

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

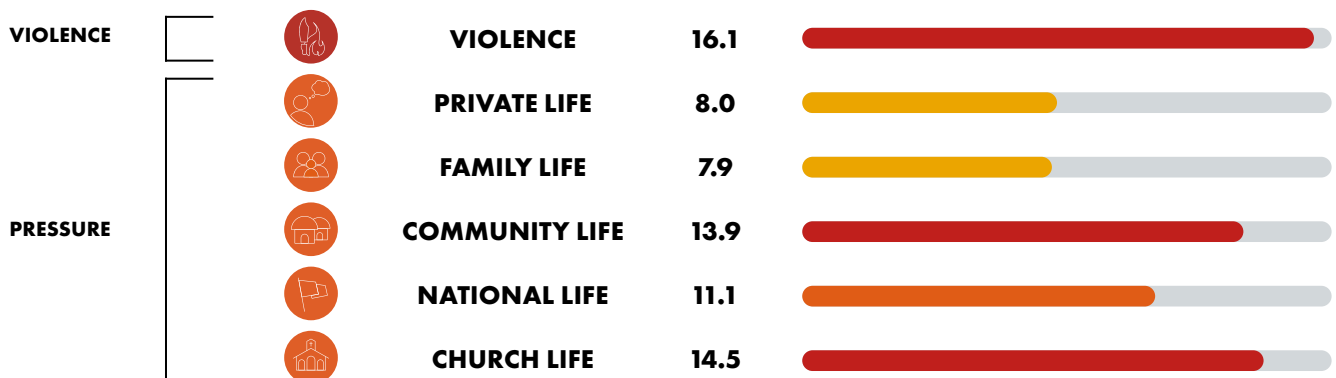
## SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**29**



#### LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

### Key findings

In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), especially North Kivu, Ituri, and parts of South Kivu, Christians face severe persecution amid violent conflict. The Islamic State–linked Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have deliberately targeted Christian communities through massacres, abductions, and the destruction of churches. Survivors report atrocities designed to erase Christian presence. The resurgence of the M23 rebel group, reportedly backed by Rwanda, has worsened conditions. M23's territorial gains in 2024-2025 have triggered mass displacement and silenced dissent. Christian leaders who criticize their actions risk abduction or disappearance. Converts from Islam or traditional religions endure social rejection, pressure to recant their faith, and exclusion from inheritance and community life. Refusal to perform traditional rites often results in intimidation. Meanwhile, Catholic and Protestant leaders who speak against state corruption or advocate for constitutionalism face threats, surveillance, and harassment. Church activities are disrupted, and clergy are publicly smeared, contributing to a climate of fear where calls for justice are systematically silenced.

## Quick facts

### LEADER

President Felix Tshisekedi

### POPULATION

109,076,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

104,159,000<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

### GOVERNMENT

Semi-presidential Republic



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## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	104,159,000	95.5
Ethnic religionists	2,467,000	2.3
Muslims	1,491,000	1.4
Others	959,000	0.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>2</sup>

DRC has endured over five decades of conflict involving a multitude of armed rebel factions. Weak state institutions and fragile rule of law have allowed grave abuses such as abductions, killings, and arbitrary detentions to persist with impunity. A long-delayed new government, led by Prime Minister Judith Suminwa, was finally sworn in on 11 June 2024. Despite the country's vast mineral wealth, economic mismanagement, inflation and corruption remain entrenched.

A 2025 [report by Freedom House](#) continues to rank DRC as “Not Free,” assigning it a score of 18/100, highlighting ongoing repression of political rights and civil liberties.

Since October 2024, eastern DRC, especially North Kivu and Ituri, has witnessed a marked surge in violence. In just one week in December 2024, ADF/IS attacks killed at least 140 people—including Christian civilians and pro-government fighters ([BBC Monitoring, 3 January 2025](#)). These brutal operations include mass killings, village burnings, kidnappings

and church bombings, explicitly aimed at Christian communities. IS-linked propaganda routinely identifies churches as priority targets. On 28 March 2025, the [European Parliament](#) adopted a resolution condemning the ADF for their targeted attacks on Christians. The resolution highlights the group's links to the Islamic State, its history of killing thousands of civilians, many of them Christians, and its role in destabilizing the resource-rich North Kivu region. It calls for accountability through the International Criminal Court, stronger support for the MONUSCO peace-keeping force, and enhanced international efforts, including the ‘Shujaa’ joint operation with Uganda, to protect Christian communities and uphold religious freedom.

At the same time, the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebel group widely reported by the UN to be backed by Rwanda, has made territorial advances around Goma ([The Independent, 4 July 2025](#)). Their presence has severely disrupted humanitarian access and civic life. In areas under M23 control, critics (particularly Christian leaders) have been arbitrarily detained, disappeared, or silenced under threat. Citizens report a climate of fear where even mild dissent can result in disappearance.

Women and girls face an elevated risk of sexual and gender-based violence, while men and boys are vulnerable to forced recruitment, abductions and execution. Pastors and outspoken believers are frequently singled out by jihadist factions for targeted attacks.

<sup>1</sup> Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

<sup>2</sup> Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

## How the situation varies by region

Christian communities in eastern DRC, particularly in North Kivu and Ituri, face distinct threats, largely shaped by armed groups. In Ituri, the ADF's violent campaign is especially brutal, with churches targeted for bombings and Christian villagers routinely abducted or massacred. In North Kivu, Christians face threats from both the ADF and the advancing M23 rebel group, which exerts control through intimidation and disappearances. South Kivu remains volatile, with a lower concentration of anti-Christian violence. Across these provinces, Christian leaders and converts from Islam or traditional beliefs endure intense communal pressure and exclusion.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

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

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Roman Catholic and Protestant communities face violations by armed groups, including attacks on churches and intimidation of clergy. During political unrest, church properties are frequently looted. From Kinshasa to Kasai and North Kivu, churches, convents, and Catholic schools have been vandalized by militias and armed youths.

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts, especially from Islam in North Kivu, face persecution from Islamist militants and social pressure from family and community. Converts from Catholicism to Protestantism or from traditional African religions also face localized hostility.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Baptist and Pentecostal churches, which are growing rapidly, are targeted by the Islamist militant ADF group. These communities also experience discrimination from members of historical churches.

## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

This is most acute in North Kivu and Ituri, where Islamist militant groups, most notably ADF, formally aligned with the Islamic State since 2018, have waged a campaign of terror against Christians. These groups explicitly target churches, Christian leaders and converts. Beyond the armed actors themselves, local populations influenced by extremist ideology also contribute to a hostile environment, making everyday life dangerous for believers. Christian villages are raided, pastors abducted, and church properties destroyed as part of a broader strategy to eradicate Christian presence.

### ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Ranked 163<sup>rd</sup> out of 180 on Transparency International's 2024 [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) (with a score of 20/100), DRC suffers from systemic corruption across government and business sectors. Christians who advocate for integrity, transparency, or denounce abuses, especially those in civil society and church leadership, often become targets of harassment, surveillance, and sometimes physical attack. Law enforcement and judiciary mechanisms remain largely compromised.

### DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Christian voices have long been suppressed under authoritarian regimes. Under Joseph Kabila, church-led protests were brutally repressed. While President Félix Tshisekedi, elected in December 2018, promised reform, progress has been limited. Security forces remain unchecked, and Christians continue to be exposed to abuse for challenging either government corruption or rebel violence. Prominent clergy who speak out face intimidation.

### CLAN OPPRESSION BLENDED WITH ETHNO-RELIGIOUS HOSTILITY

In areas such as Kisangani, Kasai and North Kivu, persecution often overlaps with ethnic tension. Some local power brokers adhere to indigenous spiritual traditions or syncretic cults that foster deep hostility toward Christianity. Converts and minority denominations are especially vulnerable in such environments.



## How are men and women differently affected?

### WOMEN

In DRC, Christian women and girls face abduction, rape, sexual slavery, trafficking, and forced marriage, especially at the hands of the Islamist militant ADF and other armed groups. Girls as young as 12 are married underage, often suffering abuse and domestic violence. Survivors of sexual violence frequently experience trauma, shame, and rejection by families or communities. The conflicts and the presence of over a hundred a-armed groups in eastern provinces have made life extremely risky for women, and many have been raped, kidnapped, and killed. Government soldiers have also been implicated.

#### Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Trafficking

- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

### MEN

Christian men are often targeted for forced recruitment, abduction, torture, and execution. Many suffer mutilation or forced labor, while others must pay ransoms, driving families into long-term poverty. Church leaders face additional risk when speaking out. Men also encounter discrimination in employment, weakening household stability and reducing the church's capacity to advocate or mobilize in times of crisis.

#### Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Trafficking
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical



## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	29	72
2025	35	70
2024	41	67
2023	37	67
2022	40	66

DRC scored 72 points in WWL 2026, two points higher than in WWL 2025, driven largely by rising pressure in the community and national spheres. Christians face sustained interference from local authorities and community actors, especially in areas where state control is weak. In the east, Islamist militant group ADF are a major source of violence: they attack Christian villages, abduct men and women, burn churches, and carry out killings that destabilize entire districts. Women and girls are kidnapped and subjected to severe abuse, and church leaders face targeted intimidation. These combined threats, bureaucratic obstacles, armed-group violence, and weak state protection, explain the country's high score and why Christian communities remain highly vulnerable.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **November 2024:** At least 13 people were killed and others kidnapped in Mabisio village, North Kivu province, following an attack by ADF militants. According to reports, this is consistent with the ADF's longstanding pattern of targeting Christian communities in eastern DRC ([AP News, 16 November 2024](#)).
- **February 2025:** Even though there are others who dismissed this, in February 2025, reports from North Kivu stated that about 70 Christians were abducted from Mayeba village and later found beheaded in a church in Kasanga. The massacre was attributed to the ADF, which has long targeted Christian communities in the region ([ACN International, 21 February 2025](#)).
- **July 2025:** More than 38 people were killed when ADF fighters attacked Christian worshippers during a midnight vigil on 27 July 2025 in Komanda, northeastern DRC. Nearby shops were also looted and set on fire, according to the UN and Congolese military ([BBC News, 27/28 July 2025](#)).



WWL Year	Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians internally displaced
2026	1,000*	339	100*	10,000*
2025	100*	355	100*	10,000*

*This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period – for full results see the violence section of the country's corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* or 1000\*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*.*

### PRIVATE LIFE

In areas controlled by the ADF, any visible expression of Christian faith can be life-threatening. Christians wearing crosses or other religious symbols risk being killed on sight. Simply gathering with fellow believers can lead to abduction or death. Even inter-denominational converts, for instance, Catholics who join Evangelical churches, face backlash from family and neighbors, often resulting in expulsion from their homes. Converts from African traditional religions are similarly pressured to abandon their Christian faith and participate in ancestral rituals.

### FAMILY LIFE

In jihadist-dominated areas, Christian families are under constant threat. Children can be abducted from school or forced to study Islamic teachings. Converts, particularly those who have left Islam or shifted between Christian denominations, risk losing inheritance rights and may be coerced into divorce. In some cases, forced divorce serves as punishment, while in others it is driven by the fear that keeping a convert in the family might invite jihadist retaliation on the wider community.

### COMMUNITY LIFE

Christian community life in eastern DRC is marked by anxiety and isolation. Businesses owned by Christians have been looted or destroyed, plunging families into poverty. Travel and education, especially

for girls, are dangerous due to the risk of abduction, forced marriage, and ongoing violence. In some regions, schools remain closed or unsafe. In some areas Christians are watched closely by neighbors who may report them to militants or authorities. Speaking out risks abduction or assassination, forcing many Christians into silence and social seclusion.

### NATIONAL LIFE

Christians who publicly denounce injustice, corruption, or violence often do so at great personal risk. Armed groups and government actors alike may target them for retribution.

### CHURCH LIFE

The Church in DRC faces intense pressure from both non-state armed actors and the central government. In eastern provinces, the ADF has deliberately attacked churches, killed clergy, and displaced entire congregations. Pastors, seen as both spiritual and civic leaders, are high-value targets. In areas where the state has full control, the government monitors sermons and religious gatherings, cracking down on churches that criticize political leadership or advocate for peace and electoral reform. The Ministry of Justice has refused to issue permits for new churches since 2014, leaving thousands unrecognized and vulnerable to closure. State harassment and jihadist violence have together pushed church life into a precarious and often dangerous position.





## International obligations & rights violated

**DRC has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:**

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#))
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#))
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([CAT](#))
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#))
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#))

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and threatened with divorce and loss of inheritance (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are often left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are killed because of their faith by members of Islamist militant groups (ICCPR Art. 6.1)

## Situation of other religious minorities

The number of religious minorities in the DRC, including Muslims, is often a subject of dispute. The High Islamic Council of Congo estimates that Muslims make up approximately 14% of the country's population. However, this figure has been contested by some, leading to ongoing disagreements. Muslims in the country have voiced complaints about not receiving the same privileges and treatment as Christians.





## Open Doors in DRC

Open Doors support to the Church in DRC commenced in 2016. We serve the church through partners and churches. Our vision is for a Congolese church that provides physical and spiritual support to persecuted Christians to enable them to be resilient in the face of persecution. We work to achieve that through:

- Persecution preparedness training
- Discipleship





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## ABOUT THIS DOSSIER

- The content of this Country Dossier is based on detailed analysis carried out by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. This dossier may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2026 Open Doors International.
- All 50 Country Dossiers – along with the latest update of WWL Methodology – can be accessed [here](#).
- The WWL 2026 reporting period was 01 October 2024 - 30 September 2025.

*Many photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes*