



Kyle Wisdom

Top Five Countries for Killings, Abductions, Arrests and Sentences of Christians, Attacks on Buildings and Houses of Worship, and Forced Displacement

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International Institute
for Religious Freedom



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for Religious Freedom

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The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) was founded in 2007 with the mission to promote religious freedom for all faiths from an academic perspective. The IIRF aspires to be an authoritative voice on religious freedom. We provide reliable and unbiased data on religious freedom—beyond anecdotal evidence—to strengthen academic research on the topic and to inform public policy at all levels. Our research results are disseminated through the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* and other publications. A particular emphasis of the IIRF is to encourage the study of religious freedom in university institutions through its inclusion in educational curricula and by supporting postgraduate students with research projects.

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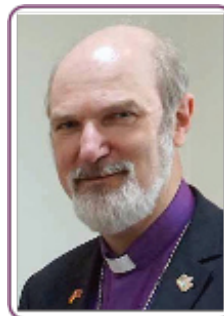
We understand Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) as a fundamental and interdependent human right as described in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In line with CCPR General Comment No. 22, we view FoRB as a broad and multidimensional concept that needs to be protected for all faiths in all spheres of society.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Introduction

The figures in this report are drawn from the IIRF Violent Incident Database and cover the calendar year 2025, from 1 January to 31 December. All counts below are restricted to incidents in which the victims were recorded as Christian.

Killings and abductions remained overwhelmingly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, and largely within Nigeria. Of 4,652 killings of Christians recorded across 36 countries, 3,792 – more than four in five – occurred in Nigeria, and the country accounted for 2,486 of the 2,832 recorded abductions. Together with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which recorded 445 killings and 99 abductions, the two countries account for over ninety per cent of all killings in the dataset. Mozambique, Ethiopia and Haiti complete the top five list for killings, while Ethiopia, Myanmar and Cameroon follow for abductions. Within Nigeria, where a perpetrator was identified, revolutionary or paramilitary groups and ethnic group leaders accounted for the largest shares, consistent with the pattern of Fulani herdsman and armed militia violence described in earlier reports. IIRF has expanded its own data collection on Nigeria rather than relying solely on partner reporting, and the higher figures for 2025 reflect that additional work as much as any change on the ground.

Arrests and sentences followed a different geography and a different logic. China led on arrests with 228, followed by Iran with 115, Tanzania with 89, Russia with 61 and Thailand with 60. For custodial sentences the order shifts, with Russia first at 88, then China at 41, Iran at 32, Cuba at 14 and Nicaragua at 7. What distinguishes this category is who acts: government officials were recorded as the perpetrator in 812 of the 843 arrests and in 198 of the 199 sentences. Where killings and abductions are largely the work of non-state armed actors, arrest and sentencing are almost entirely the work of states, confirming the continuing pattern of legal harassment and criminalization of religious activity in authoritarian contexts.

Attacks on buildings – counting homes and businesses – again track the areas of armed conflict. Nigeria recorded 556 such attacks and Mozambique 381, both cases were driven overwhelmingly by attacks on homes rather than businesses. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq and Myanmar follow at considerably lower levels. These are, in effect, the property dimension of the same violence that produces the killings and displacement figures.

Attacks on houses of worship show a markedly different distribution, and the raw totals conceal two distinct phenomena. India heads the list with 212 affected places of worship, but 200 of these were administrative closures rather than physical destruction. The other four countries in the top five – Germany with 69, Mexico with 48, Ukraine with 44 and the United States with 42 – recorded almost exclusively destruction, damage or vandalism, with no closures at all. Bureaucratic restriction and physical attack produce similar numbers but call for very different responses, and the presence of Germany and the United States near the top of this list is a reminder that attacks on church buildings are not confined to states where Christians face broader legal restriction.

Displacement figures reinforce the concentration seen in the violence data. Some 3,527 Christians were recorded as forced from their homes within their own countries, of whom 2,117 – three in five – were in Nigeria. Mozambique recorded 777 and the Democratic Republic of the Congo 346, with Kenya and Nicaragua following at 100 and 62 respectively.

Taken together, the 2025 data confirm the dual pattern identified in previous thematic reports and sharpen it. In sub-Saharan Africa, and in Nigeria above all,

Christians face lethal violence from non-state armed actors, which destroys homes and drives large-scale internal displacement. In China, Iran, Russia and parts of Latin America, the pressure is exercised by the state itself through arrest, prosecution and the administrative closure of places of worship. The categories are not sealed off from one another, but the distinction matters for advocacy: the first pattern is a failure of protection, the second a deliberate exercise of state power.

Killings

Nigeria	3,792
Democratic Republic of the Congo	445
Mozambique	72
Ethiopia	58
Haiti	42

Abductions

Nigeria	2,486
Democratic Republic of the Congo	99
Ethiopia	77
Myanmar	32
Cameroon	30

Arrests

China	228
Iran	115
Tanzania	89
Russia	61
Thailand	60

Sentences

Russia	88
China	41
Iran	32
Cuba	14
Nicaragua	7

Buildings

Nigeria	556
Mozambique	381
Bosnia and Herzegovina	60
Iraq	48
Myanmar	40

Houses of worship

India	212
Germany	69
Mexico	48
Ukraine	44
United States	42

Internal displacement

Nigeria	2,117
Mozambique	777
Democratic Republic of the Congo	346
Kenya	100
Nicaragua	62

Imprint

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