



Bible Access List

Where Bible access is most difficult, and Bible shortage is greatest

Indonesia

Bible Restrictions Rank: **50**
CONSIDERABLE ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **9**
Bible needs estimate between three and five million



An Overview of Bible access in Indonesia

Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world, with Christians making up around 13% of the total population, approximately 36 million people. Despite religious freedom being enshrined in the constitution, in practice, a portion of Christians face considerable challenges in accessing Bibles. Estimates suggest approximately half of Indonesian Christians have access to Scripture; hence this leaves millions without a Bible, particularly in regions where religious tensions are high and legal restrictions on church activities exist.

In Indonesia, owning a Bible is generally permitted, and religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed. However, obtaining a Bible is a different challenge altogether. Printing and importing Bibles require government-issued permits from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and while these permits are available, they are difficult to secure. In six provinces, including Aceh, West Sumatra, and parts of West Java, Bible printing is outright prohibited and dangerous. These areas account for almost 30% of Indonesia's population including a significant number of Christians, leaving millions without a straightforward way to obtain Scripture.

For many Christians, particularly Muslim-background believers (MBBs), simply owning a Bible can be dangerous. While traditional Christian communities can keep Bibles without issue, MBBs face severe social and familial pressure, making Bible possession risky. In areas with a strong Islamic extremist presence, believers often resort to hiding their Bibles or self-censoring their faith to avoid repercussions.

On the surface, Indonesia's infrastructure seems favorable for widespread Bible access. The country boasts nearly full electrification and high literacy rate, making printed and digital Bibles viable options. However, access is far from universal. Almost a third of the population still lacks internet connectivity, particularly in rural and remote regions, limiting access to Bible apps and online Bibles.

Economic hardship further complicates access. While Indonesia has seen strong economic growth, many Christians live in provinces where poverty remains widespread, such as Papua and East Nusa Tenggara. In these regions, the cost of a printed Bible is often beyond reach for many families. Digital Bibles could help bridge this gap, but with limited internet access and financial barriers to smartphones and mobile data, millions of believers remain disconnected from God's Word.

Before we continue, would you take a pause and pray for Indonesia?

How can I pray for Indonesia?

- **Provision and Access.** Pray for the unhindered distribution of Bibles across Indonesia, especially in provinces where Christian communities face severe restrictions.
- **Global Partnerships.** Ask for strengthened global collaboration to overcome legal and logistical barriers, ensuring every believer has access to the Scriptures.
- **Legal and Social Change.** Pray for transformation within Indonesia's legal framework, that policies would support religious freedom and the unrestricted flow of Bibles, and for a cultural shift toward tolerance and acceptance of all faiths.

After praying for Indonesia, continue reading on the next page to learn more.

Bible Access Restrictions

Some Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions for part of the country
- Print restrictions for part of the country
- Storage restrictions for part of the country
- Ownership restrictions for part of the country
- Distribution restrictions for part of the country

Other Limiting Factors

Some Other Factors

- Poor infrastructure

Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is over 50%, **estimated** Bible need is between 3 and 5 million

Main religion: Islam

Country population: 279,798,000

Christian population:

36,608,000, 13.08% of total population

World Watch List: #59

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN INDONESIA?

A Region Under Pressure

In parts of Indonesia, especially Aceh and regions of West Java, Christians face significant restrictions when it comes to practicing their faith, let alone accessing the Bible. Despite Indonesia's constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, local governments in many areas impose strict regulations that make it nearly impossible for churches to operate legally.

In Aceh, the only province governed by Sharia law, churches have been shut down, and building new ones is virtually impossible. In West Java, radical Islamic groups and local authorities often work together to hinder Christian activities, making Bible access a challenge for believers.



Daily Risks and Bible Access

Owning, distributing, or even reading a Bible can be met with strong opposition in many regions. Muslim Background believers or MBBs face the harshest persecution—often from their own families and communities. Many are pressured to return to Islam through social isolation, verbal abuse, and, in some cases, threats of violence.

In areas such as West Sumatra and East Java, local mobs have protested Christian gatherings, forcing believers to abandon their meetings. Church raids and closures have become increasingly common, limiting access to physical copies of the Bible and making secret house church gatherings the only option for many.

Poverty and Practical Barriers

Beyond the threat of persecution, economic hardships create additional obstacles to Bible access. Indonesia has a high poverty rate, and for many families, purchasing a Bible is not financially feasible. Even where Bibles are available, logistical challenges make distribution difficult, particularly in rural areas and conflict zones such as Papua.

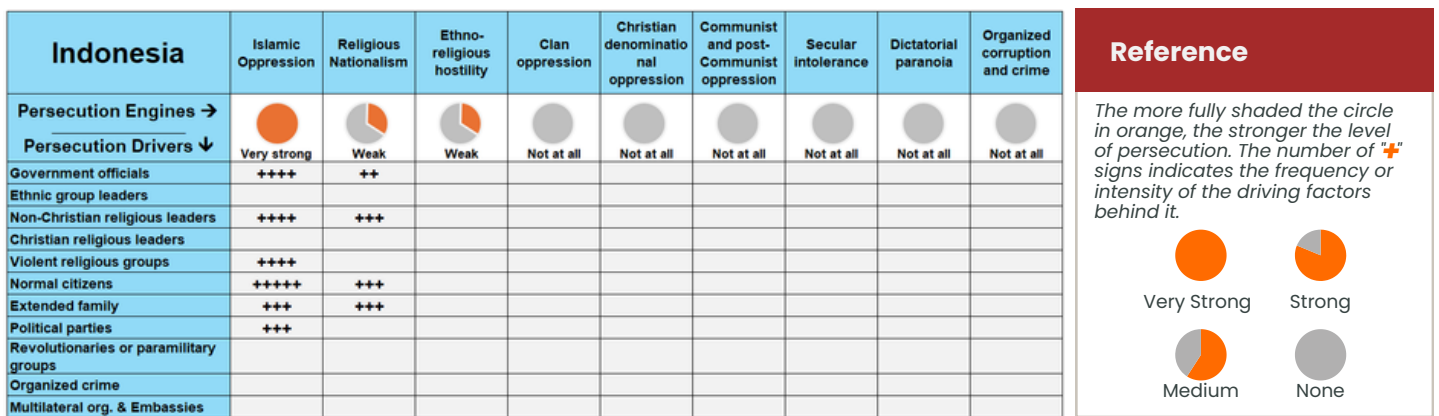
In addition, digital access to Scripture is not always a solution. While Indonesia has high internet penetration in urban centers, many rural areas still lack internet access, making online or app-based Bibles inaccessible for millions.

Church Restrictions and Legal Barriers

One of the most significant barriers to Bible access is the difficulty Christians face in securing places of worship. Indonesian law requires churches to obtain approval from at least 60 local residents of another faith before building a church, an almost impossible requirement in predominantly Muslim regions.

Even when churches manage to meet all legal requirements, local authorities often refuse to grant building permits or delay the process indefinitely. Many Christian communities resort to worshipping in homes, but even these gatherings are frequently disrupted by local mobs or police intervention.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Indonesia



While Indonesia’s constitution guarantees religious freedom, this one dominant force seeks to block Bible access: Islamic oppression. The drivers behind this oppression include government officials, non-Christian religious leaders, violent religious groups, and normal citizens.

Now, we need to go deeper and ask the question: How do we address the problem of Bible access in the country? So that we can meet the need and demand to supply the Word of God to our brothers and sisters in Indonesia.

A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINE



A Systematic Barrier to Bible Access

Indonesia’s national ideology, Pancasila, guarantees religious freedom, but in practice, Islamic oppression is the strongest force restricting Bible access—especially in regions where conservative Islam dominates. In Aceh, the only province in Indonesia governed by full Sharia law, churches face extreme restrictions. Obtaining permits to build or renovate churches is nearly impossible, and existing churches have been forcibly shut down. Since 2015, thousands of Christians in Aceh’s Singkil district have been forced to worship in makeshift shelters because their churches were demolished and not allowed to be rebuilt.

The rise of radical Islamic groups has worsened conditions for Bible access. Groups such as the **Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)** and **Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD)** regularly incite violence against Christians. Although some of these groups have been banned, they continue to influence local communities and instigate attacks against Christian places of worship. MBBs, who already face social ostracization, are among the most vulnerable. If their new faith is discovered, they risk being disowned by their families, verbally and physically abused, and pressured to return to Islam. In many cases, they must hide their faith and practice Christianity in secret, making access to the Bible even more difficult.

Indonesia's new criminal code, set to take effect in 2026, is also a growing concern. The expansion of blasphemy laws could be used to criminalize Christian evangelism and Bible distribution, making it even riskier for believers to openly share their faith. With rising Islamic conservatism and local Sharia-based policies spreading, Christians in Indonesia are facing mounting barriers to accessing the Word of God.

Government Officials and Local Authorities: Silent Enforcers of Persecution

Although Indonesia's central government does not officially ban Bible distribution, local officials often reinforce persecution by restricting church activities, refusing permits, and failing to protect Christians from attacks. In Tangerang, Banten, in April 2024, the government sealed a church building following protests from residents who opposed Christian worship in their community. Similar cases have been reported in West Java, Jakarta, and other provinces, where authorities have either delayed church permits for years or shut down churches outright, even when courts ruled in favor of the Christian congregations.

This passive enforcement of persecution also extends to the legal system. The blasphemy laws, which are loosely defined, have been used to intimidate and arrest Christians for alleged offenses against Islam. A high-profile case in 2017 saw Jakarta's Christian governor, Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, sentenced to prison for blasphemy, despite international outcry. Such cases create a climate of fear, discouraging Christians from speaking openly about their faith or distributing Bibles. Under the new criminal code, online speech about Christianity could also be used as evidence for blasphemy, further isolating believers and complicating Bible access.

Mob Attacks: Another Threat to Bible Distribution

While legal and bureaucratic restrictions make Bible access difficult, the threat of physical violence from mob attacks further limits access. Beyond organized extremist groups, mob violence is a growing concern. Local residents, often incited by radical preachers or online misinformation, have formed crowds to disrupt Christian gatherings.

In March 2024, a house church in Tangerang was attacked by dozens of Muslim residents, who forced the pastor to announce an indefinite suspension of worship services. In other cases, mobs have physically assaulted Christians, destroyed church property, and even burned Bibles. Such attacks are rarely prosecuted, further emboldening extremists.

Even outside of formal church settings, Christians attempting to gather for Bible study or prayer face intimidation. Back in May 2024, Christian students from Pamulang University were attacked for holding a prayer meeting, with one student reportedly injured by a sharp weapon. These incidents send a clear message, owning and reading a Bible in Indonesia is not just difficult, it can be dangerous.

Education and Social Pressure: Restricting Bible Access from Childhood

Christian children in Indonesia face intense pressure to conform to Islamic norms, making early Bible access particularly difficult. In many schools, Christian students are forced to attend Islamic religious classes due to a shortage of Christian teachers. There are cases where students have been required to recite Islamic prayers or wear Islamic attire, even if their families are Christian. The government has acknowledged these issues, but enforcement remains inconsistent, leaving many young believers without formal Christian education.

Beyond the classroom, Christian children often experience social ostracization and bullying. In schools, they are sometimes mocked as “kafir” (infidels) or warned that they will go to hell for not following Islam. At the university level, Christian students have reported discriminatory grading practices, where they receive lower marks simply because of their faith. Such treatment discourages open discussion of Christianity and Bible study, as young believers fear ridicule or academic repercussions.

For those who do manage to access a Bible, practicing their faith openly is risky. Families of Muslim-background believers (MBBs) are especially strict, often forbidding their children from reading the Bible or attending church. MBBs have been disowned or physically harmed for embracing Christianity. The result is a generation of young Christians who must hide their faith, with limited opportunities to engage with Scripture or Christian communities.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN INDONESIA

Against the backdrop of religious persecution, economic hardships, and social hostility, Bible access in Indonesia remains low. Despite being home to over 36.6 million Christians, research estimates that **between 3- 5 million Bibles** are needed to bridge that gap of access. This includes Bibles needed for seekers to support their desire to explore the Christian faith. This stark reality highlights the urgent need to provide God’s Word to those who yearn for it.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

The need for Bibles is amplified by the growth of Christianity in Indonesia. Protestant churches, particularly Evangelical and Pentecostal groups, have seen steady expansion. However, this growth is met with significant challenges, mainly from societal pressure, government-imposed restrictions, and the increasing influence of Islamic conservatism in certain regions. This rising Christian population desperately needs Scripture to support discipleship, strengthen their faith, and aid in evangelism.

Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

Given the complex landscape of Indonesia, a multi-format approach is essential for effective Bible distribution. While digital Bibles provide accessibility in urban areas, **print Bibles** remain the top priority, especially in rural communities where internet connectivity is limited. **Audio and video Bibles** also play a crucial role, particularly for illiterate populations or those who fear being seen with a physical Bible.

Ensuring Bibles are available in all necessary formats will significantly enhance accessibility, allowing believers to engage with Scripture despite the barriers they face.

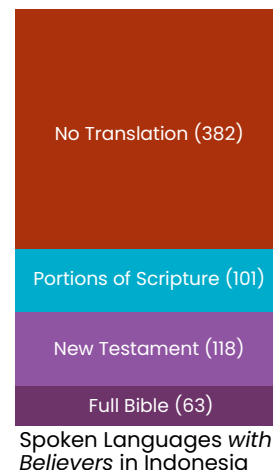
The Challenge of Bible Translations

There are several native languages where Bibles are translated, but not yet printed, The Nias language is one example: more than 300,000 believers, but only 20,000 Bibles in local language are available. The Bible in Bahasa Indonesia is commonly available, but in remote islands, people prefer to have the Bible in their mother tongue language.

Further to this: Indonesia is a linguistically diverse nation, with hundreds of languages spoken across its vast archipelago. The Christian population can speak 664 of these languages. If you look closer:

- Only **63** languages have a full Bible translation.
- **118** languages only have New Testament translations.
- **101** languages have only portions of Scripture translated.

This leaves a staggering **382 languages** without any Bible translation, cutting off entire communities from the message of Christ. Bridging this translation gap is a vital step in ensuring that every believer can experience the transformative power of God’s Word in their heart language.



THE CLARION CALL

The call to provide Bibles in Indonesia is not just about numbers—it is about souls who have yet to encounter the gospel of Christ. For many, the lack of access to Scripture means struggling to grow in their faith while facing discrimination, hostility, and limited religious freedoms. The need is urgent, and the opportunity is now. Through strategic efforts in **Bible distribution, format accessibility, and translation projects**, we can ensure that every believer in Indonesia has access to the life-changing truth of God’s Word.

The challenge is great, but the reward is eternal. With global partnerships, unwavering prayer, and dedicated action, we can meet the pressing need for Bibles in Indonesia—one believer, one seeker, one Bible at a time.

2.1%
Annual Church Growth

Bibles needed for both
Believers & Seekers

3-5 million
Bible needs estimate

Printed Bible
Preferred Format

Audio & Video Bible
Format 2nd Priority

The Bible Access List (BAL) and the Country Profile utilizes data from various primary and secondary sources. Key resources include the survey data, World Christian Database, Open Doors' World Watch List files, World Bank development indicators, and Bible translation data from multiple organizations. For a complete list of data sources and links, please refer to the BAL Methodology available at Bibleaccesslist.org.