

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

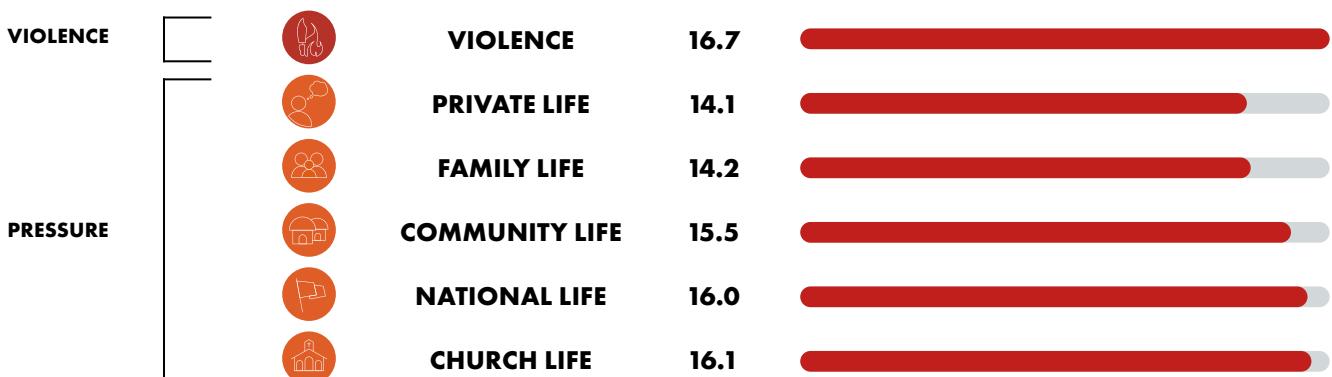
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
4

## SUDAN



### 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 ( $6 \times 16.7 = 100$ ).

### Key findings

Since the 2021 military coup in Sudan, conditions for Christians have worsened. Even before this, the government had brought back “morality policies” and officials from the al-Bashir era. Hostility toward Christians remains strong in society, and converts or ethnic African Christians face serious abuse with little outside help. The situation became even worse in April 2023 when fighting broke out between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese army, causing massive destruction. In January 2025, the U.S. Secretary of State determined that RSF members had committed genocide, imposing sanctions on their leader “Hemedti” for systematic human rights abuses ([Reuters, 7 January 2025](#)). By March 2025, USCIRF reported that Sudan’s civil war was “particularly impacting vulnerable religious populations,” ([USCIRF Annual Report 2025, p. 75](#)) with Islamic hudud laws justifying corporal punishment and forced conversions to Islam. Hundreds of churches have been damaged, religious gatherings disrupted, and faith leaders detained, while Christians face widespread discrimination in education, employment and justice access.

## Quick facts

### LEADER

General Abd-al-Fattah al-Burhan  
Abd-al-Rahman

### POPULATION

50,615,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

2,201,000<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Islam

### GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	2,201,000	4.3
Muslims	46,538,000	91.9
Ethnic religionists	1,333,000	2.6
Others	543,000	1.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>2</sup>

The situation for Christians in Sudan has reached a critical point since the October 2021 military coup compounded by the civil war that erupted in 2023. Despite international narratives suggesting positive change, the reality for Christians, especially converts and ethnic African Christians, is one of severe persecution and constant fear. The military dismantled the civilian-led transitional government and reinstated figures from the oppressive al-Bashir regime known for persecuting Christians. The situation worsened in August 2022 when the government reintroduced morality policies disguised as community policing initiatives.

Sudan's complex history of conflict, including the Darfur crisis, South Sudan's 2011 secession, and the Nuba people's struggles, has created deep religious and ethnic divisions. With a Muslim majority, Sudan presents a challenging environment for Christians who primarily reside in urban areas. Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians maintain established communities in cities like Khartoum, alongside Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations. Converts from Islam face particularly severe persecution.

The 2021 coup led to ongoing unrest, culminating in violent clashes between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese army in April 2023. By October 2024, the UNHCR reported nearly three million people had fled to neighboring countries, with Egypt receiving the largest influx, followed by South Sudan and Chad. According to the joint [UN Agencies report](#), "With more than 30 million people in need, including 9.6 million internally displaced and 15 million children, Sudan is among the world's largest humanitarian crises."

In Sudan, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) established a parallel government after signing the Sudan Founding Charter in February 2025, which laid the groundwork for an alternative administration. This culminated in the formal creation of the Government of Peace and Unity on April 15, 2025, with RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti") as its head, adding a new layer of [complexity](#) to any future peace negotiations.

Christians face targeted persecution as churches are occupied by Janjaweed militias and radical groups. Many believers are terrified to speak against persecution, revealing a troubling disconnect between reform promises and escalating violence. Christians in Sudan live under a shroud of fear, making progress claims ring hollow.

Despite international pledges and attempts at democratic transition, Sudan has regressed into crisis and severe repression, especially for its Christian minority, undermining any perceived advances and demanding international narrative reassessment.

<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

Christians were long targeted in conflict zones such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile. Since the civil war's outbreak in April 2023, however, persecution has spread to urban centers, with Khartoum and later Gezira State becoming focal points of systematic repression. The RSF's entrenchment in Gezira brought church demolitions, forced closures and clergy abductions. Unlike past rural violence that often went undocumented, urban attacks have been extensively recorded by rights groups (Le Monde, Nov 2024), exposing a deliberate and increasingly brazen campaign against Christian religious communities and spaces of worship.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Expatriates, primarily from Western countries and South Sudan, face forced church closures, registration denials, and church demolitions. Many encounter arbitrary arrest and detention without due legal process, particularly during the ongoing conflict.

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Members of historical churches such as the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations face violations from both Islamic oppression and dictatorial paranoia. Al-Bashir's program of church demolition targeted these communities, and current conflict has exacerbated their vulnerability.

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Christians from Muslim backgrounds experience the most intense pressure and violence, facing threats from both government forces and non-state actors.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Sudanese Christians belonging to Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations suffer violations through Islamic oppression that expresses itself via state actors and social structures, and Dictatorial paranoia, with most of their churches facing closure or destruction.



## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

The Muslim Brotherhood's ideology has profoundly influenced Sudan's governance since the 1989 coup that installed President al-Bashir. His regime systematically worked toward establishing an Islamic state at other religious groups' expense. Sudan was internationally condemned for supporting violent Islamist militants (including sheltering Osama bin Laden), sponsoring terrorism, and weapons trafficking. Despite regime changes, this ideological foundation persists in current governance structures and military factions, with both warring parties attempting to establish Islamic credentials to gain popular support (International Crisis Group, September 2024).

### DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Sudan has struggled with civil order since independence. Although the southern secession conflict has formally ended, the Darfur crisis and the current civil war persist. Successive governments have relied on fear and coercion to maintain control, using nationalism and internal scapegoating to reinforce their authority. Under the present military leadership, repression has deepened, and Christian communities have faced intensified persecution as the regime seeks to consolidate power amid continuing instability and civil war.

### ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Under al-Bashir, the government mobilized tribal militias that committed extensive human rights violations, including trafficking non-Arabs from Sudan and others from neighboring countries to Libya and Egypt for profit. Christians, viewed as foreign and threatening, face particular brutality from these groups. The current civil war has created lawless zones where criminal enterprises flourish, with Christian communities frequently targeted for extortion and violence.

### ETHNO-RELIGIOUS HOSTILITY BLENDED WITH CLAN OPPRESSION

Sudan's population comprises approximately 19 different ethnic groups, predominantly of Arab origin in the north and African origin in the south. Since independence, Arab-dominated governments have pursued policies promoting Islamic and Arab superiority, marginalizing non-Arab and non-Muslim communities.



## How are men and women differently affected?

### **WOMEN**

Since Sudan's 2021 coup, reforms advancing women's rights have been undermined, worsening instability. Christian women, especially converts, face social isolation, loss of inheritance, legal discrimination, domestic violence and forced psychiatric treatment. Ongoing conflict since 2023 has weaponized sexual violence: RSF and allied militias have raped women and girls, abducted some for ransom or sexual slavery, and attacked clinics supporting survivors. Stigma, weak legal protections and biased courts silence victims, while even police have raped Christian girls. Women remain deeply vulnerable amid systemic inequality and impunity.

#### **Female typical pressure points:**

- Abduction
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced marriage
- Trafficking
- Violence – physical
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

### **MEN**

Sudan's conflict since April 2023 has deepened the humanitarian crisis, leaving millions displaced and facing famine. Amid this instability, male Christians - especially church leaders - are targeted with government harassment, surveillance and false terrorism charges. Converts face beatings, imprisonment and rejection by their families. Men and boys are also abducted or killed by RSF and allied militias, with their absence leaving families vulnerable to economic collapse, looting and sexual violence against women. As primary providers, Christian men live under constant threat, enduring violence, humiliation, and fear.

#### **Male typical pressure points:**

- Abduction
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- False charges
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical



## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	4	92
2025	5	90
2024	8	87
2023	10	85
2022	13	79

Sudan scored 92 points in WWL 2026—its highest yet—placing it 4th in the global ranking. In WWL 2025, it stood at 90. The two-point rise reflects increases across the national sphere, church sphere and the violence block. Over the last three reporting periods, the situation has steadily worsened for Christians. The civil war fractured state authority, emboldened armed groups and created zones where impunity is the norm. Churches have been occupied or destroyed, clergy threatened or displaced and Christian families pushed into repeated cycles of flight. Even though other groups in Sudan are also suffering, the position of Christians is uniquely precarious. They are a small minority with no political leverage, no institutional protection and no meaningful recourse when targeted by militias, security actors or local authorities. Their vulnerability deepens in areas where armed factions impose ideological control, treat Christian identity as foreign or use accusations of conversion as a tool to intimidate or extort.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

- Jan-Feb 2025, Madani arrests:** 19 Christians were detained in Madani between January and February 2025, and many of them still have no legal access or formal charges.
- June 2025, El Fasher bombings:** RSF airstrikes in El Fasher destroyed three churches and killed five people.
- July 2025, Khartoum demolition:** Security forces in Khartoum bulldozed a Pentecostal church complex, destroying the entire site.



WWL Year	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians' private property damaged or confiscated
2026	1,000*	23	100*	1,000*
2025	100*	44	182	100*

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

## PRIVATE LIFE

Christians must conceal their faith from local communities for safety, as discovery can lead to government arrest or militia attacks. Constant surveillance by neighbors, community leaders and security forces creates an atmosphere of fear. Possession of Christian materials, particularly Bibles, presents significant risks, especially for converts from Islam. If discovered, believers face intense pressure to renounce Christianity. Resistance often results in property confiscation, community expulsion and violence. During the ongoing conflict, digital surveillance has intensified, with authorities monitoring communications for religious content.

## FAMILY LIFE

Mixed marriages face severe pressure, with Christian spouses expected to convert to Islam. Children from Christian families experience systematic harassment in schools and communities based on their faith identity. Converts who attempt to raise children as Christians risk losing custody through both legal proceedings and family interventions. The education system mandates Islamic instruction for all students, with no exemptions for Christians. Fear of betrayal by relatives is ever-present.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Christians face overwhelming communal pressure in Sudan. Public order laws based on strict Islamic interpretations remain enforced despite nominal reforms. Authorities regularly harass and arrest Christians for allegedly violating “morality” codes. Christian communities struggle to access basic resources like clean water and healthcare, particularly outside urban areas. The prevailing societal attitude is that Sudanese citizens should be Muslim, with

Christians viewed as outsiders. Government forces and militias deliberately restrict Christians from using community resources and conduct targeted house searches in suspected Christian neighborhoods, particularly in conflict zones.

## NATIONAL LIFE

Christians face systematic monitoring by security forces, particularly those Christians whose origin is from South Sudan or with international connections. The transitional government's promises of religious freedom remain unfulfilled. Organizations perceived as Christian or critical of authorities face operational restrictions or outright bans. International Christian NGOs providing humanitarian assistance are frequently denied access to vulnerable populations. Under current conflict conditions, Christians are often accused of foreign loyalties by both government and rebel forces; they face discrimination in employment, education, and justice systems. Many report being denied humanitarian aid distribution based on religious identity.

## CHURCH LIFE

Churches operate under extreme pressure from authorities and society. Government officials routinely interfere in leadership selection and monitor services. Construction and maintenance of church buildings face systematic obstruction, with repair attempts often triggering violence. Community leaders incite attacks against Christians and their places of worship, particularly in areas with limited international monitoring. The ongoing civil war has exacerbated this situation, with both warring factions occupying or destroying church properties. Worship gatherings have been forced underground in many areas, with believers meeting in small groups to avoid detection.



## International obligations & rights violated

**Sudan 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 on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#))

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

- Church buildings are attacked and burned down (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian women and girls are harassed for not covering their heads or wearing trousers (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians can be accused and charged with blasphemy (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian children are often harassed due to their parents' faith (CRC Art. 14 and ICCPR Art. 18)

## Situation of other religious minorities

Any religious group outside Sunni Islam faces severe restrictions. Shia Muslims encounter systematic discrimination and have been targeted during the conflict as "foreign agents" due to perceived Iranian connections. Sufi communities have seen sacred sites vandalized or destroyed, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan. Small Baha'i and Jewish communities operate with great caution to avoid provoking violence from both government forces and non-state actors.



## Open Doors in Sudan

While Open Doors' vision for Sudan is to see a resilient church that stands strong in the face of persecution and is economically empowered to support themselves through:

- Persecution preparedness
- Discipleship
- Economic empowerment programs, the current reality in the country demands a focus on emergency relief to help Christians survive



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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.

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