



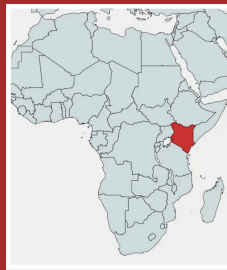
# Bible Access List

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

# Kenya

Bible Restrictions Rank: **61**  
**MINIMAL ACCESS RESTRICTIONS**

Bible Shortage Rank: **19**  
**Bible needs estimate between one and three million**



## An Overview of Bible access in Kenya

Kenya, a country where nearly 80% of its 56 million people identify as Christian, might seem like a place where Bible access is widespread. Yet, the reality is far more complex. Despite being home to an estimated 45 million Christians, just over half have access to the Scriptures. While Bibles are generally available in most parts of the country, there are significant barriers that still leave millions in need of the Word of God.

In most of Kenya, owning, printing, or importing Bibles poses no legal issues. However, in the Northeastern and Coastal regions, where Muslim-majority populations dominate, access to the Bible is met with intense opposition. In places like Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Marsabit, Lamu, Kilifi, and Kwale, Christians—especially those from a Muslim background (MBBs)—face severe risks. Simply possessing a Bible can be dangerous, and for those caught distributing or sharing Scripture, the consequences can be life-threatening. Smuggling is often the only way to bring Bibles into these areas, as open distribution is nearly impossible.

The importation of Bibles is unrestricted in much of Kenya, but in these hostile regions, believers must hide and transport them in secret. Likewise, while Bible printing is generally permitted, it would be unthinkable in the Northeast, where jihadist groups like Al-Shabaab maintain a strong presence. These groups target MBBs and those sharing the Gospel, making Bible ownership not just difficult, but dangerous. Reports indicate that Christian materials, especially in the Somali language, are actively blocked, with local informants working to prevent their spread. In these regions, even reading a Bible in private can lead to harassment, forced displacement, or worse.

For millions of Kenyans, Bible access is hindered not just by restrictions, but by poverty and a lack of resources. While urban centers have Christian bookstores and digital options, in rural and impoverished areas, Bibles remain out of reach. Many families prioritize food and survival, making the purchase of a Bible a luxury they simply cannot afford.

Digital Bibles, while promising, are not a full solution. Only around 40% of Kenyans have internet access, and a quarter of the population lacks electricity, making it impossible for many to rely on digital or audio Bibles. For those living off-grid, print Bibles are essential, yet remain scarce and expensive.

Before we continue, would you take a pause to pray for Kenya?

### How can I pray for Kenya?

- **Provision and Access.** Pray for the resources needed to provide Bibles to those who long for them but cannot afford or obtain them.
- **Protection for Persecuted Christians.** Lift up believers in northeastern and coastal Kenya who risk their lives to follow Christ, especially MBBs who face extreme persecution.
- **Global Partnerships.** Pray for strengthened partnerships to support Bible translation, printing, and distribution efforts in Kenya.
- **Transformation in Muslim-Dominated Areas.** Ask God to open doors for the Gospel in regions where owning a Bible can be a death sentence

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

### Bible Access Restrictions

#### Minimal 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
- Poor internet access

### Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is over 50%, **estimated** Bible need is between 1 and 3 million

**Main religion:** Christianity  
**Country population:** 56,203,000

#### Christian population:

44,852,000, 79.8% of total population

**World Watch List: #53**

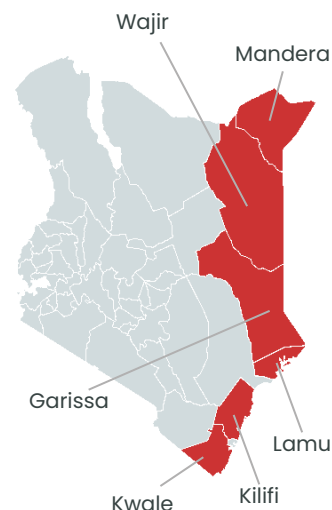
# WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN KENYA?

## A Region Under Siege

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In Kenya's northeastern and coastal regions, owning a Bible can be dangerous. Although the country's constitution guarantees freedom of religion, militant groups like al-Shabaab continue to create a climate of fear for Christians. In counties such as Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Lamu, Kilifi, and Kwale, radical Islamic influence is strong, making it nearly impossible for Christians to safely access, store, or distribute Bibles. Al-Shabaab has specifically targeted Christians in these areas, attacking villages, churches, and individuals in an effort to eliminate their presence. Christians who are identified as such, particularly those from Muslim backgrounds, are at risk of execution, forced displacement, and community ostracization.

Even beyond direct violence, there is a network of local informers who monitor Christian activities, reporting on believers who possess Bibles or attempt to share their faith. This has forced many Christians to practice their faith in secrecy, often relying on oral traditions or digital Bibles when possible—though internet access remains a challenge for many in these rural regions.



## Daily Risks and Bible Access

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Christians in Kenya, especially in northeastern counties and along the coast, face relentless persecution in their daily lives. Al-Shabaab militants and their sympathizers frequently raid villages, attack churches, and forcibly recruit or kill believers. In Garissa and Lamu, Christians have been pulled from buses and executed for refusing to renounce their faith. Even those who are not directly attacked live under constant threat of violence, making it difficult to gather for worship, much less safely store a physical Bible.

Beyond militant threats, Christian converts from Islam face extreme pressure from their own families and communities. Those who embrace Christianity are often forced to flee their homes, denied inheritance, and in some cases, forced into marriages with Muslim spouses as a form of coercion. Women, in particular, are vulnerable to abduction, forced conversions, and sexual violence if their Christian faith is discovered. Because of this, many converts live in hiding, unable to safely own or access a Bible.

## Poverty and Practical Barriers

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Even where violence is not a daily threat, widespread poverty and economic discrimination prevent many believers from obtaining a Bible. The cost of a printed Bible is prohibitively high for a large percentage of Kenya's population, particularly in rural areas where over 36% of the population lives below the poverty line. In some cases, Christian businesses are boycotted, and believers are denied access to essential resources, making Bible purchase a secondary concern to basic survival.

For those hoping to access Scripture digitally, technological barriers remain a challenge. While Kenya has a relatively strong mobile phone penetration rate, internet access is only available to just a little over 40% of the population, with rural areas being the least connected. This makes digital Bibles inaccessible for many, especially in regions where literacy levels are low. For non-literate believers, audio Bibles would be a critical solution, but limited distribution and high costs make these resources scarce.

## Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Kenya

Kenya	Islamic Oppression	Religious Nationalism	Ethno-religious hostility	Clan oppression	Christian denominational oppression	Communist and post-Communist oppression	Secular intolerance	Dictatorial paranoia	Organized corruption and crime	Reference
<b>Persecution Engines →</b>										<p>The more fully shaded the circle in orange, the stronger the level of persecution. The number of "+" signs indicates the frequency or intensity of the driving factors behind it.</p>
<b>Persecution Drivers ↓</b>	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Weak	Not at all	Weak	Very Weak	Medium	
Government officials									+++	
Ethnic group leaders				+++						
Non-Christian religious leaders	++++									
Christian religious leaders										
Violent religious groups	+++++								+++	
Normal citizens	++++									
Extended family	++++									
Political parties										
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups										
Organized crime	+++								+++	
Multilateral org. & Embassies										

In Kenya, several forces operate to restrict Bible access, these often involve **Islamic oppression** (the most dominant), **clan oppression**, **organized crime and corruption**. These forces are often driven by non-Christian religious leaders, violent religious groups, normal citizens, and extended family.

The World Watch List sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we must ask the question: How does this affect Bible access? Furthermore, where can we pinpoint the problem so we can address the need and demand for Bibles in Kenya?

## A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES

A persecution engine is simply this: the source of persecution in the country. A persecution driver (or actor) is the one “driving” the persecution. Taking a closer look at these engines and drivers in proper context, will give us insight on how we can solve the problems of Bible access in the country.



### A Deadly Threat to Christians in Kenya

Kenya’s **northeastern and coastal regions**—including Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Lamu, Kilifi, and Kwale—are particularly dangerous for Christians due to Islamic oppression. The jihadist group al-Shabaab, which operates from neighboring Somalia, is the most significant threat, targeting Christians in these areas. Their goal is to establish strict Islamic rule, and they view Christianity as a direct obstacle to this mission. Because of this, Christians who are found in possession of Bibles or other Christian materials have been killed. The extreme hostility in these regions makes even the private ownership of Scripture a serious risk for believers.

Recent developments have worsened the situation. The reopening of **Kenya–Somalia border crossings** and the **withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)** have created a security vacuum, allowing al-Shabaab to escalate attacks within Kenya. In 2023 alone, the number of attacks doubled, with violent raids targeting Christian communities. At roadblocks set up by militants, Christians have been separated from other travelers and executed on the spot if they failed to recite Islamic prayers correctly.

For Christian converts from Islam, the danger is even greater. They are often hunted by both their families and extremist groups, facing immense pressure to renounce their faith. Many flee their homes, while others are forced into hiding to escape death threats. In some cases, simply owning a Bible is enough to warrant torture or execution. The fear of exposure forces many believers to practice their faith in secrecy, leaving them without access to Scripture and Christian fellowship.



### **Converting to Christianity Means Losing Everything**

In Kenya, clan identity is deeply tied to religious belief. Among Somali and Swahili communities, being Muslim is an essential part of ethnic belonging, and converting to Christianity is considered an act of betrayal. This has led to severe persecution for Christian converts, who face ostracization, forced marriages, and violence from their own families and communities.

Family and community pressure is unrelenting. Those caught practicing Christianity, reading the Bible, or attending church can be beaten, disowned, or expelled from their homes. Christian women are especially vulnerable, as families frequently force them into marriage with Muslim men in an attempt to bring them back into Islam. Refusing to comply can result in verbal abuse, physical violence, or even death. Converts who manage to escape often lose access to family resources and inheritance, leaving them in a desperate situation.

Religious leaders and clan elders actively enforce religious conformity. In some cases, local Islamic clerics issue fatwas against Christian converts, encouraging community members to take action against them. These rulings justify violence, social exclusion, and even the killing of those who leave Islam. The deeply entrenched cultural connection between religion and ethnicity makes Bible access nearly impossible for those who have converted from Islam. Even digital resources are difficult to access due to community monitoring and fear of exposure.



### **A System That Works Against Christians**

Kenya's widespread corruption plays a major role in restricting Bible access, particularly in regions where government officials, security forces, and criminal networks are involved in persecuting Christians. The country's Corruption Perceptions Index score of 31 highlights deep-rooted bribery and legal failures that leave persecuted believers vulnerable. Corrupt officials often ignore violence against Christians, allowing attacks to go unpunished and emboldening those who wish to suppress Christianity.

Militant groups like al-Shabaab exploit corruption to further their agenda. They have been known to bribe police officers to turn a blind eye to attacks on Christians, delaying security responses to violent incidents. This has enabled acts of arson, church destruction, and Bible confiscation to occur without repercussions. Reports indicate that al-Shabaab smuggles weapons into Kenya using bribed officials, strengthening their capacity to carry out targeted killings of Christians.

For Christian organizations attempting to import or distribute Bibles, bureaucratic hurdles create significant obstacles. Increased taxation, arbitrary restrictions, and shipment confiscations make it costly and difficult to bring Bibles into regions where they are desperately needed. In some cases, corrupt officials resell confiscated Bibles on the black market or use them as leverage against Christian groups, demanding bribes in exchange for their release. These factors have severely hindered efforts to provide Scripture to believers, leaving many without access to God's Word.

## THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN KENYA

Research from the **Bible Access List** estimates that **at least 1 – 3 million Bibles** are needed to meet the significant gap in access. Despite Kenya's large Christian population, widespread barriers such as persecution, poverty, and linguistic challenges leave millions of believers without Scripture.

While legal restrictions on Bible ownership are minimal, practical obstacles—especially in northeastern and coastal regions where extremist threats persist—make access to God's Word incredibly difficult.

### A Large Church In Desperate Need of God's Word

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Kenya's Christian population stands at nearly 45 million people, yet millions remain without Bibles. The church's has increased by just 2% over the past five years. This raises a critical question: could greater access to Scripture help revitalize and strengthen the church? With so many lacking the Word of God, the need is not just about sustaining faith but also about stimulating spiritual growth and ensuring that every believer has the foundation needed for discipleship.

### Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

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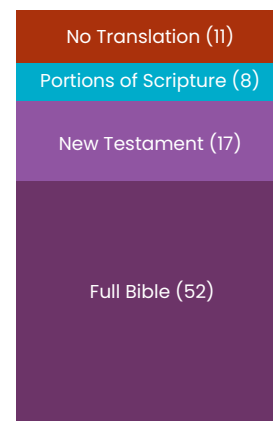
The priority needed in Kenya is for **print Bibles**, followed by **audio formats** to reach those who are illiterate or in high-risk regions where digital access is limited. While digital Bibles are growing in urban centers, internet access remains a challenge—with many rural areas having little to no reliable connectivity.

# The Challenge of Bible Translations

Christians in Kenya speak at least 88 languages, yet many still lack access to the full Bible in their native tongue:

- **52** languages have a complete Bible translation
- **17** languages have only the New Testament available
- **8** languages have partial translations of Scripture
- **11** languages remain without any Scripture translation, leaving entire communities unable to engage with God’s Word in a way they fully understand.

The demand for translated and audio Bibles is urgent, particularly in indigenous communities where oral tradition plays a major role in learning and faith formation.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Kenya

## THE CLARION CALL

The need for Bibles in Kenya is more than a logistical challenge—it is a spiritual emergency. In regions like Mandera, Garissa, Wajir, and Lamu, Christians live under constant threat from al-Shabaab and extremist elements, making Bible access nearly impossible. Meanwhile, deep poverty across many communities means that even when Bibles are available, many simply cannot afford one.

Addressing this crisis requires strategic efforts—providing Bibles in multiple formats, expanding translation projects, and strengthening distribution networks to ensure every believer has access to Scripture. With Kenya’s church growth slowing, there is an urgent need to equip believers with the Word of God, ensuring they are not just Christians by identity, but Christians deeply rooted in Scripture. Now is the time to act—to ensure that no Christian in Kenya is left without the life-transforming power of God’s Word.

