions and the courts still often favor Muslims over minority group members in legal matters, such as divorce or child custody. In addition, women who convert are often threatened with rape or forced marriage.

## Prayer points

- Pray for Christian children who are required to attend Islamic education courses required by state-run schools.
- Pray the new government will pursue those responsible for the abduction of three Christian workers abducted in 2016 and 2017.
- Pray for Evangelical, Baptist, Pentecostal and other groups who face monitoring, intimidation and harassment.

# Algeria

## Ibrahim's story

"I didn't make my faith known to my wife, nor to my children. I was too afraid they would take them away from me," Ibrahim\* says. Ibrahim is an Algerian man in his mid-30s, and he is a Christian in a place that is hard to be a Christian—especially when one has converted from Islam, as Ibrahim did.

After his conversion, to the outside world, nothing had changed. He visited the mosque and said Islamic prayers. "After being a believer for some time," he says, "I felt I had to be open about my faith, to confess my conversion to my family."

Ibrahim decided to first tell his father that he had become a Christian. "My father just stared at me and kept silent for about 15 minutes," he says. "Then he rose from his chair and gathered all my brothers and sisters. My brothers started beating me. They shouted: 'You will renounce your faith.'"

While they were beating him up, his children were there, witnessing everything. "My parents threatened that they would take my wife and children away from me if I didn't renounce my Christian faith," Ibrahim remembers. "My children started crying, and screamed, 'Daddy, Daddy, please renounce your Christian faith, return to Islam, so you can always be our father.'"

Ibrahim was forced to leave his wife and children and found refuge in the house of a pastor. He stayed there for three months, living with believers. He learned about the Bible and about living as a Christian.

"To my surprise, after three months, my father called," he says. "'Take back your wife and children, but leave the house,' he said."

The children are still young and are happy to be with Ibrahim again. His wife is a Muslim, but she is not against Ibrahim's new faith. "For her, the most important thing is that we are together again as a family," Ibrahim says. "I am not afraid, but my wife and son are worried. I sometimes don't find the words to comfort and encourage them. That is the burden we bear in Algeria."

*\*Name changed to preserve security.*



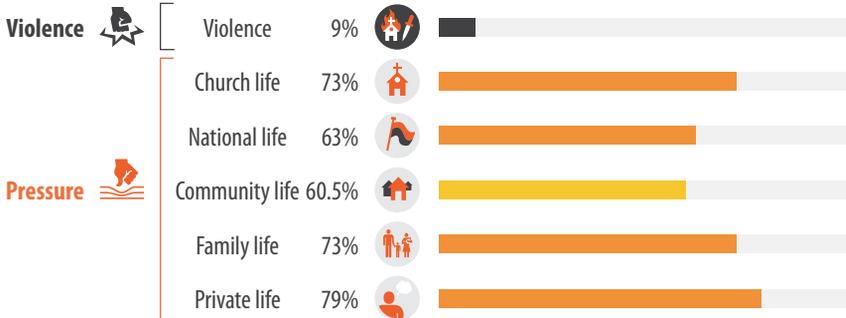
43

# Kuwait

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 4,197,000  
**Christians** 436,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Constitutional monarchy  
**Leader** Amir Sabah Ahmad al-Sabah

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Islam still shapes public life

While Kuwait upholds many human rights suggested by the United Nations, their constitution is full of contradictions when it comes to religious freedom. Violence against Christians has decreased, but Kuwait still prohibits religious expression that violates Islamic customs. For example, criticizing Islam or the Prophet Muhammad will lead to public prosecution. Despite a reported decrease in fear of Islamic radicalism, some Kuwaitis are joining ISIS.

## Prayer points

- Pray there is a decrease in Islamic radicalism, which is currently on the rise.
- Pray churches would gain access to property and buildings, which are extremely scarce.
- Pray the current government will work toward greater freedom of religious expression, freedom of the press and freedom of association.

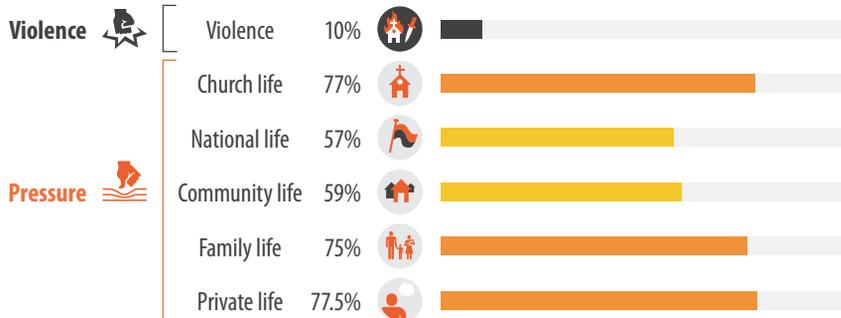
44

# Oman

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 4,830,000  
**Christians** 198,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Absolute monarchy  
**Leader** Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Peaceful, but still concerned

In Oman, most Muslims subscribe to a moderate, non-violent school of Islam. However, families do shun those who leave Islam and tribal traditions do sometimes force Islamic values on Christians. The current sultan is credited with maintaining peace, but his health is deteriorating. There is fear radical Muslims could succeed him and use contradictions in the country's constitution to enforce strict Sharia law.

## Prayer points

- Pray Christians will feel complete religious freedom and no longer face social discrimination.
- Pray the sultan will continue to encourage peace and non-violence.
- Pray that whoever succeeds the sultan will maintain the current tolerance.

45

# United Arab Emirates

(UAE)

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression

**Population** 9,542,000

**Christians** 1,226,000

**Main religion** Islam

**Government** Federation of monarchies

**Leader** President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data

**Violence**



Violence 11%

Church life 73%

National life 63%

**Pressure**



Community life 54%

Family life 72%

Private life 77%

## Christian converts face penalties

Because Islam dominates public life, Christian converts often lose their inheritance and parental rights, are forced to marry, are fired or are required to work for free. To avoid the death penalty or other penalties, Christian converts often feel like they must hide their faith or flee to another country. Evangelism is also prohibited, but non-Muslims can worship in dedicated buildings or private homes.

## Prayer points

- Pray that more buildings will be made available for Christians to gather to worship.
- Pray the government-run internet providers stop blocking websites affiliated with Christianity.
- Pray Christians would find new opportunities to share their faith even while evangelism is prohibited.

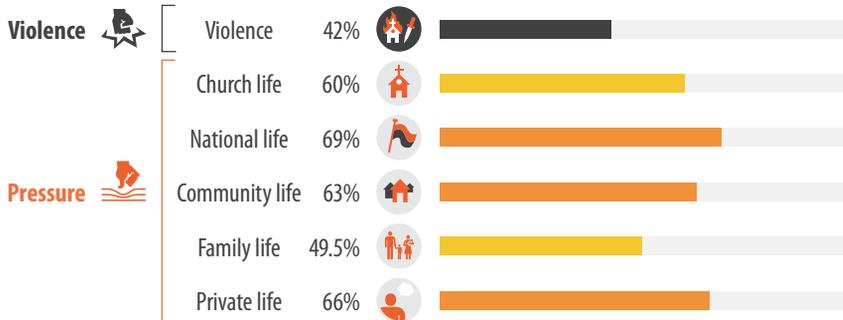
46

# Sri Lanka

**Source of persecution** Religious nationalism  
**Population** 20,950,000  
**Christians** 1,962,000  
**Main religion** Buddhism  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Maithripala Sirisena

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Radical Buddhism opposes converts

Those who convert to Christianity from a Buddhist or Hindu background are subject to harassment and discrimination by family and community. They are put under pressure to recant Christianity. Additionally, Christian churches are frequently targeted by neighbors, and local officials sometimes demand they close their buildings, which they regard as illegal. This repeatedly leads to mobs protesting against and attacking churches, especially in rural areas.

## Prayer points

- Please pray for the spiritual development of pastors in rural areas who have had little training for facing persecution.
- Pray for hundreds of displaced Christian families still struggling to survive following the civil war, which ended in 2009.
- Pray for Christian students who often have to attend mandatory Buddhist religion classes.

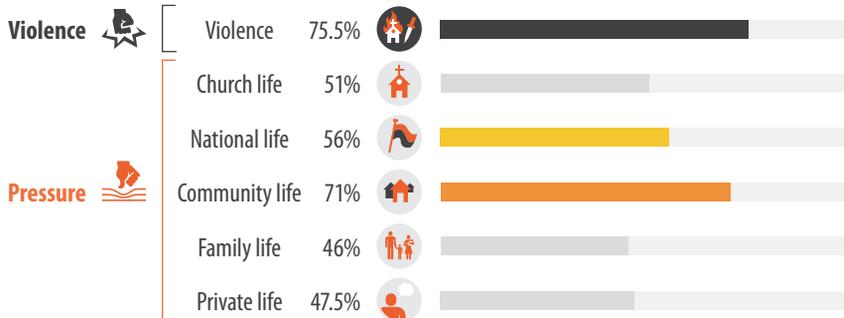
47

# Colombia

**Source of persecution** Ethnic antagonism  
**Population** 49,465,000  
**Christians** 46,955,000  
**Main religion** Christianity  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Iván Duque Márquez

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Christians live under suspicion

Church leaders are being threatened, harassed, extorted and even murdered as a result of the violence perpetrated by guerrillas or other criminal groups. Christians are also ridiculed when they try to participate in public debate, especially concerning gender, marriage and abortion. Natives who convert to Christianity and missionaries risk imprisonment, torture and the confiscation of property.

## Prayer points

- Pray for Protestant Christians who often experience less tolerance and acceptance than Roman Catholic believers.
- Pray the power of criminal guerilla groups who control entire regions will be diminished.
- Pray that government officials will stop trying to eradicate all mentions of religion from the public domain.



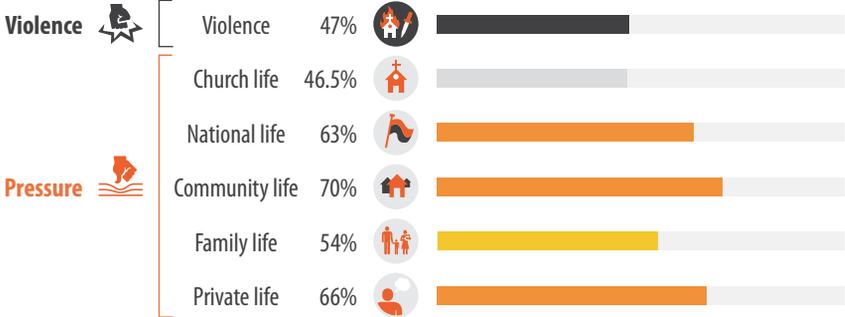
48

# Bangladesh

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 166,368,000  
**Christians** 869,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Parliamentary republic  
**Leader** President Abdul Hamid

### Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



### All Christians face threats

Those who convert to Christianity from a Muslim, Hindu or other ethnic, tribal background face the most severe persecution in Bangladesh. They often gather in small house churches or secret groups due to fear of attack. Both newer evangelistic churches and historical churches like the Roman Catholic church are increasingly faced with attacks and death threats. Tribal Christians like the Santal are twice as vulnerable because they face both ethnic and religious discrimination.

### Prayer points

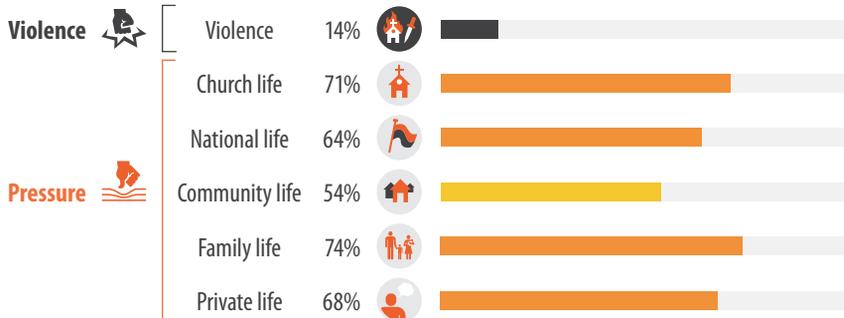
- Pray for converts who face the threat of divorce or loss of custody if their faith is discovered.
- Pray with Christian business owners who are socially boycotted or who have had to give up their shops due to pressure from the Muslim majority.
- Pray for churches who face increasing levels of monitoring by authorities.

# Palestinian Territories

**Source of persecution** Islamic oppression  
**Population** 5,053,000  
**Christians** 46,600  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Interim administration  
**Leader** President Mahmoud Abbas

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Caught in the middle

In general, Palestinian Christians face ethnic persecution from Israelis as a result of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict. All Christian groups struggle with travel and other limitations imposed by Israeli authorities. Those who convert to Christianity from Islam, however, face the worst persecution, and it is difficult for them to safely participate in existing churches. Christians also sometimes face harassment from radical Jews.

## Prayer points

- Pray that the influence of both active and “sleeping” ISIS cells will continue to be diminished over time.
- Pray for church leaders in Jerusalem who have to operate carefully to avoid losing privileges, such as easy access to visa and permits.
- Pray for the children from historic Christian communities who sometimes face discrimination in schools in Gaza.

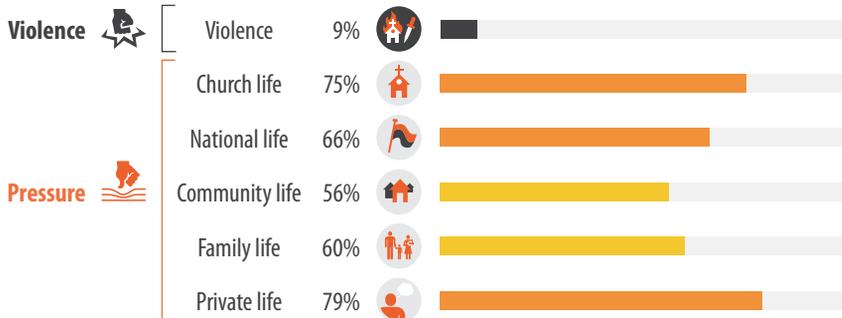
50

# Azerbaijan

**Source of persecution** Dictatorial paranoia  
**Population** 9,924,000  
**Christians** 321,000  
**Main religion** Islam  
**Government** Presidential republic  
**Leader** President Ilham Aliyev

## Profile of persecution

Based on World Watch List 2019 data



## Constant monitoring and pressure

On paper, Azerbaijan is secular and religion is tolerated. However, churches are subject to excessive surveillance by the government. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government, as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Azerbaijani population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who face the most severe persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community.

## Prayer points

- Pray specifically for those who convert to Christianity from Islam who face pressure from family, friends and community.
- Pray for non-traditional Christian communities who are required to make regular reports to the government and who are constantly monitored.
- Pray God would soften the hearts of local authorities who purposefully obstruct legal proceedings of new converts.

# Horn of Africa

## Yusuf's story

Yusuf is a Somali teenager living in East Africa—and a secret Christian. He was raised to be a good Muslim and tried to be a perfect child. He was proud of being a Muslim and **felt superior to other faiths**.



Later, Yusuf left his home village to continue his education. While he was away at school, though, he fell sick and was admitted to the hospital. Yusuf's father asked a Somali family living in the area to take Yusuf in as he recuperated. What none of them knew was that all the members of this family were followers of Jesus.

Before long, one of the brothers in his host family took him out and told him about Jesus. "Without arguing, we discussed religion for three solid days," Yusuf remembers. "Before I returned to school, he gave me some verses from the Bible to read and some information on the difference between Islam and Christianity.

"After six months, I realized I **had no more answers**. I had to admit that the Bible was the true Word of God," he continues. The next school holiday, when he visited the Christian family again, Yusuf trusted Christ.

Yusuf was baptized along with a few others who had come to Christ from Islam and were now learning about God. All of this happened in secret. "Not even my parents know I have become a Christian," he says. "When I go back home, they treat me as a Muslim. It is hard to tell them because it will shock [and embarrass] them. They'll be neglected by the community. It's not my intention to bring this kind of trouble for them."

Yusuf has high hopes for the future. "My vision is to **become an ambassador of Christ** to my community, to those who have never heard the Word of God," he explains. "Pray for me."

# CONNECT WITH YOUR PERSECUTED FAMILY

## Join us and take action

After reading through the World Watch List and learning about the 50 countries where faith costs the most, you might be asking, "What can I do to help?"

Open Doors invites you to:

**Pray** // Sign up for our Prayer Force Alert calendar and commit to praying daily with your persecuted family. You can also download our Prayer App and get up-to-the-minute prayer requests and updates from your brothers and sisters around the world. Visit [OpenDoorsUSA.org/pray](https://OpenDoorsUSA.org/pray) for more information!

**Engage** // Write a letter to a persecuted Christian and remind them they're not alone! You can also write a note on a special prayer wall, where you can see the prayers of Christians around the world. Visit [OpenDoorsUSA.org/letters](https://OpenDoorsUSA.org/letters) to let your sisters and brothers know they are part of God's global family!

**Volunteer** // Join us in serving the persecuted church by using your unique skills and calling by becoming a volunteer. Visit [OpenDoorsUSA.org/volunteer](https://OpenDoorsUSA.org/volunteer) to find out more!

**Give** // Give today and help provide Bibles, discipleship, food, medical supplies, trauma care, safe houses and much more for your persecuted family. Visit [OpenDoorsUSA.org/give](https://OpenDoorsUSA.org/give) to give today.

We want to give you multiple ways to connect with and encourage your global family! For the people of God, anything is possible. As Open Doors Founder Brother Andrew reminds us: "Any door is open, anytime and anywhere ... to proclaim Christ."





**For over 60 years, Open Doors has worked in the world's most oppressive countries, empowering Christians who are persecuted for their beliefs.**

