



Reports

Ronald Boyd-MacMillan

Faltering states and growing churches
Underneath the rising violence springs
healing and hope

2025 / 1

International Institute
for Religious Freedom



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for Religious Freedom

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*Executive Editor of the
International Journal for
Religious Freedom (IJRF)*

Ronald Boyd-MacMillan

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, serves as Chief of Research and Global Strategy at Global Christian Relief. He also is a Senior Research Fellow at the International Institute for Religious Freedom and a Research Associate at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies where he completes a 150,000 word manuscript entitled, *An Answer for My Enemies: The Theology, History and Spirituality of the Suffering Church*.

Boyd-MacMillan is Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary where he was invited to develop and teach the first course at seminary level focusing on understanding and learning from the suffering church in the Fall term of 2019, entitled *Persecution, Mission and Christian Spirituality (MC544)*. He also is a Visiting Professor of Practical Theology and Spiritual Formation at Lahore College of Theology in Pakistan.

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Introduction

“If you want to make the biggest difference for religious freedom in the world today,” said former Congressman and Human Rights giant Frank Wolf to a group of GCR donors in Washington DC, “pick the NGO with the best ground game, because violence and conflict has risen so much that governments can’t help, or won’t help, and it’s up to the churches to bring relief like never before.” The last two years have seen violence and conflict rise exponentially, in some cases drawing the world’s attention, as in Gaza, Lebanon and Ukraine, but in other cases going all but ignored, in Sudan, Myanmar and Yemen. Amid the spiraling violence, the Church is suffering even more while taking these new opportunities to assist, relieve, and offer peace and hope. As a preacher in Lagos put it, after returning from a visit to Sudan, “the church in the world is at a crossroads—where once it was pushed out of welfare provision by the State, now it is needed as never before as nation States accept that they are over-matched.”

Violent Islamic Extremist Groups Gain Strength Across Africa, Driving the Mass Killing of Christians

While the world’s attention is held fast by the wars in Ukraine and Israel, violent jihadist groups are gaining ground across Africa. The collapse or overthrow of some national governments and the expulsion of Western security forces in some areas has weakened resistance to the jihadists, leaving defenseless communities, especially Christians and moderate Muslims, exposed to increasingly powerful Islamist groups. In some countries, such as Mozambique, the arrival of violent extremists has upended once peaceful relations between Muslim and Christian communities. Above all, the countries of Africa have the youngest average age in the world, with literally hundreds of millions of youths uneducated and unemployed, and joining jihadis more to get a job and have a family than for religious reasons.

The fragile states that comprise the semi-arid Sahel belt that runs from the Atlantic to the Indian ocean, contain no fewer than twenty well-funded Islamic insurgencies, the best known of which are Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, Al Shabab in Somalia, and Al Qaeda and ISIS running affiliates in many countries, especially Francophone Africa. It is the level of killing that draws the headlines. Nigeria remains an outlier with no less than 9776 Christians dying in the period November 2022 to November 2024 according to the latest data from the Violent Incidents Database (VID)¹ funded by Global Christian Relief (GCR) and conducted by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF). No other country reached 1000, but half of the countries in the top ten killings list were from this region, with the Democratic Republic of Congo placing second at 390, Mozambique at third with 262 deaths, Ethiopia at four with 181 before Russia breaks the African monopoly at number five but Burkina Faso at number six,

¹ Violent Incidents Database (VID). URL: <https://iirf.global/vid/>.

with 113 killings. These numbers focus on well attested deaths, but reports indicate the actual numbers are likely far higher. Abductions in Nigeria are also astonishingly high, with 9,305 Christians abducted. The Global Terrorism Index of 2024, which seeks to measure the impact of terrorism more broadly on society, placed Burkina Faso at number one, with Mali at three, Somalia at six, Nigeria at seven, Niger at eight and Cameroon at ten. A north-south divide characterizes many of these countries—desert in the north results in a smaller population and more vulnerable villagers, while the south tends to be more temperate and populous. The desert landscape provides a helpful cloak for Islamic extremists, who then drive populations south and into cities which tend to be safer zones. This causes huge needs for emergency relief in urban areas.

Eritrea, Ethiopia and Mozambique have been caught up in the violence too. Mozambique is a secular state with a robust constitution that guarantees freedom of worship, and relations between Christians and Muslims were largely peaceful until the arrival of the ISIS affiliated Islamist group, al-Sunnah wa Jema'ah (ASJ), also known as ISIS-Mozambique (ISM) in 2017. These groups lost no time in mounting vicious attacks on Christians (as well as Muslims) particularly in Cabo Delgado province in the Northeast corner of the country. Fresh violence broke out in January and February of 2024, under the slogan “*Kill them Wherever you Find Them.*” Entire villages were razed, people beheaded, women raped. The country is third on the number of Christians killed list in the Nov 22–Nov 24 period, with 262 confirmed deaths, and third on the list of Christian churches and properties attacked, with 1711 incidents recorded. It also comes in at #3 in numbers of Christians displaced, with 15,925 forced to flee their homes. Africa will continue to spring unpleasant surprises as so many of its governments appear incapable of maintaining order and sharing prosperity. Such a surprise is Rwanda, outwardly stable and relatively prosperous, but in global terms no other country closed more churches than Rwanda, no less than 7,700, with the government insisting on upgrades to building codes, safety standards, and even imposing theological requirements on clergy. It is hard to determine whether this is an excuse and constitutes a serious violation of religious liberty, but many local pastors mutter that it is so.

Christians are squeezed like never before in the Middle East and North Africa

Ten years after ISIS conquered the grand Iraqi town of Mosul, their devastating impact on the Christian communities of northern Iraq remains. At the time of Mosul's capture in 2014, all 1200 Christian families living in the city fled. ISIS was routed from the area in 2017, but according to Paul Thabit Mekko, the Chaldean Bishop of Alqosh, barely forty of those families have returned. Other estimates—harder to check—allege less than half of the 80,000 Christians that fled the Nineveh Plain have returned to their villages. Shia militia groups, funded by Iran, have also partially filled the power vacuum in Northern Iraq, ensuring that the ever-shrinking population of Christians remain marginalized.

While the focus was on Israel’s conflict with Hamas and subsequently Hezbollah, a perceptible reduction in religious freedom was observed throughout the region, especially among Muslim background believers (MBB’s). Arrests of those leading Muslim background believer house churches in Iran rose sharply. The same happened in Mauritania, Yemen, and Morocco. Expatriate Christians in the UAE reported much higher levels of surveillance, and in Oman more Christians were expelled than usual. The number of Indigenous Christians in Gaza fell below a thousand. Still, there are signs of hope. In Amman, Jordan, a terrible catastrophe was mercifully averted on 22nd October 2024, when a man carrying a backpack entered the Bible Society’s bookshop and asked, “How you want to want me to explode the place?” He then left suddenly, without attacking.

In Türkiye, one church leader said, “President Erdogan is the best evangelist we have ever had in Türkiye—he has totally divided the country, and 50 % of the population detest the Islam he pushes, with predictable effects for the growth of the church.” After many centuries, there is a church in Pergamon again, and the church has unprecedented opportunities throughout the region to provide relief, trauma care and support, especially in Yemen, Lebanon, and Sudan.

Egypt continues to improve its treatment of Christians under President el-Sisi, who is eager to court American aid. Although violence by radicalized mobs remains all too common, the government approved the legalization of nearly three hundred churches in October of 2024, helping shield them from future attacks. As a well-known leader in Cairo said, “If the worldwide church can remember us, and resource us to help with the overwhelming humanitarian needs, we will see growth.”

Election Losses in 2024 Set Back the Hindu Extremist Agenda, but the *Hindutva* Movement Remains Powerful

The world’s most prominent, successful, and charismatic Hindu nationalist—Narendra Modi—displayed far too much hubris by confidently expecting his party to maintain and extend their absolute majority for the third time in a row in May–June elections. To his shock, his BJP were humbled by losing their absolute majority, forcing them to share power with two other parties to attain the 272 seats required to form a government. This might require them to temper their nationalist agenda, while Modi himself must accept that he has suddenly become—in the words of one of his circle—a “broken brand,” especially within his own party who blame him for the poor showing. This does not mean the Hindu nationalist agenda is over however, and a political post-mortem was quick to blame BJP leaders for ignoring the warnings of the RSS, or National Volunteer Associations, the ideologues who guard the agenda of Hindutva, who have an outstanding on-the-ground presence and reported that vast numbers of younger Indian voters no longer trusted the BJP to run the economy in the

interests of the struggling poor. Two billionaire cronies of Modi own a major portion of India's television media and so few dared to suggest Modi might be heading for a reckoning. However, if the RSS return to a position of influence, and a chastened BJP elite start listening again, the Hindutva agenda may get back on track after all, as the recent Haryana and Maharashtra elections demonstrated, where the BJP swept the states

It is not clear if the large numbers of *Christ-followers* in India played a role in the result of the general elections, but there is no doubt that top Hindu nationalists are shaken by the sheer numbers deserting the Hindu religion in favour of a Jesus centred faith, albeit choosing to retain their identity as Hindus culturally. RSS cadres have already redoubled efforts in the villages of Uttar Pradesh (traditionally their heartland) to disrupt the many Christian small group gatherings and do so in many instances with the aid of the law enforcement agencies, while in Chhattisgarh, RSS and its affiliates have successfully fractured the tribal society by mobilizing tribals against Christian tribals thus displacing the age-old amity that the community shared.

The results are visible in physical violence, social ostracization and the fleeing of Christian tribals from their villages nearly every week. In the recent VID statistics (Nov22–Nov24) there is hardly a violence category in which India does not feature in the top ten showing how hard the onslaught has been in recent years, with 157 Christians killed and 150 arrested and/or sentenced, and of course 63,328 mostly Kuki Christians displaced in Manipur due to the violence in May 2023, only surpassed by the numbers of Christians displaced in Azerbaijan in September 2023 of 120,000 from the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. India also tops the list for Christian properties (churches, homes, and shops) destroyed in the past two years, with 4,949 violent incidents recorded, mainly against homes.

China's leaders are getting increasingly frightened of the Christian church, especially as the CCP weathers new legitimacy concerns

In 2024 evidence emerged that the higher echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are reluctantly having to reconcile themselves to the fact that the unregistered churches of China are too big to properly control. One of the most informed scholars of the Chinese church (who must remain nameless) gave a presentation in the summer of 2024, offering four reasons why China's leaders feared the church, especially its unregistered Protestant portion where estimates vary from 40 to 80 million (in addition to the official Protestant and Catholic churches). One, Xi subscribes to the view that it was the Church that played a vitally significant role in the overthrow of Eastern European communism. Two, he accepts the *hollow heart* theory and fears communism is overmatched by Christianity in its capacity to fulfil the heart's desires and form an alternate society that ironically better reflects the ideals of Communism. Three, Xi is angry that the unregistered church remains significantly beyond the control of the

CCP and seems powerless to slow the growth. It is still the fastest growing religion in the country. Four, Xi thinks Christianity is entirely foreign and anti-Chinese, yet so many Chinese keep saying Christianity has now taken a Chinese face and is much more indigenous than its detractors claim.

President Xi Jin Ping has his challenges too. Despite the massive purges he has waged under the banner of anti-corruption, Michael Sheriden in his 2024 book, *Red Emperor* marshals evidence that this was merely a means of removing his enemies yet still faces powerful factions within the Party that consider him a blundering bully. Xi has set up to offer prosperity and stability to China and those who come into its trading orbit, but a property crash, fleeing foreign investment, and harsher and harsher controls, suggest Xi's grip may be weakening, which could make him a more dangerous foe on the world stage. "On the surface, it is very tight, with our home churches getting smaller," said a Shanghai house church leader, "but we are keeping one step ahead of the surveillance, for example, we form "walking churches" in parks, and we see our numbers quietly growing as Christ meets the needs of the heart in ways the government knows but cannot match."

World famous dissident Alexi Navalny writes a classic on how faith brings hope in prison, then dies

Russia's most famous dissident, Alexi Navalny, died because of his harsh incarceration in Siberian prisons. He was only 47. The fact of his demise was widely mourned, but less well known—and almost ignored by the Western media—was that Navalny adopted a robust Christian faith in his later years, committing to memory all 111 verses of Jesus's *sermon on the mount* in Russian, English, French and Latin. His autobiography, *Alexi Navalny: Patriot* came out in October 2024, and is more prison diary than anything else. But the book may well rank as a classic of religious prison literature in due course, alongside Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* and Martin Luther King Jnr's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in its affirmation of the strength of faith to overcome the worst the State can throw at a person. Navalny's book ends with an exercise of imagining the worst that could befall him, and contesting this with the ultimate religious comfort: "*But are you a disciple of the religion whose founder sacrificed himself for others, paying the price for their sins? Do you believe in the immortality of the soul and the rest of that cool stuff? If you can honestly answer yes, what is there left for you to worry about? ... My job is to seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and leave it to good old Jesus and the rest of his family to deal with everything else. They won't let me down and will sort out all my headaches. As they say in prison here: they will take my punches for me.*"

Other prominent dissidents with an explicit religious faith include Hong Kong's Jimmy Lai, whose Catholic conscience compels him to stay in jail on charges of treason for his role in pro-democracy protests; Wang Yi, the lawyer turned pastor in Chengdu, China, sentenced in 2019 to a nine years in jail for the crime of insisting that the State should not ask for ultimate loyalty over God, and in so doing joins a long and historic list of Christian leaders. And April 2024 marked

ten years since Boko Haram abducted 276 mostly Christian girls from a high school in Chibok. Roughly 98 Christian girls are still missing—a national scandal highlighting the official disinterest and incompetence of successive Nigerian governments.

The last two years have seen an unprecedented number of Christian properties destroyed, attacked, and vandalized all over the world, often in unexpected places

You would think the focus of destruction would be Ukraine, but in fact it is India, followed by Mozambique, and Myanmar. In the 2022–24 reporting period a total of 4,949 churches, houses and business premises were the objects of violent attack in India, mainly in places like Manipur and Chhattisgarh. But dreadful violence was unleashed in Mozambique in early 2024 with 1711 Christian properties attacked, and 1490 in Myanmar, mainly by government forces attacking Christian tribes who are part of the resistance to the Junta. Ukraine comes fourth although in terms of churches destroyed or attacked—as opposed to the homes or businesses of Christians—no other country in the world saw more places of worship turned to rubble. Its historic churches have been largely damaged by the war following the attempted invasion of Russia on February 24th, 2022. A total of 1270 Christian churches, spanning diverse denominations, have been partially or completely destroyed by Russian military actions between February 24, 2022, and November 2024. These include 187 Ukrainian Orthodox churches affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate, 59 Orthodox churches of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, 41 Catholic churches (21 Roman Catholic and 20 Ukrainian Greek Catholic), and 323 Protestant churches, such as Pentecostal, Baptist, and Seventh-Day Adventist congregations. Specific cases, like the severe damage to St. Catherine’s Cathedral in Kherson, the looting of the Word of Life church, and the destruction of historical structures such as the wooden church in Smozhe and the Transfiguration Cathedral in Odessa, underscore the war’s devastating impact on Ukraine’s religious heritage. These acts signify not only cultural and religious loss but also highlight the strategic use of violence against places of worship in the broader conflict. Bizarrely, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, continues to call the conflict a “holy war” Russia must win to save the world from” Jews, Nazis, Gay pride activists and Satanists.” One must presume he sees the destruction of churches within his own denomination from targeted Russian artillery as acceptable collateral damage.

We are witnessing the beginning of the full scale weaponization of the digital arena to silence voices defending religious freedoms and inhibiting research into religious liberty trends.

It is not new to suggest that powerful governments have been increasing their surveillance and manipulation of social media, but concern of the effect of this to derail an effective democratization of the digital sphere is peaking. At the beginning of 2024 a survey of the world's CEOs by the World Economic Forum placed "misinformation and disinformation" as the number one short term Global Risk. The report contained this chilling paragraph: "*The disruptive capabilities of manipulated information are rapidly accelerating, as open access to increasingly sophisticated technologies proliferates and trust in information and institutions deteriorates. In the next two years, a wide set of actors will capitalize on the boom in synthetic content, amplifying societal divisions, ideological violence, and political repression—ramifications that will persist far beyond the short term.*"

Closer to the issue of religious liberty was a prescient report issued by Hong Kong Watch in October 2024, entitled *Invisible Decline: Violations of Digital Rights in Hong Kong and Their Impact*. The report documents how digital rights to freedom of expression have been violated in Hong Kong. One case known to GCR was when a London based Christian activist spoke out in defense of Jimmy Lai and found his bank account cancelled. He went to a friend in the bank, who was puzzled and looked up the story. He said, "You have been red flagged, which means the Chinese government has leaned on our banking executives." The problem worsened as there was no recourse. Going to court? His friend told him frankly, "It's more than my job is worth to testify about this." Debanking is becoming a more general issue, including of GCR Advocacy Fellow Sam Brownback, whose National Committee for Religious Freedom was debanked by Chase Bank in 2023. It is nation states with limitless budgets seek to control the space, and release AI tools of great disruption. Said one RSS operative in India, "We have a strategy of *surround and suppress*,—we flood the market with our lies, and in so doing prevent access to other sources of information that are hostile to us." A well-known Christian leader said, "International charities have had to cease their activities here because of government backed spreading of three lies over social media: "You force conversions; You conduct money laundering; You use foreign money for advocacy." Activists the world over are shaking their head in the face of being hacked, debanked, and libeled. One of the more common phrases one hears today is a victim saying, "How on earth did they know all that about my private life?" The battle lines are differently drawn today.

In Latin America there is no let up from the power of cartels and criminal groups

In the Latin American context, particularly in countries like Colombia and Mexico, there is sustained evidence of pressure and violence from criminal groups, traditionally concentrated in rural areas but increasingly extending into urban centers. The violence stems not only from the presence of dominant criminal factions but also from conflicts and power struggles between them. This situation places increased pressure on the Church, negatively impacting religious activities. Criminal groups often demand additional fees, and religious leaders crossing from one area to another risk being mistaken for informants. In cases where religious leaders have a high social profile, their attempts to negotiate truces or initiate dialogue with criminal leaders can make them targets of attacks from rival groups. In Mexico, this has resulted in forty-six killings, 250 Christian properties attacked, 745 forced to flee. Lawless Haiti saw 59 Christians murdered. And Cuba—where the government acts like a cartel though it isn't—a spike in the number of arrests and sentences to 156 has been noted.

In Nicaragua, Catholic churches—and more recently, Evangelical churches—have faced a range of hostilities. Over the past three years, violations of religious freedom for political reasons have intensified, involving the full use of state mechanisms to silence and penalize religious leaders and parishioners identified or perceived as opponents of the government. This has led to the mass closure of places of worship, the arrest of numerous priests and pastors, and, in some cases, their expulsion from the country and the revocation of their nationality. Tiny Nicaragua came third in the world top ten countries that arrested and sentenced Christian leaders, with 226 incidents recorded.

In El Salvador, the situation is distinct. In 2022, there was an unprecedented surge in arrests of religious leaders and members of Evangelical churches. Those detained were predominantly pastors involved in rehabilitation programs for former gang members or former gang members who had joined a church. This occurred in the context of the government's strict anti-crime measures, which cast suspicion on pastoral work with ex-gang members and resulted in arbitrary arrests under the pretext of gang eradication. However, recent reports indicate a decline in such arrests, and with the overall reduction in violence and insecurity in the country, incidents of gang-related violence targeting the church have also significantly decreased.

The sharpening division of the world into the Democratic Vs Autocratic blocs will play into the religious liberty sphere

British cultural commentator Matthew Syed writes that we now "... live in a world where there is a new connective tissue between forces antithetical to the forces of openness and liberty." The Ukraine war has sharpened the division. China and North Korea support Putin's Russia. Russia backs the Houthis in

Yemen. Iran and its proxies Hamas and Hezbollah continue to threaten any post Gaza peace settlement. The Taliban in Afghanistan have no international recognition, but Chinese, Russian, and Iranian diplomats hold court in Kabul. Even democracies like India sit on the fence, buying Russian oil and gas at reduced prices, little fearing Western disfavor. The religious liberty position is clearer in this sense—in this autocratic bloc, religions are expected to explicitly support the State, or else! Former Congressman Frank Wolf, bemoaned in a DC summer briefing to GCR supporters, “It’s strange, but all the great persecutors in the world today are represented here in Washington DC by the best PR and law firms, who do not seem to be embarrassed by this. Back in the Reagan era, no law or PR firm would have represented the USSR, but now the Chinese government has a vaster lobby today in DC than ever before, even as they commit genocide against Uighurs, and countries like Azerbaijan are represented by our most prestigious firms.” He shook his head, “What happened? We have given these repressive nations such house room, but one day my sons may have to go to war against them!”

Five to Track in 2025!

- **An incoming Trump administration may restore a more aggressive pro-religious freedom agenda around the world.** It is a well-known fact that in the first Trump administration the triumvirate of Mike Pompeo at the State Department, Mike Pence as Vice President, and political heavy weight Sam Brownback appointed Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom worked to promote and protect religious liberty in a way not seen before. Although the personnel will change, it is thought that Trump will need to ensure this becomes a priority, if only to reward his Evangelical vote bank. Marco Rubio’s appointment at the State Department has set the tone. His vocal support for religious freedom in Latin America, Pakistan, and in support of Jimmy Lai and other pro-democracy figures in Hong Kong bodes well for the promotion of religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy.
- **So called “middle tier” wars will result in larger numbers of Christians caught in collateral violence.** These are conflicts that ten not to draw the intervention of great powers. Sudan’s sad civil war continues apace, with officially ten million displaced, and no one inclined to intervene who could. Yemen used to have the largest IDP population, and it is still at 4.5 million. In Afghanistan there is no war, but chronic food insecurity is affecting 12.4 million of the forty-two million population, with Taliban leaders quoted as saying “Just look to God for your food.” As the number of wars seems to be increasing, it is often the churches that are the only hope of channelling enough emergency aid.
- **The Western media and general culture will continue to studiously avoid reporting one of the biggest global injustice stories of our age, even though in a smaller way, the persecution war is coming to them.** Brother Andrew once said, “There will come a day when you think you are fighting persecution in a far-off country, then suddenly, you will find the same fight at your own door.” In the media at least, the global story of faith

under fire remains mysterious. The BBC continues to report anti-Christian antics of jihadists in terms of climate change and ethnic strife—which are factors but not drivers. Jimmy Lai and the role of faith in forty-five people sentenced for their pro-democracy work in Hong Kong in November rarely rates a mention, even though it is their deepest motivation. As one commentator put it, “It’s like going to the Olympics and never mentioning athletics.” Christianity in particular—with the help of social media—remains chronically ghettoised as well as profoundly misunderstood. Yet the issue of the persecution of Christians will not stay in far off places. The Violent Incidents Database recorded seventy-two confirmed attacks on Christian churches and associated properties in the USA. These demonstrate a troubling variety of motivations and perpetrators, ranging from ideological pressure groups to individual citizens and unknown assailants, reflecting diverse forms of hostility toward religious institutions. Our report documents nine incidents attributed to ideological groups, such as pro-abortion activists targeting Catholic and other Christian churches with graffiti, vandalism, and disruptive protests, often linked to politically charged events like abortion legislation. Another eleven incidents involved individuals or small groups, often motivated by personal grievances or opportunistic acts, including arson, theft, and desecration of religious objects. Additionally, thirty-two attacks remain unattributed to specific perpetrators, including severe vandalism, arson, and theft, such as the desecration of cemeteries, the destruction of religious statues, and the targeting of churches during significant religious or political anniversaries. Together, these incidents highlight a multifaceted and persistent threat to religious freedom and the sanctity of sacred spaces in the United States, revealing deep societal tensions and the vulnerability of places of worship to ideological, personal, or random acts of violence.

- **Never have so many Western nations seen so much antisemitic hate in their own countries, and there are even worrying rises of anti-Christian violence in its wake.** The attacks on Israel on October 6th, 2023, massacring 1200 most Jewish people, horrified the world, but sympathy quickly dissipated after the subsequent bombardment of Gaza killed thousands, although Hamas’s figures of 44,000 thousand civilians killed are hardly to be trusted. Antisemitic incidents surged worldwide, including physical attacks, vandalism, arson, online threats, and more. Incendiary rhetoric and openly antisemitic slogans at protests and public statements have contributed to a significant increase in hostility toward Jewish communities in numerous countries. In 2023, the Anti-Defamation League recorded 8,873 antisemitic incidents across the United States. This marks a 140 % increase from the 3,698 incidents documented in 2022. Similar spikes have been observed in France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Australia, and South Africa.

Antisemitic incidents are clear violations that the Violent Incidents Database aims to capture. In the VID, we only include records that match our categories of violence such as physical attacks on synagogues, Jewish institutions, homes, and individuals. We do not records various forms of hate

speech or slander. For the 2022–2024 period, our overall top five in terms of antisemitic violence are: Israel (1,722 violent incidents), the United States (85), Germany (23), France (20) and Palestinian Territories (20). Israel leads in the number of killings and abductions, with 1,214 killed and 257 abducted, most following the brutal Hamas attack on October 7, 2023. Additionally, during the past three years, nineteen Jews were killed in Russia, two in France, and one in Egypt. In India, in May 2023 during violent ethnic clashes in Manipur, when a member of the local Jewish community was killed, and several others went missing. Regarding attacks on Jewish buildings, including synagogues and homes, we recorded 200 reports from India, 36 from Turkey, 37 from the United States, 36 from Turkey, 20 from Germany, and 18 from Canada.

This may be followed by a rise in anti-Christian violence. Warned a leader of the MBB church in Europe, *We are tolerating so much antisemitism in Europe for the Muslim population that has come in—I think that governments are not ready to protect the MBB population from extremism in Europe, because that is the next scenario—the extremists in Europe will turn on their own, those who have become Christians from a Muslim background.*

- **Human rights discourse will continue to fail to acknowledge its religious roots, even as scholars and leaders make this more plain.** The British classical scholar, Tom Holland, became a cause celebre in Christian circles for pointing out that the ethics western nations take for granted are in fact rooted in Judeo-Christian thought. In his 2019 tome, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, he argued that ethics like “everyone is worthy of equal dignity” and “women are as important as men”, and “we should not exploit the hopeless and weak” were not built into the ancient Roman and Greek religions, but controversially introduced by Christianity. Said Holland in another context, “There is nothing in nature that says we should treat everyone with equal respect; in fact, nature contradicts it—it is purely a theological truth from the Jewish and Christian faith, and we need to stop pretending it is otherwise.” Another book published in 2024 by Rupert Schott, entitled *The Eclipse of Christianity ... and why it matters* strongly argues that “discourse of rights without a discourse of dignity risks becoming ... a recipe for endless contention and growing individualist rivalry.” Ayaan Ali Hirsi, the Muslim born Somali activist who repudiated Islam and embraced atheism, has now very publicly become a Christian, and argues that only Christianity, not atheism, can equip us for the coming civilisational wars. Many feel that the language of human rights has become too “zero-sum,” and that we must recover a sense that forgiveness matters more even than justice.

Three reasons for hope

Yet those who seek to defend the rights of religious believers do not despair in the face of the challenges ahead. Indeed, there are some strong trends that bring unexpected hope. For one, it has been remarkable that in the face of deadly wars and conflicts involving powerful states (in two cases nuclear

powers) how international politics has refused to allow deadly escalations. Iran holds off from open war with Israel, preferring to back its more beleaguered proxies Hamas and Hezbollah. The Gulf States have remained remarkably neutral, with the Abraham Accords holding firm. And there is evidence that China's President Xi is keen to prevent his Russian counterpart from escalating the conflict with Ukraine. For another, it is strangely encouraging that mighty leaders of powerful states seem so thin-skinned and sensitive to criticism. China, for example, spends millions on trying to head off human rights criticism at all its forums. As a Chinese house church leader mused, "You would wonder why they bother? It must be that they are paranoid and scared, and that is our opportunity." Christian NGOs believe afresh in the power of criticism to influence outcomes if so, many powerful dictators spend so much time and energy trying to quell it. Veteran Indian journalist, John Dayal, confirmed this by adding that "Hindu extremists do not fear the domestic church, because it feels they can bully them and starve them of money—what they do fear is the international church, which really got the story out about Manipur in ways that infuriated the leaders of the ruling party." Finally, the trust deficit that marks out the modern world is also an opportunity. Outfits like *Bellingcat* exercise huge influence by utilizing open-source research tools to hold nations to account. People believe less today, but if the right evidence can be marshalled and presented, it goes farther than before, especially with AI tools emerging coming to help with their generation. As a Washington policy maker confided, "If a Christian NGO uses figures to us and says, "trust us", I can tell you they have no weight, because we don't trust them anymore; but let them offer evidence that is "open source", or undeniable, and they have more leverage than they dream." For this reason, GCR is pioneering the funding of open source research in the realm of persecution, the fruits of which are seen in this article and the accompanying Red List. But the invitation is to collect undeniable information, fight better share more, and work across all barriers to better serve the persecuted of the world today.

Data appendix

Top Ten Killings of Christians 2022–2024

1	Nigeria	9818
2	Democratic Republic of the Congo	390
3	Mozambique	270
4	Ethiopia	200
5	Russia	166
6	India	157
7	Burkina Faso	115
8	Myanmar	81
9	Haiti	59
10	Mexico	54

Top Ten attacks of Churches, Christian homes and Christian businesses 2022–2024

1	Rwanda	7700
2	India	4951
3	Nicaragua	1968
4	Mozambique	1745
5	Myanmar	1510
6	Ukraine	1276
7	Ethiopia	490
8	Mexico	387
9	Colombia	255
10	Democratic Republic of the Congo	147

Top Ten arrests and sentences of Christians 2022–2024

1	China	1559
2	Eritrea	500
3	Russia	224
4	Cuba	214
5	Nicaragua	209
6	North Korea	208
7	India	150
8	Myanmar	146
9	Vietnam	119
10	Kenya	95

Top Ten Christians forced to leave home or country 2022–2024

1	Azerbaijan	120001
2	India	63328
3	Mozambique	15854
4	Democratic Republic of the Congo	15703
5	Haiti	4601
6	Myanmar	2297
7	Mexico	995
8	Colombia	670
9	Nicaragua	247
10	Ethiopia	230

Top Ten abductions, sexual assaults and forced marriages of Christians 2022–2024

1	Nigeria	9348
2	Mexico	137
3	Haiti	101
4	Cameroon	84
5	Colombia	79
5	Ethiopia	79
7	Democratic Republic of the Congo	72
8	Myanmar	67
9	Mozambique	35
10	Burkina Faso	14

Top Ten Christian victims 2022–2024

1	Azerbaijan	120001
2	India	64290
3	Nigeria	19400
4	Mozambique	16246
5	Democratic Republic of the Congo	16241
6	Haiti	4821
7	Myanmar	2771
8	Mexico	1656
9	China	1615
10	Colombia	1223

Imprint

Address

International Institute for Religious Freedom
P. O. Box 780068
Orlando, Florida 32878
United States of America

Friedrichstr. 38
2nd Floor
53111 Bonn
Germany

International Director: Dr. Dennis P. Petri (V.i.S.d.P.)
Research Director: Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer
Executive Editor of the IJRF: Prof. Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham
President: Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher

Contact: info@iirf.global

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