



# Bible Access List

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

# Somalia

Bible Restrictions Rank: **1**  
**EXTREME ACCESS RESTRICTIONS**

Bible Shortage Rank: **76**  
**Bible needs estimate is less than ten thousand**



## An Overview of Bible access in Somalia

In Somalia, a country of over 18 million people, the Christian population numbers below 5,000—a fragile and deeply underground minority. Even so, the need for Bibles among these believers remains urgent. With not even 10% of believers estimated to have access to Scripture (that's just a mere few hundred) the hunger for God's Word is met with insurmountable barriers.

Bible access in Somalia is not just limited; it is outlawed. Under a strict interpretation of Sharia law, it is illegal to print, import, store, or distribute Bibles. While some legal provisions might technically allow foreign workers to keep a personal copy, in reality, these are rare exceptions. Local believers face life-threatening consequences for possessing Christian materials, and Bible access is considered unsafe and severely restricted across the country. Even accessing Scripture online is dangerous, Somali authorities reportedly monitor internet usage, and any trace of engagement with Christian content can result in harsh penalties.

Beyond legal restrictions, Somalia's deep poverty compounds the crisis. With more than 70% of the population living in poverty and widespread food insecurity following years of drought and conflict, basic needs often eclipse the possibility of purchasing a Bible—even if it were possible. Digital Bibles, while theoretically a safer option, are inaccessible to most. Not even a third of the population is online, and less than half have consistent electricity.

The threat of violence further isolates Somali Christians. The Islamist terrorist group al-Shabaab, aligned with al-Qaeda, exerts control over large parts of southern Somalia and actively hunts down Christians, particularly Muslim Background believers or MBBs. There are no functioning churches in Somalia, and house gatherings are rare and dangerous. Even in relatively stable regions like Somaliland and Puntland, societal hostility, clan loyalty, and systemic monitoring make Christian fellowship and Scripture access virtually impossible.

Additionally, almost 4 million people in Somalia are internally displaced, many due to extremist violence. These IDPs face even more intense vulnerability, lacking not just Bibles but basic security, community, and freedom. In many cases, Christians among them must hide their faith entirely to avoid detection and punishment.

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

### How can I pray for Somalia?

- **Creative Bible Distribution.** Ask God to inspire and equip global Christian movements with innovative strategies to safely deliver Bibles to Somali believers. Despite the small size and slow growth of the church, access to Scripture could catalyze significant spiritual revival and strengthening within the community.
- **Safety for Believers.** Pray for the protection of Somali Christians who, despite Islamic oppression within communities and violent encounters with al-Shabaab, continue to stand firm in their faith. May they find courage and peace as they discover safe ways to practice their beliefs and access the Word of God.
- **Infrastructure Development.** Pray for advancements in infrastructure that can increase internet access, providing a crucial lifeline for Christians to access digital Bibles and other resources for spiritual growth.

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

### Bible Access Restrictions

#### Extreme Access Restrictions

- No Importing
- No Printing
- No Storage
- No Ownership
- No distribution

### Other Limiting Factors

#### Extreme Other Factors

- Extremely Poor
- Poor internet access
- Extremely poor infrastructure
- <50% of population access to electricity
- 50-70% literacy

### Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is very low, **estimated** Bible need is between 50 and 100 thousand
- Impacted by armed conflicts

**Main religion:** Islam

**Country population:** 18,707,000

**Christian population:**

4,100, 0.2% of total population

**World Watch List: #2**

# WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN SOMALIA?

## No Safe Place for Scripture

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In Somalia, possessing a Bible is not just risky; it's potentially fatal. Christians must live in secrecy, as even the suspicion of owning Christian materials can lead to death. Al-Shabaab, a violent Islamic group that controls large parts of the country, targets MBBs and has infiltrated both federal and local government structures. Its goal is the complete eradication of Christianity from Somalia.

In areas under al-Shabaab's control—especially the southern and southwestern regions like Kismayo, Jamaame, Marka, and El Hur—any form of Christian expression is life-threatening.

## Extreme Surveillance and Hostile Communities

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Somali society assumes every citizen is Muslim. MBBs are viewed as betrayers of their families, clans, and national identity. Family members, clan leaders, and local communities often serve as the first line of persecution, monitoring suspected Christians and reporting them to authorities or militants. Surveillance is extensive—covering phone calls, emails, and even day-to-day behavior. This forces many Christians to completely hide their faith.

## No Legal Protection, No Church Life

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The Somali constitution explicitly states that no religion other than Islam may be propagated, and Sharia law is the basis for all legislation. There are no officially recognized churches, and the attempts to reopen church buildings have been met with immediate backlash from the public and government alike. Christians cannot legally register churches or even conduct Christian funerals without severe repercussions.

## A Culture of Fear and Violence

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Every part of life—private, family, community, and national—is shaped by pressure against Christians. Christians face harassment, abduction, forced marriages, and violence, often with the tacit approval of family or local authorities.

The rise of organized crime and rampant corruption further strips away any remaining protection, allowing terrorists to operate with impunity. In this environment, even digital access to Scripture is dangerous.

# Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Somalia

Somalia	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
<b>Persecution Engines →</b>									
<b>Persecution Drivers ↓</b>	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Very strong
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									

**Reference**

*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.*

Very Strong

Strong

Medium

None

In Somalia, multiple forces of persecution operate simultaneously to restrict Bible access, including **Islamic oppression, clan oppression, organized corruption and crime,** and **dictatorial paranoia.** These are driven by a complex web of actors—violent Islamic militants like al-Shabaab, local clan leaders, extended family members, non-Christian religious authorities, and even government officials—all of whom contribute to a culture of fear and hostility towards Christianity.

The World Watch List by Open Doors 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 Somalia?

## 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 Death Sentence for MBBs

Islamic oppression in Somalia is driven by both violent extremist groups and broader societal enforcement of religious conformity. Al-Shabaab remains the most dominant actor, enforcing a radical version of Sharia law and targeting anyone suspected of being a Christian. In August 2017, an attempt to reopen a church in Hargeisa, Somaliland was shut down after Islamic community pressure led the government to close it.

Christians discovered practicing their faith are often executed on the spot. There are examples of al-Shabaab operatives killing Somalis suspected of converting to Christianity. Foreign jihadists operating in Somalia further intensify the threat.

Even Islamic leaders outside of al-Shabaab publicly state that there is no room for Christianity or churches in Somalia. This makes any attempt to store, read, or distribute a Bible a matter of life and death.



### **Betraying Your Clan Can Be Life-threatening**

Clan oppression is a deeply rooted engine of persecution. In May 2022, the Somali president was elected by a parliament that had been selected by 14,025 clan elder-appointed delegates, revealing the political and cultural power of clans.

Clan leaders equate Somali identity with Islam. If a clan member is suspected of converting to Christianity, they are harassed, intimidated, and in many cases, killed. The clan system is also exploited by al-Shabaab to recruit members and force imams and sheikhs to preach jihad or face death. Clan-based retaliation ensures that even private Bible study or Scripture possession is impossible without severe consequence.



### **Rule By Lawlessness and Terror**

Somalia ranks #180 out of 180 in Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index, scoring just 11/100, reflecting systemic lawlessness. In this context, organized crime and jihadist networks like al-Shabaab collect illegal taxes and control trade routes, using the profits to fund militant activities that include targeting and killing Christians.

Al-Shabaab's networks extend into government and local authorities, further compromising any possibility of legal Bible distribution. Because militants fund operations through these corrupt channels, any attempt to smuggle or import Bibles would be intercepted or extorted, making Bible access structurally impossible in most areas.



### **Legal Systems Used to Silence and Expel Christians**

Though less dominant, dictatorial paranoia still plays a role in suppressing Christianity. A specific example occurred on 5 October 2020, when a married couple in Somaliland was arrested for Christian proselytizing. Religious leaders called for their prosecution under apostasy laws. On 5 November 2020, a court ordered their deportation to Mogadishu instead of releasing them.

This case illustrates how government authorities in Somaliland actively enforce anti-Christian laws and respond to public religious pressure, ensuring that even private expressions of Christianity—including Bible study—are criminalized or punished.

# THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN SOMALIA

Against a backdrop of extreme persecution and life-threatening danger, Bible access in Somalia is nearly nonexistent. Imagine what **a few thousand Bibles** could do. Even by rough estimates this can already make a huge difference in an environment designed to suffocate the Word of God. The number may appear small, but its significance is profound. Each Bible now becomes a lifeline of hope, truth, and strength for a believer facing constant threats of death, isolation, and displacement.

## A Small Church With Little Growth Needs the Bible to Survive

Despite these hostile conditions, the church in Somalia is slowly growing. In the last five years, there has been a steady increase in the number of Christians. The need to equip this underground church with Bibles has never been more important. Without access to God's Word, believers' risk spiritual stagnation, and new MBBs are left without the foundation they need to grow in faith.

## Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

To meet the diverse needs of Somali Christians, especially those in hiding, **audio Bibles** are the highest priority. These provide access without the danger of physical possession. **Video formats** are the next most useful, especially for use via mobile devices.

# THE CLARION CALL

The crisis in Somalia is not only political or humanitarian—it is deeply spiritual. Amidst violence, systemic poverty, clan persecution, and Islamic extremism, Christians are crying out for the Word of God.

Providing a Bible in Somalia is not a casual distribution effort—it is an act of courage, compassion, and defiance against the forces of darkness. The global Church must respond with urgency and faith. We need Bible translations in unreached languages. We need audio and video formats for those in hiding. And we need unshakable commitment from global partners to ensure that even in Somalia, one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian, no believer is left without the Word of God.

The need is urgent. The time is now. Let us answer the call.



1.0%  
Annual Church  
Growth



Bibles needed for both  
**Believers  
& Seekers**



<10k  
Bible needs estimate



**Audio  
Bible**  
Preferred Format



**Video  
Bible**  
Format 2nd Priority