

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

## SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

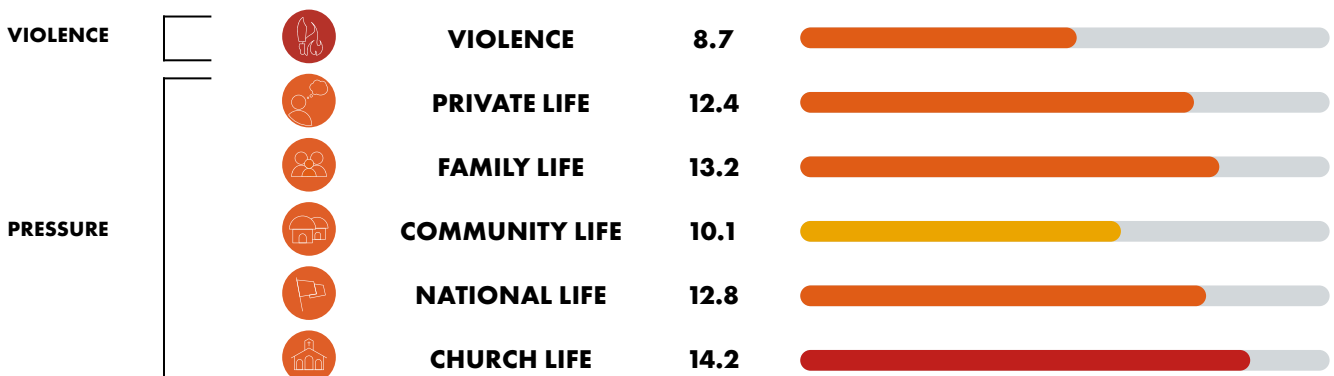
### TUNISIA

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**31**



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#### LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



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

### Key findings

During the WWL 2026 reporting period, Tunisian security services intensified surveillance of Tunisian Christians, while also taking the unprecedented step of arresting several foreign Christians and searching their homes. Authorities increasingly linked their campaign against undocumented Sub-Saharan African migrants to foreign Christians, bringing “human trafficking” charges as a pretext. This escalation on both Christians but also human rights NGOs has heightened fears and raised concerns about the ability to organize themselves in the future. Many Tunisian converts already feel compelled to conceal their faith due to societal hostility, which makes sharing beliefs or gathering for worship risky. Fear of exposure has left many struggling with isolation and limited community support. In addition, Sub-Saharan African Christians in Tunisia face persistent difficulties. While they cannot openly proselytize, their primary challenge is racial abuse, which surged dramatically after President Saied’s [inflammatory remarks](#) in February 2023. Many lost jobs or fled, and those who remained encountered worsening violence and stigma during WWL 2026, including reports of daily harassment and sexual assault, [including rape](#).

## Quick facts

### LEADER

President Kais Saied

### POPULATION

12,666,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

23,000<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Islam

### GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	23,000	0.2
Muslims	12,603,000	99.5
Atheists/Agnostics	34,600	0.3
Others	5,400	0.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>2</sup>

Tunisia is located at the northernmost tip of Africa, placing it at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East. Tunisia's indigenous Amazigh ('Berber') culture is still present, although many other civilizations influenced it, including the Phoenicians, known for Carthage, the Romans the Ottomans and eventually the French.

Tunisia boasts a rich Christian heritage, having been home to three highly influential Church Fathers: Tertullian (160-230 AD), Cyprian (210-258 AD) and Augustine (354-430 AD), all of whom lived, worked and died in Carthage. In the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, Arab armies introduced Islam to the region. While Christianity survived in Tunisia until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, it was not reestablished until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when many French Christians settled in the country under French political protection. Following Tunisia's independence in 1956, many expatriates left and the Church's public presence became increasingly restricted.

In 2011, Tunisia's Revolution ignited the Arab Spring, overthrowing the president after years of high

unemployment, corruption and limited freedoms. The following decade was marked by frequent government changes and economic and political instability. In July 2021, President Kais Saied seized power and a constitutional referendum in 2022 established a presidential republic, granting him sweeping authority. Uniquely, the new constitution does not declare Islam as the state religion, but it does charge the state with upholding Islamic values. In practice, the scope of religious freedom and civil liberties is now largely determined by the president's interpretation.

Saied has since intensified his crackdown on opposition, most notably arresting leading opposition figure Rached Ghannouchi, and faced strong international criticism after a 2023 speech blaming Sub-Saharan Africans for crime and demographic change, which triggered violence against both migrants and Tunisians of Sub-Saharan descent.

Tunisia is predominantly Muslim, with about 99.5% of the population adhering to Islam, while Christianity is considered a foreign religion by the government. Only expatriate Christian denominations—such as the Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, French Protestant and Anglican churches—are officially recognized and operate mainly in the capital, Tunis. Tunisian converts to Christianity face social marginalization, government surveillance and legal challenges. Although a 2017 law lifted the ban on Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men, social opposition continues to hinder its full implementation. Converts often face exclusion from family inheritance and loss of custody rights and Christians are generally excluded from government and military positions.

<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

Converts from Islam to Christianity have most to fear from their own family members and society, especially in the country's more conservative south. Urban areas, especially the capital Tunis, offer possibilities for converts to escape family pressure and live their faith in more anonymity. Violent Islamist militants are active in the southern border areas and may attack Christians indiscriminately if they get the chance.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Expatriate Christians are relatively free to practice their faith, although public evangelism is not tolerated. The Sub-Saharan African Christian community mainly suffers from racial abuse.

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This category is included under "Communities of expatriate Christians".

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background mainly face violations from family members, though state pressure has grown in recent years. However, they can seek information about the Christian faith, particularly content posted online. The convert community is not permitted to have church buildings so they typically meet in house churches.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This category is included under "Communities of expatriate Christians".

## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

At the family level, converts from Islam to Christianity may be forcibly confined in their homes by family members. At the political level, Islamist political parties are still influential. The president appears committed to keeping Tunisia an Islamic country, with little regard for the religious rights of Tunisian Christians.

### DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Since his July 2021 power grab, President Saied has shown no willingness in sharing authority with other state institutions. The new Constitution has weakened the role of the parliament significantly, while almost giving absolute powers to the president. Although the impact is unclear yet, the rights guaranteed under the Freedom of Religion and Belief will now directly be determined by the president. Saied, who has taken an increasingly authoritarian approach, is likely to seek close monitoring and control of the Christian community. During the WWL 2026 reporting period, state surveillance further increased, with several Tunisian and foreign Christians being arrested and questioned.





## How are men and women differently affected?

### WOMEN

Christian women in Tunisia face compounded vulnerabilities as women's rights regress under President Saied. They endure sexual harassment, domestic violence and economic discrimination, while converts from Islam face the harshest persecution. Female converts can be beaten, confined under house arrest, expelled from their homes or threatened with rape or death. Married converts risk divorce and loss of child custody, while single converts may be forced into marriage with Muslim men, especially in rural areas. Persecution is typically driven by dominant male relatives, leaving women isolated and silenced.

#### Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

### MEN

In Tunisia, new Christian converts are the most vulnerable, with men facing intimidation, beatings, death threats and job loss. Families often punish male converts without consequence, seeing them as bringing shame by leaving Islam. They risk ostracism, loss of inheritance and possessions or abandonment by their wives under family pressure. Converts also face social isolation and loss of marriage prospects. While some families eventually tolerate conversion, others expel men permanently, forcing relocation. When Christian men are persecuted, their families are left vulnerable and usually deprived of income.

#### Male typical pressure points:

- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological



## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	31	71
2025	34	70
2024	33	69
2023	36	67
2022	35	66

The overall score increased by 1.2 points. With Tunisia returning to dictatorship, the church has faced intensified monitoring and arrests, particularly targeting foreign Christians. Increases were most obvious in the pressure in the Church sphere of life and in the violence score, which rose from 8.1 to 8.7 points. Several church gatherings of both Tunisian and Sub-Saharan African Christians were raided or forced to stop meeting. This has heightened pressure on Tunisian converts to Christianity, who cannot worship openly and usually choose to hide their faith.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

- Due to increased arrests of both Tunisian and foreign Christians, many Tunisian believers have gone into isolation. While none have been prosecuted, the arrests create a chilling effect, bringing stigma within families and communities.
- In a new development during the WWL 2026 reporting period, Tunisian authorities arrested and detained several foreign Christians. Previously, the authorities limited their actions to refusing a visa application or the renewal of residence permits.
- Young Tunisian Christians faced abuse from families and communities. Children were bullied at school, a teacher called one girl an “infidel,” a young man was pressured to lead mosque prayers during Ramadan and a young woman was forcibly moved to stop her from keeping Christian connections.



WWL Year	Christians detained	Christians physically or mentally abused	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians internally displaced
2026	14	19	8	21
2025	17	47	7	21

*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

Converts from Islam to Christianity face intense family pressure, especially young and recent converts, with women generally at higher risk. Meeting other Christians or owning Christian materials can be risky, leading to ostracization and the loss of family support. Social stigma makes it difficult to connect with other Christians, so many keep their faith secret. Risks and pressures generally become less over time as converts find ways to rebuild relationships and receive support from other Christians, although for some, relief only arrives after they have been ostracized by their families.

## FAMILY LIFE

Tunisian society views non-Muslims as foreign and discriminates against these groups as a means of coercing assimilation into wider Sunni Tunisian culture. Non-Muslims are prohibited from adopting children in Tunisia. Spouses who are discovered to be Christians may be divorced and lose custody of their children. Children of Christian converts must attend mandatory Islamic classes and may experience social ostracization, bullying and even violence because of their parents' religion.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Converts, especially in rural areas, experience harassment and social isolation by the community. Forced marriage to Muslim men is commonly used

as a threat to young female converts. Converts face obstacles in higher education, discrimination in job applications and boycotts of their businesses. Tunisian Christians therefore tend to seek employment with foreign institutions to avoid discrimination.

## NATIONAL LIFE

Sharia law is not the principal source of legislation, as in many other Arab countries, but Islam still dominates national life. Authorities generally view non-Muslims as outsiders, not deserving of equal status. These sentiments are supported by a hostile media apparatus that seeks to scapegoat and spread misinformation about Christians. Monitoring is frequent and police officers regularly question Tunisian Christians about their activities. Even a routine request for a new passport can lead to detailed interrogation.

## CHURCH LIFE

Tunisian converts cannot register their churches, and no new church has been granted official registration since Tunisia's independence in 1956. Registered churches are allowed to operate freely but face practical difficulties, particularly relating to their property upkeep, hiring staff and obtaining permission to publish and distribute Christian texts in Arabic. Although selling Bibles is not prohibited, in practice there are many difficulties to do so publicly. Distributing Christian materials for free is seen as proselytizing and is forbidden.



## International obligations & rights violated

**Tunisia 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](#))

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

## Situation of other religious minorities

Adherents of Baha'i faith in Tunisia lack official recognition and cannot have their own places of worship, though they have recently engaged in constructive dialogue with officials. Jewish groups worship freely, with government support for synagogues, but a deadly attack on a Jewish festival in May 2023 was downplayed by authorities to protect tourism. The Sunni-Shia divide remains mostly peaceful, though Shia Muslims face some discrimination. Atheists from Muslim backgrounds often experience family and societal pressure to hide their beliefs or conform.





## Open Doors in Tunisia

In cooperation with local partners and churches, Open Doors is supporting the church in North Africa through the following activities:

- Leadership training and mentoring
- Discipleship training, support theological initiatives, offer persecution preparedness training and distribute Bibles and Christian literature
- Trauma counseling training to women, legal aid to persecuted Christians and practical support
- Livelihood through micro-loans to start small businesses, vocational training, medical help and relief items
- Raising prayer support for believers in Tunisia

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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.

*All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.*