

WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

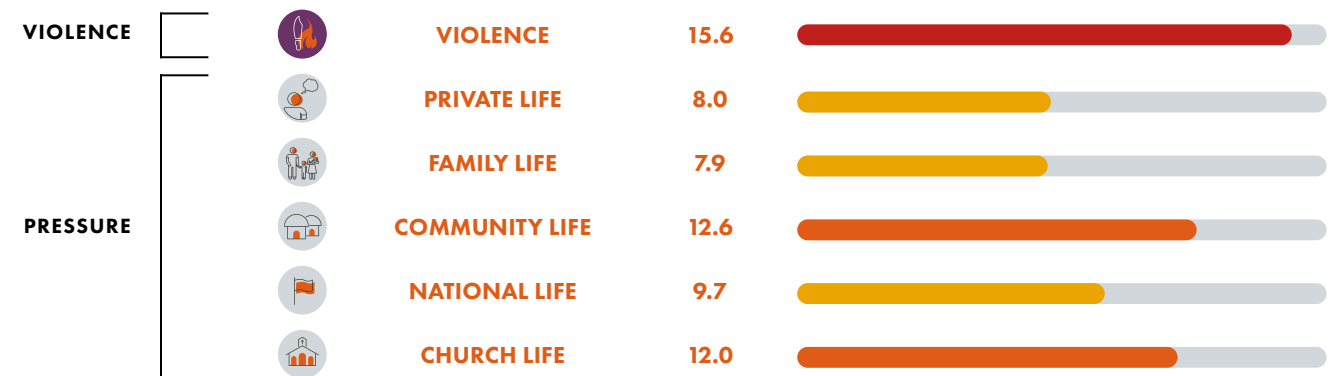
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
40

Democratic Republic of the Congo



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).¹ Red = extreme level, orange = very high, yellow = high

Key findings

The Islamic radical group, Alliance for Democratic Forces (ADF-NALU), is active in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The group attack the local population, including Christian communities and churches, in Ituri and North Kivu provinces. In March 2021, the United States officially linked the ADF to Islamic State. Converts to Christianity, both from Islam and indigenous religions, face pressure to take part in non-Christian religious activities and ceremonies. Christians critical of the government experience verbal harassment and interference.

¹World Watch Research measures pressure across all spheres of life as well as violence (full methodology [here](#) – password: freedom).

Quick facts

LEADER

President Felix Tshisekedi

POPULATION

92,336,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

87,845,000 (95.1%)²

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Semi-presidential Republic

Context

Main Religions	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	87,845,000	95.1
Muslims	1,339,000	1.5
Ethno-religionists	2,240,000	2.4
Bahais	376,000	0.4

Source³

DRC has experienced conflict for more than 50 years, and fighting between a plethora of armed rebel groups continues across the country. In the east, where the ADF is the most prominent group, the situation has been exacerbated by interference from neighboring countries. Under former President Joseph Kabila, weak rule of law enabled violence including abductions, detentions and murders of journalists to continue with impunity across the country. The rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and democratically electing a government were violated. Following a long-delayed and disputed election, Felix Tshisekedi was sworn in as president in January 2019. President Tshisekedi has promised to guarantee the respect of fundamental rights and released most political prisoners, but fighting between security forces and armed groups, as well as militia attacks on civilians, have continued to increase. Despite being rich in natural resources, DRC struggles with inflation and corruption. Around 72% of the population lives in poverty, and the country has the largest number of extreme poor in sub-Saharan Africa.

How the situation varies by region

Christians suffer rights violations from Islamic militants who are particularly active in North Kivu and Ituri provinces (eastern DRC).

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 experience violations from armed groups, such as attacks on churches and intimidation of leaders. In Kinshasa, Kasai Province and North Kivu province, churches, convents, and Catholic schools have been vandalized and looted by militias or groups of armed youths.

Converts to Christianity

Converts to Christianity (especially from Islam) are particularly found in North Kivu and South Kivu Provinces. They experience persecution from Islamic militants and pressure from family and community. To a lesser extent, cross-denominational converts from Catholicism to Protestantism, or converts from African traditional religions to Christianity, also face pressure from their communities.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Baptist and Pentecostal churches are growing rapidly and are targeted by the Islamist group ADF-NALU. They also face discrimination by members of historical Christian groups.



²Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Islamic oppression:

This is present in North Kivu, where militant Islamic groups such as ADF-NALU, along with people influenced by their ideology, target Christians and churches.

Organized corruption and crime:

Ranked 170 out of 180 on [Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index](#), corruption is rampant in the public and private sectors. Christians who oppose it are vulnerable to attack. Government officials often embezzle public money. Militant Islamic groups participate in illegal mining, which perpetuates regional conflict. Criminal networks have become adept at [smuggling valuable natural minerals](#) out of the country.

Dictatorial paranoia:

DRC has suffered enormously under different regimes. Former President Joseph Kabila was determined to stay in power at all costs. His supporters and security apparatus targeted Christians who voiced discontent with his rule. The Roman Catholic Church tried to play a role in resolving the political crisis (caused by President Kabila delaying presidential elections without legal grounds), so some have perceived Christians as allies of the opposition.

Ethno-religious hostility:

Much of the violence in North Kivu, Kisangani and Kasai has an ethnic component. Some ethnic and militant leaders belong to cults or adhere to indigenous belief systems that generate hostility towards Christians.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

DRC is politically, socially and economically complex. In various regions, women are commonly treated as inferior, impacting much of their lives, including their access to education. Christian women are vulnerable to abduction, rape, sexual torture and forced labor, especially by the Islamic radical ADF group and armed groups in north-eastern regions. These attacks cause psychological distress and trauma, with the shame associated with sexual violence often resulting in family and community isolation. Forced marriage and forced divorce is also a risk, especially for converts. These forced marriages are often early marriages.

- Abduction
- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Targeted seduction
- Violence - psychological
- Violence - sexual

MEN

In a context of violence and impunity, Christian men face maiming, abduction, forced recruitment into militia groups, forced labor, sexual mutilation, disemboweling and brutal killings. To escape kidnapers, men may be forced to pay ransoms which paralyze already impoverished families, sentencing them to live out the next few years in even more desperate poverty. Christian men also face discrimination at work and in accessing jobs. This persecution serves to weaken families and the wider church, especially when church leaders are targeted and if they have publicly denounced violence.

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

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution score out of 100
2022	40	65.68
2021	40	64.14
2020	57	56.16
2019	54	55.33
2018	0	33.00

The two-point increase in the score for the WWL 2022 is the result of an expansion of activities by the Islamic militant group ADF in the country. Even though this did not lead to an increase in violence (the score for violence decreased by 0.5), it has led to increase in pressure in other spheres of life.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **On 5 February 2021**, suspected ADF members killed at least 21 civilians in Lume, a village east of Beni city in North-Kivu province. Seventeen victims were identified as Christians of the CECA20 church, among them the pastor and two of his brothers. Seven others were reported missing following the attack.
- **In May 2021**, militant groups attacked two different villages (Bahema-Boga chiefdom and Banyali-Tchabi) in the eastern Ituri province, killing at least 49 people. Among the victims was an Anglican church leader who had moved from another area to escape increasing attacks.
- **On June 27 2021**, a makeshift bomb exploded inside a Catholic church in the city of Beni, injuring two women just an hour before a children’s confirmation ceremony was due to be held. About an hour after the first bomb blast, another bomb was successfully retrieved from the Saint Therese church, another Catholic church in Beni city. Later that same Sunday, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives outside a bar in Beni city. The bomber was identified as Ngudi Abdallah, a known recruiter for the ADF.

WWL Year	Christians killed	Christians abducted	Christians forced to marry	Christians internally displaced
2022	100	134	100	1000
2021	460	250	100	1000

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - see [here](#) for full results. 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.

Private life

In ADF-controlled areas, expression of Christian faith is dangerous. Jihadists have [killed](#) those wearing Christian symbols, and meeting with other Christians can lead to abduction or killing. Inter-denominational converts (such as Catholics who join an Evangelical church) also face pressure and discrimination from family and community, and may even be expelled from their homes.

Family life

In ADF-controlled areas, Christian children can

be abducted from school or forced to learn Islamic scriptures. Converts (either Christians from Muslim backgrounds or Protestants from Catholic backgrounds) can lose their inheritance and be put under pressure to divorce. Forced divorce is a means of punishment for the convert and is also motivated by fear that ADF jihadists may attack the community as revenge for a member leaving Islam.

Community life

Christian businesses have been ruined by ADF and revolutionary groups. Travel and access to

education are difficult for Christians. In eastern DRC, the abduction of girls, especially Christians, by armed groups is common. They can be forced to marry group members. Christians are monitored by their local communities; they may be reported to the police, shadowed, or their communications read or listened to). In militant-controlled areas, anyone speaking out against Islamist groups risks severe violations. In June 2019, an armed militia kidnapped a Catholic priest for [denouncing violence](#).

National life

Violence against Christians can be perpetrated with impunity and Christians who speak out against injustice or corruption are targeted.

Church life

In conflict regions, violent attacks have left villages and churches empty. The government monitors churches and sermon content, especially churches that are seen as being ‘unfriendly’ to the president. In some areas the government prevents church activities, alleging they might turn into public disorder. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has not issued permits for churches since 2014.



International obligations & rights violated

DRC has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in 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)
- Christian children can be forced to learn Islamic scriptures (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians are killed because of their faith by members of Islamist organizations (ICCPR Art. 6.1)

Situation of other religious minorities

There are 27 cases of assault on or suspected killings of Jehovah's Witnesses from as far back as 2015. These continue to languish in the court system or were never sent to court, according to [USCIRF's 2020 report](#). The government also used excessive force against the [Bundu dia Kongo](#) religious group, which resulted in the death of over 55 people in April 2020 in western Kongo Central Province.



Open Doors in Democratic Republic of the Congo

Open Doors' operations in DRC commenced in 2016. 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 hope to achieve that through:

- Persecution preparedness training and trauma care
- Economic empowerment and discipleship

About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the full Country Dossier produced annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2021 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The full Country Dossier for this country can be accessed [here](#) (password: freedom). The latest update of WWL methodology, as well as the complete WWL 2022 ranking and reports, can be found [here](#) (password: freedom).

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
