

WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

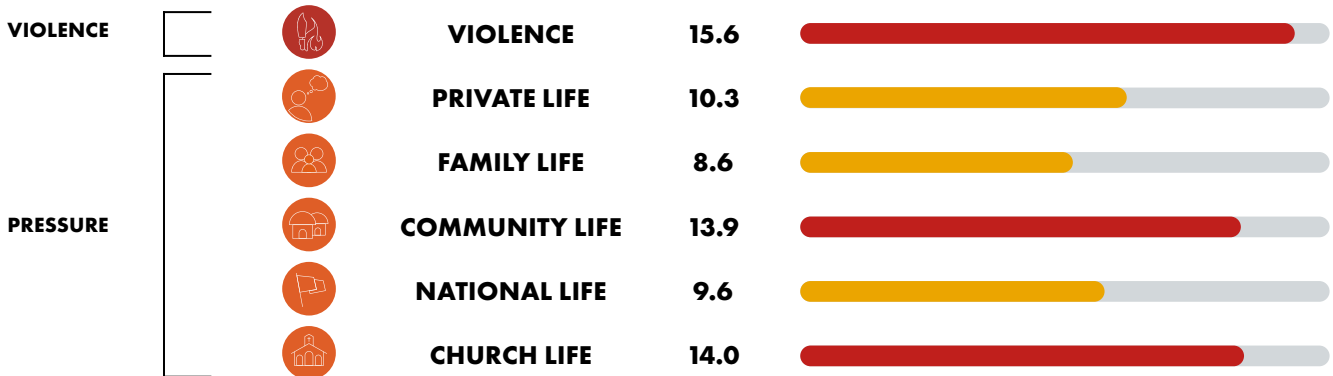
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
27



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



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

Key findings

The already precarious situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) is further exacerbated by the looming crisis in neighboring Sudan. The potential for another round of major conflict in Sudan, particularly due to delays in elections, casts an alarming shadow over the fragile state of affairs in CAR. As Sudan navigates its own internal strife, the ripple effects threaten to further destabilize CAR, amplifying the risks for vulnerable populations like Christians.

Currently, the breakdown of law and order has reached such a level that impunity and anarchy reign, leaving no space for Christians to practice their faith in safety. Armed militias, which occupy large swaths of the country, have been responsible for an extensive list of human rights abuses, including the burning

and ransacking of church buildings. Christian leaders brave enough to speak out against this violence have faced threats to their lives, compelling many in the Christian community to flee to neighboring countries like Cameroon for safety.

The lack of governance and the rule of law has resulted in thousands of Christians becoming internally displaced, often forcing them into makeshift camps after losing their homes and means of livelihood. This also provides a breeding ground for more localized forms of persecution; particularly in the northern regions of CAR, converts to Christianity experience social ostracization and physical violence, often orchestrated by their own family members in attempts to force them to renounce their newfound faith.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Faustin-Archange Touadera

POPULATION

5,916,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

4,433,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	4,433,000	74.9
Muslims	800,000	13.5
Ethno-religionists	628,000	10.6
Agnostics	39,500	0.7

Source²

Since its independence in 1960, CAR has been mired in violence driven by overlapping tensions between armed groups, religious and ethnic groups, and herders and farmers. The mainly Muslim group, Séléka, staged a coup in 2013 that gave rise to deadly conflict along religious and ethnic lines.

Since President Touadera was elected in 2016, he has made reconciliation his priority, and a Political

Peace Agreement was signed in 2019 between the government and 14 armed groups but this collapsed in the run-up to the December 2020 elections and the fighting has not come to an end. The government is only in control of the capital city, Bangui. The rest of the country is divided into different factions. These factors have also made the tracking of persecution more complex.

The presentation of a new constitution for a referendum by the country's president has raised concerns among the population as it provides for the removal of presidential term limits and undermines the country's democratic governance. The presence and influence of Rwanda and the Wagner mercenary group are growing in the country. The Chadian army has also continued its operations. Many armed groups have been forming alliances with others and some groups who want to establish a Sharia state. There are still clashes involving the mainly Muslim ex-Séléka splinters and the self-defense group, called the anti-Balaka. Although the anti-Balaka is frequently

¹ Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

² Data source: Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

referred to as Christian, they mostly follow African Traditional Religions and churches have strongly disassociated themselves from them.

In the middle of this, it is very difficult for Christians to speak out against injustice or comment on the increasingly powerful criminal gangs that are facilitating the prevalence of the different armed factions.

The [2016 Constitution](#) provides for freedom of religion, and this is generally upheld. Relations between Muslims and Christians are reasonable, but there are some tensions. In particular, converts from Islam to Christianity face violations and Christians living in Muslim-dominated areas have reported discrimination and attacks on churches by ex-Séléka groups. Anti-Balaka rebel groups also attack churches and any Christians who oppose their activities. Many women and girls are economically dependent on their families, which can make them vulnerable if they convert to Christianity.

In 2024, there were multiple clashes that took place between government forces, and various rebel groups, resulting in significant casualties and displacement. Increasing political tensions due to President Touadéra's attempts to amend the constitution by removing the presidential term limits led to crackdowns on civil society organizations and political opposition parties. Amid an already critical situation, reports of rebel groups being supported by Sudan adds to the complex new dynamics of the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR). This would effectively make CAR a nation increasingly encircled by countries embroiled in conflicts, thereby exacerbating its own precarious state of affairs. International aid organizations are already spread thin dealing with multiple areas of instability and human rights violations.

How the situation varies by region

Rights violations against Christians are most severe in the northern and eastern parts of the country, which are dominated by Muslims and where Séléka splinter groups operate. There are also difficulties for Christians in the eastern part of the country, bordering Sudan.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

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

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics, and schools. During and after the Séléka coup, many of their churches were looted. The Catholic Church has been a strong voice calling for peace and reconciliation and has also provided places of refuge for civilians, both Muslim and Christian, fleeing attack. As a result, Catholic churches have often been targeted for attack.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts with a Muslim background experience opposition and pressure from family members to renounce Christianity if their conversion becomes known. Most do not worship in public due to the fear of attacks by Muslim agitators, especially in the northern Muslim-dominated areas of the country.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Evangelical and Pentecostal communities have been subject to attacks by ex-Séléka militants. Recently, the number of people joining these Christian congregations has increased dramatically.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Besides the violence against Christians perpetrated particularly by the offshoots of the Séléka militia, Islamic oppression is also evident in the persecution of Christians by society in general in predominantly Muslim parts of the country.

ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

This persecution engine is particularly evident where Anti-Balaka militants attack churches and Christians. Although Anti-Balaka began as a collection of vigilante groups, they have morphed into criminal gangs. Particularly in Bangui, they have often targeted Christians and church leaders, especially those who do not subscribe to their ideals or those who oppose their violent activities. While the group claims to protect Christians, it has become evident over the years that this is untrue, since they attack Muslims and Christians alike.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS HOSTILITY BLENDED WITH CLAN OPPRESSION

There are two dimensions to this persecution engine – 1) Animism/ATR (religious and/or cultural) and 2) tribal fighting. In CAR, ethnic and religious motives typically go together. Some ethnic minority groups are specifically targeted. For instance, Ba'aka Pygmies are forcibly recruited for labor. Anti-Balaka groups sometimes force Christians into their ranks.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Years of violence and political instability have left Christian women and girls particularly vulnerable to rape, trafficking, abduction, and forced marriage as forms of religious persecution. Sexual abuse results in shame, trauma and often pregnancy. High rates of sexual violence discourage parents in high-risk areas from sending girls to school. Dependence on family means family-driven persecution affects women more, with financial need also a significant factor. In Muslim-dominated areas, women are pressured to follow an Islamic dress code and converts face house arrest and forced marriage to older Muslims.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Economic harassment via fines
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced marriage
- Targeted seduction
- Trafficking
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

MEN

Men can be killed for their faith or detained by radical militias. Pastors are especially targeted, falsely accused and even attacked during church services. Men are also discriminated against in jobs, as Islamic leaders occupy all marketplaces, control trade, impose large taxes on Christian businessmen, and even loot Christian-owned shops which can keep them in poverty. Christians are forcibly recruited into rebel militant groups, discriminated against in national military service, and targeted for torture and assault. Abduction, killing, threats and the tactical impoverishment of men greatly affects Christian families.

Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2025	27	72
2024	28	70
2023	24	70
2022	31	68
2021	35	66

CAR has been enduring a severe crisis since 2013, during which Christians have frequently been targeted for their faith. In WWL 2025, the country scored 72 points, marking a 2-point increase from WWL 2024. This rise is primarily due to an increase in overall pressure, with the average pressure reaching 11.3 (up from 10.9 in WWL 2024). The Community and Church life spheres were particularly affected. Once known for its religious tolerance, the country is now witnessing a troubling shift towards intolerance, especially against non-Muslim communities in areas where Muslims are dominant.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **Targeting of churches and Christian property:** Armed groups increasingly targeted churches and Christian property, leading to the destruction of religious buildings and the looting of Christian-owned assets. This pattern of violence has severely disrupted the lives of many Christian communities, causing widespread fear and displacement.
- **Attacks on women and girls:** In areas controlled by jihadist groups, women and girls faced heightened risks of violence, including abductions, forced marriages and sexual exploitation. The presence of these armed groups has created an environment of extreme insecurity, particularly for female members of the Christian community.
- **Forced displacement of Christians:** Due to the ongoing violence and threats from armed groups, many Christians have been forced to flee their homes. This displacement has resulted in a significant humanitarian crisis, as displaced individuals and families struggle to find safety and basic necessities amidst the chaos.

WWL Year	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians abducted	Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted
2025	67	100*	100*	100*
2024	23	14	100*	100*

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



PRIVATE LIFE

Converts to Christianity from Islam experience severe violations from family members if their conversion becomes known. Financial help can be cut off. In the Muslim-dominated north, where Séléka splinter groups operate, converts risk their lives if they own Christian materials. When ex-Séléka fighters come into a house and find someone reading a Bible, they have been known to kill them immediately.

FAMILY LIFE

Often, after a spouse has converted to Christianity, extended families and the local community will put pressure on the non-convert to divorce. In addition, converts almost automatically lose family inheritance rights. In areas controlled by rebel groups, where children's parents have been killed or have been forced to flee, any children left behind remain at the mercy of the attackers. Some have been brutally killed.

COMMUNITY LIFE

The government has lost effective control over many areas. In Muslim-dominated areas, Christians are often discriminated against, especially where Sharia law is more or less officially implemented.

Monitoring by some rebel groups and their supporters has been common. In the context of the ongoing conflict, Christians (especially young girls) suffer from attacks and abductions. Muslim community members usually do not want to share community resources (such as healthcare) with converts to Christianity, especially in the remote northern part of the country.

NATIONAL LIFE

In areas controlled by ex-Séléka militants, all transportation facilities are under Muslim control, making movement for Christians difficult. When violence flares up, pastors are particularly vulnerable when traveling between churches to carry out their work. In regions where rebel groups wield power, Christians are discriminated against and sometimes attacked, forcing them to flee home and country.

CHURCH LIFE

Although there is no official surveillance from the government, civilians are watched by various rebel groups to discover their possible links to other groups. Many attacks have been reported, with church services being interrupted and churches burned.



International obligations & rights violated

Central African Republic 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)

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

- Christian converts in Muslim-majority areas experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are physically attacked for sharing their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are killed because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 6.1)
- Christian women and girls are raped and sexually abused because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 7)
- 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)

Situation of other religious minorities

As reported by the [US State Department](#): “The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) said government forces targeted Muslims, including Fulani pastoralists, carrying out arbitrary arrests and mistreating detainees.” Citing MINUSCA, the reports adds that: “members of the Russia-backed Wagner Group detained and reportedly tortured an imam and his cousin in Bangui, leading to a general strike by the Muslim community. In January, the Wagner Group unjustly detained 15 Muslim civilians in Nana-Grebizi Prefecture.”

In the context of the ongoing conflict, religious minorities are not the main targets. However, adherents of small religious minorities do face challenges in the communities where they live.



Open Doors in Central African Republic

Open Doors, through local partners and churches have been involved in CAR for quite a few years. From 2013 our programs were dominated by support to the Church in crisis following the March 2013 coup by the Islam-dominated Séléka forces. Our vision for CAR is a Church that is mature, autonomous, and able to deal with trauma and persecution. Our programs include:

- Persecution preparedness
- Economic empowerment
- Trauma care



ABOUT THIS BRIEF

- The content of this document is based on the more detailed WWL Persecution Dynamics per country published 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: © 2025 Open Doors International.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the WWL Persecution Dynamics per country, accompanying Background Information per country and the latest update of WWL Methodology. These are also available at the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).
- The WWL 2025 reporting period was 01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024.

Many photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.

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