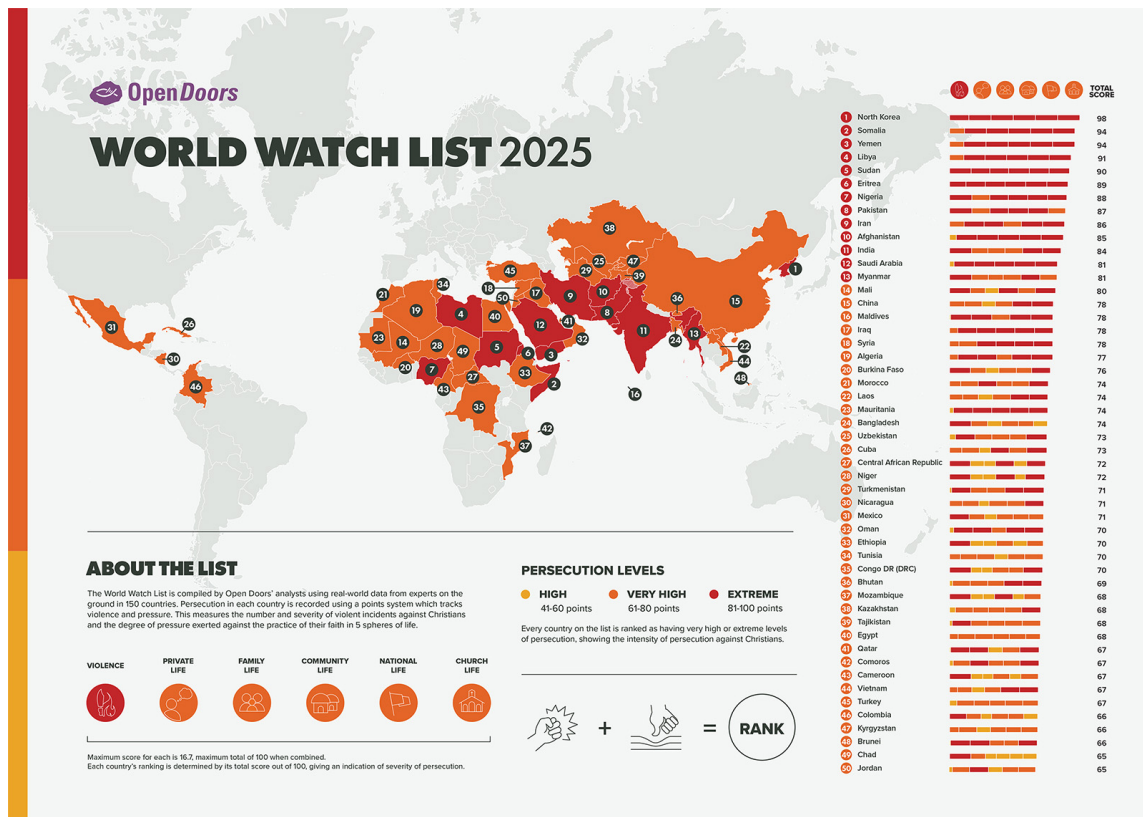


One global Christian in seven faces high-level persecution

January 15, 2025

(RNS)—Driven by Islamic extremism, authoritarian regimes and war, high-level persecution and discrimination impacted 380 million Christians around the world in 2024, according to the annual World Watch List report by the evangelical nonprofit Open Doors [released Jan. 15](#).

The World Watch List ranks the 50 countries where Christians experienced the most persecution and discrimination.



A map of the 2025 World Watch List Top 50 compiled by Open Doors. (Image courtesy of Open Doors via RNS)

The 2025 report draws concerns about escalating violence in sub-Saharan countries, authoritarian regimes targeting Christians, conflicts forcing Christians to flee their homes and churches forced underground.

North Korea topped the list for the 23rd year, followed by Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan.

The report also counted 209,771 Christians displaced because of their faith and 54,780 Christians physically or mentally abused, 10,000 of whom lived in Pakistan. In total, 1 in 7 Christians faced “high-level” persecution.

“While the numbers and rankings only partially tell the story, they do help draw the world’s attention to the 380 million believers who are suffering for their faith. This presents an opportunity for us to communicate the rest of the story,” said Ryan Brown, CEO of Open Doors US.

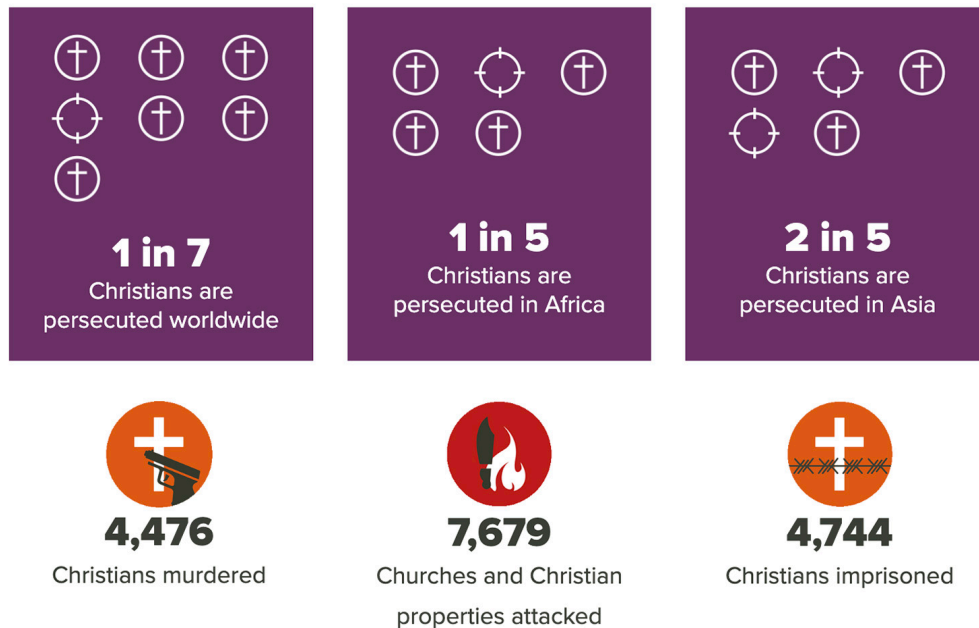
Since it debuted in 1993, the Open Doors’ World Watch List relies on data provided by on-the-ground local researchers and attributes a persecution score to countries based on the evidence collected.

How the list is determined

Countries in the “extreme” category scored between 81 and 100 points. Scores between 61 and 80 points are associated with a “very high” level of persecution, and scores between 41 and 60 with a “high” level.

The report defines persecution as “any hostile action towards a person or community motivated by their identification with the person of Jesus Christ.”

It takes into consideration insults, abuse and workplace discrimination. It also distinguishes “smashes”—cases of physical violence, bombings, shootings and sexual violence—from “squeezes”—policies and laws forcing Christians into isolation and underground practices.



(Graphic courtesy of Open Doors via RNS)

Several countries have pushed more Christians to worship underground, the report found, including Afghanistan, ranked 10th, and China, ranked 15th. World Watch List researchers found more Christians in China feared online and real-life surveillance than in previous years.

The report also mentions cases of churches facing ideological pressures and new laws enrolling pastors into indoctrination sessions.

In Eritrea, called the North Korea of Africa for its internet and phone surveillance of citizens, Christians were arrested en masse in house-to-house raids. Only certain denominations are allowed, excluding evangelicals and Christians from a Muslim background.

Algeria, ranked 19th, has forced its Protestant churches to close or operate secretly. This caused its score to decrease by 2 points, as it lowered the number of persecuted churches to observe. The report also notes the number of Christians awaiting trials and sentencing for faith-related

allegations in Algeria is at an all-time high.

The persecution score of Kyrgyzstan increased by 7 points, pushing its rank on the list to 47th, the most dramatic increase of all countries. The government there has taken an authoritarian turn and used laws against public criticism to target Christian minorities, explained the report.

In Kazakhstan, which is ranked 38th and gained 3 points on its persecution score, churches have been attacked by police and security services, and Christian women have been forced to marry Muslim men.

Like in past years, the report reiterates Islamic terrorism remains the main threat to Christian communities worldwide. In sub-Saharan countries, jihadist militants have benefited from unstable governments to seize control of specific areas.

‘Extremely-high’ sub-Saharan persecution

All 15 countries of the sub-Saharan region were among the top 50 list, and 13 had “extremely high” persecution scores.

With more than 106 million Christians, Nigeria, ranked seventh, remains “among the most urgently dangerous places for Christians on earth,” according to the report, primarily because of violent attacks by Islamic, ethnic Fulani militias in the country’s northern states. The attacks are meant to drive Christian communities off the land they farm.

According to the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa, quoted in the report, 30,880 civilians have been killed in Nigeria from 2020 to 2023, including 22,360 Christians and 8,315 Muslims.

Groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province also remain influential and have tightened their control over certain areas.

The report also flagged the emergence of a new armed jihadist group, Lakurawa, affiliated with the al-Qaida splinter group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, which operates on the Nigeria-Niger border.

In Burkina Faso, where armed groups control about 40 percent of the territory, a local Open Doors researcher identified as Pastor Soré described repetitive attacks against farming communities by jihadist groups that led him and his family to flee to a refugee camp.

The Sudanese civil war has dashed hopes for religious freedom and caused the world's largest hunger and displacement crisis. Out of a population of 49 million people, more than 7.7 million had fled in mid-2024.

Islamic extremists have taken the opportunity to destroy more than 100 churches and abduct and kill Christians, the report's researchers found.

Violence in India's northeastern state of Manipur has caused tens of thousands of Christians to flee their homes. India was ranked 11th for the increasing popularity of Hindu nationalism and laws that discriminate against Christians.

In Yemen, the conflict that has raged between the government and Houthi rebels since 2015 also left Christian communities more vulnerable to attacks.

In Houthi-controlled areas, Christians face numerous persecutions and also are targeted by Yemeni laws outlawing non-Muslim practices.

Since their involvement in the Israel-Gaza war, Houthi rebels have gained more power in Yemen and tightened their restrictions on churches, impeding dozens of assemblies from gathering.

The persecution of the countries ranked closer to 50th echoes much of the same occurring in the first 10.

In Chad, also located in the Sahel region, Christians are caught in the middle of a conflict opposing jihadist groups and military power. They are targeted on allegations of being affiliated with the opposing party. Chad is ranked 49th on this year's list.

While Gaza and the West Bank were not ranked, the report collected stories from there too.

Since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war, Christian communities in Gaza are on the brink of extinction, with nearly all their houses destroyed.

Christians in the West Bank, who represent about 1 percent of the population, also have been affected by stricter travel limitations imposed by the Israeli government.