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Alabama Tops Religious Freedom Index at 80 Percent as Michigan Finishes Last at 34 Percent

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Alabama ranks first in America for religious freedom, scoring 80 percent overall in the Napa Legal Institute's fourth annual Faith and Freedom Index, released on 16 November 2026"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Alabama ranks first in America for religious freedom, scoring 80 percent overall in the Napa Legal Institute's fourth annual Faith and Freedom Index, released on 16 November 2026. Michigan finishes last at 34 percent for the second year running. The index ranks all 50 states plus Washington, D.C., On laws affecting churches, religious schools, pregnancy resource centers, homeless shelters and faith-based nonprofits across 15 categories.

Behind Alabama come Kansas at 76 percent, Indiana at 75 percent and Texas at 71 percent. At the bottom, Michigan's 34 percent is followed by Washington at 38 percent and Massachusetts at 41 percent. More than half of the states - 32 of them - scored below 50 percent, which means most of America still falls short on the laws that protect faith-based nonprofits.

The results cut across party lines, and that is one of the most surprising parts of the report. New York, a Democratic-led state, scored 55 percent - higher than Republican-led North Dakota, South Carolina and Tennessee. The index measures laws, not politics, and the laws do not always follow the map the way people expect.

Two different sets of scores are circulating, and they should not be mixed up. The overall scores - Alabama 80 percent, Michigan 34 percent - are the headline ranking. There is also a seperate religious-freedom-only score, where Alabama reaches 94 percent, Kansas 87 percent and Michigan just 24 percent. Same index, different measure, and the two should always be labelled clearly.

It is also important to say what the index does and does not measure. It measures laws affecting nonprofits: whether a church can own property, whether a religious school can operate freely, whether a pregnancy resource center can advertise honestly, whether a homeless shelter can hire people who share its faith. It does not measure how free Christians feel in their daily lives. A state can score well on paper while its believers still feel the pressure, and a state can score badly while its churches thrive.

Alabama's top ranking comes with a wrinkle. The state still has a Blaine amendment on its books - a 19th-century provision, originally aimed at Catholic schools, that bars public money from going to religious institutions. Alabama tops the index in spite of that amendment, not because of it, and the amendment remains a reminder that even the best-scoring state has work to do.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

READ THE FULL STORY

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