



World Watch List 2018 Compilation Volume 4

PERSECUTION DYNAMICS
FOR COUNTRIES RANKING 26-50

January 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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WWL 2018 Compilation Volume 4: PERSECUTION DYNAMICS FOR COUNTRIES RANKING 26-50

Each Country Persecution Dynamics has the following structure:

- Position on World Watch List (WWL)
- Persecution engines
- Drivers of persecution
- Context
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26. Brunei

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 64 / Position: 26

WWL 2017 Points: 64 / Position: 25

WWL 2016 Points: 61 / Position: 25

The WWL 2018 score for Brunei of 64 points is virtually unchanged in comparison to WWL 2017, reflecting a stable, but still difficult situation for Christians in the country. The average pressure is very high but the score for violence is very low. Controlling, watching and spying upon Christians is deemed more important than exerting force. The pending implementation of the Sharia Penal Code illustrates that ruling by threat is seen as being more effective than ruling by actual violence.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Brunei ¹	
Islamic oppression	Very strong

¹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Very Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Brunei is an Islamic nation, based on an ideology called “Malay Islamic Monarchy” or MIB (Melayu Islam Beraja). This form of government is claimed to be the fairest for all people in the country, whether they are Muslims or not. The Sultan has favored Brunei government democratization (although Brunei is still far from any real democratization) and declared himself prime minister and president. Brunei wants to be a center of Islamic excellence: Sharia law was fully implemented in civil and religious affairs for all Muslims even before the country’s independence in 1984 and the government follows a plan of Islamization among the partly Christian, partly animist tribal people in supporting the so-called *dawah* movement (Islamic evangelism). By decree, the import of Bibles and the public celebration of Christmas are banned. Christian pastors and workers are facing a multitude of limitations due to Islamization and the prevailing MIB ideology and both native and foreign Christians have been targets of aggressive Islamization. The government, which aims to convert 2,000 people a year, promises an incentive of BND 2,000 (USD 1,450) and other fringe benefits (e.g. homes, facilities, and decent jobs) to those who convert. According to Islamic Dawah Centre statistics, 235 people embraced Islam nationwide in the first half of 2017.

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

The sultans have held absolute power in the country for over 600 years. All important positions are held by the Sultan himself, be it prime minister, finance minister, minister of the interior, minister of foreign affairs and trade, defense minister or head of religion. People deeply revere and respect him and any criticism is unthinkable and indeed not very likely as citizens value him highly and do not blame the economic tough situation on him. His rule has not implied any danger to Christians so far, but his Islamic conservatism was shown in 2016 when he criticized authorities for their failure to implement the second phase of Sharia law, which are the criminal rules. Therefore, conservative Islam seems to serve as state ideology backed by the ruler as well as a means to control people, leaving Christians insecure about their future and as second-class citizens in the best case.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Brunei	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Weak
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Weak
Own (extended) family	Very Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Since all MIB policies (which favor Muslims over other religions) are legally executed and enforced by government authorities in all sectors of the country, government officials are the main drivers of persecution. Religious (i.e. Islamic) and Malay leaders exercise great influence on the Sultan, who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam, and thereby put pressure on the Christian minority. Family members and neighbors can easily bring converts to Christianity and churches into trouble by simply reporting them to the security department KDN, which is frequently happening.

Context

On 1 May 2014 Sultan Hassanal introduced the first of three phases in the adoption of a penal code based on Islamic law, or *Sharia*. The first set of regulations allows fines and prison sentences for “crimes” such as pregnancies outside of wedlock, propagating religions other than Islam, and not attending mandatory Friday prayers. The second phase, which will introduce harsher punishments such as floggings and amputations for property offenses, was supposed to be introduced in May 2015 but has been delayed, causing Sultan Hassanal to call this delay “unacceptable” at a meeting with the Brunei Islamic Religious Council. The Sharia Criminal Procedure Code is now being drafted and was scheduled to be introduced in

June 2017, but this still did not take place in the WWL 2018 reporting period, despite the Sultan's expressed displeasure. Two potential explanations are offered for this: Either the administration is overwhelmed by the costs of implementation and ran out of money due to a lower oil price; or the threat of implementation is strong enough to create fear among non-Muslim citizens and keep them under control.

In 1929, when huge reserves of oil and natural gas were discovered in Brunei, the Sultan used that enormous income to make his tiny sultanate one of the world's most economically prosperous and socially secure societies. Its citizens are given free medical service, free education, housing benefits, low interest housing and are exempt from personal income tax. Nearly 96% of Brunei's exports are oil, gas and related products. At its current pace of extraction, Brunei has enough oil left for only 22 years, others expect an end even as early as 2025. Even if reserves last longer, the costs for exploration are increasing. Brunei is currently the only country in SEA facing economic decline. In an effort towards diversification, in 2008 the Sultan unveiled Vision Brunei 2035, which aims to reduce its reliance on oil and gas and increase private-sector employment. The sultanate has started making attempts to diversify its economy with a string of major international trade agreements, but so far with mixed results at best. Brunei also appears well-cushioned by substantial fiscal and current account surpluses. Vision Brunei 2035 plans to transform the nation into an "Islamic Singapore," where the accomplishments of Brunei's well-educated and highly skilled citizens will receive international recognition. However, since parts of Sharia law will also apply to non-Muslims (who account for roughly 33% of Brunei's population), it is feared that many better-educated Bruneians will opt to migrate. And anyway, since places like Dubai already exist, there would seem to be hardly need for another "Islamic Singapore".

Muslim groups seen as deviant - such as Shiite and Ahmadis - are banned and persecuted as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Since expatriate Christians join local churches, they are not treated as a separate category of Christianity for the WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

These communities, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, are increasingly facing hostility and have to exercise more and more caution as they are strictly monitored, though they are still less affected by persecution than the newer forms of Protestant church and convert communities.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

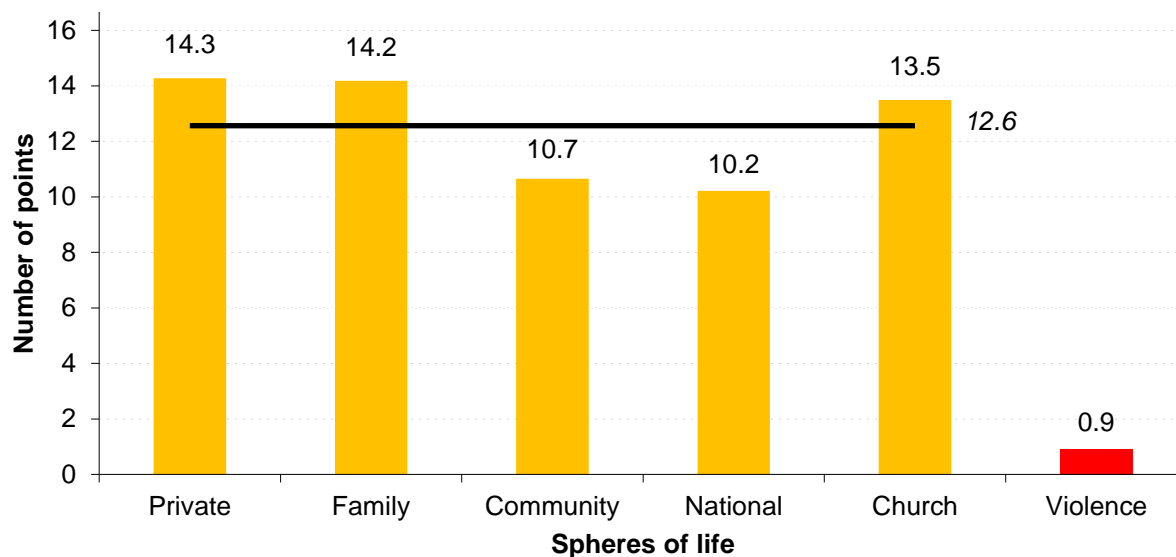
Converts from a Muslim background suffer strong pressure from family and friends as conversion is considered illegal.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

These Evangelical and Pentecostal communities have to be cautious in living their faith and in meetings both in their private and church life.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Brunei



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Brunei remained at a very high level, rising from 12.5 in WWL 2017 to 12.6.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private, Family* and *Church spheres of life*. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private* and *Family spheres* (both at extreme levels), while all Christians face a growing pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This pressure is fuelled by the implementation of Sharia law and threat of implementing the Penal law phase.
- The score for violence against Christians decreased from 1.1 in WWL 2017 to 0.9 points; the persecution of Christians never has been very violent in Brunei.

Private sphere:

Bruneian laws do not allow Malay Muslims to leave Islam. Strict punishments are imposed on those who do so. Section 112(1) of the Sharia Penal Code of Brunei stipulates that a Muslim who turns away from Islam is punishable with death, or with imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty years and corporal punishment, depending on the type of evidence. If a Sharia court is satisfied that the accused has repented, the court must order an acquittal. Any private statement about Christianity can be construed as proselytizing for the Christian faith, so even wearing a cross is done with much more caution than in previous years. It is very risky for a convert from Islam to own any Christian materials as it could expose their Christian identity. In these circumstances meeting with other Christians is particularly difficult for Christians with a Muslim background, (but also difficult for other Christians as they are monitored), as on the one hand it is dangerous for the converts themselves and on the other hand it may disclose or endanger a Christian meeting. Spreading Christian “propaganda” to followers of other faiths or to

members of the tribal groups, who are often following ethnic religions, is prohibited. Christians, especially their leaders, are under permanent surveillance by the authorities. It is also important to note that there is a law in Brunei that prohibits the unauthorized gathering of more than 5 people.

Family sphere:

Convert parents find themselves in a dilemma as they do not dare to raise their children according to their faith as their children could accidentally expose the family's belief in Christ. No school, whether private or public, is allowed to teach Christian subjects and all students in primary and secondary schools are required by law to study Islam (or, more accurately, the national MIB philosophy). One pastor commented that some Christian students can recite the MIB principles better than the 10 commandments. If Christians with a Muslim background are discovered, they will be isolated and put under pressure to recant their faith. If married, a convert will be separated from his or her spouse, who in turn will be forced to divorce.

Community sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background are always under strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to give up their Christian faith. Especially the Malay speaking churches are under serious threat and are always monitored, resulting in a high level of fear among the church leaders. Everyone is aware of the monitoring and surveillance that is being done. Sometimes even in the churches there will be informers (sometimes other Christians) sent by the authorities. The authorities extract information from local citizens about church activities. Furthermore, Christians are discriminated against in their business lives. With Sharia law in place, the government is gradually implementing more rules and restrictions. Since 2014, public Christmas celebrations are banned. One report stated that a mother had to prevent her son from singing Christmas songs too loudly in a shopping mall, revealing the growing level of fear. There are also strict regulations and penalties during Ramadan concerning the observance of Muslim prayer times both for Muslims and non-Muslims.

Around 50% of conversion cases happen among expatriates, e.g. Catholic Filipinos convert to Islam in exchange for work permits; Indian blue collar workers are asked to embrace Islam in exchange for work permits and other fringe benefits.

National sphere:

As mentioned above, Brunei introduced Sharia penal law in May 2014. This not only regulates crimes like murder and theft, but also affects the public display of Christian symbols. Implementation was scheduled for 2017, but the introduction of the second phase of Sharia Law seems to be quietly postponed, maybe reflecting the fact that it is more convenient for the ruler to leave citizens and especially religious minorities uncertain about the rules. Registering a conversion is out of the question. Christians are often subjected to discriminatory treatment when dealing with the authorities. In many cases, when permanent residents with a Chinese, Christian or Buddhist background applied for citizenship, they face rejection or delay, but no official reason is given by the officials. The country's Islamization activities, especially among Christians, are strongly publicized and the conversion of Christians to Islam is highly praised in the media. Underground churches, of course, never display religious symbols, but even Christians from recognized churches are careful not to put up anything in public, since this may be regarded as propagating the Christian faith with the intent to convert Muslims, which violates the new Sharia laws. Thus, Christians are also afraid of wearing anything that publicly expresses their faith, like a cross on a necklace.

Church sphere:

All church activities are being monitored, but registered churches are particularly affected by spies sent by the government. These informers are sometimes Christians themselves, who are offered bribes. Those churches which have been registered in the Constitution during the colonial era, still have legal status today. However, the government does not allow any further churches to be registered. And even registered churches face problems. In the capital Bandar Seri Begawan, the government implements zoning restrictions on Sundays and all roads leading to the Catholic and Anglican churches are closed for "recreational" purposes from 6 am to 1 pm. Only those with valid permits are allowed to enter the area near the two main churches. There is a *fatwa* that bans non-Muslim worship buildings from being renovated or built, tacitly endorsed by the Sultan. Consequently, church buildings deteriorate further and further, but some churches have renovated their buildings without permission. Despite these challenges, churches stand firm in their Christian faith, although one challenge is that many young Christians are leaving the country and hence, there is a gap in leadership. Convert fellowships and non-traditional churches cannot register and their meetings have sometimes been disturbed by the police. However, in the WWL 2018 reporting period even historical churches have experienced difficulties in getting permits extended. No Christian activities are allowed in public. In December 2014, the government warned all Christian communities not to hold public Christmas celebrations. This ban on Christmas celebrations is still in force. Sunday services are monitored closely by government officials and pastors (especially Bahasa Malay pastors) are very careful not to offend the government or the royal family in their weekly sermon. Published materials are also subject to scrutiny and importing Christian materials is not allowed. The movements and activities of church leaders in particular are monitored and it is difficult to train church members or to provide theological studies.

Violence:

The score for violence is at a very low level, reflecting the fact that persecution has never been very violent in Brunei. However, it is enough to cause some Christians to leave the country and for converts to go into hiding.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male: No data available.

Future outlook

The government of Brunei needs to make some difficult choices. The comfortable days with the Sultan caring for all his subjects will soon be over. Until now, his government provides free medical services and subsidizes goods such as rice and housing. There are no school fees for state schools, and citizens of Brunei do not have to pay income tax. But since the oil and gas reserves may only last for just one more generation or shorter, the government needs to start thinking about alternatives. Until now, it has [not been particularly successful](#)² as it seems that the world does not need an "Islamic Singapore" (or already has

² See: <http://www.atimes.com/article/wells-run-dry-brunei/>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

one in Dubai or Doha?). The growing economic pressure may lead to increased insecurity and even unrest, especially as the government is not hiring any more staff, and it seems that by pushing for the introduction of Sharia law and by issuing a ban on public Christian celebrations, the Sultan is relying on a conservative brand of Islam - certainly out of conviction - but also as a means of keeping his people in check. This will lead to an increase in the country's main persecution engine *Islamic oppression*. The fact that the Sultan decided to [close down](#)³ the popular English-language Brunei Times in November 2016 shows that he is trying (and succeeding) to control media and public reporting more tightly, thus *Dictatorial paranoia* will continue to be a persecution engine as well. This is challenging for Christians who are anyway facing a changing church situation with young Christians leaving the country in large numbers. Additionally, the country's mindset may be best reflected in what one professor [said](#) in September 2016: "Educational institutions in a country should be led entirely by religion in order to maintain peace in the future". Whereas this is meant to curb extremist influence, it does not bode well for the religious minorities in Brunei.

Policy considerations

- The government of Brunei should lift the decree that bans the importation of Bibles and the public celebration of Christmas.
- The international community should urge the government of Brunei to end the policy of "Islamic evangelism" which is forcing people to change their faith and convert to Islam for financial and material benefits.
- The international community should urgently call for the government of Brunei to repeal the first phase of the Sharia penal law introduced in 2014 and the next phase (which was due in June 2017). The rights of non-Muslims are severely restricted under penal law.
- The European Union (as it prepares the EU-Brunei Partnership Agreement) and countries entering into major trade agreements with Brunei under Vision Brunei 2035, should make trade agreements conditional to compliance with repealing the Sharia penal law which violates the fundamental right to Freedom of Religion or Belief.

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³ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brunei-media/bruneis-second-largest-daily-newspaper-shuts-down-abruptly-idUSKBN1320YF>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

27. Qatar

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 63 / Position: 27

WWL 2017 Points: 66 / Position: 20

WWL 2016 Points: 65 / Position: 21

The WWL 2018 score of 63 is 3 points less than in WWL 2017. Despite this decrease, Christians in Qatar, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, remain under very high pressure from the Qatari government and Qatari society in particular. A scoring refinement in registering the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity in Qatar contributed to the decrease in points. There was also less violence reported during the WWL 2018 reporting period.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Qatar ⁴	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam. While Muslims are free to worship in public, non-Muslim religious groups (Christians) can only worship in private houses or designated places. Proselytizing is outlawed and can lead to sentences of up to ten years imprisonment. Criticism of Islam is punished. Conversion from Islam to another religion constitutes apostasy, which is forbidden and socially unacceptable. Family law is regulated by *Sharia*, the Islamic legislation. Nearly all Qatari citizens and nationals are by definition either Sunni or Shia Muslims.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Typical for this persecution engine are situations in which age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context are forced upon Christians. In the case of Qatar, *Ethnic antagonism* is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity.

⁴ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

Qatar is an absolute monarchy, ruled by the Emir who is a descendant of the Qatari royal family. The government created a welfare state, with many financial benefits for Qatari nationals. The government expects obedience in return and does not allow any opposition. Besides that, because of the low number of nationals compared to very high number of expatriates, the government tries to keep the country Islamic. Although expatriate Christians are relatively free to practice their belief, the government monitors all activities. The country is well policed; the many expatriates in the country have to behave carefully as they can easily be expelled from the country.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Qatar	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Conservative Islamic society is the biggest threat to Christians in Qatar. Employees are tied to their employers and thus vulnerable to their bosses' demands. The latter can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from South East Asia and North Africa. Expatriate Christians also face discrimination or mistreatment by their fellow Muslim expatriates.

Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable in Qatar. The government will act against any Christian who makes an attempts to share the Gospel, since proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. No Christians have been officially prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country without due process in recent years.

Qatar is also well known for its spreading of Wahhabism, known for its ultraconservative view of Islam. While the country tries to be open and modern, this strict interpretation has its grip on the country. In particular because society and government enforce it in public, e.g. by enforcing public dress codes, virtually prohibiting the drinking of alcohol, by limiting the freedom of expression (i.e. criticism of Islam) and by forcing other religions to worship in private only.

Besides this, a conservative Islamic preacher like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who has millions of viewers via the Qatari-based Al Jazeera network, is also based in Qatar. Although he does not support Wahhabism, he is seen as an important intellectual voice for the Muslim Brotherhood and he has been very clear that apostasy has to be punished with the death penalty.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Since *Ethnic antagonism* is clearly mixed with *Islamic oppression*, it is hard to identify specific drivers. Nevertheless, family honor is an age-old norm and shaming it by conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable in Qatar. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for it.

Drivers of dictatorial paranoia:

The Qatari government does not allow any criticism, especially not from (foreign) Christians. The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring all activities in the country. Expatriates speaking out against the government will most probably be deported.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the Keys to Understanding document for Qatar.

Since declaring independence from Great Britain in 1971, Qatar has gone through massive economic, social and political changes. Once a poor (pearl-)fishing nation, Qatar has developed into a prosperous and modern country, due to the exploitation of its abundant oil and gas fields.

Until June 2017, Qatar seemed to be a stable nation, maintaining friendly relations with the USA and Saudi Arabia, but also with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. Apart for a few online protests, the Arab Spring did not seem to cause any unrest in Qatar, despite the country's active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad. This suddenly changed when certain Gulf countries and Egypt, led by Saudi-Arabia, cut off all diplomatic and economic ties on 5-6 June 2017. Since then, all land and sea borders between Qatar and respectively Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have been closed. The official reason for the boycott is Qatar's alleged support for terrorist groups.

The conservative and mostly Wahhabi Qataris are not in favor of democracy. They perceive this as a Western concept that leads to difficult situations as witnessed in several democratized Arab countries. Unusual for the region, there is no social or economic discontent expressed, since the state distributes its wealth generously. This materialistic saturation leads to political apathy.

The large number of foreign workers plays an important role in Qatar. They make up more than 80% of the country's population which is the world's highest ratio of foreigners/citizens. Expatriates are generally perceived and treated by Qataris as slaves, especially the ones from Africa and Asia. Working conditions can be inhumane and dangerous; they face underpayment, lack of proper living conditions (e.g. unsanitary,

overcrowded labor camps), domestic violence and sexual abuse. It is not uncommon for them to die in the work-place. Forced labor and human trafficking are also major problems.

According to the Qatar 2016 International Religious Freedom Report, only Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations are registered as official religious groups. However, other groups like Hindus, Buddhists, adherents of Bahai and unregistered Christian groups were free to worship in private, despite lacking designated places and facilities for their meetings.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two exist in Qatar:

Communities of expatriate Christians:

The level of persecution varies within this category. For instance, low-skilled workers (e.g. construction workers) from low or middle income countries have a low social status and are generally treated worse than expatriates from the Western world working in more skilled occupations. Therefore, workers from Asia and Africa are treated badly, independent of their religion. If such workers are Christian, this can add to their vulnerability and they are under strong pressure to become Muslims. They are not free to openly practice their faith and many among them hardly have the opportunity to attend church in the special compound built on land provided by the authorities outside of the capital Doha. The number of expatriate Christians is growing, as many workers convert to Christianity during their stay. Already, there are traffic and parking problems at the church complex. Also, many Christians think that the complex will soon be too small to house all Christians in Qatar gathering for worship. A positive development in 2015 was the allotting of land to the recently registered Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches. The construction needs to be completed within three years.

Historical Christian communities:

There are no historical Christian communities in Qatar.

Communities of converts to Christianity

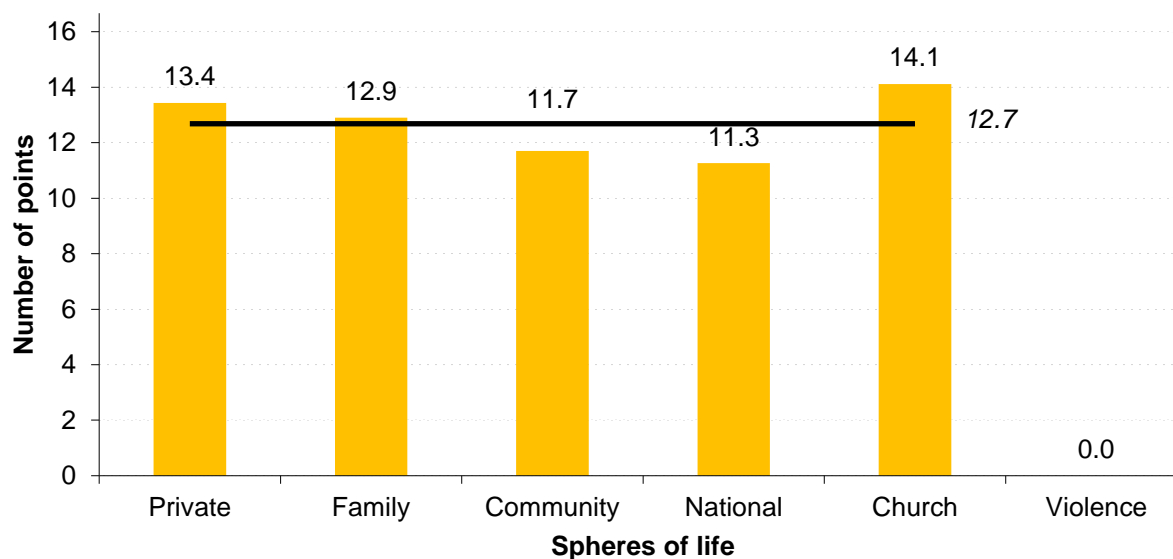
Christians with a Muslim background are heavily persecuted in Qatar. They are considered apostates and face discrimination and harassment from society and even risk being killed by their family. Apostasy is also a crime and punishable under the criminal law. However, no execution or other punishment for apostasy has been recorded since the country's independence in 1971. Almost all Qatari converts converted abroad and the majority of them do not return to the country out of fear. Most of the converts are foreign workers. The level of pressure on both groups (indigenous and foreign converts) is very high. Local converts are very much under control by their families. They face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. Converts from a migrant background face high pressure and are controlled by their social environment in the labor camps they live in. Even their Muslim employers are likely to be a source of persecution.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are no non-traditional Christian communities in Qatar.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Qatar



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Qatar remains very high, although it went down from 13.2 in WWL 2017 to 12.7.
- Pressure is extreme in the *Church sphere*, underlining the marginalized position of the Church in Qatar as a religious group which is not allowed to play a public role. The very high levels of pressure in the *Private* and *Family spheres* reflect the dire position of converts from Islam to Christianity.
- The score for violence went down from 0.4 in WWL 2017 to 0.0 in the WWL 2018 reporting period. (During the WWL17 reporting period it was reported that the visa of some Christians were not extended. Although this has most probably happened during the WWL2018 reporting period as well, no reports were made.) The very low score underlines two things: Firstly, the heavy pressure on Christians is institutionalized in such a way that the Qatari government has no reason to act violently against them. Secondly, the high level of social and governmental control prevents acts of violent persecution becoming public.
- A Puritan form of Islam and a heavy level of control on society characterize the overall persecution situation in Qatar.

Private sphere:

Indigenous and foreign converts from Islam cannot openly practice their faith. Any hint that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. Christians from the West have relatively more freedom to

privately practice their faith, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims. Lower-skilled Christian workers have to act carefully and their freedom in the *private sphere* depends on the attitude and religion of fellow migrant workers who live in the same labor camps, where there is often hardly any privacy. In the case of domestic workers, mostly women, it also depends on the attitude of their employers.

Family sphere:

All Qataris are considered Muslims. For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. Converts run the great risk of honor killing, physical violence or being ostracized, if their families or communities discover their faith. As a result, converts tend to keep their Christian faith secret for fear of gossip and betrayal. For expatriate Christians, it is difficult to live as a Christian and to raise a Christian family in an environment which is dominantly Islamic.

Community sphere:

All Christians are more or less put under pressure to renounce their faith through all kinds of discrimination. Lower-skilled expatriate Christians can experience harassment and discrimination in their workplace and community - converts will for sure if their new faith is known. Discrimination in dealing with the authorities affects all Christians. Christian parents are allowed to teach religious education to their children at home, but non-Muslim religious education is prohibited in both public and private schools.

National sphere:

The legal system is based on Sharia law and conversion to a religion other than Islam is illegal. Non-Muslims are subject to Sharia law in cases of child custody, but civil law covers other personal status cases, including those related to divorce and inheritance. Muslims have more rights than followers of other religions. Converts in particular face serious pressure in dealing with the authorities if their Christian faith is known. Expatriate Christians will face problems in this *sphere of life* if they are actively proselytizing Muslims. This can lead to imprisonment and deportation.

The government has funded a center for interfaith dialogue, which actively promotes religious tolerance. However, this policy does not seem to make a real difference for Christians living in the country. During the Ramadan month, the government actively promotes fasting and other religious duties, also for non-Muslims. Any people seen eating or drinking during daylight hours can be arrested.

Church sphere:

Expatriate Christians can only gather for worship in private or designated places. Outward symbols of faith, like crosses on churches, are illegal. There are six registered and many unregistered churches in Qatar that serve the large group of foreign workers, but converts are not allowed to attend. Official church recognition is hard to obtain. The churches are mostly concentrated in a district outside the capital Doha. This brings the risk of ghettoization and monitoring, which usually happens under the authorities' pretext of ensuring protection. Reportedly, government security services protecting the churches also check for Muslims trying to visit a church service. The publication, import and distribution of religious materials are heavily regulated. Churches are no longer allowed to use their own channels for importing Bibles and are forced to use a secular bookshop for importing. On a more positive note, the Qatari authorities granted

land for the Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches in 2015, however no church has been built yet. Also positive news to report is that unregistered churches have not been hindered in their worship.

Violence:

No violence has been reported during the reporting period. However, Open Doors is aware of the very worrisome situation of low-skilled expatriate workers. According to Amnesty International, they are vulnerable at the hands of their employers - especially domestic workers who are excluded from any labor protection.⁵ Open Doors fears that Christian workers, especially women, are even more vulnerable and are being discriminated against because of their faith.⁶ However, there are currently no clear signs of persecution-related mistreatment of Christian expatriate workers. More research into this subject will be conducted in the near future.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Female Christians risk abduction, rape and other forms of abuse. In Quranic terms, a Muslim is free to have sex with whatever his "right hand possesses". This includes wives and female slaves. House maids working in Qatar are often viewed as belonging to this category. Many Qatari households have a domestic worker, many among them are Christian which makes them even less significant in the eyes of the Qataris and more vulnerable to sexual abuse. It goes without saying that the impact of sexual abuse is deeply traumatic.

Male:

Most of the time, Christian men are the breadwinner for their families and face the brunt of discrimination (at their workplaces) to help their families. Men can also easily become the victim of discrimination in the labor camps.

Future outlook

Despite the political crisis with Saudi Arabia and allied countries, the political, social and economic situation of Qatar does not seem unstable - also due to its ample fiscal buffers. In some ways, the crisis seems to be more of a power play, without the intention of ever becoming an armed conflict. On the other hand, the blockade could harm Qatar's economy in the long term, which might cause an economic fallback for all immigrant workers, including the Christians among them.

Another major challenge for the country is to maintain its cultural and religious standards amidst rapid modernization and development. As it prepares for the World Soccer Games in 2022, Qatar and its

⁵ Amnesty International Report 2016/17, pp. 302, 303.

⁶ See for example: <http://www.dohastories.org/?p=153>, last accessed on 7 December 2017.

deplorable treatment of foreign workers have increasingly caught the world's attention. Under pressure from the West, Qatar is implementing minor - according to human rights organizations: cosmetic - reforms in the labor conditions for workers. In spite of the pressure to improve human rights in Qatar, no major improvements are expected in the strict Islamic country which is known for its overall control on society. As such, no major changes in religious freedom for Christians are expected in the near future.

Policy considerations

Open Doors recommends:

- Qatar's Fourth National Human Development Report (2015) found that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) human rights recommendations set in 2014 were falling short of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and limited by their non-binding status. The GCC Human Rights Bureau should extend "respect for all religions" (GCC Human Rights Declaration 2014) to enshrine full freedom of religion, including conversion and the right to association and assembly. The international community should engage with the GCC Human Rights Bureau and call for full and binding rights provisions.
- The government of Qatar should remove reservations to Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- The international community should hold Qatar accountable on Freedom of Religion or Belief in line with international human rights treaties as part of its call for improvement of migrant worker rights.
- The government of Qatar should remove apostasy laws and guarantee the rights of all citizens to freedom of religion.
- The government should uphold article 35 of the Permanent Constitution and fully investigate and penalize discrimination against Christians, in particular those of Muslim background.
- The Qatar National Vision 2030 seeks to remove barriers that people face on account of religion, and to sponsor and support dialogue among civilians, promoting coexistence between different religions and cultures.⁷ Under the QNV 2030, a plan with indicators should be created to measure progress toward full enjoyment of Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- The government should properly investigate and punish (domestic) violence committed against Christians.

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⁷ See: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/qatar_nhdr4_english_15june2015.pdf, last accessed on 7 October 2017.

28. Kazakhstan

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 63 / Position: 28

WWL 2017 Points: 56 / Position: 43

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 42

With a score of 63 points, Kazakhstan rises 7 points compared to WWL 2017. The situation has become worse for Christians due mainly to the large number of violent incidents: Raids on Christian homes, confiscation of religious materials, detentions, interrogations. Physical violence has increased markedly too. The country, which used to be one of the mildest in the region regarding persecution, is increasingly getting on par with the other Central Asian countries. The decision not to include isolated communities of expatriate Christians as a separate category in the WWL analysis gives a better representation of the country situation, but also contributed to the rise in score.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines ⁸ in Kazakhstan	
Islamic oppression	Medium
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Very Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Very Weak

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Pressure from the authorities has been stepped up since 2015 and the number of raids on meetings and of Christians being detained and interrogated has increased in the WWL 2018 reporting period. It is very common that members of Protestant churches are regarded as followers of an alien sect that has only one goal, namely to spy on and destroy the current political system. From this perspective they need to be not only controlled, but if necessary, even eradicated.

⁸ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Islamic oppression (Medium):

If indigenous citizens (who are Muslim) convert to Christianity, they are likely to experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families, friends and local community to force them to return to their former faith. Some converts are locked up by their families for long periods, beaten and may eventually be expelled from their communities. Local mullahs preach against them, so adding pressure. As a result, converts will do their best to hide their faith – they become so-called secret believers.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Kazakhstan	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Weak
Violent religious groups	Very Weak
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very Weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Government officials and *Political parties* are the drivers that can be linked directly with the persecution engine *Dictatorial paranoia*. They form the oppression that comes from the authorities. The *Extended family*, *non-Christian religious leaders* and *Normal citizens* are the drivers that can be connected to the oppression of the Islamic environment especially on Christians with a Muslim background. These drivers are linked with the persecution engine *Islamic oppression*.

Context

President Nazarbayev is ageing (he was born on 6 July 1940) and is reportedly not in good health. It is unclear who will succeed him but it will most probably be someone of the same school, providing little scope for change.

Another important issue is the significant size of the ethnic Russian minority in the north of the country. According to the 2009 census 23.7% of the total population of Kazakhstan is Russian. This causes some headaches for the government, bearing in mind the assertive policies of President Putin's Russian government. The events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine clearly show that the Kazakh worries are for real.

A small, but growing group of Islamic militants, which carried out small-scale bomb attacks in October 2011, add to the country's worries. There are also reports of Kazakh jihadists who are fighting with the

Islamic State group (IS) in Syria and Iraq. Officials say there are 300 Kazakh citizens in the Middle East region fighting for IS. Non-official sources claim the number is much higher. The government makes use of this information and even exaggerates the danger so that they can clamp down on society and restrict more areas of freedom.

Christians are not the only religious group persecuted by the government. Since all religious activities are under surveillance, Muslims, Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses also experience similar pressure.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians in Kazakhstan form isolated groups and are not classed as a separate category for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

These groups, of which the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is by far the largest, are not involved in evangelism among Kazakhs. They can function relatively freely since the Kazakh regime does not consider them a danger. Also, the Kazakh government has no interest in provoking Russia by making difficulties for the ROC – the events in eastern Ukraine have set an example.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

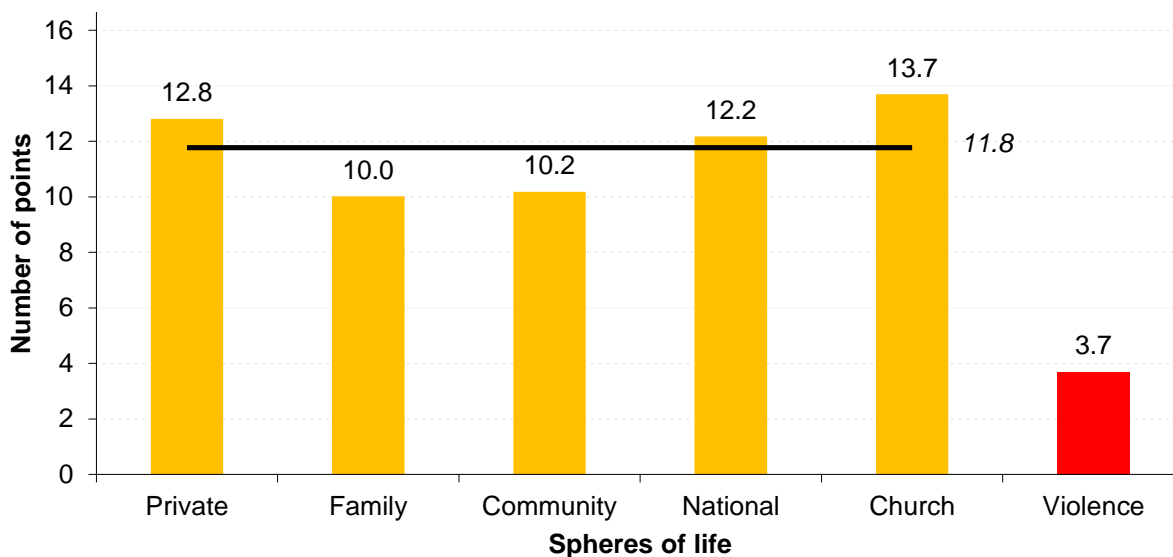
Christian converts with a Muslim background bear the brunt of the persecution in Kazakhstan. Apart from certain state restrictions, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. And for them the latter is by far the more powerful.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

Especially the unregistered groups of this category (which include Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations) experience increasing persecution, especially since they are also active in evangelism. All Christians in this category suffer from raids, threats, arrests, and fines by the authorities.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Kazakhstan



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7.)

The Persecution pattern for Kazakhstan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Kazakhstan rose from 11.0 in WWL 2017 to 11.8.
- Pressure was highest in the in the *Church sphere* with 13.7 points, followed by the *Private sphere of life* (especially for converts from Islam) with 12.8 points. This can be linked directly with the two Persecution engines that are active in Kazakhstan: *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*.
- The score for violence rose from 1.3 in WWL 2017 to 3.7 points. There were several reports of physical violence, raids on Christian homes and arrests, among others.

Private sphere:

Conversion is the issue that triggers a strong reaction in Kazakhstan. Converts with a Muslim background tend to avoid performing Christian rituals or openly displaying Christian symbols or materials in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves. The state is exceptionally sensitive to the spread of "untraditional" religions which are not recognized by law. Protestants are the main target of monitoring and scrutiny and raids against Protestant individuals and organizations, the confiscation of Christian materials and the issuing of fines for Christian activity are not uncommon. As soon as converts touch upon issues of faith in their circle of relatives (or a wider circle) conflicts almost always arise. Converts find it difficult to meet with other Christians as they are being monitored by their community closely and they run the risk of being placed under house-arrest by their family in an attempt to force them to give up their new faith. All non-ROC Christians are monitored by the Kazakh Intelligence Service (KNB).

Family sphere:

For Kazakh converts, baptism is a very important step and very often causes conflicts with their Muslim relatives. Islamic cemeteries permit Christians to be buried there, but only if Islamic rites are used. Freedom of religion is increasingly curtailed in Kazakhstan and cases of monitoring by security forces have been more commonplace. The situation for Protestants has become more difficult as the country's 2011 Law prohibits all activities of non-recognized religious groups. Children of Protestant Christians are quite frequently harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. Schools and other educational institutes use state funds to arrange meetings to combat sects, which include Evangelical churches. These (propaganda) meetings are supposedly voluntary, but everyone is strongly urged to attend. If converts refuse to give up their Christian faith, the family may try to force a divorce or take children out of their custody. There have also been court cases in which converts have lost their inheritance rights.

Community sphere:

The community in the countryside will monitor known converts. In rural areas only Muslims will be accepted in local institutions. Pressure, at times intense, is immediately put on converts to return to the faith of the fathers. Christian children and youth may be subjected to insults and propaganda at school, but none have yet been expelled simply because they are Christians. While lower levels of education are generally not problematic, higher education and professional training may not be as freely accessible to active Christians. Discrimination takes place mainly in state employment. This applies primarily to Kazakhs. A teacher may be made redundant, for instance, if he/she attends an Evangelical church. In law enforcement agencies, such discrimination is a common occurrence. The January 2015 criminal code introduced new fines and penalties that include up to six years imprisonment. There are also fines for groups that conduct activities that are not included in their charter.

National sphere:

In practice, the government has let it be known that Islam is for the Kazakhs, Orthodoxy is for the Slavs, and everything else is superfluous. Although freedom of religion is protected by the Constitution, in practice such protection is only offered to religions and religious groups that are recognized as "traditional" by the 2011 Administrative Code. Such groups include Sunni Hanafi Islam, Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Judaism. Therefore, non-traditional Christian groups are left out and often risk prosecution for conducting faith-related activities. The same 2011 law made registration very difficult for smaller religious groups, therefore making them vulnerable to prosecution. The Kazakh media are in general negative towards Christianity. There have been quite a few programs targeting non-traditional Christian groups and converts. Non-traditional Christians have been accused of being non-Kazakh and anti-Islamic/anti-Christian, and have therefore by extension been accused of blasphemy by former co-religionists of their ethnic community.

Church sphere:

Fifty citizen-sponsors are required to register a religious association. Unregistered churches are strictly illegal. There are special requirements for church buildings and the land they are built on. Non-traditional Christians have often had their services and meetings disrupted. They often received fines because their places of worship were not officially recognized by the state. Courts frequently interpreted any religious

activity that took place outside of a registered religious building as illegal missionary activity. The law requires that registered churches have the consent of both parents before children under 18 can attend church activities. Approval for all printing, importing, distribution and sale of religious materials is needed from the Religious Affairs Committee (RAC) and only registered churches can apply for this. According to the law no religion-based organizations, institutions or schools are allowed; nor is it possible to establish charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural institutions or associations by religious groups.

Violence:

No Christians were reported killed during the WWL 2018 reporting period. Two house churches were damaged. 40 Christians were detained, while 4 Christians were sentenced – 3 to short term imprisonment, while Pastor Bakhytzhon Kashkumbayev was sentenced to 4 year prison sentence on 18 February 2014. 2 cases of physical harassment of Christians were reported, while 22 properties of Christians were damaged. 8 businesses of Christians were attacked. 1 Christian had to go into hiding, while 1 Christian from India was deported.

Further examples:

- Police who raided a Baptist Sunday morning meeting for worship on 28 May 2017 in the southern city of Taraz took 20 of the men and one of the women present to the local police station. There they took their fingerprints, photographed them and recorded their home addresses and other personal data. Police issued summary fines with no court hearing to eight of those present. (Source: [Forum 18](#)⁹)
- Seventh-day Adventist Yklas Kabduakasov remained throughout the WWL 2018 reporting period in a labor camp after being sentenced to two years hard labor in December 2015. He was originally arrested for discussing his faith with students recruited by the secret police. (Source: [Forum 18](#)¹⁰)

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

In Kazakhstan the daily life of indigenous people is based on Islamic culture which puts women in an inferior position compared to men. Total submission is expected from women to their parents and if married - to their husbands. This makes them more vulnerable to persecution - both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order. Female converts are at a bigger risk of suffering physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, house-arrest, discrimination and rejection by their family and the wider Muslim community, than other female Christians. For other Christians, persecution would be not different for men and women.

⁹ See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2285, last accessed 18 December 2017.

¹⁰ See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2252, last accessed 18 December 2017.

Male:

Church leaders are normally men and men are also normally the head of their family and the main bread winner. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution – e.g. is fined or imprisoned - his whole family will suffer. Losing jobs and income will affect the whole family. If a man is a church leader his persecution will affect his church and cause fear. Obligatory military service for young men provides an extra potential risk of persecution. In the case of converts from Islam, men and boys are at a bigger risk of physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, discrimination and rejection by family and Muslim community, than other male Christians.

Future outlook

Religious freedom is already restricted by the 2015 legislation and the Kazakhstan government is constantly working at increasing its control over the entire society, which will continue to mean more surveillance, raids on meetings, and detention of believers. It is using the threat of militant Islam to restrict more and more areas of freedom. This all accounts for a worsening situation for the Christian minority and makes the future outlook for them look worrying. The pressure from the social environment (mostly on converts) is likely to remain unchanged.

Policy considerations

Open Doors suggests the following recommendations be made:

- The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and international community should press the government of Kazakhstan to implement recommendations on Freedom of Religion or Belief by the OSCE within the framework for ‘Countering Extremism and Terrorism’.
- The OSCE and international community should press the Kazakhstan government to amend provisions in the Religion Law and Administrative Code which enact compulsory religious censorship and legal prohibition and sanctioning of unregistered activities. There should be no prior registration for individuals and communities wishing to express Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- The government and the OSCE should cooperate closely to ensure those drafting and applying policies concerning Freedom of Religion or Belief refer to the 2015 benchmark Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities.
- The government should stop arbitrary arrests of Christians.

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29. Ethiopia

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 62 / Position: 29

WWL 2017 Points: 64 / Position: 22

WWL 2016 Points: 67 / Position: 18

With a WWL 2018 score of 62 points at Rank 29, Ethiopia has gone down two points since the WWL 2017 reporting period. The situation in Ethiopia has shown some changes mainly due to the current political crisis. This has actually led to an improvement in terms of the relationship between Christians and other groups. More importantly, the fact that the government has been facing political challenges led to a situation whereby the government reduced its persecution of Christians since its hands have been full with other pressing issues. This led to a reduction in pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Ethiopia ¹¹	
Islamic oppression	strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Medium
Denominational protectionism	Strong
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Strong):

Ethiopia is a Christian majority country (according to World Christian Database in April 2017: an estimated 59.4% Christian and 34.8% Muslim) and yet Islamic oppression poses a real threat to Christians. One country researcher reports: “Islamic extremism continues to be a problem in Ethiopia. As Islamic countries have been competing to get the upper hand in Africa, they continue to pour in considerable funds that is used in spreading Islam through the establishment of schools of religious learning as well as direct aid to the needy attaching conversion to Islam as a condition.” With the rise of radicalism in the region and beyond, radical (or political) Islam is growing at the local, regional and national levels. In the process, various types of Christianity have become increasingly vulnerable to pressure in almost all *spheres of life*.

¹¹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Particularly in rural areas where they are in the majority Muslims harass Christians, and often deny them access to communal resources. Furthermore, Christians are victims of violence. Converts from Islam to Christianity will be ostracized and often denied family rights such as inheritance rights and child custody. It is also important to note that the growth in radical Islam in neighboring Somalia and Sudan is spilling over into Ethiopia.

Denominational protectionism (Strong):

This is another main persecution engine in the country and is mainly driven by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). One country researcher reports: “The EOC considers itself as the only ‘true’ Christian denomination. It is particularly opposed to evangelical Christians viewing them as followers of a Western religion that poses a threat to Ethiopian nationalism and culture that has long been preserved by the EOC. It is common to hear sermons and songs that strongly criticize evangelical Christians. Priests and other teachers in the EOC openly condemn socializing with evangelicals sometimes going as far as putting a ban on their members from speaking to ‘the heathens’. There is also growing antagonism on the part of some evangelical churches against the EOC going into a series of hateful to-and-fro between the two sides.” The EOC has been seriously persecuting Christians who leave their ranks to join (mostly) Protestant churches, or who join the renewal movements within the EOC. This persecution manifests itself in many ways. For example, EOC members will sometimes attack them physically. The EOC members also use their connections in government to curtail the development of non-Orthodox churches. They also lobby the government to bring in laws that restrict the expansion of Protestant Christianity. For example, the law that governs registration of churches exempts the Orthodox Church from this requirement. EOC also uses its powerful media to demonize Protestants and those who are supporters of the renewal movement.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

The Ethiopian government is becoming more authoritarian and has continued to restrict rights for civil society and religious institutions. Even though high-ranking government officials like the prime minister are considered to be Protestant, the Ethiopian government is suspicious about religion in general and Christians in particular. First, religious groups seem able to organize and assemble people very efficiently and effectively. This causes concern about their perceived ability to organize action that hypothetically could bring about a regime change. Secondly, the government suspects Protestants (especially non-traditional Protestants) of being foreign agents seeking to bring about a regime change, although there is no evidence to support this notion. Thirdly, the government believes that a significant number of EOC leaders are supporters of opposition groups. The government has brought in laws which limit the areas of activity in which religious institutions can engage: The ban on setting up broadcasting services for religious purposes as well as the ban on religious instruction and other activities in schools restrict the Christians’ freedom to worship, teach and preach. The Freedom House [2017 report](#)¹² also rated the country “not free”.

The government declared a state of emergency in October 2016 due to the widespread demonstrations in the country. In short, the persecution of Christians by the government is intrinsically related to the protection of its own power. One country researcher states: “The government that has been in power since 1991 continues to be increasingly authoritarian. Even in the wake of the nation-wide protests that

¹² See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/ethiopia>, last accessed 21 September 2017.

have swept through the country since 2015, the ruling party (EPRDF) remains unrelenting. Thousands of protesters were arrested; the government blocked off social media and restricted access to the internet; it also declared a six-month state of emergency in October curtailing a number of basic rights. The state of emergency was then extended for another six months.” Another researcher adds: “More than promoting the interest of a single religious group, any political ideology and/or attempt to bring secularism as mentioned in the constitution; unlimited desire to stay in power indefinitely is the main reason behind almost all acts/omissions of the ruling party when it comes to how religious matters are dealt with in the country. Things are allowed as long as they in no way challenge the regime. All forms of prosecution against religious minorities by different actors are ignored as long as [these minorities are not in alliance with] EPRDF and its members. All the protections for religious freedom under the constitution and relevant laws in place will not be enforced properly if doing so will result - in any way or form - [in] a challenge to the status quo.”

Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

For the past quarter of a century ethnic politics has dominated all areas of public life in the country. This political discourse has led to the search for “roots and identity” which has caused some individuals and groups to become hostile to Christianity. Until 1974, the EOC represented the state religion. The country was under Communist rule from 1974 to 1991, when it was overthrown (after 17 years of civil war) by a coalition of various rebel groups formed from different ethnic groups. The ethnic groups were promised respect and acknowledgment of their culture and identity during the 1991 Ethiopian Transitional Charter - a charter that was set up after the fall of the Communist regime in 1991. This was initially seen as being a politically sound move, but the current government has stirred up resentment towards Christianity among some ethnic groups. In regions like Afar and Somali (Ogaden), Islam is interconnected with ethnicity. Other tribes also demand that Christians participate in tribal clashes and they retaliate if Christians fail to do so. A country researcher also adds: “Although the majority of the population practices either of the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), in some parts of the country, traditional religions are still practiced. Individuals living in those communities are expected to comply with all the religious and cultural rites of the community, failure of which would likely result in banishment. But even among Christians and Muslims the practice of dark magic is quite widespread; practices such as dedicating a newborn to the local magician are commonplace.”

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Ethiopia	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Fanatical movements	Strong
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Very Strong

Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

There are many drivers behind the persecution of Christians in Ethiopia. Religious leaders of both Christians and non-Christians, government officials, family members and extended family members are all involved in some way or another in the persecution of Christians. In the case of government officials, the level of participation in persecution varies from region to region. Mid-level and lower-level officials have especially been in action against the so-called new forms Christianity. Officials at the local level have more control over the day-to-day activities and thereby get more involved in the persecution including (but not limited to) the refusal to grant permits for meetings and worship.

Concerning Muslim leaders as drivers of persecution, one country researcher says: “There were reports of some Muslim leaders who have engaged in inciting violence against Christians. There have been videos circulating of some Muslim preachers encouraging Muslims to ostracize Christians, in some cases going as far as supporting violence.”

Regarding the role of Orthodox Church leaders and members one researcher states: “There is a clear religious demographic change in the country mainly due to the rapid expansion of new forms of Christianity, especially the Protestant Church. Such rapid expansion is not welcomed by the leaders and followers of the Orthodox Church. Resentment against the new forms of Christianity manifests itself in different forms at different levels by acts of both the leaders and followers of the Orthodox Church. The association called ‘Mahibere Kidusan has been publishing inflammatory as well as derogatory articles about protestant Christians for years. Things are getting better in the capital city, other major cities and areas like the southern and southwestern part of the country where the new forms of Christianity are getting strong.”

Context

Ethiopia is a country where different persecution engines exert pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life*. The following points aim to give background information on the persecution dynamics in Ethiopia.

Protest and State of Emergency - current affairs: During the WWL 2017 and WWL 2018 reporting periods, Ethiopia experienced a great deal of political turbulence. There have been persistent and intense demonstrations particularly in Oromia and Amhara regional states to which the government responded with force. However, the security forces did not target any religious group in particular and acted indiscriminately, especially as far as the religion of the protestors is concerned. There have been some reports concerning attacks on churches in a Muslim dominated locality within the Oromia regional state.¹³ However, those regarded as leaders of the protest were quick to condemn the attacks and called on

¹³ For instance, see: <http://addisababaonline.com/ethiopian-religious-leaders-condemn-recent-attack-on-places-of-worship-in-romia-region/>, last accessed 22 September 2017.

demonstrators to make sure the protests do not lead to sectarian or religious conflict. Characteristic for the protests in Oromia regional state was that ethnic solidarity took precedence over religion. In the Amhara regional state, most of the areas where there were protests and disturbances were areas dominated by Coptic Orthodox Christians. There has been intense pressure on the government to allow an international investigators to conduct an independent investigation into the killings and disappearances of protestors in the country. So far, the government rejected the idea of allowing UN Investigators into the country.

Historical perspective: Ethiopia has a long history of both Christianity and Islam. Over time, both religions have been engaged in attempts to expand their sphere of influence and have fought many bloody wars that involved foreign actors like Turkey, Portugal and Egypt. Secondly, Ethiopia has many tribes. These are not necessarily favorable to Christianity; and in some places like the Afar and Somali regions, tribes are interconnected with Islam. Thirdly, the ruling party has closed all possible avenues for freedom of expression and assembly, and has also tried to control all religious institutions in a bid to curb perceived dissent. In 2009, the government enacted a law that limits freedom of religion, association, expression and assembly. As per the law, Christian charities could no longer raise money from abroad and work on human rights issues, conflict resolution or democracy related issues. The ruling party tightened its grip on power by claiming to have won 100% of the seats in the parliament during the May 2015 elections. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn seems to have ignored all the calls for reform from the international community regarding giving space for civil society, freedom of the press and so forth. Following the protests and violence that rocked the country in 2015 and 2016, (and that followed in to 2017), the prime minister dissolved the cabinet. Many investors left the country due to the uncertainty that surrounds the country. Despite this, Ethiopia remains one of the main destinations for international aid.

The ongoing narrative concerning the EOC: The EOC targets Protestants and reform-oriented groups within the EOC itself. This is mainly orchestrated by groups of fanatics in the EOC. Through their magazine, website and newspaper, these fanatic groups use inflammatory rhetoric against non-traditional Christian communities in particular, using expressions like “newcomers”, “false prophets”, “*Menafikan*” (deniers of the Virgin Mary and the saints) and other words to portray them as non-believers or false believers. It is believed that the Protestant community is growing at an annual rate of 6.7% in the country. Putting this into perspective, according to the 1994 census, Christians in the country made up approximately 62.5% of the total population and Muslims 32.8%, animist 4.6%. Back then, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians made up half of the Ethiopian population and Protestants only 10%. This was found to have changed in the 2007 census which listed Orthodox churchgoers as being 43.5% of the population, Protestant 18.6% and Muslims 33.9%. This swift change in population demography has created animosity towards Protestants both from EOC and Muslims. Most of those who have become Protestant are from the EOC.

The Persecution engine Dictatorial paranoia works more or less against any group that is organized under religion or political party. For example, some argue that the arrest of some Muslim leaders in the country

in 2012 is nothing more than the government crackdown on peaceful assembly and association¹⁴, while the government claims that it is fighting radicals.

There are very few religious minorities in the country. These groups are also affected by the broadcasting legislation, the role of faith in education and the civil society law. Generally, the civil society law requires application for registration for any religious groups except for Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews. In addition, the registration law requires a minimum membership of 50 persons for registration as a church and a minimum of 15 persons for a ministry or association to be registered and granted permission. As it stands, the requirements of minimum membership do not have an impact on Christian denominations; however, this has serious impact for religious minorities especially the newer ones: In some areas the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses (where their numbers are less than 50) struggle to have place of worship.

Christian communities and how they are affected

All Christian communities in the country face persecution but the sources and level of persecution vary.

Historical Christian communities:

The EOC is a typical example of this category and has a massive presence in the country. It is one of the factors contributing to the complexity of the persecution dynamics in Ethiopia; as well as being persecuted itself, the EOC also plays a pivotal role as a persecutor. This type of Christianity faces persecution mostly from the government and Islamic radicalism. Also in areas where tribalism is dominant, there is pressure on the EOC. Orthodox Christians are mostly concentrated in northern and central Ethiopia. Also, those Christians living in Muslim-dominated regional states (Harrari, Somalia, Afar) as well as local communities (e.g. among the Silte) face difficulties in living out their Christian faith.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

This category includes i) Christians with a Muslim background, ii) cross-denominational converts – i.e. from one Christian denomination to another, and iii) converts from ethnic traditional beliefs to Christianity. Converts in the country face persecution via different persecution engines. In Muslim-dominated areas, converts from Islam face persecution mainly from family, extended family, community leaders, and non-Christian religious leaders. In areas dominated by EOC, the engine behind the persecution is mainly driven by EOC followers. Converts also face persecution from the government in all parts of the country. In areas with a prevalence of *Ethnic antagonism* converts may face persecution from adherents of traditional belief systems and Muslims seeking to force their participation in various religious activities.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

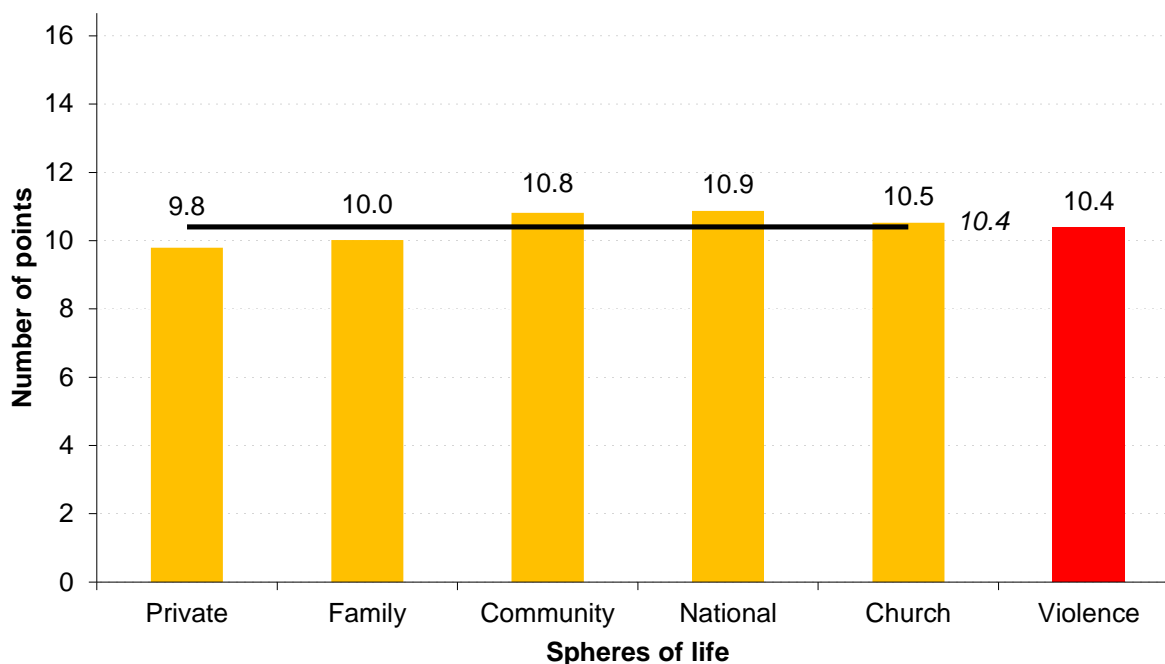
This category includes Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations which have a huge presence in the country. It also attracts serious persecution mainly from the government, EOC and Islamic groups. It is growing very fast compared to other types of Christianity. A country researcher states: “Many parts of

¹⁴ See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/15/ethiopia-prominent-muslims-detained-crackdown> last accessed 11 December 2017.

Southern Ethiopia as well as parts of Oromia are dominated by Evangelicals/Protestants. As the majority in these communities, they do not face [serious] persecution. But Protestants who live in parts dominated by Muslims and Orthodox Christians face various forms of persecution.”

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Ethiopia



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians over all *Spheres of life* went down from 11.0 in WWL 2017 to 10.4.
- Pressure is strongest in *National sphere*, since the government has imposed various restrictions on Christian activities, especially where carried out by Protestants. Pressure is next strongest in the *Community sphere* where Protestants face massive challenges in Orthodox Christian and Muslim dominated areas.
- The scores in the *National* and *Church spheres* dropped by more than one point compared to WWL 2017.
- The score for violence rose from 9.3 in WWL 2017 to 10.4. This rise is due to the increase in incidents that affected Christians in their community.

Private sphere:

This is a sphere of life where particularly converts suffer as individuals. One country researcher states: “The first factor is whether it is an urban or rural area. In the few (relatively) big cities, converting to another type of Christianity will result in less serious consequences (perhaps only opposition from some family members). But in the rural areas where the social bonds are still strong, conversion is likely to cause outrage and will be followed by persecution.” The situation also varies from one region to the other. For example, in much of northern Ethiopia (which is the heartland of the EOC) if someone converts from Orthodox Christianity to Protestantism, it often results in that person being forced to live a secluded life cut off from social interactions or being forced to leave the community altogether. Whereas in some areas of southern Ethiopia and parts of Oromia where Protestantism is the norm, converts will not face such persecution for their conversion.

Owning Christian materials, accessing Christian media, and meeting other Christians as a convert are difficult. When an Orthodox background Christian leaves the EOC and joins a Protestant group (locally called *Pentay*), family members, priests and other fanatical groups in EOC put pressure on the individual to return to their former faith. Sometimes those who leave the Orthodox Church to join a Protestant congregation are forced to drink what is called “holy water” on the assumption that the convert is possessed by a devil.

Family sphere:

This is another area where converts in particular face various forms of persecution. Obtaining places for burial in both Muslim and EOC dominated areas is very difficult for non-EOC Christians. In Muslim dominated areas, children are obliged to attend Islamic schools. Furthermore, children of Christians are harassed because of the faith of their family in many parts of the country. This also extends to the celebration of weddings. One researcher gave this example: “When a Christian is getting married to someone who is from a Muslim family or another type of Christianity, the family of the other person may raise a lot of trouble about the wedding being in a church etc. ... A particular issue is singing secular music at a wedding (since most Evangelicals/Protestants in Ethiopia consider secular music a sin, there may be trouble with members of the family.)”

Community sphere:

This is perhaps one of the spheres of life where Christians face particularly serious difficulties because of *Denominational protectionism* and *Islamic oppression*. In a very communal society like Ethiopia, religious differences play a pivotal role in many aspects. In EOC majority areas, Protestants (and those who have left the EOC) face serious challenges from their own family, community members and EOC leaders. A country researcher says: “There are a number of challenges faced by Evangelicals and Pentecostals in areas where the majority is Orthodox. They are not allowed to participate in social events and associations; they have trouble finding schools where their children would be safe; there may be obstructions to daily life such as going to the market etc. ... Especially during the major lent season of the EOC in some areas, it may be nearly impossible to find non-fasting items of food. In extreme cases, they may be forced to leave the area.”

In the case of Christians from a Muslim background, imams, madrasa teachers and those who assume leadership responsibilities in their community always make life difficult for such Christians. In some places,

converts are not allowed to share community resources. In other places, Christians will be intentionally overlooked or discriminated against in employment. It is common for Christians to be seen as the unwanted group in their community. In some places, during harvesting season, while community members help each other turn by turn, Christians (especially converts) are left on their own.

National sphere:

In Ethiopia, at the national level, the government is clearly aiming to control every aspect of society. It restricts freedom of religion by employing restrictive civil society laws aimed against freedom of expression and association. Security and administrative issues are used as a reason to discourage the movement of missionaries in the country. There are also reports that indicate negligence by the government in dealing with violence against Christians. Immediately prior to the WWL 2018 reporting period, the country declared a state of emergency for the first time in twenty-six years. This has created its own impact on Christians as churchgoers have found it difficult to gather in public and at times it puts the church under pressure to censor itself in many ways to make sure that it will not be accused of transgressing the ambiguous and overreaching state of emergency. The national laws also restrict the establishment of broadcasting services for religious purposes. A ban on religious activities (including worshipping in groups) within educational institutions has also been implemented. A country researcher also reports that Christians are subject to smear campaigns: “This [smear campaign] is common practice especially by religious leaders. There have been teachings and circulating videos of some Muslim preachers who engage in hate speech against Christians. Among Christians too, it is common to hear priests of the EOC running smear campaigns against Pentecostals/Evangelicals using derogatory terms to refer to them and depicting them as people who feign religion in order to get foreign aid. Some Pentecostal preachers also make statements against the Orthodox painting them as backward.”

Church sphere:

The pressure in this *sphere of life* has many forms: First, church registration is a challenge. The government does not require registration for the EOC (or the Muslim community), yet other Christians are required to register to operate legally. Secondly, some EOC-affiliated officials monitor non-EOC Christians, and they use their official capacity to deny registration permits. Thirdly, in Muslim majority areas, speaking against instigators of persecution has become risky; as a result, many church leaders do not want to speak openly against perpetrators. Furthermore, in Muslim-dominated areas converts are most likely to hide their faith and avoid going to church for fear of attack. One researcher adds: “In areas where Christians or Pentecostals are the minority, the respective leaders will be seen as primarily responsible for the 'corruption' of societal values and are often persecuted even more severely than the new converts themselves. Community members would resort to various means to make such leaders leave the area before more damage is done; they often have to live in hiding.”

Violence:

Christians also faced a very high level of violence in the WWL 2018 reporting period. A country researcher reports: “A woman was brutally killed by her husband in western Ethiopia. Another woman died after she was poisoned in western Ethiopia.” Nineteen churches have been attacked and demolished. Christians have been detained. In some areas community members object evangelization. For example, on 16 July 2017 a Muslim mob in Hirna, a rural town 400 Km east of Addis Ababa, attacked the local Full Gospel

Church and partly damaged its roof and a wall before attacking a 27-year-old Christian man at his home with machetes. The mob was expressing its anger over evangelizing activity in the area. In the WWL 2018 reporting period there were more than 100 violent incidents against Christians recorded.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Women are mostly victim to abduction, rape and divorce. A country researcher says: “Some believers will also face the challenge of living without marriage. Church leaders explain that women comprised the majority of their members. But, these women would not find husbands and the community and their relatives will pressure/insult them.”

Male:

A country researcher states: “Physical attack is more serious on men and boys than on women and girls. They will also face more scrutiny in *Ethnic antagonism* areas.”

Future outlook

Ethiopia is at a crossroads. The country has seen protests and demonstrations (still sporadically taking place in some areas) for many months and that led in 2016 to the declaration of a state of emergency for the first time since 1991. The future of the persecuted Church in Ethiopia will very probably be shaped by the following factors: First of all, the structural nepotism in government and blatant discrimination that have been in place for many years will still play a role in many ways (i.e favoring EOC). Secondly, the government tactic is “divide and rule” and involves using one group against another to balance the political power in the country – this is also another factor in the persecution dynamics in Ethiopia. For example, the government does not want to take action against those responsible for violent acts against churches and Christians (appeasement). Thirdly, the struggle between the different church denominations is also weakening a unified Christian response to the challenge of persecution. In this regard, the EOC has been ruthlessly accusing and persecuting Protestants.

Ethiopia is part of the Horn of Africa - one of the most volatile regions on the continent. Somalia and its spill-over effect also affects the lives of Christians in Ethiopia. With more than 5 million Somalis in the country, Ethiopia has the largest population of ethnic Somalis outside Somalia. The countries also share a long border, which is porous. Radical Muslims in Somalia always claim that Ethiopia is a Christian state and a historical enemy of Somalia. This sentiment has been underlined by one of the militant leaders claiming that “Somalia is a Muslim Arab country invaded by a Christian country, Ethiopia”, when Ethiopia stepped in to fight against al-Shabaab in Somalia. It also has to be noted that al-Shabaab has threatened to attack Ethiopia on many occasions. Thus, for the coming year(s), if al-Shabaab’s power is not broken, it might carry out attacks in Ethiopia similar to that in Kenya.

Thus, the future will most likely look as follows:

- The instability in the country will continue.
- The persecution of Christians in general (and in particular of converts and Protestants) will continue, especially at the hands of radical Muslims and EOC circles.
- *Islamic oppression* will continue to increase, posing a further threat to the state and Christians.
- The country was placed under a state of emergency in October 2016. The stability of the country mainly depends on how civilians respond when it is lifted.

Policy considerations

Christians in Ethiopia have been under pressure for decades. One of the challenges has been the lack of recognition of this situation by the international community. Open Doors suggests the following policy considerations:

- The government should repeal laws introduced to restrict the establishment of broadcasting services for religious purposes.
- The government should repeal the 2009 civil society law which curtails space for civil society and bans work by foreign NGOs on political and human rights issues.
- The government should respect the citizen's right to form association.
- The government should investigate violence perpetrated against Christians and bring those who are responsible to justice.
- The government should repeal the ban on religious activities which disallow worship in groups within educational institutions.
- The international community should hold the government of Ethiopia accountable to the above, in line with its obligations under international human rights treaties through specific recommendations and letters of appeal.
- Christian leaders around the world should use all available forums to urge the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to stop persecuting Protestants. Mahibere Kidusan, an ultra-conservative group in Ethiopian Orthodox Church is putting massive pressure on Protestants and even on the EOC leadership to target Protestants.

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30. Tunisia

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 62 / Position: 30

WWL 2017 Points: 61 / Position: 29

WWL 2016 Points: 58 / Position: 32

With a score of 62 points in WWL 2018 Tunisia rises one point in comparison to WWL 2017. Although there has been a decline in the pressure experienced by Christians in Tunisia in some *Spheres of life* (for instance, due to a legislative reform concerning marriage), a rise in violence had the effect of offsetting this decline in pressure.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Tunisia ¹⁵	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Very Weak
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

This persecution engine operates at different levels: At the family level, converts from Islam to Christianity are often not supported by family members in their decision to convert. There are cases of converts being locked up in their houses by their own families. At the social level, radical Islamic militants spread fear throughout the country. At the political level, Islamist political parties are still influential. The links between some Islamist movements and organized crime should not be underestimated. They create a lot of unrest in Tunisian society and contribute to the increase of the already high levels of fear among Christians. The prime minister has recently emphasized the [link between terrorism and organized crime](#)¹⁶ and corruption by asserting: “We are persuaded there is a link between smuggling, terrorism financing, cross-border activities and also capital flight.”

¹⁵ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

¹⁶ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/25/world/africa/corruption-crackdown-intensifies-in-tunisia-and-the-people-cheer.html>, last accessed 5 October 2017.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Tunisia	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Very Weak
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers for Islamic oppression:

The main drivers of persecution in Tunisia are violent religious groups, in particular militant Islamic groups. Despite the country's reputation as being the most celebrated success story of the Arab Spring uprisings, radical Islamic teaching and militancy is widespread, especially among the youth. Such radical groups (whose ranks are swelling with returnees from fighting in Syria and Iraq) are among the major drivers of persecution. Ordinary people such as neighbors and family members are also sources of persecution especially for Christian Tunisians who have converted from Islam. This is particularly the case outside the major urban centers. The government and state apparatus also could be regarded as drivers of persecution since they deny registration and official recognition to congregations of Christians with a Muslim background.

Context

There had been a lot of social, economic and political discontent in Tunisia leading up to the Jasmine revolution (Arab Spring). On 14 January 2011, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his inner circle fled the country to Saudi Arabia. The regime fell and an interim government was established. The political landscape in Tunisia has since been transformed. A new constitution was approved on 26 January 2014. Subsequently, Tunisia conducted presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2014, marking the end of the period of transition. The presidential election went into a second round and in this run-off election, Beji Caid Essebsi was declared to be the winner.

Due to the fact that no single party has been able to win a majority in parliament and due to the difficulties in reviving the Tunisian economy, there seems to be a constant change of prime ministers and governments in Tunisia since the 2014 parliamentary election. The key challenges that these successive national unity governments have been tasked to deal with are: i) the growing threat of militant Islamic

groups in the region, and ii) the economic crises caused especially by the decline of tourism which had been one of the mainstays of the Tunisian economy. In the WWL 2018 reporting period so far, Youssef Chahed is leading a unity government formed by a coalition of secular, Islamist and leftist parties, with the support of independents and a trade union.

Despite the security and economic challenges it is facing, Tunisia remains the only country in which the Arab Spring has led to the emergence of a more democratic and legitimate government in which secularist and Islamist parties have been able to govern on the basis of consensus and compromise with one another. An interesting development in relation to this is the fact that Ennadha, which was the largest and most prominent Islamist political party in Tunisia, has officially become a secular party. At the same time, there are radical Islamic parties such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir which the Tunisian government is trying to ban as a threat to public order. Tunisia has also emerged as the number one country of origin of foreign fighters in Syria, many of whom are returning to Tunisia after being radicalized by IS.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians experience a relative amount of freedom, although public evangelism is not tolerated. Foreign Christians worshipping at the few international churches hardly encounter any problems; native Christians face the brunt of persecution.

Historical Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by the WWL Methodology.

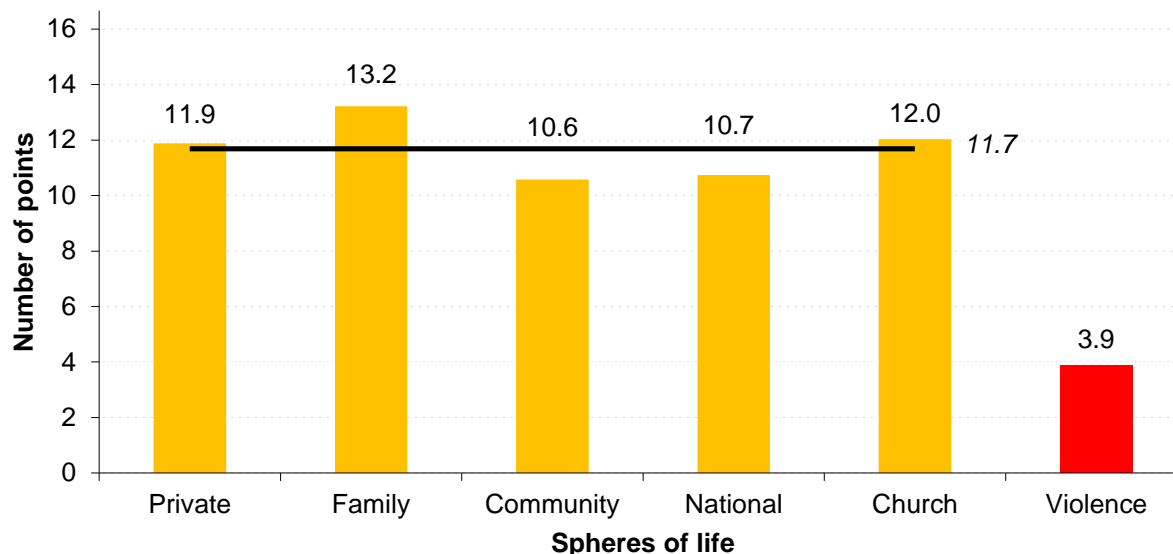
Communities of converts to Christianity: Converts with a Muslim background face various forms of persecution, e.g. from their family members. However, they (and others) are more or less free to seek and receive information about the Christian faith, particularly content posted online.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by the WWL Methodology.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Tunisia



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Tunisia has remained at 11.7 as in WWL 2017, although there are slight differences in pressure scores for the *Spheres of life*.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Family sphere*. This is because the country is overwhelmingly dominated by Islam in terms of its religious demographics and despite the government's effort to project an image of a liberal, open and democratic country, most Tunisians, especially those outside of the major metropolis, are influenced by less tolerant versions of Islam. In this context, believers with a Muslim background face a great deal of pressure from their family members to renounce their faith.
- The score for violence in Tunisia for the reporting period is 3.9, rising from 3.0 in WWL 2017. This rise in the number of violent incidents can partly be explained by the return of Tunisian fighters, who had joined up with the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. They have been further radicalized and [battle hardened](#).¹⁷

Private sphere:

Particularly converts from Islam experience pressure when their conversion is known at the private level, though there are notable differences between the countryside and the country's capital, Tunis, where the situation is comparatively better. Most converts (especially young people) experience some sort of opposition, rejection and/or persecution because of changing their faith. Especially for young converts it

¹⁷ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/europe/isis-tunisia.html> last accessed 15 December 2018.

is difficult to read the Bible regularly and find a place for prayer in the open by themselves since this could expose them to harassment and pressure.

Family sphere:

In the family sphere, the freedom of Christian families to conduct their family life in a Christian way is limited. Every Tunisian is automatically registered as a Muslim. Expatriates have no trouble if their children keep their foreign nationality. Converts have to accept that official documents will state that they are Muslim. If they seek to change this, it proves impossible and causes repercussions.

Community sphere:

Converts receive threats from their families or the society around them when their conversion is known. Especially in rural parts of the country young female converts are scared of being forced into get married to marrying a Muslims. There are also cases known of converts being expelled from their university, or who are not able to go to school, because of being turned out of their homes. Sometimes customers are told not to buy from shops run by a Christian.

National sphere: When dealing with the authorities, Christians are usually in a disadvantaged position. There are hardly any Christian high profile politicians or government officials in Tunisia. Church registration is impossible for indigenous Christians. Expatriate churches are the only ones allowed to display Christian symbols.

Church sphere: Although the constitution of Tunisia currently respects freedom of religion and conversion from Islam is not prohibited, in practice representatives of the government often act very differently. The importation of Christian books in Arabic is obstructed by the authorities. Tunisian converts cannot register their churches and – no new church has been granted official registration since Tunisia’s independence in 1956. This stands in stark contrast to the law that regulates mosques. Registered churches are allowed to operate freely but face practical difficulties, particularly relating to their properties, hiring of staff, and permission to publish and distribute Christian texts in Arabic.

Violence:

Violent persecution against Christians seems to have been on the rise in the WWL 2018 reporting period, even though the score for violence is not as high as for other countries in the region like Egypt and Libya.

Examples:

- A 29 year old Tunisian who converted to Christianity from Islam was expelled from the house he had built with his own money on land that was owned by his father. His family evicted him from the house and they were not willing to give him the money he had invested on building the house. He was also severely injured when he was been beaten up by youngsters belonging to a radical Islamic group called Ansar al-Shariah. He has also been arrested a few times by the police on various pretexts due to his Christian [faith](#)¹⁸.

¹⁸ See: <http://underground.priscillahwang.com/>, last accessed 15 December 2017.

- A Christian cemetery in the town of Sfax had been vandalized in an attack that is believed to have been religiously [motivated](#).¹⁹
- During the WWL 2018 reporting period, more than a dozen believers have been detained and questioned by the authorities for faith related reasons.
- A 23 year old Christian who converted from Islam had been unable to marry her Christian fiancé (who has German nationality) since she is still considered a Muslim under Tunisian law and thus prohibited from marrying a non-[Muslim](#).²⁰

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male: No information available.

Future outlook

Although the political situation in Tunisia seems to have stabilized, this does not mean that the pressure on Christians can be expected to decrease. In fact, society and culture, particularly in rural areas, remains anti-Christian and this is not influenced by political changes. Tunisia's constitution may seem a positive step forward, but the wording is general enough to make restrictive interpretations possible. It will strongly depend on the kind of government that is in power and its attitude towards religious minorities.

Tunisia faces a real threat of instability and conflict as a result of the rise in the activity of radical Islamic groups in the country. The situation is getting even more disconcerting now that many Tunisian Islamic fighters who have been fighting alongside Islamic State (IS) in Libya are now returning home with the apparent demise of IS in Libya. If groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir gain more influence in Tunisia, the situation for Christians in the country will get much worse than it is and the persecution of Christians could become much more intense and violent.

Policy considerations

Taking in to account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors suggests the following policy recommendations:

- The international community should work with the Tunisian government to clarify Article 6 of the Constitution to comply fully with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of ICCPR and leave no room for interpretation. Open Doors recommends that a plan for implementation, including full protection for those who convert from Islam be developed.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=30750>, last accessed 15 December 2017.

²⁰ A recent reform of the relevant law would allow the girl in question to marry her fiancé. See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/21/why-tunisia-just-passed-controversial-laws-on-corruption-and-womens-right-to-marry/?utm_term=.46a79ace4c77, last accessed 15 December 2017.

- The government of Tunisia should put in place effective legal measures to prevent, investigate and finally bring justice for violations of freedom of religion, particularly involving those of Muslim background who converted to Christianity.
- The EU should mainstream Freedom of Religion or Belief into its major investment programs aimed at bringing security and stability in Tunisia, and so ensure the protection of Christians vulnerable to radical Islamic groups and the creation of a culture of peaceful interfaith participation in politics, business and education.

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31. Turkey

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 62 / Position: 31

WWL 2017 Points: 57 / Position: 37

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 45

Turkey scored 62 points in WWL 2018, a rise of 5 points compared to WWL 2017. The country has seen a high rise in anxiety following the attempted coup in July 2016. Fierce rhetoric from the government has left less space for other voices, including the Christian one. Especially church life has become more difficult. There is more suspicion towards Christians, making public outreach hard.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Turkey ²¹	
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Very strong
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

²¹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Islamic oppression (Strong) /Religious nationalism (Very strong)

Fierce, fanatical nationalism affects all Christians in Turkey. The biggest pressure is on Christian converts from a Muslim background. Family, friends and community will often exert heavy pressure on them to return to Islam, the faith of the fathers. The general opinion is that a true Turk is born a Muslim. Conversion is not only a question of family honor being hurt, it is also seen as a case of insulting Turkishness. This can result in court cases and imprisonment. The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects other Christians who are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syrians). They are hardly regarded as full-fledged members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong)

Tribal antagonism has grown stronger over the past year in the context of the Kurdish conflict. Syriac Christians in the southeast particularly feel the pressure from the civil war and are caught between Kurdish clans, the government and the Kurdish militant group PKK. The tribal leaders use their monopoly on force to push out the Syrians from their homeland in the southeast. However, this only affects rural Christian populations. Most Christians in Turkey live in large cities and are not strongly affected by *Tribal antagonism*.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

Since the failed coup of July 2016, President Erdogan's government has dropped its mask of supporting democracy and is openly restricting freedom throughout Turkish society. The media have been curtailed, and all forms of opposition are persecuted. Although Christians are not directly targeted by the government at the moment, the regime has openly declared Sunni Islam to be the religious norm in the country, thus further marginalizing Christianity.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Turkey	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Medium
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Medium
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Medium
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers of Islamic oppression and religious nationalism

- **Government officials:** The most important drivers of persecution against Christians are government officials. It is no secret that President Erdogan wants to change Turkey from being a secular country into a Sunni Muslim one. So far, the changes have been implemented very gradually. One of those steps is the change of the Constitution, after the referendum in April 2017, which gave the president more powers and freed the way for him to stand in two more elections.²² Except for a small number of foreign Christians, the government has not targeted Christians in particular yet. There have been issues over church properties though, in particular in the troubled south-eastern region. The government closed and confiscated church buildings for different reasons. In some cases, the government said this happened because of reformed land registry laws and the reorganization of municipalities, in other cases the government seized control over churches for security reasons.²³ Although it is difficult to prove whether the government is purposely hindering Christian communities or not, one country researcher is certain that the government is trying to push out the already diminished historical Christians communities out of Turkey.
- **Societal pressure from extended family, non-Christian religious leaders and citizens:** Society's fierce nationalism, instigated by the government, leaves almost no space for Christians to proclaim an alternative message. Converts from Islam to Christianity in particular face opposition from society and family members, although conversion from Islam to Christianity is not legally forbidden. Converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. (Leaving one Christian denomination for another can also be problematic.) Christians therefore sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Once discovered, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights.
- **Political parties:** In July 2017 the opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP), organized a "justice march" against the government, which was joined by hundreds of thousands of people. Nevertheless, it seems that none of the opposition parties are vocally supporting the historical Christian or other Christian communities, which leaves them vulnerable to government pressure.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism

- **Ethnic group leaders:** In the more rural areas conservative norms and values are upheld by ethnic leaders. In the southeast, it would seem that Kurdish chiefs are trying to force the historical Syriac community out of the traditionally Christian territory. The Kurdish PKK is also trying to purposely drag the Syrians into their conflict with the Turkish government for nationalistic reasons.

²² See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/10/turkish-referendum-all-you-need-to-know>, last accessed on 22 September 2017.

²³ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/legal-limbo-turkeys-syriac-christian-properties-still-unresolved> and <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/historic-armenian-cathedral-desecrated-southeast-turkey>, last accessed on 22 September 2017.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials:** The backlash to the attempted coup of July 2016 has led to heightened polarization and public scapegoating of anyone who (allegedly) does not support Turkey or Erdogan's vision for Turkey. The fact that the alleged coup mastermind, Fethullah Gülen, is residing in Pennsylvania and that the United States has not extradited him so far (for lack of evidence that he orchestrated the attempted coup) has increased tension between Turkey and the United States. Protestants in particular have felt the deterioration in relations. Since the United States is seen as Christian, Christians in Turkey are portrayed as spies of the West. Hate speech and threats to Protestant churches have increased (while other Christian communities are used to keeping a low profile for fear of violence and persecution). This has not spilled over into violence yet but the general atmosphere is tense.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the WWL Keys to Understanding document for Turkey.

Since 2002 Turkey has been trying to reinvent its internal and public image. The concept of being a Western, secular country is no longer the leading principle. Instead, Islam is regarded as the element that cements Turkish society. The need to adhere to the Western block disappeared after the USSR collapsed in 1991, when Turkey assertively turned to the Middle East. The goal of the government has since then been to make Turkey a key player in the region and role model for other countries. But regionally and internationally, these objectives have faltered in the past few years.

In 2003, Erdogan became prime minister and in 2014 he was elected president of Turkey. In the June 2015 elections the AKP lost its absolute majority in parliament and negotiations for a coalition failed. In the new elections of 1 November 2015, the AKP won back its absolute majority. On 15 July 2016 a coup took place but failed and the regime struck back fiercely. It accused the Islamic preacher and former ally Fethullah Gülen (in self-exile in USA) to be behind the failed coup.

After the failed coup of July 2016 developments in Turkey changed dramatically. The government took on more dictatorial powers and nationalism and Islamization soared. Many teachers were fired on accusation of links with the Gülen-movement, head teachers have been replaced by those loyal to the Islamic AKP-party and Islamic Imam Hatip schools are on the rise.²⁴ The fight against the militant Kurdish minority intensified and Turkey took a much more assertive stance in the international scene, becoming militarily active in neighboring Syria and Iraq (primarily targeting Kurdish forces). Because of the new strict government policies, the level of intolerance against all those not siding with Erdogan has increased. Non-Sunni citizens (including the tiny Christian minority) are facing growing pressure, which is increasingly translating into violent incidents.

²⁴ See: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/turkey-high-schools-student-stand-up-against-islamism.html>, last accessed 17 October 2017.

Both government and society verbally attack other religious groups like Alevites and Jews and ethnic groups such as the Kurds. This trend is likely to continue.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

There are expatriate Christians in the country, but they are not involuntarily isolated from other Christian communities. Because these foreign Christians can freely interact with other Christian communities, they are included in the other Christian communities for monitoring reasons and are not considered as a separate WWL category.

Historical Christian communities:

These include the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches (the only churches “recognized” in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923), and the Assyrian, Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic churches, all of which are monitored regularly and subjected to controls and limitations by the government; their members are considered “foreign” in many official dealings, as well as in the minds of the general public. They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions. For example, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches need permission from the Turkish government to select new church leaders.

There are also expatriate Christians belonging to Historical Christian churches. There are Russian Orthodox Christians who have residency permits, while there are also Roman Catholics, mostly immigrants from Africa and the Philippines. In the past few years, their ranks have swelled with tens of thousands of Christian refugees arriving from Syria and Iraq escaping the war in their homelands.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Christian converts from a Muslim background bear the brunt of persecution in Turkey. Pressure comes from family, friends, community and even the local authorities. They are considered traitors to the Turkish identity. Besides converts from a local, Turkish background, there are also communities of converts from other countries such as Iran.²⁵

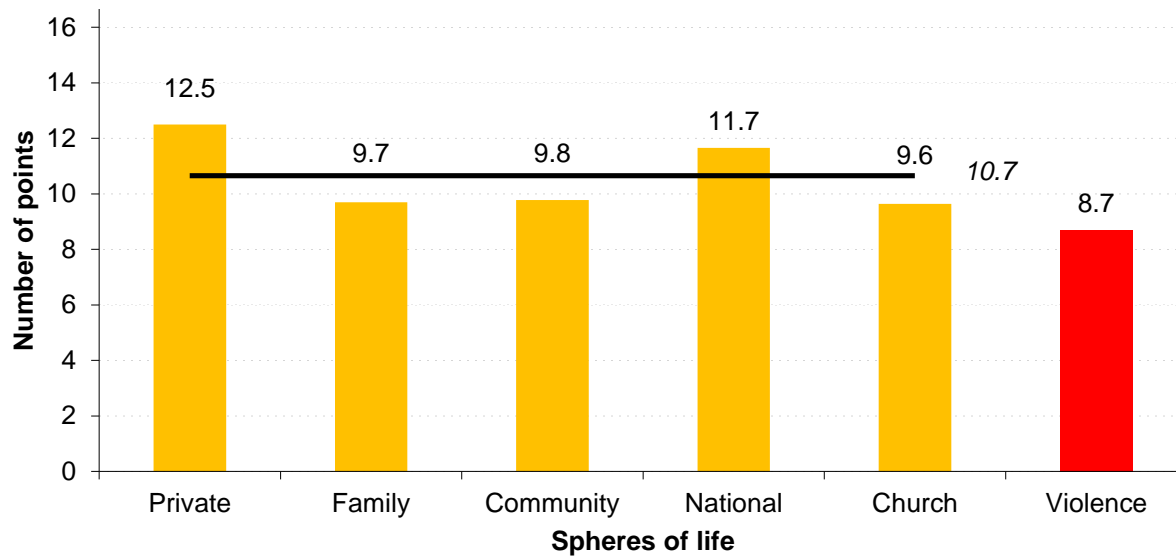
Non-traditional Christian communities:

Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations mostly exist as small groups who find it difficult to function and some are unable to afford a rented place of worship. Many of them are meeting in their homes, which can lead to opposition from neighbors.

²⁵ For example 222ministries: <http://www.222ministries.com/articles/view/104>, last accessed on 16 October 2017.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Turkey



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Turkey has increased from 9.8 in WWL 2017 to 10.7. This is mainly due to the harsh measures the Turkish government has taken after the coup in July 2016. Instead of de-escalation, President Erdogan chose to start a witch-hunt against all alleged coup plotters and their supporters. By replacing many officials within the judiciary, Erdogan has undermined the rule of law in Turkey and hence endangered the position of minorities in Turkey.
- Pressure remained strongest in the *Private sphere*, reflecting the difficult situation converts from Islam face living in a land where a true Turk is a Sunni Muslim.
- The score for violence remains at the same very high level (8.7) as in WWL 2017, another indication that the general position of Christians has not improved.

Private sphere:

Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, there are likely to be social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity or from one Christian denomination to another. Although the level and nature of oppression from families would vary considerably depending on the background of the family, conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable. Christians sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion, which means hiding their praying, reading of the Bible and access of Christian websites. This kind of oppression is viewed as "normal" and it is hardly reported or documented unless there is physical violence. There is also family and church pressure on those who change church affiliation from historical to non-traditional churches. Again this is not documented or reported upon. Those who hide their Christian identity are often too afraid of meeting fellow believers.

Family sphere:

Although converts from Islam can legally change their religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity, it can be a difficult and stressful process. If the ID card reads Muslim, children of converts are obliged to attend courses on Islam at school. Unless converts have changed the religious affiliation on their cards, any children will automatically be registered as Sunni Muslims. Once a conversion to Christianity becomes known, converts can face the threat of divorce and lose their inheritance rights. They can also experience difficulties in organizing a Christian wedding or burial (where a convert's last wishes are not respected and the burial is carried out according to Islamic rites). Applications for Christian cemeteries have been denied in some parts of the country. Where this has happened, Christians can only be buried according to Christian rites in sections reserved for all non-Muslims or be buried in a historically Christian cemetery.

It is nearly impossible for Christians to adopt a Muslim child. Children of Christians, and especially of converts, are often harassed either because of society's religious intolerance or because of nationalist zeal. Spouses of converts occasionally experience pressure to divorce.

Community sphere:

Converts face strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to recant the Christian faith. There are compulsory Islamic classes in the schooling system, although non-Muslim children can opt out. However, there have been reports of societal and teacher discrimination against those who opt out. Christian schoolchildren are regularly discriminated against in classes, by both teachers and other students. There are Christians who study at Turkish universities but they are barred from reaching higher positions or professorships at university level. Christians have no access to state employment and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government. Since religious affiliation is recorded on every ID card, it is very easy to discriminate against Christian applicants.²⁶ Christians are marginalized in Turkey and treated by society as second class citizens.

National sphere:

The Turkish constitution is very restrictive in its approach towards the rights of religious minorities. Converts (particularly those who are church leaders in the southeast or in rural areas elsewhere) are sometimes given disrespectful treatment by police and security forces because of their open Christian identity. Christians face difficulties in obtaining permits for building churches or for getting place-of-worship status. Access to public sector jobs, the state's security apparatus and law enforcement is denied to Christians, as is promotion in the army, despite obligatory military service. Although one's religious affiliation is no longer displayed on the new ID cards²⁷, it is still registered on the chip in the card. The rise of nationalism in the country caused issues for non-Muslim business owners, as nepotism is reportedly widespread under the ruling AKP-party. Local media and columnists in particular have been biased against Christians. There have been several reports of intolerance and prejudices against Christians. There are concerns about the impartiality of the judiciary in court cases that involve Christian minorities, especially

²⁶ There is a possibility to leave the religious affiliation section blank, but this might attract suspicion.

²⁷ See: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/religion-be-left-new-identification-cards-turkey-326099214>, last accessed 17 October 2017.

after the government ousted more than 4000 members of the judiciary due to alleged ties to the Gülen-movement.

Church sphere:

It is impossible to register as a new religious community as such. Although there is an option for churches to register as an “association”, this is also a difficult process and some applications have been denied. The establishment of foundations with the aim of supporting a new religious community is also prohibited. The Turkish secret service (MIT) closely watches Christian groups and their activities, although the security services are also (visibly) protecting churches during services, especially after threats made by the Islamic State group. It is very difficult to get official permits for repairing or renovating church buildings. A lot of Church buildings, seminaries or schools that have been confiscated have not been returned.

Organizing activities outside designated church facilities are generally regarded as evangelism and hence obstructed by both local officials and the community. This has especially become difficult after the coup and the following state of emergency, in which all alleged suspicious behavior can lead to arrests. Openly integrating converts into existing churches is made difficult, mainly by the community. Changes in leadership of the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches must be given government approval, even though these are leaders of religious communities which do not exist in law and whose personal positions are not recognized in law. The training of Christian leaders legally is impossible. Christian materials are available in the Turkish language, but their distribution remains sensitive as it is automatically linked to evangelism.

It is difficult for church leaders to obtain a visa. Many foreign religious workers are either denied a visa or their residence permit is simply not renewed.

Violence:

Although the level of violence did not increase compared to WWL 2017, it remains very high. Three Lebanese Christians were reportedly killed during the New Years’ Eve attack in Istanbul. Several buildings have been damaged because of intensified fighting in the troubled southeastern part of Turkey. In the same region, a legal battle about the title deeds of church property is still going on after several properties were confiscated by the Turkish state.²⁸ Besides this, the ongoing detention of US Pastor Andrew Brunson has send shockwaves through the (Protestant) Christian community in Turkey; several other Christians felt forced to leave the country. Last, but certainly not least, the situation for converts from Islam to Christianity remains worrisome. Reportedly, some of them had to hide in-country out of fear of repercussions from their families.

²⁸ <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/legal-limbo-turkeys-syriac-christian-properties-still-unresolved/>, last accessed on 5 December 2017.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Conversion to Christianity is probably more difficult for women as they are more vulnerable to persecution in an Islamic society in which they have an inferior position. That holds particularly true for women from minorities and even more so in rural areas.

Male:

During military service men are in an environment where, if their religion is stated as being Christianity in their ID, they can be viewed with suspicion by their superiors and bullied by their peers.

Future outlook

Turkey's economic future is not looking bright. The Turkish Lira does not seem to stop devaluating, youth unemployment remains high ($\pm 20\%$)²⁹ and the instable political situation is deterring investors.³⁰ Although the country has seen huge economic growth since 2000, there is now a lot of uncertainty about the future.

The state of emergency remains in place, with the security services clamping down on all opposition. At the same time, Erdogan seems to be isolating Turkey from Europe, the United States and Arab states. The conflict with the Kurdish PKK has intensified and the country has proved vulnerable to attacks and bombings from Kurdish and IS groups in the WWL 2018 reporting period.³¹

Although Christians do not seem to be direct targets of the government, the general situation for Christians is worrying. The Christian population is tiny, consisting only of 0.15% of the population. Taking into consideration the fact that just a century ago Christians made up 20% of the country's population, the fear of total extinction is not unrealistic.³² The situation of the historical Christian communities in the southeast of Turkey is particularly worrying. A lot of their property has been taken away by the Turkish government in recent years and their ancient culture is gradually disappearing. Besides that, the arrest, imprisonment and keeping hostage of American pastor Andrew Brunson shows clearly that Turkish government under Erdogan has developed into a regime without scruples. Overall, Christians will have to operate carefully, especially in the public sphere.

²⁹ See: <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/youth-unemployment-rate>, last accessed on 16 October 2017.

³⁰ See: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview>, last accessed on 16 October 2017.

³¹ See: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2016/06/timeline-attacks-turkey-160628223800183.html>, last accessed on 16 October 2017.

³² See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-religion-turkey-christians-factbox/factbox-christians-in-turkey-idUSTRE50L08O20090122>, last accessed on 16 October 2017.

Policy considerations

- The implementation of European Union humanitarian aid programs in Turkey should include the monitoring of equal access and protection for religious minorities.
- Provisions for protecting persecuted religious minorities should be integrated into the implementation of all EU-Turkey refugee agreements.
- In the wake of the 2016 attempted coup, the repression of Christians and non-Sunnis has sharply increased in Turkey. The international community should press the Turkish government to comply fully with Freedom of Religion or Belief in law and practice, and fully investigate and report on the increasing number of violations.
- The new Constitution should guarantee the rights of all citizens to Freedom of Religion or Belief, with the express protection of the right to conversion, and of Christians and religious minorities to equal citizenship before the law, with equal access to ID cards, residential permits and permits for places of worship.
- The international community should also urge the Turkish government to ensure the return of all confiscated property belonging to Christians that were disputed under the zoning law, and those seized, such as Syriac Christian property in the southeast of Turkey.
- The government of Turkey should do all that is in its power to prevent and punish the violence of radical Islamic groups against houses of worship of religious minorities, including Christians.
- The government should fully respect press freedom, and more broadly, freedom of expression in Turkey.
- The government should allow all religious minorities to register and to function freely, without restriction, and to establish universities or seminaries to train their leaders. The right to distribute religious materials should be respected, and Christian evangelistic activities should not be criminalized. Neither the so-called Lausanne minorities nor the other minorities are fully protected by the Turkish state.
- The international community should urge the government of Turkey to eliminate any bias against Christians in the judiciary system. Illegal detentions and the intimidation of religious minorities should be investigated and ended.

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32. Kenya

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 62 / Position: 32

WWL 2017 Points: 68 / Position: 18

WWL 2016 Points: 68 / Position: 16

Kenya's WWL 2018 score was 62 points, dropping six points in comparison to WWL 2017. Even though the total score decreased, the persecution of Christians in Kenya remains at a very high level. Two of the main reasons why the country dropped down in score are:

- a. The general elections in the country forced different religious groups to align together on a tribal rather than religious basis. Thus, religion became secondary. That led to a drop in pressure in the *National sphere*. In analyzing this situation, a country expert stated: "Tribalism is so strong in Kenya that Muslims and Christians of one tribe will put aside any issues between them to attack or persecute another or rival tribe." This is particularly true in the context of elections.
- b. The pressure on Christians in most of the Coastal region (except in some counties) is decreasing parallel to a reduction in the influence and tone of the Mombasa Republican Council.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Kenya ³³	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Weak
Denominational protectionism	Very Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Weak
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Medium

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Even though Kenya is a majority Christian country (with approximately 81% of the population being Christian), *Islamic oppression* is the main persecution engine. An estimated 10-15% of the Kenyan population is Muslim, of which the majority is Sunni. The Muslim population is mainly located in the northeastern and coastal areas of Kenya, but has also spread over other parts of the country, and has

³³ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

begun to respond to perceived disenfranchisement in Kenyan society. Inspired by radical Islamic influences spilling over from Somalia, Muslim politicians, representing Muslim dominated constituencies in Kenya, have an agenda to eliminate the Church from their constituencies. The northeastern part of the country is also highly affected by *Islamic oppression*. Radical Muslims living in Kenya, together with militants crossing the border from Somalia, are severely persecuting Christians and responsible in recent years for the killing of hundreds of Christians solely for their faith. In underscoring the challenge in the northeastern and coastal areas, one country researcher reports: “The Eastern or coastal counties have long been under heavy Islamic influence due to historical factors - this is where Muslims first arrived long before the Christian missionaries in Kenya and along the east coast of Africa in general. The counties where incidences of medium to very strong strength of this engine can be found include Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Lamu, Kilifi, and Kwale.”

Organized corruption and crime (Medium):

In Kenya, corruption is rampant. According to Transparency International’s corruption index of January 2017, Kenya ranks 145 out of 176 countries scoring only 25 out of hundred.³⁴ For example, there are reports that Kenyan soldiers fighting in Somalia are participating in smuggling charcoal and sugar and making vast profits. There are also local reports that suggest al-Shabaab managed to carry out the deadly attacks at Garissa University in April 2014 by paying bribes to security officials for importing weapons and ammunition. Furthermore, in the northeastern region there are reports about al-Shabaab and its supporters earning fortunes by paying millions of Shillings to public officials for importing sugar and other goods via the port of Kismayo. It is in this context that the persecution of Christians must be seen. Co-opted officials do not take measures against those who persecute Christians, and this in turn encourages further acts of persecution.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Kenya	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak
Violent religious groups	Very Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Medium
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

³⁴ See: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016, last accessed 15 September 2017.

The main drivers of persecution in Kenya are the Islamic militants called al-Shabaab. In the northeastern and coastal areas of the country this group has killed Christians, destroyed churches and forced Christians to flee their homes. One country researcher says: “Al-Qaeda linked terrorist group al-Shabaab has a presence in the north eastern Kenya and along the coast. In May 2017, al-Shabaab kidnapped two teachers in Fafi village near Garissa town in north eastern Kenya - they killed the Christian teacher.”³⁵ Muslim family and community leaders are also drivers of persecution especially in relation to converts from Islam. Government officials and some ethnic leaders are to some extent also drivers of persecution. The presence of organized corruption in the country has also made application of the rule of law difficult hence in the process Christians are victims of persecution have limited course for redress.

Context

The analysis of the present Kenyan situation would be incomplete without mentioning the 2017 presidential elections and the role of the Kenyan Supreme Court. The Kenyan Supreme Court nullified the presidential election in August 2017, an election that was declared “fairly free and fair” by international observers including former US Secretary of State John Kerry. The Court ruled that the election was not conducted according to the standards set out by the constitution. The preparation for the elections led to a security vacuum that al-Shabaab exploited, beheading non-Muslims in areas bordering Somalia.

It should be emphasized that persecution in Kenya due to *Islamic oppression* contains elements of *ethnic cleansing*, but there are several other factors that are relevant for understanding the persecution dynamics going on in the background in Kenyan society. To begin with, Kenya has a very complex ethnic composition which is always at play in everyday politics in the country. Next, Kenya is a country with a Christian majority and a considerably smaller Muslim population. Approximately 81% of the Kenyan population are (or regard themselves as) Christian, while approximately 10-15% are Muslim. This Muslim minority has become politically active and powerful in many sectors in the country. In addition, Kenya suffers from periodic outbursts of ethnic and tribal violence. Often this has a political dimension; the violent aftermath of the elections (which were widely believed to be rigged) in 2007-08 is a good example.

Another factor for understanding the current persecution dynamics in Kenya is the role religion plays. Until fairly recently, Kenya had no history of inter-religious conflict. Christians and Muslims appeared to co-exist in relative peace. This has completely changed in the last few years. Especially the northeastern and coastal regions have become hot-spots of radical Islamic activity, which is a major factor causing faith-related violence. Kenya shares a long border with Somalia, and is affected by its lack of sustainable peace and stability. Furthermore, the Kenyan armed forces are engaged in fighting in Somalia. Large numbers of refugees from different neighboring countries, including Somalia, are currently finding refuge in Kenya.

Kenya held a referendum in 2010 that approved a new constitution with a new government structure. Over the past year, the government has also stepped up implementing its secularism program which restricts freedom for Christians. In this regard, the government is devising policies and implementing them

³⁵ See: <http://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Teachers-stay-away-schools-Garissa-attacks/3444784-3959774-o1aejoz/index.html>, last accessed 20 June 2017.

even though some of the policies might be in conflict with Christian beliefs. Examples are new school curricula, gender-based policy and other policies that require churches to either bend or break. Also important is the level of corruption in Kenya. Corruption in public institutions is rampant, and seriously weakens the protection of citizens. Last, but not least, the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC, a group working for the secession of northeastern and coastal Kenya) has been linked to terrorist groups like al-Shabaab by the Kenyan authorities. Many churches have been destroyed in the coastal region over the years, and many Christians were forced to leave the area. It is the cumulative effect of these complex situations that have been taken into account for WWL 2018 analysis.

Concerning other religious groups in the country, there are no reports that suggest their persecution. But, some analysts say that al-Shabaab, even though its primary target is Christians, will target all groups except Sunni Muslims.

Christian communities and how they are affected

All Christian communities in the country face persecution even though the level of persecution depends upon where they live and which Christian groups they belong to. For example, in northeastern and coastal regions the level of persecution is so intense that at times Christians pay the ultimate price just because of their faith.

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians in Kenya are not treated as a separate WWL category.

Historical Christian communities:

These communities type can be found in many parts of the country. The persecution they face and the intensity of the persecution depend on the regions in which they live. In areas where Islam is dominant, the persecution is from *Islamic oppression* and the intensity is very high.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

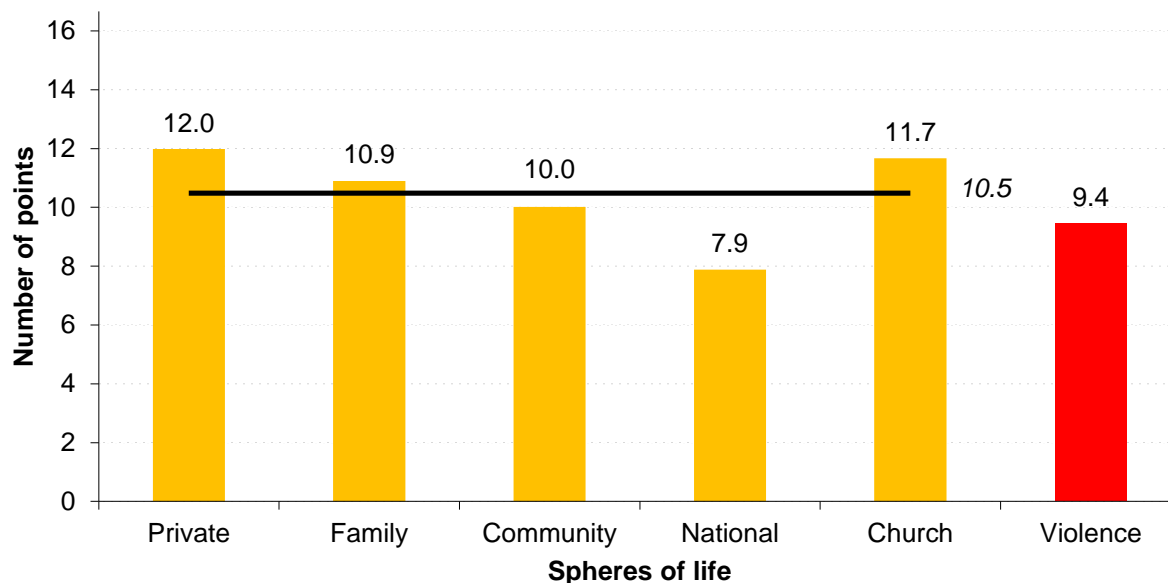
Christians with a Muslim background are mainly found in Muslim-dominated areas in the northeastern region and along the coast (including Mombasa). In general, these converts face different persecution dynamics to those Christians from a non-Muslim background. They face intense pressure in the hands of their family and friends and, if discovered by groups like al-Shabaab, they could be killed as well.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This group includes groups such as, Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic congregations. They can be found throughout the country. This group is the most active type of Christianity in the country and as a result, it faces severe forms of persecution.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Kenya



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Kenya went down from 11.7 in WWL 2017 to 10.5. This reduction is mainly due to the general election in the country which made religion a secondary issue and led to dropping in pressure.
- Pressure is strongest in *Private sphere* followed by *Church sphere of life*. Christians in the northeast often struggle to come together in their church for fear of attack. Converts from a Muslim background also face grave difficulties which is reflected by the very high score in the *Private sphere*.
- The score for violence went down from 9.6 in WWL 2017 to 9.4. See below for details.

Private sphere:

In the context of *Islamic oppression*, Christians with a Muslim background face pressure mainly, but not exclusively, in their private life. For example, in the predominantly Muslim northeastern and coastal regions of Kenya, converts face the risk of deadly attack if they reveal their conversion. These attacks could be orchestrated by family members or by leaders or members of the local community. A country researcher explains: “The coast and northeastern part of the country have traditionally been Muslim.... Christian converts from Islam are subject to harassment, violent attacks and other forms of persecution.”

Family sphere:

This is another area of life where converts face serious problems. Being denied a place for burial, forced marriage, children of Christians being harassed – these are some of the common forms of pressure. Also,

women with a Muslim background in particular face severe challenges when it comes to marrying and starting a family. They face the possibility of forced marriage and even rape.

Community sphere:

Christians living in the northeastern and coastal regions have been under immense pressure. Recently people have begun to worry about infiltration by al-Shabaab: It has become very easy for al-Shabaab members to go house-to-house, call out non-Muslims and [behead](#)³⁶ them. In these areas, it is very common to see grazing land or drinking water shared in a communal way of life. This sharing is made particularly difficult for Christians in areas where the Muslim population is a majority. The main drivers behind this persecution are primarily direct family members or members of the extended family (for converts), but also non-Christian religious leaders and ethnic group leaders.

National sphere:

Pressure in the national sphere of life is common to all types of Christianity. The drivers are government officials, political parties with a Muslim affiliation and the nexus of religious leaders and their followers (i.e. fanatical movements involving ordinary people). The role of *Organized corruption and crime* in this sphere of life is also visible. The steps towards decentralization which the country has taken in the past seven years are also having an impact on Christians; Muslim politicians are considering Christians unimportant for their political purposes.

Church sphere:

The pressure experienced in this sphere is tied to the impact of violence being orchestrated by Islamic militants in the region. The targeted violence has created an environment of fear among Christians. As a result, building a church or gathering for activities in a church in some places has become dangerous. The combined influence of *Islamic oppression, Ethnic antagonism, Secular intolerance* and *Organized corruption and crime* has made church life more complicated than in previous years. Corruption has handicapped the authorities in their duty to protect all citizens; in the case of most violent incidents against Christians, proper investigations by police were not conducted.

Violence:

The level of violence, especially in the form of faith-related killings, appears to have changed in its form in the northeastern and coastal areas. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, Christians have been singled out and beheaded. Al-Shabaab members have been reported going from house-to-house to call the names of non-Muslims who were then often beheaded or shot dead. Such killings have become common in Lamu country. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, more than 30 Christians were shot dead or beheaded.

³⁶ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/three-kenyan-christians-called-out-by-name-then-beheaded-by-suspected-al-shabaab/>, last accessed 26 September 2017.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male:

No data available

Future outlook

In the WWL 2018 reporting period, the level of violent incidents (including faith-related killings) remained very high. There is virtually no hope that the Kenyan government can keep Kenyan Christians safe. This is mainly due to the fact that there is institutionalized corruption in the country. In the case of most incidents, proper investigations by police were not conducted. In the coming year(s), if there is no solution to the blatant violence that has been claiming the lives of Christians, this could possibly lead to communities turning against each other (community conflict):

- The level of persecution in Kenya has kept been growing over the last years and this trend is likely to continue.
- If al-Shabaab were to be defeated, this would reduce the level of violence against Christians in the northeastern and coastal regions.
- Any possible political fallout due to the election might well benefit al-Shabaab.

Policy considerations

The Kenyan government vowed to bring the perpetrators of atrocities that have been committed against Christians to justice, especially the perpetrators of the massacre of Christian students at Garissa University in 2014. However, there have been no satisfactory results and Christians are still getting killed at the hands of radical Islamic militants. Open Doors recommends:

- The Kenyan government should investigate the atrocities committed against Christians with due diligence.
- The African Union and the international community should call on and support the Kenyan government to develop a plan with legal and practical steps to fight corruption in line with Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals and in this way indirectly assure that incidents of killings and violence against Christians are fully investigated and measures for the protection of Christians are put in place.
- The international community should help Kenya in its attempt to fight terrorism that has been taking the lives of Christians and other civilians.
- Kenyans should hold serious interfaith discussions in order to avoid misunderstandings and suspicions between different faiths in the country.
- Kenyans should go beyond politics and political alliance to solve the issue of faith-related killings in the country that have taken lives of many Christians.

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33. Bhutan

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 62 / Position: 33

WWL 2017 Points: 61 / Position: 30

WWL 2016 Points: 56 / Position: 38

Bhutan scores 62 on WWL 2018, an increase of approximately 0.7 points in comparison to WWL 2017. Although the score for violence halved in the WWL 2018 reporting period (with no Christians being arrested), there was an increase in pressure, particularly in the *Private* and the *Family spheres of life*, reflecting a slightly more difficult situation for Christian converts from Buddhism or ethnic-animist religion as they are not recognized in society and are therefore neglected (for instance, by being shunned by fellow farmers or being denied documents from the authorities).

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Bhutan ³⁷ :	
Islamic oppression	Not at all
Religious nationalism	Very strong
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Religious nationalism (Very strong):

A continuing emphasis on Mahayana Buddhism as the country's spiritual heritage makes it hard for the Christian minority. Bhutan had been a Buddhist kingdom for centuries. Even after introducing a constitutional monarchy in 2001 and installing democratic elections with the new Constitution in 2008, the country continues to give a dominant role to Buddhism. Under Article 3(1) of the Constitution, "Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan", which promotes amongst other things "the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance." Accordingly, Buddhism is not explicitly defined as the state religion. Instead, the Constitution defines Bhutan as a secular state and affirms religious

³⁷ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

tolerance. This is, however, stronger on paper than in reality. Buddhism is heavily incorporated into people’s daily lives and is strongly evident in the political, social, cultural, and even economic activities/dynamics of the country. An illustration of this close relationship can be seen in the so-called “dzongs”. These are administrative centers with one department for political administration and another for the religious authorities, which often includes a Buddhist temple and accommodation for monks. No Christian congregation has ever been allowed to build a church structure yet. All Christian fellowships remain underground. Especially in rural areas, Buddhist monks oppose the presence of Christians; the authorities do nothing to protect Christians and most often side with the monks.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Another source of pressure comes from shamans following the traditional animistic *Bön* belief. Although most citizens are not adherents to this faith exclusively, they will observe certain rites and traditions, especially in rural areas. Converts to Christianity who do not wish to participate in these rites and traditions will be put under pressure and face opposition and exclusion. The fusion of tribal belief and Buddhism has also caused persecution especially in the central and eastern parts of the country.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution for Religious nationalism	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

In their effort to maintain national identity and unity, government authorities suppress (or eliminate) perceived “foreign” elements, including Christianity. The government upholds Buddhist beliefs as the country’s national heritage in managing the country and does not know a clear distinction of religion and state. Therefore, one could say that the government is operating on two levels: On one level, government officials are drivers of persecution as executors of state power; on another level they are true followers of Buddhism and the country’s spiritual heritage.. Buddhist (and at times even Hindu) leaders are drivers of persecution as well. The merging of ethnic beliefs with Buddhism causes additional possibilities for persecution; Christians refusing to follow both Buddhist beliefs and ethnic traditional rites are more likely to get into difficulties. This is especially true for Christians coming from the central and eastern part of the country. For converts, family members are another strong driver of persecution.

Context

Bhutan is a country squeezed between two giant neighbors: India to its south and China to its north. It does not appear in international headlines much, except when its two neighbors decide to have a [military standoff](#)³⁸ at their much disputed border, as happened in the period June - August 2017. Bhutan decided to stay as quiet as possible. The country has gained some fame for its invention of the Gross National Happiness index for measuring its citizens' overall happiness. Democracy continues to develop firmer roots, albeit in a climate in which all parties agree with the dominance of Buddhism and loyalty to the king. The situation for Christians, who are a small minority among the Bhutanese, has remained unchanged: They still lack official status and recognition.

Bhutan faces economic challenges and needs to find ways of giving the younger generation a perspective. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, this has continued to be urgent. The country is strongly relying on tourism. Both the numbers of tourists and the revenue it earns with foreign currency seem to have stabilized, however, it is becoming harder and harder to offer young adults a career perspective in tourism.

Depending how economic developments progress, there may be repercussions for the Christian minority. If the country falls into serious economic difficulties, it may rely on placing greater emphasis on its Buddhist cultural heritage, so making any recognition of the growing Christian minority a far-off dream. If the economy develops positively, this may relax the country's emphasis on its Buddhist heritage and make recognition of the Christian community a possibility.

Besides the Christian community, the tiny Muslim minority in Bhutan and the Hindus (who are of Nepali ethnicity) are not recognized and are hence frequently neglected as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

The very few expatriate Christians usually join the existing house- churches and are therefore not treated here as a separate WWL category.

Historical Christian communities:

First Christian traces can be tracked back to Jesuit missionaries arriving at Paro as early as 1626. In the 19th century, a small Roman Catholic presence existed under the Indian diocese of Darjeeling, and this is still present today.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Converts from a Buddhist, Hindu or ethnic background face persecution from family, friends and neighbors.

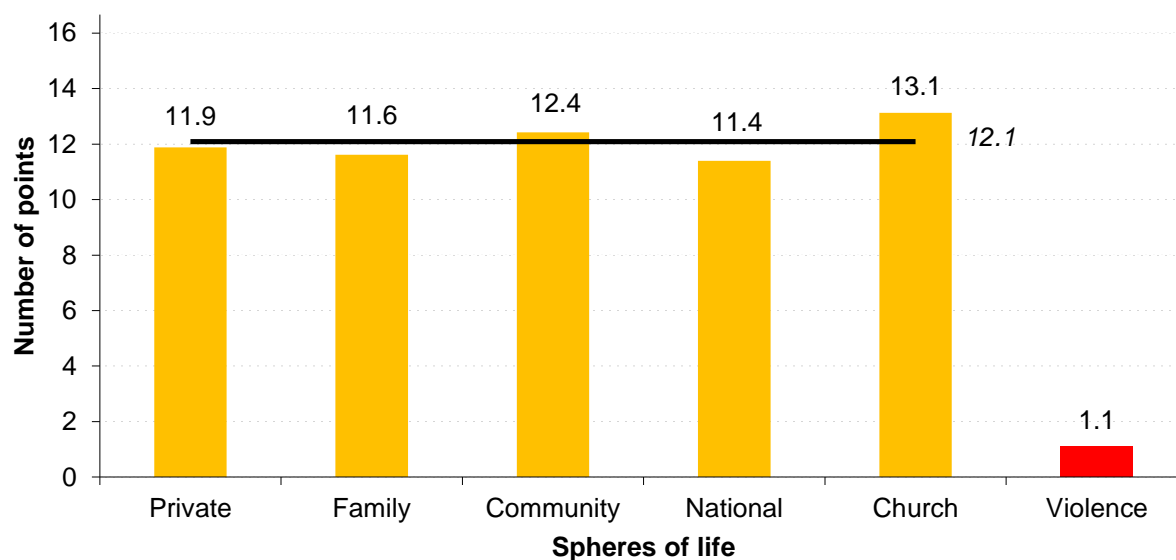
³⁸ See: <http://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/india-china-08182017175038.html>, last accessed 6 September 2017.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

These groups include Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations. Fellowships such as Brethren and El Shaddai exist, but none are recognized and are therefore prone to experiencing conflict with the authorities. This can be in the form of monitoring, but raids or even detentions and arrests occur as well.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Bhutan



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

The overall pressure on Christians in Bhutan remained at a very high level, with average pressure rising from 11.8 in WWL 2017 to 12.1 in WWL 2018.

- Pressure is strongest in the *Church, Community and Private spheres of life*. Pressure on converts is especially high in the *Private and Family spheres*, while all Christians face pressure in the *National and Church spheres*. This pressure is fuelled by the the Christian minority continuing to be neglected, be it in everyday life or when not being recognized as a fellowship.
- The score for violence against Christians almost halved, going down from 2.0 in WWL 2017 to 1.1 points in WWL 2018. No Christians were detained or sentenced for their faith.

Private sphere:

All conversions face opposition and are mostly forbidden. Conversion is banned in line with Section 463 (A) of the country's Penal Code. It stipulates that conversion by means of coercion or other means of inducement is a punishable offense. Notably, "coercion" and "other means of inducement" are not defined. All conversions are strictly opposed by family, community, religious authorities and the state. Indeed, "forced conversion" is punishable by law, but the term "forced" is open to interpretation; in practice, conversion is simply forbidden in most cases. Even the distribution of a simple Gospel tract

without having a discussion about Christ or inviting a person to church can be ground for arrest. Consequently, converts have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only Christians in their family. For converts, it can be dangerous to display Christian symbols in private, especially if their family members are not yet believers. Christians meet in most cases in rented houses; this can be difficult if the owner of the house is a Buddhist. Rarely do Christians display Christian symbols in their houses or wear them. In rural areas, known converts are often closely monitored.

Family sphere:

Once converts are discovered, they can face the threat of divorce (if married) and lose their inheritance rights. Organizing a baptism in public is not possible because it is illegal: Christian funerals are also very difficult to arrange and often impossible; Christians usually bury their deceased in neighboring India.

Many Christians do not get issued with an electronic National Identity Card because of their religion, and especially converts face this problem. Also, for day-to-day life, all citizens need a document referred to as a “non-objection certificate” (NOC) which is issued by village authorities to show that the village has no problem with the individual. This certificate is needed for loan applications, registering property, applying for jobs and the renewal of ID cards. Christians often fail to be issued with a NOC or have a hard time obtaining it.

Children of Christians are required to learn and to practice Buddhism and face opposition from teachers and pupils at school. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, an interview with a Christian schoolchild about being bullied by classmates had to be stopped because the interviewee was clearly traumatized. Converts are sometimes isolated by their families and hindered from meeting fellow Christians. Relatives of three Christians imprisoned for their faith were prohibited from visiting them in prison.

Community sphere:

Converts face strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors who often threaten to report them to the local authorities if they do not renounce their Christian faith. One of the traditions of farmers in Bhutan is community planting and harvesting. However, Christians are excluded from this and cannot count on any help. Villagers often make life very difficult for Christians: If they do not attend festivals and contribute to them, this will trigger more harassment from the community. Children require a letter of recommendation from the village head or from the local government office in order to be admitted to schools; Christians often have difficulties in obtaining such letters. And if they succeed, their children face discrimination in school by getting lower grades, which in turn makes it difficult for them to qualify for higher education. In schools, everyone is required to follow Buddhist rituals. Christians are also frequently asked to participate in the traditional religious festivals in their community. Also, Christians who want to start a business are often left out of government subsidy schemes.

National sphere:

The Constitution states that Mahayana Buddhism is protected as the national’s spiritual heritage. This means that Buddhism is treated as state religion and all religious institutions have the constitutional duty to promote the spiritual heritage of Bhutan. On 24 May 2011, the government enacted an amendment to

the law inserting an anti-conversion clause. This was inserted into the Penal Code in order to fulfil Article 7(4) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, which states, “A Bhutanese citizen shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. No person shall be compelled to belong to another faith by means of coercion or inducement.” Section 463 (A) of the Penal Code (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2011 states: “A defendant shall be guilty of the offense of compelling others to belong to another faith if the defendant used coercion or other forms of inducement to cause the conversion of a person from one religion or faith to another.” Section 463 (B) adds: “The offense of compelling others to belong to another faith shall be a misdemeanor,” which is punishable with one to three years in prison. Christians are not allowed to display Christian symbols publically, and no Christian civil society organizations are permitted. Courts sentence Christians severely, even when the accusations against them are based on little evidence. The very few Christian civil servants are under high pressure to participate in Buddhist rites and contribute to festivals. Where they refuse, they are pressed to resign, as happened in the WWL 2018 reporting period. If Christians have a record of “unethical conversion”, they will not get a NOC, as mentioned above.

Church sphere:

Registration continues to be the biggest problem for churches in Bhutan. Without registration they are technically illegal. Although the national government says that Christians may gather, fellowships are disrupted by villagers or their legality questioned at district and village level. Christians engaging with the authorities on matters of religion and worship are routinely discriminated against. Christian groups who seek registration with the Commission of Religious Organizations (CRO) often do not hear back from them. At present, there is not a single Christian group which is recognized in the country.

In the WWL 2018 reporting period this resulted in a house-church closing down and house-churches in another district ceasing meetings. The government continues to keep gatherings confined to household premises also as a way of limiting the growth of Christianity and making them dependent on the landlord. Some Christians have managed to rent larger places, but all run the risk of being discovered, and some have been visited by the authorities. There have been incidents where Christians have been threatened with serious consequences if they continue to meet. As a result, many Christians choose to gather very early in the morning or in the evening (with lights off) to avoid raising suspicion. Bibles and other Christian materials cannot be produced in Bhutan and importing them is not allowed, unless they are brought in in small quantities for private use only.

Violence:

Persecution is not very violent in Bhutan. There had been incidents where Christians were sentenced for proselytization, but they were released in 2016. As already mentioned under “Church sphere” above, two house-churches were forced to close down and cease meetings, having received threats and warnings from the authorities. For security reasons, the exact time and places cannot be mentioned.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:/Male: There is no information on gender specific persecution in Bhutan available.

Future outlook

The way Bhutan decided to remain quiet during the June-August 2017 military stand-off between China and India and did nothing which could be perceived as taking sides, has to be seen as a wise decision. Indeed, Bhutan's survival might depend upon balancing the needs and wishes of China and India. However, the [tensions are not over](#)³⁹ yet. Straight after declaring the stand-off terminated, the Chinese army told India to learn a lesson from this experience. Therefore it is very likely that within the region a lot of nervousness continues to linger. Maybe the authorities will be busier watching foreign relations than they are with internal politics.

In a situation where Bhutan needs to show its own unique place in the region, it is very likely that it will do so by referring to its exceptional religious and cultural heritage. In such a situation the Christian community in Bhutan is unlikely to get the protection and space it deserves. So the future of the Christian minority will continue to be determined by how *Religious nationalism*, the country's main persecution engine, develops.

Policy considerations

Currently under review.

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34. Kuwait

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 61 / Position: 34

WWL 2017 Points: 57 / Position: 38

WWL 2016 Points: 56 / Position: 41

Kuwait rose by four points in WWL 2018 to a score of 61. The rise is due to two factors: 1) Unlike in WWL 2017, some violence has been reported; 2) A refinement in the WWL analysis of the situation of converts was made, adding to the rise.

³⁹ See: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/08/what-china-learned-about-india-at-doklam/>, last accessed 6 September 2017.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Kuwait ⁴⁰	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

As in many countries in the region, *Islamic oppression* is the main engine behind the persecution of Christians in Kuwait. It is operating strongly at both national and local community levels. The whole region is in a volatile situation, with society generally becoming very conservative – this is the context for the situation in Kuwait where the laws and Constitution also affirm the conservative nature of society. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion and Islamic law (Sharia) is an important source for legislation. The government requires Islamic religious instruction for all pupils in state and private schools. Teaching Christianity in public high schools is prohibited, even to legally recognized Christian groups. In the past, a significant number of Kuwaitis were tolerant towards non-Muslim residents; however, this has been changing significantly due to the growing influence of radical Islamic groups, who do not want to see Christians in the country. Even though the Islamic State group (IS) has been largely defeated, its influence is still present and enjoys a notable resonance among significant Sunni radicals. There have been Kuwaiti citizens fighting alongside IS in Iraq and Syria.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

The government of Kuwait is restrictive in many ways. Although the country has one of the strongest parliaments in the region, the ruling royal Sunni family still dictates everyday life. In 2016, two former members of parliament, who were critical of the government and their allies, received prison sentences.⁴¹ *Dictatorial paranoia* is behind most of the government restrictions, as the country's ruler does not want his hegemony threatened in any way. Freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of association are also restricted. Getting church registration is a very complicated and lengthy procedure. Not only Christians have to face the oppressing hand of the government, other minorities like the Shia minority also experience discrimination and have to operate carefully.

⁴⁰ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

⁴¹ Amnesty International Report 2016/17, p. 224.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Typical for this persecution engine are situations in which age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context (such as family honor) are forced upon Christians. In the case of Kuwait, *Ethnic antagonism* is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Nigeria	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Weak
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Very weak

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Despite its tough rule, the heavy pressure on Christians is not coming from the government in the first instance. Christians have most to fear from members of Kuwait's conservative society. There is a clear dichotomy in the country between Kuwaitis (by definition Muslim) and the many immigrant workers, even more so if the latter are Christian. As a result, due to the already existing societal abuse and discrimination, Christians frequently exercise self-restraint for safety reasons.

Foreign Christian workers have to behave carefully, but converts from Islam to Christianity bear the brunt of persecution. A change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Although there is no criminal penalty for conversion, it is socially unacceptable. Families will most certainly expel converted family members from their home, as they see conversion not merely as being an attack on Islam, but also on the family honor.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

The Kuwaiti government does not allow criticism, especially not from (foreign) Christians. As Freedom House reported: “Journalists and social media users deemed to have insulted the emir or Saudi Arabia often face prosecution, and the government sustains efforts to stifle criticism of its actions and policies.”⁴² The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring activities in the country. Expatriates speaking out against the government will most probably be deported.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the Keys to Understanding document for Kuwait.

Situated at the western part of the Persian Gulf and bordered by Saudi Arabia in the south, Iraq to the north and Iran to the northeast, Kuwait is one of the Gulf countries with close ties to the West. Although Kuwait is one of the smallest nations in the Middle East, it has a strong economy based on oil and is one of the richest countries in the Arab world. Of the country’s four million or so inhabitants, more than half are immigrants. It is a relatively open economy with crude oil reserves of billions of barrels - more than 6% of world reserves. Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy whose head of state is the Emir of the al-Sabah family and was the first Arab country in the Gulf to have an elected parliament.

Kuwaiti society is conservative and Islam (Sharia law) prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. Although Kuwait has accepted some of the major United Nations conventions on human rights (e.g. the 1996 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 1996 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) the constitutional provision regarding religious freedom is full of contradictions. On the one hand, it provides for religious freedom, but also states that the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals. The government has been using the traditional conservative tribal society of the country to eliminate the liberal and leftist groups and has so far been very successful. In the process, other religious minorities were also seriously affected.

In the past few years, IS created a toxic environment for religious minorities in the region and some Kuwaitis have joined the group. Even though IS is suffering military defeat in Syria and Iraq, the radicalization that IS has left behind in the minds of the youth and others in the region might take decades to eradicate. It is difficult to know what will happen to the Church and Christians in the future.

Other religious groups

Other non-Christian religious groups like Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs are relatively free to practice their faith in private, although they lack facilities to worship and it remains difficult to obtain permission to build new facilities. However, government scrutiny applies and conservative groups within parliament view all non-Muslim religious activities with suspicion, opposing them if they have a chance.

⁴² See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/kuwait>, last accessed 11 December 2017.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two are present in Kuwait:

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Of the total number of Christians in Kuwait, the majority of them are foreign workers. They are relatively free to worship. However, the existing worship places are very small for the number of people gathering. The extreme difficulty to obtain property to gather for worship is an extra burden.

According to the International Religious Freedom report on Kuwait, there are seven officially recognized Christian churches: the National Evangelical (Protestant), Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Anglican. Some religious groups without a licensed place of worship stated they could conduct worship services without government interference provided they did not disturb their neighbors or violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing. The government allows such groups to operate in rented villas, private homes, or the facilities of licensed churches.⁴³

Historical Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Kuwait. .

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Converts from Islam to Christianity face daunting challenges in many forms. They risk discrimination, harassment, police monitoring of their activities, and all sorts of intimidation by vigilante groups. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters. For converts, the main drivers of persecution are family, community members and radical Muslims, and, to a lesser extent, the authorities.

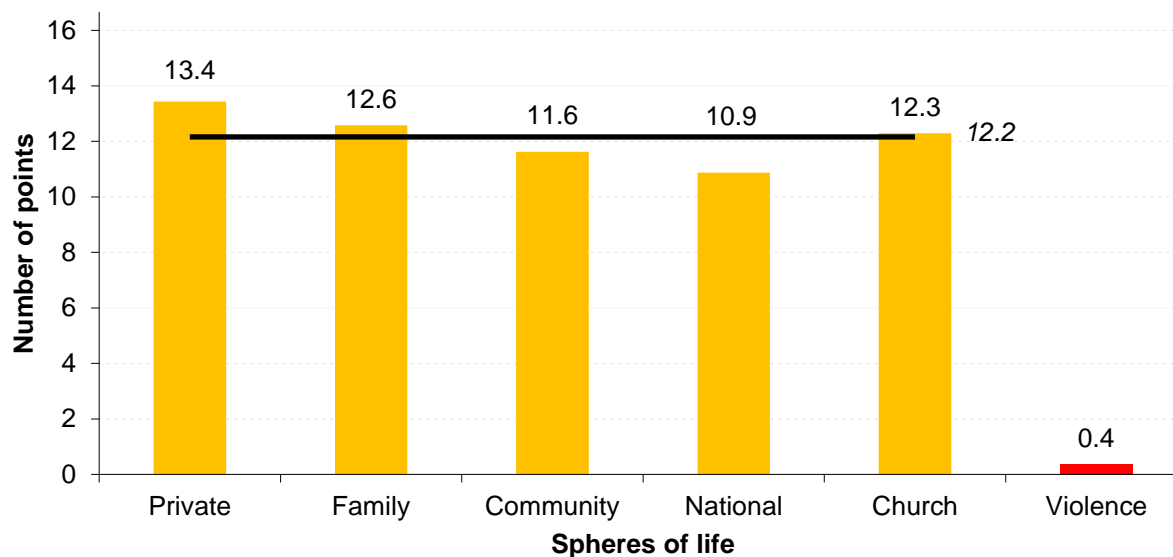
Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Kuwait.

⁴³ Kuwait 2016 International Religious Freedom Report, United States Department of State, pp. 3, 7.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Kuwait



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Kuwait remains very high, increasing from 11.4 in WWL 2017 to 12.2. This rise is due to the refinement in WWL analysis concerning the situation of Christians with a Muslim background in Bahrain.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private and Family spheres*, showing the difficult situation of converts in Kuwait.
- The score for violence increased from 0.0 in WWL 2017 to 0.4, as some violent incidents were reported.
- The overall persecution situation in Kuwait is fueled by a society and government increasingly influenced by radical Islamic movements.

Private sphere:

In a very conservative society that regards leaving Islam as a betrayal of family values, conversion to Christianity always brings difficulties. As a result, even though the law does not formally prohibit conversion, both society and government put hurdles in the way for people who convert. For instance, they will not get an official document with their new faith recorded on it. Besides that, all (religious) literature deemed offensive towards Islam is forbidden. Converts living with their family (both nuclear and extended) have difficulty worshipping or owning Christian materials as they have to be careful that such materials are not deemed offensive.

Family sphere:

Especially converts from Islam face serious challenges living as a Christian family. The prevailing circumstances in the country also put significant restrictions on expatriate Christian families. Both have to behave carefully in the public sphere. Speaking about their beliefs is difficult and even dangerous, because proselytizing in any way is strictly forbidden. Besides this, converts bear the brunt of persecution in the family sphere. Deceased converts are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, and there are very limited facilities for expatriate Christians. Baptisms must be conducted discreetly as open baptism might attract severe abuse and harassment from family as well as from the community at large. The law also puts restrictions on who should marry who - a Muslim female may not marry a non-Muslim man unless he converts to Islam. These laws have a significant implication on questions of custody and inheritance as well. Converts often do not receive any inheritance from their deceased parents, as their leaving Islam has dishonored the family.

Community sphere:

In Kuwaiti communities, Christians are seen as second class, foreigners and infidels and are often directly or indirectly prevented from participating in community activities. During the Ramadan month, Christians struggle to cope with the de facto requirement to fast imposed by the government and the community. There is always pressure on converts to renounce Christianity. Education is another area where Christians face challenges. The government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools for all students and also requires Islamic religious instruction in private schools that have one or more Muslim students. But the law prohibits organized religious education for faiths other than Islam.⁴⁴

National sphere:

The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution is not up to the international standard, as it merely focus on the observance of religious rites, which may not conflict with the Kuwaiti, and thus Islamic, morals.⁴⁵ There are laws against proselytizing, and the government enforces them. Besides that, the government endorses a policy of funding and supporting Sunni Islam, by financing Sunni mosques, imams and Sunni Islamic teaching and education. Although Kuwait does hold democratic elections, running for a public office as a non-Muslim is unthinkable. Several radical groups (as well as conservative hardline Members of Parliament) wish to get rid of all non-Muslim influence, like celebrating Christmas, from the country.

Church sphere:

What happens in other *Spheres of life* (especially in the *National sphere*) has a profound impact on the *Church sphere of life*. Church life in Kuwait is restricted. For example, to purchase a plot of land to build a church, the buyer must be a citizen of Kuwait. For converts to go and buy land for church construction would be very dangerous as this would expose their conversion to the general public. It is not uncommon that churches applying for licenses to build new places of worship have had to wait years for approval. A country researcher noted: "Most of the recognized Christian churches considered their existing facilities

⁴⁴ See: <http://freethoughtreport.com/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁴⁵ Constitution of Kuwait, article 35, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.pdf?lang=en, last accessed 30 September 2017.

inadequate to serve their communities and faced significant problems in obtaining proper approvals from municipal councils to construct new facilities. Municipal authorities obstructed religious gatherings in private spaces and pressured landlords who had leased property to unlicensed churches.” Besides obtaining church facilities, publishing religious material is also limited to one’s own church congregation. The government allows churches to import religious materials, but under the condition its content does not insult Islam. Signs and symbols on the outside of church buildings are forbidden. The government has prohibited non-Muslim missionaries from working in the country and from proselytizing Muslims.

Violence:

When considering the small amount of violence against Christians, Kuwait is a typical Gulf country. The government does not have to act against Christians as the pressure from society is very high and Christians are obedient. It is not easy to get verified reports about violence out of the country. However, Open Doors is aware of the difficult situation of low-skilled expatriate workers. According to Amnesty International, these workers “continued to face exploitation and abuse under the official *kafala* sponsorship system”.⁴⁶ Open Doors fears that Christian workers, especially women, are even more vulnerable and are discriminated against because of their faith. However, there are currently no clear indications of persecution-related mistreatment of Christian expatriate workers. More research into this subject will be conducted in the near future.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

According to the Tahirih Justice center, domestic abuse, especially against women, is thought to be widespread in Kuwait. Domestic violence is considered to be a family affair; there are no specific laws on domestic violence and the authorities most probably will not act against it.⁴⁷ Besides that, the role of women in society is very limited and they often do not have a choice in marriage. In this kind of atmosphere, it is not difficult to imagine what can be going on with female Christian domestic workers. In March 2017, a shocking video was published, showing an Ethiopian housemaid falling from a window; the woman filming her does not try to rescue her.⁴⁸

Male:

Men are especially subject to discrimination and hostilities on the work floor. Migrant workers are tied to their employers via the so called *Kafala* sponsorship system, which make both men and women vulnerable to slavery practices.⁴⁹ This could lead to the disintegration of their families.

⁴⁶ Amnesty International Report 2016/17, p. 225.

⁴⁷ See: <http://preventforcedmarriage.org/forced-marriage-overseas-kuwait/>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁴⁸ See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39456558>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁴⁹ Amnesty International, Amnesty International Report 2016/17, p. 225.

Future outlook

The future of Kuwait, like that of other countries in the region, is intrinsically linked to the political situation in the region. The Middle East and the Gulf region have become more unpredictable than ever. Although IS is being defeated from a military point of view, its influence still remains. The rise in Sunni radicalism has been an issue not only for Christians in the region, but also for individual country leaders and the international community. Sunni majority countries, including Kuwait, are on the alert to make sure that such radical militants do not establish their networks in their country. However, as long as the country maintains its openness to the world economy, Christians are likely to continue coming to the country regardless of the existing pressure. Despite the regional turmoil (such as the Qatari crisis and the ongoing civil war in Yemen), Kuwait has been politically stable during the WWL 2018 reporting period and there has been no massive rise in persecution. However, the fear among Christians (especially converts) will continue as the environment in the country remains hostile. Society is likely to become even more conservative and the government is likely to allow this to continue (as long as it does not feel challenged in its administration of power) in order to appease the radical Islamic groups in society. Nevertheless, Christian migrant workers are likely to continue coming into the country in search for jobs.

Policy considerations

Open Doors recommends:

- The government of Kuwait should be urged to ensure the Freedom of Religion or Belief for international domestic workers, a significant number of whom are Christians.
- The government of Kuwait should be urged to ensure the necessary protection of international domestic workers during their employment.
- The international community and businesses operating in Kuwait should urge the government and businesses to uphold Freedom of Religion or Belief when developing security policies aimed at stemming the influence of IS and violence by radical groups.
- As Islam is the state religion, the freedom to choose a different religion is severely restricted and converts are still considered Muslims. Therefore, the international community should urge the government to ensure the full rights of converts to fully embrace the religion they choose.
- The government should encourage the establishment of interfaith discussions that can reduce religious animosities and build unity based on the peaceful co-existence of religions.

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35. Central African Republic

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 61 / Position: 35

WWL 2017 Points: 58 / Position: 34

WWL 2016 Points: 59 / Position: 26

The Central African Republic (CAR) rose three points in WWL 2018 to a score of 61. In the reporting period for WWL 2017 there had been a lull in the violence, however the situation has since deteriorated and there has been a rise in violence against Christians. A refinement in WWL has meant a shift from scoring the size of territory affected by persecution to a more accurate assessment using the percentage of population living in the territory. Had it not been for this change, the score for CAR could have been higher.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in CAR ⁵⁰	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Weak
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Weak
Organized corruption and crime	Very Strong

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

The Seleka militia (which has divided into several factions) has been one of the main actors in the civil war that has engulfed the Central African Republic (CAR). This group used to be made up of fighters from the predominantly Islamic northern part of the country. The factions that have since emerged have a similar composition and most of their fighters are Muslims. In addition to the violence of militant groups like the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), the Patriotic Convention for the Salvation of Kodro, Union of Republican Forces, and the Alliance for the Rebirth and Rebuilding, which are offshoots of the Seleka, *Islamic oppression* is also the persecution engine that animates the persecution of Christians by ordinary people in predominantly Muslim parts of the country.

⁵⁰ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):

In addition to *Islamic oppression*, *organized corruption and crime* is also a significant persecution engine in CAR. This is particularly the case since the militant group known as anti-Balaka also attacks churches and Christians. Many fighters belonging to this group - which begun as local self-protection units and vigilante groups and later become a major actor in the civil war - have effectively turned into criminal gangs. The criminal activities of these gangs results in the persecution of Christians in Bangui since they often target the church and religious leaders in addition to the violent and horrific attacks they commit against Muslims.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Nigeria	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very Weak
Ethnic group leaders	Very Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Weak
Violent religious groups	Very Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Weak
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Very Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	Weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Very Weak

Drivers of Islamic oppression

The most significant drivers of persecution in CAR are militant and paramilitary groups such as the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), the Patriotic Convention for the Salvation of Kodro, Union of Republican Forces, and the Alliance for the Rebirth and Rebuilding as well as the anti-Balaka. To some extent many of these groups could be considered as violent religious groups. However, it is also possible to characterize them as political parties and paramilitary organizations. In the predominantly Muslim parts of the country ordinary people influenced by the teachings of fanatical and intolerant imams also act as drivers of persecution. Tribal or ethnic elders also play a role in this process since they reinforce the pressure against converts to Christianity.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

Some factions of the militant groups mentioned above act as organized criminal gangs and often engage in looting and frequently target churches and church-affiliated entities. In addition to militants that used to belong to the Seleka, the former anti-Balaka also engage in such acts. The state of lawlessness and the inability of the state to impose law and order means that Christians and the wider community have little protection from the criminal acts of these groups.

Context

CAR has seen many conflicts and five coups since its independence from France in 1960. The instability and weakness of its successive governments (as well as their lack of legitimacy) have meant that [France](#)⁵¹, its former colonizer, still plays a very decisive role. There have been many direct French military interventions in support of the governments of the day and at times to protect its own nationals and foreigners living in CAR. While the rebels and those who lead military takeovers of power often allege that they are motivated by a desire to root out corruption or ethnic or religious discrimination, very often it seems that they are motivated by the material rewards of political power and the opportunities for the patronage and corruption it offers. CAR is considered to be a Christian nation, but Islam has shown significant growth in the last decade from 5% to 13% – strengthened by communities migrating from Chad and Sudan. Discontent among northern Muslims was one of the root causes for the March coup in 2013. Local Christians are very concerned about the Islamic inroads being established in the country and have pointed out that the rebellion that led to the coup came from a jihadist agenda.

The conflict in CAR which began in December 2012 has claimed thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands, and caused severe destruction to property. What made the recent conflict more dangerous was the fact that it had a religious dimension. In September 2014, the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a second investigation. Experts claim that what brought the (mainly Muslim) Seleka forces into the picture was, among other things, the failure of the government to address social problems and the lack of good governance. However, the attack by Seleka forces on Christians has given the conflict a religious overtone. The [mostly animist](#)⁵² anti-Balaka forces have also targeted Muslims in the south and committed atrocities, exacerbating the conflict. In this regard it is important to note that a [declaration](#)⁵³ issued by various Christian organizations in Bangui in February 2014 has reiterated; “The confrontation between Seleka and anti-Balaka has started a cycle of reprisal in which the civilian population have fallen victim. We condemn this violence, whatever its origin. Moreover we do not accept the amalgam of labelling of anti-Balaka as “Christian” militia.”

Although the Seleka have now been driven out of many parts of the country, numerous challenges remain. In Bangui, a growing group of radical Muslims continue to keep a stronghold in the so-called PK5 enclave where they instill a reign of terror. In the north-east, which is mainly populated by Muslims, many Christians are forced to flee from their villages and are denied access to farming fields. Large groups of Christians live in extremely poor conditions in refugee camps. Although the election held in 2016 had given rise to some optimism about the prospect of peace in the Central African Republic, clashes between various militant groups have continued and just within a period of three months in 2017, [45 civilians](#)⁵⁴ died and at least 11,000 were displaced. This spike in violence in central CAR poses a huge risk both for

⁵¹ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/france-poisoned-legacy-central-african-republic>, last accessed 18 September 2017.

⁵² See: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2014/march/central-african-republic-churches-pledge-action-car.html>, last accessed 18 September 2017.

⁵³ See: http://www.opendoorsuk.org/campaign/documents/Bangui_II.pdf, last accessed 18 September 2017.

⁵⁴ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-violence/dozens-of-civilians-killed-in-central-african-republic-report-idUSKBN17Y0BX?il=0> last accessed 18 September 2017.

Christians and Muslims in the country. The fact that the civil war that has barely ended in the country had been fought along religious lines means that some of these reprisal killings will result in killings on the basis of both ethnicity and religion. Unless the UN Peace Keeping force in the country acts decisively to bring to an end these clashes, there is a risk that the country could descend into the instability and conflict in which it has been mired in past years. The UN peace keeping mission in the country has so far been incapable of maintaining peace and stability in the country.

As far as the persecution of religious minorities in CAR is concerned, Muslim residents in parts of the country where they are a minority are targeted and attacked by the predominantly animist anti-Balaka militia.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

These do not exist in CAR as a separate category according to WWL methodology.

Historical Christian communities:

This category is comprised of Roman Catholic and mainstream Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics and schools. When the Seleka militants were in the ascendancy, cars, computers and other valuable items were looted from church-buildings and other properties. The Catholic Church and its leadership in CAR, alongside other religious leaders, have been a strong voice for peace and reconciliation and have also provided a place of refuge for civilians, both Muslim and Christian, targeted by militants. As a result, the Catholic Church is often targeted and attacked.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

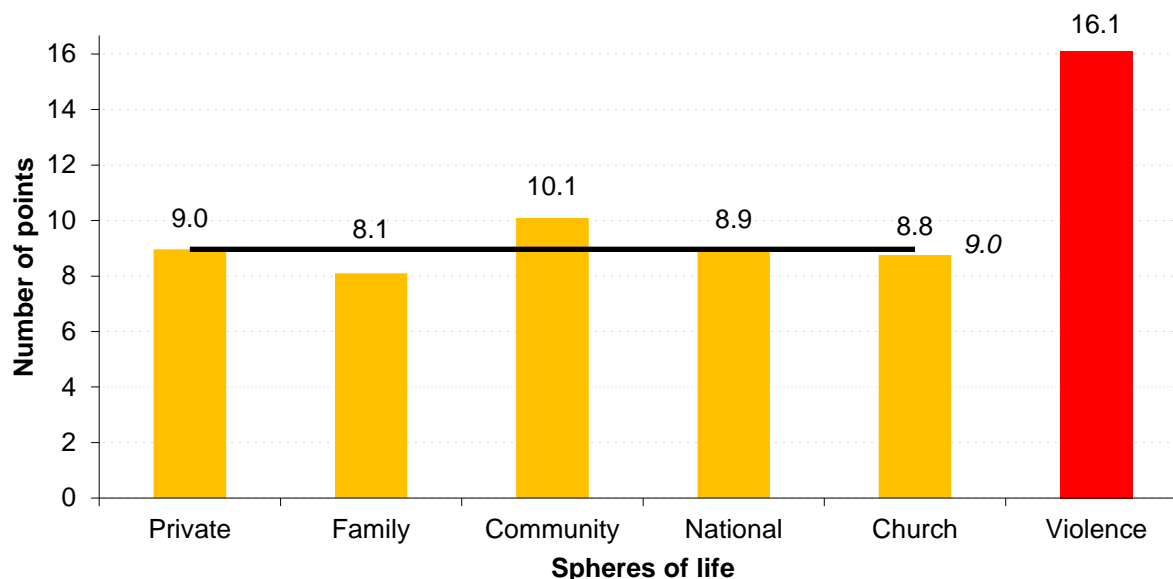
Christians with a Muslim background experience opposition and pressure from family members to renounce Christianity if their conversion becomes known. They also have very limited opportunities to have a fellowship with other Christians and worship collectively.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category is comprised of Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations. Christians belonging to this group (as well as those belonging to historical Christian communities) have been subject to attacks by members of the former Seleka militant group.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Central African Republic



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians went down from 9.6 in WWL 2017 to 9.0 in WWL 2018. This decrease is not really a result of an improvement of the situation for Christians in the predominantly Muslim parts of the country. It is mainly due to a refinement in WWL analysis concerning how the geographical scope and prevalence of persecution is assessed.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Community sphere* of life. This is the case for pockets of the country where Islam is the predominant religion. The fact that the civil war in the country has been perceived as a sectarian war seems to have contributed to the rising level of pressure from the community towards believers with a Muslim background.
- The score for violence rose from 9.8 points in WWL 2017 to the extreme level of 16.1 points. This makes the Central African Republic one of the countries with the highest level of violent persecution in the world.

Private sphere:

Because CAR is a majority Christian country, Catholics and all types of Protestants enjoy relative freedom in the private sphere especially in Christian majority parts of the country. Converts from Islam however experience interference from their family members if their conversion becomes known. The greatest problem in CAR is the division of the citizens along faith lines. Therefore, sharing the Christian faith between a Christian host and Muslim guest is very risky. In the northern part of the country which is dominated by a Muslim population (and where former Seleka forces are operating), a convert is likely to

risk his/her life by owning Christian materials. When former Seleka come into a house and find someone reading a Bible, they have been known to kill him/her immediately.

Family sphere:

As the situation in the country is far from being safe, it is very difficult for Christians (converts in particular) in the northeastern provinces to register births, weddings or deaths, especially as this would attract unwanted attention. In a country where groups are targeting each other based on religion, it is also difficult to baptize. Converts almost automatically lose inheritance rights.

Community sphere:

In villages which the former Seleka have attacked, young girls have often been abducted. In cities like Kaga Bandoro, Bambari and Bria, Christians took refuge after being forced to flee from their villages. They were often chased away by Muslim Fulani herdsmen that took the Christian farmers' land for their cattle to graze on.

National sphere:

Christians have at times been fired from government offices, and replaced by Muslims in some localities at the local government level. This is mainly a concern in northeastern provinces where the former Seleka militia dominates local governments.

Church sphere:

Normal church life is very difficult as meetings of Christians are always under the threat of attack, especially in Bangui close to the PK5 quarter and in northeastern CAR where Christians are harassed in the big cities and forced to flee.

Violence:

The level of violence in the country is at an extreme level and rose a massive 6.3 points compared with the WWL 2017 reporting period. The reasons for this rise in violence are multi-faceted. However, the failure of the government and the UN peacekeepers to disarm militants that took part in the civil war could be cited as one of the main reasons. As some of the bigger militant forces break down into small groups with very little (if any) structures of command and accountability, it is becoming more difficult to control the rise in violent attacks against churches.

Examples:

- On 7 February 2017, Pastor Jean-Paul Sankagui of the Eglise du Christ en Centrafrique (ECC) was killed by militants and his church also demolished in the capital Bangui. The attack took place in the PK5 neighborhood (the area where most conflict in Bangui has taken place).
- On 3 September 2017, ex-Seleka armed men kidnapped Father Robert Wiczorek in the north-western town of Ndim. According to a local source, the priest was tortured before being released [overnight](#).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/catholic-priest-killed-another-injured-spate-attacks-car/>, last accessed 18 December 2017.

- On 1 September 2017, armed men crossed the border from Sudan, attacked the town of Zemio and looted the Catholic church in the city. The attack caused the displacement of [thousands of inhabitants](#).⁵⁶

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Women and girls are frequently subjected to rape and sexual assault in CAR, particularly when militants attack civilian communities. They are also often forced into marriage under threat of violence. Polygamy also seems to be an accepted practice. Hence, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, and young girls who are abused and get pregnant are likely to drop out of school.

Male:

Boys and men are at times forced to join some of the Islamic militant groups and they are also targeted for torture and assault. They are also exploited as forced laborers in the mining industry.

Future outlook

The conflict in the last years has fundamentally changed the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the country. Unless the reconciliation process and the attempt to end the cycle of impunity in CAR succeeds, there is grave risk that the polarization among Muslims and Christians will continue and exacerbate the religious conflict. Despite the elections in 2015 and 2016 (which many hoped would bring a fresh chance of reconciliation), the former Seleka militia seem unwilling to lay down their arms and there is still a serious risk of a relapse into a violent conflict which has religious overtones. Church, state and society in CAR are caught up in a very traumatic experience. Church leaders of the main denominations have condemned the violence by anti-Balaka.

The Interim government managed - after much delay - to finally hold an election that was supposed to be a significant milestone in the transition process. In the run-off presidential election held in February 2016, Faustin-Archange Touadera won the presidency. Although President Touadera has made peace and reconciliation his priority agenda since taking office, various factions of militant groups are active and there is still instability and violence in the country. Expressing dissatisfaction with their perceived lack of representation in the government established by the new president, the Muslim militants have resorted to violence. This indicates that there is a serious likelihood that the situation in the Central African Republic could deteriorate significantly and lead to the resumption of conflict and violence with religious overtones that has devastated the country for most of the past decade. Reinforcing this view, the UN has

⁵⁶ Ibid.

issued a report regarding growing risk of a deadly civil war and genocide.⁵⁷ As the instability continues in the country, the situation is becoming more and more complex with several factions emerging from the Seleka and anti-Balaka militant groups - and in some places even [joining forces](#).⁵⁸

Policy considerations

Taking into account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors suggests the following policy recommendations:

- Security should be effectively kept in the whole country and notably in the PK5 quarter of the capital of Bangui and at the Batafango-Mobaye frontier (dividing the country in two) where former Seleka and anti-Balaka militia clash. Special concern should be given to the integration of Muslims returning to western CAR and to the safeguarding of Christians in northeastern CAR. Since January 2013, these Christians have been marginalized, discriminated against and violently targeted by former Seleka militia and associated groups of Muslim Fulani herdsman.
- The government of CAR should actively pursue a working relationship with the former Seleka rebels in the north and northeastern regions. The process of reconciliation should be inclusive, giving voice to groups both in support of and against the Seleka to re-establish peace and stability.
- The government and international community should engage with the concerns of the former Seleka and anti-Balaka groups regarding the program of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and come to agreement about bringing the remaining armed groups into the program.
- The UN and the AU should bolster the existing peace keeping force in the country with the troops and resources it needs to restore peace and stability in the country.
- The UN's decision to conduct an investigation into the complicity of peacekeepers who are members of UN Mission (MINUSCA) in violent incidents that have resulted in the death of civilians. Based on the findings of this investigation the UN should take firm measures to avoid such incidents from happening again.

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⁵⁷ See: <http://theanalytical.org/central-african-republic-reports-warn-of-rising-levels-of-violence/>, last accessed 27 September 2017.

⁵⁸ See: <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/clashes-in-car-leave-at-least-2-dead-10-injured-20171031>, last accessed 18 December 2017.

36. Palestinian Territories

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 60 / Position: 36

WWL 2017 Points: 64 / Position: 23

WWL 2016 Points: 62 / Position: 24

The score for the Palestinian Territories went down four points from 64 in WWL 2017 to 60 in WWL 2018. Less violence has been reported, causing some decrease in points. However, a refinement was also made for registering the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity within the Palestinian Territories and this caused a further decrease.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in the Palestinian Territories ⁵⁹	
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Strong
Ethnic antagonism	Medium
Denominational protectionism	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

Religious nationalism (Strong):

Palestinian Christians indicate that the Israeli control of the West Bank and their firm grip on Gaza, causes the biggest part of their suffering. This consists of external control of all the borders⁶⁰, combined with a permit system to enter Israel and to travel between Gaza and the West Bank, thus limiting the possibility of visiting holy places in Jerusalem for example.

Besides this, Israel has full internal control of approximately 60% of the West Bank (territories belonging to Area C under the Oslo accords) - an area which separates all the regions controlled by the Palestinian Authority. Internal checkpoints within the West Bank are used to control the area and to protect the Israeli settlements within the West Bank. This control creates insecurity, limits economical development and limits the freedom of movement, thus isolating the Christian communities within the West Bank.

⁵⁹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

⁶⁰ Except for the Gaza border with Egypt.

Without hope for a political solution, many Christians do not see a future for themselves in the Palestinian Territories and emigrate to other parts of the world. The Israeli control of the West Bank is linked to the view that sees the West Bank as part of the biblical Israel belonging to Jews only. The general feeling among non-Jews (including Palestinian Christians) is that they are allowed no space to live a dignified life in the West Bank.

Islamic oppression (Strong):

Generally speaking, Christians are affected by *Islamic oppression* throughout the territories, although there is noticeably more pressure in Gaza than in the West Bank, because of the presence of active radical Islamic movements. Islamic militants more radical than Hamas have been active in Gaza, and are also present in the West Bank. These include Islamic State group (IS) cells - either active or “sleeping”. Despite the fact that these groups do not have any major power yet, their influence cannot be dismissed.

Dictatorial Paranoia (Strong):

Dictatorial Paranoia is connected to plain greed and the safeguarding of the interests of a small group. Both parties within the Palestinian Authority, Fatah and Hamas, try to maintain power with all means necessary. Criticizing them in their respective territory can be dangerous. Nepotism is widespread within the clan-based society and people with connections to those in power are most of the time well-off. Without elections for many years, the democratic legitimacy of the government is low. Overall, Hamas seems to be more popular within the territories than Fatah, which forms the internationally recognized part of the Palestinian Authority. Politically active Christians are mostly involved with Fatah, which claims to be secular in principle.

Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

This persecution engine describes the continuing influence and enforcement of age-old norms and values. In the Palestinian Territories it is very much mixed with Islam and especially affects converts from Islam. As in the rest of the Middle East, religion is connected to family identity. Therefore, leaving Islam is interpreted as betraying one’s family. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their faith.⁶¹

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in the Palestinian Territories	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Not at all
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Medium
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak

⁶¹ See: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281034882_FREEDOM_OF_RELIGION_IN_ISRAEL-PALESTINE_MAY_MUSLIMS_BECOME_CHRISTIANS_AND_DO_CHRISTIANS_HAVE_THE_FREEDOM_TO_WELCOME_SUCH_CONVERTS, last accessed 14 September 2017.

Violent religious groups	Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers of Religious Nationalism:

Palestinian Christians mostly face pressure from Israeli government officials, above all the Israeli security forces, in their day-to-day life. Confrontations with Israeli inhabitants of the West Bank, the settlers, can also be intimidating. Both security forces and settlers are well armed, but the latter are known to be more zealous than the common Israeli soldier.

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

As the number of Palestinian Christians is very small (1.4% according to WCD statistics compared to the Muslim majority, the biggest pressure is the subtle pressure from *normal citizens*. This can be viewed in the dress rules for women, which are enforced via disapproving looks or comments. Palestinian society is conservative, with more liberty in the cities compared to the rural areas. Most Christians are part of the historical Christian communities. They have to operate carefully, as they are regarded by Muslim society as being “different”. One country researcher stated: “The majority eats the minority here. The Christians isolate themselves, out of fear of upsetting society in one way or another”.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Members of a convert’s (extended) family will put a lot of pressure on a convert to give up the Christian faith. They see converts as bringing shame to the honor of the family. Especially converts from Islam to Christianity will be expelled and harassed by their families. The situation for converts is in Gaza even worse, as the Christian community is tiny and there are hardly any places to hide.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

Palestinian *Government officials* and other people connected to one of the two *political parties* within the Palestinian Authority are another source of pressure, although Christians traditionally have been involved with Fatah and the nationalist movement. Most Christians support the factions in their struggle against the Israeli authorities and face no difficulties. Nevertheless, the freedom of expression and therefore the freedom of religion is limited, as criticizing the Palestinian Authorities or their Islamic rule can have negative consequences, especially in Gaza. Christians also face the pressure of Israeli government control.

Context

The Palestinian Territories are ruled or impacted by three different governments:

1. The West Bank's ruling Fatah party is formally based on secular principles – meaning non-Islamist, although the Basic Law states that the principles of Islamic *Sharia* law shall be the main source of legislation. Christians enjoy several rights, even being active in the highest levels of government.
2. Islamist Hamas de facto rules Gaza. They base their governance on Islam and *Sharia* law. Christians are largely tolerated, as their numbers are very small.
3. Israeli military law is valid in most parts of the West Bank, leading to great restrictions of movement of all Palestinians, including Christians. The total number of Christians has been decreasing in both parts of the Territories over time due to emigration and lower birth rates. A ray of hope is the small but growing number of converts from Islam to Christianity.

After Islamist Hamas won a decisive majority in the parliamentary elections of 2006, a national unity government was formed in which both Hamas and Fatah took part. Tensions over control of the Palestinian security forces led to a civil war in Gaza, in which Hamas took power by force in 2007. Since then, there have been two rival administrations within the Palestinian Authority. The relationship between both political parties is characterized by mutual distrust, revealing the influence of tribalism and clan rivalries within the Palestinian Arab community. Adherents of the one have been imprisoned and abused by the other. Meanwhile Hamas is gaining in popularity both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Rapprochement efforts between Fatah and Hamas resulted in the formation of a Palestinian unity government in June 2014. This move was meant to pave the way for parliamentary elections, however these have not been held as the unity government resigned in June 2015. Members of Hamas also attended the Fatah conference in November 2016, though divisions between both continued. In October 2017, both parties reached an agreement, in which the administrative authorities in Gaza were signed over to the Palestinian Authority. The control of the borders was also handed over to the Palestinian Authority.⁶² Hamas keeps its military wing, however, and is effectively still controlling the Gaza strip.⁶³ In November 2017, it was announced that general elections will be held by the end of 2018.⁶⁴

Other minorities

Other minorities like the Bedouins and the Samaritans in Nablus are not persecuted in particular, although the living conditions of the former are difficult. Especially the Bedouins living in Area C of the West Bank face many problems with the Israeli military and civil authorities.⁶⁵

⁶² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/01/hamas-hand-over-control-of-crossings-to-palestinian-authority>, last accessed on 27 November 2017.

⁶³ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-41591450>, last accessed 18 October 2017.

⁶⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-talks/palestinian-factions-agree-to-hold-general-election-by-end-2018>, last accessed on 27 November 2017.

⁶⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/07/film-human-face-palestinian-bedouins- plight-170701133202312.html>, last accessed on 27 November 2017.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

There are no communities of expatriate Christians in the Palestinian Territories.

Historical Christian communities:

The biggest churches within the historical Christian communities are the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. They are, among other churches, registered and there are several congregations in the West Bank and two (Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic) in Gaza. In Gaza, some members of the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church are vulnerable to conversion to Islam. They feel trapped, cannot stand the threats or are offered allurements such as housing, wives, jobs or diplomas. In the West Bank, they have the freedom to worship, as long as they do not proselytize Muslims. The churches have a far greater influence in society than one would expect on the basis of their number. Both the Roman Catholics as well as the Greek Orthodox run private schools, which are also attended by many Muslims. However, religious education classes are held separately.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

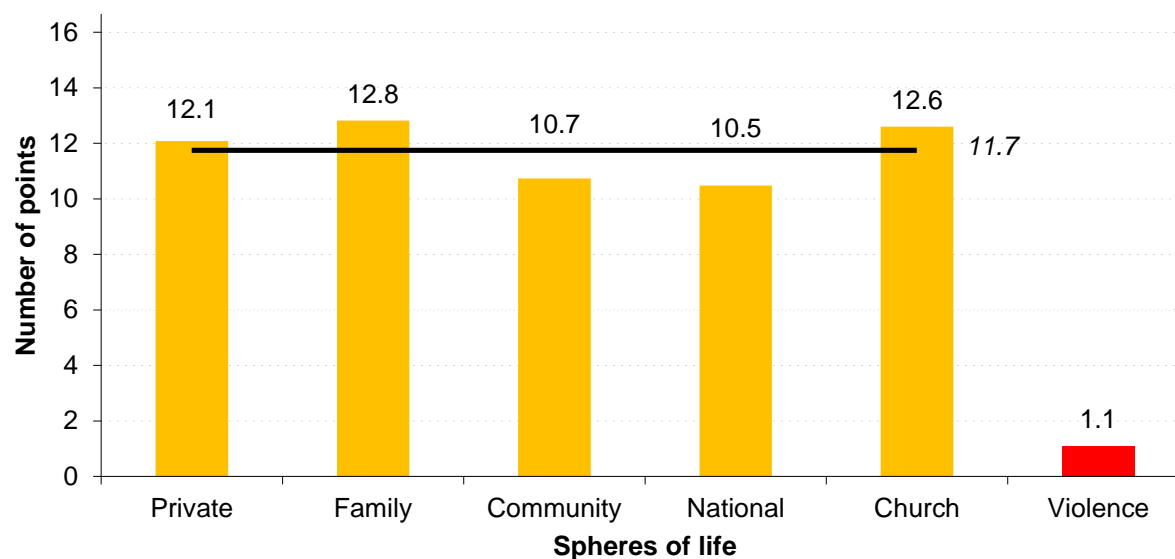
Converts are mainly from a Muslim background, but also cross-denominational “church-changers” are included in this category. Depending on the families, both groups experience pressure from family members to give up their new belief. When Christians change church e.g. from a historical to a non-traditional Protestant church this often causes trouble with their families. Converts from a Muslim background definitely face the most severe persecution of all types of Christianity though. In the West Bank they are threatened and put under great pressure, in Gaza their situation is so dangerous that they live their Christian faith in utmost secrecy. Nevertheless, the number of converts from Islam is growing slowly.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are several Evangelical churches in the West Bank and one in Gaza. Leaders of the historical Christian communities often see the Evangelical churches as a threat to their flock. Non-traditional Protestant churches are known to put emphasis on outreach and evangelization – this can lead to pressure from society.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Palestinian Territories



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in the Palestinian Territories decreased from 12.4 in WWL 2017 to 11.7. This decrease was caused partly by a refinement in the WWL analysis for recording the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity.
- Converts experience pressure particularly in the *Private* and *Family sphere*. Pressure is strongest in the *Family sphere*. Religious values (like the Islamic prohibition of apostasy) and cultural values (like family honor) are blended, creating a mix in which it is very difficult for people to leave Islam.
- The score for violence went down from 2.2 in WWL 2017 to 1.1. There has not been a significant change in circumstances, but less violence has been reported.

Private sphere:

Both converts from Islam and cross-denominational “church-changers” experience pressure in this sphere of life. In Gaza the situation for Christians with a Muslim background is very serious. Also in the West Bank, converts from Islam cannot openly practice their faith. Giving any impression to those around them that they might be Christian can have serious consequences. All other types of Christianity have more freedom to practice their faith privately, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims. In Gaza, the display of Christian symbols (e.g. crosses) is dangerous for converts.

Family sphere:

If their faith is discovered, converts are put under pressure by their families, especially in Gaza but also – to a lesser extent - in the West Bank. If it is known of converts’ children that their parents are Christians, they are likely to be harassed or discriminated against, especially in Gaza. Children of the historical Christian communities may also be discriminated against in schools in Gaza. Except for converts, most

Christians are generally free to live their Christian convictions within the circle of the family. However, if a Christian husband and father converts to Islam and divorces his Christian wife, their children (if under 18 years of age) would automatically become Muslims. Also, if a Christian married to a Muslim is divorced, he or she would be excluded from having custody of the children. This is explained by the fact that a large part of family law is handled by *Sharia* which does not treat Christians on an equal footing with Muslims.

Community sphere:

In Gaza – and in majority Muslim communities in the West Bank – there is pressure on the entire local Christian community. Adding to this is the general context of political unrest and the growing influence of radical Islam in the Middle East, especially in Gaza. Christian women might feel the pressure to cover up when they go out – e.g. wearing long sleeves in public. If they do not, they risk being the target of harassment. The number of Christians is diminishing and the influence of radical Islam is growing. For safety reasons, most of the converts need to hide their new faith from their community.

National sphere:

Laws in the West Bank generally protect religious freedom, whereas those in Gaza are restrictive. The Palestinian Basic Law – which functions as a temporary constitution – states that the official religion is Islam and *Sharia* (Islamic legislation) is the main source of legislation. The authorities sometimes fail to uphold and protect the rights of individual Christians and in some cases Christians – mostly converts - have to flee to safe places somewhere else in the area. In engaging with the authorities, subtle discrimination is present in the entire Palestinian Territories, especially in Gaza, but this is less prevalent in areas with a large Christian population (as in the Bethlehem area). Nevertheless, Christians are involved within the government. During Ramadan, it is socially unacceptable to consume food in public during the day. As a religious minority in a majority Muslim society – and one which is often identified with the (Christian) West - Christians have to be careful in expressing their opinions and are inclined to self-censor. Converts cannot openly interact with the authorities as Christians.

Church sphere:

Converts with a Muslim background cannot officially gather as a congregation nor can they openly join existing churches in both Gaza and the West Bank. For non-registered Protestant churches, it is hard to get permission to build a church in the West Bank. In Gaza, this is practically impossible for all types of Christianity. Importing materials (including Christian literature or Bibles) to the West Bank can be problematic and is difficult for Gaza, due to Israeli control and bureaucracy.

Within the Palestinian Territories there are some areas of friction between the different churches. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the main disputes were between the ‘old’ Greek-Orthodox and the ‘new’ Roman Catholic Church. Nowadays, it is the Evangelicals who are the newcomers and who are received with suspicion by the traditional churches. This is partly caused by different theological views, in particular when it comes to the status of Israel, where the traditional churches see Evangelicals as Western or Zionist and more in favor of Israel. Leaders of all church denominations are trying to protect their own flock. Hence, cross-denominational “church-changers” sometimes experience pressure from their (extended) family or community.

Violence:

The score for violence is at a very low level. No Christian has been arrested for his faith during the WWL 2018 reporting period and (reportedly) less church properties were damaged. However, a Christian with a Muslim background in Gaza was physically assaulted by his family and had to go into hiding. A female convert was reported to be under family house arrest. However, it must be remembered that not all violence is reported, especially if it is happening within families.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Sometimes, Christian girls and women are looked down upon by their Muslim neighbors, because they are not obviously Muslims (e.g. they do not wear a veil). There is also the issue of honor killings, an accepted practice that leaves girls and women vulnerable. A Muslim girl who wants to come to Christ would refrain from doing so, because of her knowledge that one of her family members might kill her.

Male:

Job discrimination especially affects men – and their families, as they are usually the main family breadwinners.

Future outlook

Without any hope of a sustainable political solution to the conflict with Israel materializing, outbreaks of Israeli-Palestinian unrest are likely to continue happening in Gaza and West Bank over the next few years. Nation-building and reform are hindered by (among other factors) divisions between Hamas and Fatah. Until now, reconciliation attempts between both parties have failed and there are no guarantees that the most recent agreement of October 2017 will overcome the impasse. It has been announced that general elections will take place by the end 2018. If they do take place they will be the first for more than a decade and could cause a major shift in Palestinian politics. The outcome and possible consequences of such elections are unpredictable and they could easily lead to further internal conflict as well as to another uprising against the Israelis. But these elections were announced in November 2017 and they might just die a silent death over the next months as earlier election attempts have done.

As the peace process seems likely to stagnate, the chance of new outbursts of violence remains high. The Palestinian president is ageing and reportedly has health issues, and there does not seem to be a clear roadmap for his succession.

In particular in Gaza, the socio-economic situation is bad. Unemployment is high, youth unemployed even higher, there is only electricity for a couple of hours each day and the strip is overcrowded. The tiny Christian minority has almost no perspective for the future. The socio-economic situation in the West Bank is better, but unemployment is a big issue as well. It is the lack of hope for a political solution to the conflict

in the near future though, which forms the biggest threat for all inhabitants of the Palestinian Territories. The current situation can easily lead to an outbreak of violence. This is further affecting the quality of life of all Palestinians negatively, including Christians, leading to a continuing emigration of the latter. According to some Palestinian Christians, if the current situation continues, there will be no Christians left within one generation.

Policy considerations

Open Doors suggests the following recommendations:

- Above all, the international community, the Palestinian leadership and the Israeli leadership should strive for a sustainable political solution to the conflict based upon the UN resolutions. This should help to stop the ongoing emigration of Christians.
- The Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority should respect basic human rights for all Palestinians, including Christians in the West Bank.
- The influence of radical Islamic organizations in the Palestinian Territories is growing. The international community should urge the political leaders of the Palestinian Territories and of Israel to address the threats posed by these organizations and protect the Christian population. It is crucial that the sense of hopelessness and despair, which leads to radicalism is recognized and dealt with at all political levels.
- Palestinian Basic Law should be amended or fully implemented to provide full protection for religious minorities and to provide in law and practice for Freedom of Religion or Belief and conversion.
- The Palestinian and Israeli authorities should ensure all citizens of any religion enjoy equal rights in the workplace, ensuring company policies end discrimination in appointments, salary and promotions.

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37. Mali

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 59 / Position: 37

WWL 2017 Points: 59 / Position: 32

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 44

For WWL 2018, Mali remained at the same score of 59 points as in WWL 2017. Although the score for violence more than doubled, this was countered by a fall in average in pressure on Christians. However,

this fall in pressure is mainly due to a refinement in WWL analysis which now takes the percentage of the national population living in an affected area rather than a whole geographical area. Given the lower population density in northern Mali where the pressure is more pronounced, the resulting score for pressure is lower than in the analysis for WWL 2017.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Mali ⁶⁶	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Very weak
Ethnic antagonism	Weak
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Mali, as is typical in other West African states, has always had (mostly) moderate Islam dominance and a constitutionally secular political system which prohibits religious political parties, even though a high percentage of its population is Muslim. Christians used to have sufficient freedom in Malian society, including the presence of foreign Christian missionaries (although the northern part of the country had always been problematic for Christians). The situation changed when the creation of the independent state of Azawad in northern Mali was proclaimed in April 2012. The Islamists, most of whom can be identified as Wahhabis, soon established an Islamic state system with a strict Sharia regime in the north. Most Christians fled before the Islamists took over. In the meantime, they destroyed churches and other Christian buildings. The Church in southern Mali has also been negatively affected by the increasing visibility of various Wahhabi groups. Although the rebels and the government have reached a peace agreement and international peacekeepers are in place, the tendency for Islamic radicalization in Malian society may continue, and increasingly put pressure on or physically harm the lives of Christians and their churches.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Mali	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very Weak
Ethnic group leaders	Weak
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Weak
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Weak

⁶⁶ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Violent religious groups	Very Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Weak
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers for Islamic oppression

The main drivers of Islamic oppression in Mali are militant Islamic groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) who are active mainly in the northern part of the country but also with an ability to strike and conduct attacks and kidnappings even in the southern part of the country. Segments of the population influenced by the radical and intolerant teaching of Wahhabism are also drivers of persecution especially aiming at Christians with a Muslim background. Therefore, generally speaking, fanatical Islamist movements and teachers are the major drivers of persecution in Mali, and due to their alliance with such movements the rebels based in the north can be considered drivers of persecution too.

Context

Mali is one of the least developed countries in the world but is also rich in gold and other minerals, which are mined by South African and European companies. And yet the main economic development model relies on foreign aid, including the World Bank and other international donors, and bilateral donations from the European Union, European countries and the United States. In addition, France is a main commercial partner and other countries (e.g. China and Middle Eastern states) trade with and invest in Mali.

Since the Islamist takeover of northern Mali in April 2012 and the subsequent French-led effort to restore Malian authority to the entire country in early 2013, the situation of civil liberties and political rights is yet to return to pre-2012 levels in both the north and south of the country. The Tuareg rebels and Malian authorities signed a deal on 18 June 2013, paving the way for the redeployment of administration and Malian army forces to the northern city of Kidal, which was controlled by fighters of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). However, this was not a comprehensive peace agreement that put an end to the rebellion. As of May 2013, all regions of northern Mali returned to government control, except for the most north-eastern region of Kidal.

The conflict between the government and opposition militant actors in Mali is nothing new. The main opposition group which has posed the greatest threat to the government is the MNLA. The MNLA has been the representative of Tuareg independence militias since 2011, but its legacy dates back to 1916. Since 1916, there have been at least five Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali under both French rule and post-

independence Mali since 1960. All of the rebellions have been part of the effort to establish a state in northern Mali, separate from national leadership, a state called Azawad.

In June 2015, the Tuareg rebels belonging to the Azawad Movements Coalition entered in to a peace agreement with the government after their demands (including greater political competences, a regional security force and more investment in the region's development) were met by the government. Despite the peace agreement the security situation in Mali is still fragile and Islamic militant groups continue to stage attacks. For example in June 2017, gunmen attacked a resort in Bamako Mali that is frequented by [foreigners](#)⁶⁷ and killed two people. An al-Qaeda affiliate in northern Mali has also staged a suicide attack against a facility housing soldiers and fighters belonging to a militia affiliated with the government, resulting in the [death of 50 people](#)⁶⁸ in January 2017. As these incidents show, the security situation in Mali is still precarious. These militant groups have shown hostility to and persecuted not only Christians but even adherents of Islam who do not subscribe to the extremist brand of Islam such groups try to impose.

Apart from Christians, animists or those who adhere to indigenous traditional belief systems can also be considered as religious minorities in Mali. Although historically such beliefs have co-existed with Islam, with the rise of more militant and intolerant versions of Islam in Mali, animists have also been targeted for violent attacks in the northern part of the country.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Communities of expatriate Christians do not exist in Mali as a separate category as defined by WWL methodology.

Historical Christian communities:

These include Roman Catholic churches and a significant number of various Protestant denominations. Among the less than 5% of Malians who are Christian, the majority belong to historical Christian communities. Those living in the southern part of the country enjoy freedom of religion in relative terms as compared with their counterparts in the north. Nevertheless, although the degree and intensity of the threat of attacks by Islamic militants is greater in the north than in the south, those in the south also have to face threats of attack and kidnapping.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

These small communities of Christians with a Muslim background are mainly to be found among the Bozo and the Dogon, but there are also converts living elsewhere in the country. In addition to the threat from

⁶⁷ See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/18/africa/urgent--gunfire-heard-at-mali-tourist-resort/index.html>, last accessed 18 September 2017.

⁶⁸ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-38663693>, last accessed 18 September 2017.

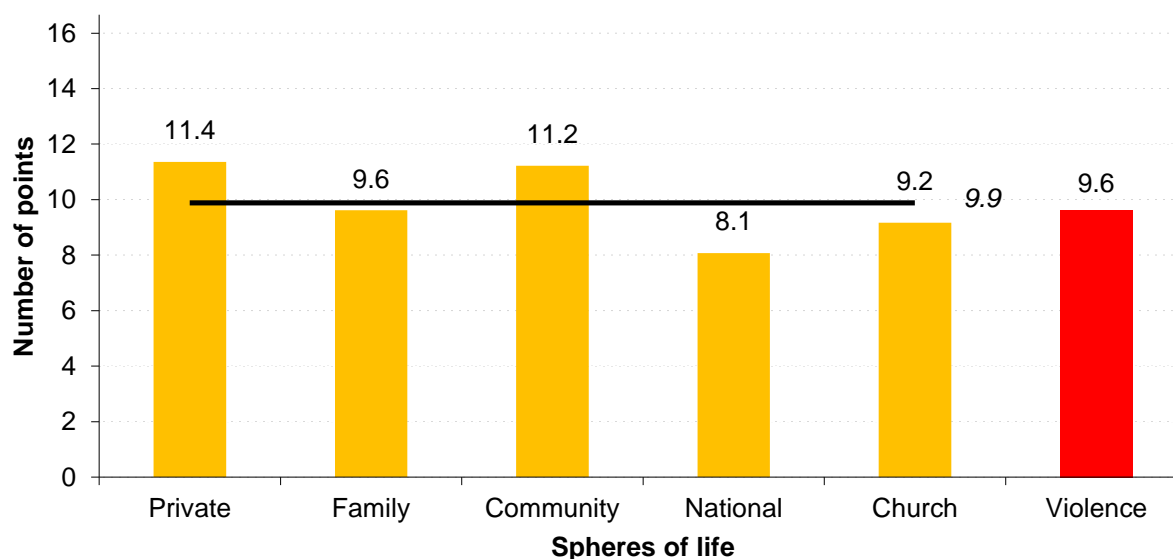
Islamic militants that most Malian Christians face, converts to Christianity particularly face varying degrees of pressure to renounce Christianity from their family members, relatives and neighbors.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

Mali has a small number of charismatic and Pentecostal churches mainly found in the southern part of the country. Due to their style of worship and their likelihood to be more engaged in evangelism such communities are likely to draw the ire and hostility of society at large.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Mali



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mali went down from 11.0 in WWL 2017 to 9.2. As already stated above, this fall in pressure is mainly due to a refinement in WWL analysis which takes the percentage of the national population living in an affected area rather than a whole geographical area. Given the lower population density in northern Mali where the pressure is more pronounced, the resulting score for pressure is lower than in the analysis for WWL 2017. Thus, the lower score for pressure does not really reflect a change in the level of freedom and security enjoyed by Christians as compared with WWL 2017.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private sphere* due to the problems believers with a Muslim background will face in parts of the country where the influence of radical Islamic teachers is strongest.

- The score for violence went up from 4.3 in WWL 2017 to the very high level of 9.6. This reflects how violent militant groups in the country are becoming an increasing threat to the safety of Christians in Mali.

Private sphere:

It is particularly difficult for converts to live out their faith even in private. Living arrangements and conditions are such that their deviance from Islamic rites and their acts of private worship could easily be detected and lead to persecution.

Family sphere:

Particularly in the north, the extended family of any Christian with a Muslim background is likely to exert pressure on the convert to renounce Christianity fearing that a convert within their family could make them vulnerable to ostracism by the community.

Community sphere:

Christians in the north have felt less safe than in the past to openly participate in community affairs due to the influence of Islamist groups. Although the Islamic militants have been pushed back, they have not been eradicated and fears of possible new insurgencies remain. Even local Muslims do not want Christians to return to their homes and Christian property has often been taken and occupied by others.

National sphere:

The level of pressure in the WWL 2018 reporting period at national level was less than in the previous reporting period; however, Christians in the north have felt threatened by the lingering influence of Islamist groups and are afraid of openly displaying Christian symbols.

Church sphere:

In the south, society accepts Christian gatherings, although some Christians have felt threatened by lingering Islamist movements. Normal church life is not yet possible in the north.

Violence:

- The level of violence - especially against Christians in the northern part of the country - is very high and increased from 4.3 in WWL 2017 to 9.6. Both government and international peacekeeping forces operating in northern Mali have not been able to fully restore law and order and guarantee the security and freedom of Christians. An assortment of militant Islamic groups are still active in the north and have occasionally also attacked parts of the country that were considered to be safe.
- On 16 November 2016, suspected Islamic militants [shot and killed](#)⁶⁹ the Christian deputy mayor of Kerana. Moussa Issah Bary was a rare example of a Christian member of the predominantly Muslim Fulani ethnic group which is one of the most prominent Muslim ethnic groups in the whole of West Africa.

⁶⁹ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/12/murder-of-fulani-christian-mayor-in-mali-increases-concerns-over-creeping-islamic-extremism/>, last accessed 20 December 2017.

- A Colombian nun, Gloria Argoti, was kidnapped by a consortium of Islamic groups on 7 February 2017 in the southern part of the [country](#)⁷⁰ which is normally considered safe. The militant groups include Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, al-Mourabitoun and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).
- Christians in Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao have not been allowed to rebuild churches which were destroyed a few years ago.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Many Christian women and girls are subjected to sexual abuse, forced marriage, under-age marriage, and are denied access to modern education. This is particularly rampant in northern Mali. Although there are national laws that protect women and girls in general, traditional and cultural practices and norms make women more vulnerable for such treatment including early marriage, forced marriage polygamy and female genital mutilation. As a result of such practices, fellow Christians are traumatized, and lose confidence in the authorities in their country, and their faith is sometimes also affected.

Male:

Young men are subjected to abduction, forced conversion and conscription in militia in the northern parts of the country. This has a devastating effect on their families and fellow Christians who are traumatized by such persecution.

Future outlook

- The main trend facing Mali is the rising influence of militant Islam and Wahhabism in the country. It will take a long time to build up a Christian presence again in the north of Mali. Islamic militants continue to be active in Mali, notwithstanding the peace deal that was signed in 2015, and will remain a threat in the years to come. The peace deal is very fragile and the government and UN peacekeepers are still unable to establish the authority of the government in some parts of the country. The restoration of law and order as well as governmental authority in the northern part of the country is a prerequisite for the improvement of the situation for Christians in northern Mali.
- The situation in Mali cannot be seen in isolation; it is part of the overall rise of Islamic militancy and Wahhabism in the entire region. Therefore, the trajectory of the political and security situation in the whole region is very crucial for the future of Mali. Furthermore, even if the government of Mali and other regional states manage to crush the armed Islamic militancy of groups like AQIM, the radicalization of the youth and society at large by this group is a more intractable problem that is creating a hostile environment for Christians for years to come.

⁷⁰ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/kidnapped-missionaries-appear-video-posted-jihadist-groups-africas-sahel/>, last accessed 20 December 2017.

Policy considerations

Taking in to account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors International makes the following policy recommendations:

- Through the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; MINUSMA) the government of Mali and the international community together should enable religious minorities (especially Christians) to exercise their freedom of religion in northern Mali by rebuilding communities and ensuring security.
- The government of Mali should ensure that Christians are guaranteed rights as citizens of the state, therefore entitled to freedom of religion and deserving protection.

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38. Indonesia

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 59 / Position: 38

WWL 2017 Points: 55 / Position: 46

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 43

Indonesia's WWL 2018 score of 59 points shows an increase of four points in comparison to WWL 2017. Pressure on Christians increased in all *Spheres of life*. Pressure increased for all categories of Christians, possibly best reflected in the large-scale demonstrations organized by radical Islamic groups against Jakarta's Christian governor of Chinese ethnicity "Ahok". The latter was finally arrested and sentenced to two years prison in May 2017 on charges of alleged blasphemy. This shocked the Christian community which has come under more attacks.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Indonesia ⁷¹	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Medium
Ethnic antagonism	Very Weak

⁷¹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Indonesia is a country both blessed and challenged by its diversity. It hosts the largest Muslim population in the world, whose predominant brand of Islam is traditionally fairly tolerant, granting minorities some space (often referred to as: *Islam Nusantara* or *Island Islam*, referring to the archipelago's unique topography of more than 17,000 islands and to its diversity). In regard to geography as well as religion, Indonesia is one of the most de-centralized countries in the world. Although the Constitution of Indonesia guarantees religious freedom, various regions and territories of Indonesia are governed by a host of Islamic by-laws, including Sharia law in the Province of Aceh. Radical groups have increasingly gained influence as was shown in the WWL 2018 reporting period when *Hizb-ut Tahrir Indonesia* and the Islamic Defender Front (FPI) took to the streets of Jakarta, protesting against the (Christian Chinese) governor of Jakarta, "Ahok". They managed not only to influence voters to not re-elect him, but also put so much pressure on courts and society that he was sentenced to two years Imprisonment on grounds of alleged blasphemy. These organizations publically use strict religious interpretations to justify the implementation of Sharia law and the infringement of the rights of religious minorities. They are used by politicians and their parties in Jakarta for getting leverage, although the government decided to ban Hizb-ut Tahrir in May 2017. Indonesia's universities are known to be hotbeds of [Islamic radicalization](#)⁷² and more and more money from Saudi Arabia is pouring in, used for education purposes, but having the effect of bringing Wahhabi ideology into the country. Not only Christians are affected by the radical Islamic groups; Muslim minority groups such as Ahmadis suffer as well.

Religious nationalism (Medium):

As already stated, Indonesia is one of the most diverse countries in the world, be it in language, ethnicity or religion. Another example of this is the predominantly Hindu island of Bali. If a Hindu converts to Christianity, there is strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors to return to the belief of their fathers.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Indonesia	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very Weak
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Strong

⁷² See: <http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/one-14-high-school-students-support-islamic-state/>, last accessed 20 December 2016.

Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Weak
Violent religious groups	Very Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Weak
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Very Strong
Own (extended) family	Medium
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Persecution comes from radical Islamic religious leaders, who instigate hatred against Christians and other religious minorities via their teaching in mosques and in the mass media as well. Several conservative Muslim political parties, e.g. the PKS, are known to push their agenda for an Islamic nation. Their representatives in the legislation are often behind the drafting and passing of Sharia-inspired policies (including in the field of education), although they have but a small electorate. More influential are radical Islamic pressure groups like the FPI. They are able to mobilize hundreds of thousands for street demonstrations, they are also used by some politicians and parties to gain electoral leverage. The government per se is not a driver of persecution at the national level. The difficulties arise when it comes to the implementation of policies at the local level and to confrontations with radical Islamic pressure groups.

Context

President Joko Widodo faced considerable challenges in the WWL 2018 reporting period. The ousting of Jakarta Governor Ahok (mentioned above) was also a warning shot to Ahok's long-term ally, Jokowi, and points to an already heated atmosphere in the run-up to the [national elections in 2019](#).⁷³ While Jokowi's approval rates with 60% are still surprisingly high, given that the end of his first presidential term is coming close, his largest challenge may become a [weakening economy](#).⁷⁴ But he will be attacked in person as well, as was shown in July 2017, when his 22 year-old son has been called in by police for questioning due to [blasphemy allegations](#).⁷⁵ The fact that Governor Ahok [won the first round](#)⁷⁶ of gubernatorial elections in Jakarta, despite all protests from radical Islamic groups, shows that people are fed up with corruption and want politicians to improve their living standards and not to fill their own pockets. The person who had doctored Ahok's speech, put the video online and created the outcry, has since been [sentenced](#)⁷⁷ to 18 months in prison (in November 2017).

⁷³ See: <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co17073-2017-jakarta-election-and-indonesias-democracy-jakartas-contentious-election-what-anies-baswedans-victory-means/#.WdZ3DH-WxZV>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁷⁴ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-politics/after-political-storm-indonesia-president-faces-economic-clouds-idUSKCN1BF07S?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁷⁵ See: <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesia-jokowi-07072017181416.html>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁷⁶ See: <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/15/jakarta-election-heads-for-second-round-as-christian-governor-holds-narrow-lead.html>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁷⁷ See: <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesia-politics-11142017175623.html>, last accessed 16 December 2018.

Indonesia still struggles with the violent threat radical Islamic groups continue to pose. In July 2017, a bomb attack in Jakarta [killed three police officers](#),⁷⁸ more bomb attacks were foiled. Merely [prohibiting](#)⁷⁹ radical movements will not be enough, especially as war veterans will return from IS battle fields in Iraq and Syria and not all of them will immediately move on to the latest place of Islamic fighting: Marawi in the Philippines.

Other religious groups suffering persecution are the Muslim minority groups Ahmadi and Shia. They have also come under scrutiny by both the authorities and radical Islamic groups. Adherents to traditional indigenous religions used not to be recognized by the authorities, but this may change due to the recent ruling of the Constitutional Court (see “National sphere”).

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

These groups are not involuntarily isolated from local Christians and are therefore not considered as a separate category for WWL purposes.

Historical Christian communities:

These are groups such as the Roman Catholic Church, but also churches related to several ethnicities (such as the Batak Christian Protestant Church). They are monitored and experience persecution once it is noted that they are growing. The historical churches in poorer regions like Papua, East Nusa Tenggara and Mentawai are subject to aggressive Islamization attempts, especially among children, as Islamic mission efforts get bolder.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Converts to Christianity in Indonesia come mainly (but not exclusively) from a Muslim background and face the most severe persecution, especially in the hot-spot areas. There, they are closely monitored and try to blend in with the surrounding society. If their conversion is discovered, they are put under pressure to give up their new faith. Pressure comes from family, friends, community local authorities. Another driver of persecution are Islamic radical groups.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

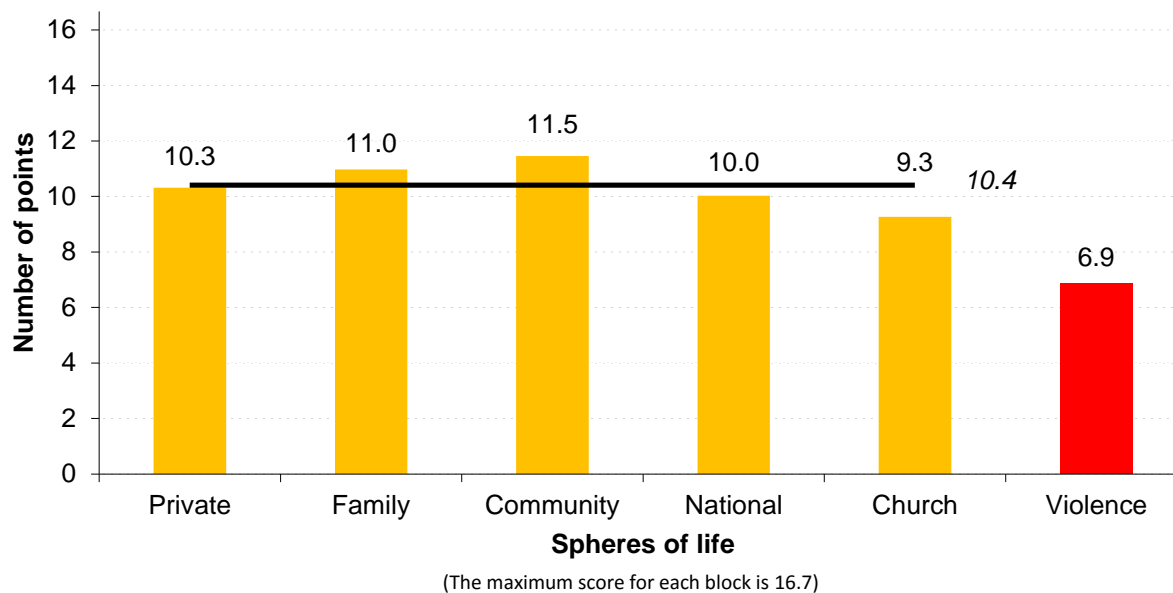
The main congregations in these category are Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal. They are made conspicuous by their often fervent propagation of the Christian message, which leads them to be targeted by communities and extremist groups alike. Building or renovating a church can be fraught with difficulties – the authorities must issue a permit and Islamic groups and neighbors will often attempt to hinder the actual building process. (However, Catholic churches can face the very same problems with building permissions.)

⁷⁸ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/24/jakarta-suicide-bombers-kill-three-police-officers-in-bus-station-attack>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁷⁹ See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Jakarta-approves-law-prohibiting-radical-Islamist-groups-41266.html>, last accessed 30 September 2017

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Indonesia



The Persecution pattern shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Indonesia increased in all *spheres of life*, causing the average pressure to be at a high level. It rose from a score of 9.6 in WWL 2017 to 10.4 in WWL 2018. (Compared to WWL 2017, pressure increased most in the *Family sphere*, closely followed by the *National sphere*.)
- Pressure is strongest in the *Community* and *Family spheres* followed by the *Private sphere*. This pattern is typical in situations where Christian converts from a Muslim background draw the most persecution. The increase in points in the *National sphere* (from 8.9 in WWL 2017 to 10.0) reflects the increasing influence of radical Islamic groups in national life as well as the stricter implementation of blasphemy laws against a prominent politician and Christian.
- Violence against Christians remained exactly on the same level as in WWL 2017 (6.9), although the WWL 2018 reporting period started with a bomb attack against a church in Samarinda, killing a two year old. Apart from that, there were also other churches closed, damaged and/or destroyed.

Private sphere:

While traditional Christians enjoy freedom from fear to live their Christian life, the situation for converts from Islam is different. Converts always have to be careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only believers in their family. Bibles and other Christian literature have to be hidden carefully, and can only be read secretly to avoid conflict. Fellowship with other Christians can become challenging in these circumstances, as they bring themselves and people around them into danger. The situation is different in big cities or in Christian enclaves. On the other hand, other types of Christianity also face limitations in worshipping or expressing their faith in hot-spot areas in Indonesia. In these areas, Christians are closely

monitored as are known converts, the latter are subjected to house arrest physical or mental abuse. This is most common in hotspot areas like Aceh, East Java, Banten, West Java and West Sumatera.

Family sphere:

Converts sometimes have to register their children with the majority religion. Changing their religion often draws many questions, suspicion and pressure from the community and, at times, even from the local authorities. It also exposes them to the authorities and the growing radical Islamic groups. When converts are discovered, they often face the threat of divorce and loss of their inheritance rights, which happens to Hindu converts as well. Organizing a baptism, wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible in the hotspot areas, especially for converts.⁸⁰ Christians that live in enclaves or in big cities like Jakarta and Surabaya, are able to obtain Christian education for their children. However, in provinces where Christians are the minority, there are more difficulties. Children of Christian parents in general are forced to attend Islamic lessons, and be examined in the subject; sometimes this is also due to a lack of Christian teachers. Christian students are frequently discriminated against. Many Muslim families forbid their children to play with Christian children. Converts can be isolated from their families and even be cast out by them.

Community sphere:

Converts face strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to recant the Christian faith, though conversion is not forbidden by law. Chiefly in areas like Aceh and other hot-spot areas, Christians experience discrimination in their private lives as well as in their business lives and are urged to follow Sharia law. In such areas, Christian activities are closely watched by neighbors and Islamic radical groups. In some parts of Indonesia, developers build a housing complex for Muslim residents only and non-Muslims are forbidden to rent or buy a house in that complex. According to reports obtained in 2017, some doctors did not want to touch Christian patients or visit a Christian villager's house as it is considered forbidden (haram) for Muslims to touch them. Children of Christian parents report facing discrimination on behalf of teachers and peers in schools and are even denied scholarships and receive poorer marks in religious education. This is done in order to keep such students from meeting the minimum requirements to become a civil servant. Consequently, few Christians make it into the civil service and many experience discrimination in their business lives. Many churches in Indonesia are forced to pay "uang keamanan" (security money) to radical groups in exchange for being able to conduct Sunday services.

National sphere:

The Constitution does not limit the freedom of Christians; but it recognizes only six faiths: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. However, the Constitutional Court stated clearly in a verdict on 7 November 2017, that all religions have to be [treated equally](#)⁸¹, including indigenous religions. Legislation on a local level often restricts religious freedom further. The attitude

⁸⁰ On the subject of funerals: One illustration of rising Islamic radicalism can be found in the following report. After the recent "Ahok" case, some radical Muslim leaders refused to celebrate Islamic funerals for any Muslims who showed support for Jakarta Governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama. Posters marking this campaign can be seen publicly in many places all over Indonesia, even Jakarta.

⁸¹ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/indonesia-high-court-milestone-ruling-religious-freedom/>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

against Christians is often negative, and even in more tolerant cities like Jakarta, public servants are often discriminated against because of their faith. Christian NGOs can be freely founded, but some Islamic organizations promote bad press against them. Though the country enjoys a free and diverse press, several Islamic media outlets have run smear campaigns and spread fear and hatred towards Christians. One example of this is the campaign against the Chinese. This proved very successful against the ethnically Chinese Christian governor of Jakarta: He ended up in prison and the campaign even caused the government to propose broadening a [new draft blasphemy law](#)⁸², leaving Christians to wonder where this may end: If even such a high-ranking and well-connected politician like Ahok cannot escape such wrong accusations, how much less can the average Christian?

Church sphere:

Churches face massive problems in the registration of congregations and in the construction of church-buildings. Based on the revised Joint Ministerial Decree of 2006, a church can only operate if: i) its congregation has at least 90 members, ii) it has the consent of 60 neighbors from another faith, and iii) it has the approval of both the regency chief (administrative subdivision of a province) and the inter-faith harmony forum. Many churches find the permit extremely hard to obtain, even if they have met all the necessary requirements. And if they do manage to receive the permit, there is no guarantee of protection from the government and local police. In one case, the congregation filed its application five years ago and has never received any response from the authorities. In other cases, radical groups simply block the entrance of church buildings and hinder access. Based on a survey by the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), 85% of worship buildings in Indonesia have no proper permit, especially in rural areas. This includes mosques, churches and the houses of worship of other religions. Prior to building a church, the government of Aceh requires the congregation to collect 150 signatures from neighbors of a different religious background. In the province of Banten, there has been a provincial regulation issued by the governor to prohibit the presence of churches, demanding that Christian meetings are limited to the capital city of Serang. In general, producing or distributing religious materials and Bibles is no problem, but there are exceptions in the hot-spot areas where distributing Bibles to non-Christians may be considered proselytization.

Violence:

The WWL 2018 reporting period started sadly with the bombing of a church in Samarinda on 13 November 2016, in which a two-year-old toddler was [killed and three others wounded](#).⁸³ In May 2017 Jakarta's Christian governor of Chinese ethnicity "Ahok", was arrested and sentenced to two years' imprisonment on charges of alleged blasphemy.

Gender profile of persecution

No data available.

⁸² See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/20/indonesia-religious-rights-bill-would-harm-minorities>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁸³ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/2-year-old-girl-dead-after-indonesia-church-attack/>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

Future outlook

Indonesia faces very interesting and maybe even decisive times. The fact, that ethnic and religious affiliations were used for political gains without concern for the consequences, shocked many Indonesians and significantly harmed the country's international image of sponsoring a tolerant brand of Islam. And there are more worrying signs ahead. Propaganda from the Islamic State group (IS) has been in use by [school-children](#),⁸⁴ indoctrinating them at a very early age. Also, since the state-owned Saudi Fund for Development will be pouring out [14 billion US Dollars for social aid](#)⁸⁵ (including funding for businesses, education and religion), the intolerant and radical Wahhabi brand of Islam will continue to spread across the islands. In August 2017, the Jakarta governor-elect, Anies Rasyid Baswedan, only called upon the radical Islamic group FPI to [protect religious and cultural diversity](#),⁸⁶ which makes it hard to believe that radical Islamic groups will be restricted in any way. This is true, even if at least one of its leaders is currently involved in a potential scandal: FPI leader Rizieq Shihab, who studied in Saudi Arabia and was recently travelling there when he was [accused of involvement in a case of pornography](#)⁸⁷. Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), is [mired in a struggle](#)⁸⁸ about its theological direction. Many younger clerics view the relatively liberal brand of Islam Nusantara (a.k.a. "Islam of the Islands") as not being compatible with classic Islamic theology and values. Several of those young clerics have formed a group within NU, calling itself the 'True Path'. All this shows that in Indonesia, *Islamic oppression* as well as *Organized corruption and crime* are gaining strength.

Although President Jokowi has been highly applauded for his commitment to invest in development for the whole country (not only the West but also the so-called underdeveloped East like Papua), he is unfortunately very silent on religious issues. Some observers say that he is playing it safe as he is also a target for the same political enemies that brought Ahok down. Seeing the widening rift between radical Islamic groups, the moderate Muslim majority and minority religious groups in society, the government has been launching media campaigns about "One-Indonesia", reviving the old national tagline of unity-in-diversity. How effective these campaigns are at grassroots-level is highly questionable: The new governor of Jakarta, for instance, seemed to contradict this and used [racial undertones](#)⁸⁹ in his inaugural speech by saying: "All of us natives have been oppressed, pushed aside. Now is the time for us to become the masters in the country of Indonesia." And in a separate development, results have been published from an October 2017 poll among university and high-school students, in which around a quarter of all participants agreed

⁸⁴ See: <http://zeenews.india.com/world/indonesia-says-seized-islamic-state-propaganda-likely-used-by-children-2020120.html>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁸⁵ See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/saudi-funding-of-indonesian-education-fuels-concerns/80083>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁸⁶ See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/jakarta-governor-elect-under-fire-for-embracing-hardliners/80092>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁸⁷ See: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/08/19/rizieq-wants-to-go-home-after-being-questioned-in-saudi.html>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁸⁸ See: <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co17018-politics-plurality-and-inter-group-relations-in-indonesia-islam-nusantara-its-critics-the-rise-of-nus-young-clerics/#.WdaFzX-WxZU>, last accessed 30 September 2017.

⁸⁹ See: <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesia-politics-10162017183054.html>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

that „Islamic State“ ideology is [worth fighting for](#)⁹⁰ and that a caliphate would be the preferable state system. This all goes to show that Indonesia is in danger of losing its reputation of following a tolerant brand of Islam. Given that major elections are coming in 2018 and 2019, it remains to be seen if politicians can withstand the temptation of wooing Islamic extremists to increase their vote-bank. Moderate Islamic organizations like Nadhlatul Ulama or Muhammadiyah need to become more active too.

Policy considerations

- The government of Indonesia should ensure that it continues to promote the values of tolerance and pluralism, in particular as it steps up efforts to maintain public order and security. Such policies should safeguard Freedom of Religion or Belief, and seek to tackle the propagation of radical Islam and media smear campaigns aimed at inciting hatred and unrest.
- The government should draft and enforce a policy that curbs the spread of teachings on religious radicalism, violence, and intolerance in the educational system, especially public schools, and instead promote teachings on tolerance and diversity.
- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and international community should cooperate closely with Indonesia to develop a plan for dealing with radical Islamic fighters returning from Syria and Iraq.
- The international community should urge the Indonesian government and its legislative body to abolish any legal disposition that restricts freedom of religion. Islamic by-laws are in force in many regions and territories and the province of Aceh is ruled by Sharia law. These legal dispositions contradict the core principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular in relation to freedom of religion.
- The government should do all that is in its power to prevent and punish the violence of radical Islamic groups against houses of worship of religious minorities, including Christians. In addition, the government should dissolve civil society groups that spread violence in the name of Islam.
- The government should remove any practical or administrative obstacles regarding the registration of church buildings. The international community should urge the Indonesian government to repeal its blasphemy laws as they continue to be abused by radical Islamic groups.

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⁹⁰ See: <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesia-militants-10312017181359.html>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

39. Mexico

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 59 / Position: 39

WWL 2017 Points: 57 / Position: 41

WWL 2016 Points: 56 / Position: 40

The WWL 2018 score for Mexico is 59, a rise of two points compared to WWL 2017. This rise can be attributed to an increase in the intensity and frequency regarding the persecution of Christians within indigenous communities and to a deeper WWL analysis of factors related to secular intolerance.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Mexico ⁹¹	
Islamic oppression	Not at all
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Very Strong
Denominational protectionism	Very Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Strong
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Very Strong

Ethnic antagonism (Very strong):

The indigenous population represents about [21.5%](#)⁹² of the Mexican population and is mainly located in communities in rural areas along the country's southern border (Oaxaca, Yucatan and Chiapas) and central-western area (Hidalgo, Guerrero, Puebla and Jalisco). These communities are governed by indigenous traditional laws and customs and therefore the intervention of the State is minimal. Community leaders attempt to impose a single lifestyle according to their ancestral customs, in which ancient indigenous beliefs are often mixed with Roman Catholic influences. Where these tribal customs and this syncretistic tendency are rejected (for instance by Protestant Christians), punishment is swift, since such rejection is considered a serious attack on the indigenous community's worldview and welfare. Where a member of the community decides to convert to Christianity (usually Protestant), the communal authorities urge converts to renounce their new Christian faith and put pressure on them through fines,

⁹¹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

⁹² See: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf, last accessed 25 September 2017.

isolation, and through depriving their families of basic community services. Many are imprisoned and beaten to the point of death because of their faith. Government authorities fail to intervene in these cases since they consider these issues to simply be a matter of disagreement between members of the indigenous communities and not as a serious violation of human rights.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):

Crime and corruption are probably the most serious problems in Mexico. As they increase, the inefficiency and insufficiency of state action has increased too. In the ensuing [climate of impunity](#)⁹³ there is even less protection for citizens. The violence perpetrated by criminal groups particularly affects practicing Christians, who represent a challenge to the chaos and anarchy created by criminal gangs, especially in the so-called "[narco-states](#)".⁹⁴

There are frequent cases of extortion involving pastors and priests. Threats are also frequently made to make churches cease meeting and engaging in advocacy activities, especially if they try to evangelize young people, set up drug rehabilitation programs or make Christian converts out of those who were (or still are) linked to drug trafficking. These threats do not affect Christian leaders alone. Other Christians may be also victims of attacks (either personal or against their property) if they live their faith openly. Even the risk of kidnapping is increased simply by attending church services - with young Christians being at particular risk of being recruited by gangs. There is also widespread and sophisticated surveillance of church activities by members of drug cartels.

Secular Intolerance (Strong):

The international pressure on Mexico (especially exerted by UN and OAS⁹⁵) to remove Christian influence from public policy has not ceased, on the contrary, it has gained more ground during the government of President Peña Nieto. Since 2012, legislative initiatives and public policies aimed at promoting liberal ideologies in the country have been encouraged, even against the will of citizens, especially in matters related to the defense of unborn life and family. This situation particularly affects Christians, who, in their attempt to defend their own religious convictions and beliefs, are ridiculed, slandered and publicly attacked. Any kind of religious expression in the public sphere is considered to be an offense against the principles of secularism (separation of Church and State) thereby confining religion to the private sphere. This understanding of secularism is widespread and criticism of public manifestations of faith (such as processions, demonstrations organized by religious groups and political statements made by Christian leaders) are increasing, especially if they are linked to the political sphere (e.g. when a Christian participates in a government authority).

⁹³ See: <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/latin-america-scores-poorly-in-new-global-impunity-index>, last accessed 13 September 2017.

⁹⁴ This refers to states controlled by drug cartels and in which the state authorities have no influence. See: <http://www.proceso.com.mx/463066/nos-hemos-convertido-en-corresponsales-de-guerra-en-nuestro-propio-pais-jose-gil>, last accessed 13 September 2017.

⁹⁵ [The Organization of American States](#) (OAS) came into being in 1948, brings together all 35 [independent states](#) of the Americas and constitutes the main political, juridical, and social governmental forum in the Hemisphere. The Organization was established in order to achieve among its member states—as stipulated in Article 1 of the [OAS Charter](#)—"an order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence."

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Mexico	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Weak
Violent religious groups	Medium
Ideological pressure groups	Very Strong
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Weak
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Strong

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Tribal leaders and indigenous religious authorities reject any religious manifestation contrary to the community's ancestral customs, as this is regarded as an affront to the entire indigenous group. Some religious indigenous groups will therefore react violently against Christians. This attitude will also cause other members of the community and the own (extended) family to denounce Christian practices and reject them, as part of their obligations to the ethnic group and under the threat of being fined or prosecuted. Thus the Christian population's rights are infringed due to the absence of official government action and due to a misinterpretation of the concept of "Indigenous autonomy".

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

The most violent dimension can be seen in the attacks by criminal groups against church leaders. In many cases, government officials directly collaborate in the harassment of Christians. Through this collaboration they encourage impunity for abuses and crimes committed against Christians. Additionally, the fear of reprisals is a constant breeding-ground for impunity because of the high levels of corruption in the country (with the majority of political parties taking the lead). This fear motivates society or the own (extended family) to indirectly become accomplices with the mafia: They are then coerced into collaborating with criminal networks through monitoring Christian practices and passing on information or remaining silent when violence is used. Some organized crime groups are associated with the "Santeria" cult, which also opposes Christian faith.

Drivers of Secular intolerance:

Secular ideology in society has been strongly influenced by ideological pressure groups (such as the LGBTI community) and in practice, has been implemented both by the government itself (through some political parties clearly identifying with such ideological groups) and as a result of the influence of multilateral organizations. All these actors are trying to eliminate Christian values from the public sphere, especially regarding marriage, family and protecting the unborn. Because religious practices have come to be

regarded as something purely personal and spiritual (as in the style of New Age), society in general has now changed its past positive attitude towards the Christian faith to one of indifference and rejection.

Context

Contemporary history shows a country whose democracy has been weakened by the loss of legitimacy of its governmental authorities, the lack of security, the failing economy, an increase in the presence of organized crime and the lack of access to social services and justice. In this context, Christian leaders have assumed an influential role in society.

In 2012, the beginning of the gubernatorial period of President Enrique Peña Nieto meant the return to power of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). However this party is now [losing support](#)⁹⁶, as confirmed by the results of the country's 2016 and 2017 elections. The government of President Peña Nieto has [lost much power](#)⁹⁷ and has little space for manoeuvring when it comes to dealing with the problems facing the country, not to mention the corruption and money-laundering scandals involving the families of ruling politicians. This has led to a general mistrust in politics and public institutions and an increase in trust in Christian leaders with conservative leanings.

Violence by criminal groups has intensified (especially in border areas where drug abuse is prevalent). According to the Armed Conflict Survey 2017, Mexico is (after Syria) the country with the [highest level of killings](#)⁹⁸ and is renowned for human trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping. This violence is the main reason for the displacement of people to the interior of the country, but it is not the only factor. The increase in unemployment and poverty rates have forced many Mexican families to seek new opportunities in other areas of the Republic where they can find a greater degree of economic and social stability.

The economy of the country has plummeted in recent months. In January 2017, the [Mexican Peso](#)⁹⁹ was valued at 21.75 pesos per USD. Donald Trump announced restrictive measures in trade with Mexico during his campaign and also the implementation of a more aggressive control on migration. This caused panic among investors which has resulted in a decline in the national economy.

The situation of misgovernment affects the lives of all Mexicans. Inequality among the Mexican population has increased, highlighting both the lack of effective government policies and the sheer determination of the churches in their provision of assistance to the poor. This has caused frequent attacks against church members, along with the impunity (from the government) towards the perpetrators.

⁹⁶ See: <http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/nacional/pri-reconoce-crisis-de-credibilidad-ruiz-massieu.html>, last accessed 13 September 2017.

⁹⁷ See: <https://gruporeforma-blogs.com/encuestas/?p=6829>, last accessed 13 September 2017.

⁹⁸ See: <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-39877442>, last accessed 13 September 2017.

⁹⁹ See: <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/carera/economia/2017/01/4/dolar-cierra-en-nuevo-maximo-historico-de-2175>, last accessed 13 September 2017.

Christians are not the only religious group to experience intolerance. Hostility towards groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons has also increased in the country.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

This category does not exist in Mexico.

Historical Christian communities:

The Roman Catholic Church (which is still the majority religion) and small Orthodox, Presbyterian and Anglican communities make up this category. These communities are particularly affected by the consequences of organized crime and high levels of corruption as well as by the intolerance shown by society and government as regards the public expression of Christian beliefs.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

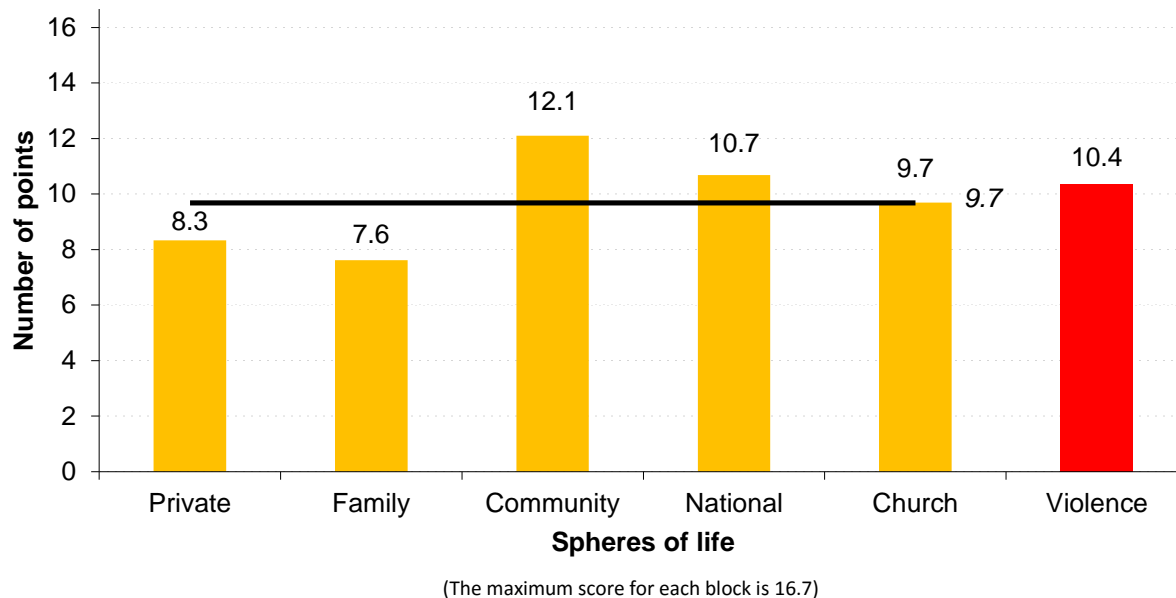
This category includes cross-denominational converts from historical Christian communities, converts from a criminal (mafia) background and Christians who abandoned the religious practices of the indigenous community to which they belonged. In such cases, they are put under pressure to leave their new faith and their new way of living. This pressure usually takes the form of threats of violence, expulsion and even death, if the communal or mafia leaders' demands are not met.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category includes Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal congregations and the Catholic Renewal Movement. They are particularly affected by the lack of understanding of religious diversity in the country, which leads to greater vulnerability for the younger Christian communities. This is especially the case where these communities are involved in advocacy activities in areas affected by organized crime and in the native communities, which refuse to accept the presence of other religious denominations.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Mexico



The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mexico is at a high level and rose from 8.4 in WWL 2017 to 9.7 in WWL 2018.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Community sphere* (very high: 12.1), *National sphere* (high: 10.7) and *Church sphere* (high: 9.7) due to the combination of various types of pressure exerted by criminal groups, indigenous leaders and public officers against Christians and the Church in general.
- The score for violence is very high at 10.4, but decreased from its WWL 2017 level of 14.4. Although the levels and frequency of violence did not decrease significantly, the types of violence were different. There were less reports of attacks on shops or businesses of Christians, and (especially within the indigenous communities) of the number of Christians sentenced to jail, labor camp etc. for faith-related reasons.

Private sphere:

Organized corruption and crime and *Ethnic antagonism* as persecution engines serve to increase the level of pressure in the private lives of Christians in Mexico. Drug mafia and cartels prohibit their members from adhering to or converting to Christianity, since this would be contrary (and dangerous) to their own ruling ideology and goals. The repression of indigenous converts to Christianity reaches the personal level in (immediate or extended) family pressure and may also include the demand to leave one's own home. Such pressure also prevents Christians from having fellowship with each other, since the risk of an attack against them is constant due to the supposed "danger" they represent (i.e. that their Christian faith might spread wider amongst community members).

Family sphere:

There have been cases where the registration of births, marriages or deaths of Christian converts (or their children, in the case of births) have been obstructed within indigenous communities. Baptisms, weddings, and burials celebrated with Christian rites have been hindered or restricted by communal authorities as a way of preventing any increase in such religious manifestations contrary to those of the community and as a form of punishment for those converting to Christianity. This situation of repression also affects their children, because community leaders try to prevent them from following their parent's faith. They are thus discriminated against and subjected to a high risk of being separated from their relatives in order to be raised by a non-Christian family. Also, since the national government is mainly responsible for public policies - especially in matters of education - and given the increasing secular intolerance within all governmental branches, there is strong opposition to the right of the parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs and convictions. Added to this is the fact that crime and corruption are also factors causing separation within families, as Christians are forced to look for a safe place to live elsewhere, when the danger of attack by criminal groups is high.

Community sphere:

The persecution engine *Ethnic antagonism* is evident, especially where Christians are excluded from basic social services (e.g. water supply, electricity, education, etc.) and are prevented from participating in community life and accessing community resources. In addition, Christians face situations such as the constant (and growing) pressure to give up their Christian faith; this pressure may be in the form of job discrimination, obstacles for businesses owned by Christians, the imposition of "fines" as protection money, interrogation or having to report to the local authorities. It is worth mentioning that, even when such situations occur within indigenous communities, they often occur in areas dominated by drug cartels as a manifestation of organized corruption and crime.

National sphere:

In this sphere, persecution engines manifest themselves in different ways at different levels.

- *Ethnic antagonism*: Christians are subject to the tribal authorities, who do not admit exceptions to their laws and community practices which may contradict Christian convictions.
- *Organized corruption and crime*: Christians are coerced to finance the activities of these organizations or to refrain from publicly manifesting their faith, given the constant risk of being attacked.
- *Secular intolerance*: Christian witness in the public realm is prohibited or rejected, especially in the political sphere, where it is considered an attack on the secular principles of the State.

These manifestations of pressure against Christians are in danger of being minimized when considered "normal" or disguised as a consequence of other issues, such as the general violence perpetrated by drug cartels. On the other hand, many of these cases of persecution are simply ignored because they only relate to matters of faith. Where such persecution is not given its due importance, there will be less understanding of the issues involved, which in turn is likely to lead to biased judgments being made and more impunity for aggressors.

Church sphere:

In this sphere, persecution engines manifest themselves in different ways at different levels.

- *Ethnic antagonism* and *Organized corruption and crime*: Christians churches are subject to control by the surrounding society. Churches try to carry out their activities freely (for instance, among the youth and in charitable institutions), but they find it difficult to ensure the safety of their leaders in violent environments (where drug cartels operate) or in intimidating circumstances (in relation to indigenous communities).
- *Secular intolerance* is also especially evident in urban areas, where some Christian activities are quickly highlighted as being as being acts of sexual discrimination and hate-speech.

Violence:

Violence in Mexico is a huge problem and particularly affects actively practicing Christians, who are a frequent target for attacks. They are much easier to identify from the rest of the population – for instance, it is known in which church they regularly meet etc.; the risk of attack is greater for pastors and priests. Indeed Mexico has the worst reputation in Latin America as regards the assassination of Roman Catholic priests by criminal groups in the areas under their control. On the other hand, in the south of the country (Chiapas), there were violent incidents against Christians who did not follow the religious practices of the indigenous communities. These Christians were put under high pressure by the tribal leaders to renounce their faith and in some cases, were imprisoned without reason and made to suffer psychological mistreatment. In the WWL 2018 reporting period there have even been attacks in places outside such areas: For instance, [the Cathedral of Mexico City](#)¹⁰⁰ and the [Mexican Episcopal Conference](#)¹⁰¹ were both considered the last places in which such attacks might occur.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Regarding women and young girls, public policies and legislation related to the promotion of abortion in cases of sexual violence and teenage pregnancy puts them in greater danger, because it favors the impunity of the aggressor (not forgetting the fact that it also forces doctors to practice this procedure). Also, in the poorest sectors of the country, conditions are in place for government aid to be received – these include the acceptance of contraceptive health policies (including tubal ligation).

Since Mexico is one of the countries with the highest rate of human-trafficking, women are an easy target for recruitment, especially in the areas controlled by mafia and drug cartels, in which girls and women have been abducted are used for sex slavery and prostitution.

¹⁰⁰ See: <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/08/03/mexican-priest-stabbed-cathedral-may-dies/>, last accessed 14 September 2017.

¹⁰¹ See: <http://www.fides.org/en/news/62705#.WbpPoH-Wxu3>, last accessed 14 September 2017.

Male:

There is no law making Christian men more vulnerable to persecution. However, in the areas controlled by criminal groups or drug cartels, young men are exposed to indoctrination and mandatory participation in these groups. In some cases, due to the economic and social context, young men accept this as their inescapable destiny and those who do not accept this - whether for Christian or other reasons - are persecuted, threatened and often abducted.

Future outlook

- The situation for Peña Nieto's government has not improved over recent months. President and party have been unable to respond to the needs of the Mexican people; there have been human rights violations, scandals of corruption and inefficient management of the economy. This all contributes to the emergence of new leaders in society, which can be seen as both a risk and an opportunity. It is a risk because some of the new leaders have an extremely secular stance that even guarantees the criminalization of opponents when such opposition is founded on religious convictions. Others, however, could influence the political destiny of the country in a positive way. Based on the trust of the Mexican people in Christian institutions, it is possible that the new leadership will be able to defend unborn life and the family. For this to happen, it will be necessary to stop the expansion of secular ideology and guarantee that Christians can express their faith freely and participate actively in the country's political discussions.
- The political instability of the country favors criminal activities and unless rigorous measures are taken in the fight against drug trafficking and in a comprehensive reform of local authorities - who contribute to the proliferation of criminal activities and obstruct the administration of justice - the culture of impunity will continue. Such impunity discourages the denunciation and follow-up of judicial processes against criminal groups and contributes to the lack of protection for Christians in both urban and rural regions.
- The limits of indigenous autonomy are not entirely clear, especially in relation to the protection of individual rights. Thus, sanctions or attacks on Christian converts within indigenous communities will not cease until the authorities understand their duty to protect individuals in cases of human rights violations. The authorities also need to learn to impart justice not by simply regarding incidents as cases of religious disagreement, but by appreciating all the dimensions giving rise to the conflicts, taking into full consideration the right to religious freedom. This lack of understanding about the full meaning of religious freedom as a human right is not only a matter for the Mexican authorities but also for international human rights institutions (e.g. UN and OAS) which do not take full account of the nature of life within indigenous communities.

Policy considerations

Open Doors suggests the following recommendations:

- The Mexican government, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, UN and the international community should cooperate with indigenous authorities to integrate Freedom of Religion or Belief as a fundamental right into indigenous laws and develop a plan to set out how to preserve traditional cultures and values while guaranteeing the co-existence of different faiths.
- The International community (especially UN and OAS) and Mexican government should ensure that citizens of all faiths maintain full access to the media and equal participation in public debates. They should tackle and counter the slander and ridicule of Christian values and promote a pluralistic and healthy space for all religious groups to fully express and exercise their religion or belief.
- The government should guarantee by law and in practice the full rights and equal treatment and benefits of all religious minorities, including Protestant Christianity. For this, it is necessary that the constitutional protection of religious freedom follow the established in Article 18 of the UNDHR and facilitates its legislative development in each Federative entity and the application of its content by the institutions of the State. Many times the treatment of matters of religion has been reduced to respecting State-Church secular principles and this carries with it many misinterpretations that leave Christians of all denominations unprotected.
- The international community should pay special attention to the position of vulnerable groups in Mexico, particularly that of actively practicing Christians. They should also recognize the violations of religious freedom, including the vulnerability of Christians in a context of organized crime (particularly Christians engaged in social work with youths and drug addicts), without the situations being ignored or minimized by their relationship with the Church or by the fear of reprisals by aggressors. Efforts in the field of state reforms, corruption prevention, strengthening of the rule of law and human rights are also essential to Mexican society as a whole.
- The international community should work together with the government to create a system in which churches and Christian leaders who are victims of extortion feel safe to denounce threats against them and allow investigations of these cases to be public and transparent in order to avoid impunity and motivate complaints of similar cases.
 - Mexico is one the signatories of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. However, corruption levels within the country are high. Mexico is also the country with the world's highest number of abductions. The international community should assist the government in tackling corruption at all levels. Also, the infiltration of organized crime in public institutions by means of corruption should be addressed.

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40. United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 - 31 October 2016

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 58 / Position: 40

WWL 2017 Points: 55 / Position: 44

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 47

The score for UAE rose from 55 in WWL 2017 to a score of 58 in WWL 2018. More violence reported during the WWL 2018 reporting period caused some of this increase of 3 points. However, in the WWL analysis a refinement has been made concerning how the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity are registered. In UAE this contributed to the rise in overall score.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in UAE ¹⁰²	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Medium
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Like many countries in the region, society in UAE is defined mainly by its religion. Thus, Islam dominates private and public life, as well as political discourse in the kingdom. Consequently, all citizens are understood to be Muslims. The law of the kingdom does not recognize conversion from Islam to Christianity, and officially the legal punishment is death, although capital punishment is only rarely carried out. To avoid the death penalty, social stigma or other penalties, Christian converts from a Muslim background are at times compelled to appear to be Muslims and hide their faith, or travel to another country where their conversion is allowed. Even though there are no reported cases of the death penalty being enforced against converts, the mere fact that the law exists is frightening. In addition, the government does not allow any religious teaching other than Islam in public schools. Evangelism is prohibited, but non-Muslim groups can worship in dedicated buildings or private homes.

¹⁰² The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

This persecution engine describes the continuing influence and enforcement of age-old norms and values. In the United Arab Emirates it is very much mixed with Islam and especially affects converts from Islam. As in the rest of the Middle East, religion is connected to family identity. Therefore, leaving Islam is interpreted as betraying one's family. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion.

Besides this, some ethnic Arabs see foreign Christians as a threat to their religion, culture and language (as Arabic is seen as the holy language of the Quran). Hence, they also treat Christians as such.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

UAE is not a democracy. The country is ruled by a dynasty that does not recognize various fundamental human rights. The rulers exert pressure on society and do not allow any dissent. Since the persecution engines *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia* overlap to a certain degree, the government also shows characteristics of *Islamic oppression* by limiting the rights of Christians compared to non-Christians.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in UAE	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Conservative Islamic society is the biggest threat to Christians in UAE. The conservative Emiratis expect Islamic governance from their rulers, with Sharia law being a principal source of legislation.¹⁰³ The government will act against any Christian who makes an attempts to share the Gospel, since proselytizing

¹⁰³ Constitution of the United Arab Emirates, https://www.constituteproject.org/Constitution/United_Arab_Emirates_2004.pdf, last accessed on 12 December 2017.

is illegal and punishable under the law. No Christians have been prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country in recent years.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable. Converts face the risk to be ostracized by their families and might even be killed for shaming their families. Beside this, ethnic Arab Emiratis are at the top of the social ladder and look down upon foreigners, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from South East Asia and Africa. Employees are tied to their employers and thus vulnerable to their bosses' demands. The latter can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians. Expatriate Christians also face discrimination or mistreatment by their fellow Muslim expatriates.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

The UAE government does not allow criticism, especially not from (foreign) Christians. As Freedom House reported: “[...] the domestic media environment is tightly controlled. Nearly all media outlets serving Emirati audiences are either owned or heavily influenced by the authorities. Individuals who use internet-based platforms to publicize dissenting views or sensitive information have for years been subjected to arbitrary and extralegal detention or criminal prosecution with little due process.”¹⁰⁴ In this environment, Christians always have to operate carefully.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the Keys to Understanding document for UAE.

The UAE consists of seven emirates which have their own rulers and which were united in a federal state in the early 1970s. All emirates have a seat in the Federal Supreme Council – the highest constitutional, executive and legislative authority. UAE is not a democracy and the rulers exert pressure on society, allowing no dissent. All political decisions rest with the dynastic rulers of the seven emirates and there is no place for the will of the people at large. Freedom of religion, press, assembly, association and expression are severely restricted in the kingdom.

Contrary to fellow Gulf country Bahrain, the wave of Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 hardly seem to have affected the UAE. This is remarkable, especially since the Emirati society is based more on tribal loyalty than on democratic norms. However, the population appears to trust the government and its generous distribution of oil wealth obviously plays a significant role in the world's fourth richest state per capita.

While the UAE had depended predominantly on the fishing and pearl industry in the past, this changed after oil was found in the 1950s and first exported from Abu Dhabi in the early 1960s. Today the UAE holds the world's sixth-largest oil reserves and this has brought a lot of immigrants to the country where only 15% of the population are national citizens. The UAE have developed and implemented structural diversification strategies to avoid too much dependence on oil.

¹⁰⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/united-arab-emirates>, last accessed on 12 December 2017.

Other religious groups

The government allows other non-Christian groups like Hindus, Buddhists and Jews to practice their faith in private. They are allowed to gather in designated places or in private facilities. However, government scrutiny applies. For example, conference organizers need to register their events, even disclosing speakers and topics.¹⁰⁵

Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two exist in UAE and are affected by persecution:

Communities of expatriate Christians

The majority of Christians in UAE belong to this group which enjoys some freedom but also faces certain restrictions. African and Asian expatriates do not have as much freedom as Western ones, but do have more freedom than converts (see below), as long as they do not evangelize Muslims.

Historical Christian communities:

There are no historical Christian communities in UAE.

Communities of converts to Christianity

This group, consisting of converts from Islam to Christianity, is the most vulnerable group in the country. Converts are under severe pressure from relatives, family and Muslim society due to the Islamic government, law, and culture.

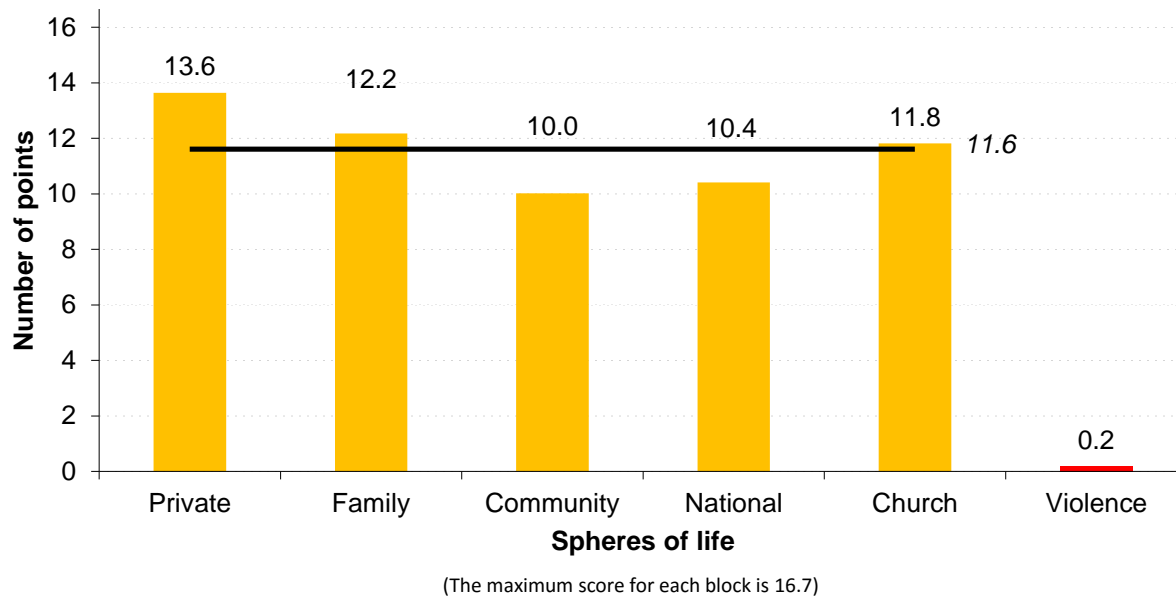
Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are no non-traditional Christian communities in UAE.

¹⁰⁵ United Arab Emirates, 2016 International Religious Freedom Report, p. 8.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for United Arab Emirates



The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in the United Arab Emirates remains very high, rising from 11.1 in WWL 2017 to 11.6. This rise is due to the refinement in WWL analysis concerning the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity in the United Arab Emirates.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private* and *Family spheres*, underlining the difficult situation of converts in the UAE. This is typical for countries where family (both nuclear and extended) and the surrounding community play a significant role in the persecution of converts. Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship – indicated by the lower score for the other *Spheres of life* - although church life remains highly restricted.
- The score for violence rose from 0.0 in WWL 2017 to 0.2, as some violence was reported.

Private sphere:

The pressure on Christians – particularly converts - is strongest in this *sphere of life*. Conversion from Islam to any other religion is prohibited. Due to the serious social discrimination and stigma against Christians, openly possessing Christian materials is dangerous especially for Muslims who might be converting or who have already converted but have not risked being identified as Christian for safety reasons.

Family sphere:

Pressure in this *sphere of life* is also strong and can be seen particularly concerning such issues as marriage, child upbringing, inheritance and child custody. Mixed marriage is only legal between a Muslim man and a non-Muslim woman. In the event of divorce, the law grants custody of any children of non-

Muslim women who do not convert to Islam to the Muslim father. By law, a non-Muslim woman who fails to convert is also ineligible for naturalization as a citizen and cannot inherit her husband's property unless named as a beneficiary in his will.

Community sphere:

For Christians in the UAE, community life is not easy. In a society which is very conservative, being Christian is seen as a sign of impurity. The community ostracizes any converts or suspected converts. A country researcher states: "There are no specific laws or active practices prohibiting Christians from participating in communal or other similar institutions. However, Christians frequently exercise self-restraint for safety reasons. As a result, due to the already existing societal abuse and discrimination, Christians and other non-Muslims don't feel safe to engage freely in communal institutions and forums."

National sphere:

In UAE, Islam is the state religion and Sharia law is the principal source of legislation. Courts also use legislation based on Islamic law. Christians thus have to live their lives in a manner that is defined by others – e.g. they are required not to eat and drink in public during the Ramadan month. Christians are also not permitted to proselytize while Muslims are encouraged to do so. In general, (social) media are in favor of Islam and are biased against Christians.

Church sphere:

As there are a significant number of (expatriate) Christians in the country, there are more than two dozen official churches. Expatriate Christians face some problems in this sphere of life. The number of the existing churches is not enough for the significant number of Christians in the country. Secondly, the government does not allow congregations to worship, preach or pray in public. Furthermore, the Emirati society is conservative, forcing churches to exercise self-restraint in their public expressions of faith. They also have to be careful in their contact with the Muslim population, especially because anything which could be construed as proselytizing Muslims is strictly prohibited.

As there is no space at all for converts from Islam to Christianity in UAE society, there are no congregations of converts. Expatriate churches have to be careful with accepting converts into their congregations.

Violence:

When considering the small amount of violence against Christians, the UAE is a typical Gulf country. The government does not have to act against Christians as the pressure from society is very high and Christians are obedient. It is not easy to get verified reports about violence out of the country. However, Open Doors is aware of the difficult situation of low-skilled expatriate workers. According to Amnesty International, they "continued to face exploitation and abuse".¹⁰⁶ Back in October 2015, the BBC reported upon one tragic example of domestic worker abuse¹⁰⁷ and Open Doors fears that Christian workers, especially women, are even more vulnerable because of their faith. However, there are currently no clear indications

¹⁰⁶ Amnesty International Report 2016/17, p. 381.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34616879>, last accessed on 7 December 2017.

of persecution-related mistreatment of Christian expatriate workers. More research into this subject will be conducted in the near future.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Christian women remain especially vulnerable, as women in general in the UAE are treated as being inferior to men. Amnesty International has also reported that some laws improving the rights of foreign workers explicitly excluded domestic staff, many of whom are Christian women.¹⁰⁸

Male:

Men in particular face discrimination on the work floor. According to one country researcher: “Most of the time, men and boys are breadwinners and therefore they have to face the brunt of discrimination to help their families.”

Future outlook

Looking to the future, political stability can be expected as the Emirati rulers support one another. National elections do not exist and political parties are forbidden, which prevents citizens from changing their government. Government posts are mainly filled through tribal loyalties and economic power. There are some calls for greater political representation but these demands are not entertained by the rulers. For now, most of the population does not seem to be very interested or involved in politics – the elections for the legislative institution FNC in 2006 and 2011 saw low turnouts especially in the largest and richest emirates. A generous distribution of wealth seems to appease the population at the moment, though the historically poorer northern states with their demand for political change do pose a certain risk.

Emirate-wide, a significant youth population combined with a process of globalization (which loosens the state’s monopoly over information) and a high unemployment rate do imply that the UAE should start to take the call for more democracy seriously.

Externally, the UAE joined Saudi Arabia in its boycott of Qatar in June 2017. The Qatari crisis only seems to be affecting Qatar seriously at the moment, but the ongoing tension might also affect the Emirates in the long term because the high dependency on trade requires an open and non-hostile environment.

¹⁰⁸ Amnesty International, Annual Report 2016/17, p. 381.

Policy considerations

Open Doors recommends:

- The international community should support the UAE and other Gulf countries in efforts to tackle intolerance and radicalism, and ensure that new policies actively protect people of all religions.
- The government of UAE should be requested to give the necessary protection to domestic workers from South East Asia and Africa, many of whom are Christians.
- The government should actively stop all kinds of discrimination that Christians face in the country, thereby ensuring equal civil and legal rights for residents from all religions and ethnicities.
- The government should actively stop all kinds of pressure on Christians to convert to Islam. Any religious conversion should be of one's own volition.
- The international community should urge the government to ensure the protection of religious minorities in the country.
- The government should remove the restrictions it imposes on Christian fellowship and on the construction of places for worship.
- The government should remove any restrictions on the citizen's right to change his/her religion.

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41. Bangladesh

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 58 / Position: 41

WWL 2017 Points: 63 / Position: 26

WWL 2016 Points: 57 / Position: 35

Having spiked in WWL 2017, the WWL 2018 score for Bangladesh (58 points) has returned to the long-term normal level. Almost half of the decrease is due to a lower level of violence, although in the WWL 2018 reporting period three Santal Christians were killed because of land issues. All *Spheres of life* except the *National sphere* showed a decrease in pressure. This shows that the insecurity and pressure on Christians caused by radical Islamic groups ceased to a large extent as the authorities began a serious crack-down on the activities of militants. The relatively low ranking should not be mistaken as a general improvement of the situation, however. Basically, the Christian minority still faces discrimination, neglect and violence, but for the time being the previous WWL 2017 situation can be seen as an exception.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Bangladesh ¹⁰⁹	
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Strong
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

Islamic oppression (Strong):

This engine affects all Christians in Bangladesh, although the country continues to be both a secular and an Islamic country according to the Constitution. It is increasingly difficult to see how this dual system works in practice, especially as the government is increasingly giving in to demands by local Islamic groups which are not tied to the opposition. These groups are watching minorities, especially converts. They are instilling fear and many of them are inspired by international Islamic groups like Islamic State (IS), although the authorities continue to deny any such links. Despite government rhetoric, these links are widely perceived to be real, which has increased fear in the whole population. Beside these Islamic groups, it is still families and communities who drive persecution and monitor the activities of converts, especially in rural areas. The fact that the government is fighting Islamic groups which are known to have connections with the political opposition party does not help bring calm to the volatile situation.

Religious nationalism (Strong):

There are over twice as many Buddhists in Bangladesh as Christians and are found mostly among the indigenous people groups concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, bordering India and Myanmar. Among these people groups, the tribal Chakma people are the most well-known. Over the past years, an increasing number of Chakma have converted to Christianity. This has caused Buddhist and tribal leaders to put more pressure on converts. This is not only done by family, friends and community, but also by radical Buddhists aiming to strengthen local Buddhist and indigenous groups in resisting Christianity. The region is getting more and more volatile with a steady and continuing influx of Muslim Rohingya refugees across the border from Myanmar. [Latest estimates](#)¹¹⁰ from 29 November 2017 report that 625,000 Rohingya have fled to neighboring Bangladesh since 25 August 2017 and are living in desperate circumstances. This brings the overall number of Rohingyas living in Bangladesh to more than 800,000. The insurgency group “Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army” (ARSA) which has recently emerged will add to the government’s nervousness and lead to even less of a welcome for the refugees, as Bangladesh struggles with its own Islamic militants.

¹⁰⁹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

¹¹⁰ See: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/171130_iscg_sitrep_one_pager_final.pdf, last accessed 18 December 2017.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

As the Chakma, Tripura and Marma are tribal groups, *Religious nationalism* is mixed with *Ethnic antagonism*. This means that new Christian believers of a tribal background are being forced to follow the age-old norms and values of their community, be it mixed with religion or not.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Bangladesh	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Very Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Very Strong
Own (extended) family	Very Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Weak
Organized crime cartels or networks	Medium
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Very Weak

Muslim leaders in Bangladesh are a source of persecution for Christians. As the number of Christians from a Muslim background is growing, they face more and more restrictions and challenges from radical Islamic groups, local religious leaders, and families. There are fatwas implemented all over the country, especially in rural areas, and there are demands for introducing Sharia law in order to show that the country belongs to the “House of Islam”. Local administration officials create various obstacles for Christian people, specifically converts. A notable trend is the rise of IS atrocities in the country, targeting primarily free thinkers and minority religious groups including Christians (especially leaders and evangelists) and converts. Buddhist religious and tribal leaders and families are persecutors in their respective regions as well. Some political parties are cooperating with radical Islamic groups, e.g. with Jamat-e-Islam. Further, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), the opposition party, puts pressure on minority religious groups (including Christians) as these are seen as belonging to the ruling party’s camp. Organized crime cartels are also a source of persecution for Christians, but as far as land grabbing cases are concerned, Christians are affected by simply being the weaker part of society.

Context

In Bangladesh, a long-term political stand-off between government and opposition (and related families as politics is mainly family business) is taking place. This leaves the country in such political limbo, that the very real and serious threat from militant Islam sometimes seems to be of secondary importance. Its lethal reality was shown in a string of killings, targeting members of religious minority groups (including Christians), secularists and political activists. Whether these killings – as the government continually

claimed – had nothing to do with IS and have to be fully attributed to local militant groups, does not really matter. The largest of these local groups, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) and the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), have pledged some sort of allegiance to IS, and so IS can be seen to be making inroads into Bangladesh.

Fighting against Islamists has continued throughout the WWL 2018 reporting period and even intensified after the attack on a bakery on 1 July 2016 in Dhaka, claiming 22 lives. The sophisticated attack showed that militant Islamic groups must have provided support from abroad. In one stand-off with a group of [Islamic militants](#)¹¹¹ in Sylhet in March 2017, 10 fighters were killed and 25 wounded. The fact that society and politics are politically split at this crucial time adds to the difficulties Bangladesh faces and for its much needed fight against militant Islam.

It seems particularly unhelpful that the government is allowing Islamist demands to make inroads into the country, most likely in an effort to gain votes. This was shown by the government's decision in January 2017 to make its [school textbooks](#)¹¹² more suitable for conservative Islamic groups. By having the letter 'o' now explained by depicting a devout Muslim girl's "orna" (a scarf worn at the beginning of puberty) is just one example of a creeping Islamic drive beginning in textbooks for first-graders. A textbook for sixth-graders replaced a trip report to the north of India (a neighboring country) with a report about the Nile in Egypt. Other books have changed as well, for example in no longer using Hindu or Christian-sounding first names. However, this new drive is not supporting violence: The government decided to [ban chapters on jihad](#)¹¹³ in secondary-school textbooks. In April 2017, two other reports added to this observation: The government [accepted a 10.8 billion Euros donation](#)¹¹⁴ from Saudi Arabia to build mosques and Islamic schools and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina [met with a hardline Islamic group](#)¹¹⁵ called Hefazat-e-Islami, promising that certificates from the estimated 70,000 Islamic madrassas run by the group will now be officially recognized for employment purposes. Previously, the certificates issued were not considered to be up to the standards of the state-run curriculum.

As a minority, Christians are trapped in the middle of this insecure situation since they do not take sides. They will be affected by all decisions the government takes as well as by all actions the Islamic opposition carries out. Christians are perceived to be leaning towards the government and will thus be targeted. In July 2017, a [Catholic woman was made](#)¹¹⁶ Acting Secretary of the Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry, showing that Christians are not completely excluded from politics. Before this, in October 2016, a Catholic Christian had been [elected](#)¹¹⁷ to fill one of the highest offices of the country's

¹¹¹ See: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/10-die-as-terrorist-standoff-ends-in-bangladesh/78784>, last accessed 5 September 2017.

¹¹² See: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/22/world/asia/bangladesh-textbooks-radical-islam.html?_r=0, last accessed 5 September 2017.

¹¹³ See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladesh-govt-bans-jihad-from-madrasa-texts/80639>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹¹⁴ See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Riyadh-donates-10.8-billion-euros-to-560-mosques-in-Bangladesh:-Muslims-split-40554.html>, last accessed 5 September 2017.

¹¹⁵ See: <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/hasina-hefazat-04212017154204.html>, last accessed 5 September 2017.

¹¹⁶ See: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/catholic-woman-rises-to-top-govt-post-in-bangladesh/79846>, last accessed 5 September 2017.

¹¹⁷ See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Bangladesh,-first-ever-Catholic-elected-to-lead-opposition-38987.html>, last accessed 5 September 2017.

largest opposition party (Bangladesh Nationalist Party – BNP) for the first time ever. He took over the presidency of the party's youth wing.

All religious minorities are prone to discrimination and violence, this includes Islamic minority groups like Shiite and Ahmadis as well as Hindu and Buddhist minorities.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

This group includes embassy personnel and foreign workers from the important textile sector. They face being observed and threatened by Islamic extremist groups.

Historical Christian communities:

This group includes the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Bangladesh (Anglican). They are frequently threatened and watched.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

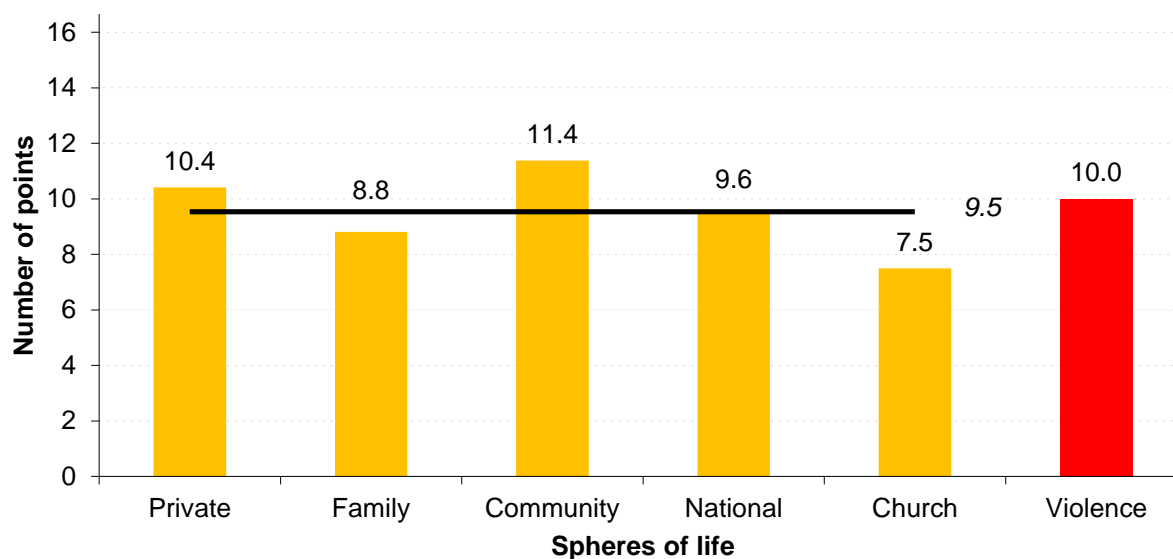
This category includes converts from a Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist background. They are facing the strongest persecution, not least from their own families and communities, and often gather in hidden groups out of fear.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This group includes Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations. The Assemblies of God are one example and gather for worship mainly in house-churches. They are frequently threatened and at times violently attacked.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Bangladesh



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- Overall, pressure on Christians in Bangladesh decreased in nearly all *Spheres of life*, causing the average pressure to drop from a score of 10.2 in WWL 2017 to 9.5, a level much more in line with previous years. Although this average pressure is still at a high level, it has dropped thanks to the government starting to put pressure on militant Islamic groups and partly hunt them down.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private* and *Community spheres*, where converts are particularly affected, but all Christians face pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*.
- Violence against Christians decreased from 12.2 points in WWL 2017 to 10.0 due to the fact that less killings and attacks against churches were reported. However, three Santal Christians were killed in a land grabbing case in November 2016.

Private sphere:

Although the Constitution guarantees the freedom to profess any religion, Christians live with limited freedom. The most vulnerable ones are converts. If they reveal their identity in public, it will be almost impossible for them to continue living where they are because they face pressure from families, neighbors and religious leaders. People seen as converting or proselytizing can be detained and accused of criminal offences, as has happened in the WWL 2018 reporting period. Everyone will then monitor them and go at great lengths to prevent any possibility of them having fellowship with other Christians, even to the point of blocking houses and roads. To privately own Christian books (such as a Bible) is likewise risky. Christians who are not converts have more freedom in their private lives, however.

Family sphere:

Once converts are discovered, they often face the threat of divorce (if married) and can lose their inheritance rights, especially in rural areas. Organizing a baptism, a Christian wedding or a funeral can be difficult or even impossible. Children of Christians, not just of converts, are forced to study non-Christian teachings and use Islamic textbooks at school and are frequently mocked by other children, up to the point where they refuse to go to school or leave the house at all. Especially in schools and playgrounds teachers, friends and relatives harass Christian children. Either they are scolded and mocked by school teachers, by calling them 'son of Christian' or are even expelled from school for being Christian, as happened in the WWL 2018 reporting period. Converts are often isolated from their families and may even be forced to leave their homes.

Community sphere:

Christians are discriminated against in their private lives as well as in their business lives. Some Christians have had to give up their shops or other businesses due to pressure by the Muslim majority and boycotts. Children of converts often face discrimination by teachers and co-students at school. Pressure to renounce the Christian faith can become so unbearable for converts that they have to leave the community they live in. Just a few months before the WWL 2018 reporting period (in July 2016), Christian owners of shops, restaurants, hotels and other businesses in some parts of the country were threatened with death by radical Islamic groups if they did not comply with a list of eight Islamic rules:

1. The entrance must bear the inscription "Bismillah Rahman Rahim" [the invocation "In the name of Allah, the Clement, the Merciful"];
2. Have a copy of the Koran;
3. Have a picture of the Kaaba in Mecca;
4. Remove paintings or sacred statues of their own religion;
5. Have a dedicated space for Muslim customers to pray; not serve haram (forbidden) food such as pork and if Muslims customers order beef in a Hindu restaurant [considered sacred by Hindus], they must be served beef;
6. Closure of restaurants during the month of Ramadan;
7. No music of any kind, except Islamic songs;
8. Women are generally forbidden to work. If they must however, they have to wear a hijab [headscarf] or burka [the dress that covers from head to toe, leaving only the eyes uncovered].

National sphere:

Bangladesh has a secular government and its secularism is even laid down in the country's Constitution, which states at the same time that Islam is the state religion. Christians commonly experience discrimination when dealing with government authorities and are frequently slandered, especially in rural areas. Media reporting about Christians is often biased, predominantly from Islamic TV channels. Christians and others (like secular bloggers) have been accused of insulting Islam and some were even killed. In cases where Christians have been attacked, they have faced a high degree of unwillingness by the authorities to even start proper investigations. Christian schools and other institutions are being hindered through frequent threats made by radical Islamic groups. And even when authorities provided protection, the institutions were limited in their functioning by being observed or having to close down for a time.

Church sphere:

In general, churches are able to minister to their congregations. However, they are facing an increasing level of monitoring by authorities and radical Islamic groups alike, who especially target churches from the non-traditional category. Church services have been hindered both by these groups and also by tribal and ethnic minority leaders. Openly integrating converts into churches is impossible and it was reported that training has become more difficult as the Christian leaders being trained were expected to give suspicious villagers details about their whereabouts and the training. Openly distributing Bibles has been hindered and three pastors faced arrest for doing so.

Violence:

On 6-7 November 2016, about 2,500 [Santal squatters](#)¹¹⁸, mostly Christians, were violently forced off disputed land in the Sahebganj area by workers from the Rangpur Sugar Mill with support from local police. In the clashes three Christian squatters were killed, 30 are reported missing and dozens were wounded. The attackers also looted the homes and livestock of tribal people and set fire to about 600 squatter homes. This illustrates that persecution can have economic motives as well.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male: No data available.

Future outlook

The government has made only limited progress in curbing radical Islamic groups. It is not only losing support from some parts of society, it also faces the challenge of an influx of radical international Muslims and has to deal with their local affiliates. As long as the ruling party continues to link all Islamic militancy to the opposition party and to woo Islamic radical groups in order to gain votes, it will be difficult to find a solution. Furthermore, in May 2017 the government gave in to pressure from Islamist groups and [removed a recently erected statue](#)¹¹⁹ representing the Greek goddess of justice from the front of the country's Supreme Court. The statue was moved to a less visible place in a backyard of the building, precisely reflecting the relationship between secularist and Islamic principles in Bangladesh. In August 2017, the [Supreme Court came under fire](#)¹²⁰ by the government as it had ruled in July 2017 that the parliament's power to replace judges is limited. The country's highest judge, who happens to be Hindu, was attacked for that in very strong and personal words. All this sees the country leaning towards more *Islamic oppression*. In another twist of events, the Chief Justice went abroad and [had to resign](#)¹²¹ as he was accused of corruption in October 2017. Whether this had anything to do with his ethnicity and religion seems unclear, however, one of the highest ranking civil servants from a minority religion was forced to leave his office.

¹¹⁸ See: <http://www.news.va/en/news/evicted-tribal-people-face-food-crisis-in-banglade>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹¹⁹ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-40055372>, last accessed 5 September 2017.

¹²⁰ See: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladesh-activists-hail-supreme-court-judgment/79790>, last accessed 5 September 2017.

¹²¹ See: <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/justice-resigns-11132017160658.html>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

Christians are targeted by radical Muslims because they are seen as being allied with the government as they prefer to retain the country's secularism according to the Constitution. Politics in the country frequently involves the use of violent means and often enough innocent by-standers suffer and are even killed. It is especially worrying that the ruling party's youth organizations and student wings engage in violence. Bangladesh faces serious challenges coming from the [madrassa system](#)¹²² in the country, no matter if the official number of 22,000 madrassas is correct or estimations of 70,000 apply. In officially registered madrassas around 2 million students are trained, whereas in not-registered, "private" madrassas there are said to be more than 4 million students. As in Pakistan, these madrassas are potential hotbeds for training students in hatred and violence, as became evident by the fact that nine of the perpetrators of the Dhaka attack in July 2016 were madrassa students. The recognition of its certificates despite all shortcomings sends a very bad sign for the future (see Context).

Policy considerations

- The religious freedom provision of the Constitution of Bangladesh should be upheld.
- The constitutional definition of Islam as state religion should be deleted. The international community should urge the government of Bangladesh to not give in to any demands to introduce Sharia law or any form of legislation that restricts freedom of religion.
- The government has the duty to protect its citizens, including Christians, against any threat to harm their physical integrity. The government should properly investigate and punish those responsible for any harm done against the physical integrity of representatives of religious minorities.
- The UN and Bangladesh government should follow through on the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur ensuring that there are no ambiguities in government language and in reporting on incidents of violence against religious minorities which could incriminate the victims themselves.
- The government should develop policies to stop the influence of radical Islamic teaching coming from groups such as Islamic State into the country. In addition, the government should closely monitor and take deliberate action against the activities of radical Islamic groups who are inspired by Islamic State and similar organizations.
- The government and UN Human Rights Council should follow up on recommendations by former Special Rapporteur Heiner Bielefeldt to actively promote civil society inclusion by addressing threats and violence against Christians and minorities.
- The UN Human Rights Council should also follow up on the recommendation to ensure autonomy for Christian schools and for the proper funding for the inclusion of Christians in the recruitment and training of teachers in schools.

¹²² See: <http://southasiamonitor.org/detail.php?type=sl&nid=18564>, last accessed 24 November 2016.

- The government should ensure full equal participation and representation of people of any religion or belief, ensuring political and media language is free from slander that undermines their equal status as citizens.
- The international community should urge the government authorities in Bangladesh to end impunity in cases of attacks and killings of Christians.
- While the government’s effort to curb terrorism-related money-laundering into and out of the country is to be highly praised, the government should develop a mechanism making international money transactions possible which clearly serve humanitarian purposes. This would be of benefit to Bangladeshi society, regardless whether the charities concerned are an NGO or Trust and regardless of the religious affiliations involved.

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42. Algeria

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 58 / Position: 42

WWL 2017 Points: 58 / Position: 36

WWL 2016 Points: 56 / Position: 37

With a score of 58 in WWL 2018, Algeria has the same total as in WWL 2017. Pressure remained at a very high level in all but one *sphere of life*. The score for violence rose very slightly, but there were no new cases of Christians being imprisoned and there were fewer reports of incidents of forced marriage and abduction.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Algeria ¹²³	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Not at All
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Not at All

¹²³ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Islamic oppression:

As Islam becomes increasingly influential in Algeria's government in the past few years, the freedom of Christians is becoming more and more restricted. Pressure from Islamist movements on government and society, in combination with pressure from family members on Christian converts from a Muslim background has led to persistent pressure on Christians. Islamist groups, encouraged by the Arab Spring in other North African countries, are exerting pressure on a government that has been forced works with Islamic parties. Nevertheless, despite this cooperation, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is still banned. Islamists are becoming more visible and they monitor the activities of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities (such as the small Jewish and Bahai communities).

Ethnic antagonism

Most Algerian Christians are found in the Kabylie region which is located in the northern part of the country. Since independence, there has been political tensions between this region and the central government in Algeria. Among other issues, issues of ethnic identity, culture and language figure prominently in the difficult relationship between the government and residents of the Kabylie region, most of whom are ethnic Berbers while the dominant ethnic identity in the country is Arabic. The ethnic tension and antagonism also spills into religion and contributes to the persecution of Christians in the Kabylie region.

Dictatorial paranoia:

This engine is mentioned because of the autocratic government style of President Bouteflika, which is also an important source of restrictions on Christians. Given its autocratic nature and its lack of democratic legitimacy, the government does not have the popular support to make substantive reforms more accommodative of the rights of Christians. Although the government does not necessarily see Christians as a threat to its power, it is still unable to provide a robust protection of their rights since doing so would undermine its standing with the more conservative Islamic segments of the population. Therefore, some of the measures of the government could also be seen as attempts to appease this segment of society. Furthermore, the anti-colonial and revolutionary roots of the ruling party which has been in power since independence, provides it with an ideological perspective that makes it suspicious of Christian missionary activities, especially when they are allied to churches and Christian groups in the West.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Algeria	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Medium
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong

Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at All

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

As is the case in most other countries in the region, the major drivers of persecution in Algeria are society, radical Islamic teachers and state officials who adhere to the views of such teachers. Algerian Christians, most of whom are converts from Islam face persecution especially from their family members and extended family. Therefore, the family and the wider community including local traditional (ethnic) leaders and elders are important drivers of persecution. State officials at various levels of the administrative hierarchy also play a role in exerting pressure on Christians to renounce their faith and to restrict the freedom of Christians to express their views and live out their faith in public. Some Islamic teachers actively promote the persecution of Christians and also serve as drivers of persecution.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

State officials, political parties and leaders play an important role as drivers of persecution. The hostility of these actors to the cultural, linguistic and political claims of non-Arab ethnic groups means that, in their efforts to suppress such demands, local churches in the Kabyle region are made to also face restrictions and persecution. The growth of the church particularly in this region is perceived as a threat to predominantly Arab and Islamic identity of the country. As a result, the government and the ruling party are among the drivers of persecution in relation to Ethnic antagonism.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

Algeria is one of the few countries in northern Africa that has managed to ensure regime continuity and avoid sweeping democratic reforms. Since independence, the National Liberation Front has maintained its grip on power despite several changes of presidents. The National Liberation Front has often been challenged by Islamist political movements and in order to win over the supporters of the Islamist movements and shore up its legitimacy, the government restricts the freedom of Christians.

Context

In 2014 President Bouteflika was re-elected for a fourth mandate. The Algerian constitution allows only 2 mandates, but with the help of the Islamist parties Bouteflika was able to amend the constitution. Since he suffered a stroke in 2013, President Bouteflika has rarely been seen in public and he has not even campaigned for the presidential elections in 2014. Much about the future of Algeria is intertwined with who will succeed the ailing President. Algeria introduced a host of constitutional amendments in 2016 to give more power to parliament and to reinstate the two terms limit on the presidency. However, many of the critiques and opponents of the regime have dismissed this reform efforts as superficial. The decline in natural gas prices which is a key export commodity in Algeria has also exacerbated the economic challenges faced by the country.

Algeria is ranked 83 out of 188 countries on the UNDP human development index. With an average life expectancy of 75.0 and an adult literacy rate of 80.2, Algeria seems to perform much better than most African and Arab countries in the provision of social goods and services. However, youth unemployment is still a problem and the decline in energy prices has paused a serious economic challenge to the Algerian state. Nevertheless, with a Gross National income per capita of 13,533 USD, Algerians have a better life prospect and better economic conditions as compared with most other countries in Africa and as well as with some Arab countries.

Despite its violent past and the persistent threat of Islamic insurgencies, Algeria is relatively stable. However, this stability is fragile and could be undone for many reasons. One concern is the increasing economic pressure on the government as it tries to deal with a rising level of unemployment and economic discontent with a declining revenue from natural gas. The potential for a succession battle among army officers is also another cause for concern. There is also a risk that the lawlessness in Libya could undermine stability in Algeria since the two countries share a long border. Any instability that might arise in Algeria as a result of any of these causes is likely to make the situation of Christians worse than it is currently.

Apart from Christians, Algerian Jews and Ahmadiyya Muslims also face varying levels of persecution. Algerian Jews fear for their security due to the threat of violence by Islamists and there have been instances of desecration of Jewish cemeteries. The Ahmadiyya face more intense persecution including criminal charges for “denigrating the dogma or precepts of Islam”, hostile speeches from public officials and denial of their right to form [associations](#)¹²⁴.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

This category does not exist as defined in the WWL Methodology.

Historical Christian communities:

This category includes the Roman Catholic and some Protestant churches under the EPA (Algerian Protestant Church) umbrella. These communities face restrictions outside their place of worship but are allowed to exist if registered. Catholic churches (including a cathedral in Algiers - the seat of the Archbishop), conduct services without government interference, as does the Protestant Church of Algeria which is a federation or association of various Christian communities (denominations). There is also a small number of sub-Saharan African Christian students who face discrimination at universities or in their day-to-day life in the cities.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Almost all Christians in Algeria are converts with a Muslim background and face persecution. The law prohibits public assembly for the purpose of practicing a faith other than Islam with the exception of the

¹²⁴ See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/04/algeria-stop-persecuting-religious-minority>, last accessed 21 December 2017.

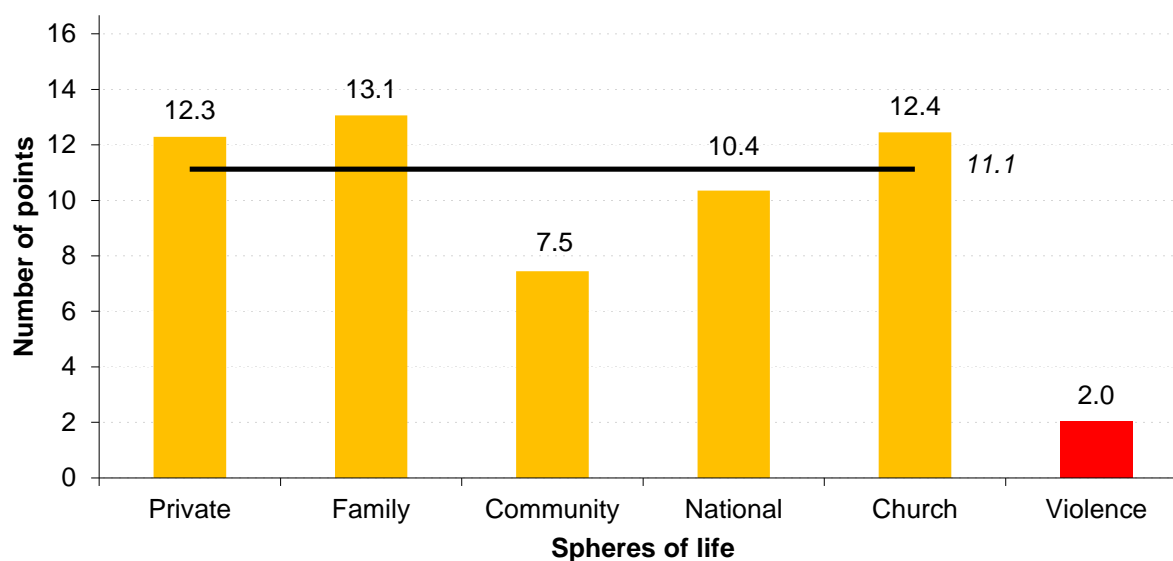
registered churches. There is a large number of unofficial groups meeting regularly in the Berber regions; non-Muslims usually congregate in private homes for religious services. Church leaders indicate that there is ongoing pressure on Christians. Individual churches are often denied registration. The very young Algerian church (mostly consisting of first generation Christians) faces many forms of discrimination by the state and by family members. While the Protestant churches under the EPA (Algerian Protestant Church) has retained its time from colonial times, it also includes communities of converts to Christianity.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category does not exist as defined in the WWL Methodology.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Algeria



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Algeria went down very slightly from 11.2 in WWL 2017 to 11.1.
- There have not been any significant changes in the levels of pressure Christians face. Pressure is strongest in the *Family sphere* (13.1) since close relatives and family members are the main drivers of persecution when it comes to Christians with a Muslim background.
- The score for violence went up from 1.7 in WWL 2017 to 2.0.

Private sphere:

Algeria has a law that criminalizes any attempt to proselytize and have someone convert from Islam to another religion. However, converting from Islam by itself is not criminalized (no crime of apostasy). Hence, technically, it is those who caused the conversion or attempt to convince someone to convert and

not the convert himself who will be criminally liable. The main problem for converts is family persecution and this can be very dangerous. Church leaders report that especially women converts are sometimes placed under house-arrest by their Muslim families. They are not allowed to meet other Christians or to have any contact with them. They are not allowed to watch TV or listen to the radio as Christian channels are broadcast into Algeria. In the Arabic part of the country, persecution is even more severe and converts risk being killed. For many believers, sharing about their faith in written form, with family members or with guests, is simply not possible and they are exposed to a lot of domestic violence.

Family sphere:

For the Algerian government, every citizen is a Muslim. There are also cases where the Muslim population in villages has refused to allow Christians to bury their deceased family members. Christian marriages are only valid within a church community but are not accepted by the government, which registers them as a Muslim marriage.

Community sphere:

Algerian Christians tend to speak of "villagers who don't talk to them," while Christian human rights organizations speak routinely of verbal and physical abuse being used. The 2012 International Religious Freedom Report states that while Algerian society "generally tolerated foreigners and citizens who practice religions other than Islam, some local converts to Christianity have traditionally kept a low profile out of concern for their personal safety." The Algerian government is especially concerned with reports of religious proselytism, particularly in the more conservative Muslim communities – i.e. in areas that served as a base for the radical Islamic groups that fought against the government in the civil war (1991-1999). Christian school-children living in these areas have to hide their faith, as otherwise they are likely to suffer discrimination by teachers and be refused entry to university studies.

National sphere:

The freedom of Christians is particularly under pressure in the national sphere because of the continued enforcement of the very restrictive ordinance 06-03. Legislation restricting non-Muslim worship was passed in February 2006, and went into effect the following September. The introduction of this anti-conversion law in 2006 was a turning point for the Church in Algeria, marking a step backward for religious freedom.

Ordinance 06-03 prohibits any action that "incites, constrains or utilizes means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim to another religion, or by using to this end establishments for teaching, for education, for health, of a social or cultural nature, or training institutions, or any other establishment, or any financial means." Punishment is two to five years in prison and a fine. The law also prohibits Christian activities being carried out anywhere outside a state-recognized church building. From November 2007 onwards, measures against the Church and pressure on Christians began to increase significantly. Between November 2007 and May 2008, the government closed 26 churches and since January 2008, about 15 Christians have been arrested and brought before court. Some of them were sentenced to prison and high fines. One particular area of concern of Ordinance 06-03 contains is its vague wording that renders it susceptible to arbitrary interpretations and applications. The freedom of Christians is particularly under

pressure in the national sphere because of the continued enforcement of the very restrictive ordinance 06-03. The trend of imprisoning Christians for social media blogs has also continued in the WWL 2018 reporting period. An Algerian Christian Samir Chamek was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to a year in prison in January 2017 for a post he made on Facebook that was perceived to be critical of Islam.

Church sphere:

The apparently positive news in 2011 that the EPA (Algerian Protestant Church) had finally obtained official registration in 2011 after many years of trying, turned out to be a disappointment. No real freedom was given and local churches are still required to obtain their own registration. On a local level, oppression has intensified and no local churches belonging to the EPA have been registered. The government has not registered any new churches since enforcing Ordinance 06-03 in February 2006, so many Christian citizens continue to meet in unofficial house-churches, which are often homes or business offices of church members. From the legal perspective, ordinance 06-03 sets regulations for church buildings, so a meeting at home is forbidden. The legal sentence can be up to three years of prison and a fine of 300,000 DA (3,000 Euros). For the moment, no Christians are in prison for this and Christians continue to meet in homes. Still, the law hangs like a sword of Damocles over them. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, several churches affiliated with the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) were instructed by the local authorities to stop their meetings on the basis of a 2006 statute that is supposed to regulate non-Muslim worship.

Violence:

The main source of violent persecution in Algeria continues to be close family and relatives. The broader society influenced by the teachings of radical Islamic teachers also contributes to the violent persecution of Christians in Algeria.

Examples:

- A young Christian with a Muslim background was beaten by his family and coerced into continuing to attend the local mosque after his family found his Bible under his bed. Another Christian with a Muslim background was forced to separate from his wife when her family discovered that he was not a Muslim anymore.
- A church in Ouargla was attacked by stones being thrown almost daily during Ramadan 2017. In August 2017, the same church was again attacked by a mob of local citizens in Ouargla. A Catholic Church (for expatriates) in Sidi [Moussa](#)¹²⁵ was also destroyed on 9 June 2017.
- A Christian convert was beaten and expelled from his family house when it was discovered that he had become a Christian. He has been forced to go into hiding since he fears for his life.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male:

No information currently available.

¹²⁵ See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Church-demolition-near-Algiers-to-make-room-for-a-mosque-highlights-Islamism%E2%80%99s-hypocrisy-41008.html>, last accessed 18 December 2017.

Future outlook

The high numbers of people who boycotted the presidential elections in 2014 are a silent expression of the population's widespread discontent over unemployment, the housing crisis and political stagnation. Should Bouteflika die in office, social unrest is quite likely to erupt under the pressure of a younger generation desperate for change – 70% of the population is under 30. The question is whether what comes after Bouteflika's regime will be any better for the country's Christians. In the current situation, Christians are very much under pressure, but have found ways to survive and even to grow. The Church may be far worse off in a new political constellation if Islamists capitalize upon the societal discontent as they did in Tunisia and Egypt.

The future of the country will also depend on developments in neighboring countries. It is certain that Islamism is gaining influence in North Africa which causes major challenges and worries. Among them are the relentless attempts by radical Muslims to justify murdering members of security forces, civilians and Christians with their interpretation of Islam.

Policy considerations

Taking in to account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors International makes the following recommendation:

- The international community should urge Algeria to repeal Ordinance 06-03 which curtails freedom of worship for non-Muslims and prohibits conversion.
- The government should commit to its constitutional obligation and implement sufficient measures to protect religious minorities against increasing violence by radical groups. The government should commit to providing adequate protection of and full freedom to the growing number of Christian converts from a Muslim background in the country.
- The government should commit to providing all legal and logistical facilities for the growing indigenous Algerian church and remove any restrictions preventing them practicing their faith. Furthermore, any restrictions on obtaining or building a place of worship should be removed.
- The government should remove any restrictions on the civil and legal rights for converts from Islam to Christianity, validate Christian marriages and permit Christian burials. The government should also take measures to ensure the equality of Christians (including converts to Christianity) in the formation, duration and dissolution of marriage. In particular, the law and authorities should treat Christians with a Muslim background equally in matters of custody during divorce.

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43. China

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 57 / Position: 43

WWL 2017 Points: 57 / Position: 39

WWL 2016 Points: 57 / Position: 33

China again scores 57 points. The scores for pressure in the *Spheres of life* decreased in the *Private* and *Family* life, but increased in *Community*, *National* and *Church* spheres, reflecting an increased emphasis on Communist rhetoric by the government and a more challenging legal and administrative environment. The latter has been caused by the new regulations on religion due to be begin implementation on 1 February 2018. These are already having consequences as Christians have started to prepare for the implementation. This pressure is especially felt in the *Church sphere*. It must be remembered that China is vast and the situation for Christians can be very different in the various parts of the country.¹²⁶

Persecution engines

Persecution engines ¹²⁷	
Islamic oppression	Medium
Religious nationalism	Medium
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Strong
Secular intolerance	Medium
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Medium

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Strong):

The over-arching goal of the Communist Party of China is to maintain its power through national unity and by limiting outside influences. The rulers will do everything they deem necessary to reach these goals. Recent years have shown a growing orthodoxy in ideology and in emphasizing Communist rules. This has continued in the WWL 2018 reporting period. In December 2016, President Xi Jinping called for

¹²⁶ Given these developments, it may be surprising that the overall score for China did not increase. There was a refinement in WWL methodology which now scores the percentage of population persecuted instead of the percentage of territory affected. As a consequence, for questions in which Christians from a Muslim or Buddhist (Tibetan) background are affected, the score is no longer “2” (since those regions make up more than 25% of the territory), but “1” (as around 3% of the population live there). In absolute scores, this makes a difference of around 3 points.

¹²⁷ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

[allegiance](#)¹²⁸ from the country's colleges and universities to the government's Communist ideology, and once again emphasized the need to [revive traditional Chinese culture](#)¹²⁹ in all strands of society in July 2017. Confucianism was praised as being Chinese; thus, if one needs to be religious, it should be Confucian. President Xi Jinping is arguably the strongest Party leader for a long time and some observers are already comparing him to Mao Zedong. Party organs like the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection are becoming increasingly powerful and investigated high ranking party members tipped to be promoted to national leadership in the 19th Party Congress. The Congress itself underlined how strongly the Party is refocusing on Communist ideology and how adamant it is in demanding this focus from all other officials and society actors. (More details on the 19th Party Congress are to be found under "Context").

The leadership's goal of maintaining power and social harmony includes the control of all religions, and hence the control of the growing Christian minority as well. This is even truer for the volatile minority regions of Buddhist Tibet and Muslim Xinjiang. The government has tightened its grip and this is not only felt by ethnic groups striving for independence, but also by the respective groups of converts to the Christian faith and even increasingly by Han Chinese Christians. While in most regions in China, Christian activities have been watched rather than controlled, some unregistered house-churches have been limited in their programs, especially concerning children and youth camps. Concerning the ethnic Han churches, some observers speak of three kinds of churches: the "black" ones which are illegal and which the state is fighting against (for example Vatican loyal Catholics), the "red" ones which are state-approved and controlled, and the "gray" ones which are not registered, but tolerated, and which form the majority of the Christian communities.

Islamic oppression (Medium):

The northwestern state of Xinjiang, where the Muslim Uighur minority lives, is becoming more and more volatile. Foreign Islamic militants are seeping into the province, and Islamic fighters from Xinjiang were reportedly found fighting in the siege of Marawi in the Philippines in May 2017. All this has led China to intensify its crackdown on militants as well as its control on religions in Xinjiang. The situation for the small number of Christian converts from a Muslim background – most likely a few thousand – is extremely complicated. They suffer from the increased general pressure from the government as described above, but additionally face persecution from their own family, friends and neighbors. Any deviation from the Muslim creed and traditions will be seen as a disgrace and even treason since every Uighur is expected to be a Muslim. Although it is difficult to obtain reports on the situation of the converts, all information received points to a deteriorating situation, sometimes even involving violent persecution such as physical abuse by families.

Religious nationalism (Medium):

What has just been said about *Islamic oppression* above also applies to the even smaller group of Christians from a Buddhist background in the Chinese region of Tibet (in far western China). Pressure and violence

¹²⁸ See: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-education/chinas-xi-calls-for-universities-allegiance-to-the-communist-party-idUSKBN13Y0B5?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Reuters%2FworldNews+%28Reuters+World+News%29, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹²⁹ See: https://jamestown.org/program/xi-jinping-chinas-traditionalist-restoration/?mc_cid=b20e8aed04&mc_eid=800570433e, last accessed 28 September 2017.

are increasing and the Chinese authorities do everything in their power to curb the Tibetan struggle for independence. Tibetan Christians face strong opposition from family, friends, neighbors and communities. To have a “deviant faith” in this region has a high price as conversion to Christianity basically shuts one out of the community.

Secular Intolerance (Medium): Efforts to remove faith from public life have increased, as seen in restrictions on religious publishing and religious activities on campuses. Some locations report an increase in atheistic education. By definition, Communism is atheist and against all religions.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium): President Xi Jinping has consolidated his power in a manner not seen since Mao Zedong, and under Xi the Communist Party has become almost militant in its efforts to attack any perceived threats to its authority. The main objective of the Party is to maintain power. In some ways, ideology is a tool which serves this rather than being an end in itself. For example, Christianity is seen as a possible threat because it involves people organizing and rallying around something outside Party control, rather than specifically for its theology.

Organized Corruption and Crime (Medium): Local officials can be very corrupt. Land disputes involving Christians account for a fair number of reported cases of persecution in the last year. However, the Communist Party started a big anti-Corruption campaign, so this persecution engine might be less apparent in the future.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in China	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Weak
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Weak
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Very Weak
Own (extended) family	Medium
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

The small convert community from a Muslim and Buddhist (Tibetan) background is facing the brunt of persecution, which comes from non-Christian religious leaders – who are still very influential in Xinjiang and Tibet – as well as from the community they live in and their own parents and family. Conversion is seen as more than just changing religion, it is rather betraying a community. The Communist authorities are driving persecution as well since they are responsible for limiting all freedoms in the mentioned volatile

provinces. And in their effort to control all social groups within Chinese society, the Communist authorities hedge Christians in as well in all regions of China, especially as Christians are the largest social body in China not under official state-control.

Context

China is one of the most complicated countries on the WWL with the persecution of Christians occurring in multi-faceted and diverse ways. While the campaign of breaking down crosses in the province Zhejiang stopped at the beginning of 2016, church meetings continued to be disrupted and stopped in several provinces and churches were strongly discouraged or hindered from running youth camps. However, in other provinces these traditional summer camps were running without any state intervention. Churches are especially targeted for monitoring and disruption if i) foreigners attend the gatherings, ii) foreign media seems to be involved, iii) the gathering is perceived as being too big, or iv) missionaries are being sent abroad.

In the Communist Party's pursuit of its goal of maintaining power through national unity and by limiting outside influences, the campaign against corruption is also continuing at full throttle. But there are plenty of other issues the leadership faces. The economy continues to be a challenge (since society has grown to expect an increasing level of wealth) as is the provision of general security (currently won by keeping radical militants hedged into Xinjiang and Tibet). The answers the rulers have given so far are cautious and ideologically strict. The easing of the one-child-policy has not yet led to the results the government hoped for and is anyway a two-edged sword: It may well alleviate some of the problems caused by an ageing society, but at the same time it adds to the need of increased economic growth.

The leadership's goal of maintaining power includes the control of all religions. The question of how to regulate Christianity and its growth is gaining weight. In April 2016, the first high-level meeting on religion took place behind closed doors and it has been reported that President Xi Jinping warned against [religious influences](#)¹³⁰ from abroad. The [sinicization of religion](#)¹³¹ continues to be a topic as well. In a popular internet forum, a young Chinese Christian asked in March 2017 if being a Christian and [joining the Communist Party](#)¹³² can go together. One answer came from a surprising source: The Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (CCCYL). It started with a clear "No" - not just to Christianity, but to any religion, and followed up with a lengthy explanation quoting the Communist Party's Constitution. It ended with a warning "to resist religion's corrosiveness". A report of Freedom House, published in February 2017 and titled "[The Battle for China's Spirit](#)"¹³³ points to an increasing control and limitation of religions as well. After more than a year, the Chinese government finally announced on 7 September 2017 that the

¹³⁰ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-religion/chinas-xi-warns-of-foreign-infiltration-through-religion-idUSKCN0XL075>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹³¹ See: <https://chinastocks.net/2017/09/10/chinas-major-religions-plan-to-sinicize/>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹³² See: https://www.chinasource.org/blog/posts/why-you-dont-need-to-be-a-communist-to-serve-the-people?utm_medium=feed&utm_source=feedpress.me&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+chinesechurchvoices, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹³³ See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/china-religious-freedom>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

[implementation of regulations on religion](#)¹³⁴ will begin on 1 February 2018. While the regulations are more detailed and seem to be stricter than in the former draft version, most depends on implementation which will only start after the publication of WWL 2018.

President Xi's name and ideas (under the title "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era") have been officially [incorporated](#)¹³⁵ into the Communist Party's constitution at the 19th Party Congress. Although time is needed to see how everything plays out in practice, there are still three important results to note from this Party Congress: 1) President Xi Jinping is the first leader since Mao Zedong to have his ideas added to the Party constitution during his lifetime. This illustrates how powerful his position really is. 2) Unlike previous congresses, the leadership did not indicate an 'heir apparent' to take over from President Xi in 2022, when the next Party Congress takes place. Whether this means that he will be seeking a third term in office or will just wield influence behind the scenes, remains to be seen. 3) In his speech lasting more than three hours, President Xi mentioned religious issues quite prominently and emphasized the [state's need to control](#)¹³⁶ religion and to sinicize it.

In relation to the regulations on religion mentioned above, a hot topic of debate is church growth. While official figures point to comparatively low numbers of Christians, other estimations say that the number of Christians – comprised of the registered Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Protestant house-church networks, Catholic Patriotic Association and Vatican-related Roman Catholic churches – outnumbers the members of the Communist Party, which is estimated at around the 88 million mark. Other estimations for the number of Christians are in the 130 million range or even above. The very discussion and the wide range of estimations show that China is not easy to understand, and that persecution and the strong growth of Christianity are not contradictory, but might well be interdependent. More importantly, this also explains why the Communist Party is nervous about the growth of Christianity. As Ian Johnson explains in his ground-breaking book "The souls of China",¹³⁷ there is another reason for the Party to keep worrying: Even though China has managed to lift millions of citizens out of poverty, people are still unhappy and are looking for a sense and meaning to life. Religion is thus a very important factor in Chinese society to reckon with. In fact, Christianity is the largest organized body outside the Communist Party.

While there is still more freedom for Christians in China than thirty years ago, persecution continues, also among the Han Chinese majority, and the space is narrowing, as the introduction of the draft regulations on religion and the new NGO Law is showing. The Chinese authorities introduced a [crackdown](#)¹³⁸ on the use of Virtual Private Network (VPN) in January 2017, a software used to access blocked websites and

¹³⁴ See: http://english.gov.cn/policies/latest_releases/2017/09/07/content_281475842719170.htm, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹³⁵ See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/chinas-leader-elevated-to-the-level-of-mao-in-communist-pantheon/2017/10/24/ddd911e0-b832-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?utm_term=.669e9d5e0426, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹³⁶ See: [http://www.newsweek.com/china-xi-jinping-unveils-plans-nationalizing-religion-691610?ct=t\(10/30/14\)](http://www.newsweek.com/china-xi-jinping-unveils-plans-nationalizing-religion-691610?ct=t(10/30/14)), last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹³⁷ See: <http://ian-johnson.com/books/the-souls-of-china>, last accessed 24 November 2017.

¹³⁸ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jan/23/china-vpn-cleanup-great-firewall-censorship>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

protect privacy. The [barring of private companies](#)¹³⁹ from providing online news and commentaries in April 2017 points to increasing efforts at controlling what news items Chinese citizens should be allowed and able to read. China's Cyberspace Administration has announced [new rules for commenting](#)¹⁴⁰ on social media. From 1 October 2017, the country's more than 730 million internet users are barred from making anonymous online comments. There have also been a host of reports published pointing to an ever-growing promotion of [the twelve core socialist values](#).¹⁴¹ This government drive includes a new series of school textbooks (to be fully introduced by 2019) aimed at primary and middle-school pupils.

Besides Christians, Muslims in Xinjiang and Tibetan Buddhists face strong pressure from the government, as does Falun Gong. Details can be found in the Freedom House Special Report of February 2017: "[The Battle for China's Spirit](#)".¹⁴²

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Compared to the other categories below, expatriate Christians experience more freedom, but they face monitoring and limitations in their contact with local Chinese churches.

Historical Christian communities and government controlled churches:

This category highlights a unique factor in Chinese Christianity: There are registered and government recognized churches – the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) – and non-registered, independent churches. On the Roman Catholic side, these are the followers loyal to the Vatican. TSPM and CPA-related churches are government-controlled and even if there is no direct censorship, they will carefully weigh their words. Election of leadership is state-influenced. It is noteworthy that the TSPM churches have [welcomed the government's new regulations](#)¹⁴³ on religion and have outlined their understanding of Church-State relations in their official magazine. This may increase pressure on non-registered churches. The Vatican-loyal churches are not recognized by the authorities and are fought against as they are connected to a foreign power.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Converts are either from a Muslim background or from a Buddhist (Tibetan) background. While Christians in China generally have more freedom, compared to the 1980s, this is not true for the small communities of Christian converts. Living in ethnic minority regions striving for independence and which are becoming ever more volatile, converts are facing pressure from two sides - from the government and family. While

¹³⁹ See: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/news-05032017114422.html>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁴⁰ See: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/ban-08282017112633.html>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹⁴¹ See: <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000764/chinese-textbooks-get-a-few-shades-redder>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹⁴² See: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_ChinasSprit2016_FULL_FINAL_140pages_compressed.pdf, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁴³ See: https://www.chinasource.org/blog/posts/three-self-church-reflections-on-revised-regulations?utm_medium=feed&utm_source=feedpress.me&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+chinesechurchvoices, last accessed 24 November 2017.

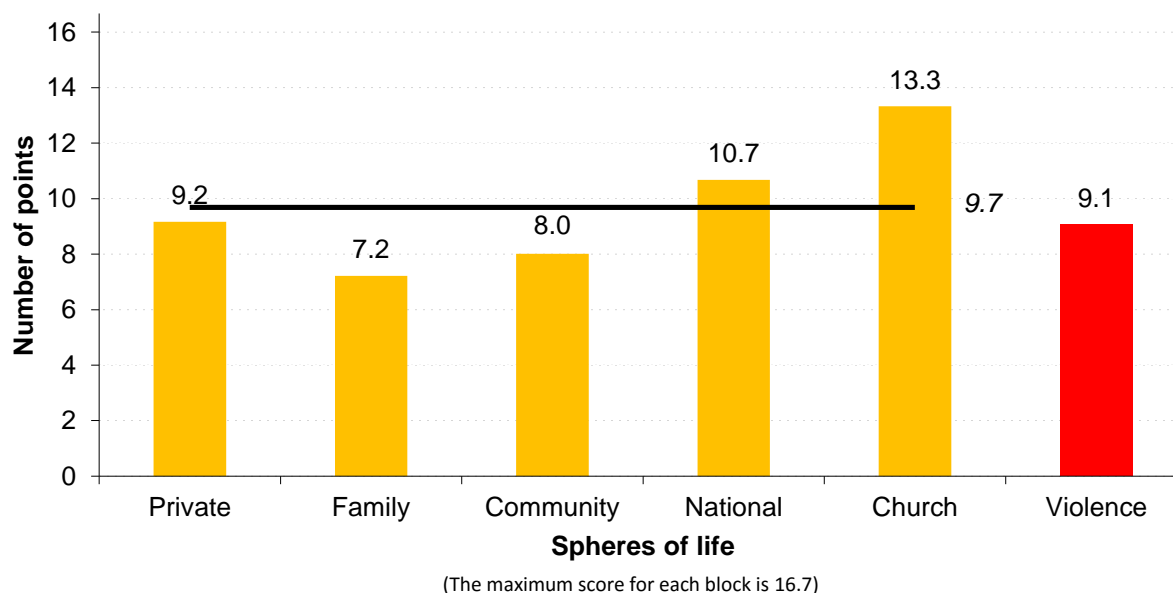
the government restricts any meeting or action it deems political or dangerous, family, friends and community put converts under pressure to return to the “true faith”, because it is an important uniting factor for the ethnic groups.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category is made up of a multitude of Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations under a whole variety of names. On the Protestant side, these non-traditional churches are also called house-churches or underground churches. These terms, however, are misleading as some congregations consist of thousands of members and they are often meeting openly in commercial buildings and not in secret. As explained in detail above (see: Persecution Engines), the government’s main goal is to keep control over society and therefore all Christians are affected by the measures it applies to reach this goal.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for China



The Persecution pattern shows:

- The scores for pressure in the *Spheres of life* decreased in the *Private* and *Family* life, but increased in *Community*, *National* and *Church* spheres, reflecting an increased emphasis on Communist rhetoric by the government and a more challenging legal and administrative environment. The latter has been caused by the new regulations on religion due for implementation on 1 February 2018. These are already having consequences as Christians have started to prepare for the implementation. The average score of 9.7 stayed the same as in WWL 2017.
- The pressure is strongest in the *Church* and *National* spheres of life (with scores of 13.3 and 10.7 respectively). While pressure in these spheres is typical for countries where *Communist and post-Communist oppression* is active, the pressure in the *Private* sphere (9.2) points to the problems Christian converts with a Muslim or Buddhist (Tibetan) background are facing. Pressure from

Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism is present not just in the *Private* sphere, but also in the *Family* and *Community spheres*. But even pressure resulting from *Communist and post-Communist oppression* can be felt in these *spheres*, for example in questions dealing with education. The increase in the *National sphere* is due to all government authorities re-emphasizing Communist ideology and often showing open hostility towards Christians and issuing warnings.

- Violence against Christians increased slightly from 8.5 (in the WWL 2017 reporting period) to 9.1 as churches continued to be closed down and landlords were put under pressure to stop renting out premises to Christians. There were no killings, but still a considerable number of Christians continue to be imprisoned. Generally, the authorities have learned that violence gives bad international headlines and they prefer to use more subtle pressure like inviting Christians to meet them “for a chat over a cup of tea”.

Private sphere:

Muslim Uighur and Tibetan Buddhist converts have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only believers in their family. Bibles and other Christian materials have to be hidden carefully and can only be read with much caution as devout Muslim or Tibetan-Buddhist families will not accept this. Meeting with other Christians is a special challenge in these circumstances as on the one hand it is dangerous for the converts themselves, and on the other hand it may endanger a Christian meeting. Sharing the new-won faith is virtually impossible and if a convert dares to do so and is reported, he or she would be warned by local authorities and – depending on the case – could even be detained for a few days. Known converts are closely monitored and will face threats and in some cases even physical or mental abuse. In strict Communist households and families, Christians may suffer from restrictions as well.

Family sphere:

In Tibet and Xinjiang the situation is very volatile and the more pressure the government places on society in these provinces, the more every change of religion is seen as a disgrace to the family and as a betrayal of the close-knit community life. Therefore converts are very cautious and hide their new-won faith. Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce (if married) and may lose their inheritance rights. It is difficult for them to organize baptisms, Christian weddings or funerals. Converts are expected to hold a traditional wedding ceremony and can therefore celebrate a Christian wedding only in hiding, if at all. If they are discovered organizing a baptism in Xinjiang or Tibet, converts are detained by the authorities for up to a few months. Children of all Christians throughout the country are forced to study anti-biblical teachings as the atheist education system strongly discourages belief (this is something which has been revived in the WWL 2018 reporting period) and the converts’ wider families will convince converted parents to teach traditional values and religion.

Community sphere:

Converts are put under pressure by family, friends and neighbors to renounce the Christian faith, and their children face discrimination and bias by Muslim or Buddhist teachers and pupils at school. Monitoring (e.g. by school authorities and neighborhood committees) is prevalent in the whole country and affects Christians as well as other citizens. However, high-profile Christians often come under special scrutiny. It is challenging for Christians to participate in communal forums as most community organizations include

a political element. In rural areas of Tibet, Lamas have great influence on the peoples' daily lives (e.g. by controlling health care), because many of them are local government officials. They allocate resources, even government relief resources, to families in the community and frequently discriminate against or even exclude known converts. All religious believers are excluded from government positions which require Party membership. While Christians are not "interrogated" by the police, they are "invited to meet for a cup of tea" with the authorities, whenever the latter deem it necessary. Local authorities will not shy away from switching their mode of operation from monitoring to cracking down, if they see the need for it, as was shown in several cases in the WWL 2018 reporting period.

National sphere:

While China does recognize freedom of religion in its Constitution, the implementation of this freedom is a far cry from having any real meaning. The government continues to propagate a Communist and atheist ideology: In August 2017 Cambridge University Press (CUP) decided - at the request of the Chinese authorities - to [censor hundreds](#)¹⁴⁴ of academic papers being prepared for publication in China, since many were regarded as being too politically sensitive. Although CUP quickly changed its mind after an international outcry, this episode shows that control of what is reported and said, be it in the academic world or elsewhere, plays a key role in national life. As the media is state-controlled and access to non-state-controlled news is made more and more impossible (see Context above), there is an inherent anti-religious bias which also affects the reporting about Christians.

Publically displaying religious symbols is a problem for all Christians in the provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet. The [new NGO law](#),¹⁴⁵ which came into force on 1 January 2017, left Christians on uncharted territory, especially those who receive funds from abroad as state control in this respect increased significantly.

Church sphere:

As mentioned above, the government's interest is in maintaining a "harmonious society". In terms of religion this means "managing" churches, be they registered or not, be they "black", "red" or "gray". The unpublished, but tacitly well-understood guidelines every Christian church should adhere to are: (1) report to the authorities about recent activities; (2) allow no participation of foreign Christians or income from foreign funds; (3) stage no high-profile activities; (4) only conduct "regular" Christian activities during sensitive periods.

How the regulations on religion will be implemented on 1 February 2018 onwards remains to be seen, but it will most likely lead to tighter control and monitoring and have the strongest consequences in the *Church sphere*. Some are expecting that authorities will offer a certain kind of registration to the thousands of house-churches in China. However there is no certainty about what such an offer might look like and what strings may be attached. And this will not be a quick process, either. On the contrary, there have been several reports of unregistered churches being pushed by local authorities to join state-registered

¹⁴⁴ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-censorship-journal/uk-academic-publisher-reposts-blocked-china-article-after-outcry-idUSKCN1B103J?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁴⁵ See: <http://ngochina.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/the-politics-of-overseas-ngo-management.html> last accessed 28 September 2017.

churches. Additionally, an increasing number of house-churches are facing difficulties in renewing their rent contracts, due to the pressure landlords have been receiving from local authorities, in particular following the release of revised religious regulations. Unregistered meetings in the provinces of Guizhou, Sichuan, Hebei, Henan, Beijing, Xinjiang and Guangdong have been shut down.

It should be noted that the bulk of implementation work for the new regulations lies with local authorities which might lead to more local biases and increased control. Christians in China experience highly differing levels of freedom today, but most observers agree that freedom is generally shrinking. This does not mean that churches are fearful of what is going to happen. A Chinese pastor said: “Our experience is that more persecution leads to a revival and a growth of the church. We stood through tough persecution before, we will stand through whatever comes now as well.” Other pastors even expect churches to benefit as they will need to become smaller again, returning to a “family style” church. Churches are monitored and even if only “high-profile” churches have been closed up till now (since they are often perceived as acting politically), the sword of Damocles is hanging over all non-registered churches in China. If Beijing demands it, they will be asked to register under the umbrella of TSPM churches and act according to the guidelines referred to above, or face the consequences.

There are, however, huge opportunities for churches as well. The one child policy and the growing number of elderly people in society make bearable solutions one of the most urgent needs the Chinese society is facing. Christians in several provinces are helping by [opening care homes](#)¹⁴⁶ for the elderly and by participating in the social care offered by the few existing state-run care homes.

Violence:

In January 2017, China [expelled 32 South Korean Christians](#)¹⁴⁷ who had been living in the border region close to North Korea. On 24 May 2017, [two Chinese missionaries](#)¹⁴⁸ were abducted by radical Islamic militants in Quetta, Pakistan, who later killed them. While this is scored for WWL purposes for Pakistan, it is highlighted here as it has far-reaching consequences for the years to come. With a growing Christian Church in China and the pledge to send 20,000 missionaries by 2030¹⁴⁹, more and more missionaries will be sent to some of the most difficult and unlikely places in the world. Especially with the government's New Silk Road policy, Chinese citizens will have relative easy access to many countries. The question, however, is if they will enjoy any protection from their (atheist) government, if they are not well received abroad. In August 2017, several buildings, belonging to a Catholic church in the Shanxi province were

¹⁴⁶ See: http://chinachristiandaily.com/2017-06-03/ministry/a-glance-into-a-christian-nursing-home-in-xi-an_4886.html, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁴⁷ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/11/china-expels-south-korean-missionaries-amid-missile-defence-tensions>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁴⁸ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41116480>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁴⁹ This pledge was made at a conference of house-church leaders in 2015, backed by the Lausanne movement: <https://www.lausanne.org/news-releases/inaugural-mission-china-2030-conference>.

[destroyed](#),¹⁵⁰ despite efforts by church members to protect them. Homes of believers were raided and belongings confiscated in Guangdong, Xinjiang, and Anhui.

Gender profile of persecution

There is no information available on gender-specific persecution of Christians in China.

Future outlook

The first term of President Xi Jinping’s rule has seen an (in recent times unprecedented) reduction in freedom in all sectors of society. The preferred line of thinking has been emphasized by introducing President Xi’s own [brand of “political thought”](#)¹⁵¹ into the Party constitution at the 19th Party Congress, even mentioning his name. This emphasis was also clear when Xi Jinping was given [a new title](#)¹⁵², which referred to him as the “core” of the party leadership – a title unheard of for the last 15 years. There are reasons to believe that the emphasis on ideology and a budding personality cult around President Xi will increasingly affect the Church in the near future as the local authorities already seem to be acting more restrictively. These restrictions come in indirect ways, such as through the renewed emphasis on Communist ideology and rhetoric, and by limiting the space in which churches can operate, as they come under pressure to adapt their ministry. These developments are most likely going to continue as the new NGO law and the draft regulations on religion indicate. The restriction on internet access and news consumption, by closing VPN services, which enable access to information blocked by China’s [Great Firewall](#)¹⁵³ (which is a vast internet surveillance and content-control system that prevents people in China from accessing certain websites and pages, including Google, Facebook and Twitter), points in the same direction. It seems that “control” and “restrictions” might become keywords for the Christian churches in China in the years to come. But the Chinese authorities have become much cleverer in dealing with Christians. They quickly learned that violent reactions and long-term sentences make bad international headlines and results can be achieved by less aggressive means as well. This is not to say that violence is not known anymore. However, the usual means of dealing with Christians and trying to steer them in the direction preferred is by “inviting them to tea”, thus practicing micro-management.

Plans to introduce a [Social Credit System](#) (SCS)¹⁵⁴ in China have emerged, by which authorities are planning to rate each and every citizen by 2020. While this may appear logical for a country developing online and mobile paying systems, such a rating has very serious implications. Questions arise not just about fraud or buying a better rating. What happens if citizens are following socially unwanted behavior, like – for example – being religious or Christian? What will be the consequences of that?

¹⁵⁰ See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/priests-laypeople-injured-defending-church-property-in-china/80137>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁵¹ See: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/xi-congress-08172017160129.html>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁵² See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/27/xi-jinping-becomes-core-leader-of-china>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁵³ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/14/truth-behind-great-firewall-of-china-headlines>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

¹⁵⁴ See: <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/chinese-government-social-credit-score-privacy-invasion>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

In the plethora of challenges the government faces, China's leadership tries to keep everything under control. Its goal of maintaining power includes control of all religions, and hence the strongly growing Christian minority as well. The question for the future is whether the governing authorities will start looking to Christians as a positive force in society. If so, Christians could become allies to improve and develop society and thus become contributors for establishing a "harmonious society". But it is also possible that in order to stay in power, the leadership's grip on churches may get tighter and Christians will face more pressure. The next years will show if local churches will be valued as an asset or rejected as a threat. The growing restrictions as well as an increasing personality cult point strongly to the latter and so it looks like Christians will continue to be affected by *Communist and Post-Communist oppression*, but there is still room for both directions, as other churches enjoy much freedom as well.

However, the room to maneuver for churches is narrowing. As one Chinese blogger [put it](#)¹⁵⁵: "No matter what kind of religion you believe in, there is only one norm: they must obey the command of the Party and acknowledge the Communist Party's superior position over all churches. If you believe Christianity, the Communist Party is the God of your God; if you believe in Buddhism, the Communist Party is Buddha of your Buddha; for Muslims, the communist party is Allah of your Allah; for the living Buddha, only the Communist Party can approve who will be the living Buddha. The Party wants you to say what she wants you to say; do what she wants you to do. Believers of different religions should uphold their faith to follow the Party's will. If you are not doing so, you will be suppressed by the dictatorship." And with the implementation of the Social Credit System referred to above, [the authorities will have the means](#)¹⁵⁶ to follow their plans up.

China's claims on the South China Sea are also causing international headaches, but in the realm of foreign politics other challenges easily top this. On the one hand, there is an increasingly unruly neighbor, North Korea, which annoys China with its nuclear tests very much. If this will lead to a strategic recalculation on the Chinese side, remains to be seen. In any case, in November 2017 Kim Jong Un decided not to receive a high-ranking Chinese envoy for talks, which shows how relations between the two countries are seriously cooling. On the other hand, China had another [military standoff](#)¹⁵⁷ with its neighbor India, close to Bhutan and the so-called "chicken neck". While a face-saving solution was found for both sides, this incident served as a reminder that there are other places to look at as well. As a wild card, the new US administration seems to follow a more protectionist role when it comes to economic issues, leaving China in the uncomfortable and unexpected position of promoting free trade, vitally needed for the country's economic growth. Of course all this will not have direct implications for Chinese Christians, but in an increasingly insecure world the Chinese government will step up its ideological efforts, grow even more conservative and - despite going ahead with free trade - follow a more nationalistic path.

¹⁵⁵ See: https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-chinese-govts-hijacking-of-religions-is-nearly-complete/6302?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_content=08-11-2017&utm_campaign=newsletter_crx_lci&PMID=58d1f792a26689dfa2699c74ec4d75ae, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹⁵⁶ See: https://www.merics.org/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads/China-Monitor/merics_ChinaMonitor_39_englisch_Web.pdf, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹⁵⁷ See: <http://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/india-china-08182017175038.html>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

Policy considerations

- The international community should encourage the Chinese government to have dialogue with local churches on the prudent enforcement of the new religious regulations, in order to maintain social stability and harmony.
- The Chinese government should be encouraged to proactively continue constructive dialogue with local churches, in order to understand that Christian values are aligned with traditional Chinese values and that Christianity can be a positive influence for Chinese society.
- The international community should encourage the Chinese government to exchange experiences with overseas religious leaders, with a view to appreciating how religious issues are dealt with in overseas countries and how positively Christianity can impact society.

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44. Sri Lanka

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 57 / Position: 44

WWL 2017 Points: 55 / Position: 45

WWL 2016 Points: 53 / Not in Top 50

The score for Sri Lanka increased from 55 in WWL 2017 to 57. This is now a clear trend since WWL 2016, when the country was not in the Top 50. The hopes that Sri Lanka's religious and ethnic minorities held after the elections in January 2015 have been disappointed. The government has gradually leaned towards and supported nationalist Buddhism, although not as openly as in the previous government under Rajapaksa. Whereas the score for violence only increased by 0.2 points, the levels of pressure in the *Private* and *National spheres of life* in particular increased more noticeably. The situation for converts (from Buddhist, Muslim or Hindu background) became more difficult in the *Private sphere*, and all Christians (especially non-Catholics) experienced more difficulties in the *National sphere*. When a Roman Catholic cardinal stated publicly on TV that there was no persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka, he was basically branding Protestants as liars or non-Christians. (For more details see under "Persecution engines".)

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Sri Lanka ¹⁵⁸	
Islamic oppression	Weak
Religious nationalism	Very Strong
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Weak
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Religious nationalism (Very strong):

The Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka is a secular state. However, its Constitution puts Buddhism first and evidently regards Buddhism as state religion. Chapter 2 of the Constitution states that the "Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana (Buddhist teachings), while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e)." This provision in Article 9 is left [unchanged](#)¹⁵⁹ in the new draft Constitution. These rights concerning freedom of religion and belief granted in Articles 10 and 14 can be limited, however, and this is done in subtle ways as will be shown below in Section 5: Spheres of life and violence.

Buddhist supremacy is still a concept widely shared in the country. Every Sinhalese is considered to be a Buddhist, so not only Tamil Christians are treated as second-class citizens, but also Sinhalese Christians are looked at with suspicion and frequently slandered and attacked. Perpetrators are not only state authorities, as the telling name "Ministry for Religious Affairs and Buddhist Sasana" indicates, but also Buddhist monks and local authorities. Radical Buddhist groups, namely the *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS, translated as Buddhist Force Army) and the *Sinhala Ravaya* (SR), are led by Buddhist monks and these are known to stir up mobs for attacking the Muslim minority and Christians as well. Although they are not as present as they used to be before the government changed in January 2015, their influence is vividly felt and attacks on Christian churches continue at the same level. Buddhist supremacy is still very much felt in the daily lives of religious minorities like Muslims and Christians, but it is no longer the BBS or SR in the driving seat.

Denominational protectionism (Medium):

It may be surprising to see a new Persecution engine enter the stage for Sri Lanka. In June 2017 the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Ranjith, publicly claimed that there had been [no attacks or forced church closures](#)¹⁶⁰ in the country. It would seem that he only sees Catholics as Christians. This

¹⁵⁸ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

¹⁵⁹ See: <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/new-constitution-state-religion-buddhism/>, last accessed 7 December 2016.

¹⁶⁰ See: <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/41372/no-such-attacks-on-churches-cardinal-ranjith>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

sentiment was echoed a few days later by the country's Minister of Justice: He too [equated](#)¹⁶¹ Christianity simply with Roman Catholicism, consequently excluding Protestant denominations and thus concluding that there have been no attacks against Christians in Sri Lanka. This completely neglects the well-documented entries in the [database on violent incidents](#)¹⁶² managed by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL). For January-October 2017 alone, it documented 43 cases.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Sri Lanka	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Medium
Violent religious groups	Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

The main drivers of persecution are radical Buddhist movements and government officials, frequently on the local level. Although the election of a new government in 2015 led to a reduction in the activities of the BBS, other movements such as SR gained strength. They claim Sri Lanka as a Buddhist Sinhala nation and recently had a widespread sticker-campaign promoting this ideology. BBS transformed itself into a political party, but has not been particularly influential in the political arena. Family members together with village officials in rural areas have often abused Christian converts verbally and asked them to leave their villages. Political parties tend to join calls for the protection of the country's Buddhist heritage since this gains votes.

Context

To understand Sri Lankan Buddhism it is helpful to understand the traditional Sri Lankan triangle: Sinhalese life has three points of reference, namely the temple, the village and the lake (meaning irrigation and farming). Nothing else should enter this triangle; therefore anything from the outside is viewed with suspicion. Sri Lankan Buddhist groups are therefore not so concerned with the philosophical themes of Buddhism so popular in the West, but rather with the fight to preserve this traditional triangle. All the

¹⁶¹ See: <http://srilankabrief.org/2017/06/open-letter-to-justice-minister-sri-lanka-you-seem-to-be-ignorant-about-the-definition-of-a-christian/>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹⁶² See: <https://slchurchattacks.crowdmap.com/>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

actions of BBS and SR can in fact be seen as attempts at fending off attacks against this view of society. Even violent clashes and riots against the Muslim minority (as occurred in 2014 and on a lower scale in May 2017) and attacks against Christians can be explained by this wish to preserve the triangle. Muslim and Christian minorities are perceived as a threat. This was shown by another incident in May 2017 as well: In a speech aimed at the Minister for National Co-existence, leading BBS monk, Galagoda Aththe Gnanasera Thero, criticized the presence of “[Christian missionaries](#)”¹⁶³, effectively declaring them to be legitimate targets.

Over the last years, Sri Lanka had been affected by two persecution engines, one being *Religious nationalism*, the other *Dictatorial paranoia*. Sri Lanka has a 26 year civil war history which came to a bloody conclusion only in 2009. In Sri Lanka’s civil war the predominantly Hindu minority of Tamils, mainly based in the northern and eastern provinces of the country, fought for independence. The “Tamil Tigers” (or LTTE) gained prominence around the world. Both government forces and LTTE committed war crimes and one of the main challenges now is how best to deal with this fact. Reconciliation, either through purely domestic means or with international help, is still far off.

Another major question connected to this issue is the de-militarization of the country. Due to the long civil war and the ever-increasing business activities of the army, the armed forces currently consist of around 300,000 soldiers. It will be difficult to re-integrate these soldiers into civilian life - and most likely some parts of the army will not want to lose lucrative opportunities, especially if they might face an investigation into war crimes.

Finally, there is the question of how radical Buddhist groups like BBS and SR will act in the future. They seemed to emerge from nowhere and grew in a very short time (BBS held its first national convention in July 2012). And while most of their leaders were naturally already known and even politically active earlier, the groups’ influence and radicalism against religious minorities was unprecedented. Their actions went unchecked, so that the claim that those groups were at least tacitly supported by the former government, especially by the minister of defence, has gained credibility. The fact that the leading BBS monk mentioned above was [released on bail](#)¹⁶⁴ in June 2017 (even though the charges of inciting religious hatred and of hate- speech against the Muslim minority were crystal clear) is a worrying signal for Sri Lanka's religious minorities. The court case against him has been postponed several times and is making very slow progress.

As already stated, Buddhist nationalist monks campaign strongly not just against Christians but also against the country’s Muslim minority. Violent clashes between Buddhists and Muslims occurred in the southern province of Galle in November 2017 and showed that the serious violence of 2014 could be repeated in the months to come.

¹⁶³ See: <http://srilankabrief.org/2017/05/govt-silent-as-bbs-continues-its-holy-war/>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

¹⁶⁴ See: <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/gnanasara-released-on-bail-warrant-cancelled/>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians are not counted here as a separate category since these Christians integrate into other churches.

Historical Christian communities:

These are groups such as the Roman Catholic Church and the eight denominations belonging to the [National Christian Council](#)¹⁶⁵. They face less persecution or violence, but are affected by the overall atmosphere of Buddhist supremacy and are being hindered in constructing church buildings at times.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

These are communities of Christians coming from a Buddhist, Muslim or Hindu background. They face frequent hostilities and also violent attacks. New converts are most often seen as traitors and are consequently harassed, subjected to physical and verbal assaults and to continued isolation by their local communities. This occurs mainly in rural villages and had in the past only been significantly visible in the southern and north central provinces of the country. However, with the end of the civil war, this trend has spread to the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka as well.

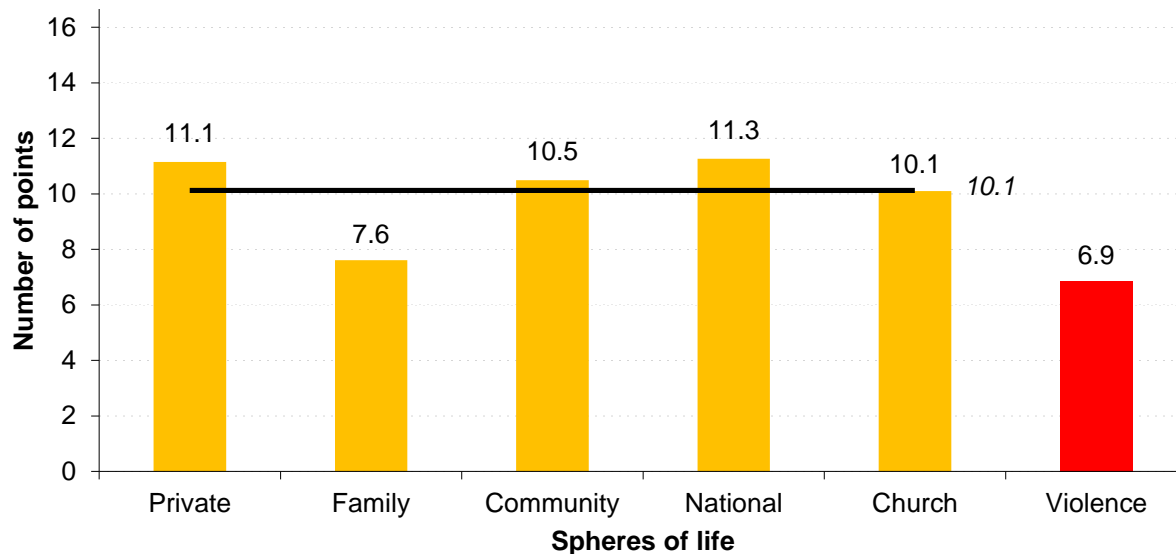
Non-traditional Christian communities:

Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations are often affected by violent attacks but the perpetrators have changed since the last elections. While previously most attacks were carried out by the main Buddhist radical groups, now attacks are mainly led by village Buddhist monks and local government officials who impose legal restrictions on Christians or cover up violent incidents against them. While the persecution engine drivers have changed, the ground level situation remains by and large the same.

¹⁶⁵ See: <http://nccsl.org/web/member-churches/>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Sri Lanka



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Sri Lanka remained at a high level, rising from a score of 9.6 in WWL 2017 to 10.1 in WWL 2018.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Community, National and Private spheres of life*. While pressure in the *National sphere* is typical for countries affected by the Persecution engine *Religious nationalism*, pressure in the *Private and Community spheres* points to difficulties faced by Christian converts from other religions. The *Church sphere* shows a high level of pressure as well, reflecting numerous incidents where mobs (frequently led by Buddhist monks) turned up in front of churches, often supported by local officials, disturbing services and demanding that churches be closed down.
- Violence against Christians remained stable, increasing only from 6.7 in WWL 2017 to 6.9 in WWL 2018. Churches and premises of pastors have been attacked. There were also reports of Christians being physically assaulted and two pastors had to leave their villages and go into hiding for some time.

Private sphere:

Converts from a Buddhist background experience opposition from their family and relatives. Even other people from the community oppose them when someone converts to Christianity in their area. Christians from a Muslim or Hindu background also experience this sort of opposition. Therefore, even worshipping by themselves in private poses a risk to converts and many fear hostility from their families. Owning Christian materials can be dangerous for Christians living with non-Christian family members, especially if they are living in areas where Buddhists are very protective towards spreading their religion. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, social media platforms have become the radical Buddhists' new tool for persecuting Christians. When Buddhist groups made attacks they would often capture the Christians on video and

upload the clips to Facebook. They portrayed their attacks as implementing justice; Christians and pastors are portrayed as traitors, out to undermine the country's Buddhist heritage. Pastors who have been targeted in this way now find it almost impossible to post anything online or express their faith in any written form due to fear/intimidation. It is risky for converts to talk to others about their new faith, especially for converts from Islam, and meetings of converts (and of other Christians too) face the risk of disruptions. Villagers, police authorities and local Buddhist monks monitor the activities of Christians in their villages in order to know when to incite attacks against them or to find faults that they can accuse them of.

Family sphere:

Evangelical and Independent churches are being denied the possibility of registering weddings within their church buildings - which is a facility traditionally allowed in churches in Sri Lanka. Converts are facing discrimination and harassment, but are usually not put under pressure to divorce, and registration questions or the change of religion in an ID card or passport are no problem either. This is why the score for this *Sphere of life* is comparably low. Adult baptisms face opposition, especially if they are held publically. In rural areas, Christians are not allowed to be buried in the public cemetery. Christian burial rites have been denied by Buddhist monks, Hindu villagers and even by government officials in the WWL 2018 reporting period (including Divisional secretaries and police officers). Christian children enrolled into state schools have been routinely forced to observe Buddhist or Hindu rituals. Christian children have also been punished by teachers and principals, and in some instances even fined, when majority religion rituals were not observed. At school, religion is a compulsory subject. Although it is allowed to study one's own religion, the lack of Christian teachers forces Christian children most of the time to study Buddhism instead, resulting in harassment, bullying and bad marks. In one case, a head-teacher not only denied a Protestant pupil admission to his school, but also advised the parents to keep the child at home, even though the parents said there was no other state school near their village.

Community sphere:

As already noted, the strongest pressure in the WWL 2018 reporting period has not come from the main radical Buddhist groups, but from local Buddhist monks. (These are of course influenced by the ideology of the radical groups and want to protect the purity of their local Buddhist triangle - see Section 3: Context.) In areas where Hindus and Buddhists are the majority, Christians often become targets for intimidation and forms of social exclusion, frequently being denied access (or only being given delayed access) to community resources such as wells and electricity. During Hindu festivals, Hindus ostracize Christians for not participating in the activities. Christians are frequently monitored and obstructed by villagers and at times even violently attacked. During the WWL 2018 reporting period, there were several incidents where villagers, Buddhist monks, or neighbors complained to the police or local government officials about the activities of pastors and churches in rural villages. Most often, police officials would then keep visiting the church for a period of time or keep questioning the pastors about their activities. Pressure to renounce the Christian faith is frequent and at times businesses run by Christians become targeted for customer boycotts. During the WWL 2018 reporting period, there were incidents where government officials denied pastors water and electricity supplies solely based on the fact that they were Christians. Christian schoolchildren have been refused enrollment in state schools, despite fulfilling all requirements.

National sphere:

Even though the government, which was elected in January 2015, does not support the radical Buddhist groups openly any more, the level of pressure on Christians in this *Sphere of life* remains substantial, especially as the government is leaning towards supporting Buddhism again. Buddhism is given religious supremacy in the new draft Constitution, and the very few Christians who are in government positions (or work with the government) experience discrimination from nationalists. Christians are portrayed negatively in the media. In July 2017, Christian lawyer Lakshan Dias, who offers legal support for Christians, clearly stated in a television talk-show that persecution against Christians still exists in the country. This led to severe statements being issued by the Minister of Buddha Sasana and the president (as well as several other radical Buddhist groups): All claimed that Lakshan Dias and the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) were traitors and had tarnished the name of the country (see “Denominational protectionism” above).

Perpetrators against Christians are left unpunished. There is a common pattern prior to violent attacks: the attacker releases false accusation to the media (e.g. a pastor is making forced conversions) which in turn justifies the attack. Perpetrators are left unpunished and, in most cases, Christians are pressed to solve court cases amicably. On a positive note, pastors dare to file cases and call on their constitutional freedoms.

Church sphere:

Mobs, monks, villagers, police and local authorities continue to interrupt the gatherings of Christians, question the legality of their activities, and take these cases to the higher authorities. Often Christian resident in the village will be asked to stop all their activities and/or to leave the village. Registration is often used as leverage against Christian churches. A 2008 circular issued by the “Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs” is still being implemented. It requires religious communities to register houses of worship and demands registration for advance approval of any new construction. Even though this circular has no legal force and would apply only to churches opened after 2008, local authorities, Buddhist monks and mobs use it to justify their at times very violent actions against Christians. In the current situation, even if pastors complain against the use of this circular, local authorities and courts do not listen to them. Generally, it remains very difficult to construct or renovate a church building in rural areas as it disturbs the Sri Lankan triangle described under the section “Context” above.

Violence:

From January-October 2017 there were a series of at least 43 [attacks](#)¹⁶⁶ against [churches](#)¹⁶⁷ (partly with the participation of government officials) and some included physical violence against persons. For the full WWL 2018 reporting period, NCEASL recorded 65 incidents. Details can be found in the NCEASL database (see footnote 5). At least 17 Christians suffered physical attacks and at least five houses of pastors were destroyed or damaged. During the WWL 2018 reporting period, two pastors and their families were forced to leave their homes and go into hiding. There are other recorded incidents of pastors and Christians being

¹⁶⁶ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/01/sri-lankan-church-lives-on-despite-destroyed-building-and-death-threats-from-buddhist-monk/>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹⁶⁷ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/06/sri-lanka-20-attacks-christians-year/>, last accessed 29 November 2017.

ordered (or advised) to leave their home-towns or villages if they wanted to continue their Christian activities.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male: No data available.

Future outlook

Although it looks increasingly unlikely, Sri Lanka still has the potential to become one of the positive stories in the World Watch List. If the government finally takes steps to include religious minorities (Muslims and Christians) in its policies and wins the power to act decisively against everyone inciting religious hatred, the situation may improve. Christians are one of the very few social groups which are cutting across the island's huge ethnic divide and many Protestant churches do have both Sinhalese and Tamil members. This is a unique opportunity for building bridges and serving as a role model. But ethnic tensions can and sometimes do hamper churches as well.

National reconciliation remains one of the country's biggest challenges. Given that most social networks are based on religious as well as on ethnic affiliation, the challenge is a big one as ethnic and religious groups need to overcome mistrust and find a way ahead. And it is not clear who can lead this process. The policy of Buddhist supremacy has not been particularly helpful in this respect.

For the time being, *Religious nationalism* will play an important role not just in Sri Lanka's politics, but in society and families as well. The government promised as recently as 17 November 2017 that it is [committed to supporting](#)¹⁶⁸ the Buddhist values of Buddha Sasana. The fact that the country relies heavily on China as one important part of the latter's "One Belt, One Road" project (illustrated for instance in July 2017 by China's [investment](#)¹⁶⁹ in the commercial redevelopment of Hambantota port), means that human rights, including freedom of religion and belief, are likely to take a backseat in the country's future politics.

Policy considerations

Currently under review.

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¹⁶⁸ See: http://www.eurasiareview.com/19112017-sri-lanka-sirisena-says-govt-committed-to-develop-buddha-sasana/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+eurasiareview%2FVsnE+%28Eurasia+Review%29, last accessed 29 November 2017.

¹⁶⁹ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-40761732>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

45. Azerbaijan

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 57 / Position: 45

WWL 2017 Points: 52 / Position: not in Top 50

WWL 2016 Points: 57 / Position: 34

Azerbaijan's score rose to 57 points (ranking 45) on WWL 2018, 5 points more than in WWL 2017 when it did not make it into the Top 50. The increase in score is due both to more reports becoming available and to the fact that communities of expatriate Christians in the country were no longer considered to be a separate category in the WWL analysis, since they are not involuntarily isolated from other Christian communities.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines ¹⁷⁰ in Azerbaijan	
Islamic oppression	Medium
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Very weak
Denominational protectionism	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	Very weak

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. State agents are reported to have infiltrated all religious congregations. Pastors and other church leaders are regularly invited for conversations with the police. This has created a huge amount of fear – no one knows who they can trust any longer. As a result, few dare to talk to foreigners and very little information about persecution is known outside the country. Restrictive legislation that requires registration has been imposed. From time to time all registered groups are required to apply for re-registration, a process in which ever fewer congregations manage to pass the hurdle. The level of oppression in Azerbaijan is so high that Azerbaijani Christians find it easier to evangelize in Iran than in their own country.

¹⁷⁰ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Islamic oppression (Medium):

Pressure on Christians coming from Islamic circles is particularly aimed at Christian converts from a Muslim background. If indigenous people convert to Christianity, they will experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families, friends and local community to force them to repent and return to their former faith. Some MBBs will be locked up for long periods and be beaten. Local Mullahs will preach against them, putting additional pressure on those MBBs. The MBBs may eventually be expelled from their communities. As a result, MBBs will do their best to hide their faith – they become so-called secret believers.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Azerbaijan	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very weak
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Medium
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Government officials and *Political parties* are the drivers that can be linked directly with the persecution engine *Dictatorial paranoia*. They form the oppression that comes from the authorities. The *Extended family*, *Non-Christian religious leaders* and *Normal citizens* are the drivers of oppression by the Islamic environment, especially on converts from Islam.

Context

Azerbaijan borders with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Turkey and Iran. The country is officially a secular state. The majority of its population is Muslim. Azerbaijan is unique among the former Soviet republics in having a large majority of Shiites (85% of the country's Muslims) and a small minority of Sunni Muslims. The government has a negative attitude towards any form of religious fanaticism. This also applies to the attitude towards Christians. Fundamentalist Islam is perceived as a destabilizing factor for the country's rulers.

The government of Azerbaijan pays a lot of attention in presenting a positive image of the country. At international meetings representatives of Azerbaijan display propaganda about "The Land of Tolerance." Critical organizations are approached to correct their reporting. Foreign institutions are invited to come to Azerbaijan to see for themselves how good everything is. Of course these people can only meet carefully

selected Azeris who will tell them that all is well and there is no persecution. At the same time, international human rights and press organizations continue to report that any form of independent and critical behavior continues to be ruthlessly treated in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has a very effective tactic to control religion: every 6-7 years all religious groups must apply for new registration. It can hardly be called coincidence that each time fewer churches manage to get the new registration. During the latest cycle, all churches and religious groups were required to renew their registration by 1 January 2010, but since that date no new churches have been able to register.

Christians are not the only believers persecuted by the government: All religious activities are under surveillance. Muslims, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses experience similar pressure.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Communities of expatriate Christians in Azerbaijan are not involuntarily isolated from other Christian communities and so have not been considered as a separate category in the WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

These groups are not involved in evangelism among Azeris. They can function pretty normally as the regime in Azerbaijan does not consider them as a danger. They will also be used to corroborate the propaganda of the regime that Azerbaijan is the "Land of Tolerance."

Communities of converts to Christianity:

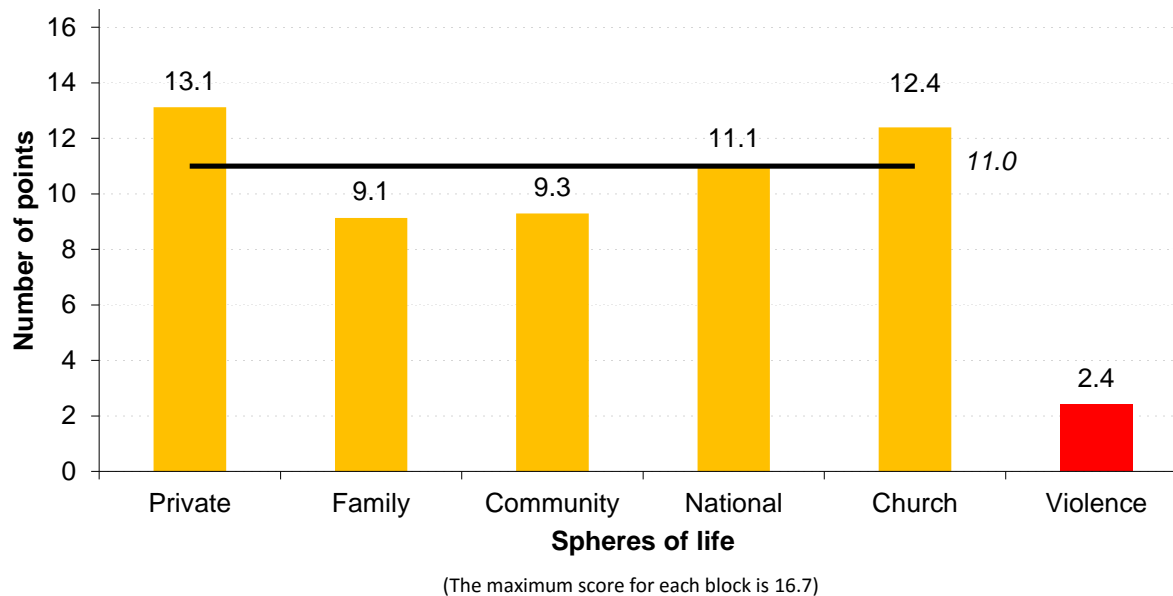
Christian converts with a Muslim background bear the brunt of the persecution in Azerbaijan. Apart from limited restrictions from the state, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. And for them the latter is far the more powerful.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

These groups are high on the government's agenda. They have been infiltrated by spies, and all their activities are constantly being monitored. Pastors and church leaders need to report regularly. Due to the repeated cycles of obligatory re-registration every 6-7 years, ever fewer congregations exist. Those who do succeed in this will be used to corroborate the propaganda of the regime that Azerbaijan is the "Land of Tolerance."

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Azerbaijan



The Persecution pattern for Azerbaijan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Azerbaijan over the five *Spheres of life* was 11.0, rising from 10.3 in WWL 2017.
- Pressure was highest in the *Private sphere* (especially for Christians with a Muslim background) with 13.1 points and in the *Church sphere* with 12.4 points. These levels can be linked directly with the two Persecution engines that are present in Azerbaijan: *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*.
- The score for violence was 2.4 points in WWL 2018. It was only 0.9 in WWL 2017, but that was also due to less reports being available.

Private sphere:

Conversions are drawing lots of opposition from social elements like the family, friends and community. Converts from Islam have to be careful when carrying out Christian rituals like prayer or worship since they are under constant surveillance from their environment. Since the state more or less prohibits the use of religious materials in the country, possession of these will lead to problems if discovered. It is risky for converts to reveal that they are Christians since this will draw unwanted attention from either the state or the family and community. The only group that runs a risk of being caught in the act of accessing Christian sources are converts. Speaking about the faith with family members or a wider circle of people is a risk factor, particularly for converts again. The family or community may put a convert under house arrest to increase pressure on him/her to return to Islam. In some cases physical violence is also applied.

Family sphere:

Local authorities may obstruct registering the birth, weddings and deaths of converts because they have strong links to the local Muslim community. Baptisms are always connected to evangelism and conversion. This is a prime target for both the state and the social environment. The state hinders fostering by Christian families. There is no religious education in Azerbaijan. All education is strictly secular. Parents can only share their faith with their children at home, but no materials are legally available. Despite the fact that Azerbaijan is secular, lessons on Islam are part of the curriculum and all pupils have to attend. Christian children have been slandered by the community, which also does its best to keep Muslim children from communication with Christian children. When it becomes known that someone has converted to Christianity, the family may lock the believers up (house arrest). When a person converts to Christianity, the family, friends and community will put pressure on the husband/spouse to divorce.

Community sphere:

Threats are very common. Converts are threatened by the family, friends and community (including the local imam), and the state constantly threatens unregistered believers. MBBs are monitored by their community and may be forced to take part in Islamic ceremonies and celebrations. Pressure on converts from their community to recant their new faith is usually very strong. Especially in rural areas several tactics will be applied: beatings, house arrest, forced marriages, and ostracism. At the local level children of converts may face disadvantages in their education. Protestants are severely hindered in the operation of their business. Imposing fines is a common occurrence with regard to Protestant churches. This is the preferred method of persecution the authorities use to crackdown on these churches, prior to escalating to more severe forms of punishment (raids, imprisonments, closure of churches). From time to time people have been called to the police station for questioning.

National sphere:

The constitution provides for religious freedom; however, other laws and policies restricted religious freedom in practice, particularly for members of some religious minorities. Religion is not recorded in official documents like passports and ID cards. Though Christians can generally travel abroad without too many obstacles, representatives to international conferences are carefully selected – they need to present the country as the “Land of Tolerance.” Christians do not get fair treatment when dealing with authorities at all levels. If it is known that a person is a Christian, he or she will have great difficulty in finding a job, let alone with the government. A Christian's views in public are likely to be perceived as potentially destabilizing and a foreign import by both the government and the Islamic society. Authorities who persecute Christians do so with utter impunity. As the Azerbaijani judiciary is not independent from the government, Christians will not get a fair trial.

Church sphere:

Azerbaijan has found a fool-proof method of getting rid of churches: simply start a new round of obligatory re-registration. Fewer and fewer churches pass the test. The state monitors all religious activity, and especially targeting unregistered groups. While registered churches can meet inside their buildings, special permission is needed for organizing events outside these buildings. Youth-work is very much restricted and all Christian materials must be cleared by the Committee for Religious Affairs in advance. In practice

this means that all importing, printing, and distribution is blocked. Training facilities for Christians do not exist. All media are state-controlled and are therefore not accessible for believers. Christians can do some social work – e.g. in prisons (where there is usually a chapel). There have been reports in the past of foreign workers being denied visas and bringing religious literature into the country is a punishable offence. By law, foreigners are not allowed to preach in the country.

Violence:

No Christians were reported killed during the WWL 2018 reporting period. One church and one Christian cemetery were damaged. 26 members of Aliabad church were detained and interrogated without trial for gathering for worship as a non-registered church. No Christians were sentenced to jail, but at least 40 Christians were physically harassed by police during church raids, or by family in the case of converts from Islam. One Christian bookshop was forced to close.

Further examples:

- In November 2016, a group of Christians (men, women and children) gathered for an unregistered prayer meeting in the pastor's house in a village in Azerbaijan. Police raided the house and all church members had to stay for hours for questioning. The police made a list of everyone's passport data and compiled an inventory of all literature in the house. Then the Christians were taken to the district police station before being released.
- In December 2016, two Baptists in the northern Zakatala District were fined for leading worship services without state permission. Religious literature confiscated from them was sent to the capital Baku for alleged "expert analysis". (Source: [Forum 18¹⁷¹](#))
- Religious literature and other materials can be sold or distributed only at registered outlets. All religious literature produced in, published in (including on the internet) or imported into Azerbaijan is subject to prior compulsory censorship. The State Committee then specifies how many copies can be produced or imported. All religious materials sold must have a sticker noting that they have State Committee approval. State officials have repeatedly denied that this represents censorship. (Source: [Forum 18¹⁷²](#))

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Christian women and girls from a Muslim background are at a bigger risk than non-converts of experiencing physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, house arrest, discrimination and rejection by family and Muslim community. For non-converts, persecution would be not different for men and women.

¹⁷¹ See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2247, last accessed 7 November 2017.

¹⁷² See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2278, last accessed 7 November 2017.

In Azerbaijan the daily life of indigenous people is based on Islamic culture which puts women in inferior position as compared with men. Women are expected total submission to their parents and if married - to their husbands. Azerbaijan is also a Caucasus country where family traditions and rules are even stricter and disobedience to senior family members is not acceptable. This makes female converts more vulnerable to persecution - both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order.

Male:

Male converts from Islam are at a bigger risk than non-converts of experiencing physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, discrimination and rejection by family and Muslim community. For non-converts, persecution would be not different for men and women.

Men are normally church leaders and the heads of their families, they are also main bread winners. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution his whole family will suffer. Losing jobs will affect the whole family. If a man is a church leader his persecution will affect his church and can result in an increase of fear.

Future outlook

It is to be expected that the government will continue its control over each and every aspect of life in Azerbaijan – and if possible, even to increase it. It will continue to claim that Azerbaijan is the “Land of Tolerance” and target all those who dare to question this. The Church in Azerbaijan will have to survive under a considerable level of surveillance and pressure.

Policy considerations

- The Government of Azerbaijan should honor international laws on Freedoms of Religion, making it clear that the involvement of the State in the internal affairs of religious institutions should be limited to and aimed only at the prevention of real threats from extremists’ activities. Citizens need to be given the right and the opportunity to meet freely for religious purposes.
- The Government should allow the Church of Azerbaijan to communicate freely with churches abroad.
- The Government should allow non-registered religious groups to be able to meet freely for religious purposes. Surveillance, raids, interrogation and censorship of Christian groups should be stopped.

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46. Oman

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 57 / Position: 46

WWL 2017 Points: 53 / Position: 49

WWL 2016 Points: 53 / Position: 50

Oman rose from a score of 53 in WWL 2017 to 57 points in WWL 2018. More violence reported during the WWL 2018 reporting period caused some of this increase of 4 points. However, in the WWL analysis a refinement has been made concerning how the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity are registered. In Oman this contributed to the rise in overall score.

Persecution engines

The Omanis have their own unique Islamic sect: Ibadhi Islam. This differs from mainstream Sunni and Shia Islam and is known for its preference to solve conflicts through dialogue, rather than open conflict. Nevertheless, being Omani means being Muslim, or as a field researcher put it: “The means are non-violent, but the oppression is greatly felt and affects how Christians function in daily life.”

Persecution engines in Oman ¹⁷³	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Islam is the state religion and legislation is based mainly on Islamic law. All state school curricula include instruction in Islam. Apostasy is not a criminal offense, but it is not respected by the legal system either, which assumes that all citizens are Muslims. National holidays are religious holidays, which means Christians are forced to adhere to the Islamic calendar, celebrations and customs. Wavering from the Omani/Islamic agenda is to set oneself in opposition of the government and the people, which many are fearful of doing. A convert from Islam to Christianity faces problems under the Personal Status and Family

¹⁷³ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Code, which prohibits a father from having custody over his children if he leaves Islam. Society shuns those who leave Islam, even though violence is not encouraged.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Tribal values, in which family honor plays a very important role, are blended with Islamic values. To be Omani is to be Muslim. There is not one without the other. There is great pride in being Omani, and often the celebration of tradition is held in higher regard than the meaning behind the tradition. To break with tradition or to question the reasons behind it are unimaginable for the general population.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

Oman has been ruled by a dynasty that does not respect the will of the people. There is discontent among the Omanis who generally believe that the government is authoritarian, even though they accept that recent economic reforms have been beneficial. In its 2017 report, Freedom House rated the country as “not free”.¹⁷⁴ According to the report: “The regime imposes limits on virtually all political rights and civil liberties, and responds particularly harshly to criticism and dissent.”¹⁷⁵ The media also faces harassment and intimidation.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Oman	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Very weak

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Local Omani Christians have been interrogated by government officials, commanded to stop meeting, and have faced threats of losing their jobs and homes. Many have faced persecution from their families. Christian expatriate workers have been interrogated and instructed not to share their faith, or risk losing their visas. In this way, government and society complement each other. The government restrains Christianity from above, meeting the wishes of their citizens to have an Islamic country. On the other hand,

¹⁷⁴ See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/oman>, last accessed 4 October 2017.

¹⁷⁵ See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/oman>, last accessed 4 October 2017.

society pressures both indigenous and expatriate Christians to comply with the Islamic rules, giving the government no need to act forcefully against Christians and to maintain a friendly face towards the world, especially the West.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

For Omanis, being Omani is their nationality, but their tribe is their real identity. As a communal society, a convert to Christianity brings great shame on the entire tribe. The leaders of the tribe and of the family then bear the burden of restoring honor to the tribe. This can only be done if the person returns to Islam, leaves the community, or dies. The persecution most often seen is the unwavering pressure to return to Islam, or the complete abandonment of the individual by their community.

Drivers of Dictatorial Paranoia:

While the Sultan is very popular for the progress and prosperity the country has seen under his rule, he is also a dictator. While many Christians fear the monitoring of their phones and social media, most often this technology is focused on Omanis and is used to suppress any hint of dissension or critique of the government.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the Keys to Understanding document for Oman.

Located at the confluence of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, Oman was an influential sultanate during the medieval period. Arabic is the official language, and more than half of Oman's population is Arab. In 1971, Oman joined the League of Arab States and the United Nations. Oman generally has good relations with neighboring countries.

The current Sultan came to power in 1970 after deposing his own father. He is credited for abolishing slavery in the country and for giving Oman a strong economy. He has brought his country into a strong alliance with the United States, which has been interested in its oil reserves and its strategic location in relation to Iran, the Persian Gulf and Middle Eastern oil fields.¹⁷⁶ He is also credited for bringing security and stability to a country that has had a history of war and conflict. The Sultan is also credited with introducing some democratic reforms. Despite all modernization and the abolishment of slavery many years ago, the attitude of slavery is still there and the Sultan's strict control over the country is still in place. The Sultan of Oman has a monopoly on the use of force, and political opposition is weak.

At the same time, Oman has a free and competitive market economy. Oil and gas wealth has promoted massive social transformation since 1970. Education levels have improved considerably. Female education has dramatically reduced illiteracy. The younger generations are interested in new ideas - visible also in the clothing of younger people. Moreover, a cultural shift is taking place from agrarian nomadic to urban lifestyle.

¹⁷⁶ See <http://www.stratfor.com/video/conversation-omans-geopolitical-importance#axzz3Cp2Ek5dY>, last accessed on 26 July 2017.

Persecution of non-Christians groups:

Other religious groups – such as Hindus, Buddhists and non-Ibadi Muslims groups - are relatively free to practice their own beliefs. The Oman 2016 International Religious Freedom Report stated that “the groups were more likely to face government scrutiny for activities not related to religion and could face prosecution for unlicensed financial arrangements”.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

There are a number of expatriate communities in Oman, centered mainly in the major urban areas of Muscat, Sohar, and Salalah. These include Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant congregations. There are more than sixty different Christian groups, fellowships, and assemblies active in the capital city, Muscat. All religious organizations must register, and Christian meetings are monitored to record any political messages and nationals attending. Foreign Christians are allowed to worship discreetly in private homes or work compounds. Their facilities are restricted in order not to offend nationals.

Historical Christian communities:

There are no historical Christian communities present in the country.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

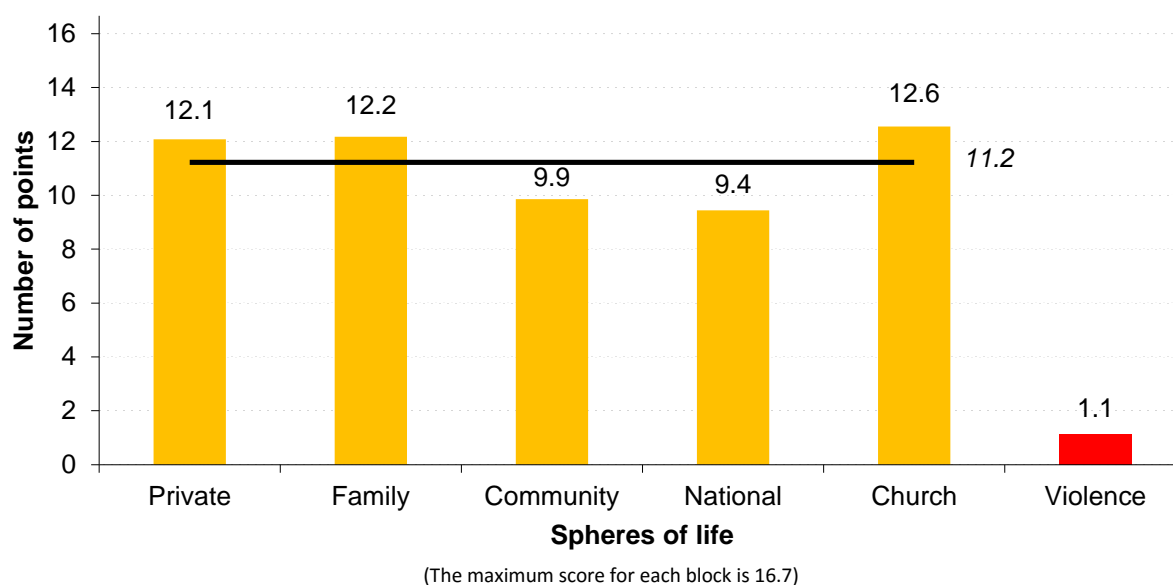
Converts from Islam to Christianity risk persecution from family and society, mostly in the form of pressure to renounce their faith and by withholding relationships. Converts can lose their family, as the law prohibits a father who leaves Islam from retaining paternal rights over his children.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There no non-traditional Christian communities in the country.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Oman



The Persecution pattern shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Oman remains very high, especially on converts in the *Private* and *Family sphere*. The average score for pressure increased from 10.6 in WWL 2017 to 11.2. This was mainly due to the refinement in WWL analysis for registering the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity in Oman.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church* (12.6), *Family* (12.2) and *Private* (12.1) *spheres of life*, which is typical for a situation resulting from the Persecution engine Islamic oppression.
- The score for violence increased from 0.2 in WWL 2017 to 1.1 because of an arson attack on a church hall. Some Christians were also called in for questioning by the police (as was also the case during the WWL 2017 period).
- The overall persecution situation in Oman is fueled by a non-violent but conservative society. The drivers include family members (both nuclear and extended), government officials, community leaders and non-Christian religious leaders.

Private sphere:

Oman is one of the few countries where Islam is state religion, but conversion is not a crime. Yet there are consequences, especially on issues related to family matters and converts in particular face persecution in their private life. One country researcher states: “There are societal discrimination and abuses based on religious affiliation, beliefs and practice. Close to 70% of the citizens are Muslims. It is particularly dangerous for converts to reveal their Christian faith due to the possible threat of discrimination and also legal consequences of conversion in child custody cases. Therefore, for Christians to reveal their faith in written form of personal expressions has its risks.”

Family sphere:

Converts can only marry under Islamic rites. A researcher adds: “A convert husband will lose his right to custody upon divorce. That is what the personal status and family code clearly puts.” Despite this, there are still Omanis who convert to Christianity.

Community sphere:

In their communities – and particularly in schools - it is especially converts who have to take precautions to avoid discrimination, harassment, and bullying. A country researcher notes: “Public school curricula include Islamic teachings. It is a must for Muslim students to take Islamic teachings. Christians or other non-Muslims are not obliged to take the Islamic teaching courses. However, converts who do not want to reveal their new Christian faith for safety reasons will still be required to take the Islamic teachings. In addition, there is no similar Christian teaching included in school curricula for Christian students.”

National sphere:

Often the pressure exerted in the national sphere has a massive impact on shaping the persecution dynamics in a given country. In Oman, Islam is the state religion and Sharia law is the principal source of legislation. That means Christians have to live under policies and laws that are enacted in accordance with Islam.

Church sphere:

It is true that there are many recognized congregations and churches in Oman. Yet building and registering a church is difficult. The government must also approve the construction and leasing of buildings by religious groups. The law prohibits public proselytizing by all religious groups, although the government tolerates private proselytizing within legally registered houses. Tolerating private proselytizing is something that characterizes the country, as this is impossible and even dangerous in neighboring countries. In this way, the government wants to present the country as Islamic to its neighbors, while being tolerant towards minorities at the same time.

Violence:

There was an increase in violence. According to a country researcher, a hall rented by expatriate Christians in Nizwa and used as a place of worship was set on fire. Reportedly, most of their equipment was burnt. A few local youngsters were found fleeing the scene, but no action was taken to find the perpetrators. During the year, a few local Christians as well as expatriates were called in for questioning.

Besides this, it is well known that under the official *kafala* sponsorship system, domestic workers are tied to their employers, who confiscate their passport and can force them to work excessive hours.¹⁷⁷ This leaves them vulnerable to abuse. Open Doors fears that Christian domestic workers are even more vulnerable and face greater discrimination because of their faith. However, there are no clear signs of persecution related to mistreatment of Christian expatriate workers. More research into this subject will be conducted in the near future.

¹⁷⁷ See: Amnesty International, Amnesty International Report 2016/17, p. 283. The *kafala* system requires all unskilled laborers to have an in-country sponsor, usually their employer, who is responsible for their visa and legal status.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

In general, the position of women in Oman is vulnerable. Society is very conservative with the lives of women and girls being controlled by their husband or guardian. This environment makes it especially difficult for women to convert from Islam to Christianity.

Male:

There is no separate information about the persecution of Christian men, but it is safe to assume that Christian expatriate men face most discrimination on the work floor.

Future outlook

The future of Christians in Oman is shaped by social, political, and regional factors. Looking at the situation of many countries in the Middle East and the Gulf, it is very difficult to envision anything positive and Oman is no exception. If social unrest happens in the future, the regime might weaken, which may, in fact, lead to further Islamization of the country's political institutions and a stricter application of Sharia legislation. The Sultan is believed to be the main force behind the security and stability of the country; he is ageing and reports have indicated that his health is deteriorating. Thus, if his influence ceases, the country might fall into the hands of radical Muslims. Furthermore, the situation in Yemen or the Qatari crisis might also eventually affect the country. On the other hand, there is also the positive trend in the country of the government trying to develop a culture of religious harmony. The al-Amana Center works to promote dialogue and understanding between Muslims and Christians on the premise: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions" and "No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions".

Judging by what is currently happening, the following scenarios are possible for the future:

- If the Sultan dies, the transition period might prove to be one of uncertainty and conflict.
- If the civil war in Yemen is not halted, it could have an impact on Oman, with radical militants and refugees crossing the border from Yemen.
- Although Oman is not directly involved in the Qatari crisis, it could be affected if the regional tension continues unabated or even increases, as it is already affecting the cooperation of the Gulf countries within the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Policy considerations

Open Doors recommends:

- The Oman government and international community should support and engage with the work of the al-Amana Center, which is influential for establishing peace and stability in the region.
- The government of Oman should develop a plan for dealing with radical Islamic militants who may cross the border from war-torn Yemen.
- The government should be requested to give the necessary protection to domestic workers, some of whom are Christians.
- The government should end all forms of discrimination in law and practice that Christians face in the country, thereby ensuring equal civil and legal rights for residents from all religions and ethnicities.
- The government should repeal the family law that denies a father who has left Islam custodian rights, as it is incompatible with international standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

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47. Mauritania

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 57 / Position: 47

WWL 2017 Points: 55 / Position: 47

WWL 2016 Not in Top 50

Mauritania went up from a score of 55 points in WWL 2017 to a score of 57 points in WWL 2018. The rise is mainly due to an increase in pressure on Christians in all *Spheres of life*. Mauritania's score for violence went down to zero (it was already very low in WWL 2017), however this may well be due to a lack of reports on incidents getting out of the country.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Mauritania ¹⁷⁸	
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong

¹⁷⁸ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Very Strong

Islamic oppression (Very Strong):

This is the primary persecution engine operating in Mauritania. Mauritania is a self-proclaimed Islamic Republic and Islamism is the dominant political ideology in the country. Non-Muslims experience intimidation and persecution particularly at the hands of Islamic groups. Large numbers of Mauritians have joined Islamic militant groups both in the northern African region and in Syria and Iraq. While the government tries to fight Islamic militancy on one side, at the same time it provides funding for Wahhabi and other fundamentalist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Tribal and racial tensions are intertwined in this very conservative and traditional country in which urbanization is a relatively modern phenomenon. When a Muslim becomes a Christian, he or she is not only worried about family and government pressure, but it can also be shaming for the tribal/ethnic group - leading to wider persecution. The issue of slavery in the country, which is linked to ethnicity, has also contributed to persecution since proponents of slavery argue that it is sanctioned by Islam and the campaign against slavery has triggered a hostile reaction from Islamists in the country.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

The current government is determined to hold on to power and tries to shore up its legitimacy among Islamic groups by persecuting Christians.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Mauritania	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Medium
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

In Mauritania there are several drivers of persecution. The state and government officials are among the principal drivers since the state embraces Islam as its ideology. In addition to the state, radical imams and Islamic teachers also play a crucial role by fueling prejudice and hatred against Christians. Ordinary citizens influenced by the teachings of such imams can also be considered to be drivers of persecution. In the context of slavery and the prevalence of a caste system in Mauritania, the current situation is reinforced by and fused with religion; the views of radical Islamic preachers is also supported by tribal leaders. Hence, conservative tribal leaders intent on preserving ethnic hierarchy and social order are also drivers of persecution in Mauritania.

Context

Mauritania has been under military rule for more than 30 years, with only a short democratic interruption in 2007. Promises to bring democracy back to the country have only resulted in rigged elections. The political situation of the country has been characterized by successive coups and the armed forces are the country's dominant political institution. The country is formally a multiparty democracy, but its parliament is completely dominated by the ruling party. There are several Islamist groups that are active in the political scene in the country and Islamism is the dominant political ideology. Ethnicity is also an important factor in Mauritania's politics since ethnic African groups in the southern parts of the country feel aggrieved by their marginalization by northern Arab-Berber ethnic groups.

Mauritania is one of the world's poorest countries. One third of the children are malnourished, and when there is enough food available, it is often too expensive for many to afford. Only 4% of the land is arable, and there is little internal food security. While the government's compliance with World Bank economic liberalization measures has resulted in some economic growth, this growth has not meant an improvement in the living conditions of most Mauritians. In this vast and arid country with a largely nomadic population, the state has not been able to have a presence throughout the country and informal institutions such as family, tribal or personal connections seem to be more influential than the state. This is evidenced by the persistence prevalence of slavery in the country despite the efforts of the government to eradicate the practice.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been a challenge to the Mauritanian government since 2005 but the army has had some success in combatting it. There is a real threat that Mauritania will become radicalized as sympathy for radical Islam is rising. Various Islamist groups seek to benefit from the popular disapproval of the corrupt political elite and from the resentment over the regime's abandonment of democratization. Although the Arab Spring movement did not have the same impact it had in many other countries in the region, in 2016 there were some unprecedented protests organized by the Islamist party whose goal was to stop the collaboration between Mauritanian and French forces in their fight against AQIM. There were also protests over socio-economic problems, such as the excessive cost of living, and discrimination against ethnic African minorities, on top of the political instability and severe tensions which have existed for several years.

Apart from the Christian minority, there is also a very small but growing Shia religious minority in Mauritania. While the government has good ties with Iran and does not target this community, Sunni religious leaders denounce this minority group and call for restrictive measures to be taken against the Shia Muslims.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Roman Catholic expatriates from sub-Saharan Africa make up the largest group, followed by Protestants and Evangelicals also from countries to the south of Mauritania. There is also a small Western Christian presence, but they are a very small percentage of the Christian population in the country. Ethnic African migrant Christians lead a precarious existence in the country due to the prevalence of ethnic prejudices and also the persecution that is related with the increasing Islamism in the country.

Historical Christian communities:

This category of Christians does not exist in Mauritania.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

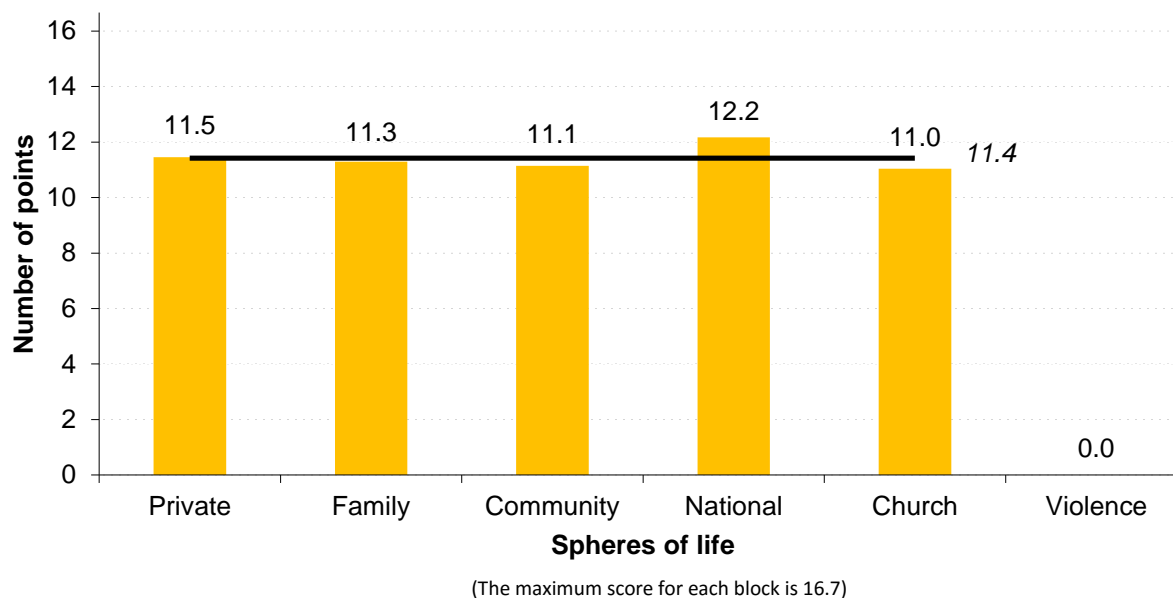
Christian converts from a Muslim background are most exposed to persecution and face an enormous amount of pressure from their immediate and extended family. In this nomadic society where communal interdependence and the extended family are necessary for one's survival, converts face a huge challenge to keep their Christian faith hidden from view. The hatred and false stereotypes that are propagated against Christians by Islamic groups affect most converts; they lose not only their status in their community but also their citizenship if their conversion becomes public knowledge.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category of Christians does not exist in Mauritania.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Mauritania



The Persecution pattern shows:

- Pressure has increased in all *Spheres of life* compared to WWL 2017. The average pressure on Christians rose from 10.8 in WWL 2017 to 11.4.
- Pressure is strongest in the *National sphere*: The Mauritanian state is officially an Islamic Republic and is not very willing to recognize and accommodate the presence of Christians, let alone converts from Islam to Christianity. The autocratic nature of the regime and its overall poor human rights record also reinforces this hostility towards Christians.
- The score for violence went down from 0.6 in WWL 2017 to zero. The lack of reports could be due to the difficulty in getting information from Christians with a Muslim background who are often isolated and who might well be suffering at the hands of family and community, if their faith has been discovered.

Private sphere:

There is relative freedom for private worship for non-Mauritanian Christians who have a Christian background. However, local converts from Islam risk significant pressure and persecution if their conversion is revealed through acts of private worship. The possession of Christian materials and any expression of their Christian faith could trigger a hostile reaction from members of their immediate family as well as the community. This is particularly the case for converts located outside the capital. Conversion from Islam is legally proscribed and any views perceived to be critical of Islam could legally entail the death-penalty. While this law has largely been symbolic up till now, it remains a big threat to those Christians having a Muslim background.

Family sphere:

Christian parents find it difficult to raise their children in accordance with their religious beliefs. This is a problem for both local converts and foreign Christians, especially those from other sub-Saharan African countries. Children of Christian parents have to attend Islamic classes at school and are likely to face discrimination and harassment from their peers. These harassments are also racially and ethnically tinged. Converts also find it very difficult to mark major milestones in their life with Christian ceremonies and are often pressured to participate in Islamic rites. Expatriate Christians have relative freedom in this regard (as compared with local converts) since they can conduct marriages, baptisms and funerals with Christian rites.

Community sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background are frequently excluded from the benefits of communal living, which are key to survival in Mauritania, especially in rural areas. Converts are at times denied the assistance and cooperation of the community and also face exclusion from accessing communal resources and forums. This situation is exacerbated when it is linked with racial and ethnic discrimination that is deeply rooted in the country. Children of migrant workers are the most affected in this regard since they are denied admission to some schools. Furthermore, as most local schooling is very Islamic, children from Christian converts are inherently at a disadvantage if they let their faith be known. Both converts and migrant Christians also suffer from discrimination in the job market and in the work place. This persecution is also exacerbated by ethnic antagonism and prejudice.

National sphere:

Even though Mauritania is party to major international human rights treaties that enshrine freedom of religion, it still has a criminal law that sanctions capital punishment for “apostasy”. The state does not recognize and hardly tolerates converts who dare to make their conversion public. Anyone working for the government are required to profess Islam and participate in state religious events. Christian immigrants frequently face overt discrimination. In recent times there has been a strong anti-immigrant campaign. These racist and xenophobic attacks often take on anti-Christian themes as well. The overall environment at the national level is such that many converts are forced to keep their faith a secret. It is virtually impossible for Christians to be visible and participate in the affairs of the nation openly.

Church sphere:

Christians from a Muslim background gather in secret, fearing that they may be being watched. Foreign Christians are only allowed to meet in specific public places of worship - though there are frequent home meetings that are not hindered unless the music and preaching is loud. Due to the legacy of French colonial rule, only the Roman Catholic Church has legal status. All other forms of Christianity are not allowed any legal status, but the Catholic Church does allow Evangelicals to use a back room within the main church compound for worship in the diocese of Nouakchott. All know that no public Christian activities are allowed outside the very confined church location. With the exception of a very few events such as an Easter sunrise service outside the city, there are no known church functions outside their walls. Therefore, the Church in Mauritania is forced to be invisible and operate in the shadows.

Violence:

While it is suspected that converts from Islam to Christianity in Mauritania suffer from violent persecution at the hands of their (extended) family members and from neighbors and society at large, it has been extremely difficult to get any confirmed reports of such incidents within the WWL 2018 reporting period.

Gender profile of persecution

Female / Male:

No separate information available.

Future outlook

The lack of any strong institutions and democratic culture that respects the rights of citizens means that the chances for any improvement in the situation for Christians are very slim. *Islamic oppression* is likely to continue as a major persecution engine in Mauritania. The turbulence and political instability that characterizes the country's history does not bode well. The poverty of the country as well as the *Ethnic antagonism* and the growing divisiveness over the issue of slavery could also exacerbate the situation. The instability in the region (especially in neighboring countries like Mali) which is fueled by the rise of Islamic militant groups like AQIM, gives rise to concern about the future for Christians in Mauritania.

Policy considerations

Taking in to account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors makes the following suggestions for policy recommendations:

- The international community should hold the Mauritanian government accountable for ensuring full Freedom of Religion or Belief as party to the major international treaties, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and ICCPR. In accordance to the treaties, the Mauritanian criminal law sanctioning capital punishment for apostasy should be repealed. The threat of sentencing stifles religious freedom for Christians with a Muslim background and atheists.
- In accordance with international human rights treaties, the international community should investigate and monitor the xenophobic and racist attacks against immigrants, including Christians.
- The international community should actively monitor the position of Christians and religious minorities. The government of Mauritania and the African regional organizations should closely monitor developments in radical Islamic activity in the country. [Return to Contents \(page 1\)](#)

48. Bahrain

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 57 / Position: 48

WWL 2017 Points: 54 / Position: 48

WWL 2016 Points: 54 / Position: 48

Bahrain scores 57 points on WWL 2018, a rise of 3 points in comparison to WWL 2017. Part of this increase was caused by a rise in pressure in four *spheres of life* and by the occurrence of violent incidents, but there was also a refinement in the WWL analysis of the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity within Bahrain, and this contributed to the increase as well.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Bahrain ¹⁷⁹	
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Medium
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Strong):

Islamic oppression in Bahrain should be seen in line with what is happening in the whole region. The region is in a chaos of war and conflict, and society has become very conservative. The legal framework is also a manifestation of this very conservative Islamic view. The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, the inviolability of places of worship, the freedom to perform religious rites, and the freedom to hold religious parades and religious gatherings, as long as they are “in accordance with the customs observed in the country”. Given the fact that the Constitution also declares that the state religion is Islam and that Sharia (Islamic law) is the principal source for legislation, it actually means that freedom of religion is limited. The situation is therefore similar to that of other Gulf countries: Christians are free to practice their belief as long as they do it privately.

¹⁷⁹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

Typical for this persecution engine are situations in which age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context (e.g. family honor) are forced upon Christians. In the case of Bahrain, *Ethnic antagonism* is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

The country's government endeavors to stay in power at all costs. A Sunni-family is ruling a Shiite majority with the help of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni majority countries in the region. Freedom of assembly, freedom of association, due process or law and other fundamental rights are constantly violated by the government.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Bahrain	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Bahrain is a country in which Christians experience pressure in all areas of life. Christians, both from expatriate communities, as well as converts from Islam, are in a weak position. The government can easily expel expatriate Christians, which forces them into self-restraint as opposing the government or infringing "fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine" is forbidden.¹⁸⁰ However, normal citizens from Bahrain's conservative society make up the biggest threat. As a country researcher put it: "This group does not compromise on the belief that the country is for Islam and Muslims only." Discrimination of Christians by this group is commonplace.

¹⁸⁰ Constitution of Bahrain, Article 23: See https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bahrain_2012.pdf?lang=en, last accessed 9 October 2017.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

For indigenous converts from Islam to Christianity, besides society in general members of the (extended) family form the greatest risk. They do not allow any space for converts; for a Bahraini family member to leave Islam would be totally unacceptable. Foreign workers who convert from Islam to Christianity face the same issue from their employers and peer workers, for example.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

The Bahraini government is oppressive, especially against the Shia majority. As Human Rights Watch put it: “The country’s courts convict and imprison peaceful dissenters and have failed to hold officials accountable for torture and other serious rights violations, including security forces’ disproportionate use of force to quell unrest. The authorities prosecute and jail prominent human rights activists and political opposition leaders, dissolve political opposition groups, and strip the citizenship of dissidents.”¹⁸¹ It goes without saying that Christians in such an environment have to be careful, especially involving criticism of the country’s ruling elite.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the Keys to Understanding document for Bahrain.

Bahrain, a country where both Iran and Saudi Arabia exert their influence, is ruled by an authoritarian regime. When the majority Shiite population demonstrated against the Sunni government in 2011, the country became a scene of competition between Saudi Arabia, who supported the Bahraini government by sending in troops to extinguish the sparks of revolution coming from the Arab Spring uprisings, and Iran, whose action was limited to threatening rhetoric. Although further uprisings have been prevented, the Sunni-Shia divisions within society are still present and the Sunni-government is actively oppressing the Shia-majority, with little or no respect for human rights.

Nevertheless, a considerable number of expatriate Christians (mainly from South Asia) work and live in Bahrain and are relatively free to practice their faith in private places of worship, though proselytizing Muslims is socially unacceptable. The country is relatively tolerant in general because of its international position in banking and trade. The first Gulf country to produce oil, Bahrain is now faced with dwindling oil reserves. This has prompted the government to start the diversification of the economy at an early stage. Bahrain has become a center for banking and financial services and its economy is less dependent on oil than is the case in most other Gulf States. The freest economy of the Middle East is also focusing more and more on IT, health care and education. Unemployment and poverty are still real issues, as are the dwindling water reserves of this densely populated country.

Other religious groups

Hindus and Buddhists are relatively free to practice their faith. However, the country’s majority Shia Muslim group is discriminated against. This oppression has a political element since Bahrain’s Sunni government accuses Shiites of cooperating with Iran.

¹⁸¹ See: <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/bahrain>, last accessed on 9 December 2017.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two types exist in Bahrain:

Communities of expatriate Christians:

The majority of expatriate Christians are either unskilled workers from South East Asia (e.g. from the Philippines) or skilled workers from Western countries who work in financial or other high-tech institutions. They are relatively free to worship. They belong mainly to Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox congregations.

Historical Christian communities:

There are no historical Christian communities in Bahrain.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

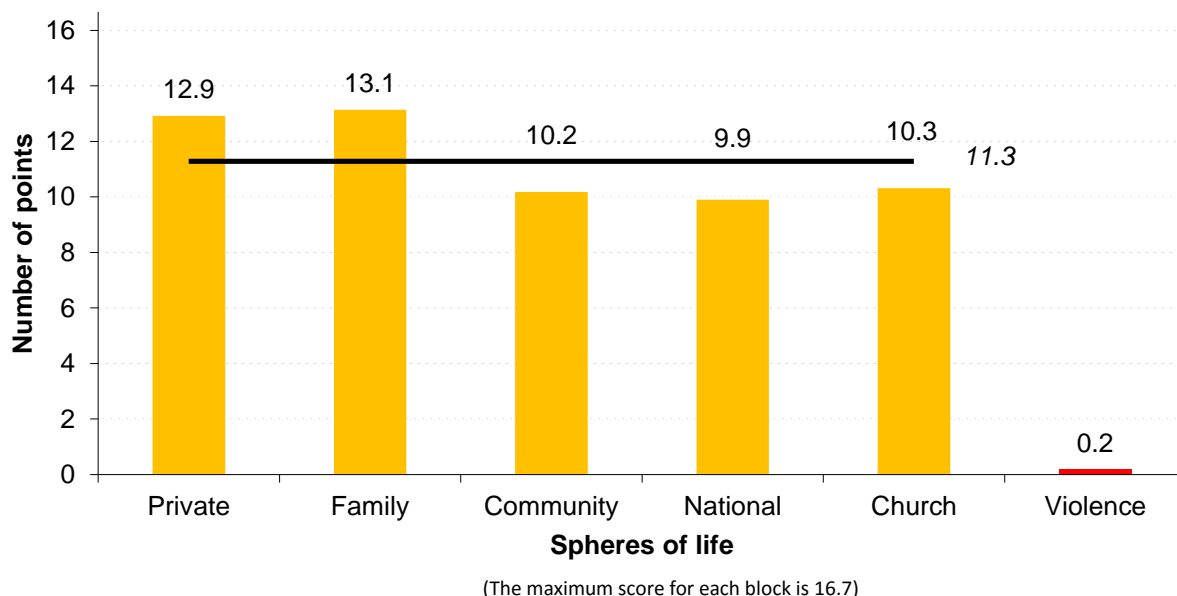
In Bahrain, Christians with a Muslim background are under considerably more pressure than the expatriate communities are. Traditionally, society is not tolerant towards converts from Islam to other religious groups. Converts generally do not dare to talk about their conversion. Pressure comes mostly from family and community, and to a lesser extent from the state.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are no non-traditional Christian communities in Bahrain.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Bahrain



The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Bahrain is very high, rising from 10.9 in WWL 2017 to 11.3. This rise was mainly due to the refinement in WWL analysis of the situation for converts from Islam to Christianity.
- Pressure is strongest and at a very high level in the *Private and Family spheres*, which is a reflection of the difficult situation for converts in Bahrain. Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship, which is indicated by the relatively lower score (but still at a high level) for the other *Spheres of life*, in particular the *Church sphere*.
- The score for violence increased from zero in WWL 2017 to 0.2 as some violent incidents were recorded.

Private sphere:

The Constitution imposes no restriction on the right to choose, change or practice one's religion. It also provides for freedom to perform religious rites. Members of non-Muslim religious groups that practice their faith privately do so without government interference. However, particularly Christians with a Muslim background face serious difficulties, as the surrounding society does not accept their conversion. For those who live with their families or parents, having Christian materials, worshiping and displaying Christian symbols (such as crosses) can attract serious persecution.

Family sphere:

In Bahrain, where Sharia law governs personal and property matters, Christians suffer. Mixed marriage is only allowed for Muslim men. Muslim women cannot marry a non-Muslim man. Any such marriage will not be recognized. The same holds true for converts. Therefore, any child custody or inheritance issues arising from such a marriage will not be even considered and have serious implications for those involved, especially women. It is most likely that spouses of converts will be pressured to divorce their husband or wife. In a country like Bahrain, it is always difficult to raise children based on Christian values. That is particularly difficult for converts. There are no explicit laws restricting Christian parents from raising their children according to their Christian faith. However, the prevailing circumstances in the country put a significant restriction on doing so.

Community sphere:

Christians often find it difficult to participate in the life of the local community. Especially converts face many challenges, for instance at neighborhood playgrounds and local schools. One country researcher states: "Public schools' curriculums include Islamic teachings. It is a must for Muslim students to take Islamic teachings. Christians or other non-Muslims are not obliged to take the Islamic teaching courses; however, converts who do not want to reveal their new Christian faith for safety reasons will still be required to take the Islamic teachings. In addition, there are no similar Christian teachings included in school curriculums for Christian students." Furthermore, experience from past persecution has created the feeling that if you are a Christian - especially a convert - you do not belong in Bahrain.

National sphere:

Over 75% of the population is Muslim. Islam is the state religion. Sharia law is the principal source of legislation. Family and societal discrimination based on religion are commonplace. As a result, for example, publicly expressing Christian faith through social media, print media or radio carries serious risks. Therefore, a Christian's life in the national sphere is very restricted. National policies and laws often address issues aimed to help the Muslim population, thereby ignoring Christians and other minorities. The fact that the country is divided between Shia and Sunni groups puts Christians in an awkward position: They are often perceived as siding with the opposing group. There is an anti-Christian sentiment in Bahrain, especially evident in social media.

Church sphere:

Even though the government sometimes allots land for church compound construction, in the majority of cases it is very difficult for a church community to have a place of worship. The registered places of worship that exist in the country cannot accommodate the large expatriate population. Organizing church events outside the places of worship is illegal. Although producing and distributing religious materials is permissible, provided it does not criticize Islam, publicly distributing Bibles or Christian materials would provoke a serious reaction from the local population.

Nevertheless, when asked how visible the church is in the local community, a source said: "Our church is very visible, even though the new churches don't have a cross on the outside. Thousands and thousands of people coming to the church cannot be invisible. We don't have social engagements; our presence is more based on the personal witness of a good Christian life."

Violence:

When looking at violence against Christians, Bahrain is a typical Gulf country: The government does not have to act with hostility against Christians as pressure from society is very high on average and Christians are obedient. It is also difficult to get any specific reports about violence out of the country. However, Open Doors is aware of the difficult situation experienced by low-skilled expatriate workers. According to Amnesty International, they "continued to face exploitation and abuse by employers".¹⁸² Open Doors fears that Christian workers, especially women, are even more vulnerable and are being discriminated against because of their faith. However, there are currently no clear indications of persecution-related mistreatment of Christian expatriate workers. More research into this subject will be conducted in the near future.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Women and girls are often victims of violence. In their communities, women are often seen as inferior. As one researcher explained: "there is this practice that subtly decides what women and men could do. It is

¹⁸² Amnesty International Report 2016/17, p. 80.

very unlikely to see women in power. This is even more when it comes to Christian women. Being a woman is bad enough, and being a Christian woman is even more.”

Male:

Most of the time, male Christians are the family breadwinners and therefore, they have to face the brunt of discrimination at their workplaces to support their families.

Future outlook

Christian life in the country depends on many factors. The established system is not in favor of Christians. Since the constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and Islamic law as an important source for legislation, it implies that if you are a Muslim you are welcome, if you are not a Muslim, your religion does not deserve equal protection or recognition in the country. Converts are still considered to be Muslims by the state and a legal challenge to this is not permitted, which has strong implications for family law. However, in terms of religious freedom for foreign Christians, Bahrain remains relatively tolerant.

Politically speaking, Bahrain is vulnerable to changes in regional politics and both Iran and Saudi Arabia want to influence the politics of the country. For now, the royal family from the minority Sunni group seems to have consolidated its power with the help of Saudi Arabia. But the Qatari crisis¹⁸³ is still going on as well as the war in Yemen, in which Bahrain is fighting alongside Saudi Arabia. Besides that, the influence of radical Islamic groups in the region (even after the military defeat of the Islamic State group in Iraq and Libya), is still present. In short, the region is definitely not stable, and this endangers the stability of the country in general and the already vulnerable Christians in particular.

Policy considerations

Open Doors recommends:

- The government of Bahrain should be requested to ensure that protection is given to foreign domestic workers, many of whom are Christians.
- The international community and those involved in business with Bahrain should urge the government to ensure the protection of religious minorities in the country and uphold the Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- The government should remove restrictions it imposes on Christian fellowship and on the construction of worship places.
- The government should ensure equal civil and legal rights for residents of all religions and ethnicities.

¹⁸³ See: “Qatar crisis, what you need to know”, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40173757>, last accessed on 9 October 2017.

- Under rising pressure from radical Muslims, the government should introduce measures to protect religious minorities in the country and champion pluralism over any caliphate rule.

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49. Colombia

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 56 / Position: 49

WWL 2017 Points: 53 / Position: 50

WWL 2016 Points: 55 / Position: 46

Colombia rose 3 points to a score of 56 in WWL 2018. This increase was due to rising pressure in almost all *Spheres of life* and especially due to a rise in violence. Despite the disarmament process of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces), the violence against Christians remains in the form of organized crime. There has been an increase in the pressure exerted by indigenous leaders who refuse to accept Christians belonging to their communities and their evangelizing work.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Colombia ¹⁸⁴ :	
Islamic oppression	Not at all
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Very Strong
Denominational protectionism	Very Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Strong
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Very Strong

Ethnic antagonism (Very strong):

This is one of the main engines of persecution in Colombia, especially within indigenous communities in the north of the country (Arauca, Norte de Santander, Magdalena, Cordoba). There are 81 ethnic groups in Colombia making up almost 13.8% of the total Colombian population (according to the World Factbook¹⁸⁵). In these indigenous or native communities, the religious factor is an important component

¹⁸⁴ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

¹⁸⁵ See: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>, last accessed 26 November 2017.

of their culture and identity and is a factor that shapes their relationships with other people and even natural resources. As in many indigenous communities in Latin America, the religious practices are mostly related to Catholic syncretic practices. Although they cannot be identified as Roman Catholics (in the real sense of the word), there is a tendency for the community leaders to be more tolerant with the Roman Catholic Church than with Christians from other churches. However, this does not mean that indigenous Catholics who abandon these practices will not be persecuted and become victims of ethnic antagonism.

There is a strong religious presence in these communities due to the indigenous influence of [Cosmovision](#)¹⁸⁶ on their daily life, both private and social. The introduction of an idea or custom contrary to these ancient beliefs is seen as a threat to their traditions (cultural or religious) and is consequently banned by local authorities and most indigenous peers. Measures against indigenous converts to Christianity, their families and also against missionaries can be imprisonment, torture and the confiscation of property.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):

This is one of the most worrying forms of persecution of Christians. The Corruption Perception [Index 2016](#)¹⁸⁷ ranks Colombia in the 90th position of 176, with a 37/100 score (0 responds to highly corrupt and 100 to very clean). Among the elements explaining why this problem is so rooted in the country, are: i) the lack of state presence in many parts of the country - and also the indifference towards or denial of this issue – which allows illegal activity, including drug trafficking, extortion, abductions, etc.; ii) as a result of the above, illegal activity has become a normalized day-to-day practice; iii) the still existing alliance between the Colombian elite - at all levels - and the drug industry; and iv) the reigning impunity and the widespread [distrust](#)¹⁸⁸ of the judicial, legislative and executive branches, including the presidency. All of this adds to the economic crisis and increases both the levels of drug trafficking and the presence of guerrillas in those places not reached by the FARC peace agreement, not to mention the part played by the state's indifference - at all levels - in order to safeguard its interests.

Drug traffickers and criminal networks co-opt government and social agents through fear, harassment, and violence, especially against the most vulnerable, including Christian leaders and religious groups who disagree with their practices. Christian workers seeking the conversion of guerrillas or trying to prevent young people from joining their ranks are thus threatened with death, persecution, forced displacement, imprisonment, fines, and the denial of basic services. Sometimes these actions are addressed also to their families and the entire community in which they are located, to discourage anyone wanting to convert to Christianity.

Secular intolerance (Strong):

Particular attention should be paid to this engine because is often in operation where government authorities - at any level - attempt to eradicate religion from the public domain or try to diminish the

¹⁸⁶ The [pre-Columbian](#) societies of [Mesoamerica](#) shared a [world view](#) (cosmovision) which profoundly influenced the way in which society was organized and how cultural practices evolved over time. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesoamerican_cosmovision, last accessed 19 September 2017.

¹⁸⁷ See: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016, last accessed 19 September 2017.

¹⁸⁸ See: <http://opinometro.com/downloads/inf11378.pdf>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

influence of public figures (including political, social or Christian leaders) or of anyone who speaks publicly with an opinion based on their religious beliefs. In fact, this intimidation does not derive from a desire to be neutral but from the intention to impose a certain set of paradigms and values that are not consistent with - but totally contrary to - the Christian faith (e.g. the LGBTI agenda). This has allowed the rise of a "theophobic" tendency among certain groups, who regard Evangelical Christians as social pariahs and preach hatred against those who manifest any kind of spirituality.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Colombia	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Medium
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very Weak
Violent religious groups	Medium
Ideological pressure groups	Strong
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Medium
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Very Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Strong

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Ethnic group leaders and religious leaders (non-Christians) within indigenous communities remain loyal to their ancestral beliefs, prohibiting the spread of Christian faith among their tribes through harassment, threats (especially from some violent religious groups related to witchcraft practices), and violence or by denouncing Christians to the authorities. This pressure on Christians is encouraged by the local or municipal authorities, who collaborate with the abuse of indigenous jurisdiction and autonomy, either allowing or ignoring situations of discrimination and violence against Christians. In some cases, it is the family itself that rejects a Christian convert on the grounds that he or she has betrayed the family tradition and the values of the community. This means that – where a convert is mistreated or expelled from the community - the family agrees with the action taken by the community.

Drivers of Secular intolerance:

Ideological pressure groups, citizens' coalitions, multilateral organizations (such as UN and OAS) and lately, some new spiritual leaders (related to "New Age" practices) have pressured the government into adhering to their agenda and postulates (e.g. LGBTI and sexual reproductive rights agenda) not to mention the constant harassment and ridicule aimed at political, social and Christian leaders who air their Christians beliefs publicly. Some political parties - especially the progressive ones - have constantly tried to obstruct

measures coming from Christian politicians or that are supported by Christian groups. Often national media will be used for this purpose.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

Despite the peace agreement with the FARC, there are still isolated areas in which paramilitary and guerrillas other than FARC (e.g. ELN and smaller criminal groups known as “Bacrim”) have taken over entire communities totally unhindered by the State government. These groups do not hesitate to take action against Christians for economic and ideological reasons since the Christian values preached are entirely opposed to those practiced by these groups. The emergence of these new criminal groups has triggered an increase in juvenile delinquency which seeks to dominate vulnerable minorities through intimidation. In this way, the government is responsible for the illegal support of criminal networks and drug trafficking and for that reason, the authorities' indifference towards these issues is often denounced by Christian leaders. There are also many corruption scandals involving members of the political class, who help protect criminal leaders (especially those related to the "drug trafficking business") and reinforce their actions and impunity. Lastly, citizens living in areas dominated by organized crime often have to collaborate with (or be indifferent to) attacks against Christian groups or leaders for fear of reprisals.

Context

After four years of negotiations, President Juan Manuel Santos succeeded in getting the new peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) ratified on 1 December 2016. An initial bilateral ceasefire had been in place since 29 August 2016. 27 June 2017 marked the official disarmament of the rebel group and on 1 September 2017, the FARC movement became an official political party under the name Alternative Revolutionary Force of the Common people (ARFC), whose political aim is to achieve a revolutionary movement of Marxist, Leninist and Bolivarian inspiration, capable of subverting the "capitalist social order" - a potential risk for the entire country, but especially for the Christian community.

Since February 2017 the ELN has also been engaged in negotiations with the Colombian government aiming towards a permanent peace accord. However, these negotiations will be much more difficult because ELN is a highly radical group lacking the pragmatism to negotiate and because their units of command are much more dispersed. This process will be accompanied by the support of the United Nations and the Roman Catholic Church.

Despite the positive peace process, the presence of criminal networks, drug trafficking, paramilitary groups and gangs still remain. The authorities fail to recognize this, which worsens the persecution suffered by Christians living in the areas controlled by these groups. Due to corruption, political leaders are often involved in alliances with organized crime making it dangerous for Christians to denounce what is happening in the communities. All this represents a challenge to the Church since, in many areas occupied by guerrillas, Catholic priests and Protestant pastors are the only authority present. These are therefore the only ones who can act as mediators and speak out for the security both of their congregation and of all local citizens. They do this at the risk of their own lives. Nevertheless, the number of Christians

is on the increase, and this is especially visible in politics. Since the Christian vote is a key factor in the 2018 presidential elections, many candidates are pouting Christian values in order to obtain electoral support (which is in some cases a clear attempt at manipulating the Christian electorate and a mockery of the Catholic faith).

Intolerance has increased in the country towards many religious groups. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others also experience persecution.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

This category does not exist in Colombia.

Historical Christian communities:

This category consists mainly of Roman Catholic churches and small Orthodox and Protestant communities. These groups are in danger of attack in areas controlled by drug cartels and other forms of organized crime.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

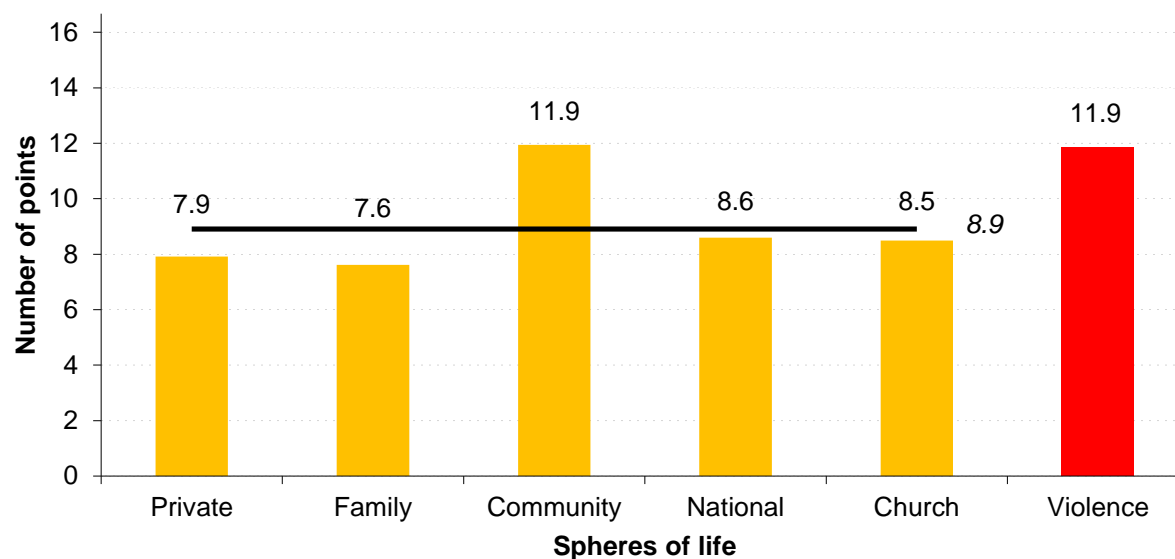
This category includes cross-denominational converts from historical Christian communities, but also converts within indigenous communities, ex-guerrilla militants and members of criminal organizations who have converted to Christianity. They are victims of harassment, expulsion, death threats and other physical and psychological forms of violence for abandoning the majority belief-system within the community to which they belong.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category is mainly made up of Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations. Like other religious denominations, they have little freedom to exercise their ministry in areas with high levels of insecurity. In addition, these groups do not receive the same government benefits given to the country's historical churches.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Colombia



(The maximum score in each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Colombia is at a high level and rose slightly in the WWL 2018 reporting period from 8.6 (WWL 2017) to 8.9.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Community sphere* with 11.9 points, caused especially by the influence of the Persecution engines *Organized corruption and crime* and *Ethnic antagonism* and by the reigning culture of fear that affects this *Sphere of life* more than any other. Sometimes these engines manifest themselves together, particularly when guerrillas conspire with indigenous tribal leaders against Christians. This interaction occurs at the local community level, so pushing up the score for pressure in the *Community sphere*.
- The score for violence is 11.9, which has increased in this reporting period compared to 10.1 in WWL 2017. The increase is mainly due to the high number of violent incidents against Christians in indigenous communities.

Private sphere:

Within indigenous communities, conversion to Christianity is the main source of [persecution](#)¹⁸⁹ which frequently involves violence, forced dispossession of property, displacement, imprisonment, and torture. Such treatment causes a sense of constant insecurity and also affects the security of the local church congregation that welcomes converts. Criminal networks and drug cartels have also put Christian converts' lives at risk when these have revealed their personal faith either verbally or in written form.

¹⁸⁹ See: <http://www.gacetacristiana.com.ar/comunidades-indigenas-del-norte-de-colombia-prohiben-el-evangelio-bajo-pena-de-muerte/>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

Family sphere:

Especially within indigenous communities, Christians cannot live out their faith surrounded by families adhering to tribal traditional religion. Christian converts also suffer isolation and exclusion from their own families.

In society in general, the government's attempts to introduce comprehensive sexual education in schools undermines the right of parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs even when the legal framework for this right exists. Also, in those areas co-opted by criminal organizations, young boys and girls often suffer from criminal indoctrination and parents have their hands tied due to the fear of reprisals. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic families are sometimes separated in the midst of the displacements perpetrated by these illegal armed groups when taking over communities.

Community sphere:

Especially within indigenous communities, Christians are put under [pressure](#)¹⁹⁰ through acts of discrimination, harassment and other forms of persecution preventing them from living their daily life according to their Christian faith. In areas controlled by criminal networks, Christians are sometimes prohibited from exercising their right to assembly and are constantly under pressure to renounce their faith too. It is also common for mobs, ideological pressure groups and the media to [harass](#)¹⁹¹ public figures who speak out on issues basing their views on Christian values. Even normal citizens are known to demonstrate intolerance through violence against religious rites or [events](#)¹⁹² concerning the protection of life, family and marriage. Last but not least, Christians have also been subject to hate-speech campaigns and biased information from the media.

There is an increasing pressure to remove the voice of Christians from the political sphere. In this context, it is common to take Christians to court for violating Church-State autonomy or to accuse them of religious proselytism when they have only given an opinion based on their religious beliefs.

National sphere:

Although the Colombian Constitution guarantees and protects the right of religious freedom and conscientious objection, in practice, this is not the case. For instance, the State does not offer a proper religious education for those who do not share the Roman Catholic faith, which constitutes a clear disadvantage to non-Catholics. On the administrative level, churches have been fined for excessive noise caused by religious celebrations. On the legislative level, there are attempts to [decriminalize](#)¹⁹³ some crimes such as the violation of religious freedom, which would be punished through participation in social projects rather than imprisonment.

¹⁹⁰ See: <http://www.gacetacristiana.com.ar/comunidades-indigenas-del-norte-de-colombia-prohiben-el-evangelio-bajo-pena-de-muerte/>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

¹⁹¹ See: <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/lideres-evangelicos-aseguran-que-hay-una-persecucion-contra-el-pastor-arrazola/519272>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

¹⁹² See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HLDEezZN2Q>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

¹⁹³ See: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/las-claves-de-la-reforma-politica-criminal-y-carcelaria-en-colombia-articulo-704791>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

The [obstructions](#)¹⁹⁴ from all government branches regarding issues of faith, life, family and marriage should also be noted. None of these issues are analyzed from an objective point of view by the authorities. Instead, the main argument always seems to be that Christian faith should not have an influence on legal issues. This is a clear example of discrimination against Christians wishing to discuss the issues and bring their Christian values into play.

Church sphere:

The signing of the peace agreement with FARC has not been enough to achieve a free and secure exercise of religious freedom in the country. There have been threats against Christian leaders and congregations in areas still controlled by guerrillas and criminal groups. Roman Catholic priests have been threatened and killed; their pastoral work is under constant surveillance and in many places they are the only intermediaries between these criminal groups and the wider society, which puts them at greater risk. The reason for this is that Christian values contradict those of these illegal groups and therefore religion is viewed as a threat that needs to be eradicated.

In political discussions, Protestant Christians are sometimes accused of engaging in [“political proselytism”](#)¹⁹⁵, despite the fact that they supposedly cannot be trusted to handle political affairs without manipulating people. Even the visit by the Pope in September 2017 was the target of harsh criticism; government support for this event was condemned for allegedly breaking the principle of neutrality between Church and State.

Violence:

In the WWL 2018 reporting period, criminal violence, corruption, and insecurity in the country have all contributed to: Death threats against Roman Catholic priests;¹⁹⁶ the murder of two Roman Catholic priests;¹⁹⁷ the assassination attempt on the widow of a Protestant pastor;¹⁹⁸ threats against San José Apartado villages by the Gaitanista Self-Defense Groups of Colombia;¹⁹⁹ the displacement of approximately 1,080 Christians in the regions of Nariño and the North of Santander;²⁰⁰ not to mention the harassment of several politicians for their connections to Christian churches²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁴ See: <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/congreso/se-hunde-proyecto-para-convocar-referendo-que-impedia-adopcion-gay-86736>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

¹⁹⁵ See: <https://www.las2orillas.co/jesus-la-politica/>, last accessed 19 September 2017.

¹⁹⁶ See: <https://www.las2orillas.co/obispo-dar-misa-guardaespaaldas/>, last accessed 27 November 2017

¹⁹⁷ See: <https://noticias.caracol.tv/medellin/un-sacerdote-y-un-rector-asesinados-las-recientes-victimas-de-la-delincuencia-en-antioquia>, last accessed 27 November 2017. See: <http://www.fides.org/en/news/63006#.Wh7kflXibIV>, last accessed 27 November 2017.

¹⁹⁸ See: <http://www.vanguardia.com/judicial/397868-esposa-del-pastor-asesinado-fue-victima-de-un-atentado>, last accessed 27 November 2017

¹⁹⁹ See: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/antioquia/paramilitares-tienen-bajo-amenaza-campesinos-de-san-jose-de-apartado-articulo-694283>, last accessed 17 May 2017. The Gaitanista Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AGC) have threatened all the leaders of the local farming association to force them to plant coca and are also recruiting youth from the village to join their ranks.

²⁰⁰ See: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/colombia>, last accessed August 2017.

²⁰¹ See: <http://www.vanguardia.com/politica/410294-viviane-morales-renuncio-a-su-aspiracion-presidencial-por-el-partido-liberal>, last accessed 27 November 2017, See: <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40361134>, last accessed 27 November 2017, See: <https://www.las2orillas.co/jesus-la-politica/>, last accessed 27 November 2017

According to sources in Colombia, violence has also intensified against Christians living in indigenous communities. Those practicing non-ancestral religions often faced physical violence and constant threats. Christians thus experienced discrimination, expropriation of property, harassment, deprivation of liberty, denial of food and basic goods and torture. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, 17 Christian churches were attacked by indigenous leaders in order to prevent and discourage Christianity from spreading within their ethnic group.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Regarding women and young girls, there is no particular law enforced that puts them in danger. However, in those areas controlled by guerrillas, paramilitaries and criminal groups, women have few chances to receive or end state education and there are reports where girls have been abducted and used as sex slaves or have become victims of trafficking and prostitution. Women have also been victims of forced abortions or forced use of contraception - especially among the FARC - since "in war there can be no children" since they might be "used by the enemy". On the other hand, according to country researchers, in the indigenous culture there have been incidents of Christian girls being promised in marriage to non-Christian men in order to eradicate their faith.

Male:

There is no law making Christian men more vulnerable to persecution. However, in the areas controlled by criminal groups, drug cartels, guerrillas and paramilitaries, young men are exposed to indoctrination and mandatory participation in these groups. In some cases, due to the economic and social context, young men accept this as an inescapable destiny and those who do not accept this - whether for Christian or other reasons - are persecuted, threatened and even killed along with their families.

Future outlook

With respect to indigenous communities, as long as the State continues ignoring and even backing up the atrocities committed against Christian converts, this persecution is likely to remain unchanged.

Regarding *Organized corruption and crime*, so far the State has failed in the implementation and compliance of measures combatting corruption, drug trafficking and organized crime. Despite efforts to establish peace agreements with major criminal groups, as long as there is no state presence in the decentralized areas, violence and insecurity will continue to be the breeding ground for the persecution of religious minorities, especially Christians.

Secular intolerance looks set to grow in the country and the theophobic tendency will increase among citizens. However, Christians are also increasing in influence and will represent an important electoral sector for those interested in the run for the presidency or other political branches in the 2018 elections.

However, it is likely that Christian groups will simply be used as a means of support in political campaigns only to be ignored once the candidate has won the election.

Policy considerations

- The international community should assist in training officials of the Colombian authorities in order to help them implement effective policies which protect the human rights of the indigenous population and the minorities within indigenous peoples - especially those professing a faith different from the indigenous tradition - without undermining their traditional autonomy, self-determination and identity. In this way, the living conditions of those members who have converted to Christianity can be improved.
- The international community should reinforce the Colombian government's dialogue with criminal networks and its actions to combat corruption and drug trafficking. This will help safeguard national and international security and improve the living conditions of persecuted Christians and others in areas dominated by organized crime.
- The international community should urgently press the Colombian government to speed up peace negotiations with the remaining guerrilla groups in the country, so that these can relinquish their control of marginalized areas so that the citizens in these regions – especially Christians - can live their lives without fear.
- The international community should put pressure on the Colombian government to carry out a transparent and democratic electoral process, in which every party can be heard and supported, without discrimination of any kind, especially for religious reasons.
- The international community should enter into dialogue with the authorities of the Colombian government to generate awareness about the importance of respecting and protecting religious freedom, worship and conscience in the private and public realm (including media), particularly in native territories.
- The international community should put pressure on the Colombian government to educate citizens through public education centers and state institutions so that the harassment of political, religious and social leaders when speaking out about their Christian beliefs can be prevented.
- The international community should encourage the Colombian authorities to actively investigate every act of discrimination or violence committed on religious grounds.

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50. Djibouti

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

WWL 2018 Points: 56 / Position: 50

WWL 2017 Points: 57 / Position: 40

WWL 2016 Points: 58 / Position: 28

Djibouti scores 56 points in WWL 2018, dropping one point from its score in WWL 2017. The gradual decrease in scores in the past years indicate that even though Christians still face challenges, Djibouti is not like its neighboring countries - Eritrea and Somalia - where Christians face extreme persecution. The decrease in one point in the WWL 2018 reporting period is due to a decrease in violence from 1.1 in WWL 2017 to zero.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Djibouti ²⁰²	
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Strong):

Islam is very deep-rooted in society, and hence any other religion is regarded as alien. Furthermore, Djibouti's geographical location is very convenient both for international trade and for the transit of jihadists from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East and vice-versa. Approximately 95% of the Djiboutian population is Sunni Muslim. Radical Islam is growing in the country in a similar pattern to other East African countries and is a major concern for the government. The government attempts to control the content of the Muslim Friday sermons and who does the preaching. Approximately 60% of Djiboutians are ethnic Somali, and so the growth of radical Islam in Somalia affects society in Djibouti too.

²⁰² The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Djibouti is the home of the Afar and Issa ethnic groups. The Issa belong to the larger Somali tribe. Tribalism in the country is so deeply rooted that any attempt to accept Christianity is deemed a betrayal of the tribe. As in Somalia, there is a close connection between tribe and Islam in Djibouti. Christians will be isolated and treated badly for their faith.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

This is one of the main causes of the persecution of Christians in the country. More than any other religious or cultural rationale, the fact that regime seeks to stay in power at all costs is critical for understanding the current state of affairs for Christians in Djibouti. In 1999 President Aptidon announced that he would not run in the presidential election and the current President Ismael Omar Guelleh was elected. In 2000, the government and the radical faction of Afar Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) signed a peace agreement finally putting an end to the civil war. President Ismael, who is still in power, does not want to be viewed as moderate by the radical forces in his party. Thus any people thought to be a threat to his political power are treated in a tough manner – this includes the Christian communities.

Djibouti is rated as “not free” by the Freedom House 2017 report.²⁰³ The World Press Freedom Index of 2017 published by Reporters Without Borders also puts Djibouti in the top ten worst countries regarding freedom of expression and information.²⁰⁴ According to the report, the ruling party has continued harassing and intimidating those who speak out about what is going on in the country. The report says: “Judicial harassment, illegal searches, exorbitant fines resulting in detention for non-payment – the repressive arsenal used against Djibouti’s journalists has it all. As a result, no privately-owned or independent media outlet operates within the country. The Freedom of Communication Law is itself an obstacle to free speech and media pluralism. It provides for jail terms for media offenses and imposes age and nationality restrictions on those who can create a media outlet.”²⁰⁵

Theoretically, the Djiboutian government upholds the constitutional protection of religious freedom. However, in practice, the government attempts to control all religious institutions and the general attitude of the government towards Christians and other non-Muslim minorities is negative. The main drivers underpinning this persecution engine are officials aligned with the Djiboutian government. The government’s negative attitude towards Christians might increase in the future due to an intensification of foreign investments from neighboring Gulf countries in a series of economic sectors (including Islamic banking).

²⁰³ See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/djibouti>, last accessed 15 September 2017.

²⁰⁴ See <https://rsf.org/en/djibouti>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

²⁰⁵ Id.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Djibouti	
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Very weak
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

The six main Persecution drivers in the country listed above are often intertwined. Government officials and some Muslim radicals are the main ones. A country researcher states: “There are instances wherein government officials at lower level engaged in activities considered as persecution of the Christian community including (but not limited to) deportation of Christians from neighboring countries under the pretext of not having legal status without conducting the necessary check.” Political parties in the country also show themselves to be unfavorable towards Christians. For converts, family (both extended and nuclear) and community leaders and members are at the forefront of driving persecution.

Context

Djibouti is a Muslim majority country (with a Muslim population of more than 90%). It is a small, poverty-stricken country, surrounded by some of the most volatile and repressive nations like Eritrea, Somalia and Yemen. It is basically a city-state, with a minimum of natural resources within its own borders. Nevertheless, it has a very favorable geographical location along one of the busiest shipping routes.

On the political front, the current government is the product of tension between the Afar and Issa, the two dominant and rival ethnic groups who waged a bloody civil war in the 1990s. The wounds from this civil war have not yet healed completely. On the religious front, Islam is deeply embedded in Djibouti’s society, but Christianity has also existed in Djibouti for a long time, partly because of ties with Ethiopia.

On a social level, a significant number of Djibouti’s citizens have close family ties with Somalia, Yemen and other Muslim countries with a strongly ingrained negative attitude towards the West and Christianity (which is perceived as a Western religion). Djibouti is a member state of the Arab League (without being Arab). Since its independence from France in 1977, Djibouti has been governed by a non-democratic, semi-presidential regime currently headed by Ismail Omer Guelleh. In 1999, Guelleh succeeded his uncle and he is only the second president since 1977. During the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Guelleh and his ruling

political party “People’s Rally for Progress” survived several demonstrations through violent means. The regime is autocratic and there is no freedom of expression and press. The government owns all media outlets. Even though around 11,000 of the population is Christian, none are in a position to assume public office. Their role and participation in the political process is either limited or non-existent. Constitutionally, Islam is accorded the status of state religion.

Djibouti does not have a diversified economy, in part due to a lack of natural resources and poorly developed industries. This leads to the country needing international support. Djibouti receives this support both from Arab and Western countries. In exchange for the support of the latter, the Djiboutian government supports Western efforts to fight Islamic terrorism, for example, in the fight against piracy off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden. Although this international support might not change the negative attitude towards Christians, it does serve to shield Christians from more repressive actions by the regime. The country is located at a very strategic location on the Gulf of Aden, which radical Islamic groups seek to exploit.

Last but not least, the country’s border dispute with Eritrea might have a long term impact on the stability of the country as Djibouti is accusing Eritrea of occupying the territory once patrolled by Qatari peace keepers.²⁰⁶

There are other minority groups in the country: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hindus, Jews, and Bahai. However, country researchers did not find any concrete evidence to suggest that they also face persecution.

Christian communities and how they are affected

All Christian communities in Djibouti face challenges, each experiencing different levels of persecution.

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians in Djibouti, some of whom have lived in the country for decades, are not immune from persecution. In the past there was some sort of tolerance. However, the tolerance towards Orthodox Christians originating from Ethiopia is withering away as radical Islam is rising. Congregations made up of French and US service personnel experience minimal restrictions.

Historical Christian communities:

In the WWL analysis for Djibouti this category has been combined with the category for expatriate Christians above. (The French Protestant, Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches represent the only active Christian witness recognized by the government.)

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Christians with a Muslim background, even though few in number, face intense pressure from the family, community and those fulfilling (religious) leadership roles at community level. This is particularly true

²⁰⁶ See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-djibouti-eritrea-border/djibouti-eritrea-in-territorial-dispute-after-qatar-peacekeepers-leave-idUSKBN1971JR>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

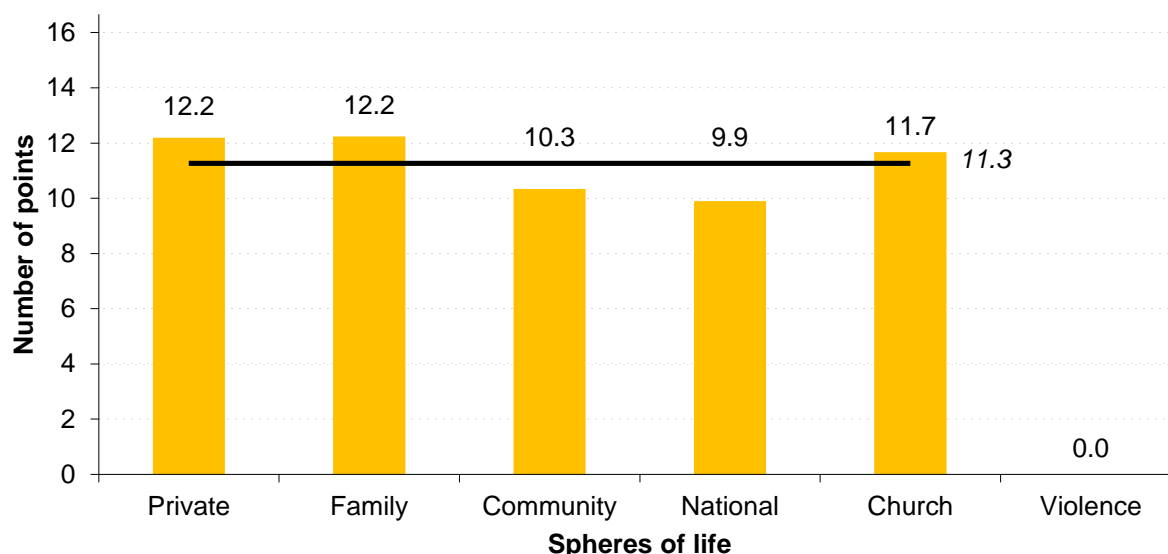
outside the city where the lifestyle is communal and pastoralist. Converts do not have the luxury of giving their children Christian names, or of celebrating Christian weddings and Church festivals. They have to stay underground and live their Christian life in secret. Converts have even been discriminated against and harassed in refugee camps.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This group consists of Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations who are known for their interest in evangelization and hence face severe persecution.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Djibouti



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The Persecution pattern shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Djibouti increased from 11.1 in WWL 2017 to 11.3 in WWL 2018.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private and Family spheres*, both scoring very high with 12.2 points. This is mainly due to the huge pressure on converts. Next highest is the *Church sphere* with a score of 11.7. This high score indicates that building a new church, organizing church events, working with youth, and speaking out about persecution are all very difficult.
- There were no reports of violent incidents. The score for violence is therefore zero, compared to 1.1 in WWL 2017.

Private sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background are particularly affected in their private life. A country researcher notes: “In a country where more than 95% of the population is Muslim, conversion from Islam to Christianity is very much discouraged and persecuted in some cases. In most it happened when a Muslim marries a Christian. Such conversion is not welcomed by the family members of the convert, his community and in some cases by local government for such conversation is taken as undermining Islam as a religion.” Christians have difficulties owning Christian materials, worshiping, and expressing Christian views and opinions without opposition. Converts are monitored by families, people from the local mosque and by other community members.

Family sphere:

Researchers have found that Christians are facing problems in raising their children according to their faith: “This is mainly reflected by the fact that Christians are not allowed to have Christian schools that will enable them to have a curriculum designed to teach kids about Christianity in addition to regular classes. The regular curriculum is mainly designed taking the majority Muslim population into consideration, and getting approval to open schools designed to teach any other curriculum is not easy.”

Converts face particularly serious persecution from their families. Hiding one’s faith is one means of protection but the communal lifestyle makes this very difficult. If a Muslim converts to Christianity or there are rumors of a possible conversion, that person will lose any inheritance rights and is also likely to have difficulty claiming custody of his/her children.

Community sphere:

For Christians in Djibouti, interaction with other community members is not easy, since the lifestyle is very communal. If a convert’s Christian faith becomes known, he/she is likely to encounter hindrance in sharing community resources, harassment, and discrimination in getting a job. Those influenced by radical sheiks and imams in the mosques and community meetings are most active against Christians in this *sphere of life*. In comparing what Christians in the capital city and other places face, one researcher states: “Christian communities are basically located in and around the capital city. Those Christians living in other parts of the country are not treated fairly compared to those living in the capital city.”

National sphere:

The mother of all government enacted laws, the Constitution, declares Islam to be the state religion. All laws and policies in the country are shaped by Sharia law; any law or policy inconsistent with Sharia is null and void. Christians are considered second class citizens. Some imams are using Friday sermons to ridicule Christians and Christianity. Local authorities do not protect Christians when they are attacked.

Church sphere:

Registration of a place of worship is a lengthy process and is carried out by the Ministry of Interior. For those who do not want to see Christian symbols in the country, church buildings are an insult. Thus, church life is made as difficult as possible for all Christians. Building a church, organizing events, working with youth, and speaking out about persecution are some of the challenges they face. Those who belong to expatriate churches are relatively better off. Convert groups are neither able to register nor build a church.

Violence:

There was no violence against Christians recorded in the WWL 2018 reporting period.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

The typical challenge that female Christians face, especially converts, is rape and forced marriage.

Male:

Data not available

Future outlook

In the WWL 2018 reporting period there has not been any significant change in the country or in the region in terms of freedom of religion. Yet the situation in the region in general (and Ethiopia in particular) is deteriorating in terms of stability. The border issue with Eritrea might have an impact on the country's stability as well. *Islamic oppression, Dictatorial paranoia* and *Ethnic antagonism* will remain the main challenges for Christians in the future. Djibouti is relatively stable, but is not a democracy. There is no room for dissent. President Guelleh and his government are still in firm control of the country. Due to a reciprocal relationship between Western nations (France and the USA in particular) and the Djiboutian government, the latter have an incentive not to sponsor violence against Christians; however, to expect a positive development regarding freedom of expression and association (two fundamental rights very connected to freedom of religion) would be plainly naive. Thus in the near future:

- The border dispute with Eritrea will almost certainly not be solved.
- The current status quo is expected to continue for the coming few years.
- The war in Yemen might also pose another challenge to Djibouti. Islamic militants who are fighting in Yemen might cross the ocean with those escaping the conflict and expand their networks in Djibouti.

Policy Considerations

Christians in Djibouti have been persecuted in many ways, even though the level of violence is not as high as in neighboring countries such as Eritrea or Somalia. Open Doors suggests the following policy considerations:

- The government of Djibouti should protect Christians from harassment perpetrated by radical groups.
- Western governments with strong reciprocal relations with Djibouti, especially the USA and France, should engage the government of Djibouti regarding freedom of religion and belief, as well

as freedom of expression, the situation of Christians in particular, and counter-terrorism measures as the threat of an influx of jihadists crossing from Yemen increases.

- Anti-Christian sentiment has spread within society without any preventative action being taken by the government. Therefore, the international community should urge the government of Djibouti to establish an interfaith commission.

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