Kenya:

Persecution Dynamics

January 2025

Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January/February).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading "External links". These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: "Any hostility experienced as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians". This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/.

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Kenya: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
56,203,000	44,852,000	79.8

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Kenya: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	44,852,000	79.8
Muslim	5,825,000	10.4
Hindu	292,000	0.5
Buddhist	2,000	0.0
Ethnic religionist	4,444,000	7.9
Jewish	290	0.0
Bahai	565,000	1.0
Atheist	2,500	0.0
Agnostic	50,800	0.1
Other	169,820	0.3
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Kenya: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Over the past decade, Kenya has been grappling with a relentless surge in attacks from al-Shabaab, one of Africa's most lethal jihadist groups. This escalating violence has placed Christians, especially those with a Muslim background in the northeastern and coastal regions, under severe threat. Converts from Islam face danger not only from militants but also from their own families. Al-Shabaab's operations have grown significantly, with incidents involving the group doubling in June 2023 alone, according to data from WWR reports and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). The recent reopening of border points between Kenya and Somalia, coupled with the withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), has further intensified fears of increased violence.

The situation is exacerbated by the rise in organized crime and entrenched corruption, which has created an environment where faith-based persecution often goes unpunished. The latest unrest in Kenya, characterized by widespread protests and violence, has diverted the government's attention and resources toward managing these internal conflicts, potentially giving al-Shabaab more opportunities to exploit the situation. As security forces focus on controlling the unrest, Christians are left even more vulnerable, particularly in areas where al-Shabaab's presence is strong. The combination of these factors has traumatized Christian communities, leading to a mass exodus of essential service providers from the northeastern regions and rendering these areas increasingly dangerous for those who remain.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Kenya 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)

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

- Christian converts face opposition from their families and are threatened with loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by the surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

Detailing the issue of converts from Islam can be sensitive and potentially dangerous. To maintain safety and avoid exacerbating their situation, only the broader impact of the incidents are described here:

- *Discrimination and expulsion:* Christians with a Muslim background in Kenya often face severe discrimination and are frequently expelled from their communities due to their faith.
- *Forced marriages:* Many Christians who have converted from Islam are forced into marriages against their will as part of the persecution they experience.
- *Fatal attacks by al-Shabaab:* Christians in Lamu are demanding greater protection (ICC, 29 November 2023). Due to the ongoing violence and the specific targeting of Christians by al-Shabaab, many Christians are unable to travel freely.

Specific examples of positive developments

The US designation of Kenya as a 'Major Non-NATO Ally' on 24 June 2024 (The Whitehouse, 24 June 2024) is a positive development as it can strengthen Kenya's security capabilities and support its ongoing fight against al-Shabaab. This status provides Kenya with increased military cooperation, access to US defense resources, and strategic benefits that can enhance its efforts to combat terrorism, particularly the persistent threat posed by al-Shabaab. Strengthening Kenya's security infrastructure is crucial in addressing the challenges posed by this militant group, which has been a significant destabilizing force in the region for many years.

Christians dominate the central and western regions, and the majority of the major cities in the country. Muslim communities dominate the northeastern, eastern and coastal areas of the country, where life for Christians is very much more difficult.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Three categories of Christian communities in the country face persecution, but the level of persecution varies depending upon where they live and which Christian groups they belong to.

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Kenya are not involuntarily isolated and are hence not treated as a separate WWL category for scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities: Churches in this category can be found in many parts of the country. The persecution they face and the intensity of the persecution depend on the regions in which they

live. In areas where Islam is dominant, the persecution is from *Islamic oppression* and the intensity is very high.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background are mainly found in Muslim-dominated areas in the north-eastern region and along the coast (including Mombasa). In general, these converts face different persecution dynamics to those Christians from a non-Muslim background. They face intense pressure at the hands of family and friends and, if discovered by groups like al-Shabaab, they can be killed as well. Christian converts are also targeted by mobs or smaller groups from the local Islamic communities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category includes groups such as Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations. They can be found throughout the country. This group is the most active type of Christianity in the country and as a result, it can face severe forms of persecution.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians living in and around the north-eastern part of the country have to live with the fear that they can be targeted at any time: Hotspots for attacks by al-Shabaab include Mombasa, Mandera, Garissa, Wajir, Lamu and Tana River. In these areas, there are many local informers to assist in organizing attacks on churches and Christians. As a result, many Christians have decided to leave these areas and move to the center of the country.

Position on the World Watch List

Kenya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	64	53
WWL 2024	63	51
WWL 2023	64	51
WWL 2022	63	51
WWL 2021	62	49

Despite Kenya being roughly 80% Christian, persecution remains significant, as reflected in the WWL 2025 overall score, which increased by one point (64) compared to the WWL 2024 score (63). This rise is primarily due to the increased violence, with the violence score rising from 12.4 to 13.9 points. While the average pressure on Christians remained stable at 10.1 points, the *Church sphere* experienced the highest pressure at 11.5 points, particularly in the northeastern and coastal regions. Christians in Kenya also face significant challenges in the *Community* and *Private spheres*, where pressure scores reached 11.4 and 10.3 points respectively. These factors highlight the growing dangers and hostility faced by Christians, especially in regions affected by militant groups like al-Shabaab.

Persecution engines

Kenya: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very weak
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

Kenya is overwhelmingly a Christian-majority nation, with about 80% of its inhabitants identifying as Christians. Despite this, Islamic oppression is a significant concern, particularly in the northeastern and coastal regions. According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2024), approximately 10.4% of Kenyans are Muslims, the majority being Sunni. These are concentrated in specific geographic regions and have become increasingly vocal about what they perceive as marginalization in broader Kenyan society.

Fueled by extremist ideologies originating from Somalia, politicians from Muslim-majority areas in Kenya aim to eradicate Christian influence in their regions. The dire situation is exacerbated in the northeastern counties, where radical Muslims, both local and those infiltrating from Somalia, have targeted Christians, leading to numerous deaths. A country researcher elaborated on the situation, stating that counties such as Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Lamu, Kilifi, and Kwale have historically been under strong Islamic influence and continue to witness medium to very strong levels of *Islamic oppression*.

The issue of Islamic militancy has been escalating since the 1990s. The Islamic Party of Kenya, founded in 1992, was banned in 1994, leading to a period of protests and fragmentation among Islamist groups. The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in 2021 emboldened similar groups like al-Shabaab, fueling the belief that foreign forces in Somalia will eventually withdraw, paving the way for their expansion into Kenya and beyond.

During the previous reporting period (WWL 2024), al-Shabaab made significant attempts to reclaim territory it had lost. The group has persistently pursued its goal of creating a country fully governed by

Islamic law, consistently viewing Christians as enemies. Additionally, during the WWL 2025 reporting period, al-Shabaab carried out a number of cross-border attacks in Kenya. As Kenya faced a series of protests in the capital city, al-Shabaab perceived a security vacuum to exploit. Crucially, some parts of the northeastern and coastal regions seem to be becoming increasingly influenced by radical Islam.

Clan oppression (Medium)

In the northeastern region of Kenya, leaving Islam is often equated with abandoning one's clan, particularly within the Somali community. Clan identity is deeply intertwined with religious affiliation, as both are fundamental to social standing and acceptance. Ethnic and community leaders in this region frequently share anti-Christian sentiments, aligning themselves ideologically with jihadist groups. This interconnectedness of clan and religion creates a rigid framework where loyalty to one's faith and clan is paramount.

In this context, Christians—especially converts from Islam—are perceived as betraying their faith and their community. Converts face immense pressure, as their decision to embrace Christianity is often seen as a rejection of their cultural heritage and a threat to clan solidarity. This perspective reinforces a cycle of discrimination and persecution that is difficult to break, isolating converts and making it challenging for them to integrate into either their original community or the Christian community.

Moreover, this dynamic is not confined to the northeastern region; similar patterns can be observed among coastal communities, where clan loyalties also significantly influence religious affiliations. Converts from Islam in these areas face analogous challenges, reinforcing the perception that abandoning Islam is akin to severing ties with one's clan and culture. This creates a hostile environment for anyone seeking to change their faith.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

Corruption is a rampant issue in Kenya, as indicated by its Corruption Perceptions Index score of 31 out of 100 for 2023. This pervasive corruption directly impacts the persecution landscape, inhibiting effective legal repercussions against perpetrators. Key institutions such as the parliament, judiciary and executive have been compromised, limiting access to justice and protection for Christian communities. There have even been reports that al-Shabaab has successfully executed attacks in the past by bribing officials to smuggle weapons, adding another layer to the existing challenges.

Drivers of persecution

Kenya: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			**MEDIUM**	**WEAK**			**VERY WEAK**	**MEDIUM**
Government officials								Weak	Medium
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Weak				
Violent religious groups	Very strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Strong								
Organized crime cartels or networks									Medium

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- *Violent religious groups (Very strong)*: Al-Shabaab, originating from Somalia, poses the most significant threat to religious freedom in Kenya. In addition to targeting the Kenyan government for its involvement in Somalia, the group is explicitly anti-Christian and seeks to eliminate Christian influences in areas they control or influence. Their ties extend to other militant groups across Africa, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and various Algerian factions, thereby providing them with additional resources and ideological backing.

- *Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):* Religious teachers in Islamic educational institutions like madrassas play a significant role in promoting antagonistic views toward Christians. These leaders often use their platforms to indoctrinate young minds with extremist ideologies, paving the way for future persecution. In coastal and northeastern Kenya, Islamic clerics have been known to issue fatwas against converts to Christianity, thereby increasing the threats against them.

- **Citizens - people from broader society (Strong):** In regions where Muslims are the majority, local communities often view Christians as outsiders or invaders. This sentiment has been fueled by the extremist rhetoric of groups like al-Shabaab, making life increasingly difficult for Christians, especially those who have converted from Islam. The social ostracization extends to various aspects of life, including business, education, and social interactions, effectively creating second-class citizens out of Christian community members.
- **Family members (Strong):** For those who convert to Christianity, family can often become a significant source of persecution. The notion of abandoning Islam is perceived not just as a personal choice but as an act of betrayal against the family, community and broader ethnic group. There have been instances where family members themselves have carried out acts of violence against converts, emphasizing the deeply rooted nature of this form of persecution.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** The concept of ethnicity and religious identity is often intertwined in northeastern Kenya. Ethnic leaders, especially among Somali communities, often amplify the anti-Christian narratives promulgated by Islamic extremists. Leaving Islam becomes tantamount to betraying one's ethnic identity, leading to a dual form of persecution that is both religious and ethnic in nature. The anti-Christian sentiment is thereby ingrained not just in religious communities but also within broader ethnic lines.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime networks (Medium):** The compromised state of rule of law, exacerbated by widespread corruption, denies persecuted Christians any substantial course for redress. Organized crime syndicates exploit this lack of accountability, enabling and financing various forms of persecution. In an unsettling symbiosis, Islamic militants have often collaborated with organized criminal networks to finance their activities through human trafficking, drug smuggling and arms dealing. These funds help sustain their operations and expand their reach while corrupting the system from within, making it difficult for law enforcement to take effective action.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Corruption within government circles aggravates the situation. Law enforcement and judicial officials are sometimes bribed to act against Christians, either by concocting false charges or by ignoring complaints from the Christian community, thus perpetuating a cycle of impunity for the persecutors. In some instances, such as the 2015 attack on Garissa University, militant groups like al-Shabaab have been known to bribe officials to smuggle weapons and ammunition into the country. This relationship between corruption and violent extremism further endangers the Christian community, who find themselves vulnerable and unprotected.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Kenya

Average score 10.1
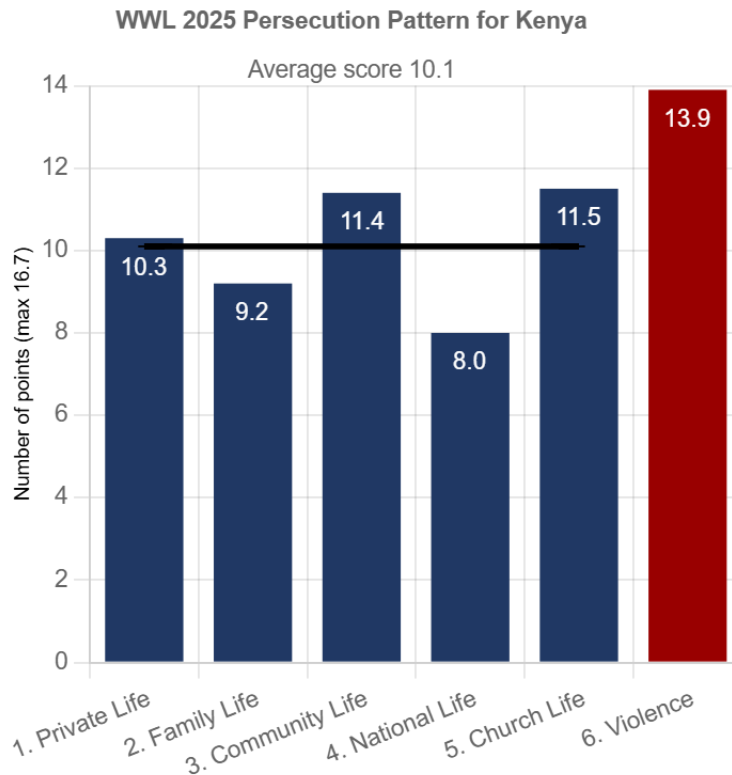
The WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Kenya shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Kenya reached 10.1 points, similar to WWL 2024.
- In all spheres except the *National sphere of life*, pressure on Christians is above nine points, with the *Church sphere* experiencing the most pressure at 11.5 points, particularly in the northeastern and coastal regions. Very high pressure is also noted in the *Community* and *Private spheres*, with scores of 11.4 and 10.3 points, respectively. This reflects significant challenges for Christians in their daily lives, especially in the northeast, due to community and family pressures, as well as threats from al-Shabaab and its supporters.
- The violence score is extremely high at 13.9 points, a major increase from 12.4 points in WWL 2024.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2025 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/.

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.75 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, expressing Christian faith through blogs and social media platforms entails considerable risk. This danger stems from strong societal pressures exerted by families and communities, particularly against converts, to conform to established religious norms in both public and private life. Individuals who articulate their Christian beliefs in writing face a delicate balance between their personal convictions and communal expectations.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.75 points)

Displaying Christian images or symbols in Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions involves considerable risk due to strong societal pressures from families and communities, especially directed at converts. These pressures demand adherence to established religious norms in both public and private life. Christians who visibly display symbols of their faith face a challenging dynamic, navigating the tension between personal convictions and communal expectations.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (2.75 points)

Christians engaging with religious content through electronic media navigate a challenging environment where personal faith conflicts with communal expectations. Accessing Christian radio, TV programs, or online content in Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions entails considerable risks due to strong societal pressures from families and communities, particularly targeting converts. These pressures demand conformity to established religious norms in both public and private spheres.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.75 points)

Engaging in discussions about Christian faith with individuals beyond immediate family members in Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions presents significant risks, deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of these areas. These risks are intensified by pervasive societal pressures, particularly on converts, to conform strictly to established religious norms. Such norms govern not only public conduct but also interaction within extended family and community networks, creating a highly restrictive environment for open religious expression. Christians who attempt to share their faith outside the immediate family navigate a landscape where personal convictions are often at odds with communal expectations. This tension reflects the broader dynamics of societal control over religious practices, where the boundaries of acceptable behavior are rigidly enforced to maintain collective identity and adherence to traditional norms. The act of discussing faith in such a context exposes individuals to potential ostracism, harassment or more severe repercussions.

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Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, Christian children encounter considerable challenges within educational systems that frequently promote beliefs at odds with their faith. These challenges are compounded by strong community pressure, which severely limits the ability of Christian families to ensure that their children's education aligns with their religious convictions.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (2.75 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, Christian couples encounter substantial obstacles when attempting to adopt or foster children, largely due to strong community pressure. Societal influences impose significant constraints, making it exceedingly difficult for couples to structure the raising of adopted children in alignment with Christian values.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (2.75 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, Christian parents encounter considerable challenges in raising their children within the framework of their faith. Intense pressure from family and the broader community impose significant constraints, making it exceedingly difficult for parents to instill Christian values. These societal influences further hinder their ability to engage in key religious practices, such as baptism and the celebration of Christian holidays, aligning their children's upbringing with their beliefs.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.75 points)

In areas where Islam is the dominant religion, such as Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, and where the clan system plays a significant role, Christian children face considerable pressure to participate in educational programs or teachings aligned with the majority religion. These societal and cultural dynamics make it nearly impossible for families to ensure their children's education reflects their Christian beliefs.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, where Islam and the clan system dominate, Christians face relentless harassment, bullying and threats as part of their daily lives. They are subjected to verbal abuse, including derogatory remarks and slurs aimed at undermining their faith, while physical intimidation often accompanies such attacks, particularly for converts seen as betraying the dominant religion and clan traditions. In extreme cases, threats escalate to physical harm or property destruction, such as the vandalism of homes or churches, further marginalizing Christians.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.25 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, Christians, including teachers, Christian organizations, and individuals, frequently face the threat of abduction and violence, particularly from the militant group al-Shabaab. Christian teachers are often targeted due to their roles in schools, where they are seen as influencing young minds with values that contradict the group's ideology. Christian organizations, especially those involved in humanitarian or educational work, have also been repeatedly threatened and attacked, with their staff abducted or intimidated into ceasing their activities. Individual Christians, particularly those who are vocal about their faith or suspected of conversion, face ongoing risks of being kidnapped, forced into marriages, or coerced into renouncing their beliefs.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, Christians face relentless pressure from their communities to renounce their faith, particularly when their Christian identity is visible or conversion from Islam is suspected. This coercion is deeply entrenched in the societal structures of these regions, where religious and clan norms dominate daily life. Christians who refuse to conform are systematically ostracized and deprived of their rights, including access to community resources and participation in social and economic activities. Such measures go beyond disapproval, functioning as deliberate tactics to force individuals to either abandon their Christian beliefs or revert to the majority faith. Converts, in particular, bear the brunt of this pressure, facing intense public shaming, threats, and in some cases, violence. Families and community leaders often spearhead these efforts, using their influence to isolate Christians socially and economically. Teachers, Christian organizations, and individuals are targeted through exclusion from communal decision-making processes, denial of basic services like water and land rights, and restriction from ceremonies or local gatherings. The systematic marginalization and exclusion create an environment where Christians, especially converts, find it nearly impossible to live without either conforming to societal expectations or leaving the region entirely.

Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.00 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, Christians face extensive barriers in operating their businesses, driven by discrimination rooted in their faith. When their Christian identity is known, particularly if conversion from Islam is suspected, they are systematically denied access to critical economic resources such as loans, subsidies and government contracts, which are essential for sustaining and growing their businesses. Beyond institutional exclusion, societal pressures further compound their challenges, dictating what they can sell, when they can operate, and even who they can hire. Community leaders and influential figures often enforce unwritten rules targeting Christian businesses through informal restrictions or organized customer boycotts. Christians may be prohibited from selling goods deemed incompatible with local norms, and business hours are frequently dictated by the expectations of the dominant religion, forcing closures during specific times or days of religious observance that conflict with their faith. Customers, influenced by societal norms and community pressure, often refuse to patronize Christian-owned businesses, creating a hostile economic environment.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

The threat of abduction is a significant concern, with militant groups like al-Shabaab frequently targeting Christians on roads and remote routes, leading to kidnappings for ransom, forced conversion or execution. In Kenya's northeastern regions, Christians particularly face these sort of dangers when traveling, with their faith often making them targets for violence and abductions. On numerous occasions, Christians have been separated from non-Christians during public transport or at checkpoints and subsequently killed. These incidents highlight the precarious nature of travel for Christians in areas dominated by religious and clan systems that view them with suspicion or hostility. Local governance structures in these regions, compounded by corruption, often fail to provide adequate protection or accountability, leaving Christians particularly vulnerable.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.00 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, Christian-affiliated civil society organizations (CSOs) face significant challenges rooted in systemic discrimination and structural marginalization. These organizations often encounter outright prohibitions or severe restrictions due to their religious affiliation, severely limiting their ability to operate or advocate effectively. At the local governance level, structural arrangements are frequently designed to exclude them, denying access to decision-making spaces and resources essential for their activities. Local officials further undermine their efforts by imposing bureaucratic hurdles, delaying permits, or subjecting them to targeted scrutiny. Corruption intensifies these challenges, as many Christian-affiliated organizations are forced to navigate bribery and corrupt systems to secure minimal permissions or access to resources. Additionally, societal hostility driven by dominant religious norms and biases leads to boycotts, public harassment, and even threats against their staff and operations.

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.00 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, publicly displaying Christian symbols poses significant dangers, despite the absence of formal legal prohibitions against such expressions. Christians, churches and affiliated organizations face societal hostility, including harassment, intimidation and threats, particularly in areas dominated by Islam and clan systems. The display of crosses or other religious symbols is often perceived as a provocation, leading to confrontation or backlash from local communities. These risks are further heightened by the presence of al-Shabaab, who operate in these regions and target Christian institutions and churches for attacks, viewing them as ideological adversaries. Community leaders and influential figures may escalate tensions, mobilizing opposition against Christian symbols under the guise of preserving communal harmony. Corruption exacerbates these challenges, as local officials may exploit societal biases to impose informal restrictions or discourage Christians from asserting their right to display religious symbols.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)

In counties like Wajir, Garissa, and parts of Kenya's coastal areas, Christians frequently face clear discrimination and marginalization within local governance structures. Local administration, government bodies and even the armed forces often overlook Christians or treat them as outsiders, reflecting deeply entrenched biases against their faith. This exclusion is rooted in governance frameworks that maintain Christians as a super-minority in these areas, where dominant religious and clan systems shape political and administrative dynamics. Local non-Christian officials routinely fail to recognize Christians' rightful role in government, denying them equitable access to public services, opportunities and representation in decision-making processes.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)

In counties like Wajir, Garissa, and parts of Kenya's coastal regions, churches are subjected to extensive monitoring and interference from various local actors, including youth groups, community elders and other influential members of society. Church activities, including services and gatherings, are often scrutinized for signs of perceived deviations from dominant religious norms, leaving Christians under constant surveillance. This monitoring extends to attempts to integrate converts, which are met with suspicion and resistance, further marginalizing church communities. The involvement of community elders and local leaders in enforcing societal expectations often creates an atmosphere of intimidation, discouraging open worship and religious expression. Corruption exacerbates these challenges, as officials may collude with community groups to disrupt church activities or turn a blind eye to harassment. This pervasive surveillance and interference make it increasingly difficult for churches to function without fear.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.50 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, integrating converts into church communities is fraught with challenges stemming from both societal hostility and systemic pressure. Converts often face intense scrutiny and targeted actions from their families, community members, and extremist groups, making open integration into Christian communities highly precarious. Surveillance of church activities by local actors, including community elders and youth groups, further complicates efforts to welcome and assimilate new believers. This constant monitoring creates an atmosphere of fear, where churches must tread cautiously to avoid exposing converts to harassment, threats, or violence. The entrenched clan system and dominant religious norms in these areas exacerbate the difficulties, as converts are often viewed as betraying their community's identity. The societal backlash may extend to public shaming, exclusion from communal resources, or even threats to personal safety. Corruption further amplifies these challenges, as local authorities may exploit the situation to disrupt church activities or extract bribes, leaving churches with limited options to provide safe space for new believers. These intersecting obstacles make the integration of converts an arduous process, undermining their ability to practice their faith openly and freely within church communities.

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.50 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, selling or distributing Bibles and other Christian materials is an exceptionally risky activity due to the pervasive threat of militant groups like al-Shabaab. Churches and Christian organizations attempting to engage in such practices face heightened scrutiny from local communities, where religious and cultural norms often view these actions as provocative. This environment of hostility makes the distribution of Christian materials a dangerous endeavor, as it may attract the attention of al-Shabaab seeking to suppress religious diversity and promote its ideological agenda. The risks are compounded by organized surveillance from local actors, including community elders and youth groups, who monitor such activities and may report them to local Islamist elements. Corruption further exacerbates these challenges, as officials may demand bribes to overlook the sale or distribution of Christian texts or, in some cases, actively collaborate with groups seeking to disrupt these efforts.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.25 points)

In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, organizing church activities outside traditional church buildings is fraught with risk. Such gatherings are often perceived as provocative acts, drawing unwanted attention from extremist groups like al-Shabaab, as well as from hostile local communities. These activities are closely monitored by community members, elders, and other local actors, who may interpret them as an affront to dominant religious norms or as attempts to convert individuals. This perception frequently leads to mob attacks, harassment or threats against participants. The presence of militant groups amplifies these dangers, as they may target such gatherings for violence, viewing them as direct opposition to their ideological goals.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security rea-*

sons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).

- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*

- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

3. The use of symbolic numbers:

- *In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Kenya: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	8	5
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	21	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	3
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	8	4
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	202
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	54	10 *

(table continues below)

Kenya: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	30	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	0

5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

| Kenya: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	10.1
2024	10.1
2023	10.1
2022	10.3
2021	9.9

The average pressure on Christians in Kenya, where approximately 80% of the population identifies as Christian, has stabilized at 10.1 points over the last three WWL reporting periods. In light of the country's significant Christian majority, this consistently high level of pressure is of serious concern.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

In the blue chart below, it can be seen that the five-year average score for the different spheres of life (WWL 2021–WWL 2025) indicates that the highest levels of pressure were recorded in the *Church* and *Community spheres*, both scoring 11.2 points. The *Private sphere* followed closely with an average score of 10.9 points. The *National sphere* registered the lowest pressure, with a score of 8.0 points.

Kenya: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 Pressure scores in each sphere of life
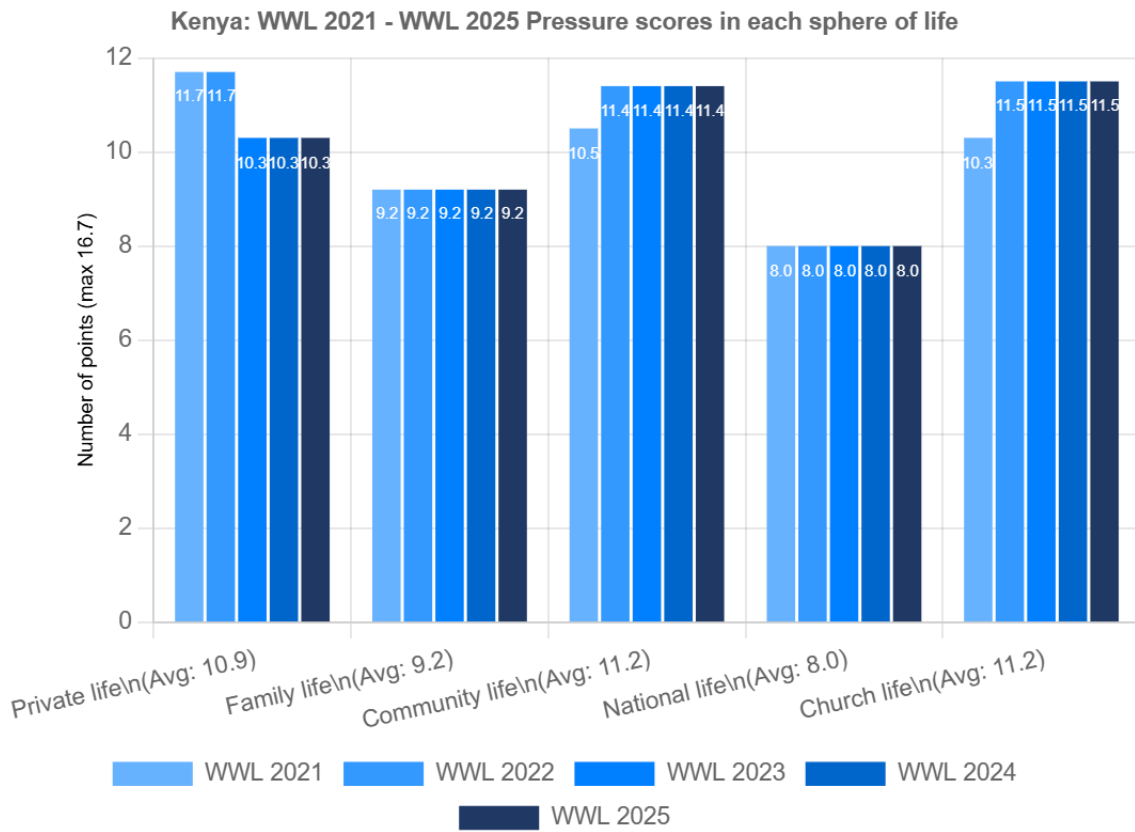
5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Kenya: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 Violence scores
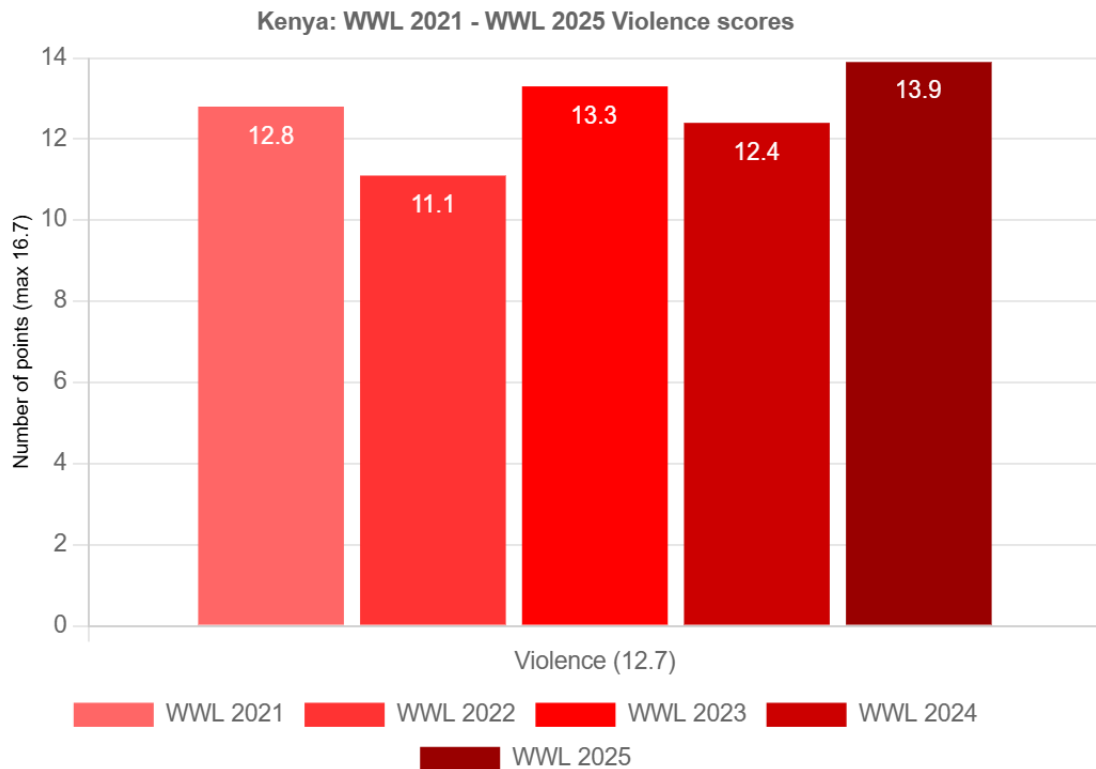
The average violence score for Kenya (WWL 2021–WWL 2025) stands at 12.7 points, reflecting a very high level of violence. The five-year trend, as shown in the chart, reveals no clear pattern, with scores fluctuating within the range 11.1 - 13.9 points.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Kenya	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
Abduction Denied access to social community/networks Denied custody of children Denied inheritance or possessions Discrimination/harassment via education Enforced religious dress code Forced divorce Forced marriage Forced out of home - expulsion Incarceration by family (house arrest) Violence - death Violence - physical Violence - psychological violence - sexual Violence - verbal	

In the Muslim-majority regions of Kenya, Christian women and girls face multiple forms of persecution. Although the Constitution fully establishes gender equality, cultural practices in some tribes (such as cleansing rites, widow inheritance, FGM, early marriage and polygamy) leave Christian women at greater risk of persecution if they oppose these practices. Widows can be disinherited and forced out of their homes if they object to traditional burial rituals. In addition, a lack of effective implementation of the Constitution has caused growing dissatisfaction among the Kenyan population.

In the Northern regions, Christian women and girls continue to face harassment and social rejection. Women and girls are forced to comply with an Islamic dress code. If they fail to do so they could be asked to leave their school, harassed and threatened. Reporting on the scale of this discrimination, a country expert explained that it is widespread in all state-run schools within Merti in Isiolo County. "In these schools," he remarked, "all girls regardless of their faith and belief must [don] the complete Muslim attire. Christian pupils are discriminated against, mistreated and harmed by Muslim pupils and if reported no action is taken." Married converts who refuse to wear certain cultural ornaments are also outlawed.

In traditional communities, women are considered as being on the same social standing as children. The strict regulations that follow this categorization, including not being allowed to run a business, save at the behest of a husband and on his behalf, place women at an economic disadvantage. For those women that do work, violence and harassment against women remains highly prevalent, particularly for those in the informal sector (HRW 2024, Kenya country chapter). These cultural

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inhibitions further exacerbate their vulnerability to persecution. According to a country expert: "Christian women are lured to marry Muslim men and bear Muslim children. The chances of conversion to Islam once a girl is married to a Muslim is almost absolute." In addition, reports suggest that female Christian housemaids are at a high risk of sexual harassment and rape, especially Ugandan and Tanzanian girls. "If these house-helps get pregnant, they are forced to abort and are dismissed without pay. Some are even murdered", a source disclosed. In the first month of 2024, at least 10 women were murdered following a pattern of physical or sexual violence, fueled by social norms that enforce male power over women (UN Women, 9 February 2024).

Female converts to Christianity from Islam face a great variety of forms of pressure. The first measures taken are to isolate them from Christian community and put them under house arrest. If married, they risk being denied custody of their children and divorced. If single, and especially if young, they face the likelihood of a forced marriage – usually to a much older Muslim man.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Kenya	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
Denied access to social community/networks Denied inheritance or possessions Imprisonment by government violence - death Violence - physical Violence - verbal	

Christian boys and men in the north-eastern region face the greatest danger of physical assault, abduction and execution at the hands of radical elements within the Muslim community and al-Shabaab. According to a country expert, men are mostly targeted and killed in attacks by Islamic militants (Africa News, 26 December 2022). Whilst instances are rare, men are also more likely than women to be imprisoned for their faith with false or exaggerated charges. Men and boys also face the threat of isolation and societal condemnation when they go against cultural norms. Those who oppose negative cultural practices in some tribes (such as funeral rites, FGM, early marriages, and polygamy) suffer varying levels of persecution. Their families are not accepted in the community as they are considered 'cursed', 'weak' or 'not real men' (if they opt for hospital circumcision) or excluded from family matters if they convert to Christianity. A country expert adds: "In African Traditional Religion, the men have to appease their fathers to get a good inheritance, especially those who are not firstborn. The pastoralist communities like Maasai, Samburu and Pokot normally prefer the polygamous lifestyle for a man. They also prefer it when a man marries from his community. When a Christian man marries a Christian woman from another community, the elders will still insist that he gets a second wife from his own community. This places immense pressure on the man and in the cases where they do not conform to this request, they would normally be disowned and not allocated a good inheritance."

There are also reports that organized cartels mobilized by Muslim leaders use Muslim girls to entice Christians into conversion and lure Christian 'boda boda' riders into traps. Pastors and Christian leaders living in Islam-dominated regions and ATR hotspots face ethnic antagonism, ridicule and rejection because of their faith, including false accusations. According to a source: "Pastors, Christian leaders and their families working in north-eastern Kenya and other Muslim dominated areas have been the special target of terror groups and in most cases, these leaders and their families are kidnapped by terror gangs who demand ransom for their release." Christian leaders who speak against illicit activities like drug trafficking and *khat* farming have also reportedly been denied entry/passage through certain gang territories. Several pastors have been threatened and even summoned to either stop preaching or face dire consequences, forcing many to flee. Certain members of parliament in Migori County also reportedly sponsor gangs to threaten and intimidate Christian leaders in the region.

While Christian female converts from a Muslim background are at a high risk of divorce and losing custody of their children, male converts are particularly disadvantaged in cases where the child is very young. Wives of converts are also married off by their family members, mainly out of spite for the convert. According to a country expert, it is "more shameful for a man if he converts because this signifies failure and attracts ridicule and profiling". Converts from a Muslim background may also be denied their inheritance rights, putting them in a weak financial position. As men are the main providers in Kenya, this also affects their extended family and all dependents.

Persecution of other religious minorities

In some parts of Kenya, Muslims - especially those with Somali background - face discrimination in Christian-dominated areas. According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Kenya](#)):

- "Human rights organizations continued to report complaints from predominantly Muslim communities, particularly in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi and coastal regions, regarding intimidation, arbitrary arrest and extortion by police. Some complainants again stated police accused them of being members of al-Shabaab."
- On 14 November 2023, "multiple press outlets reported unidentified men, presumably from the government security services, abducted Adan Ahmed Osman, a Somali national and Islamic school teacher in the Nairobi neighborhood of Eastleigh; at year's end, his whereabouts remained unknown."
- Some predominately Muslim ethnic groups, including Kenyan Somalis and Nubians, continued to report difficulties obtaining government identification cards. These communities stated government officials at times requested supporting documents not required by law and implemented vetting processes in a biased manner."

Concerning other religious groups in the country, there were no reports suggesting incidents of persecution.

Trends Summary

1) Kenya's fragile stability and Its designation as a 'Major Non-NATO Ally'

Kenya, while still considered fragile, was designated by the USA as a "Major Non-NATO Ally" in June 2024. This status is significant, especially in a region that is increasingly insecure. For years, Ethiopia was viewed as the anchor state in the Horn of Africa due to its reliability in countering terrorism and maintaining regional stability. However, Ethiopia's recent internal conflicts and instability have diminished its role, making Kenya's strategic importance more pronounced despite its own vulnerabilities. The designation by the USA could be seen as a reflection of Kenya's relative stability in an otherwise turbulent region, though the country continues to grapple with internal political challenges and the ongoing threat from al-Shabaab.

2) The persistent challenge of institutionalized corruption and its impact on the new administration

Institutionalized corruption remains one of Kenya's most pressing challenges, severely impacting governance and the rule of law. Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index ranked Kenya at #126 out of 180 countries, highlighting the entrenched nature of corruption. This environment has made it particularly difficult for the relatively new administration under President William Ruto to implement meaningful reforms. Ruto's efforts to address these issues have been met with significant resistance, leading to protests and widespread dissatisfaction. The systemic corruption has also undermined efforts to protect Kenyan Christians, especially in regions affected by al-Shabaab's activities, as investigations into violence are rarely handled effectively by law enforcement. Despite some exposure of high-level corruption cases and a limited push for transparency, these improvements remain marginal and insufficient to bring about substantial change.

3) The escalating humanitarian crisis in the north-eastern region due to attacks on Christians

The humanitarian crisis in Kenya's north-eastern region continues to escalate, largely due to ongoing attacks by al-Shabaab targeting Christians. In counties like Garissa, Mandera and Wajir, the situation remains dire as al-Shabaab's activities have led to the exodus of Christian teachers, nurses, and humanitarian workers. The educational system has been particularly hard-hit, with the state transferring approximately 2,000 teachers out of these areas, leaving many schools severely understaffed. As of February 2018, 250 schools were closed due to the insecurity, and while some have reopened, nearly 100 schools still operate with only a headmaster present, further exacerbating the educational crisis. The ongoing violence not only destabilizes the region but also has broader implications for neighboring areas, contributing to the region's overall instability and humanitarian challenges.

4) The continuing challenge of al-Shabaab in Kenya

Al-Shabaab continues to pose a significant threat to Kenya's security, particularly in the north-eastern region bordering Somalia. The group has been active in Mandera, Wajir and Garissa counties, where they have carried out several attacks: In December 2023 and January 2024, al-Shabaab was involved in multiple incidents, including the killing of five civilians and several clashes with Kenyan security forces. These attacks have highlighted the group's ability to adapt and persist despite increased counterterrorism efforts by the Kenyan government and its allies. Al-Shabaab's activities have not only affected the immediate security of these regions but have also strained Kenya's broader security

apparatus, challenging the country's stability and its ability to protect vulnerable populations. The group's continued presence underscores the complexity of Kenya's security challenges and the need for sustained, coordinated efforts to combat this ongoing threat.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/
- https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/.

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: ICC, 29 November 2023 - https://www.persecution.org/2023/11/29/christians-in-kenya-want-greater-protection-from-al-shabab/
- Specific examples of positive developments: The Whitehouse, 24 June 2024 - https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/06/24/memorandum-on-the-designation-of-kenya-as-a-major-non-nato-ally/
- Persecution engines description: Corruption Perceptions Index score - https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/ken
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: highly prevalent, - https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/kenya
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