



Bible Access List

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

Tanzania

Bible Restrictions Rank: **63**
MINIMAL ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Bible Shortage Rank: **6**
Bible needs estimate between five and ten million



An Overview of Bible access in Tanzania

Tanzania is home to nearly 70 million people, and just over half identify as Christian, which is approximately 38 million believers. Yet despite this significant number, less than a third have regular access to a Bible. While Tanzania has minimal legal restrictions on Scripture, the country faces unique challenges that severely limit access, underscoring the urgent need to make Bibles more widely available.

While the government of Tanzania does not impose legal restrictions on Bible access in general, practical barriers severely limit access, particularly in specific regions. In Zanzibar, a predominantly Muslim island, there are notable restrictions on importing Bibles, creating logistical challenges for believers in that region.

Along Tanzania's coastal provinces, particularly in communities with substantial Muslim populations, practical barriers make Bible access especially challenging. While printing and storage activities can be safely organized in other regions, owning a Bible in these areas often draws moderate risks due to localized religious tensions and hostility toward Christians. Distributing Bibles is even more sensitive, frequently exposing believers to heightened scrutiny and significant backlash from their communities.

Although Tanzania boasts widespread mobile phone usage and generally unrestricted internet access, government monitoring of online activity continues. Fortunately, this surveillance has not significantly limited digital Bible access. Nevertheless, digital options still fall short of meeting most believers' needs, particularly in rural communities where limited connectivity and lower literacy rates make online Scripture difficult to access.

The economic reality adds yet another obstacle. Poverty is widespread, placing personal copies of the Bible financially out of reach for many Tanzanian families. With fewer than one in three Christians currently owning their own Bible, millions remain without the Scripture they deeply desire for their spiritual growth.

Together, these challenges—regional tensions, economic hardship, and digital limitations—create a critical need for targeted, creative solutions. Only through focused and innovative strategies can we ensure every believer in Tanzania has the opportunity to experience and engage with God's Word.

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

How can I pray for Tanzania?

- **Open Access in Restricted Areas.** Pray for increased openness and opportunities to safely access Bibles in Muslim majority regions like Zanzibar and coastal regions. May God move in the hearts of the people to shift the localized hostility and barriers that hinder Bible access.
- **Provision and Partnerships.** Pray for resources and partnerships that will help meet the growing demand for Scripture, ensuring all believers, especially those facing practical barriers, receive the spiritual nourishment of God's Word.
- **Wisdom and Protection.** Pray for wisdom, safety, and creativity for those involved in Bible distribution efforts, that God would grant them favor and innovative solutions to navigate the existing challenges effectively.

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

Bible Access Restrictions

Minimal Access Restrictions

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

Other Limiting Factors

Severe Other Factors

- Very poor
- Poor internet access
- Poor infrastructure
- 50-70% of population access to electricity

Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is very low, **estimated** Bible need is between 5 and 10 million

Main religion: Christianity

Country population: 69,419,000

Christian population:

38,397,000, 55.31% of total population

World Watch List: #55

WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN TANZANIA?

A Region of Heightened Tensions

While Tanzania does not impose widespread legal restrictions on Bible ownership or distribution, significant practical barriers severely limit Scripture access, especially in Zanzibar and along the predominantly Muslim coastal provinces. Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous region with a 99% Muslim population, enforces notable restrictions on importing Christian materials, including Bibles. Similar issues exist along coastal areas such as Pemba and Unguja, where localized religious hostility, community pressure, and clan dynamics create an environment of fear and intimidation for Christians.

In these regions, Christians regularly encounter threats, harassment, and sometimes violence. Muslim Background believers or MBBs face heightened vulnerability, enduring severe pressure from family and community leaders, including expulsion from homes, physical attacks, and social isolation. Instances of church vandalism, arson, and violent assaults against believers remain persistent, further limiting Bible access and distribution.



Daily Risks and Bible Access

Owning or distributing a Bible can significantly endanger Christians in Zanzibar and other Muslim-majority coastal provinces. Simply possessing Scripture can provoke hostility, harassment, or even violence from radicalized community members or local mobs. Bible distribution activities carry even greater risks, marked by threats and direct physical attacks against those involved. Zanzibar's government closely monitors Christian activities, further complicating church registrations, evangelistic efforts, and Bible distribution.

While the Tanzanian mainland experiences fewer formal restrictions, bureaucratic obstacles—including import delays, high customs fees, and logistical difficulties—create indirect but significant barriers. Although printing and storing Bibles in safer inland regions remains feasible, Christians along the coast must navigate persistent challenges to secure Scripture.

Poverty and Practical Barriers

Beyond persecution and hostility, economic hardship severely restricts Bible access for many Tanzanian Christians. With nearly half of the population living below the international poverty line, purchasing a Bible becomes financially impossible for many families. Poverty forces believers to prioritize basic survival needs over acquiring Scripture, significantly reducing Bible availability despite minimal legal restrictions nationwide.

Technological limitations further compound these issues. Although government monitoring of online activities is relatively safe, digital Bible access remains out of reach for most Tanzanians due to limited internet access. Less than a third of the population has regular internet access, and where connectivity exists, services are often unstable, expensive, or geographically limited—particularly disadvantaging rural and economically marginalized communities.

Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Tanzania

Tanzania	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
Persecution Engines →										<p>Reference</p> <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>
Persecution Drivers ↓	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Weak	Not at all	Very weak	Medium	Weak	
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										

Tanzania experiences persecution forces that hinder Bible access. These, in particular, include: **Islamic oppression**, **Clan oppression**, and **Dictatorial paranoia**. These forces are interwoven, influenced by normal citizens, extended family, violent religious groups, government officials, and ethnic group leaders.

The World Watch List sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we have to 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 Tanzania?

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.



Islamic oppression is the primary and strongest force restricting Bible access, particularly pronounced in Zanzibar and Tanzania's coastal mainland regions. Christians, especially MBBs, face intense hostility. MBBs often experience severe familial rejection, expulsion from their homes, loss of inheritance, and social isolation, and even the community can pressure them to recant their faith.

In Zanzibar specifically, Christians face systemic discrimination that limits their freedom and undermines their rights. Sharia court systems there have demonstrated significant bias against Christians, with documented cases showing believers punished merely for cooking during daytime hours in the month of Ramadan. These incidents reflect broader societal pressures designed to enforce conformity to local Islamic customs and practices.

Adding complexity to the local situation is the infiltration of violent Islamist groups affiliated with ISIS-Mozambique into southern Tanzania. Reports confirm these groups have crossed borders, attacking villages, burning homes, and targeting civilians, thereby heightening fears among local Christians and significantly restricting their ability to safely access, own, or distribute Bibles.



Clan oppression further compounds these barriers, where clan leaders strongly enforce adherence to traditional religious and social customs. MBBs frequently face severe backlash from clan elders, who use their influence to isolate believers from community support, inheritance rights, and local resources.

This societal pressure makes it exceedingly difficult for these Christians to openly obtain or share Bibles, reinforcing a cycle of isolation and self-censorship.



Despite initial optimism following the recent change of government authoritarian practices persist, continuing to impact Bible access indirectly through restrictions on church activity and civil liberties. While the president lifted a five-year ban on political rallies, government forces have repeatedly dispersed opposition gatherings and civil society demonstrations, detaining participants arbitrarily. Churches and Christian leaders who speak out on issues like constitutional reform or criticize controversial policies, such as the recent Dubai ports management agreement in 2023, are routinely subjected to harassment and suppression.

This restrictive environment creates a chilling effect on religious expression, particularly for churches involved in social advocacy or political commentary, which in turn indirectly curtails Bible distribution and ownership.

THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN TANZANIA

Despite a significant Christian presence in Tanzania, the availability of Bibles is critically low, leaving millions without direct access to God's Word. Research estimates that fewer than 30% of Tanzanian Christians own a Bible.

Among Protestants and Catholics alike, the need is pressing it is estimated that between **5 and 10 million Bibles** are required to meet the gap. Additionally, more Bibles are needed immediately to support new believers who are joining the growing churches throughout the nation.

A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

The church in Tanzania has been expanding over the past five years. This steady growth highlights the urgency to equip new believers and seekers alike with Scripture. Without adequate access to Bibles, this promising growth risks spiritual stagnation and vulnerability to external pressures, particularly in regions with significant religious tensions such as Zanzibar and coastal provinces.

Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

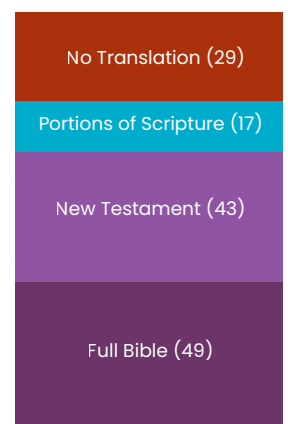
In addressing the specific needs, **printed Bibles** remain the highest priority due to their accessibility and widespread acceptance. **Audio formats** are also essential, especially in rural communities where literacy levels vary.

The Translation Gap

Tanzania's Christians speak at least 138 languages, exposing an urgent need to translations efforts.

- **49** of these languages have a complete Bible translation
- **43** languages possess only the New Testament
- **17** languages have mere portions translated
- **29 more languages are completely without Scripture**

This leaves entire communities without Scripture translation in their heart language.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Tanzania

THE CLARION CALL

Now is the time for the global church to rise in solidarity. The spiritual landscape of Tanzania presents a compelling opportunity and an urgent responsibility of the global church. Your response today can provide Bibles to believers and seekers who are eager yet spiritually underserved.

By answering the call to meet the need for Bible access, we enable Tanzanian Christians not only to withstand persecution but also to flourish in their faith, transforming communities and generations through the powerful message of the Gospel.



1.6%
Annual Church
Growth



Bibles needed for both
**Believers
& Seekers**



5-10 million
Bible needs estimate



**Printed
Bible**
Preferred Format



**Audio
Bible**
Format 2nd Priority