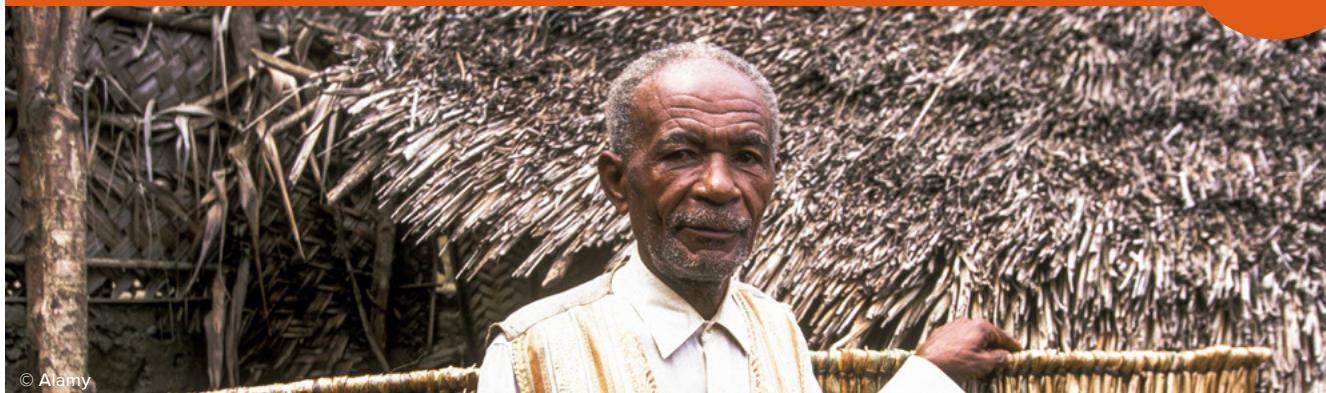


# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

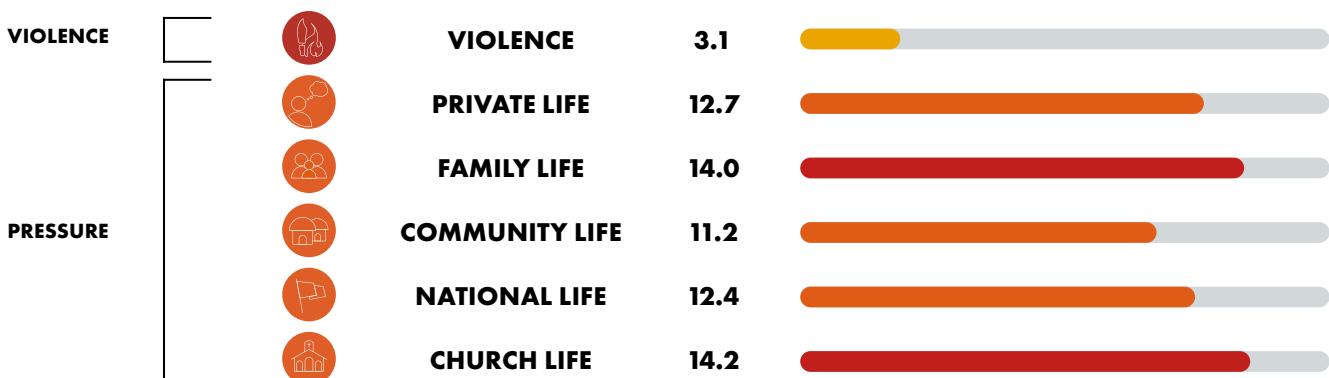
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**43**

## COMOROS



### 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

Religious minorities, especially Christians, are subjected to extreme constraints when it comes to openly practicing or even discussing their faith. For Christian families, particularly converts from Islam, the challenges are even more acute. They have to send their children to Madrasas (Islamic Schools) or they face alienation. Public worship or even conversing about Christianity in public spaces can be construed as proselytizing, which is a punishable offense. Reports continue to emerge of local communities alienating individuals suspected of converting to Christianity, thereby creating an environment that is antagonistic to religious freedom. Female converts may find themselves under house arrest as a form of social and familial punishment. Given these conditions, Christians, and especially those who have converted from Islam, are compelled to practice their faith in secret.

## Quick facts

### LEADER

President Azali Assoumani

### POPULATION

883,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

4,600<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Islam

### GOVERNMENT

Federal Presidential Republic



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## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	4,600	0.5
Muslims	866,000	98.1
Ethno religionists	10,100	1.1
Others	2,300	0.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>2</sup>

After years of political instability following independence from France in 1975, the Comoros archipelago underwent a democratic transition in 2006. Islam is the established state religion through the Constitution, and the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam sets the norms for life in Comoros. 98% of the population is Muslim. The Constitution declares equality of rights for all individuals regardless of religion or belief, but proselytizing is prohibited by law and punishable by a fine and imprisonment, except for Sunni Islam. There is legal provision to deport foreigners who proselytize.

There are only a handful of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Christian NGOs, however, face discrimination through governmental restrictions in advertising and operations.

Comorians hold to the matrilineal family system, uncommon in other parts of Africa. Women are tasked with the role of initiating marriage and

building a home for the family. Men still hold the mantle of religious leadership, but it is women who hold a strong influence within the family. Despite this, women regularly suffer from inferior legal status, as well as the cultural practices of polygamy, unilateral divorce, and child marriages.

Comoros benefits from having low crime and measures taken by the government have ensured that there is no imminent threat of Islamist militancy. However, some Islamists known as *djaulas* harass Christians, particularly converts from Islam.

While the Constitution of Comoros guarantees equality regardless of religion, in practice the government endorses and enforces laws that disproportionately target Christians, Christian converts from Islam, and other non-Sunni Muslims. Anti-proselytization laws are selectively applied, as only Sunni Islam is allowed; religious expression by others leads to fines, imprisonment, and even deportation in the case of foreigners. Christian NGOs face official restrictions, and there is no evidence of meaningful legal protection for religious minorities. The state's approach enables societal actors, including radical groups like the *djaulas*, to harass converts with little consequence. Judicial mechanisms remain weak or complicit, and there is no clear oversight from international human rights bodies to ensure that freedom of belief is upheld in practice.

The Christian population in Comoros is concentrated in the main cities, especially in the capital, Moroni, and in Mutsamudu, the main city on the island of Anjouan. The majority of Christians are Roman Catholic.

<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

## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Islamic oppression in Comoros has intensified following constitutional reforms that elevated Sunni Islam as both the state religion and a central pillar of national identity. These legal shifts have emboldened conservative religious forces and reinforced a sociopolitical climate in which religious minorities, especially Christians, are marginalized. On the islands of Anjouan and Moheli, a rise in radical Islamist sentiment is visible, with some mosques and madrasas spreading anti-Christian rhetoric. The *djaulas*—a network of ultra-conservative Islamic scholars, many trained abroad—actively propagate a strict version of Sharia and are known to monitor and harass converts to Christianity. Leaving Islam is viewed not just as a personal choice, but as a betrayal of community and national values. Converts face family rejection, community hostility, and police interrogation. Open Christian worship is banned, house churches are illegal, and Christian literature is restricted. Public religious dialogue is criminalized, effectively silencing dissent. Converts are denied religious freedom in both law and practice.

### DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

The Comorian government tightly controls religious expression, equating national unity with adherence to Sunni Islam. In this authoritarian environment, dissent—religious or political—is perceived as subversive. Christian communities and NGOs face bureaucratic obstruction, surveillance, and restrictions on legal registration. Government officials have publicly declared that freedom of religion does not apply to converts from Islam, thereby legitimizing their exclusion. This state-led enforcement of religious conformity reinforces a climate in which Christians are not just marginalized but treated as a threat to public order.

## How the situation varies by region

Comoros is a small island nation where Islam dominates all areas of life, be it religious, legal or social. Persecution of Christians occurs nationwide, with little variation by geographic region, hostility is entrenched across all areas. The most severe forms of persecution are directed at converts from Islam who are often forced to conceal their faith entirely, whether they live in urban centers or in rural villages. In smaller towns and islands such as Anjouan and Mohéli, where communal life is tightly woven and nearly everyone knows the personal affairs of other community members, converts face the risk of exposure and reprisal.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Groups like the Malagasy church from Madagascar are prohibited from integrating Muslim-background converts or preaching publicly outside church walls. Those who do risk deportation. Pressure comes from radical Islamists, non-Christian religious leaders, and political authorities.

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Muslim-background converts are shunned, cut off from family and friends, and face hostility from relatives, community members, government officials, and radical groups including *djaulas*.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Baptists and Evangelicals face legal penalties for evangelism. The Penal Code punishes anyone who teaches Muslims another religion with 3 months to 1 year in prison and fines of 50,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs.



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## How are men and women differently affected?

### **WOMEN**

Despite Comoros' matrilineal traditions, worship and social life are dominated by Sunni norms, leaving Christian women and girls disadvantaged. Female converts from Islam face social ostracism, close family surveillance, disinheritance, and strong pressure to return to Islam through forced marriage or divorce. Apostasy remains criminalized, reinforcing social hostility. Christian women are also vulnerable to domestic violence, community rejection, and trafficking, as Comoros serves as a transit hub for exploitation abroad.

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

- Abduction
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

### **MEN**

Christian men and boys in Comoros, especially converts from Islam, face intense family and community pressure. Male converts from Islam are vulnerable to societal pressures and especially risk being forced out of their homes or divorced, due to prevalent matrilocal norms that place them in their in-laws' household. They may be denied food, verbally abused, or coerced into abandoning their faith, with some forced to flee. Christian men also face workplace discrimination and exclusion. Church leaders, usually men, are especially vulnerable to monitoring, arrest, and restrictions on Christian activities.

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

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied food or water
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced divorce
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal



## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	43	68
2025	42	67
2024	45	66
2023	42	66
2022	53	63

Comoros scored 68 points in WWL 2026, a one-point increase from WWL 2025. The rise comes from a modest shift in the violence block, which moves from 2.593 to 3.148—still relatively low. The broader environment remains shaped by the country's conservative religious culture. Public preaching or religious expression outside Sunni Islam is restricted, and Christians—especially converts—face strong community pressure, social isolation, and scrutiny from local authorities. These dynamics limit open worship and push most Christian activity into quiet, private settings where visibility carries real risk.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

- In two documented cases, Christian women were compelled by their families and religious leaders to divorce their husbands and abandon their homes after refusing to renounce their beliefs.
- Throughout 2025, at least 10 Christians—primarily converts from Islam—were abused both physically and psychologically by relatives, neighbors, and local community leaders. Reports from Moroni and Anjouan describe verbal harassment, beatings, and threats of expulsion with some publicly shamed or labeled as “foreign agents”.
- In 2025, three house churches were attacked by mobs in Anjouan and Grande Comore following coordinated rumors spread by local religious leaders. Witnesses describe stones thrown, doors broken, and worship materials burned, forcing congregants to abandon those spaces for safety. No police intervention was reported.



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WWL Year	Christians' private property damaged or confiscated	Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians forced to marry
2026	1	10*	3	2
2025	1	10*	2	2

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, particularly converts from Islam, face serious violations of private life despite the absence of formal anti-conversion laws. Converts experience exclusion by family, job loss, and forced divorce. Wearing Christian symbols like a cross can provoke violence. The government promotes hostility against non-Sunni citizens and bans public non-Sunni rituals under the guise of protecting social harmony. Even private references to Christianity risk being treated as criminal proselytization. Laws penalize this with fines or imprisonment, erasing the line between private belief and offense.

## FAMILY LIFE

The government's stance that religious freedom does not apply to Comorians harms Christian families, especially converts. Christian ceremonies, such as weddings, are often held secretly to avoid accusations of illegal preaching or mob retaliation. Officially, all Comorians are classified as Sunni Muslims. Children of Christian converts are registered as Muslim at birth, with no legal route for exemption from Islamic education, leaving Christian parents without space to raise their children in their faith.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Christian converts face constant surveillance and pressure, as open Christian practice is prohibited.

Converts are ostracized, harassed, and often coerced to recant their faith. They are denied social protection and live as outcasts, often in hiding. Community enforcement is stricter than state control, making daily life fraught with fear and secrecy. Most converts must keep their beliefs private to avoid abuse or expulsion.

## NATIONAL LIFE

Comoros is retreating from religious freedom. The state champions Sunni Islam and rejects other forms of belief. Official rhetoric encourages the marginalization of Christians and Shia Muslims, reinforcing social hostility. Only two expatriate churches—one in Moroni and one in Mutsamudu—are tolerated. Local Christians are effectively denied places of worship or public religious expression.

## CHURCH LIFE

Church life is tightly restricted. Authorities monitor churches to prevent Comorian nationals from attending. Any Christian activity outside state-sanctioned churches is labeled as illegal proselytization. Small groups of local converts exist underground without recognition. Expatriate churches cannot expand; no new churches have been built or registered for decades. This reflects a sustained state policy to suppress Christianity's presence and growth.



## International obligations & rights violated

**Comoros 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](#))

*\*Comoros has signed but not ratified the ICCPR and ICESCR*

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

- Christian parents cannot raise their children according to their religious values (CRC Art. 14);
- Christian female converts run the risk of being forcibly married to Muslim men or losing custody of their children (CEDAW Art. 16)

## Situation of other religious minorities

According to the [Freedom House 2024 report](#): “Sunni Islam was made the state religion in 2018. Previously, the state religion had been “Islam”. Anti-Shia sentiments have been publicly expressed by some government figures. Proselytizing and public religious ceremonies are prohibited for all religions except Sunni Islam.”



## Open Doors in Comoros

Open Doors has supported Christians in East Africa since the 1990s and our vision is to see a church mature in faith, accomplishing the Great Commission. Comoros has benefitted through East African partners in the areas of:

- Discipleship
- Economic empowerment



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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.*