



WWL 2016 Compilation 2 – Long version of all 50 country persecution dynamics



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World Watch Research

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WWL 2016: Long version of all 50 country persecution dynamics

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North Korea – Rank 1

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 92 points, North Korea ranks No. 1 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, the same as last year in WWL-2015. The country heads the list for the fourteenth consecutive time and shows very high levels of pressure in all *Spheres of life*, combined with considerable violence in acting against the Christian minority.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in North Korea are *Communist and post-communist oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. *Dictatorial paranoia* is blended with *Communist and post-communist oppression*.

- ***Communist and post-communist oppression:*** While in theory North Korea still is a communist country, in practice the personality cult dominates. However, the country is still run according to communist traditions and administrative customs and this is still named as main engine. Another feature characterizing countries still claiming to be communist is the gradual introduction of private commerce. After North Korea's "arduous march" in the 1990s, in which hundreds of thousands of people starved to death, private commerce slowly made its inroads into the country. Nowadays, on a very low level, local markets can be found and, despite [crackdowns](#) and efforts to control business, this kind of economy seems to be tolerated and is apparently even [growing](#).
- ***Dictatorial paranoia:*** North Korea is exceptional in many respects, including the engine driving persecution against Christians. Since 1948, North Korea has been ruled by a single family, now in the third generation. As already said, while originally communist ideology was followed, this has increasingly faded away in recent years, although the communist style of controlling society lives on. North Korea is now a clear example of a country ruled by *Dictatorial paranoia*. Everyone has to revere the leadership and because of this personality cult, Kim Jong Un is much needed - not least because his rule includes the Worker's Party, the army, administration and all strands of society, even though his power may not be as absolute as was his father's or grandfather's. Still, no one is allowed or able to challenge or question his authority. The personality cult around the Kim family is unbelievable. The God-like worship of the rulers leaves absolutely no room for any religion and anyone daring to revere anything or anybody besides the Kim dynasty is seen as dangerous and a threat to the state. Kim Jong Un was proclaimed the "Great Successor" and announced as "Supreme Leader" and "Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces", when he succeeded in leadership. More importantly, he holds central positions in all important powerhouses: party, state and army. The country's political system is based upon two ideologies. One is called Juche, basically saying that man is self-reliant. The other is "Kimilsungism", the worship of the leaders. These are the all-powerful entities which lead and guide North Korea.

Everyone has to attend weekly meetings where all citizens from every age are ideologically trained and indoctrinated. No one is able, let alone allowed, to develop deviating ideas, be they religious or other. The system of strict social control results in high self-censorship and self-control on what to say to whom, even in the most private and family relationships.

3. Context

When Kim Jong Un took over power after his father died in December 2011, there were hopes that the country would witness more openness and improving economic, social and diplomatic conditions. Having studied his leadership over the last years it is clear that these hopes have not come true. Although the style of public relations changed, the style of leadership did not. To start on a more positive note: the young ruler tries to resemble his grandfather Kim Il Sung in public appearance as he was more open to the people and stands for “the Golden Years” of North Korea when people did not suffer food scarcity. Kim Jong Un also allowed his wife to appear in public, which was previously unheard of, and he himself appears much more frequently in public than his father did. This should not be misinterpreted as an opening up of the country, however. Kim Jong Un has continued a policy of unpredictable purges to consolidate his power. The most prominent of these purges was the very public humiliation and execution of his uncle in December 2013. The most recent purge was reported in August 2015 and was focused on [one of the country’s seven vice premiers](#). That this purge at the time of writing in November 2015 still is unconfirmed shows the difficulties in receiving credible reports on North Korea.

Most North Koreans are not suffering from starvation as they were in the 1990s, though supplying basic needs remains a challenge, especially when weather conditions are as unfavorable as in 2015. At the same time, underground Christians do report waves of famine going through different parts of North Korea. Hunger is an enemy that always needs to be battled, day in and day out. Large percentages of the population are undernourished and the percentage of stunted children is high. The situation is further aggravated by the regime’s refusal to cooperate with the demands of international organizations and to grant them access to the areas most affected. On the other hand, the economic situation has slightly improved since the leader has granted a certain level of “marketization”. Of course this does not mean anything close to a market economy, but it at least leaves people with more room to maneuver. Examples for these changes are the loosening of regulations for local markets and small home gardens.

Another economic challenge is the question of how to earn foreign currency. While the country traditionally relied on its big neighbor China, recent reports point to a stronger focus on its other big neighbor, Russia. While the relations with Russia have been warming in the reporting period, ties to China have been cooling down for some time, and Kim Jong Un still has not made his inaugural visit. This cooling off period was very publically displayed when China celebrated the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in September 2015. It celebrated “Victory Day” with one of the largest military parades in recent decades and next to president Xi Jinping stood a Korean. It was, however, not Kim Jong Un, but South Korean president Park Geun-hye; the North Korean delegation was placed some 30 meters [away](#). This clear sign of disapproval should not be confused with the strategic importance of North Korea for China. For the time being, China still remains by far the

country's largest trading partner, though trade numbers are declining. One other important means of earning hard currency is the sending of migrant workers to other countries. Christians would most likely benefit from an improved economic situation, just as any other citizen. But difficulties in supplying basic needs probably affect them more since Christians tend to belong to the poorer classes of society. Another challenge for them is the ubiquitous use of bribes, which goes against their Christian faith.

In August 2015, news emerged that the authorities had [banned meetings](#) of more than three people in order to maintain stability and prevent any potential criticism taking root. Although this rule does not change anything for the country's Christians since they are not able to meet anyway, let alone worship, it reflects an increase in social control, unimaginable in most other parts of the world. The recent standoff with South Korea in August 2015, triggered by landmines exploding in the demilitarized zone and seriously wounding two South Korean soldiers, revealed two main factors: one is that the South kept its promise given after the North sank the frigate "Cheonan" in 2010, namely to give a firm response to any future attack. Accordingly, the South answered by firing a round of artillery into Northern territory.

The second factor is that neither side is interested in a serious escalation. This can be seen by the fact that the South delayed its response by more than an hour, giving North Korean soldiers time to retreat. When the North announced its ultimatum for stopping cross-border propaganda, the South reportedly reacted by asking which time zone should be followed, reflecting the recent North Korean decision to switch its time zone by 30 minutes in order not to have a joint one with Japan. But the most serious hint for de-escalation can be seen in the rounds of talks and negotiations at Panmunjon, although this by no means stops North Korea's state media from attacking South Korea's president and labelling her a "confrontational maniac". Relatively swiftly an agreement was reached in which the North effectively said "sorry", but stopped short of apologizing for the wounding of the soldiers, while the South turned off its propaganda loudspeakers again. Although North Korea has not called for a full mobilization of its army and even suspended the state of war after this agreement, times of increased tension with the South are always times of heightened propaganda and stronger ideology checks. These leave Christians under higher pressure.

4. Types of Christianity affected

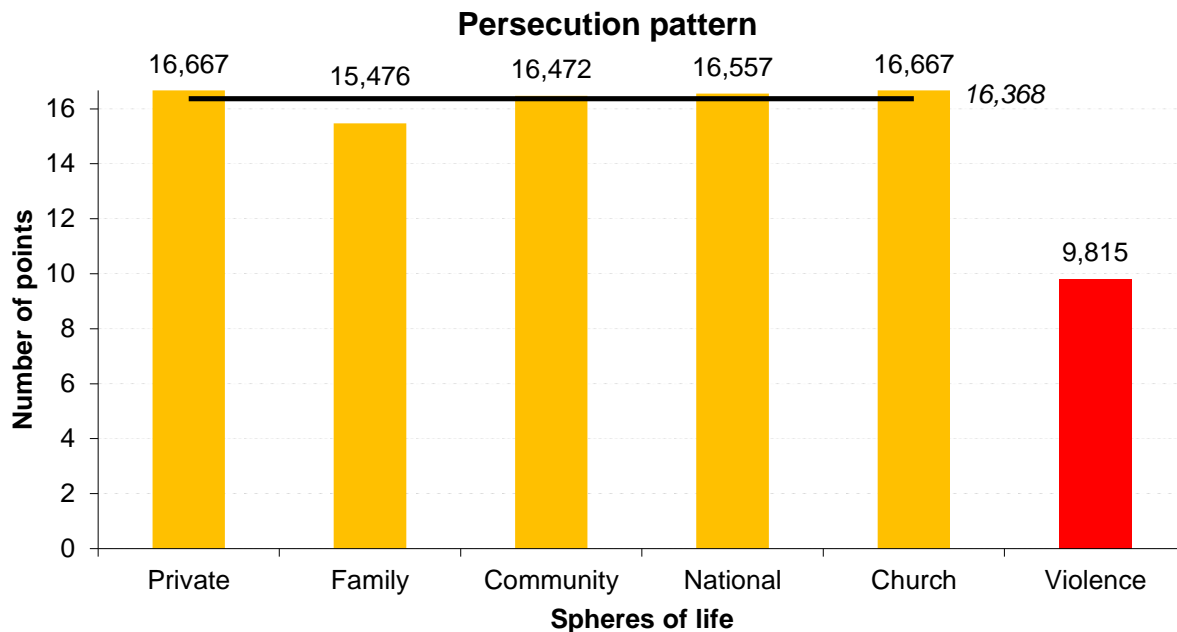
Two main types of Christianity in North Korea exist and are experiencing persecution:

- **Historical Christian communities**, which come from before the time of the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. While many Christians either died in the war or have fled to the South, others stayed and they and their descendants make up these communities. Every citizen is classified into a social system called *Songbun*. Christians are classified under the "hostile" classes and even have two subclasses of their own, namely 37 for protestant Christians and 39 for Catholic Christians. These classes generally apply to those Christians whose parents or grandparents were known Christians. Generally speaking, as a punishment for having the wrong *Songbun*, they were banished to isolated villages. Only a small percentage of the historical Christian communities were able to hide their faith and form an underground church.

- **Christian converts** from a communist or a Kim Il Sung/Kim Jong Il-background. Many people came to the Christian faith during the 90s when due to the famine countless people crossed the border to China and found help in churches. After returning to North Korea, they remained true to their new-found faith.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* below presents the scores for *Communist and post-communist oppression* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks (16.368), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (16.390) and one of the highest on the whole World Watch List. The score for the violence block (9.815) is also comparable to last year (10.000). It is lower than one might expect, but this reflects the difficulty in verifying all the atrocities happening to Christians in the prisons and labor camps. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is nearly at a maximum in all *spheres of life*. Christianity continues to be seen as directly opposing the cult of the leaders and is therefore persecuted strongly.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Given the situation already explained above, it is no wonder that North Korea scores maximum points in the private sphere. It is highly dangerous to read the bible or to express Christian faith in any way whatsoever. Bibles and other materials are carefully hidden and only used when the believers made sure they are really alone. Meeting with other Christians is highly dangerous, talking about one's faith to non-Christian family members, let alone to others, is virtually impossible. Parents even do not dare to tell their children that they are Christians; there have even been cases where children denounced their parents.

- **Family sphere:** If Christians are discovered, they will lose everything. They will not only be interrogated, to find out about their networks, their families will also be taken and all will face years of misery in labor camps. Meeting with other Christians under these circumstances is virtually impossible. Anyone discovered engaging in clandestine religious activity will be subjected to discrimination, arrest, arbitrary detention, disappearance, torture, and/or public execution. It is impossible for Christian parents to teach their children according to their faith, for not only would they not dare to do so, but they would have to work against the weekly indoctrination sessions as well, which even start with toddlers. Celebrating Christian weddings, a funeral or communion openly is out of the question, as is a public Christian baptism.
- **Community sphere:** Everyone is under strict social control as North Korea applies the old communist method of neighborhood watch, called *inminban*. Everything that happens within a housing unit will be reported by specially trained neighbors, so that virtually no activity, no visit, basically no deviation will pass unnoted. Children of Christians usually are not aware of their parents' faith, for most parents prefer to share their faith only when the children are older. But if they know about it, they have to be very careful not to reveal their faith for this will lead to immediate denunciation, not only of themselves, but of their whole family as well. Similar caution is necessary in working places and at home, especially in all sessions of self-criticism.
- **National sphere:** It has already been said that North Korea follows the ideologies of *Juche* and *Kimilsungism/KimJongllism* and everything is aligned with these ideologies. Media reporting against Christians is biased if there are any reports at all, and Christians can never expect a fair trial when standing before courts. Consequently, the *national sphere* scores nearly maximum points. North Korean police officials hunt down and vigorously prosecute North Koreans who convert to protestant Christianity while in China or those who attempt to bring Christian literature, primarily Bible verses, back with them to North Korea. Every defector caught and repatriated to the country will have to answer a lot of questions. According to all reports, these include: "Did you meet any Christians in China?" and "Have you visited a church in China?" The consistent high pressure is also witnessed by the fact that the number of defectors from North Korea to the South continues to drop. The regime enhanced its border security and [defection](#) has become much more dangerous and expensive.
- **Church sphere:** Churches simply cannot exist. There are four government-controlled churches in Pyongyang which are used by the regime to show its international visitors that it grants freedom of religion. They are not able to function as church congregations in the true sense of the word as they do not have any space to move beyond the limits set by the government. Apart from that, it is not possible to produce or to import Christian materials legally or to set up any Christian organization. Legal training of leaders or youth work cannot be done at all.
- **Violence:** Persecution in North Korea remains violent, though the recorded level of violence is not as high as it might be due to the fact that not all incidents are reported and it is difficult to get reports out of labor camps. In February 2015, North Korea detained Korean-Canadian pastor,

Hyensoo Lim, who had been in the country doing relief work (which he had been doing more than a hundred times before over the years). As North Korea from time to time detains foreign citizens, including Christian workers, this in itself was not surprising. Unusual, however, was that the authorities made him [publically confess](#) that his goal was to overturn the North Korean regime. This may point to an increasingly harsher approach towards the country's Christians; it certainly confirms the regime's perception of Christians.

6. Future outlook

- **Visible trends and significance for the Church:**

One of the major questions the regime faces concerns its relationship with China. It heavily depends on China economically and cannot afford to be abandoned by it. Though in the reporting period there have been signs that China is increasingly unhappy with the regime's behavior, it still has reasons to keep North Korea afloat. Kim Jong Un has still not traveled abroad to any country, despite ruling the country for more than three years now. If it goes according to tradition and as a matter of courtesy, he should visit China first. If he does, this would point to a warming relationship, which would be bad news for Christians. For China repatriates every North Korean who manages to defect, despite having signed the United Nation's Refugee Convention and despite the fact that without any costs and efforts China could send through all defectors to South Korea.

Something to watch in 2016 will be the seventh congress of the Workers' Party. It was [announced](#) on 30 October 2015 and will take place in early May 2016. It will be the first such congress for 35 years and may give hints about which direction the country will be heading. Earlier congresses were used to announce leadership shuffles and new policies or their amendments. For the Christians, most likely nothing will change, given that they are regarded as being against the regime.

Iraq – Rank 2

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

Scoring 90 points, Iraq holds the second position on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL-2015, Iraq ranked third with a score of 86 points. Under the influence of the presence of radical Islam and more specifically Islamic State (IS), Iraqi society has further Islamized which adds pressure on Christians.

2. Persecution engines

There are several persecution engines active in Iraq: *Islamic extremism* (main) and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism* (blended with *Islamic extremism*), *Organized corruption and crime* and *Denominational protectionism*.

- ***Islamic extremism***: Radical Islamic groups desire a religious cleansing of Iraq and aim to make the country purely Islamic. Since the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the situation has continuously been deteriorating, with anti-Western (and as such anti-Christian) sentiments mounting together with considerable levels of violence by Islamic militants and insurgent groups. This situation is aggravated by government impunity and lawlessness. Moreover, Islamic terrorist groups have increased in number in the north and west, under the influence of the civil war in Syria. In June 2014 Islamic State (IS) proclaimed a caliphate in large parts of north and west Iraq including the region they control in Syria. They implemented strict Islamic rules and are responsible for most violence against Christians.

In the Iraqi and Kurdish government the role of Islam is increasing due to regional developments. Several Shiite parties have warm relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and consequently Iran's influence in Iraq is increasing. Christians, in particular Christian converts with a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers or MBBs), are already reporting they are being monitored by Iranian secret services in areas close to the Iranian border. In general, Iraqi society seems to be turning more Islamic. There is an increase in social control of women, the wearing of the headscarf and observance of Ramadan. Even Christian women in Baghdad and Basra, have been forced to veil themselves in order to move safely outside of their homes. In areas controlled by IS, all women are forced to wear the full veil which covers the face completely.

- ***Tribal antagonism***: Iraqi society is still very tribal. Tribalism in Iraq, which tries to force the continuing influence of age-old norms and values, is very much mixed with Islam and especially affects MBBs.
- ***Organized corruption and crime***: Corruption plays an important role in the persecution of Christians in Iraq as can be seen in the ransoms demanded when Christians are abducted and in the illegal taking of Christian-owned houses and land. According to the NGO, Bagdad Beituna

(Baghdad Our Home), there have been more than “7,000 violations against properties belonging to Iraqi Christians in Baghdad” since 2003. A Bagdad official says that almost 70% of Baghdad’s Christian homes have been illegally taken. The vulnerable position of religious minorities like Christians is being exploited. Corruption is deeply rooted in Iraqi society, right up to the highest levels. Also, it is especially [people in or close to political power](#) who are occupying not just Christian-owned homes but also churches and monasteries.

- **Denominational protectionism:** In the south and center of Iraq, Christians who have changed church from traditional to non-traditional protestant churches can face threats and opposition from family members, tribal leaders and society around them. This includes threats of losing jobs, inheritances or the means to marry. Members of traditional churches who have visited evangelical churches have also been refused to be married by their bishop. Social disgrace by family and community are common.

3. Context

Christians have a long history in Iraq. Mosul - Iraq’s second biggest city now captured by IS militants - is the current name of the former city Nineveh, from the biblical book of Jonah. There was a long tradition of Christians living in Iraqi cities like Baghdad and Mosul. Before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq was home to one of the largest Christian communities of the Middle East. Christians have lived here for two millennia but are currently on the verge of extinction.

Over the last years, Iraq has suffered from structural uncertainty, conflict and instability under a government incapable of enforcing the rule of law and providing a minimum of security. Corruption levels are soaring and sectarian violence does not seem to stop.

Iraq is divided in two parts, the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north, officially governed by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) based in Erbil and the large remaining Arab part, mostly controlled by the Iraqi Government in Baghdad. Kurds and Arabs have their own languages and culture. Most of Iraq’s oil resources are found near Kirkuk and Mosul, the border areas between the Kurdish region and Arab Iraq, and these are amongst the most violent places of Iraq. Christians are caught here in the crossfire of two different battles: one for a Kurdish autonomous country and one for a religious cleansing of Iraq by Islamic terrorist groups who wish to make the country purely Islamic. On the other hand, there are also sparks of hope. Cooperation between MBB pastors in some places in the north is increasing. And the more traditional churches and organizations are reaching out to refugees from IS controlled areas and Syria by distributing blankets and toys. Churches in Erbil and Dohuk are even bringing full-scale humanitarian aid and relief to 15,000 IDP families.

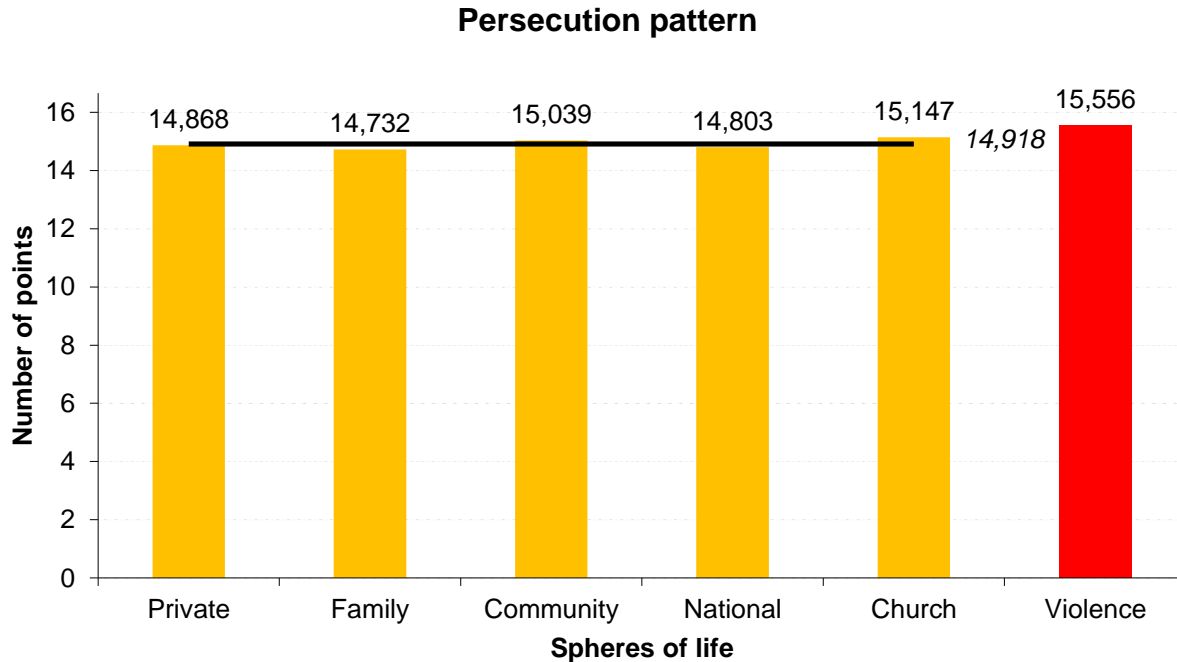
4. Types of Christianity affected

Three types of Christianity exist in Iraq and are experiencing persecution:

- **Historical Christian communities:** The historical Christian communities, as there are the Assyrian Orthodox Church, the Chaldean Catholic or Syrian Catholic Church, and the Armenian Church are seriously affected by persecution.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background. Muslim Background Believers or MBBs are seriously affected by persecution too. MBBs experience most pressure from (extended) family.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches,** such as evangelical churches in Bagdad and Basra, are seriously affected by persecution. In the Nineveh area there are none left due to the presence of IS. Local Christians are faced with persecution or discrimination mostly from fanatical Islamic movements, authorities and non-Christian religious leaders. To some extent evangelical Christians are also affected by opposition from (extended) family.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Iraq presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (14.918), denoting pressure on Christians, is noticeably higher than last year (14.067). The score for the violence block is somewhat lower, going down from 16.112 (WWL 2015) to 15.556. The higher score for the overall pressure is partly due to the decision by the WWL team to reduce the number of types of Christianity from four to three (with expatriate Christians no longer being included as they do not live isolated from other Christians in the country). The already high score for pressure in all *spheres of life* has also further increased as a result of IS presence. *Violence* is scored very high, though slightly lower than last year as there were no reports of Christians being detained without trial during the current reporting period. The data suggest a very severe and volatile persecution situation. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the scores in all *spheres of life* are at a similar high level, which is the result of increased pressure on Christians in the entire country. Especially MBBs face difficulties in all *spheres of life*. The situation is particularly tense in IS held areas, where the religious rights of all types of Christianity are severely violated.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Pressure has increased especially in areas held by IS. This is limiting all types of Christianity in their personal worship of God, e.g. they cannot sing out loud in IS controlled areas. In this respect, MBBs are limited in the entire country as it is risky to be open about their faith.
- **Family sphere:** MBBs often have to hide their new faith from their Islamic families due to the shame this brings. They run the risk of being threatened and abandoned. For all types of Christianity, life as Christian families is severely restricted in IS controlled areas. But also in the rest of Iraq, Christian parents are careful what they share about their faith with their children. If the children would for instance talk about their faith in school – especially during Islamic classes – the family risks blasphemy accusations.
- **Community sphere:** Also in their community, it is too risky for MBBs to be open about their faith. If their faith is known, MBBs will at least be discriminated in their community. This is even worse in IS held areas, where all types of Christians should be silent about their religion. Being a convert from Islam to Christianity is like a death warrant in IS controlled territory. All women in the IS area are forced to fully veil themselves. But also in the north of the country (Dohuk, Zakho and some areas of Erbil) there is a growing social pressure on Christian women to wear a head scarf.
- **National sphere:** Sharia is the primary source of law, which forbids conversion of Muslims to other religions. As such, MBBs will be discriminated in their interaction on a national level if their new faith is known. It is not possible to have their religion changed on their ID cards and their children are also automatically registered as Muslims. In October 2015 the Iraqi parliament approved the National Card Law, forcing non-Muslim children to become Muslim if the male

parent converts to Islam or if their mother marries a Muslim. The law was passed in spite of protests by religious minorities. Even babies of mainstream Christians (historical and non-traditional protestant communities) can be registered as Muslims without their parents knowing it. If Christian parents want this to be corrected on the birth certificate, this will lead to a visible correction giving the impression that the person converted to Christianity – with all the consequences that will entail. In the Kurdish region in north Iraq, the KRG government is ordering land to be sold to Muslims or Yazidis in several predominantly Christian areas and towns. This “demographic reversal process” has been going on for years in many majority Christian areas in the Kurdish region and if this trend is not curbed, these areas will gradually become predominantly Islamic.

- **Church sphere:** In areas under the control of IS, churches and monasteries are in general either demolished or used for other purposes (jails, Islamic centers, stables). It is practically impossible to have any kind of church life in IS held areas: public gatherings that are not organized by IS are forbidden. A disturbing development in central and southern Iraq is the lack of priests or church members in some churches – due to emigration - which leads churches to be put up for sale.
- **Violence:** Since IS proclaimed a caliphate, a stream of Christians as well as Yazidis, Shia Muslims, Shabaq, Kakai and other minorities have been forced to flee their homes. Many Christians have become internally displaced and have fled to the Kurdish region. Many Christians faced killings, abduction and physical harm, including sexual violence and forced marriages. Many churches, monasteries and Christian owned property were damaged, destroyed or confiscated – especially in Mosul and Nineveh Plain. At least 18 attacks on churches or Christian buildings were recorded during the current reporting period. In November 2014, a document was found indicating the prices for Yazidi and Christian women and children, who are abducted by IS fighters. The highest prices are requested for children aged one to nine. According to Middle East Concern, IS distributed printed brochures in January 2015 on how to deal with captive women, permitting IS fighters to rape them.

It is impossible to provide a complete list of incidents against Christian in Iraq, the above mentioned are just some of the major incidents occurring in the WWL 2016 reporting period.

6. Future outlook

In spite of some advances in the north by Iraqi and Kurdish forces with the help of Iran and the US-led coalition, large parts of the populated territory of Iraq remain under the control of Islamic radicals. The KRG are making use of the unstable situation to press for more independence, preferably an autonomous state. According to the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) (EIU) “the power of Shia militias is worrying and little progress in being made in winning back the confidence of disgruntled Sunnis”. There are a variety of possible scenarios for the future. One scenario is a continuation of IS advancing and gaining more power, which could have serious regional consequences. The regional power balance could shift considerably, as Iran would not allow this and would exert and gain more influence in Iraq. It already has much power in the country and Iraq is

likely to ask Iran for more support to help contain IS. On top of IS' increasing power, a bigger role for Iran means the situation of Christians, especially Christians with a Muslim background, is likely to get worse. Moreover, the further widening divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims combined with high levels of violence and the inability of the national government to defend law and order, will cause people to retreat into their own sectarian groups. There will be increased distrust between the different religious and ethnic groups. The lower levels of tolerance combined with the continued or even expanded presence of IS will have harmful consequences for religious minorities, including Christians. A local contact expects another wave of migrants – including Christians – to leave Iraq for the West if the Nineveh Plain is not liberated from IS in the short term.

Another possible scenario is that Al Qaeda will increase its efforts to show that they are following strict Islamic codes and are fighting against the heretics, in order for it to prove their worth. IS used to be a splinter group of Al Qaeda but has separated itself from the “too moderate” Al Qaeda. This situation will also increase the risks for Christians. Many more might leave Iraq, some of them going through the relatively safe Kurdish region.

A third, more positive, scenario might be that the different ethnic and religious groups in Iraq will unite against their mutual jihadist enemy. This might bring more stability to the country. On the micro level, IS's cruel form of radical Islam might eventually antagonize moderate Muslims against their religion. This opens up the doors for interest in other religions, including Christianity.

Eritrea – Rank 3

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 89 points, Eritrea reaches rank 3 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL 2015 Eritrea was at rank 9 with a score of 79 points. In the reporting period, there has been increasing pressure on Christians in Eritrea. This pressure is mainly coming from president Isaias Afewerki, his ruling government, and ordinary members of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). The increase in score (10 points) indicates that the persecution of Christians has reached a breaking point. The increase in the score is attributable to two main factors (in addition to the general deterioration in the situation for Christians since last year): The increase in violence by more than 6 points, and the specific pressure the government of Isaias Afewerki has been putting on protestants. This is done in the belief that those who follow the faith are teaming up with the international community to demonize the Eritrean government. In this regard, the government suspects that the report by the UN Commission of Inquiry would not have been possible without cooperation from people inside Eritrea. One observer states: "Eritrean Christians, even though they know that there is a very high probability of falling into the hands of traffickers and ruthless radical groups like the Islamic States, never hesitate to escape from Eritrea." According to UNHCR Office in Italy (November 2014 report), "22 per cent of the people arriving by boat are Eritrean." Dubbed the "North Korea of Africa," Eritrea ranks among the very worst countries in terms of freedom of religion, freedom of press, rule of law and other human rights records. This is compounded by the role of *Islamic extremism* and *Denominational protectionism* - two engines that play a significant role in making persecution even worse. In Eritrea, there is no safe place and the number of refugees in Europe and elsewhere - as well as the number of Eritrean Christians dying in the hands of terrorists and human traffickers - is testament to that.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Eritrea are *Dictatorial paranoia*, *Islamic extremism*, and *Denominational protectionism*.

- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: The Eritrean regime has become synonymous with absolute authoritarianism. Since 1993, the PFDJ has been exercising full control over Eritrea, under the leadership of president Afewerki. The country has been suffering from this authoritarian regime, which is geared towards exercising extensive influence over the life of its citizens. Nowadays, the regime is doing everything to maintain its power. The regime has arrested, harassed and killed Christians because they are considered to be agents of the West and hence a threat to the state and the government.
- ***Islamic extremism***: Approximately half of the Eritrean population is Muslim. Since they mostly reside in the lowlands along the Red Sea Coast and the border with Sudan, Eritrean Muslims are showing a tendency towards radicalism partly due to what is going on in the region. That means

Christians in those areas are very vulnerable, especially converts from Islam. Eritrean Muslims are “Muslims first” and “Eritrean second”. Furthermore, the Eritrean government has sympathy for Islam and Islamic militant groups, such as al-Shabaab. According to a report by the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (13 October 2014), Eritrea has supplied weapons and ammunition to al-Shabaab on different occasions. Furthermore, the Monitoring Group said that Eritrea is “cultivating a number of high-level contacts in the Federal Government of Somalia to strategically influence the new Government.” The Group also reported, “Eritrea had retained links with warlords and spoilers allied with the Federal Government of Somalia, some of whom in turn had relationships with al-Shabaab.”

- **Denominational protectionism:** The Eritrean state officially recognizes three different types of Christianity: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Lutheran Church. Christians with a background different to the Eritrean Orthodox Church sometimes face pressure from the latter. This pressure partly originates from theological differences but has practical roots as well. Well organized and with a long tradition and historic recognition, the Orthodox Church looks down upon other types of Christianity as being newcomers. For the Orthodox Church leaders, Eritrea is the home of the Orthodox Church, its Christian history is defined by the Orthodox Church, and other denominations – in particular the pentecostal churches - are not regarded as legitimate.

3. Context

Eritrea entered the World Watch List in 2002, and in 2004 the country jumped into the top 20. Thus, although there was persecution in previous years, it is important to underline that Christians in Eritrea have faced the severest levels of persecution in the current reporting period and it has reached breaking point. To begin with, the Eritrean regime is absolutely authoritarian and intolerant towards any form of unregistered organization, dissent, and free expression. According to Reporters Without Borders, “Eritrea systematically violates freedom of expression and information. It is Africa’s biggest prison for journalists.” The President of the country is on the Reporters Without Borders list of “Predators of Press Freedom.” And the Press Freedom Index put the country last for the past seven years - even below Somalia, Sudan, China and Iran. According to Freedom House, Eritrea is one of the ten worst countries when it comes to freedom. The challenges that Christians, especially Pentecostals, face in the country has no parallel anywhere in countries with significant number of Christians. The government’s animosity towards the Christian faith and sects started with the targeting of the Jehovah’s Witnesses during the 1993 referendum and ended up with persecuting all types of Christians in the country. The introduction of a registration system completely outlawed a large category of Christians. The government’s attempt to control all religious institutions culminated in the deposing of the Eritrean Orthodox Church Patriarch who has been under house arrest since 2007. Government abuse and the hardships suffered led to dissatisfaction amongst the population, and it eventually resulted in a low-level coup d’état in 2013 in an attempt to unseat president Isaias Afewerki. It failed and he blamed the West and Ethiopia for the attempted coup. It also gave the government another excuse to intensify its persecution of

Christians, named by the government as “agents of the West”. The incident also gave a chance for Muslims to get closer to the government on the basis of “my enemy is your enemy”.

Eritrea has also consistently supported the rise and spread of radicalism in the Horn of Africa. The sanctions by the UN on Eritrea for its support of radical Islamic militants in the region, al-Shabaab in particular, shows that the Eritrean government is also an accomplice in the persecution of Christians outside Eritrea by supplying the means and methods of persecution to radical Muslims. In addition, the Eritrean government has close ties with the Islamic government of Sudan, subsequently shaping negative attitudes towards Christians in Eritrea and outside Eritrea. In addition to Sudan, Eritrea is close to countries of the Middle East like Qatar, Iran and Saudi in terms of culture, policy and geography, where Christians are facing an endless ordeal day in and day out. Many Christians are leaving the country via neighboring countries - Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt - and have become an easy prey for human traffickers, especially in the Sinai desert. Some of them were caught and beheaded in Libya by Islamic State. Still many have made to Europe by boat through the treacherous Mediterranean Sea journey. That means the situation in Eritrea is also contributing to the global refugee crisis. In the international context, it is also important to take note of the fact that Eritrea is one of the two African Countries designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) by the US State Department because of severe violations of freedom of religion. One refugee stated that “the country is almost without its youth - some of them are in the SAWA Defense Training Center and others are escaping the regime through every possible outlet. And the country has become uninhabitable.” That is why Robert P. George (Chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom) and Thomas J. Reese (USCIRF Commissioner) ask: “Should Eritrea's track record on human rights crimes and religious freedom warrant a referral to the International Criminal Court at The Hague?”

4. Types of Christianity affected

Approximately fifty per cent of Eritrea’s population has a Christian background. There are four types of Christianity in Eritrea.

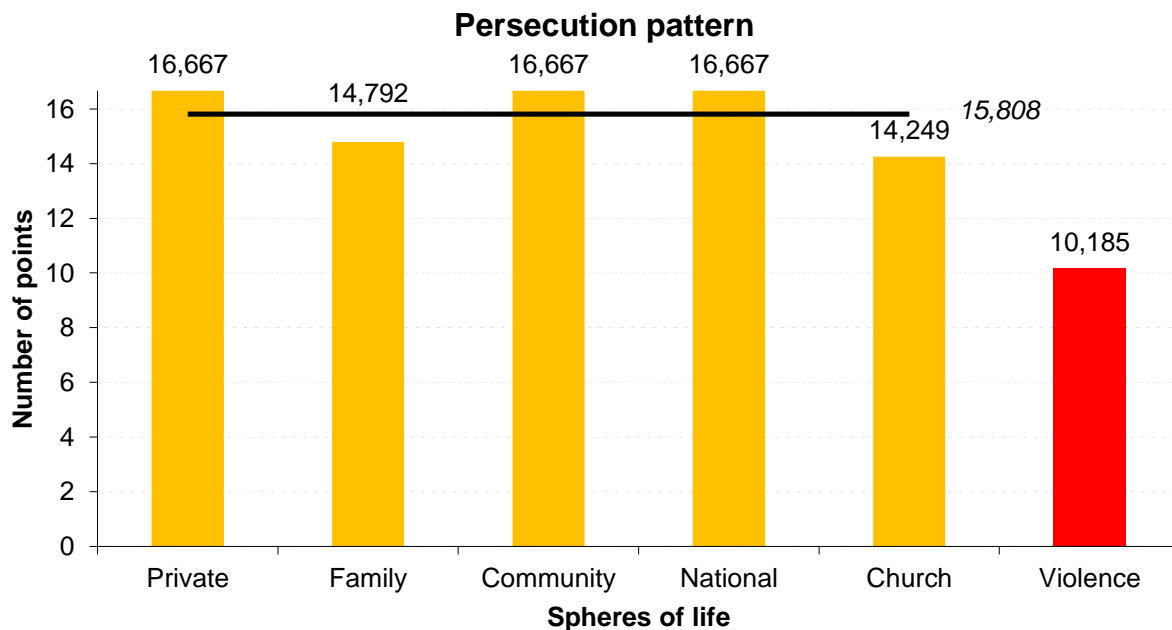
- **The expatriate Christians:** The main challenge that this group faces is emanating from the government. The number of expatriates is significantly declining due to the government’s pressure.
- **Historical Christian communities:** This group includes the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Anglicans, Evangelical Lutherans, and Roman Catholics. These Christians live mainly in the Christian-dominated areas of central and south Eritrea. They face persecution from the government and *Islamic extremism*.
- **Communities of non-traditional protestants:** These Christians – especially the pentecostal communities - face serious persecution especially from government officials and the Eritrean Orthodox Church.
- **Converts:** This group refers either to Christians who have left the historical Christian communities to join non-traditional protestant congregations or to Muslims who have converted

to Christianity (MMBs). The first category can face serious persecution from the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the latter from Muslim families and society.

5. Spheres of life and violence

Eritrean Christians face massive pressure and experience violence against them from three engines driven by many actors.

- Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The persecution pattern for Eritrea presents the scores for *Dictatorial paranoia*, *Islamic extremism* and *Denominational protectionism*. The average score over the first five blocks (15.808), showing the pressure on Christians, is higher than last year (15.100). The score for the violence block is markedly higher, rising from 3.889 (WWL 2015) up to 10.185. [This suggests Eritrea went in a downwards spiral in the reporting period.](#) As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is severe in every *sphere of life*, but strongest in the *private*, *community* and *national spheres*. The maximum scores in these *spheres of life* are caused by the overlapping effect of the three powerful persecution engines in the country.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private life:** The government continuously targets individuals in their private life and makes their everyday lives difficult and complicated. For example, Open Doors researchers noted: “To possess any materials not considered to be of the registered church is very risky. Many have been arrested for owning and using some of these materials. But even the registered groups are not free to print, import or distribute materials without government interference and scrutiny. ” *Denominational protectionism* and *Islamic extremism* are also sources of harassment for Christians in many ways. Especially Muslims converting to Christianity face intense pressure. For

example, converts will be thrown out of the family home and denied access to various basic goods in their community.

- **Family life:** Due to government arrests, imprisonment, and abductions, Christian families disintegrate. Due to *denominational protectionism*, Christians are denied inheritance as well as family-related rights. Due to *Islamic extremism* Christians face multifaceted challenges in Muslim dominated areas. For example, MBBs cannot conduct a Christian wedding in public, and if MBBs die, they are buried under Muslim rites.
- **Community life:** According to an Open Doors field researcher, the government enlists the help of the community to spy on all Christian activities in their locality. This can give rise to strange alliances: e.g. Muslims monitoring evangelical activities, especially any mission (evangelism and discipleship) to Muslims in their communities, on behalf of the government.
- **National life:** The national life of Christians in Eritrea seems to deteriorate with each passing day. The high score in this category can be attributed to the attitude and behavior of the Eritrean government towards Christians. (However, it needs to be said that, compared with the other persecuted church types, members of the Eritrean Coptic Church enjoy relative freedom. This can be explained by the government's perception that they are less Western, more patriotic and controllable.) The country is known for forcing Christians to act against their conscience. Pursuant to Article 6 of Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 of 1995, any Eritrean citizen between the age of 18 and 50 has the obligation to enlist for national service. The Proclamation does not provide any exception for citizens not wanting to enlist on religious grounds. Religious groups have thus faced enormous challenges for refusing to take part or quitting the service.
- **Church life:** The Eritrean government puts massive pressure on the Church. Religious groups in Eritrea should either register or cease operating. However, getting registration/license permits is very difficult. The government also interferes in the election of religious leaders. For example, the Eritrean Orthodox Church Patriarch, Patriarch Abune Antonios, has been under house arrest since May 2007. Furthermore, religious groups cannot print and distribute documents/materials without prior approval by the Office of Religious Affairs.
- **Violence:** As a result of state sanctioned violence, many Eritrean Christians prefer to risk the deadly emigration routes via Sudan and Libya rather than stay in their country. Houses of Christians have been raided, attacked, and damaged. In addition, it was reported that personnel from Eritrea's security branches have been involved in the systematic torture and beatings of Christians. More than 30 Christians were killed including three sisters who were trying to escape from the country. (Field reports suggest more than 30 - around 38 - Christians were killed while attempting to flee Eritrea, and some died in prison during the reporting period. The 11 included in the violent incident article are only the verified cases. For scoring purposes, there is no difference between 11 or 30 Christians killed.) Other Christians are being held by the government in miserable conditions, for example being detained in shipping containers in

scorching temperatures. Thousands of Christians have been arrested and imprisoned over the years, some of whom still remain in prison after 11 years. Two medical doctors are also in jail for their Christian faith. Asmara police stations, Mai Sirwa, Adi Abieto (new for believers to be detained in), Keren (new), Assab, Hashferai, Barentu, Mai Idaga, Alla (new) are some of the detention and prison centers. Many prisoners are forced to work very long hours in commercial flower fields.

6. Future outlook

“The country is ruled by fear not law” states the UN Commission of Inquiry. It is under the firm control of an absolute dictator, despite there being widespread dissatisfaction with the Eritrean regime. According to World Watch List records, the situation for Christians in Eritrea has been deteriorating since 2003 and reports suggest that Eritrea’s society will continue to breed an atmosphere of fear. This is partly reflected in the increasing number of Eritrean’s fleeing the country, through Sudan-Egypt and then Israel. While the government is doing all it takes to stay in power, the growth of *Islamic extremism* is a worrying trend, especially as approximately fifty per cent of the Eritrean population are Muslims and could be vulnerable to becoming radicalized. In addition, like in Ethiopia, the Eritrean Orthodox Church continues to put pressure on converts to the protestant faith.

Considering what has happened in the past years and the existing situation, the future could look as follows: The plight of Eritrean Christians will continue, including their suffering at the hands of human traffickers in neighboring countries. The Eritrean government will continue forcing Christians to join the national army without upholding the rights of conscientious objectors. The Eritrean Orthodox Church and radical Muslims will continue persecuting Christians, especially converts.

Afghanistan – Rank 4

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 88 points, Afghanistan ranks 4 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL 2015, Afghanistan ranked 5 with a score of 81 points. The increase is partly due to an increased level of violence and, apart from that, from the fact that for this reporting period, expatriate Christians (meeting in a high-security compound) were no longer included for WWL purposes. They are so few and their number is decreasing due to the tense security situation.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Afghanistan are *Islamic extremism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism* (blended with *Islamic extremism*), and *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan neither allows any Afghan citizens to become Christians nor recognizes them as such. Conversion is seen as apostasy and brings shame on the family and the community. Therefore, converts hide their new-won faith as far as possible. The Taliban still rule parts of the country and have a significant influence. One observer stated: “After twenty years of involvement in conflict, the simplest summary of the Taliban would be armed mullahs – fighting priests”. Both elements, the martial and the religious, are significant. The leadership of the Taliban consists of madrassah-educated clerics. In statements praising (suicide) martyrs, the Taliban mostly highlight their religious qualities. And they even go further when they express pity for mothers of soldiers killed belonging to the ANA (Afghan National Army) and ask them why they hindered their children from becoming a *shahid* (martyr) instead of allowing them to be killed for a purely worldly cause. All Christians with an Afghan nationality are converts coming from a Muslim background (MBBs). If Christian converts are discovered, they face discrimination and hostility up to violence by their family, friends and community. Muslim clergy will most likely be the instigators and local authorities can be involved, too. MBBs will be put under heavy pressure to recant their faith. Those who decide to leave Islam and who are considered to be apostates are in an extremely difficult situation.
- **Tribal antagonism:** The concept of nation is quite remote to the Afghan way of thinking. Your own family comes first, followed by clan own tribe and people – and all of them are much more important than the country. People are deeply entrenched into caring for their families, villages, tribes and own people. If someone dares to turn from his tribe and age-old values and to embrace something new and maybe even foreign, this results in high pressure to return to tradition. If this does not happen, such a person will be looked upon as a traitor and excluded from the community. This applies to all “deviations” but even more so if someone turns to Christianity. The Christian religion is still considered to be a Western religion and hostile to Afghan culture, society and Islam.

- **Organized corruption and crime:** The lack of exportable goods leads to a huge trade imbalance, causing the country to be in constant need of money. A stunning 80% of the GDP comes from the informal sector and so organized corruption and crime are omnipresent. This became clearly visible in the “Kabul Bank” incident in 2010 where it turned out that officers of the bank - including the brother of the then-president Karzai - had embezzled more than 850 million USD, leading to a run on the already weak bank system in Afghanistan. After president Ghani’s inauguration, investigations were re-opened in October 2014. In dealing with authorities, bribes are a very common way of getting things done. This also affects Christians because they belong to the poor majority of society. One of the main economic problems Afghanistan faces is that illicit drugs like opium are much more lucrative than virtually any other crop. Compared to wheat, farmers can earn eleven times the amount of money with poppy production. Consequently, the opium trade makes up approximately 15% of the equivalent of the country’s licit GDP. The Taliban are heavily involved in drug production, estimations are that 70-80% of all drug trafficking gains end up in the Taliban’s pockets. Afghanistan’s main opium production hub, the southern province of Helmand, is home to around 50% of the country’s area suitable for poppy cultivation and a stronghold of the Taliban. Everyone who is in the way of the drug lords will just be pushed aside. In most cases, this does not happen to Christians alone as they are not visible anyway, but they are also affected as they do not have an alternative or someone to turn to in order to seek help.

3. Context

Afghanistan has been situated in a volatile region for centuries. It was ruled by Persians and gained independence as a state in 1709. The north-western part of the country is also known as “Khorasan”, a term which recently gained prominence again when militants pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and announced the introduction of a “caliphate of Khorasan”. Ancient Khorasan included parts of Iran and Pakistan as well. The Western concept of a nation state is alien to Afghanistan; loyalty belongs to the tribe, the language, the ethnicity, but not to a state. Every decision in the country therefore has to be seen through these multiple lenses. Having authority in Kabul does not necessarily mean having authority in the provinces.

This is at least partly an explanation for the country’s complicated politics. Since the seventies, Afghanistan has lacked peace and served as an arena for playing “the Great Game” by neighboring states and world super powers involving first and foremost Pakistan, India, Russia, China and the United States. All efforts to find an agreement with the Taliban is hampered by these facts. The recent splintering of the Taliban movement complicates any peace talks the Afghan government may wish to hold with the insurgents. There have been numerous efforts (most recently in [March 2015](#)), but as the leadership is contested at the moment and it remains to be seen where factions build and settle in the end, all talks came to a halt for the time being.

Security is obviously one of the major challenges the country faces. Afghanistan’s security forces are frequently not part of the solution, but part of the problem. The Afghan Local Police (ALP) for

example was set up to assist regular forces and is basically the effort to include some of the ethnic and tribal insurgent groups. They are loosely regulated and poorly trained, but have a force of 29,000 and operate in 29 of the 34 provinces. Their loyalty is questionable as was related by a report quoting a religious scholar from Parwan: “We like the ALP – and if we don’t like them, we complain to the district chief of police, and he will disarm them.” Another problem is that militias are often armed and used to fight against the Taliban, but they also abuse the people. This means pro-government militias can have a worse effect on society than the Taliban, as one villager explained in a recent [report](#) from September 2015.

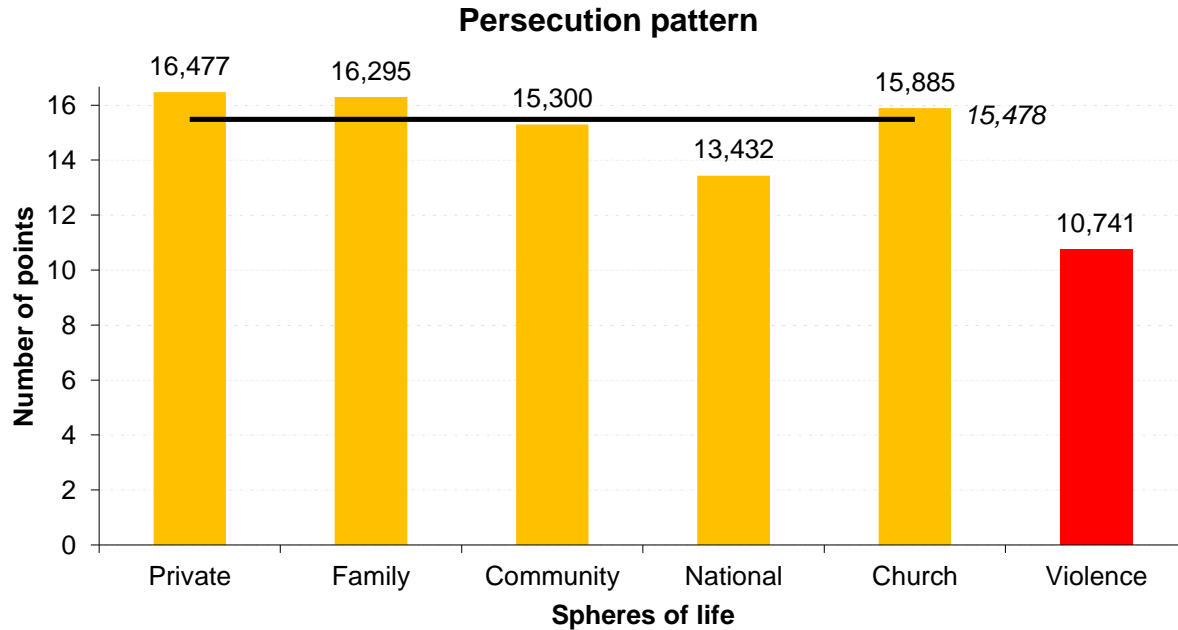
4. Types of Christianity affected

All Afghan Christians come from a Muslim Background and are experiencing persecution:

- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs). Afghanistan is one of the very few countries where only one type of Christianity is found. Expatriate Christians were not included in this year’s reporting period anymore as they are so few and their number is decreasing due to the tenuous security situation. Additionally, they are so isolated that they virtually make no impact on the situation. They may as well live in a space that is as free as the West itself on their compounds. MBBs however are trying their utmost not to be discovered by family, friends, neighbors or the wider community. Depending on the family, they even have to fear for their lives. Living openly as a Christian is simply not possible and even shops or other businesses have been destroyed just on the mere suspicion that someone might be a convert, according to reports.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Afghanistan presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (15.478), showing the pressure on Christians, is even slightly higher than last year (15.262). The score for the violence block is much higher: 5.185 (WWL 2015) to 10.741. This suggests the persecution situation is volatile, notwithstanding the already high level of pressure on Christians. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is severe, with the highest scores in the *private* and *family spheres* and the lowest in the *national sphere*. Converts face an enormous pressure as they are not just deviating from a faith, but putting themselves outside the family, clan, village, tribe and ultimately, nation. Therefore Christians have to remain in deepest secrecy and many have left the country, either because they were discovered, stood in the risk of being discovered or simply the pressure had become unbearable.



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- Private/family/community spheres:** MBBs always have to be very cautious as even the suspicion of having converted can lead to severe consequences like arrests and the destruction of living spaces and businesses. Social control is high and it is difficult to hide the new-won faith over a long period of time, especially if the convert has children. Additionally, he or she is in a catch 22 situation as they do not want to send their children to a *madrassah* and it is dangerous to share about the new faith to their children as well.
- National sphere:** Article 3 of the constitution, stating that no law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam, leads to restrictions in many areas. And as the wording is rather flexible, it remains unclear what may be deemed as inappropriate and against Islam. Afghanistan is an Islamic Republic and does not allow any deviation from the Muslim faith. Accusations of conversion are equaled to blaspheming Islam and the prophet and neither Christians nor other religious – including Muslim – minorities enjoy freedom of religion.
- Church sphere:** There is no publicly accessible church in Afghanistan. The only functioning chapel is placed in the basement of the Italian embassy in Kabul and only open for the declining number of expatriates working in Kabul, mainly diplomatic and military staff. Expatriate Christians remain a target of radical Muslims, even if they do not testify about their Christian faith explicitly, but are simply motivated by Christian charity.
- Violence:** At the beginning of the reporting period, on 29 November 2014, three South African Christians working for a relief organization were killed in an attack on the guesthouse they were staying at in Kabul. Every building which is suspected of having connections with the underground Christian community is targeted, closed down and even damaged, no matter if the

allegations are true or not. After eight months of abduction, an Indian priest supervising the Jesuit Refugee Program in Afghanistan was released on 22 February 2015.

6. Future outlook

Afghanistan continues to face a volatile and highly violent future and there is no obvious way out of it. That is one reason why among the refugees coming to Europe, there is a surprisingly large number of Afghans. Christians also face this difficult future. Observers see scant reasons for hoping for a negotiated and all-comprehensive peace with Taliban, other insurgents and regional warlords. Basically, this is due to four reasons: 1) Political: President Ghani's basis for ruling is shaky and relations to the country's CEO, Abdullah Abdullah, are strained, to say the least. 2) Economic: Afghanistan's state revenue stands at a meagre 29% of the budget, meaning that the government will continue to fail to provide the people's most basic needs. 3) Military: At least one third of Afghanistan's territory is at insurgency risk and insurgents have increased attacks, conquering further districts all over the country. 4) Geostrategic: For the time being it is Pakistan holding the keys to an overall solution in Afghanistan.

However, there may be a silver lining for the country's clouds. One of its problems is its dependency on outer powers, including neighboring Pakistan, to end its geographically land-locked position. The easing and finally lifting of international economic sanctions against Iran may have a positive impact on neighbouring Afghanistan in this respect. Both countries share a border of 936 kilometres and an opening to international trade streams could lessen Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan as it would offer an alternative access to the sea. Most likely this could be achieved by the opening of the port of Chabbar in Iran, possibly with Chinese assistance due to their efforts at creating a new Silk Road. This still leaves the question of stability unanswered, but at least it offers a desperately needed perspective. For the small Christian minority in the country, however, the situation will not improve and persecution will not cease.

Syria – Rank 5

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

Syria continues to be high in Top Ten of the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. The score has increased once again from 83 (WWL 2015) to 87 points. Remarkably, however, Syria falls one position, from rank 4 to 5. This is explained by other countries receiving higher scores and therefore overtaking Syria on the WWL. The main reason for Syria's increased score is the rise in influence and territory of radical Islamic groups, reaching an all-time high with the establishment of the Islamic State caliphate (IS). As a result, sectarian tensions within the country (including government-controlled areas) have mounted. To compare: before the start of the civil war, Syria ranked 38 on the WWL.

2. Persecution engines

In Syria, four persecution engines can be distinguished: *Islamic extremism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism* (blended with *Islamic extremism*), *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime*. It was only during the civil war that *Islamic extremism* has developed into the main persecution engine instead of *Dictatorial paranoia*.

- ***Islamic extremism***: The militants of the Islamic State (IS) and to a lesser extent those of Jabhat al-Nusra and other radical groups, are currently the cruelest drivers of the persecution of Christians in Syria. Christians used to have a relatively large amount of religious freedom in pre-civil war Syria. This has changed with the advent of militant Islamic groups. IS introduced the caliphate in large parts of Syria and Iraq at the end of June 2014. A strict version of Sharia law was implemented. Already in February 2014 Christians in the city of Raqqa were forced to sign a 'dhimmi contract' violating their (religious) freedom. At the moment, most Christians have fled IS controlled areas. As a result of the increased influence of radical Islamic groups, society is radicalizing especially in areas controlled by those radical groups.
- ***Tribal antagonism***: Tribalism in Syria, which tries to enforce the continuing influence of age-old norms and values, is very much mixed with Islam and especially affects MBBs.
- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: In pre-civil war Syria, *Dictatorial paranoia* mostly came from government officials. The state monitored churches, e.g. for the contents of their sermons, to verify whether it contained political statements. Today, the government hardly monitors Christians anymore as they are preoccupied with their fight against the different opposition groups. Due to the circumstances of war, there is hardly any attempt to ensure religious freedom for Christians. In present day Syria, this persecution engine is predominantly driven not by the government, but by armed groups that control parts of Syria and are willing to use any means to stay in power.
- ***Organized corruption and crime***: In Syria, *Organized corruption and crime* takes place in the civil war situation of impunity and anarchy. It is a means for self-enrichment; an example is kidnap for

ransom. Syrians of different religious backgrounds are being kidnapped. Behind the kidnapping of Christians there are financial, political and ideological motives. Christians have a reputation of being wealthy and supporting the regime. Being part of a vulnerable non-Muslim minority also plays a role in their abductions.

3. Context

The Syrian civil war began as a popular uprising in 2011, with demands for increased political liberties and economic reforms, similar to other Arab countries at that same period. However the roots of the conflict are deeper and more complicated, and include class conflict, rural versus urban divisions, and repressed political liberty. This in part explains why the conflict has so rapidly evolved into an extremely violent sectarian conflict that has now lasted for five years. The religious component of the conflict is primarily Sunni versus Shi'a (including Alawite).

The Syrian opposition is increasingly "Islamizing" and the civil war is taking on more and more the form of a *jihad* against the Syrian government. In the conflict, all Syrians are suffering greatly, but some groups are in a more vulnerable position than others.

One of the main features of Syria's Christian population is its combined ethnic and religious identity. Particularly significant for the understanding of the position of Christians in the context of the current civil war is the concentration of Syria's Christians in strategic areas of the country that are vital to both the government and the opposition's war efforts, such as in and around the cities of Aleppo and Damascus, and in the southern areas of the Homs governorate near the Lebanese border. The geographical concentration of Christians in strategic areas is an important factor in their vulnerability, as is their alleged support to the government.

4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in Syria are affected by persecution related to the civil war. For radical Islamic groups, it does not matter to which denomination a Christian belongs. But there are a few factors that make certain groups additionally vulnerably. The following three types of Christianity are affected by persecution in Syria:

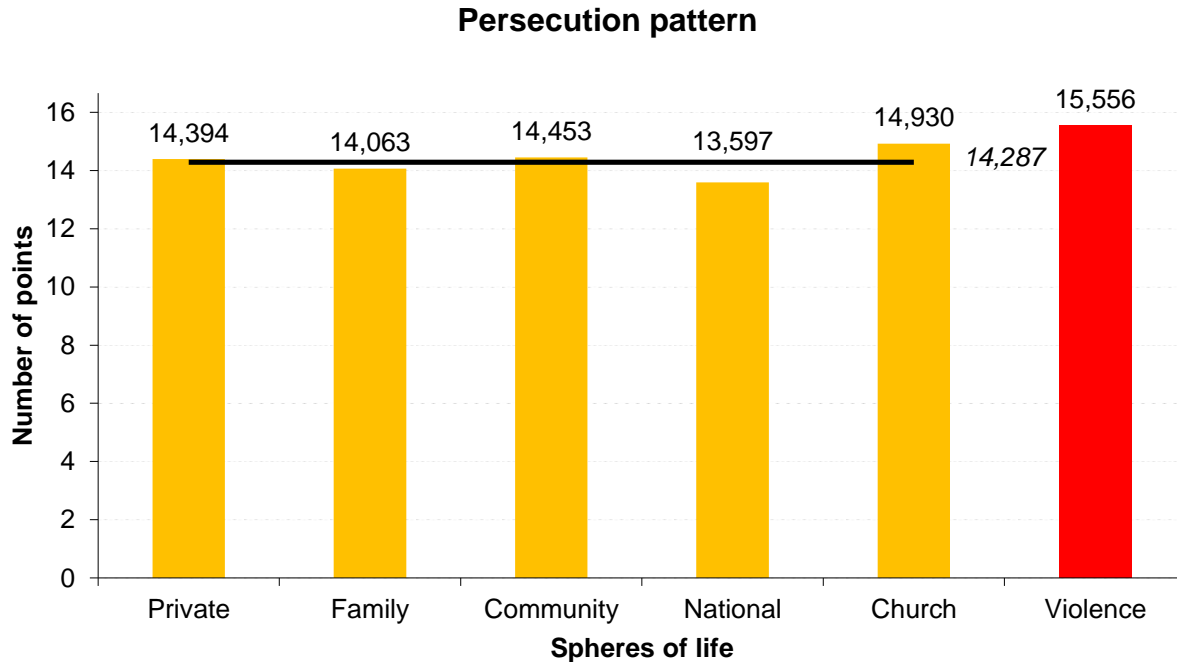
- **Historical Christian communities** (mostly Syrian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches). As the largest type of Christianity in the country, Christians from historical Christian communities are specifically targeted. They are spread over the entire country and are also present in conflict zones. Of this group, it is the leaders that are mostly affected, due to their public exposure. Clergy from historical churches are recognizable by their clothing which makes them sometimes a target. Historical Christians are also more recognizable present in society than for the other types of Christianity, for instance by clearly recognizable churches and are socio-economically more connected to the state apparatus. The political reputation of denominations, churches and local church leaders plays an important role in the level of persecution or oppression they face from groups that are fighting President Assad. In this, it is decisive how churches and Christians

aligned or positioned themselves in a political sense in the past: whether they were supportive of Assad, tried to stay neutral, distanced themselves from or even opposed him.

- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers or MBBs). Converts from Islam to Christianity are especially put under pressure by their family, as it brings great dishonor to them if a family member leaves Islam. This is particularly true in majority Sunni areas, where MBBs risk being banned from their families or worse. In a reaction to the increased radicalization of Islam, opposition from family and society towards converts from a Muslim background has increased particularly within rebel controlled areas. Pressure from the family is somewhat less intense in Kurdish areas, as the Kurdish Sunnis are generally less fundamentalist. Since the state authorities currently have other priorities to deal with, the slight governmental pressure on MBBs that there had been in earlier years, has diminished.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** such as evangelical and pentecostal communities. These churches are in a vulnerable position as they are known for their Western orientation, fragmentation, lack of strong leadership and lack of a foreign spokesperson (e.g. like a Pope or bishop) who can speak on their behalf. The total number of Christians in Syria is currently estimated to be between 600,000 and 900,000, compared to 1.8 million Christians before the civil war. Open Doors follows the estimate of the World Christian Database, which is 772,000 Christians. This means that more than 1 million Christians have fled the country since the start of the civil war.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Syria presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (14.287), showing the pressure on Christians, is considerably higher than last year (13.326). The score for the violence block is still at a very high level, though slightly lower than last year, moving down from 16.112 (WWL 2015) to 15.556. This is explained by the fact that contrary to last year, there were no reports of Christians being detained without trial. With the civil war, Syria's society is derailed in such a way that pressure for every Syrian citizen remains high. Within this context of war, with IS controlling large parts of the country and with the rising influence of Islamic jihadists in the opposition forces, Christians have become an increasingly vulnerable group. They face increased faith-related pressure in all *spheres of life: private, family, community, national and church spheres*. This is particularly true for all Christians in IS controlled areas and for MBBs in the entire country. In Kurdish areas the situation for MBBs is somewhat less intense. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution pressure is more or less evenly distributed over the different *spheres of life*, with the highest level evident in the *church sphere* and the lowest in the *national sphere*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Pressure has increased due to large parts of the country being under IS control. This is limiting all types of Christians in their personal worship of God, e.g. they cannot sing out loud in areas controlled by radical Islamic groups. Under the influence of increased radical sentiments, MBBs in the entire country (especially in those areas controlled by radical Islamic groups, and with the exception of Kurdish areas) experience a higher level of pressure in their private religious observance.
- Family sphere:** Especially MBBs face increased levels of pressure in this *sphere of life*, if their new faith is known. However, this is slightly less intense in Kurdish areas. Also, MBBs are not able to change their religious identity in official documents, cannot officially have a Christian wedding or baptism, etc. In IS controlled areas, these issues are problematic for all types of Christianity.
- Community sphere:** Community life is extremely limited for all types of Christianity in IS controlled areas. If their faith is known, it is problematic for MBBs in the entire country. In IS controlled areas all citizens (including Christians) have to abide by Islamic dress code. Christians are forced to pay protection money and to keep commercial and dietary regulations, including a ban on alcohol.
- National sphere:** Due to the fractured state of the country, there is now more impunity and inequality. In government controlled areas, Christians are generally not discriminated against in national life. However, they may encounter glass ceilings in the public sector. MBBs can be treated unequally, if their faith is known. Evangelism and conversion from Islam are prohibited.

In areas controlled by radical Muslim elements, all non-Muslims, including Christians, are second rate citizens.

- **Church sphere:** In areas controlled by radical Islamic groups most churches are either demolished or used as Islamic centers. Public expressions of Christian faith are prohibited and church buildings or monasteries cannot be repaired or restored irrespective of whether the damage was collateral or intentional. In government controlled areas, there is less monitoring of Christians due to the circumstances of war. In the entire country, MBB marriages are impossible and as such illegal.
- **Violence:** Violence targeted against Christians has continued during the WWL reporting period. The sectarian dimension of the conflict is a factor that has made Christians, as a religious/ethnic minority, more vulnerable. Radical Muslims play an important role in the anti-Christian violence. In a recently issued [magazine](#), IS explained that IS fighters are allowed to rape enslaved non-Muslim women. We have received reports of many Christians being abducted, physically harmed and killed. Within the context of civil war, many churches have been damaged or destroyed, however in several cases deliberately. It is impossible to provide a complete list of violent incidents against Christians in Syria, therefore only some major incidents of the WWL reporting period are listed here: On 23 February 2015, IS attacked 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in Hasaka province in northeast Syria. According to the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA) they captured more than 250 and “drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages”. Most of them have not been able to return. All churches in these villages were confiscated or destroyed. Three hostages were executed on 23 September 2015. Some hostages have since been released, but in total well over 300 Assyrian Christians were still being held by IS in December 2015.

6. Future outlook

A new development in the civil war in Syria during 2015 was the intervention of Russia. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the level of the Russian intervention is “unlikely to be of a sufficient scale to save the exhausted Syrian regime, but it will be assisted in the near term by the growing focus of external powers on containing the Islamic State threat, especially after the Paris attacks”. Like last year, the EIU continues to expect that as “the war descends into a free-for-all, the humanitarian crisis will worsen, forcing more Syrians to flee the country and leaving the economy reliant on foreign aid”.

The impact of the civil war on Christians, and more specifically the direct attacks aimed at Christians, are extremely traumatic, causing them to continue to flee the country. The presence of Christians as a neutral element in societies with many different facets of Islam is very important. As their numbers are decreasing, instability and conflict are likely to increase. Amidst all violence and persecution, there are also sparks of hope. Though many Christians have left the country - and will continue to do so - or are internally displaced, there are many Christians who are sincerely committed to stay in Syria and serve the country especially in the midst of this unimaginable ordeal.

Also there is growth in the number of people who have converted to Christ in this deplorable situation of civil war.

Pakistan – Rank 6

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 87 points, Pakistan ranks 6 on the World Watch List 2016. In WWL 2015, Pakistan ranked 8 with a score of 79 points. The increase is partly due to an increased level of violence, scoring maximum for the first time. Apart from that, the increase in pressure shows across the five *spheres of life* with the strongest increase evident in the *church sphere*.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Pakistan are *Islamic extremism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Pakistan suffers from a plethora of radical Islamic groups and witnesses an increasingly Islamizing culture. The Christian community feels increasingly trapped in the crosshairs of those groups and culture. Radical Islamic groups continue to flourish despite a recent crackdown on some of them by the military and are used by different political groups as allies. Their power to mobilize hundreds of thousands of predominantly young people and take them to the streets remains a frequently used political tool and a strong leverage for enforcing political goals. This power to mobilize mobs very quickly was felt by the Christian minority countless times as well. Banned radical Islamic groups do not dissolve into nothing, in most cases they simply re-brand and build charity fronts, wooing the general populace with social services and the youth with a perspective which it is badly lacking. The majority of the population is 24 years old or younger; given that one third of the population is below 14, this is a trend that will not cease quickly and brings enormous challenges with it. While life expectancy is not very high at 67.39 years, the total fertility rate stands at 2.75. These figures show that if these trends continue, Pakistan will become the largest Muslim country in the world, overtaking Indonesia within the next 15 years. This social structure leads to scores of young people leaving schools, dreaming of their future. As the country struggles to give a perspective even to the well-educated and academic among the younger generation, this builds the basis for social unrest, which in turn paves the way for radical Islamic groups luring young people into their arms, giving them a feeling of worth they have never had before.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** Corruption is rampant in Pakistan on all levels of administration and army. The army is so deeply entrenched into the country's economy and serves as a strong competitor in many economic fields. It enjoys unfair advantages which a popular joke about the army illustrates well: "All countries have armies, but here, an army has a country." Though it is difficult to access details, estimations say that the military holds assets valued at around 10 billion USD, including around 5 million hectares of farmland. Organized crime affects Christians in a special way as many Christians are poor and without defense. This was shown in the reporting period when a Christian couple was killed because of alleged blasphemy on 4 November 2014.

They were working as bonded laborers in the third generation for a brick manufacturer. These laborers depend completely on the mercy of their employers and have no way out as they will never be able to pay their loans back due to the high interest rates. They have no legal way of registering complaints and are left without any defense or perspective.

3. Context

Pakistan witnessed another eventful time in the reporting period. This started with the attacks by Taliban insurgents on a military-run school in Peshawar on 16 December 2014, leaving 144 dead, including 132 schoolchildren. Though the military announced a war against Islamic radicals and indeed started a campaign, it continues a policy of distinguishing between “good” and “bad” jihadists. While it fights the latter, it courts the former (eg. *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, now *Jamaat-ud-Dawah*, and the *Haqqani* network) and uses them as a proxy to reach its goals in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India. Apparently, the military does not abandon or even adapt this policy which has been followed for decades. The recent attacks in December 2014 led to a hasty amendment of the constitution, re-introducing the death penalty and setting up special military courts for terrorism-linked cases, fulfilling two long-standing demands of the military. While observers say that the law’s strongest result is to effectively sideline elected governments, it is also doubtful if the law will reach its goal. According to numbers quoted in newspapers, 49,000 people have been arrested through this new ruling, but only 129 of these were Islamic radicals. The ratio of pickups is even more stunning: while 292,000 people were picked up by the authorities, only 140 Islamic radicals were among them. The situation in Pakistan has become so tight that the very meeting of people is seen as suspicious.

A never-ending stream of madrassah-educated youth enters society; if madrassah teaching fails to be controlled, radical ideas will get implanted in the younger generation’s minds. One huge topic for Pakistan’s future is therefore the control of madrassahs. An estimated 35,000 madrassahs exist in the country, from which at least 11,000 follow conservative Deobandi Islam. Children and youth receive radical teaching and instil hatred towards minorities and many madrassahs receive foreign funds from Middle Eastern states like Qatar, Kuwait and Saud-Arabia. As even listing and mapping madrassahs is seen as acting against the religion of Islam, let alone monitoring or regulating them, authorities in many cases do not know what is going on within the four walls of such buildings and hence hate speech often goes unrecorded. Other religious minorities like Hindus suffer from this radicalization and persecution as well. And even Muslim minority groups like Ahmadi or Shia suffer from violent persecution since they are not regarded as being true Muslims. They are seen as being deviating sects, and so radical groups justify acting violently against them.

Pakistan suffers from severe fractionalization, not only in society, but in the country’s administration as well. The Baluchistan province and central Sindh regions are traditionally perceived as being beyond the reach of the state. Feudal landowners maintain their own private militias, courts and prisons in parts of rural Sindh and Punjab. Corruption is rampant across the country. All this affects the generally unprotected Christian minority in Pakistan. Jurisdiction over the federally administered tribal areas (FATA) is limited and distorted. This volatile region bordering Afghanistan is still ruled according to a colonial law called “Frontiers Crime Regulation” from 1901,

effectively banning police and courts and adding to the local peoples' alienation. In this region, Pakistan's constitution seems to be effectively banned.

4. Types of Christianity affected

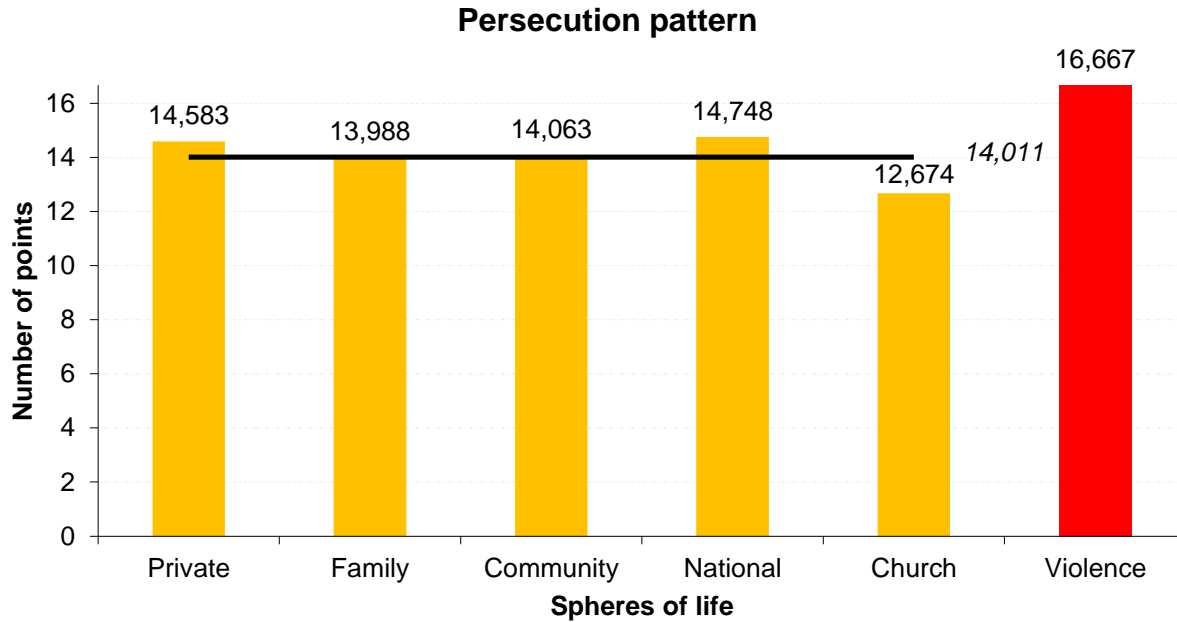
Three types of Christianity in Pakistan exist and are experiencing persecution, since expatriate and migrant Christians have joined the other types of Christianity and do not represent a type of its own in Pakistan:

- **Historical Christian communities:** The Roman Catholic and Anglican Church are examples. They increasingly face hostilities and experience difficulties concerning permission to meet. They are still able to function as church but have to put up with a stronger control and monitoring.
- **Christian converts:** Converts from a Muslim background (MBBs) suffer the brunt of persecution, on the one hand from radical Islamic groups who see them as apostates, and on the other by family, friends and neighbors who see conversion as a shameful act of leaving family and community ways of life.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches:** Evangelicals and Pentecostals have come under closer scrutiny and are frequently harassed and attacked, especially when they are active in spreading the gospel.

The Christian minority has still a considerable size and this has not changed significantly in the reporting period. Many Christians who are better off have either left the country already or are planning to do so. Pockets of stranded Pakistani Christians all over South East Asia seeking asylum in a variety of countries like Sri Lanka, [Thailand](#) and Malaysia bear witness to this.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Pakistan presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (14.011), showing the pressure on Christians, increased considerably compared to last year (12.714). The score for the violence block increased as well and even reached the maximum score: 15.186 (WWL 2015) to 16.667. Pressure increased in all *spheres of life* but the strongest in the *church sphere*, while *violence* increased too. This suggests that the level of persecution of Christians and the Church in Pakistan increased, and that the government in its efforts to curb at least certain brands of radical Islam limits the space for Christians as well. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private* and *national spheres*, closely followed by the *family* and *community spheres*. Pressure in the *church sphere* is not as high but is not far off anymore.



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- Private sphere:** MBBs always 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 can be taken away by family, friends or neighbors. Every year hundreds of Christian students who live in University campuses are punished for conducting private Christian worship. In one example during the reporting period, a young woman's bible was snatched away from her while other women held her hair and threatened her with more violence if she did not convert to Islam. They confiscated her Bible from her multiple times. Every time she found another one and brought it home, the persecution continued till one day they threatened to have her raped. She was not even allowed to read her Bible in her own room. She was forced to escape and find new accommodation and also new employment. Such cases are common and have been confirmed by many other sources all over Pakistan. While house arrest is another form of punishment for privately conducting worship, a milder form is being put under surveillance. Meeting with other Christians is a special challenge in these circumstances as on the one hand it is dangerous for converts themselves and on the other hand it may disclose or endanger a Christian meeting.
- Family sphere:** Registering one's conversion to the Christian faith is not possible. A child will be registered "Muslim" if his or her father was registered "Muslim" as well, no matter if in reality the religious affiliation has changed. Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce, will lose their inheritance rights and organizing a baptism, Christian wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible. At the very moment that a convert decides to be baptized he or she is put under particular pressure for baptism is seen as the ultimate form of rejecting Islam. MBBs are either physically attacked and hindered by the Islamic community and their own family or cursed by using black magic and potions, amulets and other occult practices. Pastors ready to baptize converts have also on many occasions been questioned and threatened. At school, Christian children are often not allowed to use the same water fountain as the rest of

their classmates as they will defile the water source, and they are often bullied. In one illustrative example, a mother from southern Punjab shared in the reporting period: “My son Ruben came home with a torn shirt every single day of the term and I could not afford new shirts all the time, but again and again he was told he was a sweeper boy and should clean the school not study there. Then they would beat him up mercilessly”.

- **Community sphere:** An estimated 700 Christian girls and women are abducted each year, often raped and then forcefully married to Muslim men from the community. This involves forced conversions as well, and if a Christian family is bold enough to challenge the abduction and marriage, they often face accusations of harassing the “voluntarily converted” girl and her new family. Every year thousands of Christians register complaints with the National Council of Churches in Pakistan and other Christian organizations about the discrimination against Christians in healthcare because any welfare is related directly to the giving of Islamic taxes and so Christians do not qualify for this. As a result Christians are often put at the back of the queue for healthcare. Christian children are forced at school to participate in (Islamic) religious practices and events. They are also constantly under pressure to convert to Islam and parents are often visited to pressure them into sending their children to Islamic events and teach them Arabic on the pretense of bettering their grades. This confuses children and makes them vulnerable.
- **National sphere:** Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and the more recent process of Islamization goes back as far as the 1980s, when General Zia introduced the infamous laws on blasphemy in 1986. Blasphemy soon became one of the main issues facing the Christian minority. According to a press report from 2010, 801 of the 1,031 people imprisoned under the blasphemy laws were Muslim (the vast majority of cases most likely affecting Islamic minorities). Of the remaining 230 prisoners, 162 were Christians, 15 were Sikh, 28 were Buddhist, while 25 adhered to other religions. Or, taken as a percentage: 70.4% were Christians, 6.5% Sikh and 12.2% Buddhist. The blasphemy laws are all too well known for being used to settle personal scores, make personal gains or to satisfy grudges neighbours have against others. They were brought back to the memory of the international community when a Christian woman, known as Asia Bibi, was accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death in 2010. She was the first woman to be on death row in Pakistan. As the blasphemy laws continue to gain prominence, it becomes increasingly difficult for courts and government to deal with them as they are highly politicized and have symbolic significance for Islamic radical groups across the country. This is frequently shown when politicians or members of the civil society take a stand against blasphemy laws (or even dare to call for a change) and end up threatened or even killed. Alleged blasphemers who have been acquitted by court also face mob violence and possible death. In most of these cases, police are either helpless or just watch. In most cases the police even refuse to file a First Information Report (FIR), which is necessary for starting proceedings wherever religious minorities are affected. In the reporting period, the murderer of governor Salman Taseer, killed in 2011 for naming the blasphemy laws “shameful” and for stepping in for Asia Bibi, was sentenced to

death. If this sentence will indeed be implemented, how the radical groups react will be seen as an indicator of how strong the Islamic radical groups really are.

- **Church sphere:** As mentioned above, the score for this sphere saw the highest increase in points which is due to two main factors. First, in the wake of the government's action against Islamic radicals, all meetings, including those involving Christians, face increasing restrictions. Although Christians are allowed to meet on Sundays for worship, other gatherings are discouraged by the government to avoid "acts of terrorism", a claim happily used by local communities as a pretext for hindering Christian activities in general. Christian church buildings frequently resemble fortresses with high walls and narrow gates. Despite the fact that the state promised to protect churches with guards, several church attacks with dozens of victims have occurred nonetheless. Most churches set up local protection services made up of [church youth](#) and volunteers. Registration of a Christian church needs a long process of negotiations. Often officials will want bribes and refusals to pay up delay the process. Unregistered churches are constantly visited by government officials, harassed by radical Muslims and threatened with closure by the local Islamic authorities. In the reporting period, a new process of registration has been introduced which requires churches to register as NGOs as opposed to a religious community. This is risky for the church as under current laws, NGOs can be de-registered and expelled from the country. This puts the whole church at risk. Apart from the Bible Society of Pakistan, all other Christian organisations are strongly discouraged from owning printing presses. Also, the work of Bible Society is closely monitored and each Bible has a serial number that can be traced and tracked.
- **Violence:** Violence against Christians in Pakistan is ubiquitous and increased in the reporting period. This period started with the killing of a Christian couple, Shahzad and Shama Masih, working at Kot Radha Kishan Brick Kiln, on 4 November 2014 by a furious mob and climaxed in a twin bomb attack on two churches – one Catholic, one Protestant – in Youhanabad, Lahore on 15 March 2015, leaving 25 dead and wounding dozens. Additionally, reports on eleven other killings are on file. At least 17 cases are recorded where church buildings and Christian schools were destroyed and attacked. There have been at least three attacks on Christian neighborhoods, including the destruction of 13 Christian homes in Samundri in December 2014, the destruction of seven Christian homes in Rao Khan Wala/Kasur in January 2015, the attack on Dhoop Sari, a Christian neighbourhood with 200 families in Lahore in May 2015, causing most of the Christians to flee. This overt violence conceals the everyday violence against Christian girls and women who are frequently abducted, raped and forcefully married and converted. Consequently, Pakistan is the only country getting the maximum score on violence in the World Watch List, together with Nigeria.

6. Future outlook

One of the ongoing challenges for Pakistan is the question of how to deal with and how to curb radical Islamic groups. While the immediate hope after the attack on the Peshawar Army School was that the army's protection of certain radical groups would cease, this seems not to be the case.

Distinctions are still being made between “good” and “bad” jihadi groups and religious minorities - including Christians - continue to pay the price for this approach.

Another question the country has struggled with for several years now is how to effectively limit the infamous blasphemy laws, and how could this be done without provoking an aggressive reaction from radical Islamic groups.

Finally, the increased tension between the Taliban and IS increases the pressure on both groups to recruit followers and for this, their recruitment strategy requires both groups to appear more Islamic and closer to the heart of Islam than the other. In their efforts to appear more Islamic, one strategy has been to attack the “dhimmi” as they are most vulnerable to the ideology of “pure Islam”. To appear more Islamic therefore means to persecute Christians more and take away as many rights as possible to limit Christian's freedom. This fuels an intrinsic hatred and hostility toward the Church in the wider society.

Somalia – Rank 7

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 87points, Somalia ranks 7 on the World Watch List 2016 (WWL). Mired in a long civil war, social fragmentation, tribalism, and radicalism, once again Somalia remains in the top ten of the WWL 50. In WWL 2015, Somalia ranked 2 with 90 points. The score for Somalia remains very high due to two reasons: i) In rural Somalia the federal government has no influence and Christians can be targeted by Islamic terrorists and clan authorities with impunity; ii) In areas where the government gains more control, especially in the urban areas, state actors are joining the Islamic terrorists and clan authorities in the persecution of Christians. The reason for the decrease in the score compared to last year is simply due to the fact that violence decreases as the African Union troops taking control of the main cities and towns and in a way reduces the number of Christians killed by al-Shabaab (most of Christians live in cities and towns).

2. Persecution engines

In Somalia, the main persecution engines are *Islamic extremism* and *Tribal antagonism*. *Organized corruption and crime* is also present in the country.

- ***Islamic extremism***: The majority of people in Somalia are Muslim, and no one is expected to be a Christian. Islamic religious leaders as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab maintain publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians, and churches in Somalia. This view is categorically expressed in the country's constitution where Islam is afforded the status of state religion, and Christianity is pushed out of public life. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, is a militant Islamic group subscribing to the doctrine of Wahhabism and advocating Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia. Foreign terrorists in the country have also made the situation even worse for Christians. *Islamic extremism* is not limited to militants only. Christians also face serious persecution from family, extended family members and the community at large.
- ***Tribal antagonism***: The social structure underpinning the way in which Somalia is governed is tribal. Clans within this tribal system maintain their massive influence in the new government system in Somalia. Militants like al-Shabaab, even though they are not motivated by the tribe and clan politics, are using the clan structure to strengthen and deeply entrench their position in the Somali society.
- ***Organized corruption and crime***: This is very much related to the lawlessness in Somalia. The fact that the central government is still very weak makes corruption part of daily life in the country. This exacerbates the already existing delicate situation of Christians. In Transparency International's Corruption Index (2014) Somalia is listed as the second-worst country in the world, ranking 174 out of 175 countries. Furthermore, militants use illegal trade to finance their operations.

3. Context

First of all, it must be emphasized that Somalia has been on the World Watch List since 1993, and almost always among the top ten countries. The persecution engines active in Somalia are explained by at least four factors.

The first two factors are historical. The first is related to the arrival of Islam and Christianity in the country. In Somalia, Islam was already firmly established before the arrival of Christianity. Ever since colonial interventions by Italy and Britain took place, severe resistance has been triggered against Christianity. The second historical factor has to do with the way the country is currently governed. Somalia's tribal system - as an informal way of governing Somalia - is very resistant to modern government models and more robust than the formal state structure. In the process of smoothing security and governance and trying to maintain relations with the Somali clans, the formal government has not prioritized civil liberties. They also allow anti-Christian sentiments to exist within the tribal system. This is clearly reflected in the constitution of Somalia.

The third and relatively new factor is radical Islam. Since the downfall of Ziad Barre in 1991, Somalia has become a safe haven for Islamic radicalism. This has become more aggressive and intolerant towards Christians in the country. At the juncture of the three main persecution engines, life for MBBs is much more difficult even compared to countries known for persecuting Christians. Christians in Somalia would not last a day in a trial or ever get the chance to be sentenced to a labor camp. A mere suspicion leads to a rush public beheading. This should be seen in connection with the attacks that al-Shabaab has orchestrated against Christians in Kenya.

The fourth factor is the current regime. The Federal Government of Somalia was established in August 2012 after the interim mandate of the Transitional Federal Government ended. Boosted by the military gains of the African Union forces against al-Shabaab, the federal government has started establishing itself. However, in terms of freedom for Christians, there has been no progress. The provisional constitution limits freedom of religion and only goes to show how regressive the situation in Somalia is. For instance, under the previous transitional charter, apostasy was not a crime whereas now the provisional constitution explicitly prohibits apostasy.

4. Types of Christianity affected

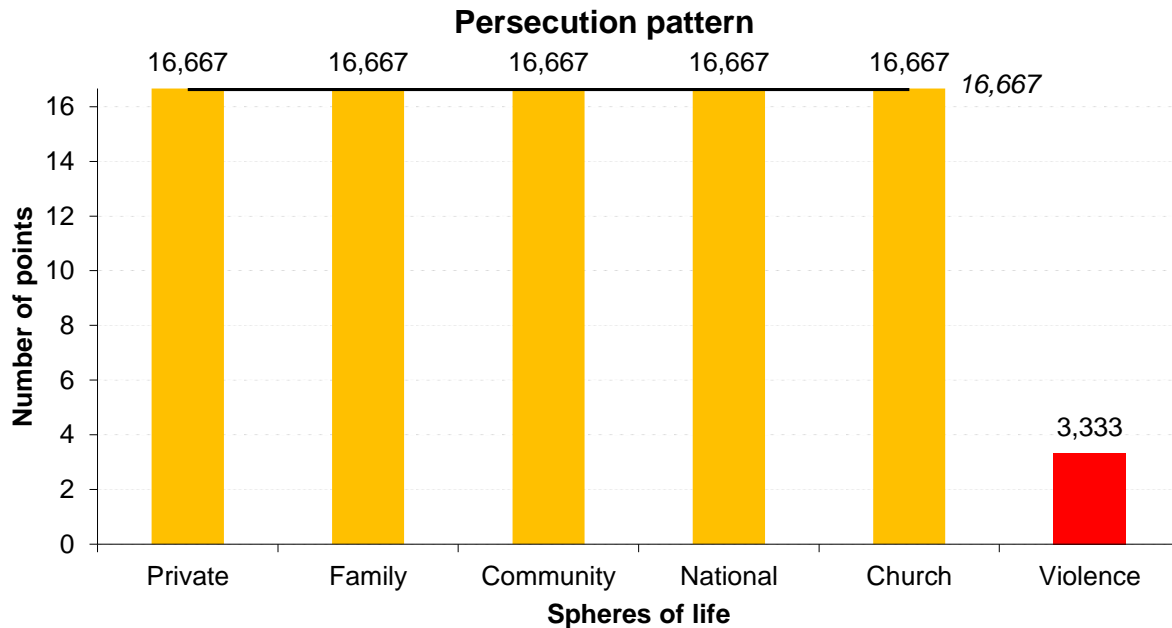
Currently, there exist two types of Christianity in Somalia, but only the main one - converts - is considered for the persecution analysis.

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians:** The pressure and violence in the country has led to an almost complete full withdrawal of expatriate Christians. There is a fellowship among officers of the African Union Mission (AMISOM) in their base in Mogadishu. There are also chaplaincy services for the soldiers and some of the expatriate workers in the capital city, but these are not considered for the persecution analysis.
- **Converts:** Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) are the only main type of Christianity left in the country. In the country's very recent history, MMBs - or those accused of being MBBs - have often been killed on the spot when discovered. Over the reporting period, the situation appears to have

worsened. Islamic militants intensified their hunt for people who are Christian and in a position of leadership. Consequently, Christians have to do everything in their power to keep their faith secret. They have fellowships in small groups and are often isolated. In south-central Somalia, al-Shabaab has lost control of major towns to the AMISOM forces. They have made a significant retreat, and blended into the local communities and are now spending more time spying and trailing people. Al-Shabaab still has control of the countryside and the mobile telephone companies have transmission masts in their territories.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Somalia presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* and *Tribal antagonism*. The average score over the first five blocks (16.667), showing the pressure on Christians, is even higher than last year (16.497), and is the absolute maximum score for these blocks. The score for the violence block is considerably lower: 7.037 (WWL 2015) to 3.333. This does not mean that the security situation has improved. In the first place it is very hard to get reliable data on violent incidents in Somalia. Secondly, it seems almost cynical to note that there are hardly enough Christians left to be violent against. As the *persecution pattern* below shows Christians in Somalia experience very serious pressure in all *spheres of life*. The pattern shows that there is a strong drive to obliterate Christianity from Somalia, verging towards ethnic cleansing or genocide. Somalia - a country that is a classic example of a “failed state” in political discourse for the past two decades - continues to be a place where Christians face very serious persecution.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Even in their private life, MBBs cannot live their life as Christians. They have to hide their conversion to Christianity not only from their extended family and clan members, but

also from their own nuclear family members. The (extended) family are not only unsympathetic towards Christianity, they also fear being suspected of being converts too. They cannot own Christian materials and the Bible as this might expose them to danger.

- **Family sphere:** This sphere is worst hit in the context of *tribal antagonism* which is scored with the maximum 16.67 points. In this sphere, Christians do everything to avoid being discovered as a Christian. Celebrating weddings according to Christian faith or celebrating Christian holidays in a family is virtually impossible. Somali children have to follow mandatory *madrassa* (Islamic) classes, and Christian parents find it difficult to teach their children about their Christian faith.
- **Community sphere:** This sphere also scores maximum points for persecution and Somali Christians face numerous challenges. For example, Somali Christians have to hide their religion in order to get access to basic necessities, such as basic social services or education. It is also reported that al-Shabaab members and sympathizers monitor suspected Christians in the country. There is also an Islamic dressing code that Christians have to abide by.
- **National sphere:** At the national level, the life of Christians is also challenging. The recent constitution declared Islam to be the state religion. Officials at the federal and local level enforce laws that limit Christian's freedom severely which has left Christians with no option, but to live in hiding. Those who persecute Christians are doing it with impunity.
- **Church sphere:** Church life is very restricted and has to remain underground. Christians gather in small community groups and meet in secret across the country. It is reported that the government has stepped up measures to investigate where Christians meet and find out who is involved in supporting and training Christians and reaching out to Muslims.
- **Violence:** Somali Christians face faith-related violence from their family, clan, authorities, and militias. Over the reporting period, access to information about the number of Christians killed became increasingly difficult, and some reports are confusing - for example, the killing of six young men at sea in March 2015 is not included as the reports contradict each other as to whether the men were Christians. Nevertheless, field researchers have been able to report various cases of faith-related violence towards Christians and that ordinary citizens - in collaboration with al-Shabaab - have been involved in the killing of Christians. In February 2015, a Christian man was shot dead in Bosaso where he went for fellowship with other believers. According to the local reports, "Sheikhs suspected that he was propagating Christianity and hired someone to shoot him while he was driving from the city." In addition, two security men for the Christian leader in Mogadishu were killed as they were suspected of being Christians too. Furthermore, some Christians are forced to get married to Muslims against their will. Al-Shabaab has already publically declared that it "wants Somalia free of all Christians." Due to this type of violence, a number of Somali Christians are fleeing the country. For example, in the reporting period, more than ten Christians were forced to flee the country. In addition, more than ten Christians were forced to leave their homes and live in hiding in the country.

6. Future outlook

Somalia has been on the World Watch List since 1993 and will no doubt continue to be listed high up. In July 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2232 (2015), to extend the mandate of the troops the African Union (AU) until May 2016. The US has kept conducting airstrikes against al-Shabaab, especially against its leaders, which is depleting the leadership of al-Shabaab. The rise of the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria led to a formation of a faction among al-Shabaab declaring allegiance to the Islamic State while the mainstream al-Shabaab remains loyal to al-Qaida. Legally, the constitution continues to see Islam as the sole religion in the country and the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the main source of the law within the country. The strict implementation of these laws might well make life even worse for Christians. On the political front, in the past both liberal democracy and socialism failed to withstand the torrent of tribal competition for political power, and there is no guarantee that democracy can triumph this time or in the near future.

As it stands, the future outlook could be as follows: *Islamic extremism, Tribal antagonism and Organized corruption and crime* will continue shaping the way in which Christians in Somalia are persecuted, and it will be very difficult to see any church life restarting visibly. Al-Shabaab militants will remain active in the rural areas, which means they will continue hunting Christians. In the urban areas, the government will continue to replace al-Shabaab in restricting life for Christians.

Sudan – Rank 8

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 84 points, Sudan ranks 8 on the World Watch List 2016 (WWL). In WWL 2015, Sudan ranked 6 with a score of 80 points. The increase in the score can be explained by two main factors: the increase in Salafist numbers and influence and the fact that the Islamist government of al-Bashir has intensified its policy of persecuting Christians, especially in the Nuba region. The trial of two pastors in the reporting period brought the country to the world's attention again. Surrounded by Egypt, Libya, Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Red Sea, the country has never been out of the spotlight due to war and conflicts that have engulfed it for decades.

2. Persecution engines

The engines underpinning the persecution dynamics in Sudan are *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia* (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- **Islamic extremism:** Radical Islam is not new to the Sudan. Historically, Islam is very well rooted in Sudanese society, including radical tendencies - the 19th century Mahdist Movement is an example. The overwhelming majority of the population in the country is Muslim. Most of them are Sunni. Sharia law is the foundation of Sudan's legal system. Sudan's elite has aimed at enforcing an Islamic regime in the country. Apostasy is criminalized, punishable by the death penalty, but according to sources, "the application of harsh punishments also has a very sinister bent, as it is predominantly imposed on Sudanese who are perceived to be non-Arab, and who come from poor socio-economic backgrounds." Salafists are growing in numbers and influence and blasphemy laws are used country-wide to persecute and prosecute Christians.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The government of Sudan is one of the most dictatorial regimes in Africa. On the one hand, the role of the government in private and public life is enormous. On the other hand, the Sudanese government faces a crisis of existence. The Darfur crisis has continued, the conflict with Sudan's People Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N) shows no sign of reaching solutions. The government can no longer afford subsidizing some services and goods. There is political discontent within the ruling party of president al-Bashir. Whenever president al-Bashir's government faces socio-economic and political challenges, support among the population at large is revived by using inflammatory language against the West. This in turn, has an adverse effect on Sudanese Christians, as the government considered Christians the agents of Western countries. In short, there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. Moreover, it has become apparent that those leading the regime are mainly radical Islamists. The ruling National Congress Party (NCP), therefore, is serving as a means to strengthen the Islamic agenda. This implies that the role of the government in the persecution of Christians is not only driven by totalitarian tendencies but radical Islamist sympathies as well.

3. Context

First of all, the persecution of Christians in Sudan is systematic and more reminiscent of a policy of *ethnic cleansing*. Historically, Islam is deeply embedded in Sudan's society. Paradoxically, even though Christianity preceded Islam as a religion in Sudan by hundreds of years, Christianity is perceived to be foreign to Sudanese culture. Sudan is one of a few African countries that has consistently been on the World Watch List since its first launch (for internal research purposes) in 1993. The country's rank on the list has been oscillating mostly between the top ten and the top 20. This is in line with how reports by other governmental and nongovernmental organizations characterize the human rights situation and freedom of religion in particular. For example, Sudan has been designated a "Country of Particular Concern" by the US State Department since 1999. Furthermore, for the past decades there was no rule of law in Sudan; press and media laws have been restrictive, and freedom of expression and religion has been highly curtailed. Yet president al-Bashir and his government showed their power by claiming more than 90% of votes in a landslide victory in the elections held in April 2015 - despite grievances among sections of the population about the country's weakened economic position due to the loss of oil revenue which is in South Sudan's hands. The merging of the war between Sudan and SPLM-N and South Sudan is creating another dimension to the challenges faced by minorities in the country.

Secondly, the ethnic-cultural landscape is very diverse and complicated: Arab versus Black, Muslims versus Christian. The secession of South Sudan did not solve these problems. This is particularly true for black Africans, as a significant number are Christian and still living in the country. The government of Sudan is strictly implementing the policy of one religion, one culture and one language. This policy has been practiced for many decades and was reiterated by president al-Bashir in 2010 where he declared: Sharia (Islamic law) and Islam will be the main source for the constitution, Islam the official religion and Arabic the official language of Sudan. Thus president al-Bashir has continued to put immense pressure on Black Christians remaining in Sudan, especially in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States. In this regard, the government of Sudan seems to be repeating the policy it employed in the 1980s and 1990s. During that period, the government of Sudan devised a strategy to "decimate the people of the Nuba Mountains by denying them basic human needs such as food, medical attention, and adequate shelter." This is exacerbated by the fact that the civil war in South Sudan and the conflict with SPLA-N have merged together in the border region of the two countries. It can be argued that *ethnic cleansing* is being perpetrated against Christians here. It is important to note that Sudan tried its best (but failed) to prevent the secession of South Sudan, and now al-Bashir is using the war between the two main tribes in South Sudan, Nuer and Dinka, to weaken the country by arming both groups. Equally important is the fact that president al-Bashir has been using the attacks on Christians to divert attention away from his arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court. The US State Department re-designated Sudan a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) in 2014 for the 15th consecutive year for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom – as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). In conclusion, the corrosive connection between *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia* is making the lives of Christians unbearable.

4. Types of Christianity affected

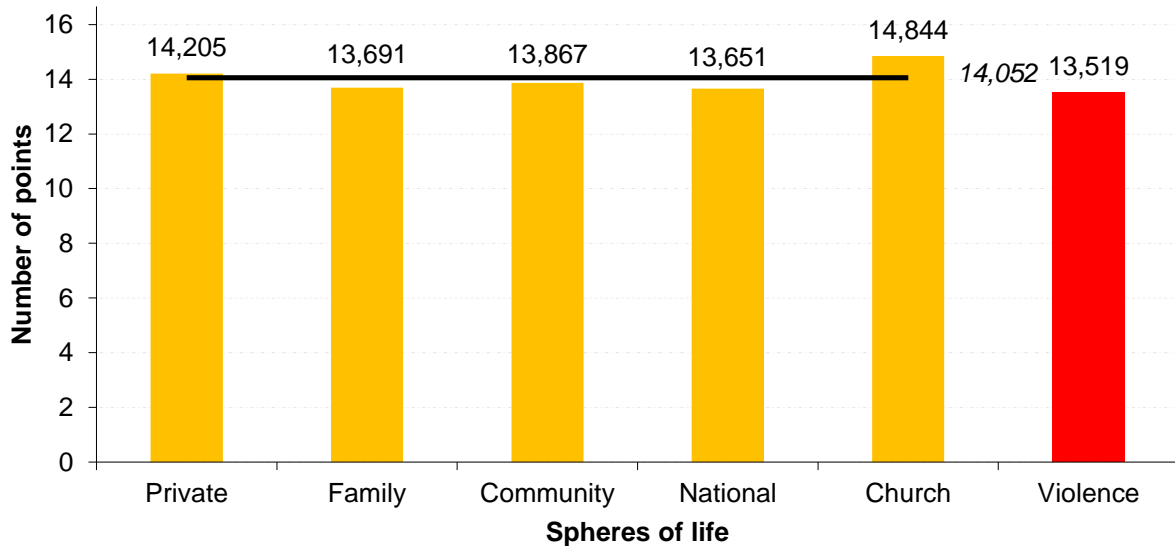
Sudan is home to all four categories of Christianity. The Islamist regime of Omar al-Bashir has made it clear that the country is a Muslim country and requires a Sharia constitution. This was emphasized at various rallies held by the government to show its defiance to the West. This defiance was substantiated with severe persecution that has targeted all types of Christianity, especially the converts. The different types of Christians face different levels and forms of persecution.

- **Expatriate Christians:** Even though many expatriates from South Sudan and some Western countries were forced to leave the country in 2013, some are still living in the country under immense pressure. They are vulnerable to persecution, their churches have faced demolition and have been denied registrations.
- **Christians from historical churches:** Christians belonging to historical churches such as Coptic Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholic Christians face persecution from both *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia*.
- **Converts:** This group consists mainly of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) and they experience the most pressure. Not only do they feel the pressure of persecution in the spheres of the *national* and *church life*, but also in severe form in their *community, family* and *private life*.
- **Non-traditional protestants:** Sudanese who belong to various non-traditional protestant denominations also face persecution from *Islamic extremism* and the authoritarian regime.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Sudan presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia* (blended with *Islamic extremism*). The average score over the first five blocks (14.052), showing the pressure on Christians, is considerably higher than last year (13.042). The score for the violence block is lower: going down from 15.186 (WWL 2015) to 13.519. It is very difficult to get data on killings, churches attacked and other forms of violence against Christians in Sudan, especially in the Nuba region. The increase in pressure on Christians is in four of the five *spheres of life* but highest in the *national* and *church spheres*. This suggests a deteriorated persecution landscape that is also very violent. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is highest in the *church sphere*, followed by the *private sphere*, while the other *spheres of life* are only slightly lower. MBBs face the worst form of persecution almost in all aspects: from home to the national level.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Christians in the country always face persecution in their private life. This is especially severe for converts. The law punishes conversion from Islam to another religion by death; therefore, for MBBs, there is no room for expressing their Christian faith in whatever form. Displaying Christian images is impossible as it attracts danger. Both nuclear and extended family members are also behind persecution for converts.
- **Family sphere:** This is another *sphere of life* where converts suffer the most. The registration or celebration of a Christian wedding is nearly impossible for all types of Christians. If this involves an MBB, it even carries grave danger. Under the government’s interpretation of Islamic law, Muslim men may marry Christian or Jewish women, but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man unless he converts to Islam. For MBBs, the problem even extends to funerals as deceased MBBs are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, even though Christian and Muslim cemeteries are separate.
- **Community sphere:** Public order laws, based largely on the government’s strict interpretation of Islamic law, are in force in Khartoum State and prohibit “indecent dresses” and other “offenses of honor, reputation, and public morality.” In addition, Christians, especially MBBs, are monitored by Muslim religious leaders and politicians. In such situations, Christians find it difficult to carry out their daily activities.
- **National sphere:** At the national level, Christians are regarded as second-class citizens. The official laws and policies of the government and the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) favor Islam. President al-Bashir and other senior leaders asserted that the country should adopt an Islamic constitution which strengthens Islamic/Sharia law. The other laws also limit freedom of

religion in their additional claw-back clauses. The regime consolidated its power by winning the 2015 elections with more than 93% votes.

- **Church sphere:** The high score for this *sphere of life* is explained by the way government policy is dictated by anti-Christian inclinations in issues concerning religion. Church life is very restricted. A field researcher reported that the Sudanese government increasingly interfered in the internal running of religious institutions. Due to rules of the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment, pastors have felt forced to censor themselves and curtail their activities. The researcher also mentioned that the government restricted foreigners from entering the country expressly for Christian missionary work. Furthermore, security forces can stop any Christian worship/prayer meetings, and even confiscate Bibles, documents, and computers.
- **Violence:** Violence mostly takes two forms, collective and individual. The collective variant: This occurs in the form of indiscriminate attacks against groups of Christians in different parts of the country. Churches, schools and hospitals - particularly in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States - have been under continuous attack, causing deaths. Since 2012 more than 4000 bombs were dropped on civilian targets in Nuba. In 2015, the government made a series of attacks in its bid to make the “Decisive Summer II” campaign against SPLA-North effective.

The individual form of violence: The government has been targeting Christians and prosecuting them under the guise of implementing apostasy and blasphemy laws. The government has also been monitoring the movements of individual Christians simply because they are Christians. Two pastors, Pastor Yat Michael and Pastor Peter Reith were charged and tried for seven different crimes, including conspiracy and espionage, but were later deemed innocent by the court after constant pressure from the international community. The dressing code is being implemented selectively. In June and July 2015 the Morality Police arrested and tried 12 young female Christian students. The Morality Police arrested the students, originally from the Nuba Mountains, to implement dress code as provided by Sharia law. The government also keeps demolishing churches in the country. For example, in October 2015 two churches were destroyed in separate incidents. False reasons were given for this action, for instance: the authorities demolished a church belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sudan (LCS) in Omdurman, citing re-development requirements, after first giving the church only 72 hours’ notice.

6. Future outlook

The Islamist government of al-Bashir, known for its poor record in human rights, has continued violating the rights of Christians in the country. As mentioned above, Sudan has been on the World Watch List ranking in the top ten and top 20 for the past 23 years. It has also been on the US State Department’s list of “Countries of Particular Concern” since 1999. The outcry from the international community, which did influence the Islamist regime into releasing some Christians on trial because of their faith, has not however brought any change to the general behavior of the regime towards

Christians. The looting and destruction of churches, hospitals and schools have become the order of the day, especially in the Nuba Mountains region. Despite the fact that president al-Bashir faces two international arrest warrants, the international community's attention has been diverted to the troubles in newly established South Sudan and the outbreak of civil war there among the two main rival ethnic groups. More importantly, *Islamic extremism*, which partly expresses itself via *Dictatorial paranoia*, is increasing as the government of al-Bashir continues to follow a siege mentality of "us versus them".

Based on past trends and the existing situations the following is likely to happen: 1) The government of Sudan will continue arresting, harassing and expelling Christians. 2) Building or renovating churches or getting permission to assemble will remain very difficult. 3) The government of Sudan will in all likelihood continue targeting the Nuba Christians indiscriminately. 4) Radical Islam in the country will continue to grow, and Christians will face the brunt of it. 5) Persecuting and prosecuting MBBs will continue.

Iran – Rank 9

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 83, Iran ranks 9 on the World Watch List 2016. Last year on WWL-2015, Iran ranked 7 with a score of 80 points. The reason why Iran moves down two positions in spite of its rise in score is the increase in points of other countries in the Top Ten. The trend of closing down almost all churches which have services in Farsi has continued. As a consequence, many churches have gone underground. At least 108 Christians were arrested and or imprisoned for their faith, an increase compared to last year. There seems to be a connection between churches going underground and a rise in the number of Christians arrested.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines active in Iran are *Islamic extremism* (main engine), and to a lesser extent *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime*. *Dictatorial paranoia* is blended with *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Shia Islam is the official religion and all laws must be consistent with the official interpretation of Sharia law. The most important drivers of persecution against Christians are government officials, non-Christian religious leaders, fanatical movements and revolutionaries or paramilitary groups. According to the Iranian state, only Armenians and Assyrians can be Christian. In their view, ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim, and therefore ethnic Persian Christians are considered apostates. This makes almost all Christian activity illegal, especially when it occurs in the Persian language - be it evangelism, Bible training, publishing Scripture and Christian books or preaching in Farsi.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** This zeal to maintain power is blended with *Islamic extremism*. The values of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 are to be protected above all.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** Imprisoned Christians – especially converts - can be offered to be released on bail. Often this concerns high amounts of money – reportedly varying between 2.000 and 200.000 dollars, forcing the Christians involved or their family members to mortgage their homes. After their release these Christians can be pressured to leave the country, which they often do.

3. Context

In the Islamic Revolution of 1979 the Shah was removed and Iran was changed into an Islamic Republic. Shia Islamic clerics took political control, today headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. During his reign, the Shah had started a program of modernization and Western influences entered the country. On the other hand, dissidents were heavily oppressed. As a result,

the Shah lost the support of powerful religious, political and popular forces paving the way for an overthrow.

In the view of Iran's current leaders, expanding the influence of Shia Islam in the Middle East is a means of continuing the revolution. Particularly in Iraq, Shia Islam has regained influence since the demise of Saddam Hussein and the upsurge of Islamic State in large parts of the country, which Shiite Iranian militias are fighting on the ground. These developments have given Iran a greater influence as a regional power, contrary to the intentions of the United States in the Middle East. Christianity is also considered a condemnable Western influence and constant threat to the Islamic identity of the Republic. This is especially the case as Christian numbers are growing and allegedly even children of political and spiritual leaders are leaving Islam for Christianity. Apart from Christians, the rights of other religious minorities like Jews, Bahai's, Zoroastrians, Dervish and Sunni Muslims are violated as well. Particularly religions that are not recognized in the constitution, like Bahai, are affected.

4. Types of Christianity affected

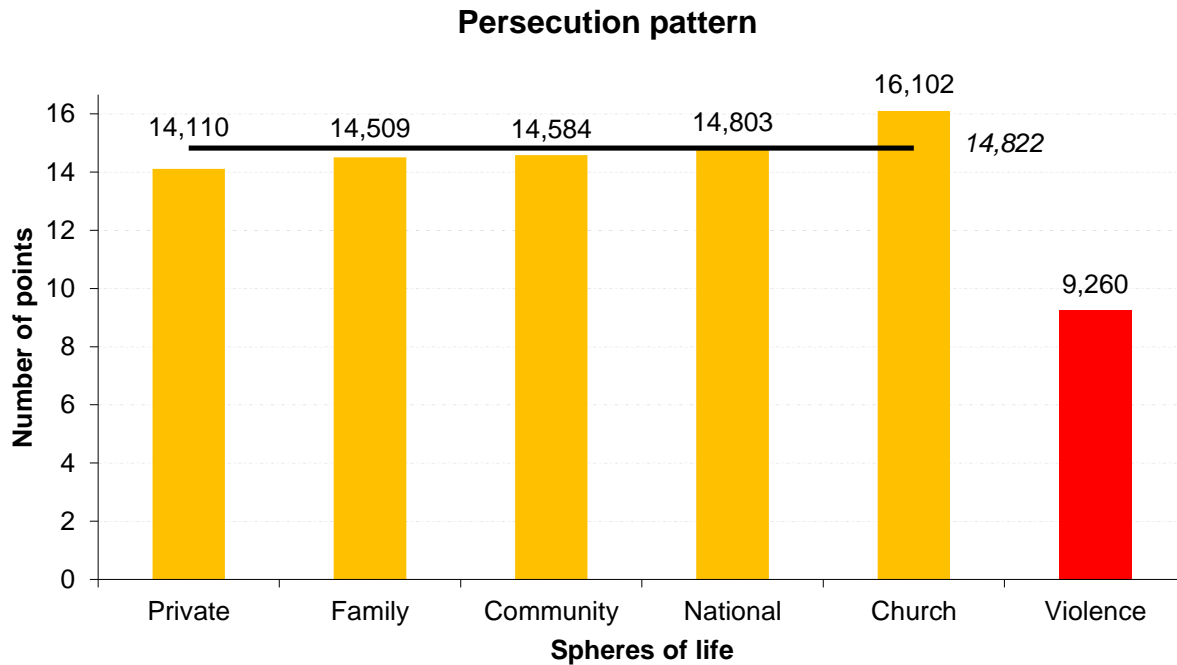
Three types of Christianity in Iran exist and are experiencing persecution:

- **Historical Christian communities:** Historical ethnic Christian minorities such as the Armenian and Assyrian Christians are allowed to preach to fellow countrymen in their own language, but it is forbidden to minister to people with a Muslim background (speaking Farsi). Although formally recognized and protected by law, they are treated as second-class citizens and have reported imprisonment, physical abuse, harassment and discrimination when reaching out to Muslims.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (or Muslim Background Believers – MBBs) are estimated to be the largest group in Iran and experience the most persecution. Converts from Islam to Christianity are considered apostates. Conversion from Islam carries the death penalty for men, and life-long imprisonment for women in Iran.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches:** Christians from evangelical and pentecostal communities, especially those who evangelize Muslims or who are considered Muslims themselves (second generation converts), are the second main group to experience persecution. Non-traditional Christians often have an Armenian, Assyrian (or other traditional) or Muslim background. Others are second or third generation MBBs (their parents or grandparents were MBBs).

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Iran presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks (14.822), showing the pressure on Christians, is higher than last year (13.917). The score for the violence block is lower but still high: 10.000 (WWL 2015) to 9.260. The higher score for pressure is partly due to the decision of the WWL team to reduce the number of types of Christianity from four to three (no longer counting expatriate Christians as they are radically isolated from other Christians in the country). Partly it is due to a further increase of pressure on Christians in the country. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the

church sphere. But all five spheres have high scores. MBBs and Christians who are ministering to Muslims are experiencing most persecution including violence.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Converts from Islam to Christianity cannot openly practice their faith. Any impression to those around them that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. If they are the only believers in their family, they have to be very careful in the way they worship. For all types of Christianity, it can be dangerous to possess Christian materials in Farsi – especially if it concerns significant quantities as this would suggest they are for distribution to Muslim-background Iranians. Historic Christian communities can have their Christian materials in their language (Armenian or Assyrian) without fear.
- **Family sphere:** For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. In the case of inheritances and custody of children in divorces, Christians are often discriminated against if family members are Muslims. In school, children of MBBs are considered Muslims and are obliged to attend Islamic classes. However, in post-secondary education all types of Christians are forced to take Islamic courses.
- **Community sphere:** All Christians in Iran are more or less put under pressure to renounce their faith as a result of discrimination. MBBs are considered unclean especially in villages and rural areas and in conservative cities in the north. Islamic people should not shake hands with Christians, touch them or eat their food. MBBs can also experience harassment and discrimination in their workplace if their new faith is known.

- **National sphere:** Any Muslim who leaves Islam faces the death penalty. The regime’s focus is on those reaching out to converts and even well-established Christian denominations are not safe from harassment if they are active in ministering to Muslims: their members are questioned, arrested and put in jail and beaten. Many church services are monitored by the secret police.
- **Church sphere:** The government has intensified its campaign to remove Farsi-speaking Christians from the country. In the past 5 years at least 8 churches have been shut down or forced to cancel their church services in Farsi. Their leaders were also often arrested. Churches are not allowed to accept new members with a Muslim background and their current members are aging. Severe surveillance on house-churches leads to increasing fear among those attending. Evangelism, Bible training and the publishing and importing Bibles in Farsi are all illegal.
- **Violence:** At the end of the current reporting period there were at least 108 Christians arrested and or imprisoned for their faith, which is another increase compared to last year. There seems to be a connection between churches going underground and the rise in the number of Christians arrested. Especially the methods of interrogations in jail are harsh and can be sexually abusive. In several cases Christians were seriously physically and mentally abused. More than ten house-churches were raided and several church members arrested. Many Christians continue to hide in-country or flee abroad as a result of persecution.

6. Future outlook

For Iran, the nuclear deal with the six major world powers is one of the most significant developments of the past year. According to The Economist, this development is a “[major turning point](#)” for the economy and for Iran's engagement with the international system”. Iran could become a trading partner for many Western countries and will emerge from its isolation. This is then likely to lead to a richer and stronger Iran, whose influence in the region will grow further. This could work out positively in the battle against Islamic State, whom Iran is already fighting in Iraq. On the other hand a stronger Iran is also liable to increase levels of [sectarianism](#) and higher levels of escalating violence between Sunnis and Shiites in the region. Iran and Saudi Arabia are already fighting proxy wars in Yemen and Syria and these clashes are likely to intensify. Iran’s influence also goes as far as Lebanon and allegedly Bahrain. Therefore, instability could increase in the entire region.

On a domestic level, will an improved economic situation and less isolated position also benefit the situation of Iran’s Christians? If the lifting of sanctions translates into a better financial situation of the entire population, Christians are obviously likely to benefit from this as well. However, according to BBC Persian business reporter [Amir Paivar](#), hardliners within Iran fear that improved relations with the USA will endanger the values of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which “for 36 years has revolved around fighting “the Great Satan” and strictly imposing religious values on people's everyday lives”. It is likely that the popularity of president Rouhani and his government will rise as a result of the nuclear deal and hardliners will try to “counter this on the domestic front by actively blocking any attempts to implement social and political reform”. Also, “a crackdown on media,

human rights and political activists would send a clear message to Iranians that striking a nuclear deal does not mean an end to revolutionary values”.

A similar development happened under reformist president Mohammad Khatami (who was in charge of the government from 1997 to 2005) when more openness and interaction was promised with countries in the West. In reality, this meant a clamp down on civil activists and journalists. Also, when more interactions with the wider world are possible, security services are also likely to monitor these more intensively. This could mean that religious minorities like Baha’i and Christians would be more closely watched especially for contacts with Western co-religionists. In short, the nuclear deal may sound like good news but for Christians it is not likely to bring any improvement – rather the contrary.

Libya – Rank 10

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

On the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, Libya ranks 10 and scores 79 points, three more than on WWL 2015 when the country scored 76 and ranked 13. The situation for Christians had already been extremely difficult, and has now deteriorated, making Libya part of the top 10 for the first time. Within a persistent context of anarchy and absence of the rule of law, Christians – both nationals and foreigners – are squeezed between fanatical religious groups and criminal gangs. Levels of fear among Christians were already high last year; this year violence has increased even more. This has been exacerbated by the consequences of the downfall of Gaddafi's dictatorial regime and the fall of the state into sectarian and impotent government hands.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Libya are *Islamic extremism* and to a lesser extent *Organized corruption and crime* (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- ***Islamic extremism***: This engine manifests itself in different ways. Libya has a deeply Islamic culture in which converts to Christianity face huge pressure from their family members and community. Following Gaddafi's downfall, a variety of radical Islamic groups, including Salafists and other jihadists, have free play in the country and have gained increasing support.
- ***Organized corruption and crime***: This is a secondary persecution engine in Libya. The fact that corruption is so rife also contributes to perpetuating the lack of rule of law and impunity in the country. This engine is blended with *Islamic extremism*.

3. Context

Libya is still trying to recover from the popular revolution and fierce civil war, which lasted from February to October 2011, against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi who had ruled for over 40 years. Following the civil war Libya was governed by the National Transitional Council (NTC) which was an umbrella organization of militias, and ethnic and political movements that had fought against Gaddafi's rule.

At present, Libya is administered by an elected 200-person General National Congress (GNC), which is a transitional government that has been in power since October 2012. Currently, there is no single party or militia that dominates Libya, thus forcing a process of politics by consensus in the country. The GNC only has power in parts of the country (in other parts of the country another group is in power). There are ongoing peace talks between these groups.

Now the influence of Islamic State is growing in the country. The prevalence of militias throughout the country is a sign of Libyan society's lack of trust in politics, which is exacerbated by the memory

of the brutal policies of the authoritarian state under Muammar Gaddafi. The dependence of Libyan society on militia forces, and the pseudo-integration of these forces as paramilitary units attached to a “national” Libyan defence force (with salaries paid by the Libyan government), has made protecting civil liberties, such as the freedom of religion, very difficult in some areas of the country.

Since the end of the Gaddafi government, Christians in Libya, being the most numerous and active non-Muslim religious group, have been the target of intimidation campaigns, arrests and assassinations by conservative, militant Sunni Muslim organizations. The influence of groups related to Islamic State, who have been responsible for beheadings and other cruelties, is also growing. Over the last years, hundreds of Christians are reported to have been abducted by paramilitary groups and imprisoned. Coptic churches have also come under attack.

In addition to Libya’s ongoing security challenges related to the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of local militias throughout the country, it also faces increasingly complex difficulties related to the smuggling of people and weapons into and out of its territory. A report by Amnesty International released on 10 May 2015 describes the [advanced state of lawlessness](#) in which Libya has been trapped, citing numerous incidents of abductions, torture, sexual violence and discrimination by traffickers, smugglers and organized criminal groups. The report specifically highlights the precarious situation of religious minorities, stating that “in particular Christian migrants and refugees are persecuted and are at highest risk of abuse from armed groups that seek to enforce their own interpretation of Islamic law.”

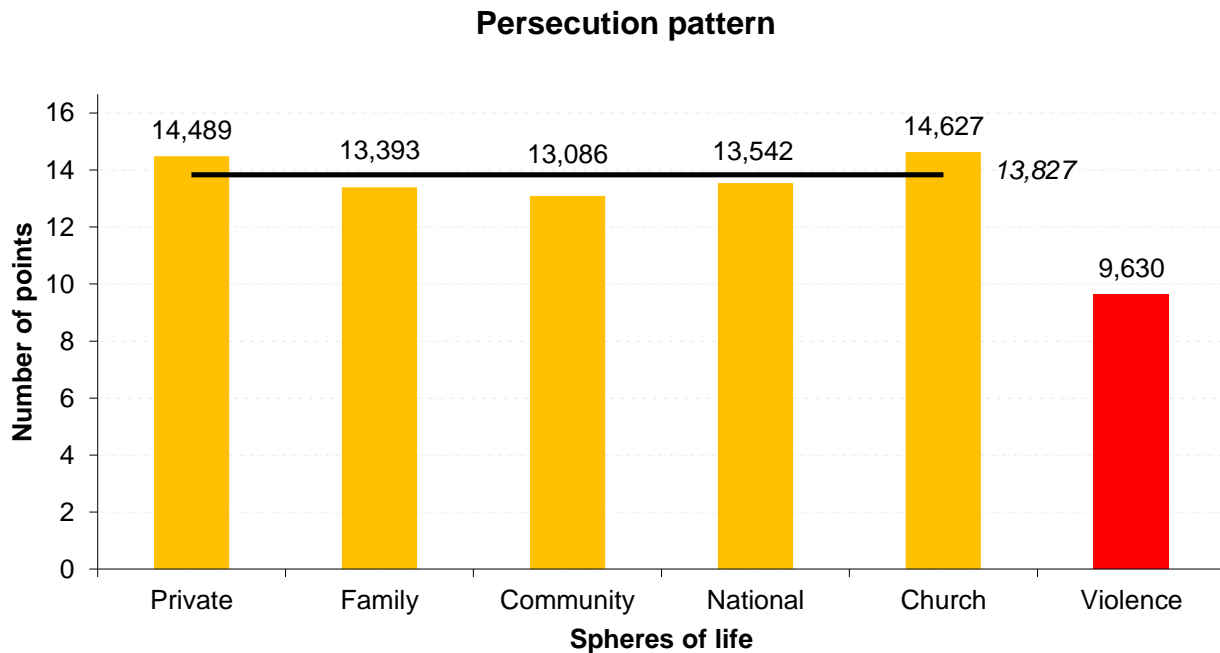
4. Types of Christianity affected

Two types of Christianity are present in Libya: migrant workers in the country, most of them coming from Sub-Saharan Africa and some from Egypt, and a very small group of Libyan nationals (who are all converts from Islam (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs):

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians:** Christian migrant workers are allowed to have their own churches, but Libyans are not allowed to attend. Under the despotic rule of Muammar Gaddafi, the situation for Christians in Libya was already extremely harsh. Expatriate or migrant Christians, who are mostly temporary workers from neighboring African countries, enjoyed some freedom. Black and non-Arab Africans faced double persecution: persecution based on race and persecution based on religion.
- **Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs):** Libyan nationals who are Christians keep their faith secret. Churches for Libyans are forbidden. The number of Libyan MBBs is very low, but with the appearance of Christian programs on satellite TV and Christian websites in Arabic, the interest in the Christian faith has been increasing. As in most Muslim countries, converting from Islam brings social pressure. MBBs are always at risk from their families; there were some reported cases of beatings by family members. Most Libyan Christians are afraid to meet with other believers, as any kind of religious gathering (other than Islamic) is forbidden for Libyans.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Libya presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Organized corruption and crime*). The average score over the five blocks (13.872), showing the pressure on Christians, is slightly higher than last year (13.356). The violence score increased from 8.889 last year to 9.630 this year. Libya’s persecution situation varies little with respect to last year, but there has been an increase in the *community, national* and *church spheres*; also the score for *violence* increased. This suggests a volatile persecution situation. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the pressure is rather homogeneous but with minor peaks for the *private* and *church spheres*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** MBBs experience rejection by family members in this very conservative society. Because of the oppression caused by the intolerance of the society and the relatives, Libyan Christians hardly dare to inform others about their faith. Many of them are (considering) fleeing their homeland.
- Family sphere:** One of the problems MBBs are facing is how to find a partner to marry. The country adheres to traditional Islamic law which states that a non-Muslim man must convert to marry a Muslim woman. Islamists in Libya have become so radical, that even Sufis are being persecuted.
- Community sphere:** Because of the weak central government, a great number of militias, with both religious and non-religious agendas, operate with impunity in the country. These militias

target the most vulnerable groups, including Christians. Their presence creates a culture of fear which restricts the freedoms of Christians.

- **National sphere:** During Gaddafi's reign the main source of persecution was the government and its secret services. Now, Islamic radical movements such as Islamic State and the Salafists are responsible for most of the pressure and violence against Christians, in a country with an impotent central government and where rule of law is absent. To some extent, criminal gangs are also responsible for pressure on Christians.
- **Church sphere:** Normal church life is hardly possible for Libyan nationals. Migrant workers can gather in churches, but are also faced with important security risks. To bring in Christian literature and bibles in Arabic remains strictly forbidden. This is another factor that suppresses the growth of the indigenous Church. The proselytizing of Muslims and missionary activity is officially prohibited in the country.
- **Violence:** In this reporting period, three major violent incidents of persecution occurred, which are all part of a structural pattern of kidnapping and murdering of Christian migrants: in June 2015, 86 Eritrean migrants (some reports mention 88), fleeing political repression in their home country, were kidnapped by militants from Islamic State in Libya in June 2015; in April, a similar incident occurred in which 79 Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees were also kidnapped and more than thirty of them cruelly killed; in February 2015 21 mainly Egyptian Coptic Christian migrant workers were murdered by jihadists affiliated to the Islamic State.

6. Future outlook

1. Due to the continuing prominence of local militias, including militant Salafist militias, and the weakness of the country's central government, Christians cannot expect their situation to improve and widespread impunity for crimes committed against Christians is likely to continue. For the foreseeable future, Libyan authorities will need to a) confront the power of the various militia groups; b) encourage a diversified economy from revenue derived from the oil industry that also enhances job prospects for the youth; c) continue to nurture a democratic transition which gives the state authority; and d) engage with its neighbors and concerned global actors to improve trans-Saharan security. None of these tasks are simple, and will most likely not be accomplished without the engagement of the international community in Libya.
2. Leaders of state security in the area of Benghazi have made statements that could be considered incendiary towards Christians. Hussein bin Hmeid, a Preventative Security Apparatus commander in Benghazi, asserted that Libya was a "100% Muslim country." Abdul Salam Bargathi, a former Ansar al-Shariah member and one of the commanders of the Preventative Security Apparatus in Benghazi, has also made statements that could be interpreted as a threat against Christians in the area. While he maintains that he will order his local forces to protect Christian churches in and around Benghazi, Bargathi also asserts that Christians in Libya could easily be considered to be a

threat to national security, and ominously warned that Christians should not rebuild destroyed churches or do anything that could be misinterpreted as proselytizing.

3. The violent incidents involving the kidnapping and murder of Christian migrants clearly show the strength and visibility of radical Islamic groups, including Islamic State, in a country drifting into absolute lawlessness. With these incidents, radical Muslims, particularly those affiliated to Islamic State, are giving a clear message: “Libya is a Muslim country and no Christians are allowed to even pass through it.” It doesn’t even matter whether the Christians are church workers or just economic migrants; all Christians are singled out as targets. Given the structural context of impunity in which jihadist groups thrive, this situation is not expected to change in the near future.
4. Sub-Saharan migrants are the majority of the country’s Christian population. They will continue to be at risk of being the target of religious-based attacks by local militias, and by (often unemployed) Libyans seeking a scapegoat to vent their frustrations.

Yemen – Rank 11

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

Yemen ranks 11 in the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, with a score of 78 points – five points more than last year. The pressure Christians experience in Yemen is comparable to that in Saudi Arabia and has specifically increased as a result of the civil war in the country and the rising influence of radical Muslims. Wherever the Saudi-led coalition forces have dominated or freed areas, local Christians were consequently often targeted by radical Sunnis.

2. Persecution engines

There are several persecution engines active in Yemen: *Islamic extremism* and *Tribal antagonism* (blended with *Islamic extremism*) are the main persecution engines, and to a lesser extent *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** The constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the source of all legislation. There is some religious freedom for foreigners but proselytization or evangelism is prohibited. Several expatriate workers have been deported for Christian proselytizing activities. Muslims are forbidden to convert to another religion. Yemenis who leave Islam may face the death penalty. All major religious authorities endorse preserving the nation's Islamic identity and resist and warn against any attempts to infringe upon this. The more extreme religious leaders also encourage violence against Christians.
- **Tribal antagonism:** The Yemeni tribal society remains very strong, and the government is a secondary institution to the traditional ways of tribal governance. As such, there are many areas in Yemen, where tribal elders enforce law and justice according to their Islam-based traditions regardless of what the national constitution or government says. Moreover, the government is not likely to intervene in intertribal conflicts, even if tribes are physically harming or imprisoning members. Tribal law and custom prohibit members of the tribe from leaving the tribe or, in the case of women, marrying out of the tribe, especially to a Christian; punishment for disobedience can be death or banishment. One political analyst sums up the situation well: "Islam is an overarching identity of all of the tribes in Yemen, and it is the tribe that often delivers retributive 'justice' for those who may seek to leave Islam".
- **Organized corruption and crime:** This engine tries to create a climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption as a means for self-enrichment. Expatriate Christians in Yemen are especially vulnerable to these criminal offences, such as kidnapping for ransom. In such cases the Christian's perceived financial status and his/her faith play a role. In the current chaos and lawlessness of the civil war, this engine now has more space to develop.

3. Context

Yemen is a relatively young nation: traditional North Yemen and communist South Yemen merged in 1990 after years of fighting. However, the separatist movement in the South is quite strong and continues to claim independence. Since the ousting of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2012, Yemen has seen political turmoil and sporadic violence. In the power vacuum, militants and rebels – including Al Qaeda affiliated groups - are fighting to gain control of territory. In September 2014, protests by a Shiite insurgent group known as the Huthis degenerated into fighting with rival forces including Yemen’s main Sunni radical Islamic party. In the end, the Huthis took possession of Yemeni capital’s airport in Sanaa including crucial ministries and succeeded in dominating the north of the country. In March 2015, they forced president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi and his government into exile in Saudi Arabia. In July 2015, forces loyal to the government and southern militias regained control of Aden, backed by the troops and airstrikes of the Saudi-led coalition, which started in March. In the meantime, the influence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) appears to be growing further as it recently expanded its territorial control in Southern Yemen. Islamic State affiliated groups are also present in the war torn country and have started attacking both Shiite and government related targets since March. According to [Al Monitor](#), “amid the spread of extremism engendered by the conflict between the Houthis and the central government, IS is becoming the main adversary for both the Houthis and [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#) (AQAP).” Meanwhile, Yemen is facing a dire humanitarian crisis. Approximately 80 per cent of the population of this poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula is in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. Almost half of the population – approximately 13 million - is [food insecure](#) and 54 per cent of the population lives below the official [poverty line](#). According to figures of [UNICEF](#), 1.2 million children are “suffering acute malnutrition and 500,000 are severely malnourished, making Yemen’s hunger crisis one of the worst in the world.”

4. Types of Christianity affected

In Yemen, the following two types of Christianity are present and affected by persecution:

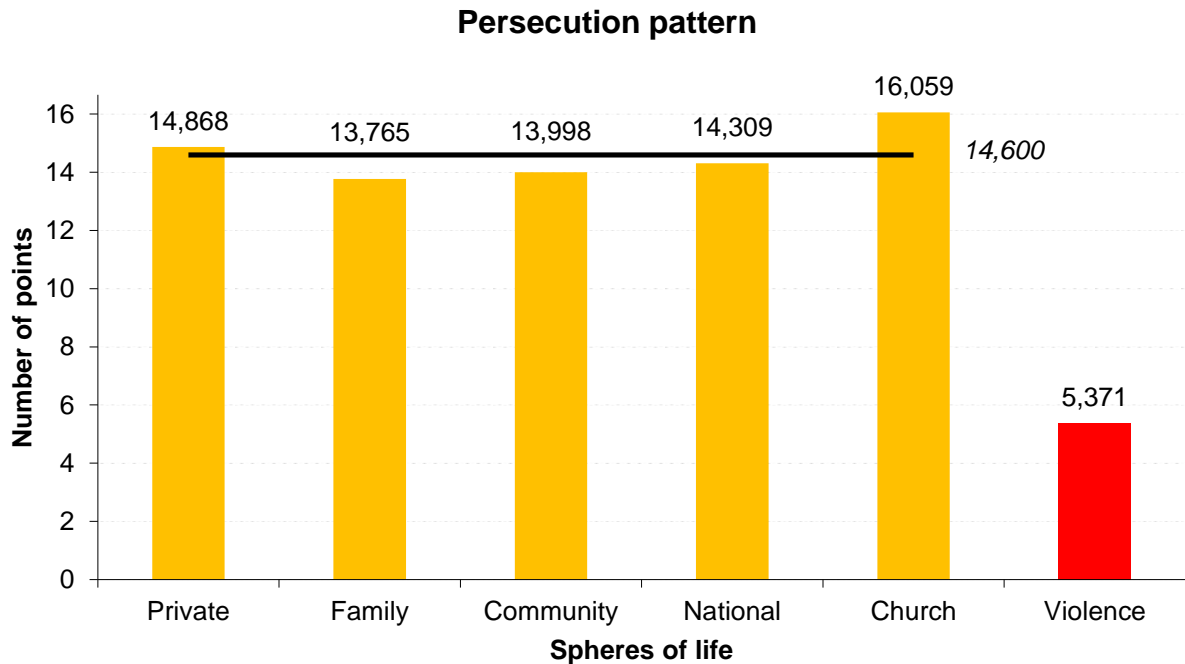
- **Expatriate or migrant Christians:** Most Christians in Yemen are expatriate foreign workers (from North Africa, the West, South and East Asia, or Arab countries) or refugees (mainly Ethiopian). Nearly all Christians are Roman Catholics or Anglicans (some are Orthodox in the case of Ethiopian refugees). Large numbers of mostly Western expatriates have left the country for security reasons as a result of the civil war.
- **Christian converts from a Muslim background** (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs): MBBs face persecution to a severe degree and effectively need to live their faith in secret. They face persecution from authorities (including detention), family and radical Islamic groups who threaten apostates with death if they do not reconvert. The number of local MBBs is estimated at just a few hundred.

All Christians in the country face extreme persecution from Islam. As most Christians are foreigners, they are particularly susceptible to persecution since they are not only non-Muslims, but often seen as outside encroachers on the national and tribal identity. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

is active in the country and is an existential threat to any Christian living in the country. The group has killed, kidnapped, and attacked Christians on numerous occasions.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Yemen presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (14.600), showing the pressure on Christians, is higher than last year (14.095). The score for the violence block is considerably higher, going up from 2.037 (WWL 2015) to 5.371. This suggests a volatile persecution situation which corresponds to the current chaotic and lawless situation of civil war in Yemen. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the scores for pressure are very high especially in the *private* and *church spheres*. MBBs are the most severely affected, but for all Christians life is difficult.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** MBBs cannot openly practice their faith. Any impression to those around them that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. Expatriate Christians have relatively more freedom to practice their faith privately, but private worship has become risky for Christians in areas controlled by radical Muslims. Al Qaeda controls large parts of the country.
- Family sphere:** All Yemeni's are considered Muslims. For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. MBBs run the great risk of honor killing or physical violence if their families or communities discover their faith. Open Christian weddings cannot be celebrated in Yemen and MBBs must marry under Islamic rite. MBBs cannot have their children registered as Christians. In school, children of MBBs are obliged to attend Islamic classes. In the

case of custody of children in divorces, Christians are likely to be excluded if family members are Muslims.

- **Community sphere:** All Christians are implicitly threatened by the Islamic society in Yemen, and in particular by AQAP. This naturally deters Christians making their religion known in public in any way. Since conversion is officially considered to be illegal, MBBs are forced by the local Islamic community to report their conversion to the authorities. MBB women are still considered Muslims and are expected to wear the veil, for example. They also run the risk of being forced into marriage or house arrest if their new faith is discovered. Expatriate women can also face negative consequences, if they are not veiled, such as harassment, especially in smaller towns.
- **National sphere:** Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden by Islam and by state law. MBBs may face the death penalty (though generally not implemented) if their new faith is discovered. Until the outbreak of civil war, expatriate and migrant Christians faced problems in this *national sphere* if they were actively involved in proselytizing Muslims, which could lead to imprisonment and deportation. However, as the authorities have been focusing their attention on political events during the past year, oppression has mostly been felt coming from Islamic radicals who have had more freedom to operate in. This insecurity caused by radical Islamic movements makes Yemen very unstable. Christians, including expatriate Christians, are believed to be under surveillance by radical Muslims and can also become a specific target for these radical Islamic groups.

Muslims have more rights than followers of other religions. Currently Christians are suffering especially from lawlessness in the country, and from Shiite rebels or Al Qaeda affiliated groups that are in control of large parts in the country.

- **Church sphere:** Apart from Aden, churches are forbidden in Yemen. Most of the four official churches in this city, which served expatriate Christians or refugees (mainly Ethiopian), have been damaged as a result of the civil war and there are no functioning churches left. Therefore, migrant Christians mostly gather for worship in private accommodation. MBBs are not allowed to have their own gatherings, so they meet in secret locations. Proselytism of Muslims is illegal; Bible training, publishing and importing Bibles (including other Christian materials) in Arabic are next to impossible.
- **Violence:** Specific anti-Christian violence against converts was carried out by family, Sunni and – to a lesser extent - Shia rebels or radicals. Two indigenous Christians were killed for faith related reasons. Several MBBs have had to go into hiding in-country or even to flee the country. At least three churches have been damaged by bombs or otherwise damaged in the civil war. It is hard to discern to what extent this damage is collateral damage or religiously motivated. Anyway, it is known that many people are uncomfortable with churches being present on the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam. Several local [Islamic clergy](#) have called for the destruction of churches in the region. In September, masked militants put fire to the St. Joseph Roman Catholic in Aden, burning the entire contents of the church. According to a security official, the culprits

could be Al-Qaeda jihadists. The church had remained open in spite of the civil war. In December 2015 (outside of our reporting period) a Catholic Church in Aden was seriously damaged after militants detonated explosives inside the church, in what appears to be an intentional act. The church was already damaged and out of use after it was hit in an airstrike by the Saudi-led coalition in May 2015.

6. Future outlook

The civil war in Yemen has led to higher levels of violence and lawlessness, a situation which is liable to increase the oppression of minorities, including Christians. According to a leader of a NGO active in the country, wherever the Saudi-led coalition forces dominated or freed areas, the local Christians were consequently often targeted by radical Sunnis. Also targeted were known Christian buildings including institutes where Christians or expatriates from Christian countries were operating. That means, buildings founded or run by Christians. This in line with the suggestion made by analysts in an [article](#) by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU): “that Saudi Arabia is, at the very least, turning a blind eye to trade entering Mukalla from the Gulf, to the benefit of AQAP.” AQAP, labelled by the US as the world’s most dangerous offshoot of Al Qaeda, is undermining national security and the economy. It has recently expanded its territorial control in Southern Yemen. Islamic State affiliated groups are also present in the war torn country and have started attacking both Shiite and government related targets since March 2015. According to [Al Monitor](#), “the growing level of violence is strengthening IS and putting it on a direct collision course to replace AQAP as flag bearer for the Holy War against their enemies. Both groups seek to take advantage of political and sectarian instability.” As IS is still in a preparation and mobilization phase, armed clashes between both radical Islamic groups are not likely yet. However, their increasing influence makes the chances for peace very slim and continued instability probable – even if the conflict with the Huthis could be resolved. The [EIU](#) gives this analysis: “the longer this central conflict drags on, and the conflict with AQAP and other jihadists is deprioritized, the greater the risk of Yemen entering a longer-term period of fragmentation, akin to Syria or Libya.”

As Islamic terrorists are an important driver of persecution in Yemen, this does not bode well for the situation of religious freedom of local and expatriate Christians in Yemen. The situation is particularly delicate for the small local Christian church mainly consisting of MBBs, especially as it is weakened by the leaving of expatriate Christians. On the other hand, it is reported that more Muslims are turning to Christ than ever before.

Nigeria – Rank 12

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

On the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, Nigeria scores 78 points, the same as last year. Nigeria now ranks 12, whereas it ranked 10 last year. The trends that were signaled in last year's report have continued in the reporting period for WWL 2016. The situation for Christians in the northern provinces of the country has continued to be very difficult, as the levels of pressure and violence against Christians remained very high. Although president Buhari, who took office in July 2015, did manage to recover some of the territory that was controlled by Boko Haram, the Islamic terrorist group labelled "the world's deadliest terror group" by the [Global Terrorism Index](#). Boko Haram has continued to conduct extremely violent attacks on a large scale.

Not only violence from Boko Haram against Christians has accounted for Nigeria's high score, but also non-Boko Haram violence from Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen and the increased pressure on Christians leading up to the 2015 elections. Moreover, the effects of Islamic law still affect the lives of many Christians in the twelve northern Sharia states. All the violence has caused very high numbers of internally displaced Christians (IDPs).

2. Persecution engines

In Nigeria the main persecution engine is *Islamic extremism*, but to a lesser extent two other persecution engines are also present, namely *Tribal antagonism* and *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Although the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram is most often associated with the persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria, the pattern of persecution is much more complex than simply the killing or wounding of Christians (and moderate Muslims) by radical Islamic militants. This is especially so in the twelve northern Sharia states where local government and communities leave little space for Christians to live their own lives.

In line with the violent traditions of the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s and the Sharia implementation of 2001, Christians in northern Nigeria have increasingly become targets for jihadist attacks. Building on this, Boko Haram has, for the past few years, carried out a systematic campaign against the Nigerian state, specifically targeting Christians in its ideology, rhetoric and actions with the intent of establishing an Islamic State. Using the rhetoric of radical Islam, it declared an Islamic Caliphate in Gwoza, Borno State in August 2014. The expansion of this caliphate has now been stopped by government forces, but the violence caused by Boko Haram continues to affect thousands of people (specifically Christians), and fosters a mutual distrust between Christians and Muslims in the entire region, if not country.

Violence is also perpetrated by Islamic assailants, commonly identified as Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen, who descend on the villages in the night or in the day and carry out cruel attacks against innocent people, including women and children. As a Nigerian researcher reports, there are moves by the governments of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Taraba States to establish and reserve grazing fields for Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. This means that swaths of land from indigenous Christian communities are taken away for that purpose, depriving Christians of their farming fields and livelihood.

- ***Tribal antagonism:*** There are indications that *Tribal antagonism* has led to violence on the Church in parts of Nigeria; incidents of persecution involving Christians with an animistic background was reported from the eastern states. More investigation is needed in 2016.
- ***Organized corruption and crime:*** There is evidence of threats on the Church being caused and driven by organized crime networks, which are reported to be abundantly present in the country. This is an issue to be further investigated in 2016.

3. Context

The leadership of former president Goodluck Jonathan (a Christian) caused serious unrest in Nigeria. When Goodluck Jonathan of the ruling People’s Democratic Party won the presidential elections in April 2011, there was a big debate about his candidacy, because he was a southern Christian. Muslims felt the presidential candidates should have been Muslim, based on an unwritten agreement in Nigerian politics between Muslims and Christians. Islamic leaders and insurgents vowed to make his government impossible, with Boko Haram being Jonathan’s most visible opponent.

In April 2012, Jonathan said that within six months he would have dealt with Boko Haram, receiving their reply that they would finish with him in three months, and take over. Many Christians feared a “clash of the titans” in 2015 and in the weeks leading up to the 2015 presidential elections there was indeed increased tension in the country.

On 29 May 2015 Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in as president. In his inauguration speech he promised to bring “increased prosperity” to the country, and also vowed to tackle corruption and the insurgency headed by Boko Haram which he described as “a mindless, godless group, who are as far away from Islam as one can think.”

Despite Buhari’s intention to fight Boko Haram, which has been responsible for much of the violence against Christians in recent years, the continuing violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria remains an enormous source of concern. As reported previously by World Watch Research, a vicious circle of violence in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria is taking place under the shadow of Boko Haram: attacks perpetrated by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen and settlers has allegedly led to the deaths of thousands of Christians, with hundreds of churches and properties targeted and destroyed.

The persecution of Christians through *Islamic extremism* does not extend to the whole of Nigeria, however. Looking from the point of view of hostilities against Christians, the Nigerian landscape can be divided into distinct regions:

- The North (19 states & the Abuja Federal Capital Territory) is mainly Muslim, with Christian majority states in the Middle Belt. Large parts of the Middle Belt have become part of the twelve now-called Sharia-states in the North. For example, Kaduna-North is Muslim majority, Kaduna-South is Christian majority, but the Kaduna administration is Muslim dominated.
- The South (17 states) is mainly Christian, but the South-West (Yoruba) has a large Muslim population.

Nigeria is one of the most complex nations on the continent. The persecution of Christians overlaps with clashes over resource control in some states. According to human rights activists and reports, the Nigerian government barely investigates the killings and abuses of Christians at the hands of radical Islamic organizations and/or individuals. By doing so, the government has failed to fulfil its international obligation as enshrined under UNHCR and ICCPR. In addition, it has been widely reported that Boko Haram has been doing all it can to incite what could be a total war between Muslim and Christian communities.

4. Types of Christianity affected

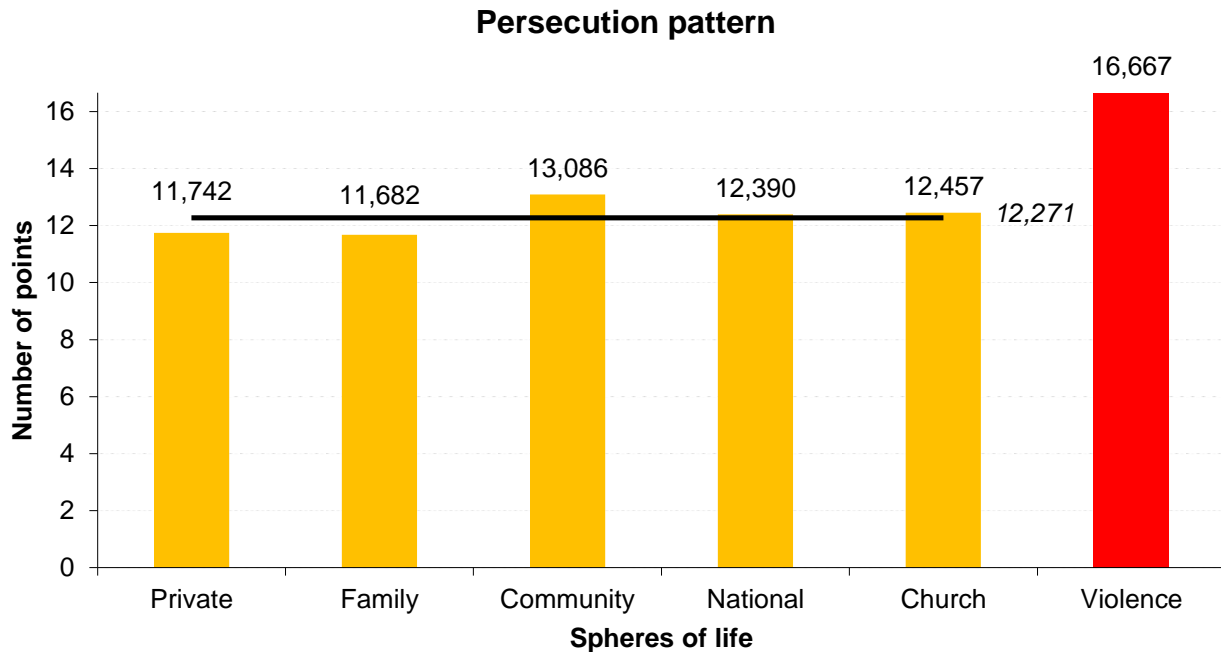
Nigeria has three types of Christianity (expatriate or migrant Christians usually worship within established national congregations). Persecution is focused on all types of Christianity in many of the northern states.

- **Historical Christian communities:** In Nigeria these include the Roman Catholic Church and protestant denominations such as Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans. In the context of the Boko Haram conflict, it was expected that the number of Christians would fall. While it is true that Christians have been the majority of the victims killed, displaced or forced to migrate, there are indications that the Christian population may be growing despite of that. In the midst of the conflict, Roman Catholics are creating more dioceses, and protestant Christianity is growing faster than expected, one field researcher reports.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs): In the Sharia states especially, conversion from Islam to Christianity is a dangerous act that can lead to many hardships.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches:** The number of evangelical and pentecostal communities is increasing in Nigeria. They now constitute about 20 per cent of the Nigerian Church, and this figure is rising. In many of the northern states they are confronted with hardships like all other types of Christianity.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Nigeria presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (12.271), showing the pressure on

Christians, is comparable to last year (12.249). Nigeria has the maximum score for the violence block (16.667; same as last year). This suggests a very volatile persecution situation. The fact that the pressure (*squeeze*) is not higher in combination with continuing very high levels of violence (*smash*), is caused by the specific situation in Nigeria: part of the country is heavily affected by persecution (Muslim majority part), while the other part of the country is not affected by it (Christian majority part). As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution in Nigeria brings a relatively homogeneous level of pressure throughout all *spheres of life*. The score for the *community sphere* is higher than the other *spheres of life* due to Christians being excluded from basic social services and other forms of discrimination.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Particularly in Bauchi, Gombo, Yobe and Borno States, more and more Christians find themselves under pressure not to display outwardly Christian symbols or the Bible. In fact, around Ganye, Jada and most parts of Borno and Yobe States, more and more Christians dress like Muslims to hide any Christian articles or materials on them and to escape being lynched.
- **Family sphere:** Faith-related pressure is most pronounced in the Sharia states, but also partly extends into neighboring states, and plays heavily upon Christians in their family and community spheres of life. Christians cannot bury their deceased in public cemeteries. Christian girls are under a serious threat of abduction and forced marriage. Reports from the field indicate that some of the Sharia states even have established ministries aimed at abducting and converting Christian girls.

- **Community sphere:** In state schools, especially at the primary and secondary level, Christian children are forced to participate in Islamic studies. Christian youth are hindered from accessing secondary schools or higher education institutions, especially when those institutions are well endowed with funding, equipment and high quality teaching. Christian students in education institutions are often considered and treated as second-class citizens. Christian communities are largely left unattended by the government. Facilities like clean water, clinics and roads are denied; Christian villages in rural areas are seldom considered for development projects.
- **National sphere:** Concerning the *national sphere*, qualified Christians are often denied employment, and some are asked to recant their Christian faith for immediate employment. In the twelve Sharia states, Christians live in fear because they live in an unpredictable environment in which local government officials put pressure on them, sometimes assisted by *Hisba* (Sharia Police) and *Da'awa* (Islamic missionary) committees. In the seven other northern states, the pressure is slightly less but in some of them Islamic terrorist activity is higher. The Islamist (or political Islamic) agenda for Nigeria, as declared by leading Islamists, is to bring the whole country under the “House of Islam”.
- **Church sphere:** As far as *church life* is concerned, it is very difficult for churches to openly integrate new converts from Islam. This would attract the attention of the Islamic community, which could result in violent actions against the churches in their entire area. Open Doors Field researchers state that pastors are increasingly becoming targets for attacks by radical Muslims to stop any further growth of the Church.
- **Violence:** Levels of violence in Nigeria remain extremely high. To give only a few examples: on 2 July 2015, 150 civilians were killed in Borno State, in north-eastern Nigeria. Reports have also emerged claiming that some of the Christian Chibok schoolgirls (kidnapped in April 2014) are now being forced to participate in the atrocities of Boko Haram. On 24 June 2015, 40 people were killed in the city of Maiduguri by two female suicide bombers belonging to Boko Haram, one of which was only 12 years old.

The report [“Migration and Violent-Conflict in Divided Societies: Non-Boko Haram Violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria”](#), issued by World Watch Research (WWR) in April 2015, includes findings that the sophisticated and systematic attack on Christians around the Middle Belt region indicate a pattern of *ethnic cleansing*. This violence has displaced many thousands of civilians, mainly indigenous Christian farmers and has led to the deaths of thousands of others, with hundreds of churches and properties targeted and destroyed. Another report, entitled [“The Case Study of Violent Conflict in Taraba State \(2013 - 2015\)”](#), issued by WWR in November 2015, looks specifically into the conflict in Taraba State and reveals a massive campaign to displace indigenous Christian farmers (belonging to such ethnic groups as the Tiv, Jukun, Kuteb, Chamba, Panso, Kaambu and Bandawa) living in towns and villages of central, northern and southern Taraba State. This report also notes the fact that this violent conflict is going on simultaneously with the Boko Haram violence, and therefore, local and international attention is absent.

It is important to highlight that in Nigeria, the numerous internal displacements are often part of a process that can be seen as ‘ethnic cleansing’ (cf. WWR report “[Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria](#)”, published in 2015) which is defined as “the expulsion of an [‘undesirable’ population](#) from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these.” The practice of ‘ethnic cleansing’ sometimes touches upon ‘genocide.’

The WWR report “[Boko Haram and Gender-Based Violence against Christian Women and Children in North-Eastern Nigeria since 1999](#)”, reissued in 2015, investigates gender-based violence specifically against Christian women and children in the context of the Boko Haram uprising since 1999. The report describes the extent to which violence against women and girls has been a part of Boko Haram’s violence.

6. Future outlook

1. The current situation in Nigeria indicates that dark clouds lie ahead. The rebranding of Boko Haram’s name to Islamic State’s West Africa Province (ISWAP) will boost its influence in the region and makes it likely that the Church will continue to suffer more violent persecution in the near future, in and outside Nigeria. Buhari’s campaigns against Boko Haram have had some success, but the group is now intensifying its attacks and making more frequent inroads into neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad and Cameroon.
2. Northern Nigeria has huge numbers of IDPs, many of whom are Christians. These refugees have been internally displaced either by the Boko Haram terror regime or by the ferocious attacks (often covered up by local state authorities) of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. Many of them are not taken care of by national or international aid agencies. They are a visible witness to the supremacy of the persecutors and to the high vulnerability of the persecuted in this region. And this in turn encourages further violence with impunity and culminates in constant fear among the persecuted Christians. This vicious circle can only be broken when the international community intervenes by means of humanitarian aid and otherwise.
3. Although Buhari is trying to contain the threat caused by Boko Haram, as a Hausa-Fulani Muslim from northern Nigeria himself, he is not expected to do much about the violence perpetrated by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen and settlers fighting for the control of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. For example, the inclusion of Islamic literature in the federal educational curriculum under the leadership of Buhari effectively contributes to the islamization of the Nigerian education system. This development only diminishes hopes that Buhari will do something about the anti-Christian violence in the Middle Belt.

Maldives – Rank 13

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 76 points, the Maldives rank 13 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL 2015, the Maldives ranked 11 with a score of 78 points. The decrease is not owing to an improvement in the situation for Christians. What we see is a reflection of the situation stabilizing at a high level of pressure. This pressure is evenly distributed across all spheres of life.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engine affecting Christians in the Maldives is *Islamic extremism*, blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*.

- **Islamic extremism:** The Islamic government continues to perceive itself as the protector of Islam, instituting a set of laws that basically prohibits a Maldivian from leaving Islam by converting to another religion. To be Maldivian is equated with being a Muslim, leaving no room for any deviation, and a convert will face harsh consequences including losing citizenship. Officially there are no Maldivian Christians, only expatriate Christians. The growing Islamization was illustrated in the reporting period by efforts in the parliament to tighten the Sharia penal laws in [March 2015](#), although one Islamic NGO condemned the fact that apostasy would not be punished by [stoning](#)! An Amnesty International report, published on 23 April 2015, describes the [growing restriction of civil rights](#) and mentions an increase in the numbers of “religious vigilantes” as well. This finding also underlines why Christians have to hide themselves so thoroughly. The findings of the report are not too surprising, and neither is the reaction of the government. It immediately [accused](#) Amnesty of a plot together with opposition’s main party MDP in order to tarnish Maldives’ image. On 16 June 2015, the Maldivian Supreme Court issued a [ruling](#) by which it published guidelines for the country’s Human Rights Commission. Following these guidelines, the Commission will lose its independence and be the second commission getting sacked after the Election Commission, whose president and vice-president lost their jobs when they criticized another Supreme Court guideline for the presidential elections. This not only shows that everything perceived as “un-Islamic” will be banned, but also shows why this engine is blended with **Dictatorial paranoia**. The Human Rights Commission was punished purely for doing its job in submitting a report to the United Nations Human Rights monitoring mechanism. According to those rules, the reports have to be drafted independently, and precisely this was opposed by the country’s Supreme Court, bringing the commission under the control of the foreign ministry and the president’s office. In a report from 18 May 2015, the Maldivian Rights NGO, Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), published a study on Maldivian school text books, sermons and other published materials on Islam. These “breed hatred and Islamic fundamentalism,” [reported](#) the NGO. The report, which is the first of its kind, analyzed text books used in Maldives for primary and secondary education in order to identify the prevalence of radical narratives in the mainstream academic discourse. The report noted that the school text books cultivate anti-

Semitism and xenophobia, and glorify Jihad or war against those who allegedly "obstruct" Islam. All Maldivian students are required to take Islam as one of the four compulsory subjects from first grade through twelfth grade, alongside Dhivehi, English and Mathematics. Text books for Islamic studies are prepared by specialists at the ministry of education and approved by the ministry of Islamic affairs. The government is struggling to prevent a flood of Maldivians seeking to join the civil wars in the Middle-East. The police in January said over 50 individuals had left the country, while the opposition puts the number at 200, in any case an astonishing number, given the country's size.

3. Context

The Maldives are still a country living in two worlds. On the one hand, internationally they have the image of being a holiday destination of paradisiac dimensions; on the other hand, the country follows a strict form of Islam and is struggling with unrest and many political challenges. The latter was illustrated by several incidents during this reporting period. On 22 February 2015, former president and opposition leader Mohammed Nasheed was arrested and accused of charges of terrorism, which showed that the current conservative Islamist government does not care too much about its international image, but more about sticking faithfully to its perception of Islam. Consequently, not even a month after the arrest, on March 13 2015, he was [sentenced](#) to thirteen years prison in a surprise move without getting a fair trial. In response, May Day 2015 saw one of the largest [protests](#) against the government the country has ever witnessed, with an estimated 20,000 participants. Many more may have wanted to come, but state employers hindered citizens from travelling to the capital Malé by boat and some were later on dismissed after having taken part in the demonstrations. In the aftermath, leading figures of the three opposition parties were detained. Towards the end of the reporting period, on September 28 2015 there was an [explosion](#) on the president's boat when he returned from the Hajj. His wife and several aides sustained injuries. While first reactions spoke of an accident or a technical failure, authorities now suppose a planned attack. According to the BBC on 24 October, after the sacking of the [defence minister](#) some days ago, the vice-president, [Abdullah Ahdeeb](#), was detained as well.

According to official [figures](#) reported by its department of immigration, in June 2015, the Maldives are home to a stunning number of 124,000 migrant workers, most of them employed in the tourist sector. In relation to the number of inhabitants of the Maldives, an estimated 358,000 people in 2015, this is a surprisingly high number. Even more so as Transparency Maldives, a local NGO, estimates that the real number of migrant workers is closer to 200,000. Given these figures, it is not surprising that human trafficking [the illegal supply of migrant workers] is the second most lucrative economic sector after tourism, according to official government figures from 2011. These figures also imply that the well-registered lack of freedom of religion in the country not only affects the very small number of domestic Christians but extends to other Christians too, namely the Christians among the migrant workers. It also points to social problems that the Maldives is facing (see Outlook below).

4. Types of Christianity affected

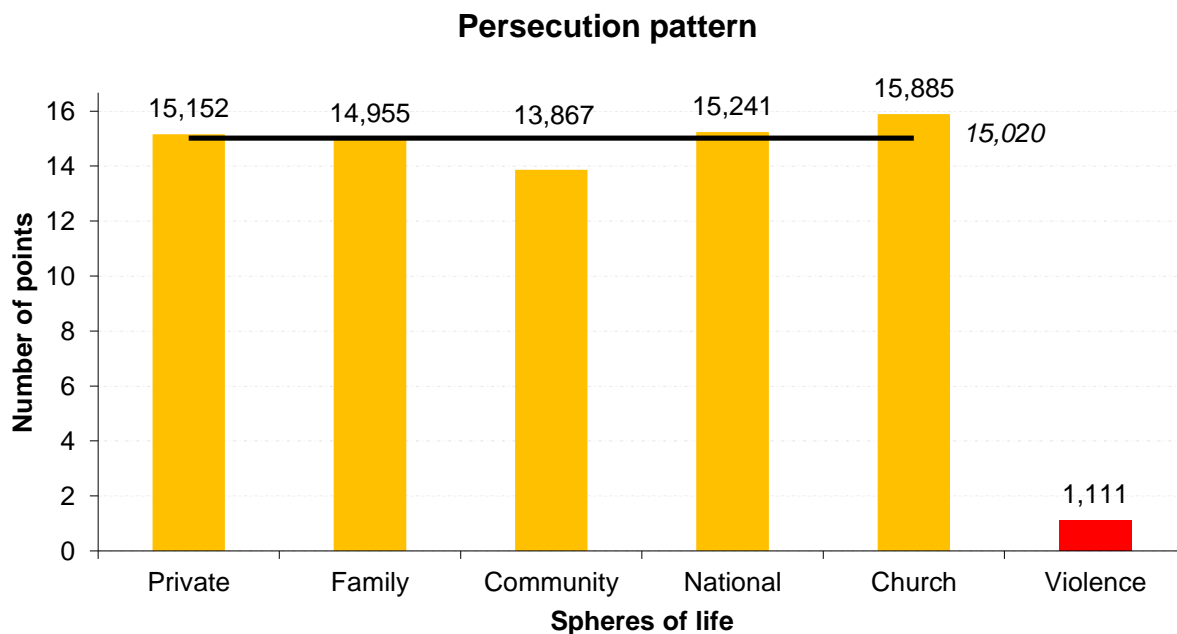
Two types of Christianity in the Maldives exist and are experiencing persecution:

- **Expatriate and migrant worker Christians**, often from India or Sri Lanka. Most of them have freedom of worship, provided that they stay strictly amongst themselves. These communities are monitored closely.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) face by far the most persecution as officially they do not exist in the country: every Maldivian has to be a Muslim and everyone who is deviating loses his or her citizenship.

The Christian community of the Maldives is strictly separated, expatriate Christians and converts do not have any contacts or connecting points.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Maldives presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks (15.020), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (15.249). The score for the violence block is slightly lower: 1.482 (WWL 2015) to 1.111. This suggests that the strong pressure on Christians is not translating into more violence. As far as converts are concerned, this is most likely due to their utmost efforts to remain secret. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private, family, national and church spheres*. Pressure on MBBs is especially acute in the *private and family spheres* and is exerted by the social environment. The pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* is fired by both the special Maldivian notion that every citizen has to be a Muslim as well as by the growing paranoia of the government.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** MBBs always have to exercise the utmost care to hide their faith as much as possible. Bibles and other Christian materials have to be hidden carefully and can only be read with much caution as their families will never accept it and possession could result in imprisonment. Even for migrant Christians it is dangerous to keep Christian material in their possession as it could be deemed suspicious, especially if it is in the native Dhivehi language or in large quantities (authorities may suspect they are being used to evangelize the Maldivians). In fact, the immigration/customs card requires travelers to declare any non-Muslim materials when entering the country. It is even much more perilous for Maldivian. Meeting with other Christians is a special challenge in these circumstances as on the one hand it is dangerous for the MBBs themselves and on the other hand it may disclose or endanger a Christian meeting. There are even reports that friends both believing in Christ hid their faiths from one another out of fear.
- **Family sphere:** Article 9 (d) of the Constitution states that a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives. Accordingly, if found to have converted to Christianity, Maldivians could be stripped of their citizenship as well as punished under the laws of Sharia. As every Maldivian needs to be a Muslim, registration for converts is out of question. Similarly, expatriate Christians are not allowed to hold any religious activities (including Christian weddings, funerals, baptisms) in public. Children of converts are forced to learn non-Christian teachings, while children of expatriate Christians are exempt from attending Islamic lessons. Once a convert is discovered, he or she can be put under pressure to divorce and lose both custody of their children and inheritance rights, and are likely to be isolated from their families.
- **Community sphere:** Social control in the Maldives is extremely strong as the population density is one of the highest in the world, especially in the capital Malé. MBBs have virtually no place of privacy and in their efforts to hide their faith, try to blend in with the majority of people around them. This includes how they dress and also attendance at the local mosque. Any native believer who is seen not attending will be questioned. Expatriate Christians enjoy more freedom, but there are times when they too are required to blend in, for example during Ramadan by not drinking and eating in public.
- **National sphere:** The constitution and other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. The constitution designates Sunni Islam as the official state religion, referring to the country as “100 percent” Muslim, and government regulations are based on Islamic law. Among other regulations, one states: “It is illegal to propagate any other religion other than Islam.” Penalties for violations of this range from two to five years in prison or house arrest, depending on the gravity of the offense. If the offender is a foreigner, his or her license to stay in the country would be revoked and he or she would be deported. Given that the government took control over the media of the country in [April 2015](#), it is no wonder that reporting on Christianity is biased and Christians are always portrayed negatively. The bias in school textbooks was already mentioned in the persecution engines section above.

- **Church sphere:** It is illegal for Maldivians to become Christians let alone gather as a church. The expatriate community enjoys more religious freedom as long as they do it privately. There have been incidents where public gatherings of Christians were dispersed harshly. Expatriate fellowships are under surveillance for fear that they evangelize to the locals. Non-Islamic material is considered contraband and by law has to be declared at customs upon entering the country. Given this, it is no wonder that Christian material cannot be imported or even produced in the country. The training of leaders is out of the question and Christian communities are not allowed to receive foreign Christian workers for ministry work.
- **Violence:** There has never been very much violent persecution in the Maldives. Sometimes Christians have been sentenced to jail when they were found to have infringed the laws deemed to protect Islam. Apart from that, some convert Christians have left the country in order to evade persecution.

6. Future outlook

Maldivian youth increasingly feel "disenfranchised and excluded" and "disconnected from the fabric of society" suggests a World Bank report [released](#) in February 2015. Rising globalization, internet use, and economic expansion has "exposed young women and men to the outside world and new ideas and values, making them acutely aware of what they can aspire to," read the report. "Yet, both female and male youth face the shackles of the limited island economy, lack empowerment and community engagement, and contend with rigid norms of behavior and increasingly conservative values, as well as an inadequate education and training system that ill prepares them for the labor market." The report argued that these issues meant that many young Maldivians are being "denied passage into adulthood". Titled "Youth in the Maldives: Shaping a new future for young women and men through engagement and empowerment", the report was compiled using focus groups and surveys, in order to address the "dearth of data" on young people in the country. Physical isolation, thwarted expectations, family breakdown, and gang participation were revealed as major challenges facing 15-24 year olds, while new insights were offered into the country's large youth unemployment problem. Another big problem Maldivian youths are facing is drug addiction, due to a lack of perspective and the high social pressure young people are experiencing as well. Unfortunately, this also affects the few Christian believers. Connecting this with the surprisingly high number of migrant workers results in a mixture poised for creating increasing social problems. This may lead to social unrest, add to the government's paranoia and so end up affecting Christians in an adverse way too.

A second trend has to do with foreign relations. Traditionally, the country has strong ties to neighboring India, but due to recent political developments, the relationship has cooled down quickly. In looking for new allies, the country acted in a surprising move on 28 July 2015. For a tiny Indian Ocean nation priding itself as the only one in the South Asian neighborhood not to have been colonized by European powers, the Maldives has now fast-tracked a constitutional [amendment](#) conferring land ownership to big-time foreign investors. This amendment aims at Chinese investors and underlines the country's dependency on international tourism. For the small Christian minority,

it will not make a big difference, whether India or China is the big neighbor. Although in the long term, migrant workers from India might possibly face additional challenges when working in the Maldives, and this would affect Christians as well. As China has a record of suppressing religious freedom at home as well, Christians cannot expect any help or even attention from this side.

Saudi Arabia – Rank 14

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

Saudi Arabia only lost one point compared to last year's World Watch List (WWL): it now scores 76 points and ranks 14, two positions lower than last year.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines in Saudi Arabia are *Islamic extremism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism* (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- ***Islamic extremism***: The desert kingdom is defined by Wahhabism, a purist and strict interpretation of Islam. It is forbidden to openly practice other religions. Saudi Arabia controls the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina, which are the birth and resting places of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam. The Saudi government is combating Islamic terrorism on a national level because it can be a threat to the reign of the royal family. However, private Saudi funding of Islamic terrorism outside the country is one of the main sources of Sunni terrorism in the world, e.g. in Iraq and Syria. Saudi Arabia's legal system is based on Islamic law (Sharia). Apostasy – conversion to another religion – is punishable by death if the accused does not recant.
- ***Tribal antagonism (blended)***: Typical for this engine is the effort to force the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context. In the case of Saudi Arabia, tribal antagonism is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects MBBs.

3. Context

There is a growing gap between Saudi's large youth population and the ageing monarchs. The majority of the population is under thirty and the youth culture has changed radically under the influence of satellite TV, the internet and social media. Young people (especially women) are longing for more freedom and do not want to be restricted by the religious police. The choice to open election ballots for women as well, a legacy of late King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, is a step forward in that respect. There is also a considerable degree of youth unemployment which leads to widespread social discontent. These factors could drive young people toward radical Islam. This is aggravated by the wealth of small groups of the elite versus the poverty of many. On the other hand, social discontent is not new and has been bought off with large sums of money in the form of allocations. Social dissatisfaction has been there for at least twenty years (including the civil disobedience of women driving, for instance). Moreover, the internet revolution has also reached Islamic leaders: several imams have twitter accounts and are being followed by many. The number of Christian converts from Islam and other religions is increasing, along with their boldness in sharing their new faith.

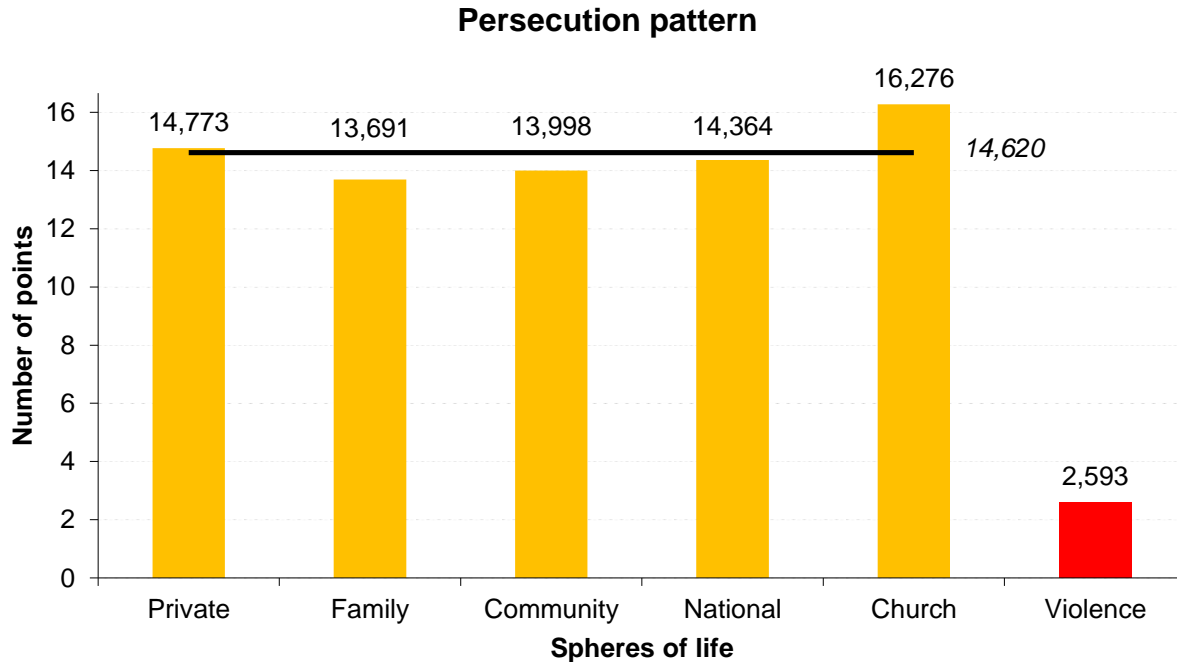
4. Types of Christianity affected

In Saudi Arabia, the following types of Christianity are present and affected by persecution:

- **Expatriate or migrant Christians:** Most Christians in Saudi Arabia are expatriates or migrants who temporarily live and work in the country. Expatriate Christians are mostly from the western world, whereas migrant Christians originate from low and middle income countries, such as India, the Philippines and Africa. Besides being exploited and poorly paid, Asian and African migrant workers are regularly exposed to verbal and physical abuse because of their ethnicity and low status, but their Christian faith can also play a role in this. Expatriate Christians are severely restricted in gathering for worship and sharing their Christian faith with Muslims, which entails the risk of detention and deportation, and Christians from a Muslim Background (MBBs) face even more pressure.
- **Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs):** There are few Saudi MBBs in the country and they often live out their Christian faith in deepest secrecy. Many of them responded to Christian programs via satellite TV or became Christians after experiencing how God revealed Himself in a vision or a dream. Muslims have testified to joining the *Hajj* - the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca – with a sincere desire to obey God and have received a divine vision showing them that they need Jesus. Internet access also plays a role as this allows access to Christian materials. This is limited, however, since the use of the Internet is strictly controlled and regulated in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the small number of Saudi MBBs has been increasing and they are also becoming more expressive about their Christian faith, sharing it with others on the Internet and Christian satellite TV channels. This public sharing has led to serious repercussions either from the family or authorities.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Saudi Arabia presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (14.620), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (14.523). The score for the violence block is lower, going down from 4.074 (WWL 2015) to 2.593. This was because there were less reports of Christians arrested, physically or mentally harmed and forced to leave the country for their faith. This combination suggests that persecution has stabilized, be it at a very high level. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure is strongest in the *church sphere*. The score for the *private* sphere is also above average, but in fact all the scores for the *spheres of life* are high. MBBs face most problems in the *private, family* and *community spheres*, especially if they are the only believers in a family or community. Discrimination in dealing with authorities as well as in employment and in the community affects all Christians.



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- **Private sphere:** MBBs cannot openly practice their faith. Giving any indication of their new faith to those around them can have serious consequences. Expatriate Christians have relatively more freedom to practice their faith privately, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims. Migrant workers have to act carefully and persecution depends on the attitude and religion of fellow migrant workers who live in the same “labor camps”.
- **Family sphere:** All Saudis are considered Muslims. For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. MBBs run the great risk of honor killing or physical violence if their families or communities discover their faith. A number have fled the country because of this. Open Christian weddings cannot be celebrated in Saudi Arabia and MBBs must marry according to Islamic rites. MBBs cannot have their children registered as Christians or give them obviously Christian names. In school, children of MBBs are obliged to attend Islamic classes. In the case of custody of children in divorces and inheritance issues, MBBs are often disadvantaged.
- **Community sphere:** All Christians are more or less put under pressure to renounce their faith through all kinds of discrimination. Converts to Christianity will experience harassment and discrimination in their workplace if their new faith is known. Sentiments against adherents of other religions are strong throughout Saudi society. Migrant workers, including Christians, have been exposed to verbal, physical and sexual abuse from employers.
- **National sphere:** There are no provisions for religious freedom in the kingdom’s constitution or basic laws. The legal system is based on Sharia law and conversion to any religion other than

Islam is punishable by death. Muslims have more rights than followers of other religions. MBBs in particular face serious pressure in dealing with the authorities if their Christian faith is known. Expatriate and migrant Christians will face problems in this *sphere of life* if they are active in proselytizing Muslims, which can lead to imprisonment and deportation.

- **Church sphere:** There are no church buildings at all in Saudi Arabia and Christian services take place at secret places. Although the government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private, the religious police (*Muttawa*) often do not respect this right. Christian services are seriously restricted by the strict gender segregation, prohibiting men and women from different families to worship in the same room. Christians who engage in such activities risk arrest, intimate body searches in life-threatening conditions, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture. As the law is not formally codified, the legal situation of private religious practice remains vague and is based mainly on official announcements in the media. Proselytism of Muslims, Bible training, publishing and importing Bibles (including other Christian materials) in Arabic are all illegal.
- **Violence:** In terms of anti-Christian violence, the situation has not changed much in Saudi Arabia. The score is somewhat lower (1 point) than last year since less reports were received concerning Christians being arrested, physically or mentally harmed and forced to leave the country for their faith. On average once or twice a year, the police and religious police raid a secret Christian fellowship at a private worship location. Most often this happens to private worship locations of African and Asian migrant workers. The attitude of local officials remains crucial, especially given the manner in which the legal system operates - it is not a codified system of law but relies on local interpretation of Sharia. Rape and sexual harassment is a huge problem in Saudi Arabia. Migrant Christians, mainly housemaids working in Saudi homes, are very vulnerable in this respect. There are no recent reports of Saudi citizens being officially convicted and sentenced to capital punishment for apostasy. Nevertheless, the risk of extra-judicial killings cannot be excluded in an attempt to save the honor of the family.

6. Future outlook

Though there are several elements in Saudi society that could lead to instability in the long run, no major changes are expected in the short term. After the death of late king Abdullah bin Abdul al-Saud in January 2015, his 79-year-old half-brother, Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, was confirmed as the new king. King Salman's first priority was to ensure stability, an important factor in Saudi Arabia's move to intervene in Yemen with airstrikes. Islamic radical terror groups are creeping towards the Saudi border: al Qaeda in the south controls large parts of Yemen, and Islamic State in the north is advancing rapidly through Iraq. There are reports that both groups have sympathizers in Saudi Arabia as well. In order to maintain stability in the country, Salman will also need to seek the support of the Islamic religious establishment and halt any reforms that might aggravate them. In April, king Salman appointed Mohammed bin Nayef as crown prince and named his son, Mohammed bin Salman as deputy crown prince, passing power to the next generation.

Again, no major developments are expected in the short run. This is also true for the level of religious freedom for Christians, though anti-Christian violence could increase as local Christians are growing bolder in expressing their faith. Religious restrictions under king Salman seem to indicate a consolidation of the already severe pressure for religious minorities, including Christians.

Uzbekistan – Rank 15

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 70 points Uzbekistan ranks 15 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Previously on WWL 2015, Uzbekistan ranked 15 with a score of 69 points. The slight increase of points is due to an increased level of paranoid control by the regime – especially in the *national* and *church spheres of life*. Fewer reports of violence have been reported compared to last year.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Uzbekistan are *Dictatorial paranoia* and to a lesser extent *Islamic extremism*. Please note that Dictatorial paranoia in Uzbekistan is a product of the communist past and has therefore emerged from *Communist and Post-Communist oppression*, though the ideology of communism has been dead and buried in Uzbekistan for many years.

- ***Dictatorial paranoia:*** No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Both mainstream Protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses are frequently branded as “extremists” for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. Pressure from the authorities is unlikely to dwindle as government leadership is preparing for transition, taking into account the president’s age and health. It is very common that members of any protestant church are regarded as followers of an alien sect that has only one goal, namely to spy and destroy the current political system. From this perspective they need to be not only controlled, but if necessary, even eradicated. Security forces have increased wire-tapping in order to find “extremists”. This has also affected believers and churches. Another strand of crackdown involves religious education, no matter what religion is concerned.
- ***Communist and post-communist oppression:*** This is the historical fundament on which the current regime is established. Communism has no ideological contribution to support the regime’s position anymore. However, many control systems and mechanisms derived from the communist system are still in place in the country.
- ***Islamic extremism:*** Pressure on Christians coming from Islamic circles is particularly aimed at Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). 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.

3. Context

Uzbekistan has one of the harshest dictatorships in Central Asia. The regime will do everything possible to stay in power – all forms of opposition and deviations from the norm will be ruthlessly attacked. Christianity is regarded as an alien and destabilising factor. On top of this MBBs experience additional pressure from their social and cultural environment.

Hundreds of volunteers from Uzbekistan have joined radical Muslim groups like *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan or Islamic State. The government of Uzbekistan has managed to expel these groups from the country over the past decades. The May 2005 riots in Andijan provide an example of how the regime acts against Muslim fighters.

The regime uses the existence of radical Muslims to justify its total control over society by claiming that they are a constant threat to the country – a claim that is grossly exaggerated. So far, few, if any, jihadists have returned to Uzbekistan from the battlefields in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The existing and state-recognised Islam (I will use the term official Islam for this) has been co-opted and official Muslim leaders are in fact state agents. Those Muslims in Uzbekistan that feel the need to become more serious in matters of faith are left with few options: there is no room for them in official Islam so they have to either take up religion alone (with the constant risk of being arrested), or to join illegal Islamic groups (with the same risk), or to leave the country (which means breaking with the family and still facing the risk of being arrested) or to convert to Christianity (which means they will have to face pressure from the family and the state).

The secret police is closely monitoring all religious activities in the country – spies have infiltrated all religious groups. The Russian Orthodox Church is not regarded as a threat since its members are exclusively coming from an ethnic Russian background and there is no evangelism carried out by the Church. Apart from this, the Uzbek regime is aware that it has to be extremely careful in acting against anything Russian.

All other churches are regarded as a potential threat to the stability of the country (and the regime) because of their (assumed) evangelism among the ethnic majority of the country and are therefore persecuted relentlessly. House church meetings are targeted for raids, those present will be harassed, detained, interrogated and fined, while religious materials found on the premises will be confiscated and destroyed. Believers are given short sentences of up to 15 days imprisonment on occasions. Only rarely are believers given sentences for long-term imprisonment.

4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in Uzbekistan exist and are experiencing some form of persecution:

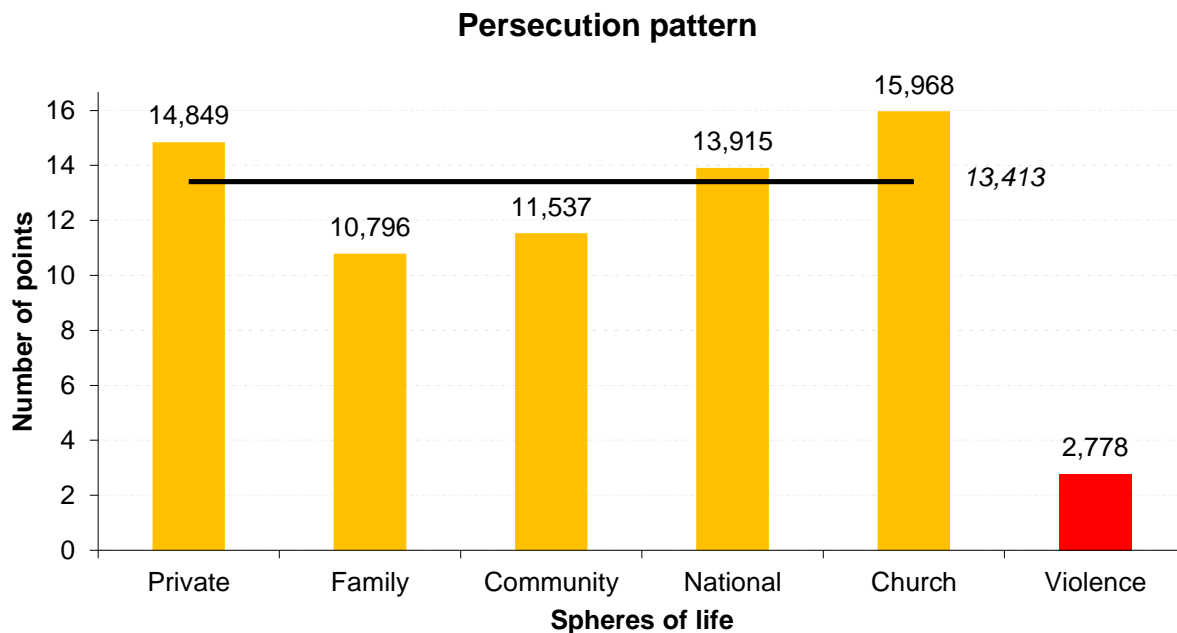
- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians.** Most of the expatriate groups will be focussed internally and hardly be involved in evangelism.
- **Historical Christian communities.** The Russian Orthodox Church has accustomed itself to the limitations provided by the government and is therefore more or less left undisturbed. Services may be monitored, but they are conducted unhindered and members can meet without fear of

arrest. However, the printing or importing of Christian materials and the immigration of foreign workers are all restricted.

- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) bear the brunt of the persecution in Uzbekistan. Apart from suffering at the hands of the state, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. And for them, the latter is by far the more powerful.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** belonging to Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are the second group to be persecuted, and then especially those who have not been registered. They suffer from many raids, threats, arrests, and fines.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Uzbekistan presents the scores for *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (13.413), showing the pressure on Christians, is slightly higher than last year (12.995). The score for the violence block is lower: from 4.074 (WWL 2015) to 2.778. This suggests that either the number of violent incidents has decreased (which does not seem very likely) or that believers have become more afraid to report incidents. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private, national, and church spheres*. This is typical for a situation in which *Dictatorial paranoia* is the leading persecution engine. Pressure from *Islamic extremism* is present mostly in the *private, family and community spheres* and is exerted by the social environment, while *Dictatorial paranoia* – the pressure from the regime – is felt mostly in the *private, national and church spheres*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Conversion is the issue that triggers the fiercest reaction from the social and cultural environment. It is regarded as a shame and an affront to the honour of the family. As it

creates social unrest, it is also high on the radar of the state and its agents. As a result, not only converts are under pressure at this point, but also those Christians active in evangelism. Neighbors will go to the police if they see that you worship at home. In some areas, it is even illegal to own a Bible, elsewhere you can own only one Bible. Christians have been imprisoned for owning a Bible. Non-recognized Christian denominations are considered illegal. Thus, members of these denominations who possess Christian materials incur particular risk. Revealing the Christian faith (e.g. by displaying Christian symbols) is also risky. This has two facets: MBBs who reveal their new faith will instantly draw the ire of their family, friends and community; and other Christians will immediately be suspected of evangelism. All state media are under state control - these are inaccessible for Christians. Internet access goes via state ISPs and is also under surveillance. Some sites are blocked. On top of this: Internet access in the countryside is difficult. Satellite TV is not prohibited, Christians can watch for example channel CNL (Russian Christian television station). Not only is it risky for a convert to talk about his new faith with members of the family, the same goes for members of traditional churches who have converted to neo-Protestantism, though this is far less acute. The pressure in this case is bigger when dealing with non-family guests. Non-Orthodox Christians are always risk government harassment and disruption when meeting with other Christians, as it is considered an illegal activity not sanctioned by the government. Christians are known to face governmental raids, property confiscation, and beatings for meeting "illegally". Practically all pastors and lay leaders are being watched. The same goes for converts. House arrests are quite common for MBBs – the family will use this to put pressure on them to recant their new faith.

- **Family sphere:** MBBs can experience problems when trying to register births, deaths and marriages at the local council, as these are often made up of Muslims from the local community. Officially, baptisms are not forbidden. But local authorities will interfere in any gathering of unregistered groups. The pressure on MBBs not to go through with baptism is immense, as it is often regarded as the ultimate sign that one has left Islam. There are examples of Christian burials being denied by local officials. In Uzbek families, relatives (grandfather, grandmother for example) may force an MBB to go to the mosque, despite the fact that the parents are Christians. As in the Soviet Union, at all levels of education, students are forced to attend special lectures in which they are informed about the "dangers of religious sects", i.e. about the dangers of evangelical Christians and other religious minorities. These lectures are held in schools about once every two months. Because of the constant propaganda against "sects" in the media, schools and colleges, young people are often hostile against the children of evangelical Christians. It is not uncommon for insults and even beatings to be motivated by religious hatred. There are cases where spouses have been forced to seek refuge in another country. In such cases, the family is separated for a long time. MBBs are quite frequently put under house arrest and kept apart from others. In this isolation they are pressurized to recant their new faith and return to Islam. There have been cases where spouses or husbands are put under pressure to divorce.
- **Community sphere:** Threats and obstructions may come to Christians from more than one source. First of all, converts have to face pressure from their relatives and community, but other

Christians (especially those active in evangelism) will also have to face threats from the local community and from authorities (i.e. the threat of imprisonment). Two groups are responsible for the surveillance of Christians: the relatives/community (as a form of social control), but also the authorities at various levels. Generally speaking, in Uzbek culture it is not customary to ask the opinion of the bride if she wants to marry. Therefore, a forced marriage for a Christian is nothing unusual. Official celebrations and meetings in schools, institutes, workplaces are obligatory for all workers/students, including Christians. There have been reports of Christians, particularly MBBs, being forced to participate in Islamic rituals. Conversion is viewed as both religious and ethnic betrayal and therefore faces sharp persecution. Children of Christians will be ridiculed and sometimes excluded from higher education. When people realize that their employee is an active Christian they can fire him on the spot. Economic opportunities are limited for non-Orthodox Christians. MBBs in particular face severe economic consequences as one part of the larger persecution against them. The NSS (Uzbek Intelligence Service) are known to blackmail Christian owners of shops. As a result, many shop owners will avoid revealing that they are believers. Christians are frequently fined for an endless list of offences: meeting illegally, possession of religious literature, having Christian songs on their smartphones, etc. Even technically legal groups (such as Baptists) face this persecution. When meetings or houses are raided, all those present will be interrogated - often very harshly. But known believers will be required to go to the local police station from time to time just to intimidate them. If it becomes known that a person has converted to Christianity lots of pressure will be exerted on him/her. The new believer will have to face beatings, house arrest, and occasionally ostracism.

- **National sphere:** The state is officially secular and is attacking those churches that endanger social peace. The constitution and some laws provide for religious freedom but not without serious restrictions. Conscription to military service is compulsory: all citizens 18 years of age (male and female) have to join the military for a conscript service obligation - 12 months – no alternative is possible. The state is monitoring active pastors. As there are regular checkpoints all over the country, some of the pastors who the state is interested in will be stopped. Citizens need an exit visa to leave the country, and on occasion Christians are refused such visas. Known believers will never get a position in state employment. They may even be fired when it becomes known that they are believers. As this will draw unwanted attention, most businessmen will refrain from making it known that they are Christian. Expressing Christian views in public is very dangerous for the non-Orthodox with threats of reprisals from both the government and the local Uzbek community. The level of persecution is so intense that converts and non-Orthodox must keep their religion effectively secret, since any public expressions of their religion may be perceived by the government as proselytization. It is completely impossible to establish Christian civil society organizations or political parties in the country - the regime will not tolerate it at all. State-controlled and state-influenced media encourage prejudice against certain minority religious groups, at times accusing missionaries of posing a danger to society and sowing civil discord. The state-controlled media regularly produce reports in which evangelical Christians are slandered and attacked. Billboards, leaflets and other public information about the danger of sects and missionaries appeared in the north of the country. Many churches avoid using Christian signs, in order to prevent conflicts. As Christians are directly targeted by the authorities

(as well as well as the local Uzbek population regarding MBBs) it is inherently dangerous to publicly display your religion. For the many churches deemed illegal/unregistered, it is likewise inherently dangerous to display religious symbols. Fair trials do not occur in Uzbekistan. The judiciary is not independent and the international monitoring of court cases involving Christians faces many political hurdles.

- **Church sphere:** Gatherings of believers are frequently hindered and raided. It is almost impossible to register as a church – for the past 15 years not a single church has been registered. All religious activities are closely watched and spies have infiltrated almost all groups. It is almost impossible to get permission to build new churches, and maintenance of existing buildings is made very difficult (except for the Russian Orthodox Church). Only the few registered churches may organize activities inside their premises; activities outside these premises are forbidden. Administrative Code Article 240 ("Violation of the Religion Law" (dating from 1998)) Part 1 bans: "Carrying out of unauthorized religious activity, evasion by leaders of religious organizations of registration of the charter of the organization, the unauthorized organization and conduct of worship by religious ministers, and the organization and conduct of special children's and youth meetings, as well as vocational, literature and other study groups not relating to worship". A 2003 decree restricts the activities of faith-based NGOs, and the law prohibits "actions aimed at converting believers of one religion to another (proselytizing) as well as any other missionary activity." Under the Religion Law all religious materials need to be subjected to the government for permission. Religious training is prohibited in Uzbekistan. There have been several verified cases of pastors being directly targeted for leading illegal/unregistered churches. Pastors and lay leaders have been insulted, beaten and humiliated at their place of work or study. All Christian materials must be cleared by the committee for religious affairs. In practice this means that all importing, printing, and distribution is blocked. It is forbidden to openly sell religious materials in Uzbekistan without state approval. All media are state-controlled and inaccessible for religious groups. It is impossible to open and run Christian organizations, institutions and schools. Charitable work is highly restricted, only the Russian Orthodox Church may organize this. Foreign missionary activity is forbidden: a 2003 decree of the Cabinet of Ministers outlining a change in registration requirements for NGOs restricted the activities of faith-based entities, and the 1998 Religion Law prohibits "actions aimed at converting believers of one religion into another (proselytizing) as well as any other missionary activity." Christians cannot speak out against their persecutors when they are state agents.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Uzbekistan seems not to be very violent, but this is mainly due to the fact that believers are afraid to report about incidents for fear of repercussions. At least one home church was damaged when police raided it. At least 5 Christians were detained, while another 3 were serving sentences in jail. We know of at least 12 Christians who were physically harassed either by police or Muslim families. At least 2 further properties of Christians were damaged. At least two MBBs had to flee their homes and go into hiding due to pressure from their families.

6. Future outlook

The question of who will succeed the aging president Islam Karimov will have to be answered soon, but at present, it is considered a taboo issue. Experts say that Karimov will be succeeded by another communist veteran, which would mean that for Christians little (if anything) will change.

Governmental bodies (police, secret services, *mahalla* (community council) etc.) will continue to monitor religious activities by various means (bugging homes, tapping phones, infiltrating groups etc.) and to visit church services. Raids on Christian gatherings, confiscation of religious materials, interrogation and detention of believers will continue.

Pressure on and violence against MBBs from family, friends and community will continue, if not increase. There is a constant threat that radical Islamic groups such as Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Islam Jihad Union may become active in Uzbekistan. There is also a possibility of renewed violence by radical Muslims in the Fergana Valley. Many people in Uzbekistan believe this will happen straight after Karimov will be succeeded.

Kenya – Rank 16

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 68 points, Kenya ranks 16 on World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year, Kenya had been the highest riser on the WWL 2015 jumping 15 points to a score of 63 and ranked 19. The increase in score this year is mainly explained by the level of faith-related killings that has resulted in an intensification of the pressure Christians experience in the majority of the country. The killing of 147 Garissa University students is one of the incidents that shook the country and the world.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Kenya are *Islamic extremism*, and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism*, *Secular intolerance* and *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Even though Kenya is a majority Christian country (with 82% of the population being Christian), *Islamic extremism* is the main persecution engine. Approximately 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 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 extremism*. Radical Muslims living in Kenya, together with militants crossing the border from Somalia, are severely persecuting Christians and responsible for the killing of hundreds of Christians solely for their faith.
- **Tribal antagonism:** Kenya is home to more than forty tribes. In the northeastern part of the country, *Islamic extremism* and *Tribal antagonism* go hand in hand. In this context, persecution mainly comes when members of the tribes convert to Christianity, but it can also be seen at the national level where politicians are emphasizing traditional values and beliefs. For example, this has been the case concerning the Kenyan law that allows polygamy. The law does not even give “the right to consent” for a first wife in the house in case the husband wants an additional wife or wives. As no Christian denomination allows polygamy this might well lead to divorce in many cases. Thus, the law certainly weakens the values and principles of Christianity, and eventually causes the disintegration of Christian families.
- **Secular intolerance:** This is a new factor emerging in Kenyan society. Within the framework of the new constitution, the government is pushing its policies on public institutions and civil societies. Some of the policies, for example in education and family planning, do not take the issue of religion into account.

- **Organized corruption and crime:** In Kenya, corruption is rampant. According to Transparency International's current corruption index, Kenya ranks 145 out of 175 countries. For example, there are reports that Kenyan soldiers fighting in Somalia are participating in smuggling charcoal and sugar and making profits of millions of dollars a year. There are also local reports that suggest al-Shabaab managed to carry out the deadly attacks at Garissa University by paying bribes to security officials for importing weapons and ammunition. Furthermore, in the northeast there are reports about al-Shabaab and its supporters earning fortunes by importing sugar and other goods via the port of Kismayo by paying millions of Shillings to public officials. 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.

3. Context

It must first be emphasized that the persecution due to *Islamic extremism* 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 82% of the Kenyan population perceive themselves as Christian, while approximately 10-15% is Muslim. Yet, this Muslim minority has become politically active and powerful in many sectors in the country. One of Kenya's present-day political leaders, deputy president William Ruto is currently on trial at the International Criminal Court in The Hague for masterminding the post-election violence during the 2007-8 Kenyan general elections. 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 couple of years. Especially the northeast and coastal regions have become a hot-spot of radical Islamic activity, which is main factor underlying the 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 involved in Somalia. Large numbers of refugees from different neighboring countries, including Somalia, are currently finding refuge in Kenya. On the political front, Kenya held a referendum in 2010 that approved a new constitution with a new structure of government. Over the past year, the government has also stepped up implementing its intolerant secularism without giving space and freedom to Christians. In this regard, the government is devising policies and implementing them even though some of the policies might contradict some of the pillars of Christian tenets. A classic example would be the education curriculum, gender-based policy and other policies that would require churches to either bend or break. Also important is the level of corruption in Kenya. In Kenya, corruption in public institutions is rampant, and its effect on protecting citizens is massive. 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 Kenyan authorities. Many churches were destroyed in the coastal region, and many Christians were forced to leave the area. It is the cumulative effect of this complex situation that has led to the increase of Kenya's score in WWL 2016.

4. Types of Christianity affected

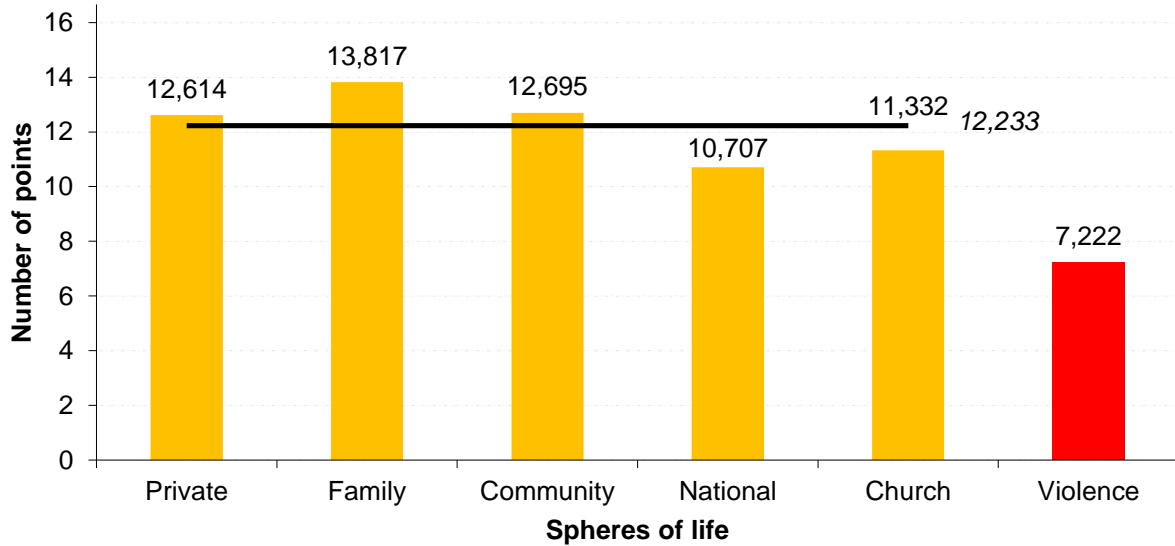
Kenya is home to three types of Christianity:

- **Historical churches:** This church 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 extremism* and the intensity is very high.
- **Converts (especially Muslim Background Believers, MBBs):** These Christians are mainly found in Muslim dominated areas, which are the areas in the northeast and along the coast (including Mombasa). In general, MBBs face different persecution dynamics to those Christians belonging to the other two categories.
- **Non-traditional protestant communities** (e.g. pentecostal and charismatic churches): Non-traditional protestant churches 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.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Kenya presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*, *Tribal antagonism*, *Secular intolerance* and *Organized corruption and crime*. The average score over the first five blocks (12.233), showing the pressure on Christians, is considerably higher than last year (10.094). The score for the violence block is lower: from 12.963 (WWL 2015) going down to 7.222, notwithstanding the high number of Christians killed. (The high number of Christians killed did not directly push up the score for *violence*, because the score for violence is a result of 12 questions. High numbers in the question related to Christians killed, only count for 1/3, whereby 10 or more killings already produce the maximum amounts of points for that question.) The increase in persecution pressure is evident in all the *spheres of life* but highest in the *family* and *national spheres*. The data suggest that the hostile atmosphere in the country (caused by the atrocities of the Islamic terrorists in northeastern and coastal Kenya) has had a tremendous ripple effect on Christian communities throughout the country. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *family* sphere, followed by the *community* and *private spheres*. This is typical for a Christian majority country in which *Islamic extremism* is a powerful persecution engine.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** In the context of *Islamic extremism*, MBBs face the increased pressure mainly, but not exclusively, in the *private sphere of life*. For example, for those in the predominantly Muslim northeastern and coastal region of Kenya, converts will face the risk of deadly attacks if they reveal their conversion.
- **Family sphere:** At a family level, persecution is intense for MBBs, although all types of Christianity face some level of persecution. Denying places for burial, forced marriage, harassing children of Christians are some of the common problems.
- **Community sphere:** In areas where Muslims are the majority, the community life for Christians is much more difficult than in other areas. The main drivers behind this persecution are primarily direct family members or members of the extended family (for MBBs), but also non-Christian religious leaders and ethnic group leaders.
- **National sphere:** Persecution in the national sphere of life is common to all types of Christianity. The drivers underpinning these processes 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.
- **Church sphere:** Church life in Kenya is significantly affected by the persecution dynamics particularly in areas where *Islamic extremism* is a problem. As a result, building a church or gathering for activities in a church has become dangerous. The combined influence of *Islamic*

extremism, Tribal antagonism, Secular intolerance and Organized corruption and crime has made church life more complicated than in previous years. The existence of *Organized corruption and crime* has handicapped public institutions to protect Christians.

- **Violence:** The level of violence, especially in the form faith-related killings, was high in the reporting period. Hundreds of Christians were killed at the hands of Islamists. For example, 28 Christians were killed on a bus from Mandera on 22 November 2014. 36 Christian quarry workers were killed in Mandera on 2 December 2014; 147 Christian university students in Garissa were killed on 2 April 2015, and 14 Christian quarry workers were killed in Mandera on 7 July 2015. Most of these were “execution-style” killings and Christians were targeted specifically by separating them from Muslims.

6. Future outlook

In the reporting period, faith-related killings increased sharply. There is 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. The Christian sections of Kenya’s society are frustrated with the way Muslim communities do not clearly condemn the violence against Christians. In the coming year(s), if there is no solution to the blatant violence that has been claiming the lives of Christians, then some Christians might well be tempted to use force to defend themselves. The future outlook can be summarized as follows: 1) It is likely that Islamists will continue targeting Christians in the country. 2) The relationship between Christians and Muslims is likely to further deteriorate. 3) *Tribal antagonism, Secular intolerance and Organized corruption and crime* are likely to become even stronger.

India – Rank 17

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 68 points India ranks 17 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL-2015, India ranked 21 with a score of 62 points. The increase of points is due to an increased level of persecution in every sphere of life, but most of all in the level of violence. By far the biggest persecution stems from Hindu radicals, with Maoists and Muslims adding to the pressure in the background.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in India are *Religious nationalism* and to a lesser extent *Islamic extremism* and *Communist and post-Communist oppression*. Furthermore, Christians are facing corruption daily, but this does not especially target them.

- **Religious nationalism:** The assertiveness of all kinds of Hindu organizations has increased over the years. They claim that India belongs to Hinduism and that other religions should be driven out of the country. Radical Hinduism is by far the main persecutor in India. It is vocal, omnipresent and very violent. To this adds persecution from the various other radical groups such as:
 - Radical Buddhists in Ladakh and Neo Buddhism in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.
 - Radical Sikhs in Punjab.
- **Islamic extremism:** There are several radical Islamic groups that are active in Jammu and Kashmir and Assam and recently Al Qaeda has announced their activities in Assam, Gujarat and other places as well. In the regions where Muslims form the majority of the population (e.g. Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal) Christians are being persecuted by Muslims.
- **Communist and post-communist oppression:** The Maoist movement in India, a.k.a. Naxalites, originated in 1967 but has only recently been classified as a serious problem by the Indian government. The existence of the Naxalites can be seen as a reaction to the static society as it is defined by the caste system. Naxalites control large areas in the poorer states (Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar etc. - a.k.a. the Red Corridor) and they carry out military actions and attacks against government buildings and railways. In these areas several thousands of Christians have been displaced from their villages in last few years. The number of incidents of religious persecution through Maoist activity is still relatively low, but they do launch attacks against Christians when they are suspicious that some Christians could be acting as informers for the police.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** Corruption is omnipresent in India. If you want to get things done, paying bribes is inevitable. It is not specifically targeting Christians.

3. Context

India is a mixture of cultures, ethnicities, and languages. It is densely populated as well: according to the 2016 UN statistics, the country had a population of 1,326,802,000 people – second only to China.

The centuries' old caste system is so deeply entrenched in the Indian psyche that it is almost impossible to get rid of it. Even belief systems that do not acknowledge the caste system but doctrinally teach the equality of human beings are marred by the same system they fight against. Islam, Sikhism and Christianity are examples of this. Although the government has outlawed it, the system continues to haunt the nation of India and the atrocities on the lower castes and untouchables (Dalits and Tribals) continue. Several observers even speak of a “racist” system.

Since May 2014 India is being governed by a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As a result, radical Hinduism, which was already present under the previous government, has increased steadily. While the level of intolerance increased, and minorities were constantly attacked, the central government refused to speak out against the atrocities – thus further encouraging the radical Hindus to step up their actions. The level of impunity has gone up markedly.

In the second half of 2014 the Hindus launched a “home-coming” campaign (a.k.a. Ghar Vapsi), designed to lure Muslims and Christians back to the Hindu fold. Several huge campaigns have been held in which hundreds of people returned to Hinduism.

At the same time, efforts to impose anti-conversion legislation at the national level have been started by BJP parliamentarians. At present, such legislation exists only at provincial level (in 5 states). It is worth noticing that this kind of legislation is targeting the conversion away from Hinduism only – efforts in the other direction are not regarded as conversion but “home-coming”.

4. Types of Christianity affected

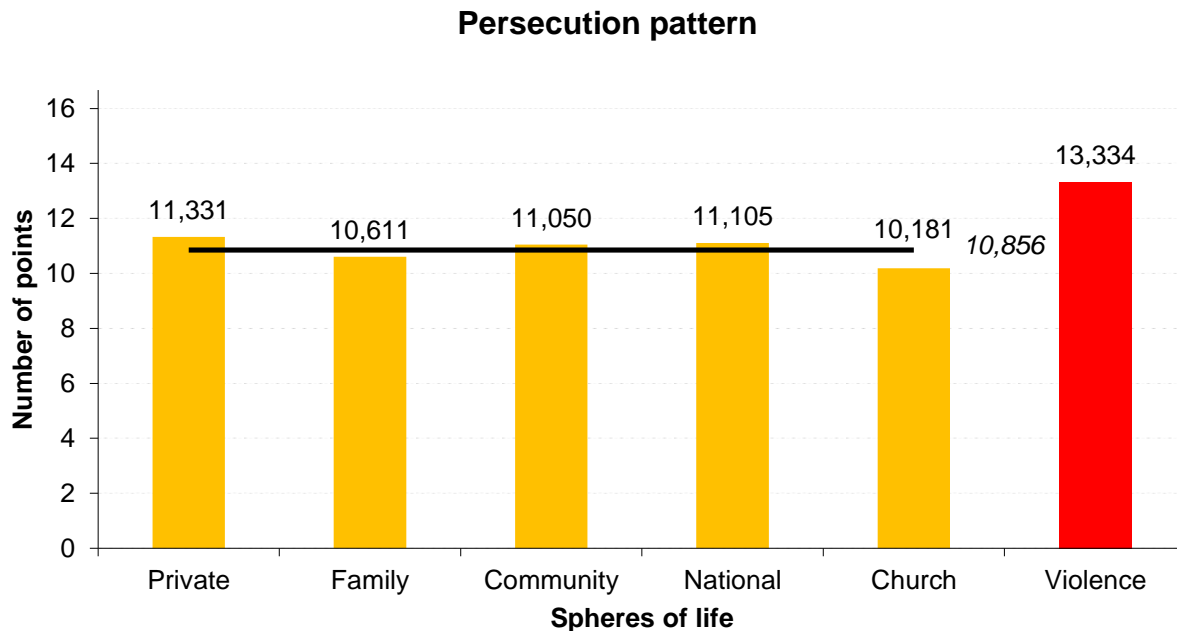
All types of Christianity exist in India and are experiencing some form of persecution:

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians.** There are several of these groups active in India. It is not only westerners living in India who have their own congregations, but also refugees. One example is the Afghan community that has a congregation in New Delhi. Most of the time, these congregations do not draw the ire of the radical Hindus in India. There are two reasons for this: they have a very distinct ethnic membership, and they are not very active in outreach among Indian nationals.
- **Historical Christian communities.** The members of these churches have been Christians in India for many centuries. The first of them came to India in the third century. This is when the Kerala Mar Thoma Church was established. These types of churches are not growing very fast because they are hardly active in outreach - they merely serve their own communities. Still, even this group of Christians is attacked by radical Hindus who vandalize churches, Jesus statues, grottos and crucifixes.

- **Christian converts.** Christian converts from a Hindu Background (HBBs) bear the brunt of the persecution in India. These believers are facing harassment on a daily basis and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism. They are often beaten up, hospitalized, sometimes even killed. They live mostly in the countryside, where they have to face societal pressure from family, friends, community and local Hindu clergy, but also from radical Hindus.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (e.g. consisting of Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals) are regarded as the second main target by radical Hindus because of their involvement in outreach activities and conversion. Apart from the converts themselves, neo-protestant groups face the most daily attacks.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for India presents the scores for *Religious nationalism, Islamic extremism* and *Communist and post-communist oppression*. The average score over the first five blocks (10.856), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (10.129). The score for the violence block is even higher than last year: from 10.926 (WWL 2015) to 13.334. This rise reflects the fact that radical Hindus have stepped up their attacks to an even higher level than in the previous year. As the central government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi abstains from speaking out against these attacks, the level of impunity increases, which makes radical Hindus feel increasingly justified to carry out their attacks. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is evenly distributed over all spheres of life. Christians in India cannot feel safe anywhere.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Conversion is not only socially opposed but also by law. Currently, anti-conversion laws are in force in five states: Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal

Pradesh, and Gujarat. In Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, the laws have been passed but not yet implemented. In Tamil Nadu the law was passed but later repealed. The BJP has made no secret of its desire to bring a nation-wide anti conversion law. What is also remarkable is that in states where there is no anti-conversion law, like Maharashtra, Jharkhand etc., it is deemed to be in force as far as ground reality is concerned. Similarly in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, even though the amendments to make the existing law stronger are not in force, still they are deemed to be in force. Believers active in outreach (neo-protestants and converts) are often monitored. They are often attacked at worship, even without any provocation. Therefore, many worship in home groups only. And if this gets known, they can be raided by non-state actors. When believers are suspected of outreach activities, their homes are often raided by both non-state actors and police if they receive a complaint. Materials found are destroyed or confiscated. Identifying oneself as a Christian can be risky for Dalit Christians and also through social media vicious threats are commonplace. In the countryside, open signs of a different faith than Hinduism (or Islam), will stimulate aggression as it will automatically be linked to evangelism or conversion. There is no government censorship of online Christian material at all. However, in the countryside, HBBs may find it difficult to access Christian media in the presence of others and persecution starts mostly with immediate family members. Due to the propaganda against Christians (i.e. that they seek to convert others using money or force), faith is almost always an uneasy topic. While it would not result in violence in most cases, the possibility is high in areas where the influence of radical Hindus is high. It can result in the severing of ties by extended family members. Private meetings for worship activities are not safe. Throughout the country local intelligence monitors all Christian activity. The police have to be informed of meetings likely of having above average attendance, even though this is not stipulated by law. There has also been evidence that digital surveillance has been carried out for Christian leaders. There have been cases of HBBs who were put under house arrest. Although this happens in rural and semi-urban areas most often, instances of the same have also been reported in metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

- **Family sphere:** Not only babies of HBBs but converts themselves are registered as Hindus during the census. When indicated otherwise, the authorities request baptism certificates, even though this is not stipulated by law. It is quite difficult for converts and neo-Protestants to hold a Christian wedding in their localities if radical Hindu groups are active there, as such a ceremony is seen as assertion of Christian identity, and sometimes even an attempt to convert Hindus. This is particularly the case in areas where only house churches or neo-protestants exist. Baptisms have been repeatedly hindered in villages, small towns and occasionally even in cities, especially at mass religious conventions or evangelistic and healing conventions. There have been cases reported from north and central India of funerals of Christian converts being targeted by radical Hindus. In some cases they force family members to cremate the person according to Hindu rites even though a certificate of baptism is produced. Christians cannot adopt children as per law. Most Christian parents wishing to adopt make use of the Juvenile Justice Act which is more of a loophole than law. Christian children have been subjected to Yoga and *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Worship) at most major schools. Attendance is compulsory. This is true on an all India basis. Persecution by family members is very common, particularly in the form of house arrest for girls.

These incidents are never reported in main stream media. There have been instances in which HBBs have been attacked by their own parents and it has been alleged that some have even been killed by their parents. Under Hindu personal laws, conversion to another religion is one of the valid grounds for divorce. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 states that if a relative converts from Hinduism, he or she is still eligible for inheritance. However, the descendants of that converted relative are disqualified from receiving inheritance from their Hindu relatives, unless they have converted back to Hinduism before the death of the relative.

- **Community sphere:** Threats and obstructions for faith related reasons have increased in intensity through the various hate campaigns and re-conversion movements across the country; this has become part of everyday life for all types of Christians. When converts try to withdraw themselves from standard religious/community practices, this provokes aggression. The Sangh Parivar (a radical Hindu organization) is known to monitor Christians at all levels. Several new Hindu groups are also active in monitoring through their local chapters. In several states of India, Christians from the former untouchable castes suffer from being hindered in sharing community resources like the community well. Christians who are part of a Hindu community cannot escape from certain obligations or standard ritual practices. They face pressure to continue to take part. Pressure to renounce the Christian faith comes from all the sides and is done very systematically; Hindu fundamentalists threaten believers with physical harm and Hindu priests try to indoctrinate Christians by broadcasting loud chanting and worship in the community. The government also curtails benefits to the believers. This has become very common and extreme in both rural and urban areas. Over the last year a rigorous re-conversion movement was launched and hundreds of poor Christians across the country are being forcefully converted to Hinduism. Social discrimination (sometimes organized) is very common against Christian employees both in the government and at the private sectors, e.g. promotions are denied for frivolous reasons. Christians are discriminated against not by law but in practice concerning loans subsidies and government schemes. In rural areas being a Christian can deprive one of all benefits that a government scheme brings. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh name tags indicating one is a Christian (with the suffix Isai) are given to Christians ensuring that they do not get benefits. The corruption in the system makes it worse. Christians are fined by the village council (*panchayat*) and failure to produce the fine have even resulted in rapes in the past. This takes place mainly in rural settings and many cases are not reported. Pastors and missionaries visiting churches have been routinely questioned by the police (together with hosts and participants). This is especially common in villages and areas inhabited by tribal and indigenous peoples groups.
- **National sphere:** Anti-conversion laws exist and are in force in five states: Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat. In Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, the laws have been passed but not yet implemented. In Tamil Nadu the law was passed but later repealed. These laws regulate and limit religious freedom. A debate is in progress about implementing anti-conversion legislation at national level as well. Obstruction or hindrance to register conversion to the Christian faith happens mainly in tribal areas, for instance in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Arunachal Pradesh. The authorities in certain

areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh have prohibited the entry of Christian preachers - which is against the constitution of India - but is happening anyway. Christians are often discriminated against when dealing with the authorities and this is true for almost all India. Subtle discrimination also occurs in dealing with the police, lower judiciary and government departments in general. There are some Christians in public office, so this is one case where Christians are not barred for their faith. But where these Christians have a boss who is a Hindu nationalist, they may miss promotions. It is far worse for people converting to Christianity when they work for the authorities - they may well lose their jobs. As long as Christians do not use the opportunity to express their views in public to proclaim the Gospel, they can express themselves pretty openly. After the BJP government took office in May 2014, all Christian groups and organizations received notices requesting details of their activities, including the names of all employees as well as those who have worked with them in the past. Some minority schools have also been asked to give the names of all Christian students. The media is dominated by over 90% Hindu high caste people and has always been biased against Christians. This is particularly true of the local media that use local languages which not only publish hate literature against Christians but are also active in inciting hatred through factual misrepresentation and sensational reportage. Christians are not the only target of hate campaigns and hate crimes, Muslims also face it. What makes it worse is the impunity with which it is carried out and the utter disregard for law. Acts of vandalism, desecration and the destruction of Christian symbols happen quite often, mainly in rural and semi-urban areas. Churches and crosses have been desecrated in Haryana, Delhi, Central India and Karnataka. For Hindu political-religious groups, targeting independent pastors and church activists under the infamous "blasphemy" laws is the norm. The Indian and Pakistani Blasphemy laws share a common descent from the Indian Penal Code devised by the British colonial government in the 19th Century. The police also register cases and imprison pastors, but only a few have ever been sentenced to terms in prison. This is used mainly as a coercive measure. Almost no one has been punished for crimes against the Christian community – impunity seems to have become the norm. The paralysis of the criminal justice and police system is a matter of deep concern.

- **Church sphere:** Christians have been hindered regularly, be it church gatherings for worship, private home worship or conventions. No registration is needed for a church. However Christian societies and trusts under which churches operate are harder to register. This is because of the infiltration of registration offices by people sympathetic to the agenda of the radical Hindus. Hindu groups monitor and disrupt Churches nearly every day and there have been numerous incidents of attacks on churches. The construction of new churches is often met with strong opposition in rural and even urban areas, and the reactions are often violent. Another issue is that many older church buildings cannot be renovated because of corruption and red-tape. Activities outside church premises are immediately understood to be efforts aiming at outreach and conversion. It may be allowed by the authorities, but it is often not accepted by communities and radical Hindus. Integrating HBBs is seen as a confirmation that the church has been active in reaching out. Radical Hindus and local authorities often keep track of Christian materials to watch if any are specifically aimed at outreach and conversion. Seminaries and Bible schools have been attacked in the past but not to control what was being taught. When

Christians are attacked, the perpetrators often focus on the leaders and pastors and beat them severely to make an example of them. The distribution of tracts and Bibles is hindered in rural areas, and sometimes even in cities, as this is directly connected to outreach and conversion. Very often when a church or a private prayer meeting is attacked by Hindu fundamentalists, the police follow and arrest the Christians (not the attackers) and Bibles and other Christian material are confiscated as “proof of conversion”. In many instances cable TV operators have been pressured by Hindu groups to remove Christian content even as Hindu content and channels multiply. India has not issued missionary visas since the late 1960s. Not only foreign Christian missionaries are not allowed in the country, but there are also increasing difficulties for foreign NGO workers and journalists to obtain visas. Human Right defenders and not just Christian leaders face risks for speaking out for minority rights. Leading Christian activist John Dayal has faced multiple death threats and lost his job as a result of his advocacy.

- **Violence:** Persecution in India is extremely violent – and the violence is increasing. The number of reported incidents is incredibly high, but it should be noted that this is just the tip of the iceberg – many incidents will not be reported in the media or be recorded by our researchers. In the reporting period, at least 9 Christians were killed for their faith and at least 23 (house) churches were attacked and damaged. More than 400 Christians were detained in India. At least 3 Christians were abducted and at the very least 3 Christian women were raped. More than 350 Christians were physically attacked. At least 25 houses or properties of Christians were attacked and damaged. At least 3 Christians were forced to flee their homes. In all cases the actual numbers will be much higher.

6. Future outlook

Radical Hindu attackers are increasingly enjoying impunity when they harass Muslims or Christians. As a result, the level of fear and uncertainty among the majority of Christians in India is increasing. We expect this dangerous trend (i.e. the government looking away when religious minorities are attacked) will incite an increase in violence in the coming years.

Ethiopia – Rank 18

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015.

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 67 points, Ethiopia ranks 18 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. On WWL 2015, Ethiopia ranked 22 with a score of 61 points. The increase in score is due to an increase in the pressure on Christians in all spheres of life.

2. Persecution engines

Five persecution engines affect Christians in Ethiopia: *Islamic extremism and Denominational protectionism (main engines)*, and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism, Dictatorial paranoia and Secular intolerance*. These five persecution engines create a complex mixture of persecution dynamics in the country.

- **Islamic extremism:** The population is made up of around 63 per cent Christians and 34 per cent Muslims. The latter group is dominant in regions like Afar and Somali and some parts of Oromia. With a growing radical (or political) Islam on the local, regional and national levels in the background, members of the various types of Christianity have become increasingly vulnerable to pressure in almost all the spheres of life. This is particularly true in eastern and south-central parts of the country where Muslims constitute the majority. Muslims harass Christians, and often deny them access to communal resources. Furthermore, Christians are victims of violence. It is also important to note that the situation in Somalia and Sudan - two countries where radical Islam is growing by the day - also affects Ethiopia.
- **Denominational protectionism:** This is the second main persecution engine. For many years, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (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 often attack reformation groups within the EOC. 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 exempts the Orthodox Church from registration.
- **Tribal antagonism:** Since 1991, identity politics- a political discourse that has made culture, language, history of the tribes it center- has dominated all areas of public life in the country. This has led to the search for “root and identity” whereby some individuals and groups have become hostile to Christianity. Until 1974, the EOC represented the state religion. The country was then under a communist rule from 1974 to 1991, when it was overthrown (after a 17 years’ struggle) by 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. What was initially seen as a politically correct and right

move by the current regime has created a resentment towards Christianity among some ethnic groups. For example, many Oromos are increasingly interested in following the traditional belief system *Wakefeta*. *Wakefeta* is both a form of culture and religion. Other tribes also demand that Christians participate in tribal clashes and they retaliate if Christians fail to do so. In some regions like Somali and Afar, religion and tribe are so intertwined that leaving Islam is seen as leaving the tribe.

- ***Dictatorial paranoia:*** This engine is ever growing. Even though high-ranking government officials, including the speaker of the House of Peoples Representatives (HPR) and the prime minister are considered to be protestants, the Ethiopian government is suspicious about religion in general and Christians in particular. Firstly, the government believes that religion organizes and assembles people in more efficient and effective ways than any demagogues could. It is frightened that if religious leaders were to organize action against the government, they could easily bring about a regime change. Secondly, the government believes that protestants, especially the non-traditional ones, could be foreign agents seeking to bring about a regime change. 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 religious institutions can engage in. The country ranks 142nd out of 180 countries on World Press Index 2015 and the Freedom House 2015 report also rated the country “not free”. In short, the persecution of Christians by the government is intrinsically related to power.
- ***Secular Intolerance:*** As stated above, Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) used to be the state religion in Ethiopia up until 1974. In 1974, the military junta that subscribed to communist ideology came to power and pushed religion out of the public life. In 1991, the military junta was ousted by rebel forces after a seventeen years’ of civil war. The rebel forces formed a transitional government. And in 1995 a new constitution was adopted. The constitution clearly states under article 11: “State and religion are separate; there shall be no state religion; and the state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs.” However, there have been some problems. Constitutional lawyers believe that “There is a tension in how secularism is being implemented in Ethiopia to the extent that justifies asserting that the principle of secularism is undermining freedom of religion. The ban on the establishment of broadcasting services for religious purposes as well as the ban on religious activities within educational institutions restrict the freedom to worship, the freedom to teach and preach one’s religion.”

3. Context

Ethiopia is a country where different persecution engines exert pressure on Christians in all spheres of life. It is a country where the persecutors do not speak loudly, and Christians suffer in silence. The following points help understand the persecution dynamics in Ethiopia.

To begin with, Ethiopia has a long history with Christianity and Islam. Over time, both religions have been engaged in attempts to expand their sphere of influence, and in a way 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 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. Despite this, Ethiopia remains one of the main destinations for international aid.

The fourth point is 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 rotestants/evangelicals, using expressions like “newcomers”, the “false prophet”, “*Menafikan*” (deniers of Virgin Mary and the saints) and other words to portray protestants/evangelicals as non-believers or false believers. It is believed that the protestant community is growing at an annual rate of 6.7 percent in the country. Putting this into perspective: according to the 1994 census, Christians in the country had constituted about 61.6 percent of the total population and Muslims 32.8, animist 4.6, catholic 0.9. Back then, the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians made up half of the Ethiopian population and the protestants only 10 percent. This was found to have changed in the 2007 census which listed Orthodox churchgoers as being 43.5 percent of the population, protestant 18.6 percent and Muslims 33.9 percent. 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.

4. Types of Christianity affected

In Ethiopia, three types of Christianity are present.

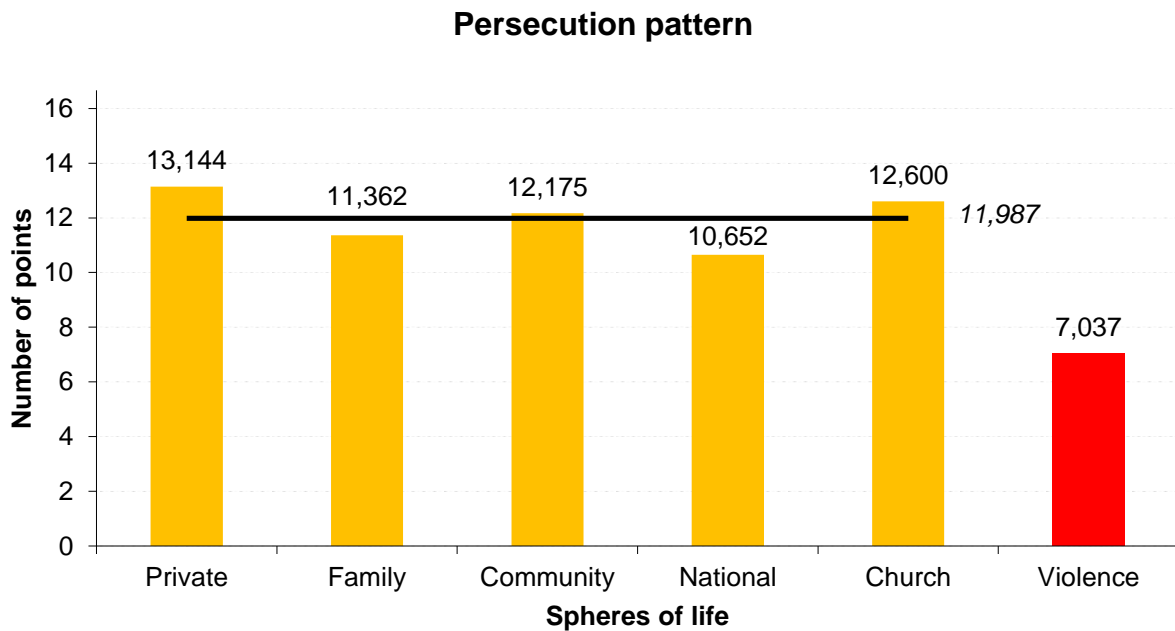
- **Historical Christian communities:** The EOC is a typical example of this type of Christianity. The EOC has a massive presence in the country and is one of the factors explaining the complexity of the persecution dynamics in Ethiopia: as well as being persecuted itself, the EOC also plays a pivotal 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.
- **Christian converts:** This includes the Muslim background believers (MBBs), as well as converts from other Christian denominations, especially Orthodox. It also includes converts from traditional beliefs. Converts in the country face persecution via different persecution engines. In Muslim dominated areas, MBBs face persecution mainly from Muslims driven by family, extended family, community leaders, and non-Christian religious leaders. In areas dominated by EOC, the engine behind the persecution is mainly the EOC followers. Converts also face persecution from the government in all parts of the country. In areas with a prevalence of *Tribal*

antagonism converts may face persecution from adherents of traditional belief systems and Muslims seeking to force their participation in various activities.

- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (such as evangelical and pentecostal communities): This is another type of Christianity with a huge presence in the country. It is also a type of Christianity that attracts serious persecution mainly from the government, EOC and Islam. It is also growing very fast compared to other types of Christianity.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern***: The *persecution pattern* for Ethiopia presents the scores for *Islamic extremism, Denominational protectionism, Tribal antagonism* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. The average score over the first five blocks (11.987), showing the pressure on Christians, is significantly higher than last year (10.539). The highest increase is in the *national* and *community spheres*, followed by the *church, private* and *family spheres*. The score for the violence block is lower but still rather high: from 8.704 (WWL 2015) to 7.037. This suggests that the combined effect of the four persecution engines has led to gradually increased persecution pressure. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution pressure is strongest in the *private sphere*. The scores in the *community* and *church spheres* are above average too.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere**: This is the area of life where Christians suffer the most. Converts commonly experience opposition. A field researcher noted: “When it comes to MBBs, the situation is even worse. A smooth integration of converts is something uncommon in Ethiopia. Parents, members of the family, relatives or even villagers would at least show some form of opposition to the decision of converting to Christianity.” It was also reported that owning Christian materials, accessing Christian media, and meeting other Christians 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 would persecute the individual.

- **Family sphere:** Persecution is also common in the family sphere of life. Place of 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.
- **Community sphere:** In EOC majority areas, protestants and those who have left the EOC face serious challenges from their own family, community members as well as EOC leaders. In the case of MBBs, mosque leaders, madrassa teachers and those who assume leadership responsibilities in their community always make life difficult for the Christians. In some places such Christians would not be allowed to share community resources. In other places, Christians will be intentionally overlooked or discriminated against in employment.
- **National sphere:** At the national level, the government is clearly obsessed with trying 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. Other persecution engines also use their influence in the government to affect Christians. For example, in some regions the schools system and court system are designed in a way that affects Christians negatively.
- **Church sphere:** One of the problems affecting the Church is registration. The government does not require or enforce registration for the EOC (or the Muslim community); however, other Christians are required to register to operate legally. It is also reported that some EOC affiliated officials monitor non-EOC Christians. 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 MBBs would hide their faith for fear of attack.
- **Violence:** Looking at the persecution pattern above it can be seen that the violence score has decreased slightly compared to last year. But there were nevertheless many violent incidents. According to a report by one field researcher, there were 135 incidents in the reporting period. Of these, according to field researchers, the persecution engines *Islamic extremism* and *Denominational protectionism* take the lion's share (*Islamic extremism* was responsible for around 50% of the incidents and *Denominational protectionism* for about 25% of the incidents). Three Christians were killed. Various churches were damaged and there were violent attacks on the property of Christians too. Through this some Christians were forced to leave their homes and/or go into hiding.

6. Future outlook

The future of the persecuted Church in Ethiopia will be shaped by the following: first of all, the structural nepotism 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 of using one group against another to balance the political power in the country 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 different denominations of Christians is also weakening the joint response of Christians against persecution. In this regard, the EOC has been ruthlessly accusing and persecuting the protestants.

Last but not least, are the regional dynamics. Ethiopia is in 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, Ethiopia has the large 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 “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 the core of al-Shabaab 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 persecution of Christians in general (and in particular of protestants) will continue especially through radical Muslims and EOC fundamentalists. *Islamic extremism* will continue to increase posing a further threat to the state and Christians.

Turkmenistan – Rank 19

Revised 22.12.2015 / Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 66 points Turkmenistan ranks 19 on the World Watch List 2016. In WWL 2015, Turkmenistan ranked 20 with a score of 63 points. The slight increase in score is due to an increased level of paranoid control by the regime – especially in the *national* and *church spheres of life*. Fewer reports of violence have been reported compared to last year.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Turkmenistan are *Dictatorial paranoia* and to a lesser extent *Islamic extremism*. Please note that Dictatorial paranoia in Turkmenistan is a product of the communist past and has therefore emerged from *Communist and post-Communist oppression*, though the ideology of communism has been dead and buried in Turkmenistan for many years.

- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Both mainstream Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses are frequently branded as "extremists" for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. It is very common that members of any protestant church 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. Security forces have increased wire-tapping in order to find "extremists". This has also affected believers and churches. Another strand of crackdown involves religious education, no matter what religion is concerned.
- ***Communist and post-Communist oppression***: This is the historical fundament on which the current regime is established. Communism has no ideological contribution to support the regime's position anymore. However, many control systems and mechanisms derived from the communist system are still in place in the country.
- ***Islamic extremism***: Pressure on Christians coming from Islamic circles is particularly aimed at Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). 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. A phenomenon unique for Turkmenistan is that the local Council for Religious Affairs is headed by the local imam which puts pressure on all Christians, but on converts most of all.

3. Context

Turkmenistan is a quickly developing country, mostly due to enormous findings of oil and gas. However, this is a two-sided coin. On the one hand, it allows huge investments of money which is highlighted in reports that the capital Ashgabat is planned to become a “marble city”. The flipside of this opportunity is that the country gets more and more dependent on the export of oil and gas and – given the high level of secrecy and corruption – and that it will only benefit a small group of people.

People belonging to the Turkmen nation are living in many countries, ranging from Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Northern Pakistan, Syria, and Iraq to the North Caucasus (Stavropol Krai). There are contacts between these groups. Apart from that, militants from Turkmenistan have become involved in the struggle of Islamic jihadists in the Middle East (Islamic State) and the Indian subcontinent (al Qaeda). The regime in Ashgabat fears the impact of the jihadists who return to Turkmenistan and therefore closely monitors all religion.

The country is considered to be one of the most restrictive places in the world. There is no freedom of information or press. It is made extremely difficult for foreigners to access the country. A new personality cult has been started around president Berdymukhammedov. Additionally, there is a high level of monitoring of each and every group in society (including Christians) as well as highly restricted access to foreign media and resources. Consequently, it is also difficult to get information out of the country.

4. Types of Christianity affected

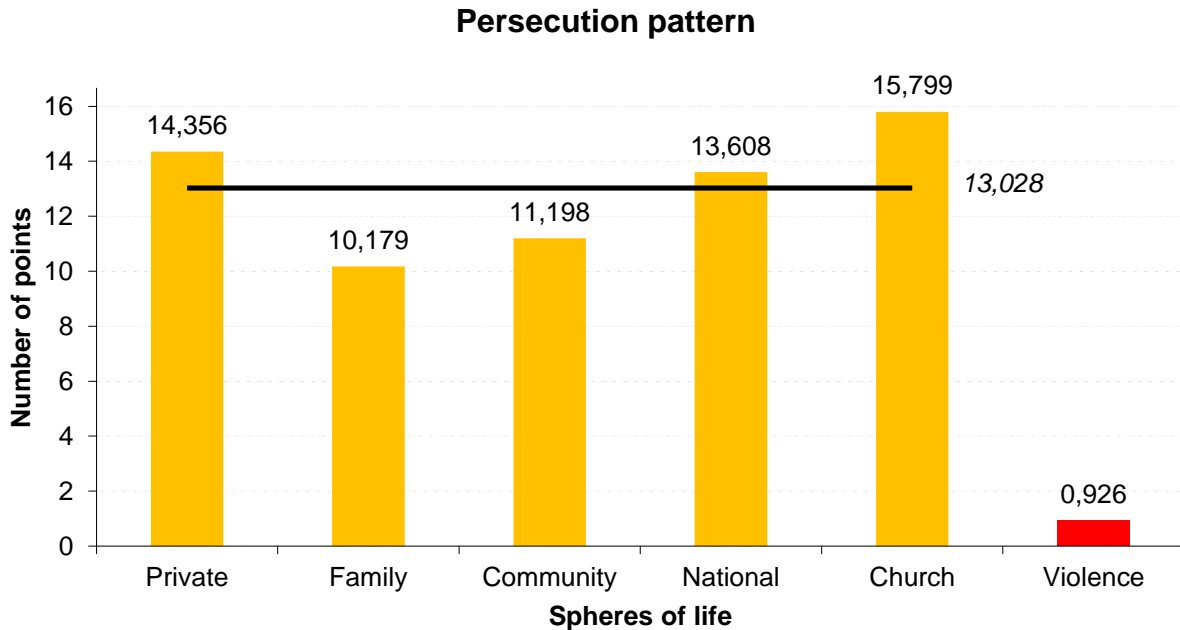
As a result of the huge difficulties imposed by the government on foreign presence in Turkmenistan there are no communities of expatriate or migrant Christians in Turkmenistan. All other types of Christianity exist and are experiencing persecution.

- **Historical Christian communities.** The Russian Orthodox Church has accustomed itself to the limitations provided by the government and is therefore left more or less undisturbed. Sunday services may be monitored, but they are conducted unhindered and members can meet. Printing or importing Christian materials and the immigration of foreign workers are all restricted.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) bear the brunt of persecution in Turkmenistan. Apart from the state, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. And for them the latter is far the more powerful because it dominates their everyday life.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** belonging to Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are the next most persecuted group - especially those which have not been registered. These Christians suffer from raids, threats, arrests, and fines.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Turkmenistan presents the scores for *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks

(13.028), showing the pressure on Christians, is a bit higher than last year (12.599). The score for the violence block (0.926) is also higher than last year (0.185). There have been a few more reports of raids, and pressure on Christians by the regime increased slightly. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private, national, and church spheres*. This is typical for a situation in which *Dictatorial paranoia* is the leading persecution engine. Pressure from *Islamic extremism* is present mostly in the *private, family and community spheres* and is exerted by the social environment, while *Dictatorial paranoia* – the pressure from the regime – is felt mostly in the *private, national and church spheres*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Conversion is the issue that triggers the fiercest reaction from the social and cultural environment. It is regarded as an affront to the honor of the family. As it creates social unrest, it is also high on the radar of the state and its agents. As a result, not only converts are under pressure at this point, but also those Christians active in evangelism. Neighbors will go to the police if they see that you worship at home. The government pays for the information about Christian worship in homes. All Christians realize that the possession of Christian materials is punishable (because permission is needed and this is almost never granted). For converts there is the additional risk of discovery by their relatives. Christians constantly face scrutiny, repression, and threats for their religious beliefs. Displaying Christian symbols is very risky for MBBs as these are considered assigns of betrayal, and there have been reports of Christians being forced to recant their faith in public. All state media are under state control - these are inaccessible for Christians. Internet access goes via state Internet service providers (ISP) and is also under surveillance. Some sites are blocked and, on top of this, Internet access in the countryside is difficult. The state has also banned the use of satellite dishes. It is very risky for a convert to talk about his new faith with members of the family. This will immediately be linked to shame and honor, and the family will then do its utmost to have the convert return to the old

faith. It is very risky for Christians to speak about their faith to non-Christian guests.. There are also reports suggesting constant monitoring by the country's secret service against Protestants and other Christian groups (also Jehovah's Witnesses). The level of surveillance on religion in Turkmenistan is huge, and even private meetings between Christians are monitored.

- **Family sphere:** Religious activities (including Christian celebrations such as weddings) are under strict scrutiny. Only registered organizations can conduct such activities and even registered groups prefer to give the authorities advance notice of their activities in order to avoid harassment by the secret police and others. The groups that don't have official registration are not allowed to participate in religious activities such as baptisms. The only Christian group that does not face such tight restrictions is the Russian Orthodox Church. Burying converts has already led to problems in Turkmenistan. In Turkmenabad and Mary local mullahs declared that no MBBs could be buried at the cemetery. There is no official religious education in public and private schools and religious education is prohibited by the government. Schools are known to arrange anti-Christian lessons together with imams and all students must attend Islamic holiday celebrations. Children of Christians are usually isolated from joining in with other non-Christian children. They are often humiliated and slandered at schools in front of all other children. MBBs can be kept under house arrest by family members. When one member converts, family, friends and community will put pressure on the other half to divorce. MBBs in particular risk losing their inheritance in the country.
- **Community sphere:** Christians are reported to have been victims of threats, harassment, sexual attacks, imprisonment, secret police raids, and arbitrary detainment. Turkmenistan has one of the most closed regimes in the former Soviet Union region and one that relies on repressive control is complemented by oppressive laws. The country's Christians are constantly under surveillance by different state organizations including secret police. Female converts in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim. MBBs come under strong pressure to attend non-Christian religious community events. There were also cases of Christians who were forced to recant in mosques. Christians are not allowed to participate in communal institutions, forums, events. Even events organized by Christian religious groups are closely monitored by the state, to the point where some groups opt to report all activities and gatherings to the authorities in advance in order to avoid unnecessary harassment and scrutiny. In the reporting period, many Christian homes were the targets of raids where Christians were fined for holding religious meetings even when that was not the case. MBBs experience pressure from practically everyone to return to Islam. Non-Orthodox Christians are denied educational opportunities. Believers will be ridiculed and sometimes excluded from higher education. Active Christians run a high risk of being fired from their job. If they own a business, Christians will not make their faith public, as this could have negative impact on their company. Non-Russian Orthodox Christians are regularly handed heavy fines. When meetings are raided in Turkmenistan - and this happens even to registered groups - all those present will be interrogated, many will be detained, many will be fined, and all materials found will be confiscated. If it becomes known that a person has converted to Christianity a lot of pressure will

be exerted on him/her. The new believer will have to face beatings, house arrest, and occasionally ostracism.

- **National sphere:** A new personality cult is being created around president Berdymukhammedov. Although freedom of religion is protected by the constitution, this is not really the case in practice. Turkmenistan is among the biggest violators of religious freedom in the world and was designated as a “country of particular concern” (CPC) by the U.S. State Department. The country's laws violate international human rights norms and Christians in the country reported cases of imprisonment, detention, threats and verbal insults, beatings, confiscation and sexual assault. Turkmenistan has compulsory military service and Turkmen law does not allow for conscientious objectors. Those who refuse to serve in the military can serve up to two years in jail. Turkmenistan's imprisonment of conscientious objectors has been a major issue and has drawn criticism from the international community. The state is monitoring active pastors. They will be stopped at checkpoints. In the past known believers have been stopped at the airport when they were trying to go abroad. The Turkmen authorities will always discriminate against Christians. It is impossible for Christians to get state employment. Christians are actively hindered in expressing their views and opinions in public. Turkmenistan is the most closed country in the former Soviet Union region and all activities by religious groups are under strict scrutiny. Many groups and individuals have been prosecuted for religious activities. According to government figures, there are 13 Russian Orthodox organizations and 11 organizations that represent various religious groups including Roman Catholics, Bahais, Hare Krishnas and Protestants. However, many Christian groups cannot get registered due to the arduous nature of the registration process, and even registered ones are under constant pressure and their members face risk of prosecution on a day to day basis. The media are state-controlled and call Christian churches “sects” and constantly distort the facts. The information that Christians steal and sacrifice children is still being spread around the nation. There have been a series of openly anti-Christian meetings with the direct involvement of imams in which threats were made to believers of Turkmen origin professing Christianity. Only registered churches are allowed to display Christian symbols, but due to the high pressure, most will use them only inside the church. State agents and community members can attack Christians with impunity. Christians suffer from biased treatment against them in court. The repressive regime in Turkmenistan doesn't allow international monitoring of any court cases, let alone those of accused Christians.
- **Church sphere:** The country's laws only allow religious activities in registered places of worship. The 2003 religion law forbids worship in private homes and bans religious activities by unregistered organizations. Such penalties can include detention and imprisonment. It is extremely difficult to obtain registration which is necessary to function as a church. Hardly any are issued and some congregations have been attempting to register for more than a decade. The state closely monitors all religious activity. It is almost impossible to get permission to build new churches, and the maintenance of existing buildings is made very difficult. Church services have been raided and disrupted in the past and this continues to happen. It is impossible to organize Christian activities outside church premises. Youth-work is prohibited; youth camps have also been raided. There are strong restrictions on Christian religious teaching. Religious

education of any kind is not permitted in state schools and there are discriminatory restrictions targeting non-Orthodox Christians. The publication of Christian religious materials in Turkmenistan is strictly forbidden by law. Importing such materials is only allowed for some registered groups under strict scrutiny by the government. Openly selling Christian materials is forbidden. Materials are routinely confiscated during raids on churches and houses of Christians. There are no Christian seminaries in the country or training centers. Church leaders and pastors are always seen as the main agents of outreach activities and conversions and will therefore be especially targeted. The state does not allow Christian organizations, institutions, or schools etc. to exist, nor do they allow Christian charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural associations. Foreign Christian workers can only be active in Turkmenistan if a registered church gets the approval from the authorities for such an invitation, but in practice this is next to impossible. Since the authorities are the biggest persecutor in the country, it is extremely dangerous (and useless) to speak out against them. It will only add to the punishment.

- **Violence:** Persecution in Turkmenistan appears on the surface not to be very violent, but this is mainly due to the fact that believers are afraid to report about incidents for fear of repercussions. At least 10 Christians were detained, while Christian prisoner Umid Gajayev was released in February 2015. At least 1 car of a Christian was confiscated.

6. Future outlook

After Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan is the most repressive Central Asian state for religious minorities. Given the increased nationalism and the “spiritual guidance” the new president is supposed to give the country, the situation for Christians most likely will remain unchanged.

Vietnam – Rank 20

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 66 points, Vietnam ranks 20 on the World Watch List 2016. In WWL 2015, Vietnam ranked 16 with a score of 68 points. The decrease does not reflect an improvement in the persecution situation, which is also shown by the fact that the violence level increased.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Vietnam are *Communist and post-communist oppression* and *Tribal antagonism*.

- **Communist and post-communist oppression:** Vietnam or – as the official name reads – the “Socialist Republic of Vietnam” is one of the five remaining countries in the world which is still ruled by a communist party. How communist the country still is can be discussed in some length, suffice it to say that in terms of administration and control it still functions pretty much in the communist way and is hence not a real democracy. Members of the National Assembly are elected by the people, but the real power remains with the party and its Central Committee. Vietnam monitors and exercises a high level of pressure on all Christians and even takes the risk of international blame as was shown when, despite an official invitation, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief was hindered from traveling to certain regions and to meet with members of religious minorities during his visit in July 2014. The Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian community in the country, but government authorities have a shaky relationship with the Catholic Church as the latter is tied to a foreign power and is often seen as colonial. Stereotypes such as “Catholics are French and Protestants are American” are still heard, especially in rural areas. The government is especially suspicious of the ethnic minorities living in the central and northern hill region, known under the term “Montagnards”. Many of them are protestant Christians and according to reports, the growth of protestantism during the first decade of the millennium has been a stunning 600 percent, so that it is no wonder why authorities became nervous.
- **Tribal antagonism:** Though it is difficult to know for sure, there are estimates that up to two thirds of all Christians come from a tribal background. Around eighty percent of all protestants have a tribal background as well, among them are many Hmong people. The pressure on converts to return to their traditional faith and to participate in rites like animal slaughter is high, especially from family and community.

3. Context

Vietnam continues to follow its *doi moi* policy (literal translation: renovation), introduced in 1986, and aimed at reforming and improving the economic sector. It delivered good results in doubling

the GDP within the last decade as well as in poverty reduction and in increasing employment. But this policy comes at a price. Many of the communist leaders, be it in politics or the military have become rich which has led the country's ideology into a crisis. Communism, especially in the cities, is more a matter of rhetoric than real life, and young people increasingly start to ask questions. Hanoi (the capital) as well as the northern part of the country is also facing a growing drug problem as youths are trying to fill a void. One additional challenge in this respect is the growing tension with Vietnam's big neighbor China. Though it is communist as well and the majority people (Kinh) are basically ethnic Chinese (Viet Nam means literally "Land in the South", seen from China based in the north), relations have become increasingly tense recently. The major stumbling block is China's actions in the South Chinese Sea. This sea is basically claimed by China exclusively, neglecting all claims other states may have, some of which are backed by international law. China not only attacked Vietnamese vessels in waters it claims for itself, it also started to build structures on reefs and rocks to support its claim. This led to violent reactions against Chinese companies in Vietnam and reportedly Vietnam even considered following the Philippines' approach in bringing this struggle to International Tribunals. For the time being, the country decided to refrain from this approach, but it did seek US American support. So the conflict with China led to a narrowing of the gap between the two former archenemies.

Though it has declined to a certain extent in recent years, the ethnic conflicts between majority Kinh and minority (and predominantly Christian) Montagnards still pose a challenge for the country. This was recently highlighted again when dozens of Montagnards fled across the border into Cambodia, creating international attention involving the United Nations as well. Cambodia started to send them back and claimed that all these refugees were purely motivated by economic reasons, though they were quoted as saying "It is better to die in the jungle in Cambodia, than to suffer persecution in Vietnam".

4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in Bangladesh exist and are experiencing persecution:

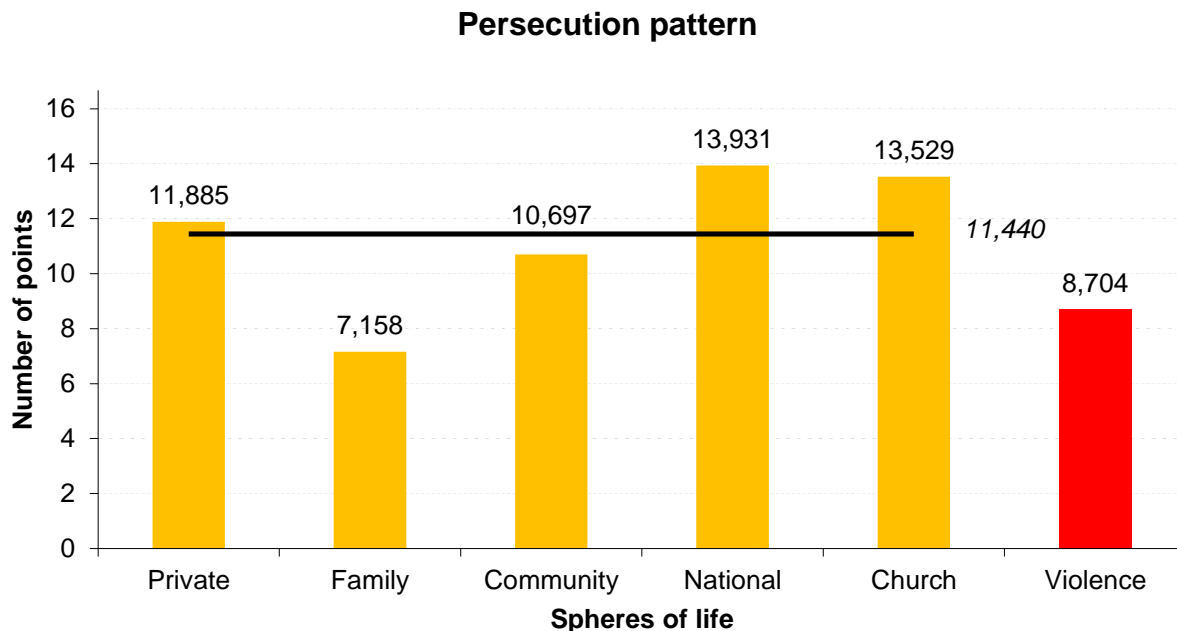
- **Expatriate and migrant Christians** are being monitored.
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as the Roman Catholic Church, face hostilities and efforts to take away church premises, schools or hospitals belonging to them. Catholic activists (e.g. bloggers) continue to be arrested and sentenced. On the other hand, reports of improving ties with the Catholic leadership emerge.
- **Christian converts** from a Buddhist Background or from tribal religions suffer much more.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** such as communities of Evangelicals and Pentecostals are seen as Western agents.

As the Christian minority is growing strongly, the government tries to keep pace in monitoring churches and meetings and in curbing its growing influence. The government has, however, invited carefully chosen representatives of religions, including Christians, to provide input for drafting the new law on religion which is scheduled to be adopted in 2016. Despite several rounds of

participation, there is still a lack of improvement. According to the religion law as it currently stands, churches and other religious entities are forced to submit their annual program for the coming year by October. This provision includes not only dates, but also places, names of leaders and expected attendance, effectively serving as a sword of Damocles over all religious groups. Another issue where no improvement can be seen is the question of registration.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Vietnam presents the scores for *Communist and post-communist oppression* and *Tribal antagonism*. The average score over the first five blocks (11.440), showing the pressure on Christians, is lower than last year (11.954). The score for the violence block is higher: 7.963 (WWL 2015) to 8.704. This suggests a seeming decrease of persecution pressure is counteracted by increase in violence that might push up the pressure again. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *national* and *church spheres*. These are the *spheres of life* which typically score high in communist and post-communist countries, reflecting the level of monitoring and control. An echo of this can be found in the high scores of the *private sphere*, reflecting the effectiveness of government’s pressure and in the case of Vietnam, added by the woes of converts. Discrimination in school, business and community is normal for Christians as well.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** As mentioned above, converts to Christianity face strong pressure in the *private sphere*, mostly from family, friends and neighbors. Christians living in strong communist families suffer from restrictions in their private lives as well. Several reports indicated that this pressure can even end up in house arrest carried out by the family or sometimes the local authorities. All Christians are fully aware that monitoring, especially of leaders, is ubiquitous and therefore

know to act carefully. It is technically illegal to share about one's faith outside of church premises. It is done nonetheless but Christians are always careful about whom to talk to and in which ways.

- **Family sphere:** Once converts are discovered, they can face the threat of divorce, may lose their right to claim custody of children, and organizing a baptism or a funeral can become difficult or even impossible. Children of Christians, not just of converts, are forced to learn non-Christian teachings and mocked by other children. Converts can be isolated from their families and even evicted.
- **Community sphere:** Converts face strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors to recant their Christian faith. Monitoring by the community is strong and social services including health care are often denied to Christians, especially in villages. Christian children face getting lower grades due to their faith, even if they excel in their classes. Scholarships provided by the state in order to improve education among ethnic minorities are often not given to children of Christians by the local authorities. Christians are discriminated in their private lives as well as in their business lives. There were reports that Christians were not accepted for loans due to their faith and there were cases where the government pressed employers to sack Christian workers.
- **National sphere:** Vietnam follows its communist ideology and reveres the state founder Ho Chi Minh, or "Uncle Ho" as he is fondly referred to. All other beliefs are fought against. Religion is curbed at the moment by the law on religion, known as Decree 92. Though this law will be amended in 2016, improvements are not expected. The national ID cards as well as the family books include a section on religious affiliation. Converts find it hard to have their affiliation changed and those who have tried, have frequently ended up with the entry "non-religious". Media reporting on Christians is biased and slander against them is frequent. For example, pastors are seen as working for foreigners, which explains why they live so comfortably. Perpetrators against Christians are almost never brought to trial, and Christians who have had to go to court have not received a fair trial. An example of this is the continuing stream of Catholic bloggers being sentenced to prison.
- **Church sphere:** Churches are closely monitored and occasionally meetings are hindered or disturbed. The publication and distribution of Christian materials is difficult and highly restricted, in this reporting period even materials officially approved by the government have been confiscated. Especially the Catholic Church faces problems in keeping possession of property. The Catholic Church owns a variety of large plots of land (churches, schools and hospitals), especially in the larger cities, and there has been more than one clash, when authorities have tried to take this property away, allegedly for development purposes. Permission for setting up training courses is also very difficult to obtain. Work among children and youth is not officially restricted, but monitored and youth camps and training events are sometimes disturbed by the police. In addition, every October registered churches have to submit in advance the topic of their sermons for the complete coming year. The government announced it will publish a revised version of its notorious Law No. 92, the law on religion next year and has invited selected

Christians to participate in the drafting process. But since the government's overarching goal remains one of control, it is not expected that things will change substantially, when it comes to registration or the construction of religious buildings, for example.

- **Violence:** Persecution in Vietnam remains violent. In November 2014, a Mennonite Church in Binh Dhuong province was bulldozed and several small house churches and dwellings of Christians in Kon Tum province have been destroyed as well. Sometimes, Christians suffer physical harm as well, for example some Christian workers were badly beaten by masked men, most likely hired by local authorities, when they were on their way home from a funeral service in northern Vietnam in June 2015. At least up to 200 Montagnard Christians have fled their homes in central Vietnam due to the high pressure of persecution executed by authorities and crossed the border to Cambodia.

6. Future outlook

So far, the *doi moi* policy did not spill over to the social or the political sphere and is not expected to do so. However, it has helped improve living conditions considerably, especially in the urban areas. An open civil society with debates on political, economic, social and religious issues, (as is usual in a democratic society) is still no more than a dream. However, it remains to be seen what the signals of friendship sent to the former archenemy USA and the widening (ideological) rift with neighboring China means for the country and for the Christians as well. It may lead to an increased openness, but may also lead the country to curl up into defensive isolation. A clearer hint of where the country is heading may come in 2016. Prime Minister Dung, who survived a public demand of resignation by the National Assembly, might become the communist party's next secretary-general and thus hold the most powerful position the country has to offer. This will be decided in 2016, when the communist party's 12th national congress will be held. Whether or not he will be able to bridge the widening gap between ideology and disillusion remains to be seen.

Another decision to be watched will be how the new law on religion, which is drafted at the time of writing will look like and how it is going to be implemented. Judging from the process of drafting and earlier drafts, Christians and other religions cannot expect any relief from that side. Organizing Christian churches and registering them will be at least as cumbersome and it is now and testifying about one's faith will remain dangerous.

Qatar – Rank 21

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

Qatar ranks 21 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, with a score of 65 points. Last year, it was at rank 18 scoring 64 points. The situation is quite stable which means that the situation for converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) and Christian migrant workers continues to be hard.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines in Qatar are *Islamic extremism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism* (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- **Islamic extremism:** The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam. While Muslims are free to worship in public, non-Muslim religious groups (Christians) are restricted to private houses or designated places. Proselytizing is outlawed and attracts up to ten years of imprisonment. Criticism of Islam is punished. Conversion from Islam to another religion constitutes apostasy, an offense which carries a capital punishment. Family law is controlled by Sharia, the Islamic legislation. Nearly all Qatari citizens and nationals are by definition either Sunni or Shia Muslims.
- **Tribal antagonism:** Typical for this engine is the effort to force the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context. In the case of Qatar, *Tribal antagonism* is clearly mixed with Islam. This affects particularly MBBs.

3. Context

Qatar's population is composed almost entirely of migrant laborers: ninety per cent out of about two million. As a nation, it has the world's highest ratio of migrants versus citizens and one of the world's highest population growth rates. The remaining ten per cent (Qataris) enjoy the highest GDP per capita in the world. Expatriates (also from the West) and migrant workers (mostly from Asia and Africa) are generally perceived and treated by Qataris as slaves. Forced labor and human trafficking are major problems. Working conditions for migrant workers can be inhumane and dangerous; they face underpayment, bad 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. Investigations by Amnesty International and others show that about one migrant worker dies per day as a result of bad working conditions. According to Human Rights Watch, Qatar had the world's worst working conditions for migrants. This is at present a major topic of discussion since a great number of migrant workers are needed for the construction of the soccer stadiums for the 2022 World Cup.

Qatar is one of the largest financial supporters of Islamic terrorism: it reportedly supports rebels in Iraq, Syria and Mali. It is also financing the construction of mosques, e.g. in Europe and Africa,

including hospitals and schools in the latter as a means of spreading Islam. Apart from Saudi Arabia, Qatar is the only other Wahhabi Islamic country in the world.

4. Types of Christianity affected

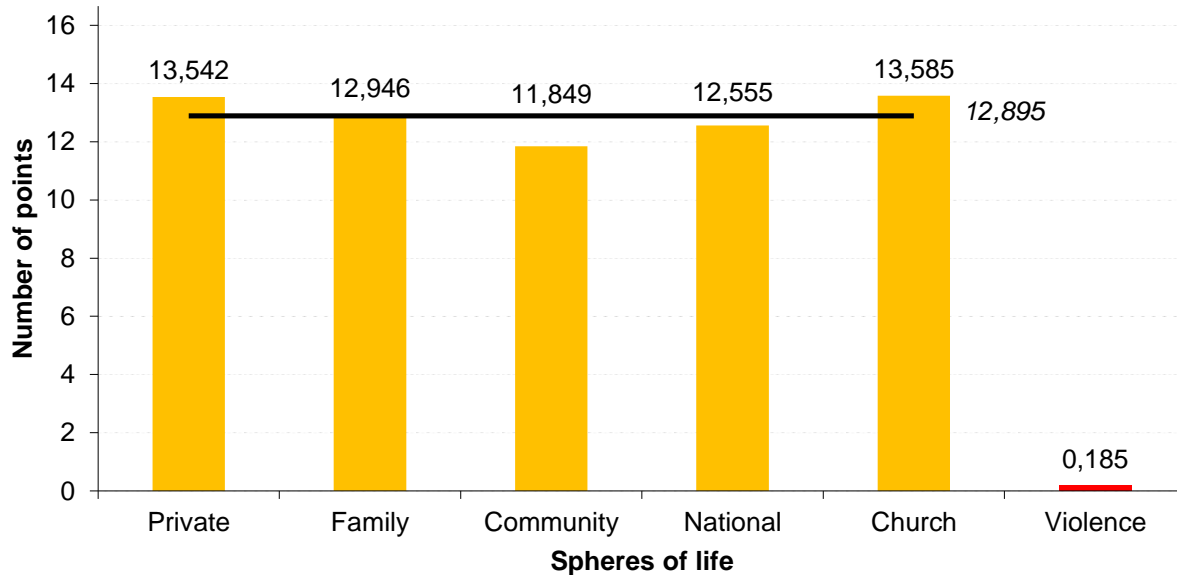
In Qatar, the following types of Christianity are present and affected by persecution:

- **Expatriate or migrant Christians:** The level of persecution varies within this type of Christianity. For instance, low skilled migrant workers from low or middle income countries (e.g. construction workers) have a lower social status and are generally treated worse than expatriates from the Western world working in skilled labor occupations. Therefore, migrants from Asia and Africa are treated badly, independent of their religion. If the migrant worker is a Christian, this can add to their vulnerability. They are under strong pressure to become Muslims. Migrant workers are not free to openly practice their faith and many among them hardly have the opportunity to attend church in a special compound in the desert outside of the capital, Doha. The number of migrant Christians is growing, as many migrant workers - nominal Christians and Muslims - convert to a living Christian faith 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.
- **Christian converts from a Muslim background** (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs): These are persecuted the most. They are considered apostates and may face the death penalty. However, no execution for apostasy has been recorded since the country's independence in 1971. Almost all Qatari MBBs converted abroad and the majority of them do not return to the country out of fear.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Qatar presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (12.895), showing the pressure on Christians, is only slightly higher than last year (12.715). The score for the violence block is the same: 0.185. This suggests persecution in Qatar has stabilized. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private* and *church spheres*. Both local and migrant MBBs face the most problems, especially if they are the only believers in a family or community. Discrimination in dealing with the authorities as well as in employment and in the community affects all Christians.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** MBBs cannot openly practice their faith. Any hint that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. Expatriate Christians have relatively more freedom to privately practice their faith, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims. Migrant 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.
- **Family sphere:** All Qataris are considered Muslims. For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. MBBs run the great risk of honor killing, physical violence or being ostracized, if their families or communities discover their faith. As a result, MBBs strongly protect their anonymity for fear of gossip and betrayal.
- **Community sphere:** All Christians are more or less put under pressure to renounce their faith through all kinds of discrimination. Converts to Christianity will experience harassment and discrimination in their workplace if their new faith is known.
- **National sphere:** The legal system is based on Sharia law and conversion to a religion other than Islam is punishable by death. Muslims have more rights than followers of other religions. MBBs in particular face serious pressure in dealing with authorities if their Christian faith is known. Expatriate and migrant Christians will face problems in this *sphere of life* if they are actively proselytizing Muslims. This can lead to imprisonment and deportation.
- **Church sphere:** Foreign Christians can only gather for worship in private or designated places. Outward symbols of faith, like crosses on churches, are illegal. There are several churches in

Qatar that serve the large group of foreign workers, but MBBs are not allowed to attend. Official church recognition is hard to obtain and at least 1,500 registered congregants are required. 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 pretext of their safety. Publication, import and distribution of religious materials are regulated. Churches are not allowed to use their own channels for importing Bibles anymore 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.

- **Violence:** From time to time, we receive reports that MBBs are physically harmed for their faith by family or others. Most often, these incidents remain unreported. During the current reporting period, Open Doors did not receive any reports of Christians being harmed for their faith. However, expatriates do run a serious risk of being detained and deported if they are involved in missionary activities.

6. Future outlook

The political, social and economic situation of Qatar seems quite stable. The emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, overhauled the cabinet after his inauguration in 2013, but no major policy changes have been observed since. In its forecast for the next few years, the Economist Intelligence Unit expects Qatar to “remain politically stable under the emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, and relations with the emirate's Gulf neighbors will continue to improve, thanks to his diplomatic outreach”. In the short run, no major changes in religious freedom for Christians are expected.

Egypt – Rank 22

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

Egypt scores 64 points on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, ranking 22. This is three more points than last year. A major political transition took place in July 2013 when the Muslim Brotherhood was evicted from power after the national uprising against it with over 33 million Egyptians taking to the streets on 30 June 2013. However, the position of Christians in Egypt – not only Christian converts from a Muslim background, but also the large indigenous Coptic community – is still under pressure. The majority of Egypt's population is Muslim and in recent years radical Islam has become more visible with various militant Islamic groups still making their presence felt. The threatening presence of an Islamist insurgency that is all but gone, led to an increase in scores on the WWL. Inevitably, the radical Islamic narrative is a source of tension with the country's large indigenous Christian minority, the Copts, which represent around ten per cent of the country's population.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Egypt are *Islamic extremism* (main engine), and to a lesser extent *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime* (both blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- **Islamic extremism:** In Egypt, the persecution engine *Islamic extremism* has many different forms: at the political level it causes varying forms of discrimination; in the family sphere, converts to Christianity (MBBs) face great pressure; there are also violent Islamist actions intimately linked to organized crime. What is noteworthy is that the Islamists, although they were evicted from power in 2013, are far from gone. They remain a threat to the stability of the country, which puts the country's Christian population at special risk. They are also turning increasingly violent, with hopeless and desperate youths being very vulnerable to radicalization. In the Sinai, radical Islamic movements are operating with a great amount of impunity.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The tradition of authoritarian rule is perhaps the only permanent feature in Egypt's political system, which has known three regime changes in just three years. All of Egypt's rulers have had one defining element in common: an authoritarian government style. In 2011, decades in which dictatorships succeeded each other were ended by massive social protests, which eventually led to the controversial election of the Muslim Brotherhood. The government led by Mohamed Morsi, which did not behave democratically, was ousted by a national uprising supported by the army in 2013, again after massive social protests. Currently, Egypt is ruled by a civilian government led by former army chief Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, after a presidential election in May 2014. This government seems to regard basic human rights and democratic pluralism as a low priority in view of the huge current economic, political, social and security challenges. In this context, therefore, religious freedom for Christians is not fully guaranteed.

- **Organized corruption and crime:** The widespread corruption and occasional crime and insecurity issues, particularly in the Sinai area, have led to a structural climate of impunity, in which hostilities against the most vulnerable groups (i.e. groups for whom nobody in the political arena speaks out for) are not penalized. This situation also affects Christians. Moreover, harassment and in some cases violence against women has increased. Women of any belief are targeted, but particularly those who are in a vulnerable position, such as Christians in a radical Islamic context.

3. Context

Morsi's failure to adequately address the country's economic challenges, combined with his progressive dismantling of democratic institutions and his accelerated Islamization of Egyptian politics was the main triggers for the massive protests in July 2013. The quick succession of revolutions reflects not only a widespread frustration with the difficult economic situation but also a struggling democratic system and the great polarization of Egyptian society. To many people, the military intervention in 2013 may have come as a surprise, however, many if not most of the Egyptians saw al-Sisi and the Egyptian army as the saviour of the country from the iron grip of radical Muslims' rule.

President al-Sisi's authoritarian style of government has to some extent restored the rule of law in Egypt, but also implies a stricter compliance with the relatively restrictive legislation related to religious affairs. This is not to the advantage of the country's Christian population. Moreover, a November 2013 law restricting public protests contributes to reducing freedom of expression in the public sphere.

On 16 June 2015 an Egyptian court confirmed the [death sentence](#) for former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi and various members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Morsi was also sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of spying for the Palestinian Hamas movement, Lebanon's Shia Hezbollah, and Iran. Morsi can still appeal against the verdicts, but has refused to on the grounds it would imply legal recognition of the courts of justice. What is most worrying is that Morsi is likely to become a martyr figure to his followers if he would at all be executed. They are most likely responsible for the massive car bomb in Cairo at the end of June that [killed Egypt's general prosecutor](#) and nine others.

4. Types of Christianity affected

There are two types of Christianity in Egypt:

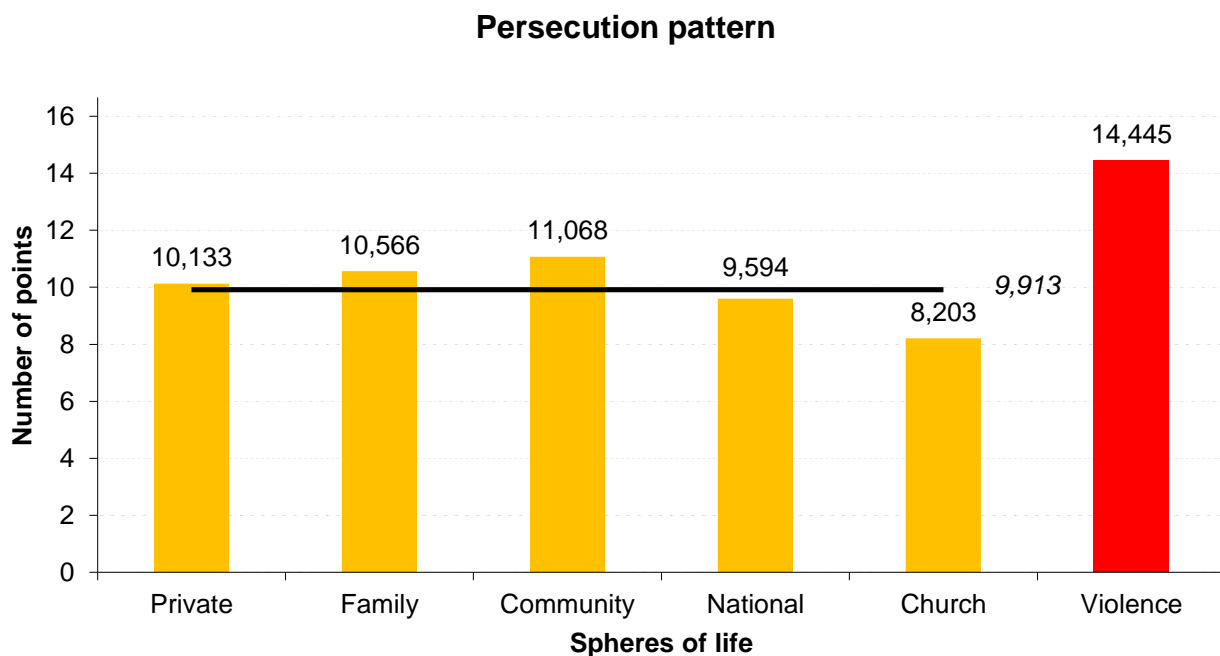
- **Historical Christian communities:** The largest church in this category is the ethnic Coptic community, most of whom are Orthodox. There are also established protestant denominations throughout the country. The large Coptic minority, while facing important difficulties (including discrimination in education, health or government and legislation that hinders essential aspects of church life), has been tolerated because of its historical presence and its demographic size (estimated at 10 – 11 million). In recent years, this has changed, however, causing historical Christian communities to be targeted as well.

- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background: There is a small but growing community of Christian converts (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs), who bear the brunt of persecution, most often from family members. The latter punish MBBs for abandoning the Islamic faith, often by means of beatings or house expulsion.

Both MBBs and Coptic Christians reside throughout the country, although there are concentrations of Coptic Christians in Upper Egypt, Cairo and Alexandria. The levels of persecution are comparable throughout the country.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Egypt presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime*). The average score over the first five blocks (9.913), showing the pressure on Christians, is higher than last year (9.126). The score for the violence block is slightly lower: down from 15.186 (WWL 2015) to 14.445. This suggests that *Islamic extremism* is slowly increasing its restriction of religious expression in all *spheres of life*. Combined with a violence level that is very still high, this indicates a volatile situation. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the *community sphere* has most points, which is explained mainly by the hindrances Christians face in rural areas. The relatively high scores in the *private* and *family spheres* are mainly due to the difficulties faced by MBBs when their conversion is known, but also by Copts in the *family sphere* who wish to register baptisms, weddings and deaths. The scores in the *national* and *church spheres* are lower compared to the other blocks, which is explained by the fact that there still is a large indigenous Church in Egypt which, although under pressure, is allowed to exist.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private and family spheres:** Within the large Coptic community, pressure in the private and family spheres is low. In contrast, MBBs face severe limitations within their homes and extended families.
- **Community sphere:** Regarding the community sphere, Copts are often victims of social exclusion. Field researchers report that Christians face constant discrimination in areas such as justice, education, basic social services and are generally more vulnerable to poverty.

Moreover, Egyptian Copts are increasingly faced with “customary-law sessions”, especially in case of a dispute between Muslims and Christians. Allegedly, Salafists are behind the spread of these unofficial hearings, although according to some analysts the phenomenon itself very likely goes back to the tribalism that is behind the actual shape of Islam in the region. In an incident reported on 4 June 2015 by an Egyptian human rights activist, [several Coptic families were expelled](#) after one Coptic individual was found guilty of publishing supposedly offensive pictures against the Islamic faith. The decision to expel the Coptic families as a form of collective punishment was taken through a “customary-law session”. These sessions in Egypt greatly endanger the position of Christians because they basically mean an alternative way of doing justice in which minority rights are not guaranteed. As with other threats, “customary-law sessions” have continued and increased after the January 2011 revolution under the supervision of Islamist groups; unfortunately even under president al-Sisi (sworn into office 8 June 2014) the trend has continued. This alternative form of justice almost always leads to very unfair decisions to which Coptic communities are particularly vulnerable, especially when they lead to “collective punishments” in which the whole community is punished for a supposed wrongdoing of one Coptic individual.

- **National sphere:** Religious freedom is not being upheld and the Egyptian legal system is biased against non-Muslims. As an illustration, in June 2015, a young Egyptian Christian and two of his friends were arrested in Alexandria, allegedly for showing contempt for Islam because of their evangelistic outreach. One of them had been handing out bags of dates together with evangelistic tracts during Ramadan. The young men were released on bail, each paying 10,000 Egyptian pounds (about \$1275), and await further investigation.
- **Church sphere:** In the church sphere, church autonomy is generally respected, although Copts do face administrative obstacles, such as difficulty in obtaining permits to renovate church buildings.
- **Violence:** During this reporting period, violence against Christians came from different sources. Reports from the field indicate that at least 12 Christians were killed by Islamist groups, mostly after severe beatings, torture and kidnapping. Field researchers also report that 61 churches were attacked. The issue of human trafficking in the Sinai also contributed to high violence scores. Open Doors received reports that young Christian women have to change their Christian

names to Muslim names in order to try to avoid being raped and kidnapped, and that there is an apparent specific targeting of the Christian women by the traffickers

6. Future outlook

1. The elements that will determine Egypt's future are essentially political. As long as the political instability continues and the economic challenges are not addressed, social protests will not cease. The country faces a seemingly unbridgeable ideological-religious divide between various expressions of radical Islam (from Salafism to the Muslim Brotherhood) and political liberals (secularists).
2. Current political developments indicate that the most likely scenario is one in which the Church is confined to a situation of *dhimmitude*, as the result of the increased opposition it receives within an Islamic society that is mostly ill-informed about Christianity.
3. The threat of radical Islamic movements in Egypt is clearly far from averted. This is also evident in the Foreign Policy report of 2 July 2015. [Violence has escalated](#) in the Sinai Province between the Egyptian government and jihadist militants affiliated to the Islamic State (IS). Many Coptic Christians have been forced to leave the region due to direct targeting. It is likely that the violence in Sinai will continue.

Myanmar – Rank 23

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 62 points, Myanmar ranks 23 on the World Watch List 2016. In WWL-2015, Myanmar ranked 25 with a score of 60 points. The increase is mainly due to an increase in the *Community Sphere* and another increase in the already high level of violence.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Myanmar are *Religious Nationalism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic extremism*.

- **Religious nationalism:** This is commonly perpetuated by radical Buddhists and tolerated - and to some extent supported - by the national government. The majority of Myanmar's population (an estimated 60%) is of Burmese ethnicity, also called *Bama*. Being *Bama* is equated with being Buddhist. Everyone deviating from this heritage is labelled as being outside the community and therefore potentially dangerous. Pressure comes from two sides: one side is society, including the movement of increasingly radical Buddhist monks, once called *969*, but now notorious under their acronym *Ma Ba Tha*. The other side is the government which tries to gain support from such movements. One very visible sign of this during the reporting period was the adoption of the "Laws for the Protection of Race and Religion" by the outgoing parliament in August 2015. *Ma Ba Tha* celebrated this victory with meetings and processions across the country. Details on the laws can be found under *Spheres of life*.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** Myanmar has a long history of being ruled by the military and the recently democratically defeated government also had a military background, including outgoing president Thein Sein. That is why Myanmar is one of the very few cases where it is not necessarily the government which is paranoid, but the military. According to the country's constitution, written by the *Tatmadaw (the Burmese army)*, the military holds one quarter of parliamentary seats which are not contested. The army holds the most important government offices, including of course the ministry of defense, but also the ministry of interior and border affairs. The fact that the army - despite all hopes for democracy and minority-participation in elections - continued and even intensified its fight against the ethnic minorities, including Christians, shows where the true power lies. The military will do everything to stay in power, including calls for Buddhist nationalism or Tribal heritage, if needed. The government concluded another ceasefire agreement on 15 October 2015, but not all ethnic minority armies joined it, and others were excluded on purpose. Two armies active in areas with a significant Christian population, the *Kachin Independence Army* and the *Shan State Army* did not join the agreement as well. The state continues to run so-called "Border Areas National Races Youth Development Training Schools" (or *Na Ta La* - schools), which are attractive for minority people as they are run without school fees. These schools are used to influence young people and to introduce them to

Buddhism. This year reports came in claiming that the army has tried to weaken ethnic insurgencies by making ethnic youth drug-addicted, a practice that is affecting Christian Kachin as well. One of Asia's two largest opium-producing areas covers large parts of that region (together with parts of Vietnam, Laos and Thailand). It is widely known as the 'Golden Triangle' and adds to the heavy pressure Christians face. Parts of the country are largely run by the *Tatmadaw*. As many commodities like ores, jade and timber can be found in predominantly Christian territories like Shan State or among the Chin and Kachin, they face heavy army pressure not only because the government wants to keep the nation united, but also because of economic interests. Companies are often run by military or high-ranking politicians, and nepotism rules. There is no desire to share the country's wealth with its people.

- **Islamic extremism:** Surprisingly enough, this persecution engine continues to play a role in this Buddhist-dominated state. Muslims increasingly bear the brunt of Buddhist opposition which involves violent clashes, but it is less known that there is a small group of Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). They not only face persecution because of their ethnic affiliation, but also because their Muslim families and communities put them under enormous pressure to recant.

3. Context

The whole reporting period was filled with preparations, hopes and fears for the first free and fair elections in 25 years, overloaded with hopes on democracy and an inclusive understanding of society, giving ethnic minorities a voice in the country's development. Many of these ethnic minorities – like the Kachin, Chin and Karen – are predominantly Christian. Elections took place on 8 November 2015, slightly outside the reporting period, and saw a landslide win of the opposition "National League for Democracy" (NLD) under Noble Peace Prize Winner and freedom icon Aung San Suu Kyi. The turning of tables was so strong that not only the ruling party USDP, but most ethnic parties as well fared badly in the elections and did not win many seats. Thus, the new parliament will most likely see less Christian members sworn in than in the old one. During the campaign and elections itself the Burmese army continued its attacks against ethnic minorities in Kachin and Shan State unabated and even increased them, despite the ceasefire agreement already mentioned before. Christians are strongly affected and the level of violence is high. Additionally, the *Ma Ba Tha* increased their campaigns against religious minorities, especially the Rohingya Muslims. Their campaign peaked in the successful introduction of four laws for the "Protection of Race and Religion" in August 2015, building insurmountable hurdles for conversions and complicating religiously mixed marriages. These will affect Christians as well. As Suu Kyi remained silent on both developments, ethnic minorities are cautiously hopeful, but do not expect too much as she is perceived as being a representative of the Burmese nobility anyway.

Another expression of aggression from radical Buddhists towards Muslims was observed when thousands of [Rohingya fleeing Myanmar](#) on boats were found adrift on the Andaman Sea after traffickers had abandoned them. The high level of discrimination against the Rohingya alarmed and gained further attention from the international community. Because Rohingya are not allowed to

leave their villages in Rakhine, Rohingya MBBs - especially the leaders - cannot attend courses or seminary for training. On top of the discrimination that they receive because of their ethnicity and Muslim background, their possibilities of fellowship are also restricted by the Muslim community. The Rohingya were widely excluded from the voting process as were tens of thousands living in areas torn by the civil war which has been raging on for sixty years. Among the excluded were many Christians.

4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in Myanmar exist and - except for the first category listed - all experience persecution.

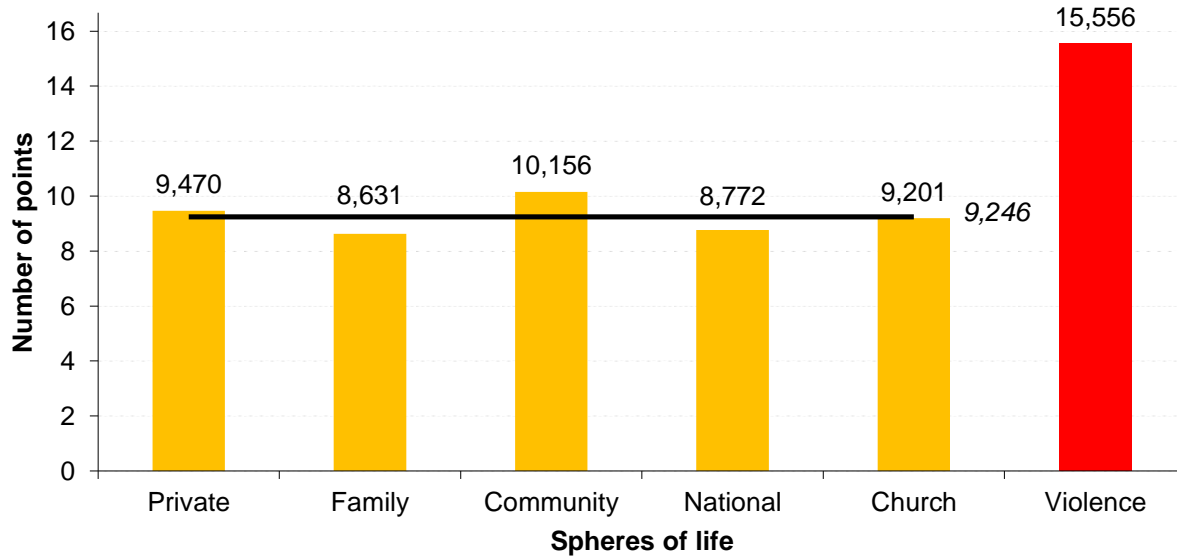
- **Communities of expatriate and migrant Christians**, mostly located in Yangon. Some expatriates are integrated in registered or traditional churches in the city. These Christians experience the least if any persecution.
- **Historical Christian communities**, mostly Baptist (of various description) and Catholic groups.
- **Christian converts**, i.e. Buddhist background believers (BBBs) and Muslim background believers (MBBs) mainly belonging to Rohingya.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** such as pentecostal groups like the Assemblies of God (AOG).

Most Christians come from an ethnic minority background and are targeted because of this very fact as well. Many face increasing attacks by the army as it fights against independence or autonomy movements, and this affects Christians either living in Christian majority or minority areas as well. But even Christians coming from a Burmese (*Bama*) background are watched, pressured and labelled as traitors. The few converts from a Muslim background are facing pressure from all sides, i.e. from the majority population, from family friends and from neighbors.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern***: The *persecution pattern* for Myanmar presents the scores for the persecution engine *Religious nationalism*. The average score over the first five blocks (9.246), showing the pressure on Christians, is slightly higher than last year (8.885). The score for the violence block remains extraordinary high: from 15.185 (WWL 2015) to 15.556. The pressure on Christians, especially in the ethnic minority regions is high and Christians suffer from a high level of violence as well, mainly from the army's side. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private* and *community spheres*, but apart from that rather evenly distributed over all *spheres of life*. Though the recently adopted and already mentioned laws were not implemented yet, their joyful celebration by radical Buddhist groups shows that they will demand a strict interpretation. So, this pressure is fired by Buddhist nationalism and the strong wish of an army to stay in power and not being harassed in their business.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Converts from a Buddhist background (BBBs) always have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only believers in their family and therefore bring shame to the family. Meeting with other Christians is usually not dangerous, but can pose a special challenge for converts. Known converts are closely monitored and can face house arrest in order to hinder them from meeting with other Christians. Converts from a Muslim background (MBBs) are facing all these challenges at a higher level as they not only deviate from their old faith, but belong to a despised minority as well.
- Family sphere:** Converts do not necessarily face the threat of divorce or losing their inheritance rights or custody, though all this can and occasionally does happen. Organizing a baptism or a Christian wedding or funeral can become difficult, especially in strong Buddhist villages or for MBBs. They also participate in the wider Muslim minority's problem that they are denied citizenship. Muslim Rohingya and with them the minority of Christians from a Muslim background are perceived as being Bengalese and effectively lack any registration. Parents face difficulties in bringing up their children according to Christian values as they not only face pressure from neighbors in Buddhist majority areas, but are often forced to let their children attend Buddhist classes as well.
- Community sphere:** When Christians stop giving alms to monks, refuse to contribute to the renovation or building of temples, and desist from participating in Buddhist festivals, they are usually harassed and forced to donate and threatened with expulsion from the village. Christians, especially those gathering in house churches, are monitored, pressured into recanting their faith, excluded from communal decisions or resources and denied access to water. Areas where many Christians live are deliberately disadvantaged with poor infrastructure and health

care. Christians are discriminated in their private lives as well as in their business lives. Children of converts are facing discrimination by teachers and co-students in schools. Children of Christians, not just of converts, have to attend non-Christian classes and can be forced to participate in Buddhist prayers or ceremonies. Especially if the families are poor and they come from an ethnic minority background, children will be sent to the *Na Ta La* schools, referred to above. Discrimination in grades, and the bullying and mocking of Christian children are common occurrences.

- **National sphere:** Section 361 of the 2008 constitution says that "the Union recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union" while stating in section 362 the recognition of the existence of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism. This "special position of Buddhism" has been abused by the Buddhist radicals and was taken advantage of by the government for their political interests. In order to gain additional support from such groups and the *Bamar* majority in August 2015, the government adopted four religious conversion bills which aim to protect Buddhism by controlling conversion to other faiths, banning interfaith marriages and polygamy, and introducing birth controls. Buddhist women wishing to marry non-Buddhist men must first receive permission from their parents and local government officials. Non-Buddhist men wishing to marry Buddhist women must first convert to the Buddhist faith. Concerning conversion, the law states that anyone seeking to change their faith needs to get permission from the Religious Conversion Registration body, which is comprised of local religious and immigration officials, a local administrator, the women's affairs chairman and a local education officer. Though it remains to be seen how the law will be implemented, its very adoption is worrying and partly counts for an increase of the country's score in the World Watch List.
- **Church sphere:** While many Christian churches are to be found in various parts of Myanmar, getting permission for and actually building new churches remains difficult and many restrictions apply. That is why many Christians use a business establishment to have a place of worship on Sundays or opt to gather in house churches. Churches are monitored - especially in Buddhist dominated areas - and church leaders and pastors are targeted frequently by radical Buddhists as this is a way to paralyze the church. Some churches have started to print their own materials, but owning printing presses or publishing in minority languages remains out of question. Churches are not able to invite foreign workers for religious purposes. Churches in ethnic minority areas face even more difficulties, as their churches are often regarded as being places for anti-government meetings and communication points for ethnic minority groups. In areas engaged in civil war, like Kachin and Shan State, churches are frequently targeted as people seek refuge from the fighting.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Myanmar remains extremely violent and even saw a slight increase in the reporting period. There were again many reports of Christians killed for their faith, one very clear example happening on 20 January 2015. On this day the badly beaten bodies of two young women were found in Kutkai township near the border town of Muse in Northern Shan State. Both ladies had worked as volunteer teachers for the Kachin Baptist Convention and were killed

after having been brutally raped. Rumors spread quickly that Tatmadaw soldiers stationed nearby had committed this crime and circumstantial evidence also pointed in this direction, but at the time of writing, the investigation remained inconclusive. The army has kept up and even increased its attacks on ethnic minority areas, some of which are inhabited by Christians. Aerial attacks increased as well and so several churches were destroyed by bombing raids. The chief Buddhist monk of Marsihta village in Karen State led a group of Buddhist villagers in building a pagoda within the compound of Marsihta Karen Baptist Church on 21 August 2015. They also planned to build a Buddha statue within the church compound, effectively banning the Christians from using their church.

6. Future outlook

Myanmar made it to international headlines in the reporting period and mainly with positive news. That elections have been largely free and fair remains an encouraging sign and gives some hope that the country is on the right track now. On the other hand, headlines not so nice covered the Rohingya refugee crisis in South East Asia. The situation of these refugees highlights the challenges well: how will the radical Buddhist groups act, now that the regime they backed has been defeated? In a first interview, one of the leading monks of *Ma Ba Tha* announced that they would support the NLD as well, provided that the Laws on the Protection of Race and Religion are kept (and presumably, implemented). Religious nationalism will continue to affect and harass the Christian ethnic minorities for some time yet.

Another important factor is the army. As long as it remains such a strong political factor and is so deeply involved in legal and illicit trade, which mainly affects predominantly Christian areas like Kachin State, no major changes should be expected. Especially the level of violence does not seem to cease, despite all progress in the democratization and non-inclusive ceasefire agreements.

Palestinian Territories – Rank 24

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

The Palestinian Territories rank 24 in the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, two places higher than last year. They score four points more this year: 62 points. The reason for the increase is a slightly higher number of violent incidents against Christians and the decision by the WWL team to reduce the number of types of Christianity from four to three: expatriate Christians are no longer included in WWL research as a separate category in the Palestinian Territories since they do not live and worship completely isolated from other Christians.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines in the Palestinian Territories are *Islamic extremism* and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism* which is blended with *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Generally speaking, Christians are affected by persecution throughout the territories, though there is noticeably more pressure in Gaza than in the West Bank because of the presence of active Islamic fanatical movements. Islamic militants more radical than Hamas have been active in Gaza, and are now stepping up activities in the West Bank as well. These include Islamic State cells - either active or “sleeping”. Despite the fact that these Salafist groups do not have any major power yet, their influence cannot be dismissed. Responsible for a large part of the rocket attacks from Gaza on Israel, they are capable of provoking escalation. Partly as a result of their influence, Hamas introduces Islamizing measures from time to time, like a virtue campaign on checking females’ clothing, imposing the *hijab* in high schools and banning males from working as hairdressers for females. The latter two measures were dropped after resistance from the local population, the West and human rights activists.
- **Tribal antagonism:** Tribalism aims to enforce the continuing influence of age-old norms and values. In the Palestinian Territories it is very much mixed with Islam and especially affects MBBs.

3. Context

The dynamics of Christian persecution in the Palestinian Territories are complex. Christians are squeezed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, their ethnicity causing many restrictions from the Israeli side and their religion putting them in a minority position within the Palestinian community. Like other Palestinians, Christians experience these limitations on a daily basis and they are an important incentive to immigrate.

The territories are effectively under different governments. The West Bank’s ruling Fatah party is formally based on secular principles and Christians enjoy several rights. It should be noted that in a

Middle Eastern context, *secular* does not mean *without religious background* but simply *not Islamist*. Six Christians have a seat in parliament and the mayor of Bethlehem is traditionally a Christian. At least sixty per cent of the West Bank is under full Israeli control. Though Christians are largely tolerated by Islamist Hamas, the rights of Christians are neither upheld nor protected in Gaza. Apart from this, Christians face threats from radical Islamic vigilante groups.

The total number of Christians has been decreasing in both areas 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 (Muslim Background Believers or MBBs).

4. Types of Christianity affected

Three types of Christianity are present and effected by persecution in the Palestinian Territories. Converts from Islam to Christianity (MBBs) are persecuted the most.

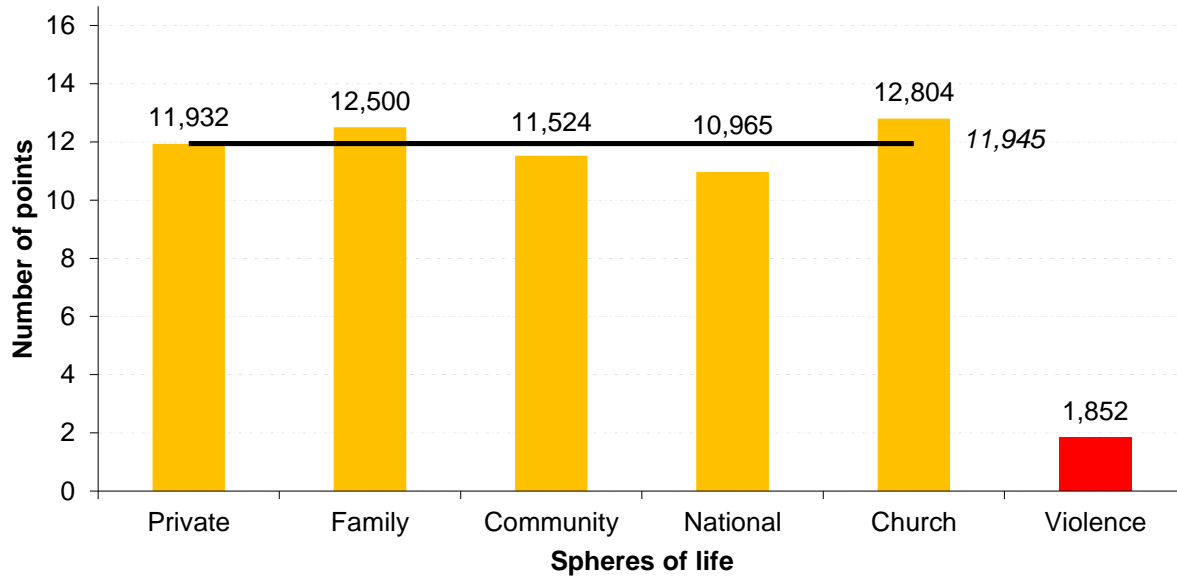
- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians:** These face some restrictions but not persecution. Generally they do not form their own churches but are part of existing local churches and congregations. They generally enjoy freedom to worship but – as for all local Christians and other non-Muslims - it is forbidden to evangelize Muslims. There are no cases known of harassment.
- **Historical Christian communities:** e.g. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox congregations. These churches are all registered and there are several congregations in the West Bank and two (Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church) in Gaza. In Gaza some members of the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church are vulnerable for conversion to Islam. Those with nominal faith convert to Islam because they feel trapped, cannot stand the threats or are offered allurements such as housing, wives, jobs or diplomas. Once converted, many of them soon regret it. The ties with their Christian identity turn out to be stronger than they thought. However, in Islam it is not easy for a convert to return to his (or her) former religion.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers or MBBs) or from other Christian background: Of all types of Christianity, MBBs face the most severe persecution. In the West Bank they are threatened and pressured, in Gaza their situation is so dangerous that they live their faith in utmost secrecy. Nevertheless, the number of MBBs is growing slowly. When Christians change church e.g. from a historical to a non-traditional protestant church this often causes trouble with their families.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches:** There are several baptist churches in the West Bank and one in Gaza. Leaders of the historical churches often see the evangelical churches as a threat to their flocks. Non-traditional protestant churches are known to put emphasis on outreach and evangelization – this can lead to pressure from society.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for the Palestinian Territories presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score

over the first five blocks (11.945) is higher than last year (11.530). The score for the violence block is also higher, going from 0.741 (WWL 2015) up to 1.852. The higher score for pressure is mainly due to the decision by the WWL team to reduce the number of types of Christianity in the region from four to three (i.e. expatriate Christians are no longer considered as being totally isolated from other Christians in the country). There were only a slightly higher number of violent incidents targeting Christians this year. This all suggests that the persecution situation has more or less stabilized. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the persecution pressure is highest in the *family* and *church spheres*, although the scores are not far apart.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** MBBs experience pressure in this *sphere of life* and in Gaza their situation is very serious. MBBs 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.
- **Family sphere:** If their faith is discovered, MBBs 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. Most other types of Christianity are generally free to live their Christian convictions within the circle of the family. However, if a Christian married to a Muslim is divorced, he or she would be excluded from having custody of the children.
- **Community sphere:** In Gaza – and in majority Muslim communities in the West Bank - the pressure on the entire local Christian community has increased. The number of Christians is

diminishing and the influence of radical Islam is growing. Especially Christian women feel the pressure to cover up more even to the extent of wearing a veil. If they do not, they risk being the target of harassment. Christians say they experience growing social and economic pressure to convert to Islam. Fear is also growing in the West Bank - though to a lesser extent than in Gaza - amid a general context of political unrest and the growing influence of radical Islam in the Middle East. More mosques are raising the volume of their loudspeakers higher and more women are wearing the veil. Here also, most of the MBBs need to hide their new faith.

- **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 are failing to uphold and protect the rights of individual Christians and in some cases Christians – mostly MBBs - have to flee to safe places somewhere else in the area.
- **Church sphere:** MBBs 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, it is practically impossible for all types of Christianity. Importing Christian literature or Bibles to the West Bank can be problematic and is legally impossible for Gaza. On the West Bank there can also be security risks for Christians gathering in public. NGO Middle East Concern reports that in Bethlehem, the Palestinian Authority governor abruptly cancelled a Christian gathering for outdoor worship in Bethlehem due to “significant political and religious pressure” in May 2015.
- **Violence:** Victims of anti-Christian violence are most often MBBs and the perpetrators are family, society and - occasionally - the authorities. In Gaza, the mental pressure on all types of Christianity to convert to Islam is always present, especially during the time of Ramadan. They are allured by jobs offers, houses, wives and diplomas. Several MBBs and other Christians are known to have fled Gaza and relocated to the West Bank, or relocated within or outside the West Bank. There were several reports of Christians being physically harmed because of their faith. In September 2015, an arson attack took place against the Maronite Monastery of St. Charbel in Bethlehem, leading to great damage. According to the Chancellor of the Maronite Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the attack was targeted and [“the work of a group or of individual perpetrators of radical Islam”](#).

6. Future outlook

There are increased tensions both in Israel and in the Palestinian Territories. In Jerusalem and on the West Bank, militant Palestinians stabbed Jewish civilians and security personnel on many occasions. Several factors play a role in this, amongst others the widely believed idea among Palestinian Muslims that the Al Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is in danger. Other drivers are Palestinian media and social media, which call for attacks against Jews. Finally, the lack of progress in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the socio-economic deterioration in the West Bank are contributing to the tensions. In Gaza the authorities are increasingly under the

influence of certain politicized Islamic forces, encouraged by the turmoil in the Middle East. The Arab Uprisings, the Syrian war and also the Gaza war in summer 2014 have contributed to growing Islamic radicalism in Gaza. Salafists from Gaza are also fighting in Syria and becoming more radicalized. When they return, they could incite a further radicalization of the local population. In general, Islamic radicalization is occurring within Palestinian society, both on the West Bank and in Gaza. This is obviously a bad development for the Church in both areas. In the West Bank, the more the Fatah government loses its credibility among the local population, the more radical elements are gaining power. The situation for Christians might improve if Fatah obtains a firm grip on power, but considerably worsen if other militant Islamic groups take over. The outlook for the Christian community in Gaza in general is bleak.

Brunei – Rank 25

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 61 points, Brunei ranks 25 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. On WWL-2015, Brunei ranked 27 with a score of 58 points. The increase is due to an increased level of pressure, especially in the *private, Church and family spheres of life*.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Brunei are *Islamic extremism*, blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Brunei is an Islamic nation, based on an ideology called “Malay Islamic Monarchy”. The sultan has recently favoured Brunei government democratization and declared himself prime minister and president. Sharia law has been fully implemented in Civil Affairs for many years already for all Muslims and the government follows a plan of Islamization among the tribal people in supporting the so-called *dahwa* movement (Islamic evangelism). By decree, the import of Bibles and the public celebration of Christmas are banned. Christian pastors and workers are considered enemies and both natives and foreigners 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 Da'wah Centre statistics, 538 people embraced Islam in the sultanate in 2013 and 540 people converted to Islam from other religions or from a tribal background from January to November 2014.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** 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, defence minister or head of religion. People deeply revere and respect him and any criticism is unthinkable. There is no real danger to his rule and he seems reluctant to push the introduction of the remaining phases of Sharia law due to international pressure. Still, conservative Islam seems to serve as a uniting state ideology, leaving Christians insecure about their future and as second-class citizens in the best case.

3. Context

On 1 May 2014 Sultan Hassanal introduced the first of three phases in its adoption of a penal code based on Islamic law, or Sharia. The first phase 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 due to international pressure.

In 1929, when Brunei discovered that it has huge reserves of oil and natural gas, Sultan Hassanal 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, exempted personal income tax, housing benefits and low interest housing. Nearly 96% of Brunei's exports are oil, gas and related products. At its current pace of extraction, Brunei has enough oil left for just 22 years, according to the BP World Energy Outlook.

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 is making strides to diversify its economy with a string of major international trade agreements, due to be implemented in 2015. Brunei also "appears well-cushioned by substantial fiscal buffers" thanks to prudent policymaking, which has provided large fiscal and current account surpluses. Vision Brunei 2035 also plans to transform the nation into an "Islamic Singapore," where the accomplishments of Brunei's well-educated and highly skilled people will be recognized. However, since parts of sharia law will also apply to non-Muslims (who account for roughly 33 percent of Brunei's population), it is feared that many intelligent Bruneians will not wish to stay in Brunei and will opt to migrate. There is the possibility that the introduction of sharia law in Brunei might derail the sultan's vision for his country.

4. Types of Christianity affected

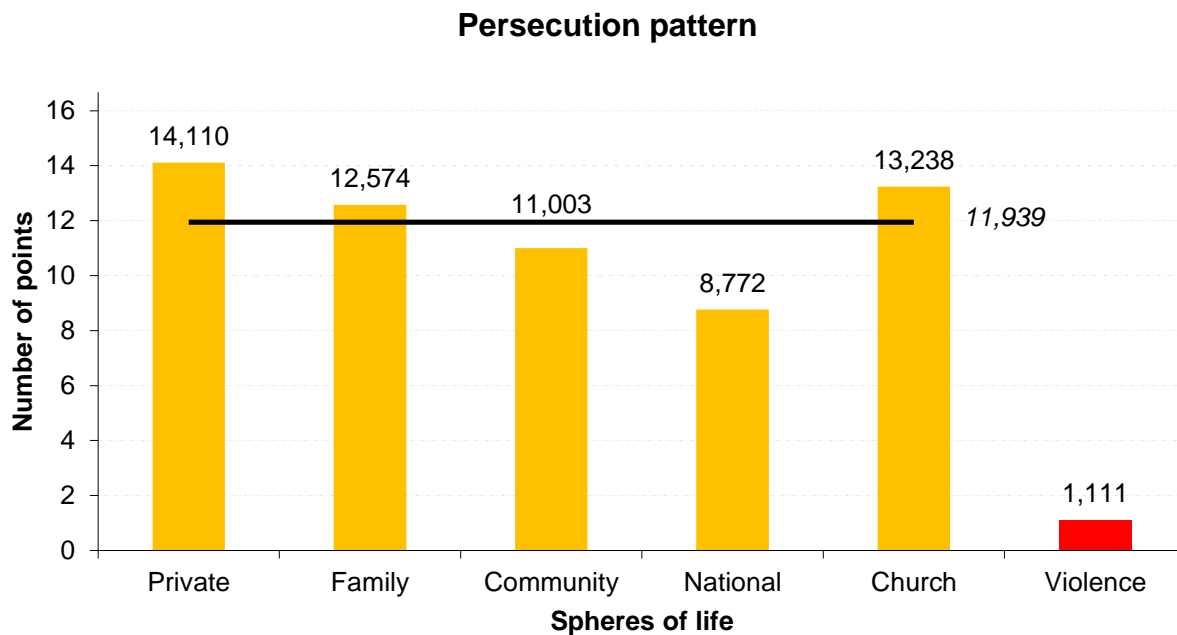
All types of Christianity in Brunei exist and are experiencing persecution:

- **Expatriate and migrant worker Christian communities** make up the majority of the Church in Brunei and participate in the limitations imposed by sharia law.
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as the Roman Catholic Church, are increasingly facing hostility and have to exercise more and more caution, though it is still less affected than protestant churches and convert communities.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) suffer strong pressure from family and friends.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches**, consisting of evangelical and pentecostal communities, have to be cautious in their private as well as in their church lives.

The Church's initial shock at the announcement of the introduction of sharia law has died down. The sultan seems reluctant to implement sharia fully and, since no one really knows what implementation may look like, Christians are watching cautiously. There are many signs of a growing Islamic conservatism in society and the younger generation of Christians are already prepared to leave the country or are beginning to consider it.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Brunei presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*, blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*. The average score over the first five blocks (11.939), showing the pressure on Christians, increased slightly compared to last year (11.528). The score for the violence block, which stood at 0 last year, increased to 1.111, which is still not very violent. This suggests that the ever present pressure on the Church is much more important than plain violence. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the private, family and church spheres. Pressure on MBBs is especially acute in the private and family spheres and is exerted by the social environment, while all Christians experience restrictions in the church sphere. This pressure is fired by the introduction of Sharia penal law as one step in the efforts to Islamize the country.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- 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 recently enacted Syariah (Sharia) Penal Code of Brunei stipulates that a Muslim who declares himself non-Muslim 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. Meeting with other Christians is a special challenge in these circumstances for MBBs, but also for other Christians as well, 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 is prohibited. Christians, especially their leaders, are under permanent surveillance by the authorities.

- **Family sphere:** Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce, will lose their inheritance rights and the organizing of a baptism, Christian wedding or funeral is impossible. It is compulsory for all children, also for children of Christians, to take Islamic studies as a subject, not only in public institutions but also in Christian schools. MBBs can be isolated from their families and even evicted by them.
- **Community sphere:** MBBs are always under strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to recant their Christian faith. Christians are always under surveillance. Especially the Malay speaking churches are under serious threat and are always monitored, resulting in a high level of fear among the church leaders. Also, authorities extract information from local citizens about church activities. Christians are discriminated against in their private and business lives. There were reports that Filipino Christians were asked to convert to Islam before receiving a working permit.
- **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. Underground churches, of course, never display religious symbols, but even Christians from recognized churches are now careful not to put up anything in public which may violate the new sharia laws, since this may be regarded as propagating the Christian faith with the intent to convert Muslims. Thus, Christians are also afraid of wearing anything that publicly expresses their faith, like a cross on a necklace.
- **Church sphere:** Convert fellowships and non-traditional protestant churches have always had difficulties in registering and their meetings have sometimes been disturbed by the police. However, in the reporting period even historical churches have experienced difficulties in getting permits extended. A fatwa exists in Brunei that bans the renovation of non-Muslim worship buildings. Christian activities in public are not allowed: for example in December 2014, the government warned all Christian communities not to hold public Christmas celebrations. Sunday services are monitored closely by government officials and pastors (especially Bahasa Malay pastors) are very careful in the wording of their weekly sermon not to offend the government or the royal family. Published materials are also subject to scrutiny. The movements and activities of church leaders are especially monitored and it is difficult to train church members or to provide theological studies.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Brunei is not particularly violent, but the score does show an increase from last year's 0 points in the reporting period. There have been incidents where Christians served prison terms for violating the law and some converts had to flee their home towns. Especially the younger generation of Christians prefers to flee persecution by moving abroad.

6. Future outlook

Brunei is facing difficult choices in the time ahead. 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 as rice and housing. There are no school fees for public schools, and citizens of Brunei do not have to pay income taxes. But since the oil and gas reserves are finite and may only last for just one more generation, the government needs starting to think about alternatives. This may lead to increasing insecurity and even unrest, and the sultan may seek to rely even more on the conservative brand of Islam. This will be challenging for Christians who are anyway facing a changing Church situation with young Christians leaving the country in larger numbers.

Central African Republic (CAR) – Rank 26

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

On the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, the Central African Republic (CAR) ranks 26 and scores 59 points, considerably less than the year before when the country scored 67. The decrease in score is primarily explained by the fact that the rebellion of the Séléka movement that caused excessively high violence against the country's Christian population in 2012-2014 has now been contained in most parts of the country. Although the Séléka movement was driven out of the south of the country at the beginning of 2014, members of the rebel group are still present in some quarters of the capital, Bangui, and in the north-eastern provinces.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in the Central African Republic are *Islamic extremism* and to a lesser extent *Organized corruption and crime*.

- ***Islamic extremism***: The main persecution engine in the Central African Republic is *Islamic extremism*. Members formerly belonging to the Séléka movement, with no formal Islamist (or political Islamic) agenda but composed in majority of (foreign) Muslims, have ravaged the country, specifically targeting Christian properties (houses and churches) and government buildings.
- ***Organized corruption and crime***: Amidst the chaos caused by the conflict, many try to take advantage of the lawlessness. For this reason, *Organized corruption and crime* can also be considered a secondary persecution engine in CAR. More research on this engine is needed in 2016.

3. Context

Constitutionally CAR is a secular state but, in the past, autocratic rulers have relied on support from religious organizations – mostly churches. According to the US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Reports government favoritism of religion in the country has been low over the past decade. CAR is considered to be a Christian nation, but Islam has shown significant growth in the last decade from 5 to 13 % – strengthened by groups from Chad and Sudan. Dissent 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 traditional jihadist agenda.

The Central African Republic (CAR) has seen many conflicts and five coups since its independence from France in 1960. The volatile nature of CAR's post-colonial political system caused the establishment of basic civil liberties and political rights to be very underdeveloped. Freedom House,

the global watchdog monitoring political freedom, categorizes CAR as “not free” with a score of seven (lowest score possible) for both civil liberties and political rights in its 2015 index. In addition to recurrent military takeovers of power, CAR has also been afflicted with chronic instability as a result of various rebel groups taking up arms against the central government. Most of these rebels turn to insurgency as a result of alleged sectarian exclusion and marginalization.

The instability of CAR and the weakness of its successive governments as well as their lack of legitimacy have meant that France, its former colonizer, still plays a very decisive role in CAR. There have been many direct French military interventions in CAR 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 patronage and corruption it offers.

The recent conflict in Central African Republic (CAR) has claimed thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands, and caused severe destruction of 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 into the country. Experts claim that what brought the (mainly Muslim) Séléka 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 manner in which the Séléka forces expressed their alleged grievances casts doubt on their true motives. To mention just one example from 2013, Human Rights Watch researchers confirmed, “in attacks on 34 villages and towns, primarily carried out by Séléka fighters from 11 February to 2 June 2013, more than 1,000 houses had been burned and at least 40 civilians killed. Séléka forces targeted some communities to quell resistance and to pillage.” These communities were mainly Christian even though many organizations failed to recognize that fact. There should not be any reason whatsoever to kill Christians indiscriminately in order to address any sort of alleged longstanding injustice. After all, as a country, both Christians and Muslims have suffered from the lack of good governance, the absence of rule of law, and the incompetence of central governments for many years together. Moreover, the killing of Muslims by anti-Balaka forces—just because they were Muslims—also cannot be condoned.

In 2013, [Amnesty International also reported](#), “The de-facto government forces, known as ex-Séléka, retaliated on a larger scale against Christians in the wake of the attack, killing nearly 1,000 men over a two-day period and systematically looting civilian homes.” There should not be any reason whatsoever to kill Christians indiscriminately in order to address any sort of alleged longstanding injustice. After all, as a country, both Christians and Muslims have suffered from the lack of good governance, the absence of rule of law, and incompetence by central governments for many years together. Moreover, the killing of Muslims by anti-Balaka forces—just because they were Muslims—cannot be condoned.

One of the dangers we are facing now is that while attempting to solve the crisis, it seems that important issues in the conflict are being neglected. The inquiry by the UN experts and Amnesty International suggest that Christian militias (anti-Balaka) are committing ethnic cleansing against the Muslim minority. However, they do not mention the crimes the Séléka forces had committed previously, although it was widely reported that the Séléka forces targeted Christians. According to a [report by the Telegraph](#), “The largely Muslim militia [the Séléka forces] has been fighting to stave off a counter-coup attempt by forces of the Christian majority in this ‘state’ in the capital Bangui and the northern city of Bossangoa. Because they get no pay, they pay themselves by looting the population they claim to protect: notably the Christian population.”

Although the Séléka have now been driven out of many parts in 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, Christians are forced to flee from their villages and denied access to farming fields. Large groups of Christians live in extremely poor conditions in refugee camps.

At the national level, CAR is currently facing a situation of political gridlock. The interim government seems impotent to bring justice, also because the country’s military is not yet allowed to be reconstituted. UN troops are not capable of providing the necessary safety in rural areas. Due to the absence of justice, the anti-Balaka in and around Bangui and the former Séléka in the North-East feel disadvantaged. The economic challenges also persist.

4. Types of Christianity affected

CAR is home to three types of Christianity which have been affected by the persecution dynamics to a similar extent.

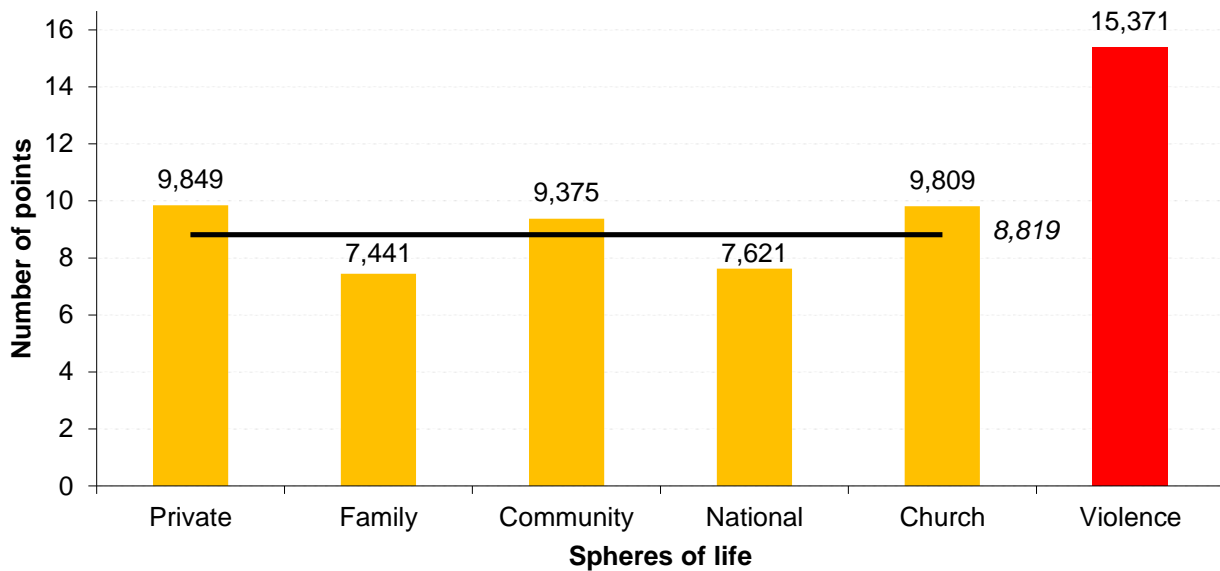
- **Historical Christian communities** (comprised of Roman Catholic and mainstream protestant churches): The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics and schools. Reports state that many church-buildings and other property (both catholic and protestant), have been completely looted of cars, computers and anything of any value.
- **Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs)**: MBBs experience interference from family members if their conversion becomes known.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (consisting of evangelical and Pentecostal communities): Any church and property belonging to ordinary Christians, has been a target for the former Séléka to loot.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern***: The *persecution pattern* for the Central African Republic presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score of the first five blocks, showing the pressure on Christians, is 8.819 points, which is lower than the average for last year (10.339). The score for violence in the reporting period (15.371) stayed at a comparable level with last year

(15.556). The overall level of pressure decreased quite substantially, mainly because persecution is no longer countrywide but concentrated geographically in the areas where the former Séléka are still active. The violence, however, remained high, as the former Séléka continued to be responsible for violent incidents against Christians in the north-eastern provinces of the country and in some areas of Bangui. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the pressure is lowest in the *family* and *national spheres*, which makes sense because CAR is a Christian majority country that allows for freedom of religious expression inside the *family sphere* and in legislation.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Because CAR is a majority Christian country, Catholics and all types of protestants enjoy relative freedom in the private sphere. MBBs 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 of Christians and Muslims. Therefore, sharing the Christian faith between a Christian host and Muslim guest is very risky. In the northern part of the country where Muslims are very dominate and the former Séléka forces are operating, owning Christian materials is also very risky.
- Family sphere:** As the situation in the country is far from being safe, it is very difficult for Christians in the north-eastern 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 the community sphere, for example, when the former Séléka come into a house and find someone reading a bible, they often kill him immediately. In villages where the former Séléka attack, they often abduct young girls. In cities like Kaga Bandor, Bambari, Bria

Christians took refuge after being forced to flee from their villages. They were chased away often by Muslim Fulani herdsmen that took the Christian farmers land for their cattle to graze.

- **National sphere:** In the national sphere, Christians have also been fired from government offices, and replaced by Muslims. This is mainly a concern in north-eastern provinces with Séléka dominated local governments.
- **Church sphere:** In the church sphere, normal church life is very difficult as meetings of Christians are always under the threat of an attack, especially in Bangui close to the PK5 quarter and in the north-east where Christians are harassed in the big cities and forced to flee.
- **Violence:** For a Christian majority country such as CAR, the degree of pressure on Christians is surprising. The crisis in Central African Republic changed the whole dynamics in the country, especially in terms of religion. In the reporting period, many Christians were killed in various parts of the country. For example, sixteen Christians were lynched by a Muslim mob in Bangui on 20 February 2015, some of whom were decapitated. This was in addition to what happened five days earlier (on 15 February 2015) where a pastor and a congregant were killed by Muslims. In December 2014, Muslim terrorists killed a Christian with a grenade. In the same month twelve Christian villagers were pulled out of their homes and stabbed or shot to death by young Muslims. The attack also resulted in the injury of thirteen more. There have also been incidents of arson attacks on churches, missionary centers, and other Christian institutions throughout the country. Also, more than 14 homes and churches were destroyed and missionary centers were looted and vandalized by radical Muslim Fulani in the north-central part of the country in February 2015. This led to many Christians and pastors fleeing the area.

6. Future outlook

1. Safety, security and rule of law must urgently be restored. If that remains absent for a prolonged period, people will arm themselves for protection against the ongoing looting, rape and killing of Christians by the former Séléka. Groups of armed civilians could easily get involved in retaliation killings between vigilant groups versus local disorganized remnants of the Séléka movement and local Muslims.
2. Church, state and society in CAR are caught up in a very traumatic experience. Although Church leaders of the main denominations have joined hands to condemn the violence by anti-Balaka, the situation remains far from resolved. Even if the anti-Balaka voluntarily laid down their weapons, there would be a very serious treat for continuing violence – different radical Islamic groups are said to be standing at the door of Bangui to revenge themselves on the "infidels".
3. The recent conflict in CAR has fundamentally changed the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the country. The conflict has claimed thousands of lives on both sides. The two communities who have lived together for more than a century now lack trust in each other. The

reconciliation process, which is backed by the international community, has started to address this problem. However, it has to be underlined that, unless the reconciliation process and the attempt to end the cycle of impunity in CAR succeed, there is grave risk that the polarization and conflict among Muslims and Christians in CAR will continue and exacerbate religious conflict.

Jordan – Rank 27

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

On this year's World Watch List (WWL) Jordan ranks 27 with 59 points. Last year Jordan ranked 30, with 56 points. Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) have experienced great pressure and face oppression and violence as a result of their faith. This is a development that was also noticed in WWL 2015.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Jordan are *Islamic extremism* and *Tribal antagonism* (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- **Islamic extremism:** Tensions between moderate and radical Islamic elements in Jordanian society are on the increase. The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists, emboldened by their increased influence in the region, have hijacked the demands for more reforms to serve their agenda: to transform Jordan into an Islamic state. Jihadists from abroad heading for Syria are traveling through Jordan. Also, more than [2,000 Jordanian jihadists](#) have reportedly travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight together with other radical Muslims from all parts of the world.
- **Tribal antagonism:** Typical for this engine is the effort to force the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context. Tribal antagonism can come in the form of traditional religion and in the case of Jordan this is clearly mixed with Islam.

3. Context

Jordanian society is multi ethnic - a phenomenon which is also reflected by the monarchy. Late King Hussein's roots are in Saudi Arabia, his second wife and mother of current King Abdullah II is British. King Abdullah himself is married to a Palestinian. The majority of the population consists of Palestinians, most of whom fled after the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967. The majority of them received citizenship in the early 1950s. Palestinian Jordanians ("Westbankers") are not treated equally compared to most other nationals who are from Bedouin descent ("Eastbankers") and have been living in the area for centuries. In general, the latter are loyal to the king. Jordan hosts large groups of refugees, mostly from Iraq and Syria: as of December 2015, the [UNHCR](#) estimates there are 937,830 refugees from Syria and 57,140 from Iraq in the country. Due to the occurrence of many different nationalities in the kingdom, there is insecurity about what shapes a Jordanian citizen's national identity. Also, the high number of refugees leads to economic, political and religious pressure and is a potential destabilizing factor.

The total number of Christians has been declining since the country's independence in 1946. This decline was mainly due to lower birth rates and high emigration rates. A large number of Muslim

refugees have also entered the country from Syria and Iraq. Combined with the rise of radical Islam, this puts increasing pressure on Christians, especially on evangelicals and Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). For a long time, Jordan was one of the most liberal countries of the region in terms of freedom of religion. However, the tide seems to be turning now for Christians. Although Christians belonging to historical churches still enjoy a relatively high degree of religious freedom, MBBs are experiencing the repercussions of increased radical influences in society.

4. Types of Christianity affected

There are three types of Christianity in Jordan which all experience persecution:

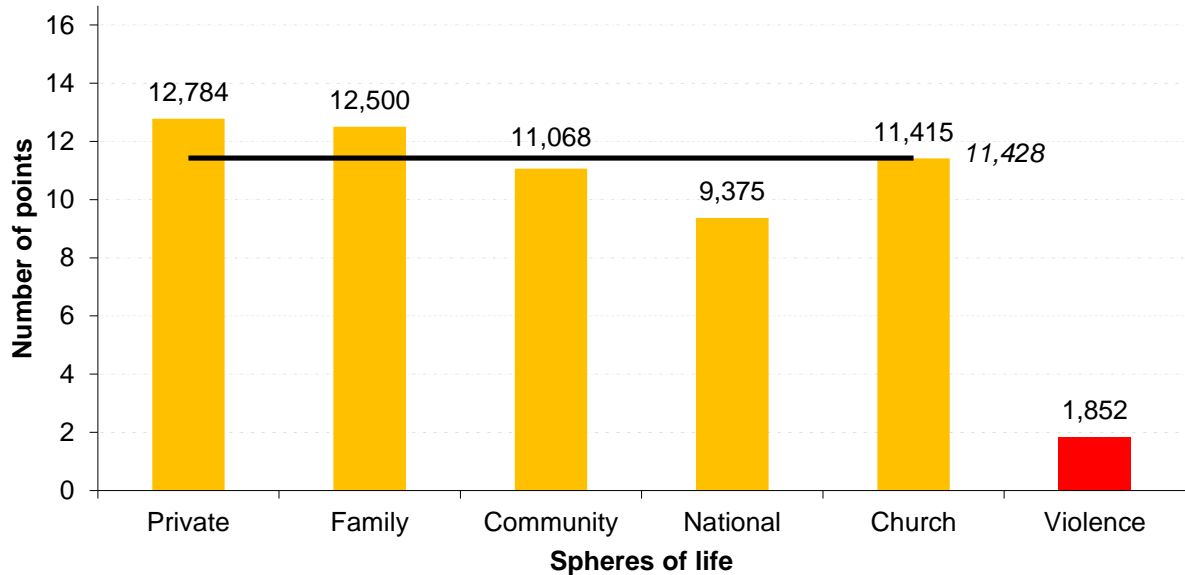
- **Historical Christian communities:** This largest group of Christians is made up mainly of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations. Overall, they enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom but can experience discrimination, e.g. in the area of employment.
- **Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs):** Of all types of Christianity, converts from Islam to Christianity or MBBs are persecuted the most for their faith. If their new faith is known, they can face oppression from a whole variety of sources: government officials, ethnic group leaders, non-Christian religious leaders, fanatical movements, ordinary people and (extended) family. The situation for MBBs – whose small numbers have been growing - has worsened during the past few years, mostly due to pressure from their families and to the increasing activity of radical Islamic groups.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (composed mostly of evangelical, baptist and pentecostal communities). After MBBs, non-traditional protestant communities face most opposition, especially from the side of government officials. Evangelical churches are not recognized by the Jordanian government. In some cases, the government can be a driver of persecution, since violence against Christians is met with impunity.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Jordan presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (11.428) is higher than last year (10.572). The score for the violence block is lower, going down from 3.519 (WWL 2015) to 1.852. The higher score for the overall pressure is due partly to the decision of the WWL team to reduce the number of types of Christianity in Jordan from four to three (with expatriate Christians no longer being included as they live almost totally isolated from other Christians in the country) and partly due to more information being available through an increase in the number of local sources. The increase in pressure is spread over all *spheres of life*, while the *private* and *family spheres* score the highest. This is mostly due to the very high pressure MBBs experience in these areas. They also face resistance at the community and national level once their faith is known. Other types of Christianity experience pressure in the *national* and *church spheres* and to a lesser extent *community sphere*.

Meanwhile the score for *violence* dropped. The reason for this is that there were some extremely serious cases of violence against Christians recorded in the previous reporting period but not in the current reporting period. However, pressure on and violence against MBBs was reported also this year: Open Doors World Watch Research received reports of Christians being held for interrogation by police, being physically abused and abducted (often by family).

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** In the area of private worship, it is especially MBBs who are affected. MBBs cannot openly practice their faith. Giving any indication to those around them that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. All other types of Christianity have more freedom to privately practice their faith, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims.
- Family sphere:** Especially MBBs experience pressure from the side of their families which can even result in serious violence, including death. To put pressure on the MBB, families are also known to inform the authorities which is likely to result in arrest. Open Doors received reports of several MBBs who have been under threat of losing custody of their children as a result of their conversion. The state, however, does not play an active role in this.
- Community sphere:** Also in this *sphere of life*, it is especially MBBs who are under pressure, if their new faith is known. However other types of Christianity can experience pressure in this area as well, for instance through discrimination in public and private employment where they can meet glass ceilings (in public service) and be disadvantaged in promotions. Especially Christians active in the support of MBBs (which includes giving practical guidance, counselling and biblical education) can face threats and obstruction in daily life and also monitoring by their local community.

- **National sphere:** Here all types of Christianity face pressure, though MBBs are especially targeted. Islam is the religion of the state. On issues of inheritance, Islamic law applies to all citizens irrespective of their faith. Code of personal status is based on Sharia which is applied to all those whom the state regards as Muslim – which includes children whose father has converted to Islam. Conversion from Islam is not officially recognized and the public evangelization of Muslims is against government policy. Muslims who become Christians still fall under the jurisdiction of Sharia courts, which means their marriages can be annulled; they can lose custody of their children and can be deprived of other civil rights as well. Security service personnel have reportedly questioned MBBs on their beliefs, threatened court and other actions, and promised rewards for returning to Islam, such as job opportunities. Authorities have also reportedly withheld certificates of good behavior needed for job applications or to open a business and told employers to dismiss MBBs. Those harming MBBs have de-facto impunity.
- **Church sphere:** MBBs face most pressure in the *church sphere of life*, while all other types of Christianity, especially non-traditional denominations, experience certain limitations. Any open or legal form of church life for MBBs is impossible. Compared to other countries in the region however, church life in general is less restricted - especially for traditional Christians - because of the existence of a number of recognized churches. Evangelical churches face problems in obtaining registration. Building permits for church buildings are hard to get and all sorts of other subtle discrimination occur. Reportedly, activities of evangelical churches and underground churches (of MBBs) are being monitored by the secret police. Christian materials cannot be openly distributed and are only allowed to be sold at recognized locations.
- **Violence:** Continued pressure on and violence against MBBs was reported. Open Doors World Watch Research received reports of Christians being held for interrogation by police, physically abused and abducted (often by family) for faith related reasons. Even expatriate Christians have been arrested if they are in contact with MBBs. The number of reports on Christians forced to hide in the country and Christians fleeing the country for faith related reasons has remained approximately the same.

6. Future outlook

Most analysts expect king Abdullah II to remain in power for the next few years, despite regional and national unrest. The main trends at the moment are regional overspill from Syria and domestic unrest. Part of the overspill from Syria is the large number of Syrian refugees entering the country and the risk of Jihadi violence. Though Jordanians may not be satisfied with their economic prospects or the political system, they are aware that rapid change is not preferable considering the situation in Syria. Meanwhile, the threat of radical Islam is a factor that has to be taken into account. More than 2,000 Jordanian jihadists have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight with radical Islamic groups, according to figures from the international consultancy firm, [The Soufan Group](#). They pose a major security threat to the stability of the kingdom once they return. Moreover, there are an estimated 10,000 jihadists inside the kingdom, according to Jordanian officials and IS is

pushing closer to Jordan's borders. The development of the civil war in Syria will greatly influence the situation in Jordan, including that of Christians. For now, the situation is stable and no major change is foreseen in the current situation for Christians.

Djibouti – Rank 28

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 58 points, Djibouti ranks 28 on WWL 2016. Last year, Djibouti ranked 24 with a score of 60 points. The slight decrease in score is due to a decrease in the level of violence in the country.

2. Persecution engines

The main engines underpinning the persecution of Christians in Djibouti are *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. *Tribal antagonism* is also present in the country but is blended with *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** The geographic location of Djibouti is very convenient both for international trade and for a transit of jihadists from the Horn of African to the Middle East and vice-versa. Approximately 95 percent of the Djiboutian population is Sunni Muslim. Radical Islam is growing in the country in a similar pattern to other East African countries. This rise in Islamic radicalism has also become a concern for the government itself. In many circumstances, the government is controlling the Muslim Friday sermons and who should preach at Mosques. Also important is that around 60% of Djiboutians are ethnic Somali, and the growth of radical Islam in Somalia affects society in Djibouti.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** President Ismail Omar Guelleh has been in power since 1999, and he is not showing any sign of relinquishing his office. Djibouti is rated as a “not free” state by the Freedom House 2015 report. World Press Freedom Index of 2015 by Reporters Without Borders also puts Djibouti in the top ten worst countries regarding freedom of expression and information. According to the report, the ruling party has continued harassing and intimidating those who speak out about what is going on in the country. 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 view towards Christians might accelerate in the future due to an intensification of foreign investments from neighboring Gulf countries in a series of economic sectors (including Islamic banking).
- **Tribal antagonism:** Djibouti is the home of Afar and Issa ethnic groups. Issa belongs 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. It has to be also underlined that, as in Somalia, there is a close connection between tribe and Islam in Djibouti.

3. Context

Djibouti is a small, poverty-stricken country. It is surrounded by some of the most volatile and repressive countries like Eritrea, Ethiopia, 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 government is a result of tension between Afar and Issa, the two dominant and rival ethnic groups. They waged a bloody civil war in the 1990s, and the wound has not healed very well. On the religious front, historically, Islam is deeply embedded in Djibouti's society. At the same time, Christianity has also existed in Djibouti for a long time, partly because of ties with Ethiopia. On the society level, a significant number of Djibouti's citizens have strong family ties with Somalia, Yemen and other Muslim countries with a strongly ingrained negative attitude and stance towards the West and Christianity. Djibouti is a member state of the Arab League (without being Arab). Since its independence 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, Guelleh and his ruling political party 'People's Rally for Progress' survived several series of street protest 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 five to six percent of the population of the country is Christian, none are in a position to assume public offices. 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, and this is not only used for good purposes, it is also exploited by radicals/terrorists.

4. Types of Christianity affected

There are three types of Christianity in Djibouti. The different types of Christianity face different levels of persecution.

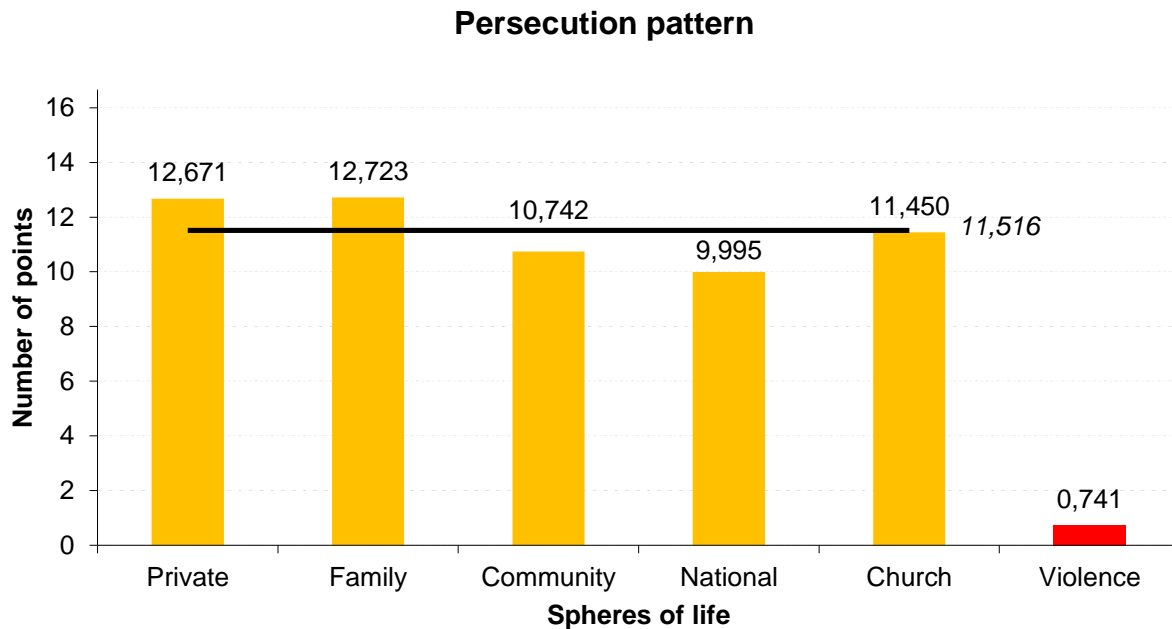
- **Expatriate Christian communities:** The tolerance towards Orthodox Christians originating from Ethiopia is withering away as radical Islam is rising. Contingents of foreign French and US service personnel experience minimal restrictions.
- **Christian converts** (from a Muslim background, MBBs): MBBs face intense pressure from the family and community. This pressure is driven by the (extended) family of MBBs and those fulfilling (religious) leadership roles at community level. MBBs have to stay underground, not necessarily because of state repression but because of pressure from their family and

community members. This is particularly true outside the city where the lifestyle is communal and pastoralist.

- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (consisting of evangelical and pentecostal communities): Life is more difficult for these churches in Djibouti. This group is very active regarding evangelizing, and as a result, it faces severe persecution.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Djibouti presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*) and *Dictatorial paranoia*. The average score over the first five blocks (11.516), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (11.423). The score for the violence block is considerably lower: 2.593 (WWL 2015) to 0.741. This suggests persecution has stabilized or decreased. However, further analysis shows that in general, the situation for Christians in the last two years has been deteriorating. This is reflected by an increase of pressure in the *family and community spheres*, in particular on MBBs. There is a decrease in pressure in the *national and church spheres*. Compared to last year, the score for *violence* has also decreased. Analysis of questionnaires indicates that persecution has shifted slightly from regime to society. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the pressure is highest in the *private and family spheres*, followed by the *church sphere*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Restrictions in the *private sphere of life* are very severe for MBBs. Worshiping, owning Christians materials and expressing views and opinions are some of the challenges that such Christians face. MBBs are monitored by families, people from the mosque, and other community members.

- **Family sphere:** MBBs face serious persecution from their families. Hiding their faith is one of the means to protect themselves, but in a communal lifestyle like in Djibouti this is problematic. An Open Doors researcher points out: “Christians will lose their inheritance the very first day they are discovered being a Christian.”
- **Community sphere:** Lifestyle in Djibouti is very communal. This lifestyle has made the life of Christians very difficult as they are the minority and hence most often refrain from revealing their faith to the community. If their faith becomes known, they face serious persecution. Hindrance to share community resources, harassment, and discrimination in getting a job are some of the problems that they encounter.
- **National sphere:** The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion. In society, radical Islam is embedding itself more than ever before. 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:** All Christians face persecution in their church life. Building church, organizing events, working with youth, and speaking out about persecution are some of the challenges they face. But those who belong to expatriate churches are relatively better off. MBB groups are neither able to register nor build a church.
- **Violence:** Compared to last year, violence has significantly decreased, but still reports indicate that MBBs are facing serious challenges. An Open Doors field researcher noted: “Four MBBs were forced to leave their homes because parents no longer want to support them.” The researcher added, “Two of them were mentally abused in attempts to make them recant their faith in Christ before they were forced out of their home.”

6. Future outlook

President Ismail Omer 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. The chaos in Yemen might also pose another challenge to Djibouti. Civilians, especially refugees living in Yemen, might be forced to flee to Djibouti in greater numbers (some have already arrived). This will pave its own way for jihadists to come to Djibouti to expand their network of jihadists.

As things stand, the future outlook can be envisaged as follows: Hostility towards Christianity and Christians in the society of Djibouti will remain the same (negative). As long as the region remains one where radical Islam poses a threat, Christians in Djibouti will not feel safe. The presence of US and French forces in the country will help in containing the impact of militant Islamic tendencies.

Laos – Rank 29

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 58 points, Laos ranks 29 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year in WWL-2015, Laos ranked 28 with a score of 58 points. The country's score did not change much, despite a slight increase of violence and scores distribute equally across all *Spheres of life* with the exception of the *Family sphere*.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Laos are *Communist and post-communist oppression* and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism*. *Religious nationalism* is blended with *Communist and post-communist oppression*.

- **Communist and post-communist oppression:** Laos is one of the five remaining Marxist-Leninist countries in the world and as such strictly opposed to any influence deemed as foreign or Western. In order to keep everything under control, the communist party puts enormous pressure on the small Christian minority. It has a negative view of Christians and considers them to be foreign agents and enemies. They view Christianity to be a Western ideology that challenges communism. Christians must take extreme caution when talking about their faith. Christians always have to stay within tacitly understood guidelines: they know full well the limits that they should not cross if they want to avoid officials' reactions. Local authorities often make use of the prevalent hostile attitude of society towards Christians to justify their monitoring Christians.
- **Religious nationalism:** Laos is one of the five countries following Theravada Buddhism (the oldest Buddhist tradition) and the Buddhist faith is deeply rooted within country and society. There is a widely shared conviction that Laos and Buddhism are inextricably linked together and Buddhism should always take the supreme position in the country. The goal of local religious Buddhist leaders of keeping their country "pure" and the goal of the political leaders of keeping control complement each other well as both want to control society and prevent deviations from the norm.
- **Tribal antagonism:** Animism is still widely practiced in Laos along with the growth of Buddhism. Village leaders and family members are those who would expel Christians in their communities because of their fear that this foreign faith will anger the spirits. Local officials also force Christians to renounce their faith and at times they are summoned by village leaders to arrest Christians. In May 2014, a Christian was arrested and convicted of unlawfully "practicing medicine" for merely praying for an elderly lady in the neighborhood. This incident shows how serious "calling the spirits" is taken.

3. Context

Laos has been in the tight grip of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party since 1975. Its exclusive networks of party members’ families and close friends add to the strongly felt pressure by every citizen, but especially by minorities. The country has a complete lack of freedom of opinion, let alone a free press which could highlight cases of corruption. Any organized group, particularly those that are not inclined to the ideology imposed by the government, is perceived as a threat to the preservation of communism in the country. The country’s tight laws (adopted in September 2014) on the founding and control of NGOs as well as on the use of social media and online criticism, has been implemented rigorously as observers had [expected](#).

Laos is facing many challenges at the moment which seem to be typical for communist countries. Reports on large-scale corruption emerge frequently and due to the new forms of media, it is not easy for the rulers to subdue these reports or any reactions to them. On the other hand, there is no civil society in existence which can raise its voice in criticism and be of influence. The country’s most prominent leader on civil rights [disappeared](#) more than two years ago which highlights the grim reality everyone faces who opposes the communist rulers’ cause.

4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in Laos exist and are experiencing persecution:

- **Expatriate and migrant worker Christians** are mainly based in the cities and face limitations as well as monitoring.
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Lao Evangelical Church, are recognized by the state, but still face limitations and its members sometimes experience hostilities.
- **Christian converts** from a Buddhist or Tribal Background are facing persecution from their family, friends and neighbors as well – in particular - from local authorities.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (e.g. evangelical and pentecostal fellowships) face hostility and opposition as they are seen as being allied with foreign powers.

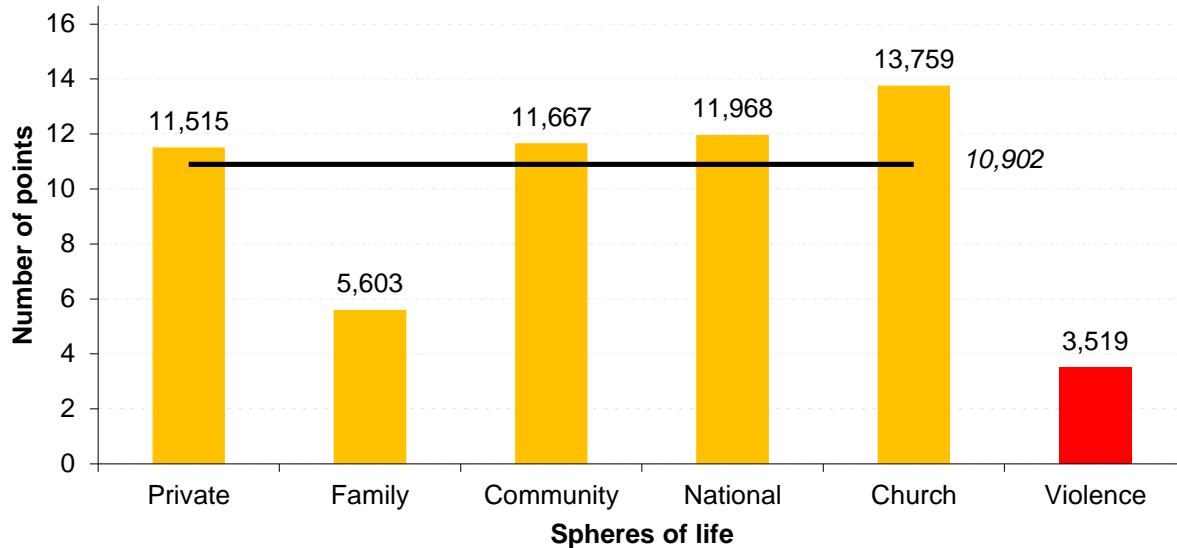
The generally hostile atmosphere towards Christians continues to hinder the freedom of many believers to exercise their faith. The Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) made what can be considered a breakthrough, when they got government approval to stage a two-night evangelistic concert in 2014. However, LEC member churches in rural areas still suffer from the strict administrative process of having to acquire permission to conduct normal church activities.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Laos presents the scores for *Communist and post-communist oppression* (blended with *Religious nationalism*) as well as *Tribal antagonism*. The average score over the first five blocks (10.902), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (11.109). The score for the violence block is slightly higher: 2.037 (WWL 2015) to 3.519. This suggests that despite the violent incidents, pressure continues

to be the main form of persecution for Christians in Laos. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *church sphere*, followed by the *national*, *community* and *private spheres*. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *private* and *community sphere* and is exerted by their social environment. The overall persecution pressure in Laos is exercised by a mixture of communism, tribal ancestor and spirit worshipping as well as a growing influence of Buddhism.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Converts always have to be very careful how they worship, especially if they are the only believers in their family. In remote places, houses have but one room, so it is very difficult to find a place to read the bible, pray or worship undisturbed and unnoticed. Sometimes family members even call the police if a Christian carries out faith-related activities. Family members also hinder Christian relatives from meeting with other Christians or from going out of their home. Bibles and other Christian materials have to be hidden carefully and can only be read with much caution. All Christians are closely monitored, and at times, the help of registered churches is used for keeping an eye on the Christians.
- Family sphere:** The score in the *family sphere* is surprisingly low, but that has partly to do with the fact that the state does not register one's religious affiliation in official documents. However, there were reports from two provinces that local authorities confiscated the family books of certain families, apparently as a punishment for being Christians. These books are needed for registering births, weddings and deaths. Converts sometimes face the threat of divorce and will lose their inheritance rights. Baptism has to be done with the utmost discretion, funeral are at times hindered in strong animist or Buddhist villages. Children of Christians are forced to attend Buddhist lessons and are often discriminated against, for example by receiving lower marks.

- **Community sphere:** The mind-set that "Christianity is of the West and Christians are traitors" proliferates not only in rural areas but also in cities and is common among the young and educated as well as the older generation. This mind-set makes Christians susceptible to harassments and accusations when they do not take part in Buddhist or animistic practices of villagers. In animistic villages, Christians are forced to join rituals (like burials and festivals) so as to avoid angering the spirits. Those working with the government are under pressure to observe Buddhist rituals. The government promoted the teaching of Buddhist practices as part of Lao culture in state schools. Cultural sessions included lessons taught in Buddhist temples. There were also reports that Christians who wished to start a business did not receive any government subsidies available for this very purpose, because of their faith. Christians are frequently interrogated by police and authorities on their church activities.
- **National sphere:** Article 9 of the constitution amended in 2009 states that it is the duty of the state to respect and protect all religions, but particularly mentions the special status of Buddhists and monks. Article 43 also states that Lao citizens have the right and freedom to believe or not to believe in religions. However, since the promulgation of Decree 92 in 2002, its broad provisions on religious practices have been abused making it more difficult to truly exercise religious freedom. This Decree demands the government's prior consent for any religious activity and any activity without this consent is considered to be illegal. Conversion to a new faith, sharing the Gospel, and conducting church activities require government permission. Based on the experience of Christian leaders, the government rarely gives consent. Also printing or importing Christian materials is restricted by that Decree. As Laos is a communist country, every movement of Christians will be monitored and, if the state considers it necessary, hindered. This is a challenge for educating Christians as here people are brought together and trained and the government wants to control this. It is a challenge for supporting Christians as well because as a tiny minority, they are in special need of fellowship. This is particularly true for converts. If perpetrators attack Christians or churches, they will go unpunished. Christians do not receive fair treatment and justice, neither from police, authorities or the courts. The media continues to present Christianity as a remnant of the colonial days and a source of anger for the spirits.
- **Church sphere:** Pressure on church life is extremely high. Only a limited number of registered Christian congregations are allowed to hold services. However, even recognized congregations belonging to the Lao Evangelical Church experiences some hindrances in rural areas where the village leader does not allow Christians to gather. Only the Catholics, LEC and Seventh Day Adventists are the legally acknowledge Christian denominations in Laos. Any Christian church that would like to apply for legal status must be registered under the umbrella of one of these three denominations. Illegal church meetings can be raided and all Christian materials confiscated. While it is legal to print religious materials in Laos, it has to be authorized by the Ministry of Propaganda and Culture with the approval of the Central Committee of the Lao Front for National Construction which usually entails a cumbersome process and often leads to not getting approval and therefore to a factual hindrance. Preaching is monitored and involves risk if anything negative about the government or social issues is mentioned. Christian bibles and training materials can in practice neither be published in the country nor imported. There is also

a lack of leadership and biblical training because most of the Christians live in remote areas and (apart from the Lao Evangelical Church and the Catholic Church) no biblical training is allowed. No bible school has been allowed to operate since Laos became a communist state in 1975.

- **Violence:** Persecution has become more violent in the reporting period. On 8 September 2015 Pastor Singkeaw Wongkongpheng was stabbed to death in Luang Prabang province and on 17 September 2015, Mr. Tiang Kwentianthong from Savannakhet province died in prison (having been imprisoned since June 2014 because he had prayed for an ill lady who later died) as his diabetes was not treated. At least one other Christian was reported to be serving a prison sentence. And, as every year, Christians have been forced to leave their villages.

6. Future outlook

Laos will hold the chairmanship of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2016. Though the regional community of ASEAN in its strength and cooperation is not comparable to other regions, this is a development which deserves being watched. Traditionally, Laos is very close with its big neighbor Vietnam. Not only in ideology, but geographically as well, since Vietnam holds access to the sea. As mentioned in the country profile for Vietnam, Vietnam's relationship with China is cooling (due to South China Sea/Eastern Sea issues). Laos for its part is becoming more and more dependent on China as the latter is financing and building large infrastructure projects in the [country](#). It will be interesting to see how Laos balances these different interests or decides which side to take. In any case, the country will most likely come down harsher on any perceived dissent and deviation (which includes Christians), as it will stand in the focus of international attention more than it is used to, due to the ASEAN chairmanship and do not want any spot to blemish its international reputation. This is one of the reasons why it is already for several years a challenge to get independent news about Laos.

Malaysia – Rank 30

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 58 points Malaysia ranks 30 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year Malaysia ranked 37 with a score of 55 points. The increase is due to an increased level of pressure equally distributed across all *spheres of life*. The sharp increase in the ranking of Malaysia has to do with the methodology of the World Watch List. If the situation of Christians in a country remains unchanged, the country will drop in rank if the scores in other countries increase.

2. Persecution engines

The main persecution engine affecting Christians in Malaysia is *Islamic extremism*. *Dictatorial paranoia* is present too (blended with Islamic extremism).

- Islamic extremism:** Malaysia is still known as probably the best role model of a liberal and tolerant Islamic country in the world. This image is increasingly fading and was also quite damaged in the reporting period. One example of this is the effort to introduce Sharia penal law (*hudud*) in the federal state of Kelantan. Its implementation requires amendments to the federal law and so the introduction is still pending, but it clearly shows an increasing Islamic conservatism. The opposition parties even [split](#) over this issue in June 2015 which in the long term might mean that Islamic parties currently opposed to each other might unite, if they feel Islam is being threatened. According to the constitution, Sharia law is not on an equal footing with civil law, but in practice this is not the case anymore. This can especially be seen in custody cases where civil courts frequently decide in favor of the child's mother. That is why fathers sometimes convert to Islam and claim custody before Sharia courts, which will then be granted to them. The Police prefer to implement the latter's decisions as this means less trouble. Thus a legal question develops concerning the rule of law in Malaysia. Another rather unknown fact is that in most of the country's federal states Islamic re-education camps exist where Muslims uncompliant to the *umma* (or just the family and community) can be held for up to three years incommunicado. This can apply to Muslims who according to their families or neighborhood drink or smoke too much, but also to Muslims who convert to Christianity (MBBs). Though little information about the running of these camps is known, allegedly mental and at times physical abuse is a daily occurrence. The ban of using the term "Allah" for God, implemented against a Catholic newspaper and sanctioned by the High Court, had another repercussion at the very beginning of this reporting period. On 8 December 2014, the religious authorities of federal state Selangor finally released 300 bibles it has seized earlier under the pretext of being against the law (as the Bahasa Melayu bibles used the word "Allah" for God). But all the bibles were [stamped](#) with the warning that these bibles are "strictly for non-Muslim usage only and shall not be published or used in any part of the state of Selangor". Islamic radicalism and conservatism is on the rise which is also shown by the fact that more than a hundred suspected supporters of

the Islamic State (IS) have been arrested in Malaysia so far, while several hundred have left the country already to fight in Syria and Iraq.

- **Dictatorial paranoia:** While *dictatorial paranoia* cannot strictly be seen as a persecution engine in Malaysia, it is still needed to grasp the country's situation. The ruling coalition called UMNO has governed the country since independence in 1957. It is comprised of a Muslim party together with smaller Chinese and Indian parties and has never faced opposition parties. So the impact of the earthquake-like elections in 2008 and 2013 cannot be over-estimated: for the first time a countable opposition appeared and now even governs some federal states. This led to panic reactions by the government. It re-emphasized its policy of preferential treatment to Malay people instead of following a policy of equality. (Prime minister Najib Razak is struggling to recover from a [corruption scandal](#) as reported by the Wall Street Journal in July 2015. According to this report, documents have emerged implicating that 700 million USD from a State Fund have been transferred to the prime minister's private bank accounts.) That is the reason why a mere week later, Razak [publically called for](#) the Quran to serve as the basis for Malay politics. The UMNO increasingly plays religious and racial cards to stay in power, a strategy which has the potential to backfire, but in any case affects the Christian minority seriously.

3. Context

Observers are calling the Malaysian society increasingly racist as the ethnic Malay majority is clearly being favored, while the Chinese and Indian ethnicities (as well as the indigenous tribal population living mainly in the eastern part of Malaysia) are discriminated against. And indeed racism is an everyday experience for ethnic minorities in Malaysia. In October 2015, a deputy minister even publically [announced](#) that he would "like to slap a Chinese". While this would suffice in many other countries for pressure being exerted on the minister to step down, nothing happened. Racial politics and hatred - especially against the Chinese minority - became so strong that in a highly unusual move in September 2015 even the Chinese ambassador to Malaysia went [public](#) and warned against racism.

Christians are affected by this tension in a special way as most Christians either belong to the indigenous tribal groups, or are of Chinese and Indian origin.

4. Types of Christianity affected

Three types of Christianity in Malaysia exist and are experiencing persecution:

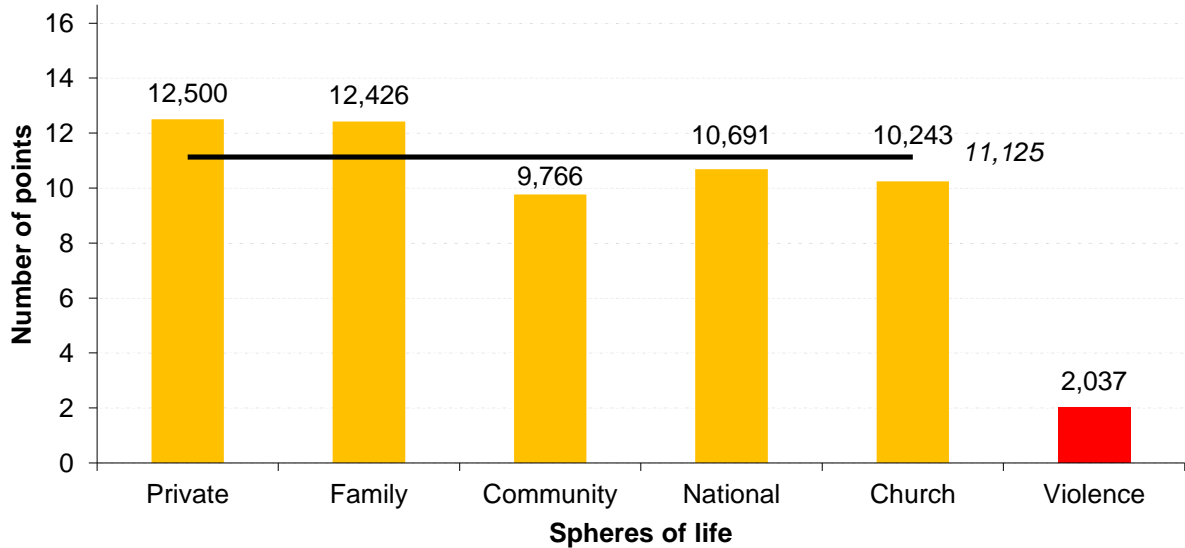
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican or Lutheran churches, which are still less affected than the non-traditional protestant and convert communities, but do suffer from discrimination as well.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) suffer the most.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** such as congregations made up of Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Christianity in Malaysia needs additional descriptions than only the types of Christianity listed above. It is more helpful to make distinctions according to geographical distribution and origin. The majority of Christians come from a *Bumiputra* background. The literal translation for this is “son of the soil” and it means that they belong to the country and come from the indigenous tribal population. From the government’s perspective, they qualify for the policy of affirmative actions as well, but in practice this only applies as long as the *Bumiputra* are not Christians. If they become Christians, their privileges will be limited quickly. The *non-Bumiputra* part of Christianity mainly has believers coming from the Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities and they are split over a plethora of different denominations, ranging in size from house churches to mega churches. Finally, the geographical distribution is important as well. Most *Bumiputra* Christians are living in the states of Sabah and Sarawak, the latter still holding a relative majority of Christians. These states make up East Malaysia and are situated on the island of Borneo (which is shared with Brunei and Indonesia). To complicate the situation, many *Bumiputra* are migrating to West Malaysia for educational or economic reasons. Converts from a Muslim-Malay background complete the picture of the Malaysian church. These MBBs face a high level of persecution as they not only leave their faith, but this decision is seen as acting against their very ethnicity and nation as well.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Malaysia presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks (11.125), showing the pressure on Christians, increased compared to last year (10.345). The score for the violence block is slightly lower: 2.963 (WWL 2015) to 2.037. This suggests that the ever present pressure on the Church is increasing, but is not translating into more open violence. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private* and *family spheres*, followed by the *national* and *church spheres*. Pressure on MBBs is especially acute in the *private* and *family spheres* and is exerted by the social environment and their own family. The pressure on Christians in their different spheres of life is fired by politics and society driven by a continuing ethnic Malay-Muslim supremacy.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Under the law, Malay Muslims are not allowed to convert from Islam in all states except Sarawak. Malay converts cannot attend any public church activities. If they do so, they risked being caught by the authorities and the church where they go to will face serious consequences for welcoming them. Therefore, MBBs gather secretly in different homes for all their Christian activities, away from the prying eyes of the government, community and the registered churches. Consequently, MBBs 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 families will not tolerate it. Known converts are closely monitored and can face house arrest, in some cases also physical or mental abuse.
- Family sphere:** Under the law, children born to couples where one parent is Muslim (either by birth or conversion), their children are automatically registered as Muslims. Every Malaysian has an identity card and religion is recorded on this card by the Federal Registration Department. Once a citizen is registered as Muslim, it cannot be changed at all. This same registration department also handles the death certificate of anyone who dies. Before a death certificate is issued, if records show that the person has converted to Islam, the authorities will inform the Islamic religious authority. If the burial rites are not celebrated according to Islam, they have the right to take the body away from the non-Muslim family so that they can perform Islamic rites for the deceased. Once MBBs are discovered, they face the threat of divorce, will lose their inheritance rights, and organizing a baptism or a Christian wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible. Converts can be isolated from their families, kicked out by them or even given to Islamic re-education camps. Some poor Christians from indigenous tribes, especially in Sabah, were converted to Islam using trickery. To accept financial help from the

government, they sign a form believing it is just that, not knowing that it was really a declaration to convert to Islam. When signing that document they surrendered their identity card to the officers. When they got back their card back, they realized that their religion has been changed to Islam. When they tried to reverse it they were told by the Federal Registration Department that it can only be changed if approval is given by the Sharia courts, which is impossible to get.

- **Community sphere:** The monitoring and surveillance of Christians is carried out by state authorities as well as by local Muslim communities and Malay rights groups such as *Perkasa*, ISMA, etc. The government does not deny non-Muslim needs like education. But for qualifying for such things as higher education and scholarships, Christians need to overcome far higher hurdles than Muslims. MBBs face strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to recant their Christian faith. Christians experience discrimination in their business lives too and will not make it to higher positions in public employment.
- **National sphere:** The constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslims. That is why Malays do not have the religious liberty to leave Islam and embrace another religion. The constitution also prohibits adherents of other religions from propagating their religion among Malay Muslims. Yet, it allows Muslims to propagate Islam all over the country. On websites run by Malay rights groups and in government owned media Christians are frequently slandered, for example by spreading rumors that Christians and Jews want to take over Malaysia or other preposterous claims. The country's harsh sedition laws have drawn much condemnation from international observers. Interestingly, those who have instigated hatred and stoke racial and religious sentiments against Christians are never charged for sedition. On the other hand, those who speak against the government do face sedition charges. Bumiputeras face aggressive, deliberate attempts to convert them to Islam, especially those who migrate to the West as it is easy to take advantage of their social uprooting and their economic vulnerability. In the long term, the Christian population may shrink because of this, especially in East Malaysia.
- **Church sphere:** Most non-traditional churches are not registered as such but operate as organizations or community centers, buying shop or factory premises to operate from. Whilst most churches are monitored, they do not face restrictions on their meetings. The only incident registered in this reporting period happened on 19 April 2015, when fifty protestors demonstrated against a church in Taman Medan and made the pastor take down the church's cross, although this was regretted later by many parts of society. All printing of Christian materials requires permission from the government. Restrictions on Bahasa Malaysia materials are imposed and use of the word "Allah" for God is in fact banned for Christians.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Malaysia is not particularly violent and for the type of Christianity affected by it the most, MBBs, it is difficult to find records of numbers and cases. Some MBBs have been detained in the re-education camps and some have even been abducted and held incommunicado. Christians sometimes also leave their home towns and go into hiding either in country or abroad, in order to escape persecution.

6. Future outlook

The political trend is showing that UMNO continues to lose influence among the people whereas the opposition is gaining momentum. In order to gain back its influence, it may resort more and more to creating situations and blaming the Chinese community (especially as a significant portion are Christians and members of the opposition party) for being a threat to the supremacy of Islam and Malay rights. The split in the opposition over the introduction of *hudud* laws, already referred to above, poses another political danger. If the trends continue, the ruling UMNO might as a last resort consider forming an alliance with the break-away and conservative Islamic PAS party, which would mean bad news for Christians as well.

Depending on further developments in the corruption affair, ethnic and religious minorities may find themselves used as scapegoats. That prime minister Razak remained defiant cannot be interpreted as a good sign. He sacked his deputy prime minister for questioning him. He removed the attorney general and re-assigned the two top leaders of the MACC (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission) for investigating him on charges of corruption. He has also appointed the home minister to be his deputy, a man known for using force and threats against his enemies. The fact that he cannot control the process now that international authorities from Switzerland have started to investigate the case will make things worse. The situation in Malaysia will surely remain volatile and for the Christian minority challenging.

Tajikistan – Rank 31

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 58 points Tajikistan ranks 31 on the World Watch List 2016. In WWL-2015, Tajikistan ranked 45 with a score of 50 points. This big increase in points is mainly due to the political change that has occurred in the country since March 2015, when it became a far more dictatorial regime. Before that date, Tajikistan was known as a weak and corrupt state, but now all opposition (especially from the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan) has been wiped out. This also had its repercussions on the Church.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Tajikistan are *Dictatorial paranoia* and to a lesser extent *Islamic extremism*. Please note that *Dictatorial paranoia* in Tajikistan is a product of the communist past and has therefore emerged from *Communist and post-Communist oppression*, although the ideology of communism has been dead and buried in Tajikistan for many years.

- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Both mainstream Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses are frequently branded as "extremists" for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. Pressure from the authorities has been stepped up in 2015. It is very common that members of any protestant church are regarded as followers of an alien sect with 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. Security forces have increased wire-tapping in order to find "extremists". This has also affected Christians and churches. Another strand of crackdown involves religious education, no matter what religion is concerned.
- ***Communist and post-Communist oppression***: This is the historical fundament on which the current regime is established. Communism has no ideological contribution to support the regime's position anymore. However, many control systems and mechanisms derived from the communist system are still in place in the country.
- ***Islamic extremism***: Pressure on Christians coming from Islamic circles is particularly aimed at Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). 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 and they 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.

3. Context

Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country with a Persian national language; culturally Tajikistan has more affinity with Iran and Afghanistan than the other countries in Central Asia. Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries in the region and relies heavily on remittances – an estimated 20% of the whole population work in Russia and Kazakhstan. On the positive side, these remittances ensure that about 60% of the population can cover their daily needs; on the negative side, there is a high social cost as families are torn apart and children are growing up with few male relatives.

Tajikistan shares a 1,200-kilometer (750-mile) frontier with Afghanistan. This has several repercussions: a) there is a huge flow of drugs from Afghanistan via Tajikistan to the West; b) Tajiks (also living in Afghanistan) are involved in Islamic fighting; c) What happens across the border has great impact on Tajikistan. Now that western forces have left Afghanistan Tajikistan has sought help from Russia. They have offered the use of military bases in exchange for border control by Russian soldiers.

On 1 March 2015 parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan. Until then Tajikistan was the only country in the region that had a recognized political opposition party – a religiously based one: the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Soon after the elections, which were of course won by the supporters of President Emomali Rahmon, a change occurred in the country. Within a few months the IRPT was forbidden. Its leaders were detained and on 27 November 2015 Hasan Rahimov, one of the leaders, was sentenced to nine years imprisonment. More and more restrictive legislation was imposed - including on matters of religion.

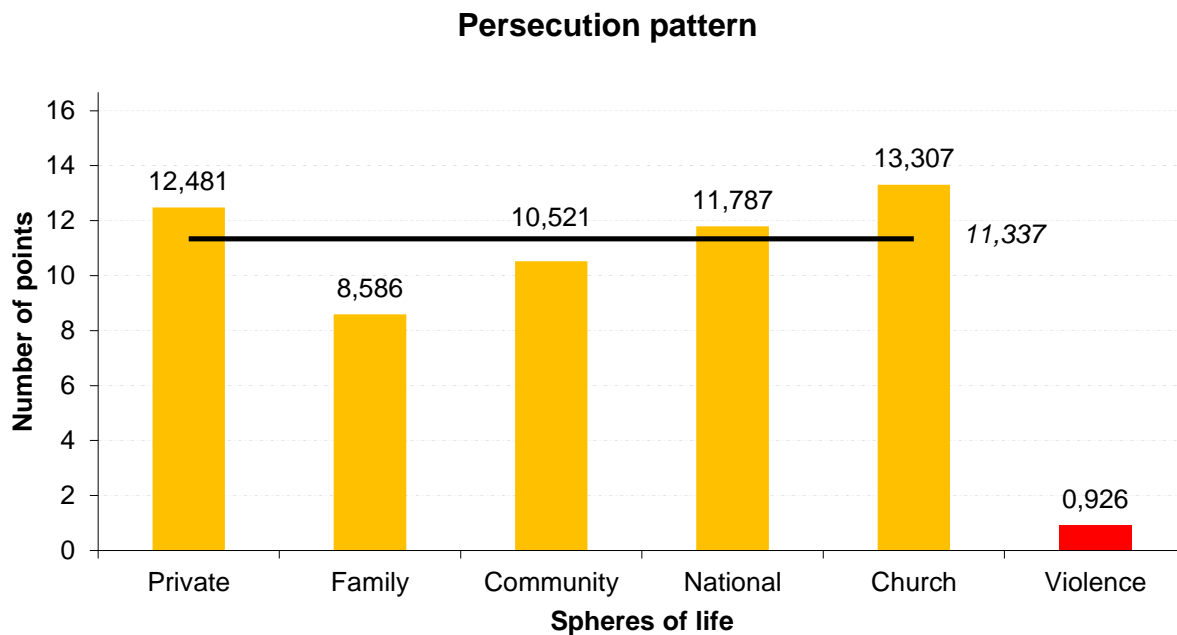
4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in Tajikistan exist and are experiencing various levels of persecution:

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians.** Most of the expatriate groups are focused internally. They are hardly involved in evangelism and hence experience few difficulties from the authorities.
- **Historical Christian communities,** (of which the Russian Orthodox Church, ROC, is by far the largest) are not involved in evangelism among Tajiks. They can function pretty normally as the Tajik regime does not consider them a danger. What is more: the Tajik government has no interest in provoking Russia by attacking the ROC.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) bear the brunt of the persecution in Tajikistan. 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. Conversion is seen as ethnic, national, and religious betrayal and as having brought shame upon the family.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** belonging to Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are the second main group to be persecuted because of their evangelism. They suffer from many raids, threats, arrests, and fines by the authorities.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Tajikistan presents the scores for *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (11.337), showing the pressure on Christians, is markedly higher than last year (9.847). The score for the violence block is slightly higher (0.926) than last year (0.741). It suggests the regime is increasing its control more and more. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private, national, and church spheres*. This is typical for a situation in which *Dictatorial paranoia* is the leading persecution engine. Pressure from *Islamic extremism* is present mostly in the *private, family and community spheres* and is exerted by the social environment, while *Dictatorial paranoia* – the pressure from the regime – is felt mostly in the *private, national and church spheres*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** There is no official obstacle to conversion, but social pressure on converts can be quite high. Punishment for conversion is unavoidable, especially from family members. Conducting acts of Christian worship is very risky for MBBs. Even at this very private level, persecution is quite severe for simply worshiping by themselves. There have been reports in the past, as well as during the reporting period, of converts being severely persecuted by their families, including beatings and forced renunciations of faith. Possession of religious materials is risky for MBBs especially, but it is also the case for all Christians where they do not have state permission. Converts usually hide Christian literature and symbols because of possible reprisals within the family, but other Christians must also be careful as owning such literature and displaying Christian symbols could be regarded as a form of evangelism. MBBs have to be very careful when accessing Christian radio, television or websites that they are not discovered by their family, friends and community. It is also very risky for a convert to talk about his new faith with members of the family as this will immediately be linked to shame and honor, and the

family will then do its utmost (sometimes in the form of house arrest) to have the convert return to the old faith. It is very risky for all Christians to speak about their faith to non-Christian guests. There are also reports suggesting that the country's secret service is constantly monitoring Christians. The level of surveillance on religion in Tajikistan is huge, both by state agents and the social environment. Even private meetings between Christians are monitored. This has resulted in a high level of fear amongst Christians who are afraid to report incidents.

- **Family sphere:** Sometimes Muslim families and the authorities are known to obstruct wedding ceremonies, baptisms and burials of MBBs. Since August 2011 any religious activity for those under the age of 18 has become strictly forbidden. All Christian youth work must now be done in secret. Children and teens are not allowed to visit Sunday school or receive religious training. Islamic topics are part of the school curriculum and all children are required to attend them. Children of Christians are often humiliated and slandered at schools in front of all other children. Wives or husbands of converts have been forced to separate because of threats and MBBs may also lose inheritance rights.
- **Community sphere:** MBBs are threatened by their families and unregistered Christians by state agents. Male converts are confronted if they continue to wear traditional clothing but confess to be Christian. Christians connected with evangelism and conversions are monitored by the community. Also for MBBs marriages are arranged by the parents there is pressure to take part in Islamic ceremonies and feasts. Known Christians are not allowed to participate in communal institutions, forums, events and have fewer career opportunities. . Sporadically, MBBs and protestant Christians face problems operating a business.
- **National sphere:** The state proclaims itself as secular, but it distinguishes between traditional and non-traditional religions. Hanafi Islam (one of the four religious Sunni Islamic schools of jurisprudence) and Orthodox Christianity are clearly preferred, while all others experience some form of discrimination. The constitution protects religious freedom, but in practice the government enforces policies which restrict religious freedom. Some local and regional leaders create administrative barriers for Christians which can affect the registration of churches. There is no alternative for military services and people end up in jail if they refuse. A law introduced in July 2012 prohibits Tajik citizens from going abroad in order to receive religious education, teach or to establish ties with foreign religious organizations. The Tajik government only treats the ROC with respect; all other Christian churches are discriminated against. Protestants are barred from public office as they are seen as an untrusted foreign influence that threatens the Tajik community. Since March 2015 there has been a crackdown on all non-government organizations. Activities related to church ministry, including youth work and the publication of religious materials have been curtailed and censored by the government. State agents and community members can attack Christians with impunity. Christians suffer from biased treatment against them in court.
- **Church sphere:** Meetings of MBBs may be disrupted by family, friends or members of the community, but unregistered meetings of any category of Christians are illegal. The obligatory

registration procedure has become so difficult that for the last decade or longer no new congregations have been registered. All religious activity is being monitored, and when unregistered groups are discovered, the government will take immediate action. Only registered groups can build (others have to rent spaces for meetings) and hence new churches are hardly ever constructed. From time to time police raid meetings and disrupts services, especially of unregistered groups. Only registered groups can legally organize activities and ask for permission to organize activities outside their buildings, but this is hardly ever granted. The August 2011 laws prohibit any youth work. Since youth form about 50% of all believers this has big consequences. The Council for Religious Affairs must approve sermons as well as religious materials. Religious training of leaders can only be done by registered groups (and these are few). Sometimes, unregistered groups do this under the umbrella of the registered ones. All media are state-controlled and thus inaccessible for Christians. Internet access only goes via state providers. From time to time the government blocks YouTube and Facebook, or specific Internet sites. The government does not allow Christians to establish their own schools, organizations or institutions, nor do they allow Christian charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural associations. All foreign contacts with domestic religious groups are prohibited as part of the government's crackdown on radical religious expressions.

- **Violence:** Persecution in Tajikistan does not at first appear to be particularly violent, but this is due to the small size of the Church and the fear among believers to report incidents. We can therefore only see the tip of the iceberg; it is certain that the real number of incidents is much higher. In the reporting period at least 2 Christians were physically harassed when police officers interrogated them, and at least one MBB suffered injuries from family. One home of a believer was damaged when police tried to force their way in in July 2015. At least two Jehovah's Witnesses were detained in July 2015.

6. Future outlook

The regime puts heavy pressure on all "deviating" groups, including Christians. By tightening already existing laws and by enforcing them strictly, the government is putting additional pressure on the Christian minority. The new youth law in particular has left Christians (and other affected religious minorities) in legal limbo as it is not obvious what is allowed and what is denied by law. This means that the situation for Christians will remain the same or even worsen in the future.

Tunisia – Rank 32

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

Tunisia scores 58 points on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, three more than the year before. With this score the country ranks 32 (WWL 2015: rank 36). The increase in score is explained in part by the fact that slightly more violent incidents took place; it is however mainly due to the increase of pressure on Christians. Although Tunisia's constitution represents an important step in bringing stability to the country, it continues to protect Islam to the detriment of other religions. Moreover, as a society, Tunisia is becoming more conservative, particularly in rural areas, which implies a greater emphasis on observant Islam.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines in Tunisia are *Islamic extremism* and to a lesser extent *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** *Islamic extremism* is present at different levels. At the family level, converts to Christianity are often not supported in their decision to convert by family members. There are cases of MBBs being locked up in their houses by their own families. At the social level, violent Salafists spread fear throughout the country. At the political level, Islamist political parties were defeated at the most recent parliamentary elections but still remain a relevant political factor.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** 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. More research is needed in 2016.

3. Context

There has been a lot of social unrest in the country, which was one of the main reasons for the demonstrations leading to the Jasmine revolution, named after the national flower of Tunisia. On 14 January 2011, president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his inner circle fled the country to Saudi Arabia. After several days of demonstrations the president saw there was no support for his regime among the people any longer. The regime fell and an interim government was established. 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. Essebsi is a veteran politician who has served as a minister and as a speaker of parliament in the Ben Ali regime and while some have cautioned that Essebsi's victory poses a danger of a return to the authoritarian

past of Ben Ali, Essebsi has tried to capitalize on his experience by projecting himself as an experienced technocrat capable of bringing about stability and a much needed economic turnaround.

In the legislative elections, no single party won a majority. Essebsi's moderate and secularist party Nidaa Tunis won the largest number of seats in the parliament. Ennahda, the "moderate" Islamic party that had won the elections in the immediate aftermath of the revolution and which had led the transitional government for a while, won the second largest number of seats. Initially, the prime minister appointed by president Essebsi tried to form a minority government but has since formed a [coalition government](#) with Ennahda (the "moderate" Islamic party that had won the elections in the immediate aftermath of the revolution and which had led the transitional government) and with other smaller parties.

4. Types of Christianity affected

There are only two types of Christians in Tunisia: expatriate Christians and Christian converts from Islam (Muslim Background Believers or MBBs).

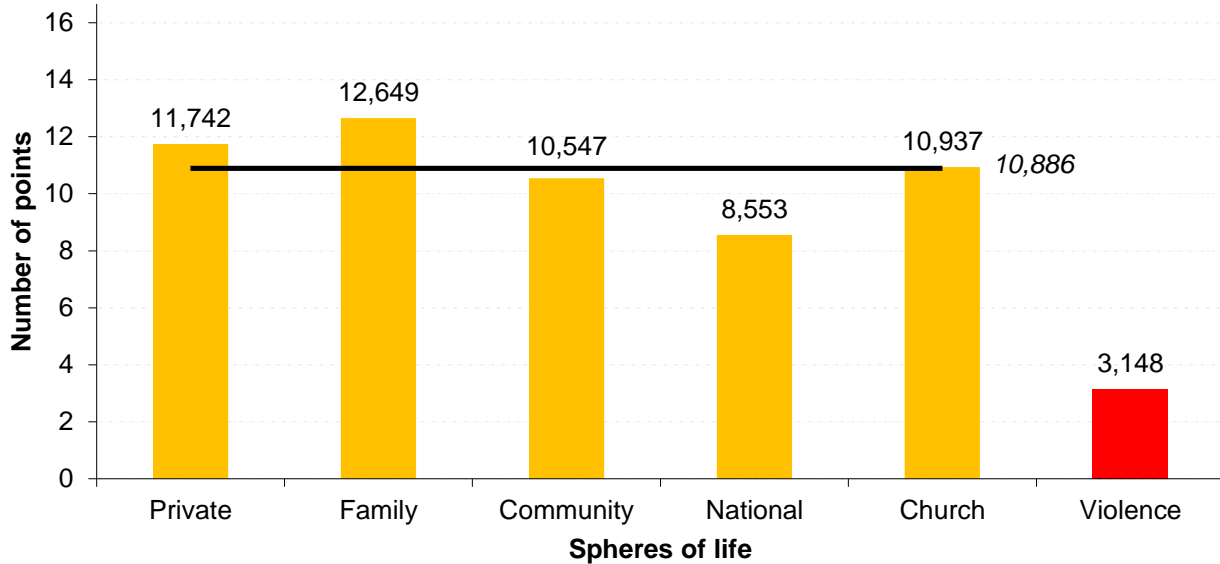
- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians:** Expatriate Christians experience a relative amount of freedom (public evangelism is not tolerated). These Christians hardly encounter any problems while almost all native Christians face problems.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) face a variety of pressures. Indeed, pressure is clearly much higher for them than for the few international churches in the country.

Christians (and others) are more or less free to seek and receive information about the Christian faith, particularly content posted online.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Tunisia presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (10.886), showing the pressure on Christians, is higher than last year (10.458). The score for the violence block is only slightly higher, rising from 2.593 (WWL 2015) to 3.148. This suggests that the level of pressure on Christians has intensified slightly, partly as a result of the increased violence which generates more fear. The terrorist attacks aimed at tourists also created more fear among the country's Christian population. Although they do not focus on Christians, the presence of Islamic terrorists has an important psychological impact. As a result of the terror attacks, the police have become stricter in enforcing legislation. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure is highest in the *family sphere*, followed by the *private, church and community spheres*.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Christians particularly 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. Almost every single MBB (especially young people) has a story of opposition, rejection and/or persecution because of changing their faith. Especially for young MBBs it is very difficult to read the Bible and pray in the open by themselves.
- **Family sphere:** In the family sphere, the freedom of Christian families to conduct their family life in a Christian way is limited because judges frequently make discretionary interpretations of Islamic law. Every Tunisian is automatically registered as Muslim. Expatriates have no trouble if their children keep their foreign nationality. MBBs need to accept that official registrations are being made under Islamic religion. If they seek to change this, it proves impossible and causes repercussions.
- **Community sphere:** MBBs receive threats from their families or the society around them when their conversion is known. Especially in rural parts of the country young female MBBs are scared of being forced to get married to Muslims. There are also cases known of MBBs 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. Active participation in public life as Christian is extremely difficult if not impossible for Christians. Church registration is impossible for Tunisian churches. 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. National churches cannot register – 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. 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 incidents during this year’s reporting period include a church being damaged, many cases of MBBs being physically harmed and their houses and shops vandalized, and some reports of abductions. Due to the sensitivity of the information more details cannot be published.

6. Future outlook

1. 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.
2. 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 newly elected government. Islamist Ennahda did lose the parliamentary elections that were held on 26 October 2014, but still has a lot of support, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, the winning secular party has had to form a government coalition with Ennahda because they did not obtain enough seats to attain the majority. The secular party which won the election in December 2014 does not necessarily have a favorable position towards Christians.
3. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), Islamic State was behind the [terrorist attack on 26 June](#) 2015 in Sousse, where 38 tourists were killed. ICG interprets the incident in the light of “the risks posed by the intermingling of criminality and jihadi groups, notably in urban peripheries and border areas neglected by the state”, and also points to the lack of professionalism within the Tunisian security forces. In Tunisia, the links between Islamist movements and organized crime should not be underestimated. They create a lot of unrest in Tunisian society, contributing to the increase of already high levels of fear among Christians. The incident is also a clear confirmation of the visibility of armed jihadi cells, which needs to be dealt with urgently.
4. In July 2015, the Tunisian parliament overwhelmingly adopted a new [anti-terrorism law](#) (BBC, 25 July 2015), which includes the death penalty for terrorists. Human rights organizations are concerned that this law could be used to silence the political opposition. Analysts, such as Hayet Ben Said, are of the opinion that terrorism should rather be addressed by [reforming the](#)

[education system](#), as he asserts in an article published on 11 August at Gatestone. There is no recipe to combat terrorism, but it is undeniable that Islamist violence is a growing source of concern in Tunisia and radical Muslims remain highly visible. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that Tunisia's political developments are not as positive as mainstream media make it seem, including the situation of minorities such as Christians.

China – Rank 33

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 57 points, China ranks 33 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year on WWL 2015, China ranked 29 with a score of 57 points. The scoring remains largely unchanged and reflects the continuing pressure against Christians belonging to the Han Chinese majority, as well as the difficult situation of converts from Muslim Uighur and Tibetan background. Though they are small in number compared to the overall Chinese church, the level of persecution against them remains high. The level of violence did not change much.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in China are *Communist and post-communist oppression* (main engine), and to a lesser extent *Islamic extremism* and *Religious nationalism*.

- **Communist and post-communist oppression:** In achieving the communist party's goal of maintaining their hold on power through national unity and by limiting outside influences, the rulers will do everything they deem necessary. In the reporting period, the country increasingly relied on its ideological roots: on the one hand, it put an emphasis on Confucianism; on the other hand, it stressed communist ideology frequently and even re-iterated the fact that being religious and being a member of the party is incompatible. While this is nothing new in itself, its repeated emphasis by the leadership and by party organs like the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, was noteworthy. In the general campaign against so-called "evil cults", churches were affected as well. In the plethora of challenges the country faces, China's leadership tries to keep everything calm. Its goal of maintaining power and social harmony includes the control of all religions, including the strongly growing Christian minority. This is even truer for the volatile minority regions of Tibet and Muslim Xinjiang. The government has increased its grip and this is not only felt by ethnic insurgents, but by the respective groups of converts to the Christian faith as well. While in most regions in China, Christian activities have rather been watched than controlled, some unregistered house churches have been affected by a program started to eradicate so-called "evil cults" as some of those cults have – contorted – Christian roots. 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 Christians.
- **Islamic extremism:** The situation in the northwestern Muslim minority state of Xinjiang, where the Uighur minority lives, is increasingly tense and deteriorating further. The situation for the small number of Christian converts from a Muslim Background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) – most likely a few thousand – has become more complicated and even more limited than before. 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. Though it is difficult to get reports on the situation of the MBBs, all information received points to a deteriorating and sometimes even violent level of persecution like being beaten by the family.

- **Religious nationalism:** What has just been said on *Islamic extremism* also applies to the even smaller group of Tibetan Background Believers in the Chinese region of Tibet (in the far Western part of China). Pressure and violence are increasing and authorities do everything in their power to curb the Tibetan struggle for independence. Tibetan believers face strong opposition from family, friends, neighbors and communities as well. To have a “deviant faith” in this region may also cost a high price as the convert puts him- or herself outside the community.

3. Context

China remains one of the most complicated and difficult to understand countries on the WWL as it is so multi-faceted and diverse. While the campaign of breaking down crosses in the province Zhejiang apparently seems to have ceased, church meetings continued to be disrupted and stopped, if authorities saw the need for it, for example in the province Guangdong. Those disturbances especially occurred when foreigners attended the gatherings, foreign media was involved or the gathering was perceived as too big. In achieving the communist party’s goal of maintaining the hold on power through national unity and by limiting outside influences, the campaign against corruption continues at full throttle and has even started to affect the military. But there are many issues the leadership is needing to face: One is the slowing down of the economy; another concerns the ability of the authorities to provide general security, especially after the explosion in Tianjin in August 2015. The answers the rulers have given so far seem to be cautious. The easing of the one-child-policy is a two-edged sword as it may well ease some social problems of an aging society, but at the same time, it adds to the need to increase economic growth. The curbing of reporting after the explosions in Tianjin, including the censoring of social media, is increasingly difficult and does not solve the problems. In this plethora of challenges, China’s leadership tries to keep everything calm. Its goal of maintaining power includes the control of all religions, including the strongly growing Christian minority.

The question of Church growth is a hot topic of debate. While official figures point to rather 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 number of members of the communist party, which ranges around the 88 million mark. Other estimations for the number of Christians are in the 130 million range. In the book “A star in the East: the rise of Christianity in China”, published in May 2015, author Rodney Stark does some math and explains that if the growth of Chinese Christianity, estimated for the last decades at an annual rate of eight percent, continues unabated, the numbers of Christians will be 295 million in 2030 and therefore China would become the largest Christian nation worldwide. Though one may doubt the assumptions and

calculations, the very discussion and the wide range of estimated numbers show that China is not easy to understand and that persecution and the strong growth of Christianity are not contradictory. Another fact illustrates this as well. In September 2015, more than 900 house church pastors gathered in Hong Kong at the conference “Mission China 2030” and pledged to send out 20,000 missionaries from China by 2030. This underlines the statement already given in last year’s report: “Everything you hear about the Church in China will probably be true.” There is persecution, also among the Han Chinese majority, but there is still more freedom than thirty years ago.

4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in China exist and are experiencing persecution at different levels:

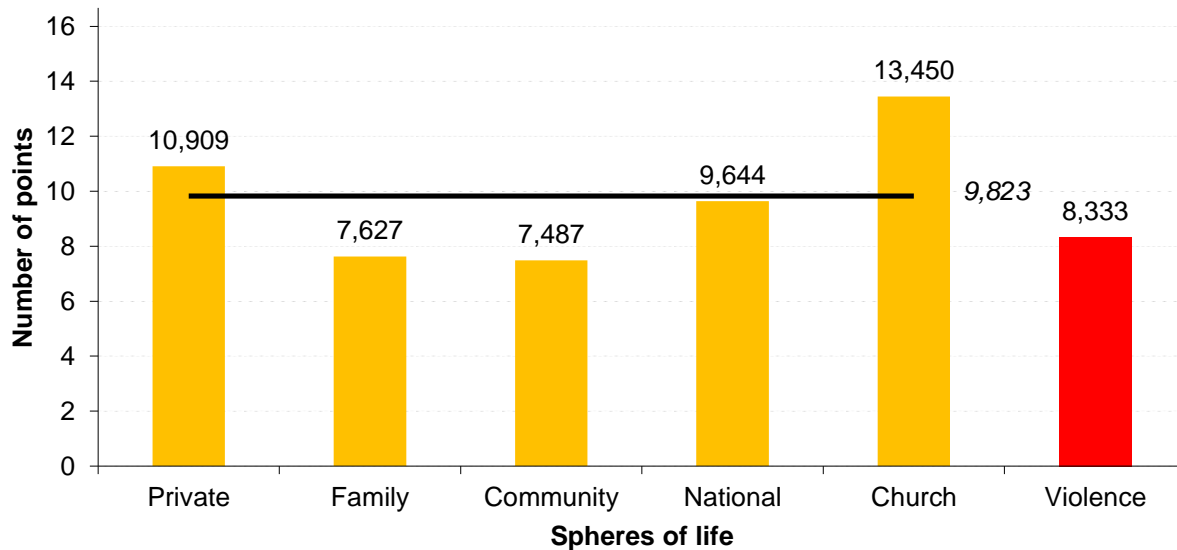
- **Expatriate and migrant Christians** basically face monitoring and limitations in contacts with the local churches.
- **Historical Christian communities or government controlled churches**, highlight a unique factor in Chinese Christianity. There are registered and government acknowledged churches – Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Catholic – Catholic Patriotic Association – and non-registered, independent churches. On the Roman Catholic side, these are the followers loyal to the Vatican.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background as well as from a Buddhist, Tibetan Background. While compared to former times Christians in China generally have more freedom, this is not true for the small communities of Christian converts. As they are living in very volatile, ethnic minority regions, which are striving for independence, converts are facing pressure from two sides: from the government which restricts any meeting or action it deems political or dangerous and from family, friends and community which presses converts to return back to the “true faith”, which is a uniting factor for the ethnic groups and a distinguishing factor to the “oppressor”.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** such as evangelical and pentecostal communities. On the protestant side, these non-traditional churches are also called house churches. The term “house church” is misleading as some congregations consist of thousands of members and they are often meeting in commercial buildings and not in secret. As already said when explaining the persecution engines, the government’s main goal is to keep control over society. Hence, all Christians will be affected by this policy to a certain extent.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution Pattern***: The *persecution pattern* for China presents the scores for *Communist and post-communist oppression*, *Islamic extremism* and *Religious nationalism*. The average score over the first five blocks (9.823), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (9.863). The score for the violence block is higher: 7.222 (WWL 2015) to 8.333. This suggests that the persecution situation in China is volatile. The combination of the different persecution engines, as presented in the *persecution pattern* below, gives an interesting picture. The effect of *Islamic extremism* and *Religious nationalism* on the persecution

pattern of *Communist and post-communist oppression* is high in the *private, family and community spheres*. There is where converts from a Muslim or Tibetan background are most vulnerable for persecution in the Chinese context. The overall picture shows that persecution is by far the strongest in the *church sphere*, followed by the *private and national spheres*. These are the *spheres of life* where Christians usually face most problems when living under *Communist and post-communist oppression*. The state is strong in rules and curbing deviation as well as restricting and controlling meetings. Additionally, the situation of converts adds to the pressure in the *private sphere*, especially if they are the only believers in a family or a community.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Muslim Uighur and Tibetan Buddhist converts always 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 it. 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. Known converts are closely monitored and will face threats, in some cases also physical and/or mental abuse.
- Family sphere:** In Tibet and Xinjiang the situation is very volatile and every change of religion will be seen as a disgrace to the family and as treason to the community. Therefore converts are very cautious in hiding their new won faith. Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce, may lose their inheritance rights and organizing a baptism, Christian wedding or funeral is difficult. Children of Christians, not just of converts, will be forced to learn non-Christian teachings and the converts' families will convince parents to teach traditional values and religion as well. Han Chinese Christians in Tibet and Xinjiang do not face persecution in their family life.

- **Community sphere:** Converts face pressure by their family, friends and neighbors to recant the Christian faith and their children face discrimination and bias by Muslim or Tibetan teachers and co-students in schools.
- **National sphere:** China continues to propagate a communist and atheist ideology, though in the reporting period the latter has been increasingly influenced by the emphasis on the country's Confucianist roots. Reporting about Christians can be biased as was shown when more than a thousand crosses in the province Zhejiang were torn down. Publically displaying religious symbols had not been a problem in most regions in the last years, but the case of Zhejiang led all observers to wonder if this campaign was started with Beijing's backing and if so, what the reasons behind it were, and what the consequences may be.
- **Church sphere:** The government's interest is in maintaining a "harmonious society". In terms of religion this means "managing" churches, be they registered or unregistered, 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. Following these guidelines might well be understood as a kind of "informal registration". The State Authority on Religious Affairs (SARA) is responsible for the general approach on religions and sometimes reacts quite harshly. But frequently the level of reaction depends more on the local authorities than on the national ones in Beijing. Christians in China experience an enormous diversity in levels of freedom today. Though it is not true that any Christian in China has freedom of religion in the true sense of the word, the general situation for most Christians has improved compared to the situation a generation ago, even if the current reporting period saw the level of persecution remaining the same as last year. Churches are monitored and even if only "high-profile" churches are closed – which are often perceived as acting politically – the sword of Damocles is swinging above all non-registered churches in China. If Beijing demands it, they will be asked to register under the umbrella of TSPM churches, act according to the guidelines referred to above, or ultimately be disrupted.
- **Violence:** The level of violence in China, as reflected in the *persecution pattern*, may be surprising. But the following should be kept in mind: although reports of violence regularly occurred in the current reporting period, most were limited to the southern province of Zhejiang, also known as the "Jerusalem of China". Here local authorities continued a campaign against religious structures, especially churches. Some were completely destroyed and an estimated 1,500 crosses on church buildings or church compounds have been broken down. In connection with this campaign, Christian lawyers were arrested and sentenced.

Apart from this hotspot, violence is not something Christians usually face. Some Christians are still serving long-term sentences in prison and some were convicted in the reporting period, though always for other reasons than faith matters. But this is not happening on a frequent

basis. Authorities prefer to apply short-time detentions from overnight to up to fifteen days. During raids, Christians are sometimes physically harmed.

Christians from a Muslim or Tibetan background face more violence. Families, friends and neighbors not only put pressure on them to re-convert, but sometimes also resort to physical or psychological violence. This can include violent actions like abductions.

6. Future outlook

- **Visible trends and significance for the Church:**

Christians will be watched with suspicion, especially if their growth in numbers continues unchanged. Converts from a Tibetan or Muslim background will face more persecution as (due to the government's effort to stay in control) the crackdown on volatile minority regions will increase and the pressure from family, friends and neighbors is going to continue. In the plethora of challenges the government faces, China's leadership tries to keep everything calm. Its goal of maintaining power includes the 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". The next years will show if local churches will be valued as an asset or rejected as a threat. It is still possible that in order to stay in power, the grip on churches may get tighter and Christians will face more pressure. The reporting period points to the latter, but leaves room for both directions.

Azerbaijan – Rank 34

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 57 points Azerbaijan ranks 34 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year Azerbaijan ranked 46 with a score of 50 points. The increase is mainly due to the heavy control that the regime is exercising over the entire country, including religion. Surveillance of all religious activities is immense. Christians are fearful and do not know whom to trust.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Azerbaijan are *Dictatorial paranoia* and to a lesser extent *Islamic extremism*. Please note that *Dictatorial paranoia* in Azerbaijan is a product of the communist past and has therefore emerged from *Communist and post-communist oppression*, though the ideology of communism has been dead and buried in Azerbaijan for many years.

- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Both mainstream Protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses are frequently branded as “extremists” for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. Pressure from the authorities has been stepped up in 2015. It is very common that members of any protestant church 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. Security forces have increased wire-tapping in order to find “extremists”. This has also affected believers and churches. Another strand of crackdown involves religious education, no matter what religion is concerned.
- ***Communist and post-communist oppression***: This is the historical fundament on which the current regime is established. Communism has no ideological contribution to support the regime’s position anymore. However, many control systems and mechanisms derived from the communist system are still in place in the country.
- ***Islamic extremism***: Pressure on Christians coming from Islamic circles is particularly aimed at Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). 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.

3. Context

Azerbaijan is bordering 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.

The regime of Azerbaijan is very intelligent in its persecution of Christians. We have received reports that some pastors were detained and held for about a week and then released. Everyone assumes that he has talked while in detention and no one will trust him anymore. Others suddenly receive an important gift (e.g. a car) – of course people then assume he must be on the pay list of the government. Most churches are infiltrated and spies are everywhere. As a result, Christians do not know whom to trust anymore. This is also reflected in the reporting of persecution: no one dares to talk for fear of being arrested.

And then there are the repeated obligatory re-registrations: every 6-7 years all churches 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.

4. Types of Christianity affected

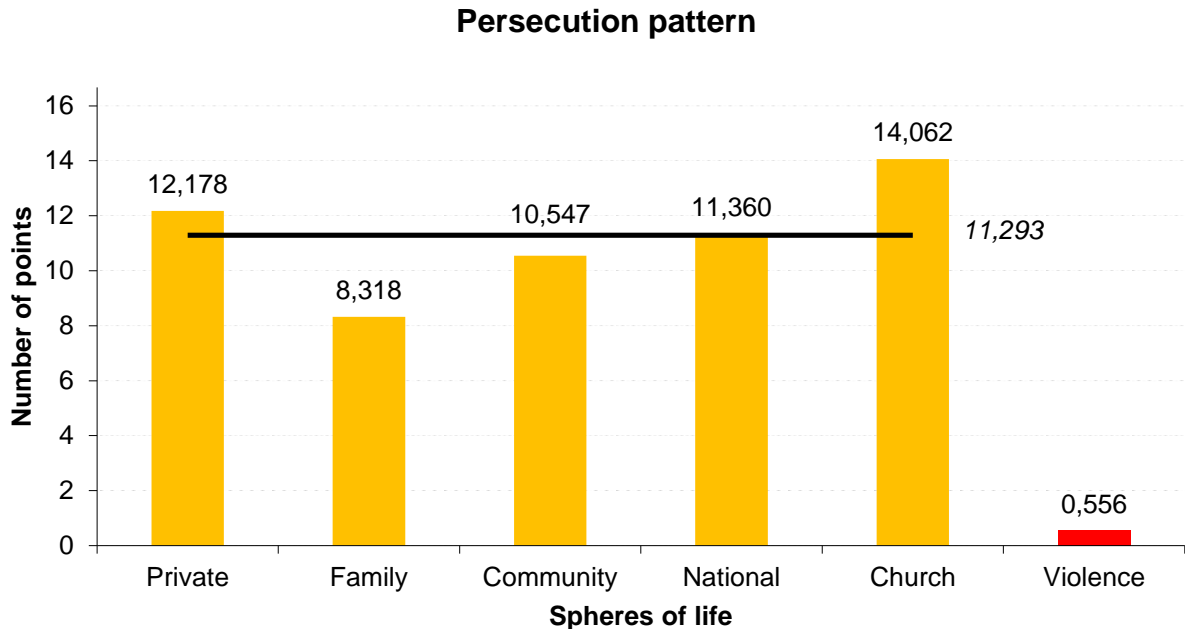
All types of Christianity in Azerbaijan exist and are experiencing various levels of persecution:

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians.** Most of the expatriate groups will be focused internally and hardly be involved in evangelism.
- **Historical Christian communities,** (of which the Russian Orthodox Church, ROC, is by far the largest) are not involved in evangelism among Azeris. They can function pretty normally as the regime in Azerbaijan does not consider them as a danger.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) 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 protestant churches** comprised of Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are the second most persecuted group because of their evangelism. They suffer from many raids, threats, arrests, and fines by the authorities.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Azerbaijan presents the scores for *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (11.293), showing the pressure on Christians, has gone up markedly since last year (9.769). The score for the violence block (0.556) is a little lower than last year (1.111). It suggests that the regime has further tightened its control on society. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private, national, and church spheres*. This is typical for a situation in which *Dictatorial paranoia* is the leading persecution engine. Pressure from *Islamic extremism* is present mostly in the *private, family and community spheres* and is exerted by the social environment, while *Dictatorial paranoia* – the pressure from the regime – is felt mostly in the *private, national and church spheres*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Conversions are drawing lots of opposition from social elements like the family, friends and community. MBBs 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 MBBs to reveal that they are Christians since this will draw unwanted attention from either the state or the community. All media are state-controlled, including Internet access. Some sites are blocked, but in fact the only group that runs a risk of being caught in the act of accessing Christian sources are MBBs. Speaking about the faith is a risk

factor, particularly for converts again. Surveillance by intelligence agents is one of the major causes for this form of persecution. Other than MBBs, most Protestants have to face similar risks since legally their gatherings are unregistered and deemed to be illegal.

- **Family sphere:** Baptisms are always connected to evangelism and conversion. This is a prime target for both the state and the social environment. Families of MBBs may also experience great difficulties in burying their dead because the community may refuse this. 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. Christians have been known to be fired (or at least discriminated against), or not hired once their religion was unveiled. Protestants are severely hindered in the operation of their business. This form of persecution is driven by both the government and the local community, which shuns Azeri Christians. There is extensive evidence that MBBs in particular face severe economic consequences as one part of the larger persecution against them. In addition, as protestant churches are generally unregistered, they are unable to get loans, run a bank account, or rent property. Imposing fines is a common occurrence with regard to unregistered 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. Occasionally, MBBs have been evicted from their communities if they would not recant their new faith – but this occurs only in the countryside.
- **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. Domestic human rights groups continued to criticize the government for not offering any form of alternative service for conscientious objectors who refuse compulsory military service. 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. The same goes for careers in the army. Pressure is greatest outside the bigger cities. Expressing their views in public is dangerous for the all Christians since Christianity is 1) seen as being linked to the arch-enemy Armenia; 2) any perceived religious preaching is highly condoned by both the local Islamic community as well as 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 the backing of the law and generally interpret their enforcement of the law as they deem acceptable. The authorities can generally expect to act with utter impunity. As the Azerbaijani judiciary is not independent from the government, Christians will not get a fair trial. Azerbaijan is doing its best to create a positive image abroad; it is working hard to impress OSCE, EU and other international organizations. When a negative report about their country is published, the Azeri regime will do its best to attack this. They will claim that international monitoring is possible, but at the same time ensure that much passes *sub rosa*.

- **Church sphere:** Only registered churches are allowed to meet. All other meetings are strictly illegal. But it should be added that even those congregations that have lost their registration continue to gather, but with the constant threat of a raid. 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. For building or renovation special permission from the authorities is needed. In the past, during the Soviet period, a number of churches were confiscated, and the Baptists in Baku, for instance, are still trying to get their old building back, but this has consistently been refused. While most churches can meet inside their buildings, even registered groups need special permission 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. Openly selling religious materials is not possible. When a meeting of Christians is raided, religious materials will be confiscated. Training facilities do not exist and even the ROC has to send their students abroad. All media are state-controlled and are therefore not accessible for believers. The only exception being that the ROC can present Christmas and Easter messages. 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. Foreign workers have most definitely been obstructed in the past. Since the state is the main persecutor, Christians are afraid to speak out against it – they know the consequences.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Azerbaijan does not on the surface seem to be very violent. But this is due to the small size of the Church and the fear of repercussions among believers if they did report all incidents. . We can only see the tip of the iceberg; it is certain that the real number of incidents is much higher. Our contacts reported that at least 10 MBBs had been maltreated by their extended families.

6. Future outlook

It is to be expected that the current regime will continue its control over each and every aspect of life in Azerbaijan – and if possible, even to increase it. The government will continue its propaganda that Azerbaijan is the “Land of Tolerance” everywhere, and target all those who dare to question this. The Church in Azerbaijan will have to survive under the enormous level of surveillance and pressure. Under the circumstances it is remarkable that the Church has survived so far and has even grown slightly.

Bangladesh – Rank 35

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 57 points, Bangladesh ranks 35 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year Bangladesh ranked 43 with a score of 51 points. The increase is due to a slightly increased level of violence, but apart from that, the increase distributes equally across all *Spheres of life*. Compared to the other spheres, the *National sphere* scores remarkably lower, showing the country's secular understanding.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Bangladesh are *Islamic extremism* and to a lesser extent *Religious nationalism* which is blended with *Tribal antagonism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Bangladesh continues to be a secular country and its constitution is giving freedom to all religions to practice their own faith. The country does not have blasphemy laws or an anti-conversion bill, though there are still demands from radical Islamic groups to introduce such laws. On the other hand, the constitution confirms that the state religion is Islam and the government is known to give in to Islamic pressure from the streets despite fighting the Islamic party, allied with the opposition, by all means. Additionally, there are *fatwas* implemented all over the country, especially in rural areas. Several of the radical Islamic groups (like Islamic Chatra Shibir, Jamat- e-Islam, Hefazat-e-Islam, Horkatul Jihad) demand to establish Sharia Islamic law, so that it becomes visible that the country belongs to the “House of Islam”. Those groups are well connected internationally and enjoy a growing influence among young people. The Islamic State’s ideology is making more and more inroads in the country, though the government denies it. Imams as well as local influential Muslims are in the frontline of persecution against Christian believers, especially Christian converts from a Muslim background. Family and neighbors are further drivers of persecution.
- **Religious nationalism:** Buddhists in Bangladesh are slightly larger in number than Christians. They are mostly 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 as well as tribal leaders to put stronger pressure on those converts. This was not only done by family, friends and community, but also by Buddhist radical groups which strengthened groups to resist Christianity not only among the Buddhist but also among the indigenous people groups.
- **Tribal antagonism:** As the Chakma, Tripura and Marma are tribal, *Religious nationalism* is mixed with *Tribal antagonism*, meaning that new Christian believers of a tribal background are forced

or pressured to obey and follow the age-old norms and values of their community, be it mixed with religion or not.

3. Context

Bangladesh is caught in a decades-long struggle for power between the governing Awami League and the main opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party. In August 2013, the High Court declared the registration of Jamaat-e-Islami, a BNP linked party, as illegal. So the largest Islamic Party which constantly called for introducing the rule of Islam is not represented in parliament anymore. But this does not mean that its ideas and wishes are gone. On the contrary, it may even help them to campaign more effectively and to target religious minorities such as Christians without being held responsible for it. The opposition boycotted elections due to the High Court's decision. Election violence, spreading far beyond the election date in January 2014, showed that society is fragmented and the fight against Islamism may need different approaches than just a strong hand.

In January 2015, the BNP leader was locked up in her office for seventeen days by the government and is now facing charges of graft. The political standoff has consequences for civil society, media and the question of human rights as well. As politics is about personal rivalries and – in the end even dynasties - criticism or thoughts seen as deviating or dangerous can easily lead to repercussions and paranoid reactions. 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. That Islamic aggression is not dead or successfully restricted by the government was shown by several incidents in the reporting period, in which four secular bloggers, a secular publisher, an Italian and a Japanese citizen were killed. The Italian was even shot dead in the high security embassy area of Dhaka.

4. Types of Christianity affected

Three types of Christianity in Bangladesh exist and are experiencing persecution:

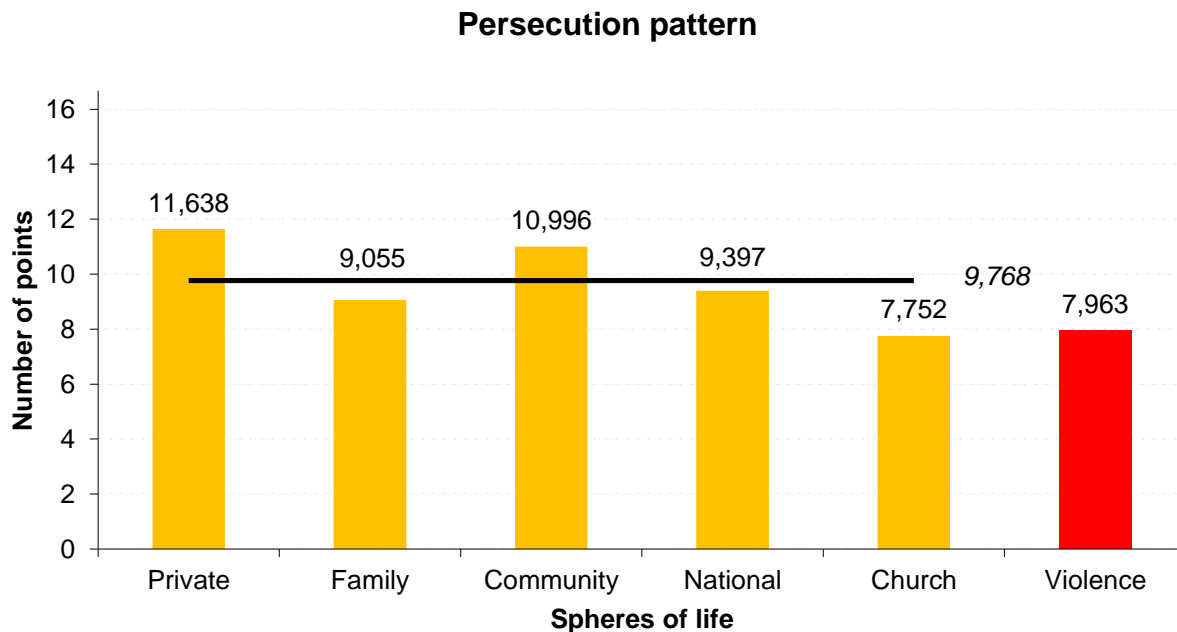
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as the Roman Catholic Church, which increasingly faces hostilities and even violent attacks, but is still less affected than the protestant churches and convert communities.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background as well as from a Buddhist Background.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches**, such as evangelical and pentecostal congregations.

As the Christian minority is growing, it faces more and more restrictions and challenges. This is not driven by the government, which is also shown by the fact that in July 2014 the president appointed a Catholic woman as her personal secretary. Pressure is driven by radical Islamic groups, local religious leaders and families. The increasingly harsh competition between the large political parties of the country is also an important factor, as the government may give in to demands from Islamic pressure groups taking to the streets. The opposition is known for taking its protest to the streets and calling for nation-wide strikes, so-called *hartals*. Radical Islamic groups also have a high potential for mobilizing youth. Christians as a minority are seen as natural allies of the government

and therefore can become more targeted by the aggressive Islamic groups as they might blame Christians for the law and government’s actions in general. This will affect especially converts, as they have deviated from the main religion, but all types of Christians can suffer from this.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Bangladesh presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* and *Religious nationalism* (blended with *Tribal Antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (9.768), showing the pressure on Christians, is higher than last year (8.748). The score for the violence block is only slightly higher: 7.407 (WWL 2015) to 7.963. This suggests that persecution is gradually increasing. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the private and community spheres. These are the spheres where converts face the most problems, especially if they are the only believers in a community. Discrimination in dealing with authorities as well as in employment and in the community affects all types of Christianity. The national sphere scores below average, as does the church sphere, what reflects the government’s secular approach.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Converts always 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 Buddhist families will not accept it. 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 disclose or endanger a Christian meeting. Known converts are closely monitored and can face house arrest, in some cases also physical or mental abuse. Local *fatwas* are sometimes issued against them as well.

- **Family sphere:** Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce (if married) and of losing their inheritance rights. Organizing a baptism, a Christian wedding or a funeral can be difficult or even impossible. Children of Christians, not just of converts, will be forced to learn non-Christian teachings and mocked by other children. Converts are often isolated from their families and may even be kicked out by them.
- **Community sphere:** Converts face strong pressure by their family, friends and neighbors to recant the Christian faith, though conversion is not forbidden by law. Christians are discriminated in their private lives as well as in their business lives. There were several reports that Christians had to give up their shops or other businesses due to the pressure by the Muslim majority or due to organized client boycotts. Children of converts often face discrimination and bias by teachers and co-students in schools. Pressure to renounce the Christian faith can become so unbearable for converts that they have to leave the community they live in.
- **National sphere:** Bangladesh has a secular government and this is reflected in the lowest score of all spheres. However, discrimination in dealing with the government is common and Christians are often slandered, especially in rural areas. Media reporting about Christians is often biased.
- **Church sphere:** Churches do not face problems in registration or in producing or importing religious material, though they can face attacks by radical groups. The closure of churches related to projects carried out by Compassion International Bangladesh is an example. This organization had carried out more than 2000 private school projects all over the country in partnership with various local churches. The overt Christian influence alarmed many Muslim families and caused parents, community people and local mosques to complain to the local *thana*/police that their children were being evangelized. As a result several schools and with them many churches were closed down all over the country in mid-April 2015. They remain to be closed at the time of writing in November 2015.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Bangladesh has become more violent over recent years. In the reporting period, one convert was killed for her faith. Additionally, nine Christian churches had to close and one church and one school were destroyed. On October 5, pastor Luke Sarkar was stabbed by three youths coming to his house, feigning interest in the Christian faith. He survived with wounds to his throat. At least eight converts were detained. Several Christians had to go into hiding due to threats.

6. Future outlook

Despite all efforts, the government is not succeeding 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 face their local affiliates. As early as September 2014, police arrested two recruits for the Islamic State (IS), preparing to fight in Syria and Iraq. Despite these facts, the government denied IS's involvement in the foreigners' killings and blamed it on the

opposition. Politics in the country frequently involves using violent means and often enough innocent by-standers suffer and are even killed. It is especially worrying that the party's youth organizations and student wings relate to violence. This situation has not only led to an increase in Bangladesh's score and position on the World Watch List, but will most likely continue for the foreseeable future and leave the Christian minority vulnerable to both radical Muslims and the government.

Another reason why Christians will continue to be vulnerable is the fact that the government continues its heavy-handed policy against the opposition. Some members of the Islamic parties receive official death sentences which have also been implemented. Because Christians are seen as being allied with the government as they prefer to retain the country's (and the government's) secularism, radical Muslims blame them for this too.

Tanzania – Rank 36

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 57 points, Tanzania ranks 36 on the World Watch List 2016. On WWL 2015 Tanzania ranked 33 with the score of 56. The persecution of Christians has more or less remained the same.

2. Persecution engines

At present, the persecution engine affecting Christians in Tanzania is *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** The Union of Tanzania has two contrasting demographic realities. The majority of mainland Tanzanians are Christians, and the majority of the population on the island of Zanzibar are Muslims. In recent years, *Islamic extremism* has become more prominent, originating from Zanzibar and moving across the coast of mainland Tanzania. The radical Islamic group called Uamsho (a Swahili acronym for the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation, meaning Islamic Reawakening or Revolution) uses Zanzibar as a springboard to further its radical Islamic agenda in Tanzania. Uamsho and related groups aim to establish an Islamic state that includes Zanzibar and a significant section of Tanzanian mainland along the coast. In this new would-be Muslim state, there would be no place for Christians or people with other religious beliefs. It appears that the idea of this Islamic state is gaining popularity among Muslims even on the mainland. The influence of the radicals has even influenced the drafters of the constitution (to be ratified by referendum) to include a provision that allows the establishment of Sharia courts in the whole country.

3. Context

The persecution situation in Tanzania has several components. To begin with, the Island of Zanzibar has had a very long connection with Islam and other Muslim countries, and it was ruled by a sultanate until the British occupation (1890-1963). Tanzania was a socialist country from 1961 to 1987. Currently, it is run by a regime that has both elements of authoritarian and democratic features. Relatively speaking, it is considered to be one of the most democratic countries in the East-Africa region, and the elections held in October 2015 were a testament to that.

The second important thing is the volatile nature of the region. The militant movements in Somalia and Kenya are having a serious impact on Tanzania. For example, Tanzanian security forces arrested 10 suspected al-Shabaab militants and bomb-making materials during the raid of a mosque in April 2015. It should be noted that the population of the Zanzibar Archipelago is mainly Muslim, and many in the region think they are being purposely and systematically deprived of development opportunities by Tanzania's central government. To undo this perceived injustice, radical Islamic groups - in part supported by some Arabic countries - advocate the establishment of an Islamic state as a way forward. This state would include the Zanzibar Archipelago and part of the coastal

mainland known as the Ten Mile Coastal Strip. It extends from Kipini/Witu in Kenya down to Sofala in Mozambique. It used to be the domain of the sultan in years gone by, and that is why the radicals want it reinstated with an extension to Mogadishu as the Capital.

Thirdly, although the majority of Tanzania's population is Christian, the percentage of Muslims appears to be growing, and especially young Muslims seem vulnerable to radicalization. The inclusion of the Sharia court provision in the constitution to be ratified by a referendum can only worsen the situation. The inclusion of the provision has virtually divided the nation and the former president, Jakaya Kikwete, has warned of the danger of religious tension in the country.

Finally, Tanzania is a country with great potential for gas, oil and coal and other natural resources. These resources attract foreign investors who influence Tanzanian interests. The country has already signed a joint venture agreement with Algeria. Moreover, there is the danger that resource disputes might be played out along religious lines.

4. Types of Christianity affected

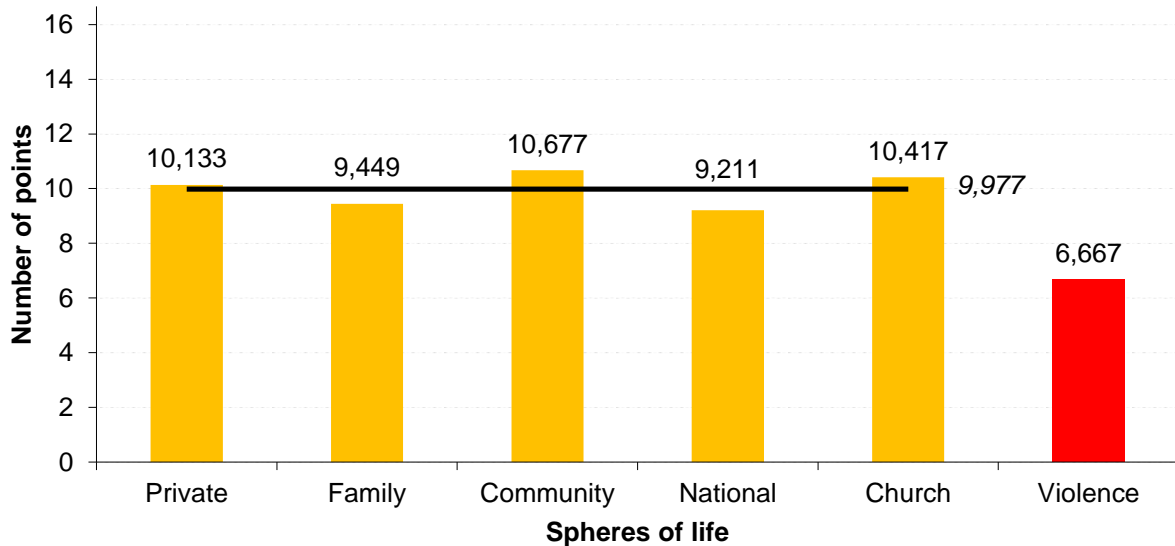
In Tanzania three types of Christianity are present. In the reporting period, all three types of Christianity have faced faith-related pressure and/or violence.

- **Historical Christian communities:** Like the other categories, this type of Christianity also faces pressure from radical Muslims.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs): In Muslim dominated areas (Zanzibar and the Coast) MBBs are most affected by permanent pressure in many areas of life as well as violence.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (such as baptist, evangelical and pentecostal communities): This group faces many challenges, e.g. getting registration to build new churches, getting permits for assembly and preaching.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Tanzania presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (9.977), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (10.101). The score for the violence block is higher: from 5.185 (WWL 2015) to 6.667. This suggests a stabilized persecution situation, however with a potential for deterioration. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, all *spheres of life* of Christians are significantly affected in the past year, with the *private, community* and *church spheres* above average.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Like in other *spheres of life*, the pressure on Christians in the *private sphere* goes hand in hand with the rise of radical Islam in Zanzibar and the coastal region of Tanzania. Christians in these areas have found it difficult to worship and even to own Christian materials and the Bible (especially MBBs).
- **Family sphere:** This is one of the *spheres of life* in which MBBs suffer seriously. Exclusion from inheritance, hindrance of baptism, and being forced to renounce the Christian faith are some of the challenges that Christians, especially the converts are facing.
- **Community sphere:** The score here indicates that this is where Christians suffer the most. In areas where Muslims are the majority, Christians face different kinds of restrictions in their community. Supporters of Uamsho play a major role in the community, which tends to alienate Christians. The infamous Sheikh Issa Ponda has been sowing seeds of intolerance and hate towards Christians over the last few years and this is now bearing fruit. Denying Christians access to public transport and watering points, forcing Christians to comply with halal products, forcing Christian women to cover their heads in public are just some of the issues that can be mentioned in this respect.
- **National sphere:** Two things are important here: First, the government did not take any measurable action to contain or prevent the growing anti-Christian sentiment in the country. Second, the drafters of the constitution included provisions for Sharia Court in the draft constitution and Christians were literally threatened by the government not to speak out against the inclusion. The combination of these two factors (along with others) puts pressure on Christians in the *national sphere*.

- **Church sphere:** This is the second worst hit *sphere of life* as the high score indicates. Worshiping collectively and using a church building - in Zanzibar in particular - has become quite dangerous. The way a Christian leader's family and children are singled out for harassment, the way church leaders are monitored, and the way Christians are often prevented from holding public gatherings are among the challenges that Christians face in Muslim dominated areas.
- **Violence:** Attacks have continued against Christians and their property as well as churches. Investigations into past attacks have not produced any results and this may suggest that the investigators and its processes are either co-opted or there is incompetence. Attacking churches (especially in Zanzibar) has become very common. Open Doors field researchers state: "A total of 13 churches - 10 in Bukoba, 1 in Kitondo and 2 in Kigoma - were attacked by arsonists. 4 of them were completely destroyed, while the others were partially destroyed." In addition, shops and businesses of Christians have come under constant attacks. Some Christians were forced to leave their homes. Most of these attacks were orchestrated by Uamsho and its supporters. Last year, a group of NGOs said Uamsho is no different to other terrorist organizations. In its appeal to the government to ban Uamsho, the group of NGOs stated: "From what they advocate, they are not different from al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and al-Qaeda."

6. Future outlook

Tanzania entered the World Watch List in 2013 and there is no sign that the situation is improving. The teachings in Mosques and Madrassas are negative about Christianity, and as these teachings lay the groundwork for lasting negative attitudes towards Christians, these could easily be mobilized and guided towards violent behavior against Christians in the coming years. The supporters of Uamsho have still been spreading their radical ideology and calling for Zanzibar's full autonomy. However, the draft constitution does not include the issue of autonomy, but it still includes the very radical idea of having sharia courts all over Tanzania and not just in Zanzibar. The Tanzanian Church has withstood the pressure it has been under by avoiding any further provocations. On the political front the newly sworn-in president is being hailed for his positive energy and determination to fight corruption and bring an end to perceived and actual injustices against any group. However, this might not be always the case in the future. As it stands the following future outlook seems likely: 1) The persecution of Christians in Zanzibar and the coast region will continue. 2) The upcoming referendum on the new constitution might pit Christians against Muslims, which would cause massive pressure on Christians. 3) If the draft constitution is adopted, Muslims would become more influential in the country. 4) There is also the possibility that the new president will be able to stabilize the country.

Algeria – Rank 37

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

On the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, Algeria scores 56 points (55 points previously in WWL 2015), ranking 37. Although Algeria has slightly increased in points, it drops in rank (34 in WWL 2015) because other countries on the list have shown a greater increase in points. Although the situation is a bit better this year regarding pressure from the government, the position of Christians in the country is still under pressure due to Islamist (or political Islamic) factions exerting more influence on national and local governments.

2. Persecution engines

The main persecution engines in Algeria are *Islamic extremism* and to a lesser extent *Dictatorial paranoia* (blended with *Islamic extremism*), and *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** As Islam is becoming increasingly more visible in Algeria's government, the freedom of Christians becomes more and more restricted. Increasing pressure from Islamist movements on government and society, in combination with pressure from family members on Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs), explain Algeria's score on the World Watch List. Negative developments outweigh a few positive developments (such as the formal recognition of the Église Protestante d'Algérie after decades of efforts).

Islamist groups, encouraged by the Arab Spring in other North African countries, are increasing their pressure on a government that already works with Islamic parties. Nevertheless, despite this cooperation, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is still banned. Islamists are becoming more and more visible and they monitor the activities of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities such as the small Jewish and Bahai communities.

- **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.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** Islamic militant groups, particularly in the south of Algeria, finance their operations through their involvement in organized crime, which causes a lot of fear for Christians. More research about this engine is needed in 2016.

3. Context

Algeria used to have a secular socialist government system. In the context of the growing role of Islamism in the region, Algeria is increasingly the scene of more terror by Islamist movements, particularly al-Qaeda in the Maghreb. The fall of Gaddafi in Libya contributed to the strengthening of Islamist movements, because it gave massive numbers of weapons and seasoned fighters to non-

state actors in Algeria, most of whom are clearly siding with Islamic State. The Algerian government is pressured by al-Qaeda to implement more Islamic legislation, to the detriment of the country's small Christian population.

Major protests in Algeria against the authoritarian regime in 2011 led to the lifting of the 19-year-old state of emergency, imposed to help the Algerian authorities during a brutal conflict with Islamist rebels in the 1990s. The protests, in which five people were killed and over 800 injured, were brought to a halt after only a few months due to massive police repression. Unlike in neighboring countries, these protests did not bring about a regime change. The military government headed by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika is still largely in place. Moreover, its continuity was not really threatened by lifting the state of emergency, although it is of symbolic importance because it is considered a symbol of the ruler's power.

For this reason, the revolutionary wave that hit North Africa and the Middle East known as the Arab Spring had no great effect in Algeria. In 2014 the very ill Abdelaziz Bouteflika was reelected for a fourth mandate as president with a devastating 81% of the vote, in a country that knows no fair and free elections. The World Politics Review (17 February 2015) warned that Bouteflika may not complete his fourth term due to poor health and anticipates a [succession crisis](#), which could very well lead to a civil war considering the immensity of the political and socio-economic challenges the country faces.

4. Types of Christianity affected

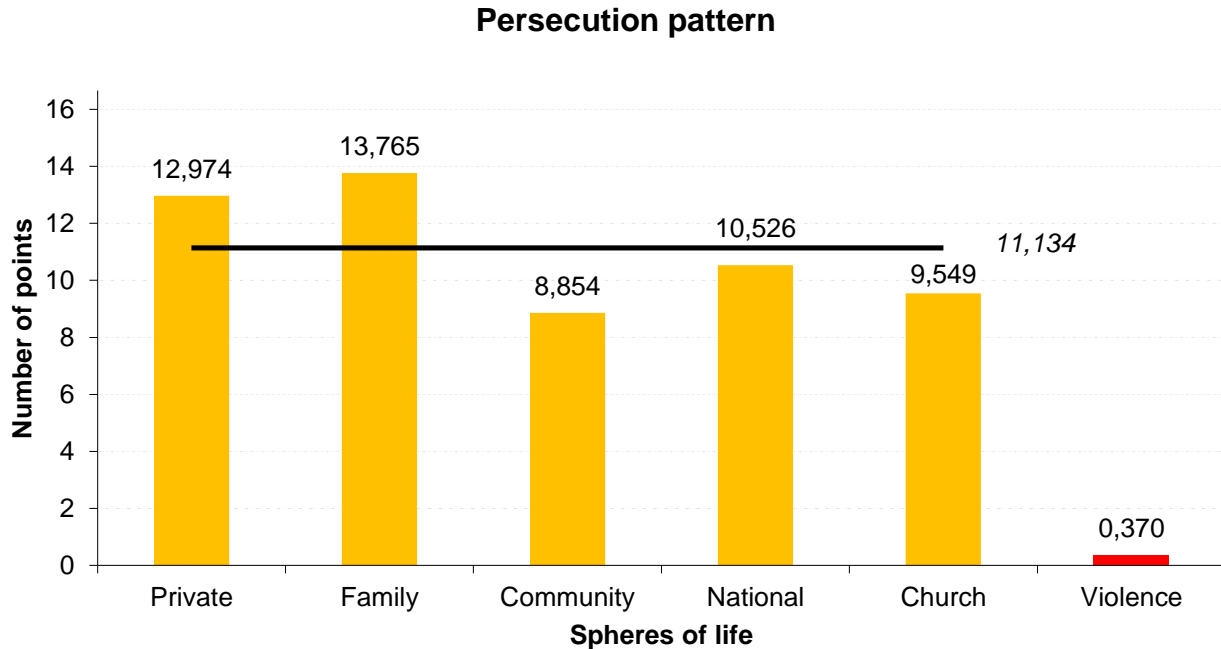
The following two types of Christianity exist in Algeria:

- **Historical Christian communities**, i.e. Roman Catholic and some protestant churches. These communities face restrictions outside their place of worship but are allowed to exist. Catholic churches including a cathedral in Algiers (the seat of the Archbishop), conduct services without government interference, as does one protestant church.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim Background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs): Almost all Christians in Algeria are MBBs. This group faces most persecution. The law prohibits public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam. 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.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Algeria presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks, showing the pressure on Christians, is 11.134 points, which is slightly higher than last

year (10.801 points). The violence level has gone down to 0.370 points, as opposed to 1.482 last year. Overall, the pressure has increased with respect to last year, although there were less violent incidents to report this year. It suggests the persecution situation is stabilizing at a slightly higher level than last year. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure on Christians is highest in the *private* and *family spheres*, followed by the *national* and *church spheres*. It is partly due to the issues encountered by Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) when their conversion is known, that the scores are highest in the *private* and *family spheres*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Conversion is not forbidden by law, but any attempt to convert someone away from Islam is. The main problem for conversions is family persecution and this can be very dangerous. Church leaders report that MBBs (especially women) are sometimes placed under house-arrest by their Muslim families. They are not allowed to meet other believers or to have any contact with Christians. They are not allowed to watch TV or listen to the radio as Christian channels are broadcasted 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. However, some Christian parents have reported that there seems to be an improvement recently in the Kabyle region. It has been possible to register new born children with a Christian name after showing the parents' Baptism certificate. 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 the church but 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. However, hardly any such threats have been recorded in the reporting period. According to the 2012 International Religious Freedom Report, 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 particularly concerned with reports of religious proselytism, particularly in the more conservative Muslim communities in areas that served as a social base for the radical Islamic groups that fought a civil war against the government. These Christians have to hide their faith, as otherwise they will be refused by the university or discriminated by the teachers.
- **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 March 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 tending 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 activity anywhere outside a state-recognized church building. From November 2007 onwards, measures against the Church and pressure on the Christians began to increase significantly. Between November 2007 and May 2008, the government closed 26 churches, 16 from EPA (Protestant Church of Algeria) and 10 independent ones, which remain closed at this date. Since January 2008, about 15 Christians were arrested and brought before the 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.
- **Church sphere:** In the *church sphere*, the apparently positive news that the EPA (Algerian Protestant Church) finally obtained registration in 2011 after having tried to obtain one for many years 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 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 their homes. Still, the law is as a sword of Damocles over the believers.

- **Violence:** In spite of some positive developments, the overall trends regarding religious liberty are negative. Although no Christians were killed or imprisoned in the reporting period, threats to churches and Christian media organizations still occur, and newspapers report negatively about Christians. The number of reported incidents increased slightly in comparison to last year. Apart from numerous cases of physical or mental abuse in the family sphere, two Christian men were arrested by police and questioned at the local police station in the Arab part of the country during spring 2015. Also, police officers in plain clothes attend church services and if foreigners are present they will question the pastors.

6. Future outlook

1. The high numbers of people who boycotted the presidential elections in 2014 are a silent expression of the widespread discontent among the population with unemployment, housing crisis and political stagnation. Should Bouteflika die in office, social unrest is quite likely to erupt under the pressure of a younger generation – 70% of the population is under 30 – that is desperate for change. 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.
2. 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.

Bhutan – Rank 38

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 56 points Bhutan ranks 38 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year in WWL-2015, Bhutan scored the same number of points but ranked 31. The country's score remained stable and this is reflected in all *spheres of life* and the level of violence as well.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Bhutan are *Religious nationalism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism*. *Tribal antagonism* is blended with *Religious nationalism*.

- **Religious nationalism:** A continuing emphasis on 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 tolerance. Though this is not mere lip-service, it is stronger on paper than in reality. Especially in remote and rural areas, Buddhist monks resent and oppose the presence of Christians and authorities do nothing to protect Christians. On the contrary, they rather side with the monks.
- **Tribal antagonism:** 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 rites and traditions especially in rural areas. Converts to Christianity who do not wish to participate in these rites and traditions will be pressed and face exclusion and obstruction.

3. Context

Bhutan is the country which is stuck between two giant neighbors: India to its south and China to its north. It does not appear in international headlines much, but has gained some fame for its invention of the Gross National Happiness product in order to measure its citizens overall happiness. Consequently, one of the few headlines that caught the international media's attention concerning Bhutan was that the new GNH Index showed an [increase](#) since people in Bhutan presently get more sleep than five years ago. In other words, not that much has happened in Bhutan where democracy seems to be getting firmer roots, albeit in a climate in which all parties agree with the dominance of Buddhism takes and cherish the king. After elections in 2013, the opposition took over power smoothly and began to tackle the very normal social and economic questions

governments have to take care of. The situation of Christians, who are a small minority among the Bhutanese, remained more or less stable and unchanged as well, which also means that they still lack any formal status and recognition.

4. Types of Christianity affected

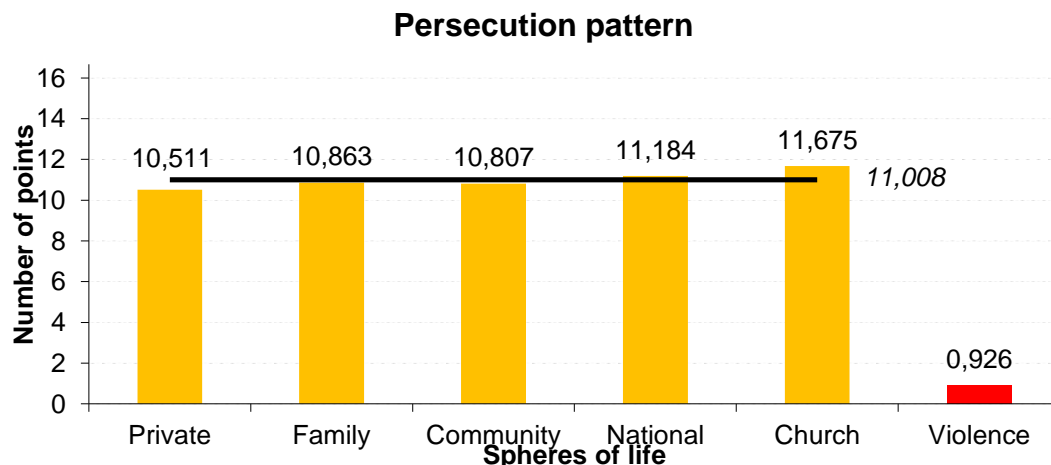
Three types of Christianity in Bangladesh exist and are experiencing persecution:

- **Expatriate and migrant worker Christians** are facing limitations, but are less affected than the protestant churches and convert communities.
- **Christian converts** from a Buddhist or a Tribal Background face persecution from their family, friends and neighbors.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** such as evangelical and pentecostal fellowships are not recognized and are therefore prone to intervention and pressure.

As the Christian minority continues to grow, the government becomes more and more aware of it. Until now, it seems undecided how to deal with them, however. Whereas the arrest and conviction of two pastors due to “holding a religious meeting without permission” in March 2014 pointed to a harsher approach, their rather surprising release in September 2014 and January 2015 pointed to more leniency, despite the fact that both had to pay hefty fines.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Bhutan presents the scores for *Religious nationalism* (blended with *Tribal antagonism*). The average score over the first five blocks (11.008), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (11.050). The score for the violence block is slightly lower: 0.926 as opposed to 1.111 (WWL 2015). The high pressure on Christians does not translate into more open violence. It suggests the persecution situation has stabilized. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is rather evenly distributed across all *spheres of life*. This pressure is fired by Bhutan’s efforts to preserve Buddhism as its national heritage.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Converts have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only believers in their family. For converts, it can be dangerous to display Christian symbols in private, especially if their family members are not yet believers. As meetings of Christians in most cases take place in rented houses, these meetings are often difficult, if the owner of the house is a Buddhist. In rural areas, known converts can be closely monitored.
- **Family sphere:** Once converts are discovered, they can face the threat of divorce and lose their inheritance rights, especially if they are from a tribal background. Organizing a baptism or a Christian funeral is very difficult and often impossible. Children of Christians are required to learn and to practice Buddhism, they face opposition from teachers and co-students. Converts can be isolated by their families and hindered in meeting fellow Christians.
- **Community sphere:** Converts face strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to recant their Christian faith. There has been a case, for example, where a Christian's water supply was cut off because of her faith. Villagers often make life very difficult for believers. If Christians do not attend festivals, this will trigger more harassment from the community. As children are in need of a letter of recommendation by the village head or the district's office in order to be admitted to schools, Christians often struggle to get these 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 or university. 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, what in fact means that Buddhism is treated as state religion which is made clear by the following provision. Each religious institution has 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 in Bhutan is punishable by one to less than three years in prison. Two pastors were sentenced according to these laws in 2014. Christians are not allowed to publically display symbols and no Christian civil society organization exists in Bhutan.
- **Church sphere:** The issue of registration continues to be the biggest problem for Christians in Bhutan. Since Christian churches are unregistered, they are technically illegal. The government continues to keep gatherings confined to household premises in order to limit the growth of

Christianity as well. Some Christians have managed to rent larger places, but all run the risk of being discovered. There are incidents where Christians are threatened with consequences if they continue to meet. Consequently, many Christians choose to gather very early in the morning or in the evening with lights off to avoid suspicion from the authorities. 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 in Bhutan is not particularly violent. As already mentioned before, one pastor, Tandin Wangyal, who had been sentenced in April 2014 was released in January 2015 after having paid a hefty fine.

6. Future outlook

Bhutan is not only placed in the midst of two giants, it also faces economic challenges and the question of how to give the younger generation a perspective. In the reporting period, two questions in particular came up. As the country is strongly relying in tourism and the revenue it earns with foreign currency, the [news](#) that the number of tourist arrivals sharply dropped by nearly 15 percent came as a warning sign in September 2015. It is hoped that the second source of income for Bhutan is will be the enormous potential for hydropower. The downside of this is that it is expensive and can damage the environment. While some observers compare Bhutan's potential with that of Norway in this respect, the first ambitious plans were to install a capacity of 10.000 megawatt until 2020. These plans had to be stretched due to the enormous costs involved.

Depending on how these economic developments turn out in the end, they may have repercussions for the Christian minority as well. If the country falls into serious economic difficulties, it may rely on emphasizing its Buddhist cultural heritage even more and make the recognition of the growing Christian minority a far off dream. If the economy develops positively, this may relax the country's emphasis on Buddhist heritage.

Comoros – Rank 39

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 56 points, Comoros ranks 39 on the World Watch List 2016 (WWL). For the WWL 2015, the archipelago – containing the islands Grand Comoros, Anjouan, and Moheli - ranked 32 with a score of 56 points. Despite some progress in the democratic process, this year’s report indicates that the situation of Christians in the country is not improving. It should be recalled that Comoros was in the top ten countries of the WWL in the early and mid-1990s until 1998.

2. Persecution engines

The main persecution engine affecting Christians in Comoros is *Islamic extremism*. *Dictatorial paranoia* is also visible in the country but is blended with *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** The recent rise in *Islamic extremism* in the country started with the adoption of a legal framework that opted for state sanctioned religion. In 2009, a referendum was held enabling the government of Comoros to change the constitution that declared Islam as the state religion. This constitutional change severely curtails the existence of other religions. Parallel to the adoption of the new constitution, there has been increasing support for radical Islam, especially on the islands of Anjouan and Moheli. The rise of radical Islamic sympathies among the population at large, government officials, religious leaders and Muslim youth groups in particular causes anxiety among Christians.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** Since independence, Comoros has seen at least twenty coups or attempted coups. Thus Comoros has a history of violence which has left the country desperately poor, and at times on the brink of disintegration. This history has also led to a paranoid state of mind among the government officials. Consequently, even though the country is considered “partly free” by Freedom House, the government is not tolerant towards dissent or any form of association. There has been progress since the mid of 2000s, yet the country’s rulers are still known for suppressing freedom of association, religion, and expression - this is particularly true when it comes to restricting Christians’ freedom in all walks of life.

3. Context

Comoros has been on the World Watch List for the past 22 years, and during the early years it was among the countries with the worst record for persecution. Several factors are relevant for understanding the background to the persecution dynamics on Comoros.

The legal framework: The 2009 constitution declares (Sunni) Islam to be the state religion, but also that everyone’s right to have his/her own religion and worship is respected. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is not allowed and foreigners who proselytize will face deportation. In the past, the

Archipelago faced political instability – in part reflected by a poor human rights record and a string of coup d'états. However, since 2006, Comoros has been going through a process of democratic transition leading to increased levels of legitimacy among the local population and a deepened capacity to deal constructively with social conflict. As a result, a 2015 report by Freedom House complimented Comoros by typifying it as an “electoral democracy” and “partly free”. Still, there is a long way to go regarding institutionalizing democracy and holding elections periodically. For example in September 2014, president Ikililou Dhoinine postponed the parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in November 2014 until January 2015 citing “government unpreparedness”.

Factors in society: There is an increasing presence of radical Islamic tendencies on the islands despite a positive trend towards furthering democratic practices. Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise at rates paralleling neighboring East African countries. The constitution reinforces this in dictating that all public policies must be based on Islamic beliefs. Some legal provisions for religious freedom exist, but these are directed more towards foreigners than native Christians. Proselytization of any religion except Islam is illegal, converts can be prosecuted, and the converts that exist face severe discrimination from the Muslim majority and are put under pressure not to practice their faith, leaving them to live out their faith effectively in secret. Comoros has established strong ties with other Islamic governments in the Middle East and the Gulf. As a result, many Gulf countries have promised to help the development of the country. For example, the Saudi Fund for Development promised 40 million dollars toward Comorian infrastructure and health services. These factors make radicalization and a possible move to militant Islam not only a possibility, but also a real phenomenon. In addition, the existence of the secular/ liberal lifestyle on the nearby Mayotte Archipelago could be exploited by Muslim conservatives to justify a stricter implementation of Islam. For example, radical scholars locally known as *Djaulas*, many of whom are from Pakistan, are pushing for stricter sharia rules in the country. They advocate a strict application of Sharia and are against Christians.

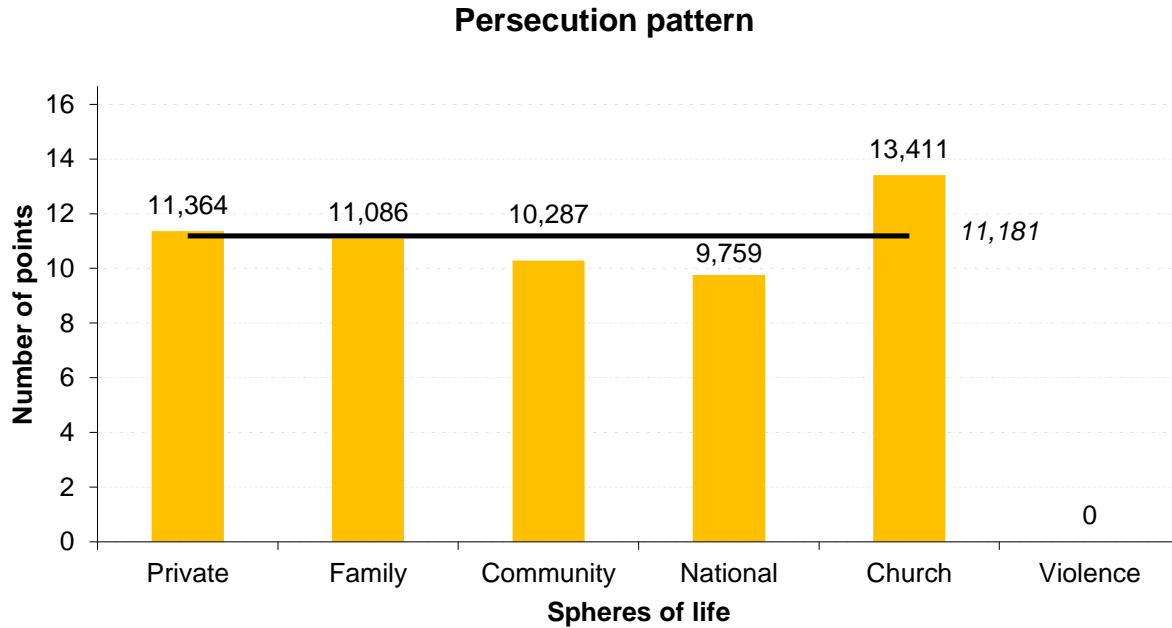
4. Types of Christianity affected

Comoros is home to three types of Christianity: expatriate Christian communities, non-traditional Protestants, and converts to Christianity from Islamic background (Muslim Background Believers or MBBs).

- **Expatriate Christian communities:** The expatriate Christian communities face persecution primarily from radical Muslims and non-Christian leaders, and to a lesser extent from the leaders of political parties and their followers.
- **Non-traditional protestants:** These Christians (e.g. from baptist and pentecostal communities) also face persecution from government and radical Muslims.
- **Converts:** MBBs always experience persecution from government officials, non-Christian leaders and from leaders of political parties and their followers, but also from members of their extended family and radical Islamic movements.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Comoros presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks (11.181), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (11.148). The score for the violence block is now 0 compared to 0.556 last year. This suggests that persecution has stabilized at the moment. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, Christians in Comoros are facing serious pressure in all *spheres of life*, but especially in the *church sphere*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Comorian Christians, in particular MBBs, experience intense pressure in their private life. Conversion in the country is not allowed. The state declares Islam to be the state religion, and society shuns those who convert. Furthermore, acts of worship or expressing one's religion in public is very risky.
- Family sphere:** This is where Christians face significant challenges. For example, MBBs find it difficult to raise their children with Christian values and principles, since children from the age of three to six are expected to learn the Qur'an. In addition, when a MBB dies in the country, she or he will be buried as a Muslim.
- Community sphere:** All types of Christians face persecution in this sphere of life. However, it is more intense for MBBs. In addition to the pressure in the sphere of family life, MBBs are marginalized in the life of the community as well. For example, they have limited access to the available medical services. Furthermore, MBBs are put under heavy pressure to renounce their Christian faith publicly with the backing of the government.

- **National sphere:** On top of all problems Christians face, the constitution explicitly declares Islam as the state religion, and other laws emanating from that declaration have a sharia and Muslim focus.
- **Church sphere:** It is no coincidence that this sphere scores the highest for Comoros. Christians find it difficult to build places of worship and cannot distribute bibles and other Christian materials. House churches are always spied on by local groups. It is very dangerous for the expat church to allow local visitors to attend church services. A foreigner who is found doing so would be deported.
- **Violence:** Field researchers and external experts reported a zero score in terms of faith-related violence for the reporting period.

6. Future outlook

It is likely that radical Islam will continue to increase in the country, which will mean that pressure on Christians will continue. Contrary to the relative stability and apparent progress in democratization, life for Christians in Comoros is not getting better. In the past twenty years, the space for Christians has been under threat from hardliners who think that Comoros is for Sunni Muslims with no space for others. Islam was made state religion under the 2009 constitution which was ratified by referendum. This is compounded by the apparent radicalization of the majority of the Comorian populace and Muslim youth in particular. In this regard, the rise in Sunni Islamic radicalism has also led to the persecution of Shia Muslims. This goes hand in hand with the rise of radical Islam in East Africa and other parts of the world. The close ties between Comoros and various Middle East and Gulf countries serve to increase the radicalization process in Comoros. Furthermore, in May 2014, Comoros and Kuwait negotiated on how to give Comoran citizenship to stateless people in Kuwait, referred to as *bedoons*. In return, the Kuwaiti government will give aid to Comoros. The same agreement was reached between Comoros and UAE in 2011. In 2014, the Saudi Fund for Development promised 40 million dollars toward Comoran infrastructure and health services. This shows that the Comorian government is highly inclined towards radical Islamic states in the Gulf and the Middle East.

Mexico – Rank 40

Revised 22.12.2015 / Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

Mexico scores 56 points on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, ranking 40. Last year Mexico scored 55 and ranked 38. The slight rise in points can be explained by the growth of organized crime in the country and the recording of more violent incidents targeting Christians. Persecution engines *Organized corruption and crime*, *Tribal antagonism*, *Denominational protectionism* and *Secular intolerance* coexist in various parts of the territory of Mexico. The overlap of these distinct persecution engines pushes the country's score up.

2. Persecution engines

Four distinct persecution engines are present in Mexico: *Organized corruption and crime* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Tribal antagonism*, *Denominational protectionism* and *Secular intolerance*.

- ***Organized corruption and crime:*** In many states of Mexico, violence is pervasive but affects actively practicing Christians to a high degree. Churches and other Christian institutions are often seen as revenue centers by drug cartels. The extortion of priests, pastors and Christian business-owners is commonplace. Attending church services increases the threat of kidnapping, and youths are particularly at risk of being recruited into gangs. Social initiatives are also faced with major threats, especially initiatives that enter the area of influence of criminal organizations. Drug rehabilitation programs or youth work are perceived as being a direct threat to the drug market and drug cartels, and therefore increase the vulnerability of Christians engaging in these programs. There is widespread and sophisticated surveillance of church activities by members of drug cartels.
- ***Tribal antagonism:*** Local communities in the southern states of Mexico are organized according to indigenous traditional laws and customs which force all community members into a homogenous lifestyle. As soon as community members accept a different religion, the indigenous laws become a noose that threatens their very existence. Recently, there has been considerably more pressure on Christians in indigenous areas. These Christians are mainly evangelical and pentecostal, but they also include presbyterians to a lesser extent. In the states of Hidalgo, Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca, local government officials (municipal and state) cooperate with the indigenous laws and ignore the Mexican constitution. Especially in small, rural villages in the southern states of the country, Roman Catholics continue to mix Catholicism with ancient indigenous pagan beliefs. They have continued to oppose protestant Christianity and promote among villagers what they believe is a protestant attempt to undermine their traditional culture. Protestant Christians have been fined, jailed, beaten or murdered because of their faith.

- **Secular intolerance:** This corresponds with the strong push by multilateral organizations and NGOs to remove all Christian values from the public sphere, and particularly from the public education system. Liberal legislation effectively reduces the freedom of Christians to freely express their faith in the public sphere. As a part of this engine, the Christian lifestyle is more and more ridiculed. Twelve homosexual organizations [filed criminal complaints](#) against cardinal Juan Sandoval Iniguez, the retired archbishop of Guadalajara, following his weekly video address in which he denounced the Mexican Supreme Court's recent declaration nullifying state laws restricting marriage to a man and a woman. Cardinal Iniguez argued that the definition of marriage embraced by the court is "deviant" and a "perversion" of the true nature of marriage. Homosexual organizations claim that the cardinal's declarations are "discriminatory" and "incite violence" against homosexuals.
- **Denominational protectionism:** This engine is mainly visible in the opposition of Roman Catholics to new religious movements such as Pentecostalism or the Catholic Renewal Movement.

3. Context

The democratic nature of the Mexican state has long been up to debate because of the long continuity of the *Partido de la Revolución Institucional (PRI)* [*Institutional Revolution Party*] which has been in power since 1929. Many analysts consider the 2000 presidential election as a major turning point in Mexico's political history and as a major step in the country's democratization process. Apart from the high levels of corruption, many human rights organizations have concerns about the human rights track record of the Mexican state, in the context of its "war on drugs." Although the drug cartels and other criminal organizations are responsible for the majority of human rights abuses (killings, disappearances, torture, rape), the country's security services are not exempt from such accusations either. To cite just one example, in a report issued in February 2014, Human Rights Watch reported that of 249 specific cases of disappearance, 149 were attributable to either the police or the military.

With over 128.6 million inhabitants (UN figure 2016), Mexico has the largest population in the Spanish speaking world. Mexico also has the largest economy in Latin America (after Brazil), with a GDP ranking among the top 15 of the world (\$1.3 trillion in 2014), and is home to the wealthiest man on earth. The global economic crisis of 2009 strongly hit the country's economy, but its growth rate was back at 3.9% in 2011. Positive macroeconomic indicators conceal huge income disparities. Mexico is the second country in the world to have the highest income disparities, according to the OECD (2013). Although the share of the population in poverty (living on an income of less than \$2 a day) decreased considerably in the last decades (from about 20% in 1990 to about 5% in 2010) and general inequality also reduced slightly (the country had a Gini coefficient of 51.4 in 2002 and 48.1 in 2010), Mexico is still considered "a very unequal society."

Mexico is one of the most violent countries in the world. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recorded more than 26.000 homicides in 2012, the fourth highest level in the world

(positioned in the 2013 world-ranking between war-torn Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

On other indicators, Mexico consistently ranks among the most violent countries in the world. For over a decade, Mexico has been the number one country in the world (in absolute terms) for kidnap-for-ransom (Control Risk 2015). Another high intensity crime that is frequent in Mexico are disappearances: the Mexican government declared it had reported 26.121 disappearances during Calderón's presidency (2006-2012); the National Human Rights Commission reported 16,076 disappearances and 6,109 unidentified bodies during the same period (ICG 2013a). In Latin America, Mexico has the third highest number of IDPs (after Colombia and El Salvador). [Mexico's number of IDPs](#) has multiplied by 35 in six years, increasing from "only" 8.000 in 2009 to 281.418 in 2014. The steep rise in numbers of IDPs is alarming, and is explained primarily by a combination of criminal, political and gender violence, forced recruitment into drug cartels and religious intolerance (IDMC 2015).

4. Types of Christianity affected

Mexico is home to three types of Christianity:

- **Historical Christian communities** including the Roman Catholic Church (which is still the majority religion) and mainstream protestants (e.g. presbyterians and others).
- **Christian converts** from an indigenous background or mafia background.
- **Non-traditional Christian communities** such as pentecostal churches and the Catholic Renewal Movement.

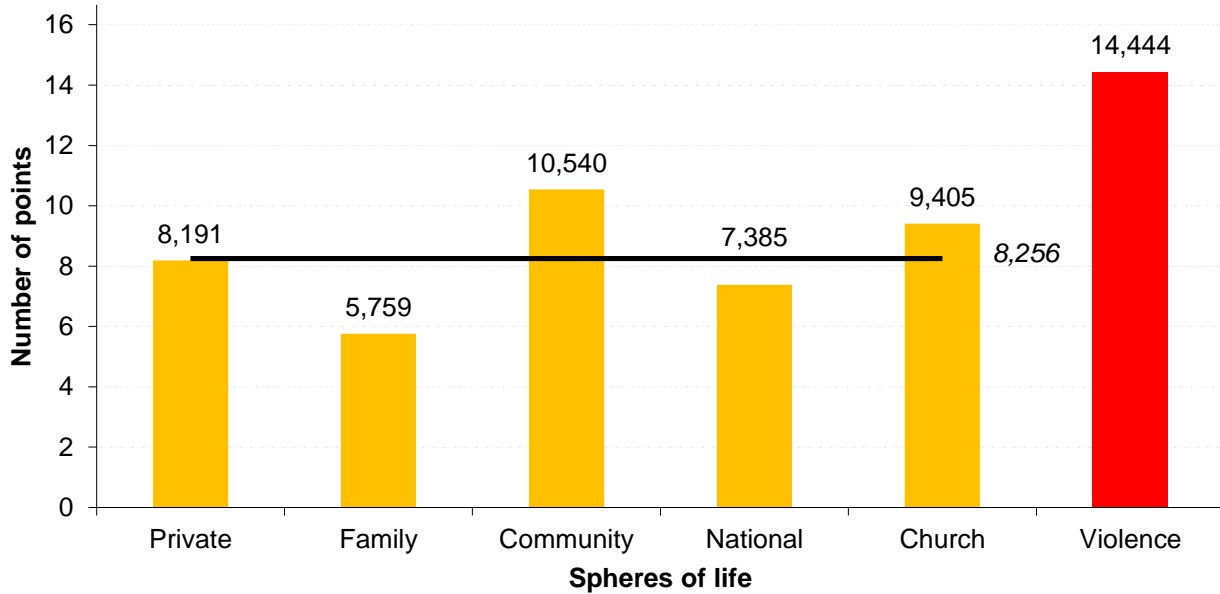
All types of Christianity are affected, although there are differences between the persecution engines. *Organized corruption and crime* affects all Christian denominations, but particularly those Christians who actively engage in social transformation and therefore constitute a threat to the hegemony of this engine's drivers. Christians who step out of criminal organizations also face heavy pressure. *Tribal antagonism* generally focuses on the situation for those converting from indigenous traditional beliefs to non-traditional protestant denominations, but members of the Catholic Renewal Movement have also been targeted. *Denominational protectionism*, as stated above, affects all non-traditional forms of Christianity. *Secular intolerance* affects all Christian denominations.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Mexico presents the scores for four persecution engines: *Organized corruption and crime*, *Tribal antagonism*, *Denominational protectionism* and *Secular intolerance*. The average score over the first five blocks (8.256), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (8.228). The score for the violence block is even higher than last year, rising from 13.519 (WWL 2015) up to 14.444. This suggests that the persecution situation is characterized more by continued violence (*smash*) than by increasing pressure (*squeeze*) on Christians. As the *persecution pattern* below shows,

pressure is highest in the *community* and *church spheres*, combined with a very high score for *violence*. This is typical for a situation in which criminal groups terrorize society at local community level.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private and family spheres:** As a result of *Denominational protectionism*, expressions of Christianity such as weddings, baptisms or funerals that are not in line with traditional Catholic rites are sometimes hindered by family members. The upbringing of children according to particular Christian beliefs can also lead to opposition from within the family.
- **Community sphere:** *Tribal antagonism* expresses itself heavily in the *community sphere*, mainly by excluding Christians from basic social services. This engine manifests itself mainly in indigenous areas and agricultural collectivities (*ejidos*) in the southern states of the country, generally opposing traditional Catholics and converts to New Religious Movements, either to Pentecostalism or the Catholic Renewal Movement. Concerning *secular intolerance*, religious instruction in public schools is forbidden, as public education is secular by law.
- **National sphere:** In this sphere, *Secular intolerance* mainly relates to the varying expressions of intolerance towards Christian convictions and the Christian lifestyle. As a result of *Denominational protectionism*, Christians belonging to non-traditional protestant movements occasionally face obstacles in when dealing with the authorities.
- **Church sphere:** *Organized corruption and crime* can be seen to affect the *Church sphere*, as the intense violence and repeated demands for money from Christian leaders reduce freedom in this sphere: Christians are at times too afraid to gather for worship etc. Extreme violence, including

killings, extortion and kidnappings, creates fear and pushes Christians and churches behind their front door. These constant threats make normal church life nearly impossible in some areas. Christians who refuse to pay the money requested by criminal organizations find they have to close their church or businesses or face violent reprisals. Their houses are often attacked and some Christians have been killed.

- **Violence:** Mexico has been the number one country in the world for kidnap-for-ransom in absolute terms for more than a decade, and this situation is not likely to change. The Mexican NGO Seguridad, Justicia y Paz [Security, Justice and Peace] published a report on 26 March 2015 about the [sharp increase of kidnappings](#) in Mexico during the first two years in office of president Peña Nieto. The whole of Mexican society suffers heavily from organized crime and this is also true for Christians. Kidnap-for-ransom is above all an income generator for drug cartels. Family members of Christian leaders are at great risk of being kidnapped as they are considered wealthy by drug cartel members, because of the offering money they collect. Kidnapping is also a useful strategy to intimidate people who refuse to collaborate with them or threaten their influence. Christians engaged in social work are frequently the target of kidnappings for this reason as well.

In indigenous communities, converts from traditional religion are often victims of violence (sometimes including the destruction of their property), and many need to flee their homes. During this reporting period, around eighty cases of physical abuse have been reported in the southern states of Mexico. Moreover, hundreds of cases have been reported of forced displacements. On 10 May 2015, the hut that was used for services of the Iglesia Apostólica en la Fe en Cristo Jesús (church of the village of Santa Fe de la Laguna) was set on fire and burned to the ground by hostile villagers. With tractor and sledge hammers the foundations and walls of this new church building under construction were destroyed.

6. Future outlook

1. National security forces have been incapable of adequately addressing the violence and crime, in part because of the infiltration and co-optation of security and judiciary institutions. The “war on crime” is far from over, in spite of desperate efforts on the part of the country's security forces to repress criminal organizations. Positive developments can be seen in some parts of the country, but overall, it can hardly be said that the Mexican State is succeeding in its ambition of containing the drug cartels and other criminal organizations. Mexico has been named a “narco-democracy” and this is justified when taking into consideration the government's de facto incapability of upholding rule of law. Mexico has relatively adequate laws and political institutions on paper, but in practice impunity and corruption are widespread. The security situation in Mexico will continue to be dire, which is always a difficult context for the Church to operate in.

2. The culture of violence affects the lives of all Mexicans and reflects the incapacity of the Mexican state to guarantee the security of its population, especially of its most vulnerable groups, including Christians belonging to minority denominations.

Kuwait – Rank 41

Reporting Period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 56 points Kuwait ranks 41 on World Watch List (WWL) 2016. The country had scored 49 points in the WWL 2015. Compared to last year the situation in Kuwait is getting worse for two main reasons: 1) *Regional*: Islamic State (IS) is exerting a very strong influence on society, pushing it into very extreme conservatism. This creates fear among Christians. They fear kidnapping and other such activities which have become a trademark of IS. IS has also been successful in establishing a network in the country. In July 2015, the interior minister told the public that the government security forces had uncovered an IS network. 2) *Government*: To control the population that is being exposed to very extreme Islamic ideology, the government of Kuwait has opted to become more authoritarian. This has brought severe restrictions with it for Christians in terms of freedom of association, assembly and worship.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines active in Kuwait are *Islamic extremism* and to a lesser extent *Dictatorial paranoia* (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- ***Islamic extremism***: *Islamic extremism* is the main engine behind the persecution of Christians. It is operating strongly on both national and local community levels. Also it is important to see that *Islamic extremism* within Kuwait in the context of what is happening in the whole region. The region is in chaos and society has become very conservative. The country's laws and constitution also affirm the conservative nature of the society. According to the constitution, Islam is the state religion and Islamic law (Sharia) is an important source of legislation. The government requires Islamic religious instruction for all students in state and private schools. Teaching Christianity 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 as radical Muslims are growing in influence who do not want to see Christians in the country. This is compounded by the rise of Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq, which has had a resonance among significant Sunni radicals. There are Kuwaiti citizens fighting alongside IS.
- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: The government of Kuwait even though relatively free, is still restrictive in many ways. The country is ruled by a royal family that has disregarded the will of the parliament on many occasions. Dictatorial paranoia can mostly explain restrictions from the government as the country's ruler does not want any organized group to threaten his hegemony. The country has banned any formal political parties. Freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of association are also restricted.

3. Context

Kuwait is a tiny nation that has a strong economy based on oil. It is one of the richest countries in the Arab world. The country has 4,007,000 inhabitants, of whom more than half are immigrants. It is a relatively open economy with crude oil reserves of billions of barrels - more than six per cent of world reserves. The government has been using the traditional conservative tribal society of the country to eliminate the liberal and leftist groups in the country, and has so far been very successful. In the process other religious minorities were also severely affected. Kuwait has acceded to some of the major United Nations conventions on human rights: e.g. the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966. However, the government has been criticized for failing to uphold the principles enshrined in those human rights documents - one of which is freedom of religion. Freedom House [rated](#) the country “partly free” in its 2015 report.

Kuwaiti society is conservative. Islam prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. Kuwaitis find the idea that religion can be separated from social and political life quite incomprehensible. The constitutional provision regarding religious freedom is full of contradictions. On the one hand, it provides for religious freedom, and on the other hand it puts a very restrictive condition stating that the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals.

4. Types of Christianity affected

The following types of Christianity are present in Kuwait:

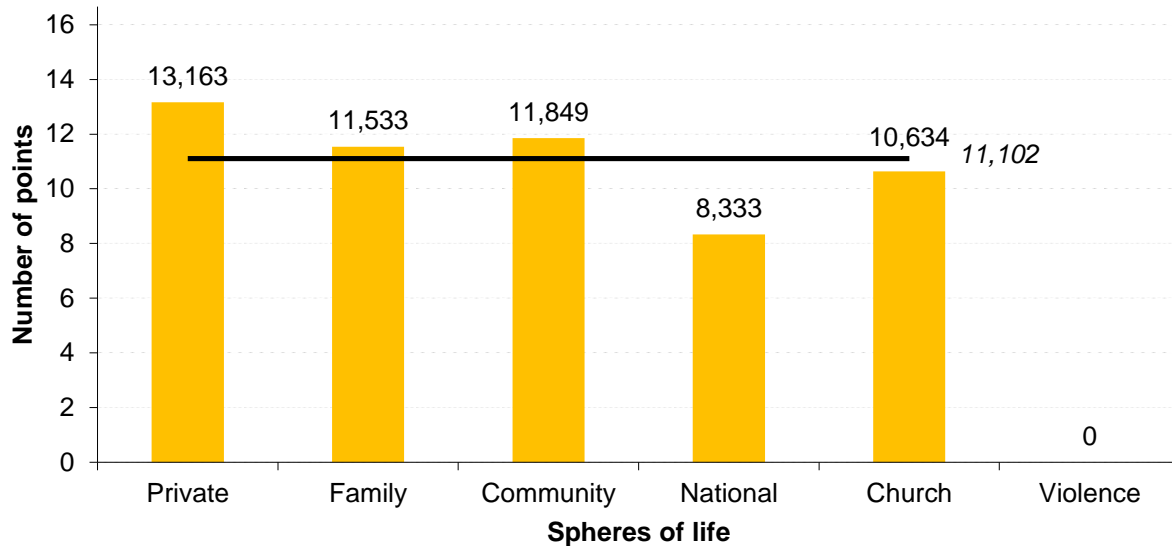
- **Expatriate communities:** There are around 350,000 Christians in Kuwait, and the majority of them are foreign migrant workers. Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship informally. However, the existing worship places are very small for the number of people gathering, and local Kuwaitis are annoyed by the noise and traffic caused by these overcrowded meeting places. The extreme difficulty to obtain property to gather for worship is an extra burden. On the other hand, the sharing of meeting places has encouraged greater cooperation and fellowship among churches. The current situation in the region, i.e. the Islamic State factor, is creating high levels of fear among the expatriates.
- **Converts (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs):** MBBs in Kuwait face more severe forms of persecution. 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 recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters in court. For MBBs, the main drivers of persecution are family and radical Muslims, and, to a lesser extent, the authorities.

5. Spheres of life and Violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Kuwait presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five

blocks (11.102), showing the pressure on Christians, is seriously higher than last year (9.707). The score for the violence block is zero (same as last year). The highest increase is in the *community sphere*, followed by the *family sphere*. This suggests that the influence of social actors in the increase of persecution is at least as effective as the influence of the regime trying to control these social actors and society at large. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, Christians in Kuwait face different levels of persecutions in all *spheres of life*. Pressure is highest in the *private sphere*, especially for MBBs. This is followed by the *community, family and church spheres*.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private Sphere:** Even though the law does not formally prohibit conversion, the government puts hurdles in the way for people who convert. For instance, they will not get an official document with their new faith on it. There are laws against proselytizing, and the government enforces them. In addition, restrictions imposed by family and society make it extremely dangerous for a Christian to talk about his/her faith in public. The government has prohibited non-Muslim missionaries from working in the country and from proselytizing Muslims.
- Family sphere:** Christians, especially MBBs, face serious family challenges in Kuwait. MBBs are often buried with Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, and there are very limited facilities for expatriates. Baptism must be conducted discreetly as open baptism might attract severe abuse and harassment from family as well as from the community at large. One observer states: “In Kuwait, the religion of the husband will determine the application of Islamic law in the future. A non-Muslim male may not marry a Muslim female unless he converts to Islam. These laws have a significant implication on custody and inheritance.”
- Community sphere:** In society, Christians are seen as second class, foreigners, and infidels. Based on this line of thinking, Christians are prevented from participating in community activities.

During the Ramadan month, Christians struggle to cope with a de facto requirement imposed by the government and the community: eating and drinking during the day is problematic. There is always pressure on MBBs to renounce Christianity. Education is another area where Christians face a challenge. One observer has noted: “The government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools for all students. The government also requires Islamic religious instruction in private schools that have one or more Muslim student. But the law prohibits organized religious education for faiths other than Islam.”

- **National sphere:** The government of Kuwait has made it clear that Islam is the state religion. The freedom of religion enshrined in the constitution is not up to the international standard. It is also constitutionally declared that the leader of the country (emir) should be Muslim, and from Muslim parents. The government requires instruction of Islam both in state and private schools. The government endorses a policy of funding and supporting Sunni Muslims who proselytize foreign residents.
- **Church sphere:** Church life in Kuwait is restricted. The government employs the stringent requirements that it uses to register non-profit organizations to register and license churches. For example, to purchase a plot of land to build a church, the buyer must be a citizen. And for a convert to go and buy land for church construction, is very dangerous. A field worker explains further: “Churches that applied for licenses to build new places of worship had to wait years for approval. Applications were denied or denied on technical grounds. Most of the recognized Christian churches considered their existing facilities 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.”
- **Violence:** No violent incidents involving Christians were reported.

6. Future outlook

The future of Kuwait, like that of other countries in the region, is intrinsically linked to the general politics of the region. The Middle East and the Gulf region have become more unpredictable than ever. The rise in Sunni radicalism in the form of IS, has been the 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 alert. The rise of Sunni radicalism in Syria and Iraq will have further significant influence. IS has been building up its own network in the country. Yet, as long as Kuwait maintains its openness to the world economy, Christians are likely to continue coming to the country regardless of the existing pressure. This could eventually help the country and society to accept diversity and develop mutual understanding in a better way. The country is taking the threat posed by IS seriously, especially after a suicide bomber blew himself up and killed more than 25 Shi’ites and injured 225 more on 27 June 2015.

From past experience, and taking into account the existing trends, the following is likely to be the future situation for Christians in the country: The fear among Christians will continue as society becomes more dangerous. Society will become radicalized, moving to the far right. Churches will continue to have difficulties with registration issues.

Kazakhstan – Rank 42

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 55 points Kazakhstan ranks 42 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. Last year (WWL 2015), Kazakhstan ranked 42 with a score of 51 points. The increase in score is mainly due to the growing control that the regime is exercising over the entire country, including religion.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Kazakhstan are *Dictatorial paranoia* and to a lesser extent *Islamic extremism*. Please note that Dictatorial paranoia in Kazakhstan is a product of the communist past and has therefore emerged from *Communist and post-communist oppression*, though the ideology of communism has been dead and buried in Kazakhstan for many years.

- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Both mainstream protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses are frequently branded as “extremists” for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. Pressure from the authorities has been stepped up in 2015. It is very common that members of any protestant church 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. Security forces have increased wire-tapping in order to find “extremists”. This has also affected believers and churches. Another strand of crackdown involves religious education, no matter what religion is concerned.
- ***Communist and post-communist oppression***: This is the historical fundament on which the current regime is established. Communism has no ideological contribution to support the regime’s position anymore. However, many control systems and mechanisms derived from the communist system are still in place in the country.
- ***Islamic extremism***: Pressure on Christians coming from Islamic circles is particularly aimed at Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). 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.

3. Context

The country’s president Nazarbayev is ageing (he was born on 6 July 1940) and is reportedly not in good health. There are frequent rumors of heart problems, maybe even heart attacks or minor

strokes, and these rumors lead to the still unanswered question who will come after him. Expectations should not be raised too high because when the current president is replaced it will most probably be by someone similar – or as one of our contacts said: “One dodgy leader will be succeeded by another dodgy leader”. After all, the ruling elite and several families would have much to lose if it were to go differently.

Another important issue is the respectable size of the ethnic Russian minority in the north of the country. According to official information 23.3 per cent of the total population of Kazakhstan is Russian. This causes some headaches for the regime, bearing in mind the assertive policy of the president Putin’s Russian government. The events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine clearly show the Kazakh worries are not unreal.

A small, but growing group of radical Muslims, 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 Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Officials say there are 300 Kazakh citizens in the Middle East region fighting for Islamic State. Non-official sources claim the number is much higher. The regime makes use of this information and even exaggerates the danger so that they can clamp down on society and restrict more and more freedoms.

4. Types of Christianity affected

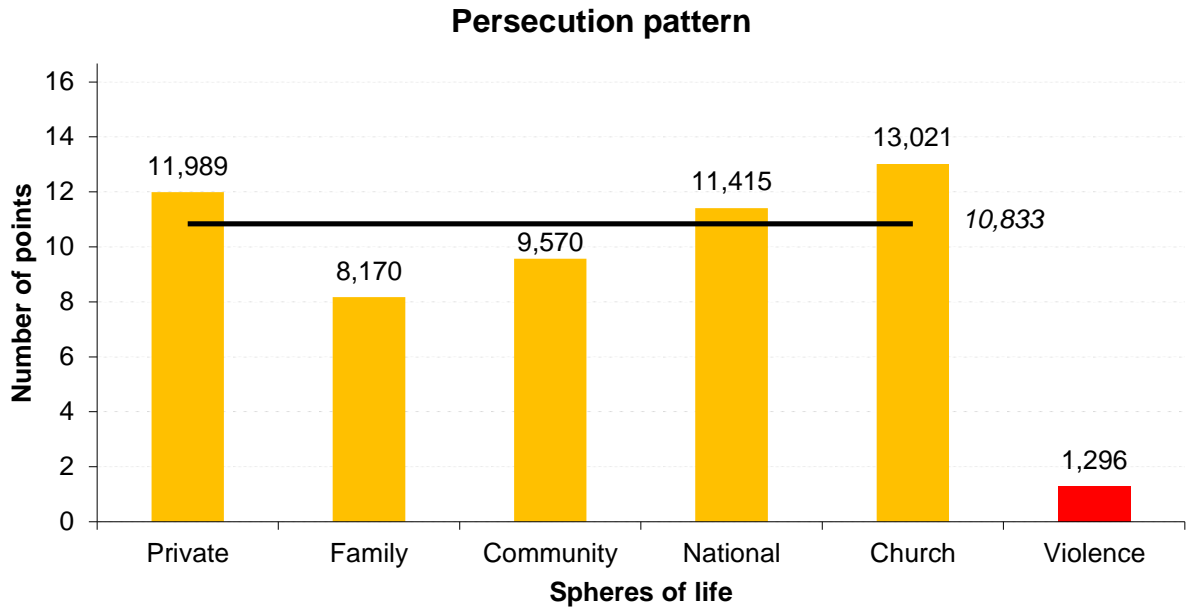
All types of Christianity in Kazakhstan exist and are experiencing various levels of persecution:

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians.** Most of the expatriate groups will be focused internally and hardly be involved in evangelism.
- **Historical Christian communities,** (of which the Russian Orthodox Church, ROC, is by far the largest) are not involved in evangelism among Kazakhs. They can function pretty normally as the Kazakh regime does not consider them a danger. What’s more: the Kazakh government has no interest in provoking Russia by attacking the ROC – the events in eastern Ukraine have set an example.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) bear the brunt of the persecution in Kazakhstan. 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 protestant churches** consisting of Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are the next most persecuted category because of their evangelism. These Christians suffer from many raids, threats, arrests, and fines by the authorities.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Kazakhstan presents the scores for *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (10.833), showing the pressure on Christians, has gone up compared with last year (10.041). The score for the violence block (1.296) is slightly higher than last year (1.111). This suggests persecution is gradually increasing in the country. As the *persecution pattern* below shows,

persecution is strongest in the *private, national and church spheres*. Pressure from *Islamic extremism* is present mostly in the *private, family and community spheres* and is exerted by the social environment, while *Dictatorial paranoia* – the pressure from the regime – is felt mostly in the *private, national and church spheres*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Conversion is the issue that triggers the fiercest reaction. This is why MBBs and protestant churches and believers are constantly attacked. Converts will 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. Because of their status (or lack thereof) in the country, protestants cannot benefit from the freedom of expression or belief that is extended to other Christians such as Orthodox Christians and Catholics. There were many reports of raids against protestant individuals and organizations where Christian materials and books were confiscated by the authorities and the owners had to pay fines. For MBBs and those active in outreach it is risky to access Christian media. As soon as Christians touch upon issues of faith in their circle of relatives, be they Kazakhs or Russians, then conflicts immediately arise. This is the case for Muslim Kazakhs who have converted to Christianity. Even in cases where protestant believers do not preach the Gospel, but only refer to moral issues, conflicts may still occur immediately, and the believers may face rejection from peers, relatives and acquaintances, and be insulted on grounds of "sectarianism". Converts find it difficult to meet with other Christians as they are being monitored by their community closely. All non-Orthodox Christians are monitored by the Kazakh Intelligence Service (KNB). Converts run the risk of being locked up by their family (house arrest) to force them to recant the new faith.

- Family sphere:** For Kazakh converts baptism is a very important step and very often causes conflicts with their Muslim relatives. There are some Kazakhs who are baptized in secret and do not make a point of flaunting it. In Kazakhstan there is a separation between the European and Islamic cemeteries. Often, newly-converted MBBs worry about how they'll be buried. Islamic cemeteries permit Christians to be buried there, but only if Islamic rites are used. Freedom of religion has come under threat in the country over the past couple of years 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 restricts non-recognized religious groups' activities. The country's laws allow parents to raise their children according to their religious beliefs unless the upbringing harms the child's health or infringes upon the child's rights, but again this is only extended to religious beliefs and groups officially recognized by the state. Children of protestant Christians are quite frequently harassed or discriminated because of their parents' faith. Schools and institutes use state funds to arrange meetings employing propaganda to combat "sects including evangelical churches. These meetings are supposedly voluntary, but everyone is strongly urged to attend. MBBs are quite frequently put under house arrest by their family to pressurize them into recanting their new faith. If MBBs refuse to recant their new faith, the family may try to force divorce or take children out of their custody. There have also been court cases in which converts have lost their inheritance rights.
- Community sphere:** Protestants (who are not officially recognized by the state as a religious group) have experienced increased pressure through the adoption of the 2011 Administrative Code (which has a very restrictive interpretation of religious freedom and freedom of belief) and through the new Criminal Code that took effect in Jan. 2015. The community in the countryside will monitor known converts. In the countryside, only Muslims will be accepted in local institutions. Pressure, at times intense, is immediately put on MBBs 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 is generally not problematic, trade schools and higher education may not be as freely accessible to active Christians. Discrimination takes place mainly in state employment. This applies primarily to Kazakhs. There was a case in Almaty, for instance, when the authorities tried to make a teacher redundant because she attended an evangelical church. In law enforcement agencies, such incidents are a common occurrence. Protestants have often been fined for faith-related reasons. Because the state does not recognize them as official religious groups, their faith-related activities are often interpreted as unlawful missionary activity or activities that may harm others or present a terrorist threat to the state. The new 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: Even the law on religion states that the priority is given to the so-called traditional religions - Orthodox Christianity and Islam. 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. This means there are many protestant communities which are not included and so 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. Military service is obligatory and those Christians, who for religious reasons do not want to take up arms, are still forced to join the army. . The Kazakh media are in general negative towards Christianity. There have been quite a few programs targeting especially neo-protestant groups and converts. Protestant Christians have been accused of being non-Kazakh and anti-Islamic/anti-Christian, and therefore by extension accused of blasphemy by their former co-religionists of their ethnic community.

- **Church sphere:** Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism are the only Christian groups recognized by the state. Fifty citizen-sponsors are required to register a religious association, but through registration missionary activity is effectively banned. In addition, there are now special requirements for church buildings and the land they are built on. Unregistered churches are strictly illegal. Protestant Christians have often had their services and meetings disrupted and received fines because their places of worship are not officially recognized by the state. In practice, courts frequently interpreted any religious activity that take place outside of a registered religious building as illegal missionary activity, including making invitations to discussions on religious topics. The law requires that registered churches have the consent of both parents before children under 18 can attend church activities. If such children are caught attending without permission, the government imposes a heavy fine on the church and pastor. However, this law does not apply to Orthodox churches and mosques. Printing, importing, distribution and sale of all religious materials approval is needed from the Religious Affairs Committee (RAC). Only registered churches can apply for this. Religious materials discovered during raids on meetings of unregistered groups will automatically be confiscated and maybe later destroyed. State media are practically inaccessible for Christians; a number of Internet sites are blocked. But registered groups may have some openings. 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. Registered groups are required to obtain a religious visa or missionary visa for receiving foreign Christian workers. Such visas allow for a maximum of six months and are renewable. However, protestant Christians cannot benefit from this. Foreign leaders who try to speak out about the current persecution both at local and international levels are subjected to intimidation, provocation and searches at border crossings.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Kazakhstan does not seem to be very violent, but as not all incidents are reported the real level of violence will be higher. According to information of "Almaty News Information Agency" published on 4 August 2015, eight members of Evangelical Christian Baptist Church were detained by the Kazakh security forces in the city of Kapshagai, Kazakhstan. On the evening of 14 August 2015 Kazakhstan's KNB secret police arrested Seventh-day Adventist Yklas Kabduakasov after searching his home in the capital Astana. Pastor Bakhytzhan Kashkumbayev with his wife Alfia, Pastor Bakhytzhan is currently going through four years of the house arrest

with three years' probation. Vasiliy Kliver, a Council of Churches Baptist in Aktobe Region was given a 5-day jail term on 5 February 2015 and was freed on 10 February. Protestant-run drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers have been repeated targets of official harassment. In a part of southern Kazakhstan the meeting for worship at a state registered protestant church was raided in February 2015 and believers were forced to write statements explaining why they were attending the meeting.

6. Future outlook

The regime in Kazakhstan is constantly working to increase its control over the whole of society. It is using the threat of radical Islam to restrict more and more freedoms. Religious freedom is restricted by new legislation. This causes the situation for the Christian minority to get worse and means the future outlook for it is worrying.

Indonesia – Rank 43

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 55 points Indonesia ranks xx on the World Watch List 2016. In 2015, Indonesia ranked 47 with a score of 50 points. The increase is partly due to an increased level of violence, but also to an increase in the *private, community and church spheres*.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Indonesia are *Islamic extremism* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Religious nationalism* and *Organized corruption and crime*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Indonesia continues to be a country both blessed and challenged by its diversity. While it is the largest Muslim country in the world, its predominant brand of Islam is fairly tolerant and gives other minorities some space (*Islam Nusantara* or *Island Islam*, referring to the archipelago's unique topography of more than 17.000 islands). Its constitution does not sponsor a state religion, but until May 2015 recognized only six religions (which included Catholicism and Protestantism). This policy was abolished in the reporting period and people can now officially choose any religious affinity. On the other hand, Indonesia is one of the most decentralized countries in the world and that is true for the topic of religion as well. A plethora of Islamic by-laws rules regions and territories and the province of Aceh is even ruled by Sharia law, though it is still under Indonesia's constitution which guarantees freedom of religion. Radical groups are, for example, the *Hizb-ut Tahrir Indonesia*, the Islamic Defender Front (FPI) and the Islamic Front (FUI). These organizations have used strict and exclusive religious interpretations to justify the implementation of Sharia law and the infringement of the rights of religious minorities. Some of these groups allegedly enjoyed the tacit support of politicians and parties in Jakarta, a practice which may continue. Universities are known as hotbeds for Islamic radicalization. Not only Christians are affected by radical Islamic groups, but Muslim minority groups like Ahmadis as well.
- **Religious nationalism:** Though Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, it is religiously diverse and the island of Bali is predominantly Hindu. If a Hindu converts to Christianity, there is strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors to return to the belief of their fathers.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** Indonesia is notorious for being one of the most corrupt countries in the world, although its position on Transparency International's list improved in recent years. The new president set an encouraging sign by having all his cabinet candidates checked before naming them by the independent Corruption Eradication Committee. On the other hand, the president damaged his perception when he impeached the Anti-Corruption-Committee's chair and after some struggles replaced him with a somewhat tainted candidate.

Allegedly, members of the police and even some members of the radical Islamic groups are involved in organized crime. True or not, it is minorities in particular who suffer under these circumstances as they tend to be excluded from patronizing networks and victimized. This is also true for the Christian minority, all the more when they speak out against it.

3. Context

Expectations in president Joko Widodo were sky-high in 2014, though his time as president started with a major challenge: He did not hold a majority in parliament (indeed, a two-third majority was against him), which caused a lot of political trouble for him and led to disappointments. One of his biggest challenges was and still is the ailing economy, which he is urged to re-vitalize. There are fears in society that these challenges may become a basis for racial conflicts as in the late 90s. Therefore he is forced to look for allies, most likely including moderate Islamic parties. Though this constellation is nothing new for Indonesian politics, it may lead to frustrations among his supporters. Besides this rough political road, he is going to face challenges from radical Islamic groups, if he decides (as was announced) to go for a policy including minorities. Most citizens are not very interested in minority questions or Human Rights; they expect quick economic improvements and that will be no small challenge either.

Another challenge the radical Islamic groups pose is that many radicals have left for Syria and Iraq to join the coalition of Jihadists, named *Islamic State*, sometimes taking with them their complete family. Most Indonesians wonder what will happen when these war veterans return to Indonesia. When this happened in a comparable fashion back in the 90s, after war veterans returned from Afghanistan, this resulted – among other things – in the Bali bombings in 2002, killing more than 200 tourists. It also remains to be seen if radical Islamic groups in Indonesia will grow stronger through this reflux.

4. Types of Christianity affected

In Indonesia four types of Christianity are present:

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians** are present in Indonesia but not experiencing persecution.
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as the Roman Catholic Church, are facing hostilities and sometimes even violent attacks, but they are still less affected than the protestant churches and convert communities.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) as well as – in far smaller numbers - from a Hindu Background (HBBs) are seriously affected.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches**, such as evangelicals and pentecostal congregations, are seriously affected, particularly in hot spot areas.

Though the official statistics show that the number of Christians has not changed much the number could be be much higher as converts do not necessarily register their new identity to the state. The number of new believers is hard to estimate, but various mission agencies believe it is growing. As

the Christian minority continues to grow slowly, it faces more and more restrictions and challenges. This is due to the fact that more and more believers come from a Muslim background. Christians are found in every part of the country and in some provinces even make up the majority, like in Papua or parts of Sulawesi. In other parts, they have to live under Sharia by-laws or – as in Aceh – in a province ruled by Sharia. The continuing labor migration of mainly Javanese Muslims to other provinces, especially in the east, poses a challenge for all types of Christianity. The persecution of Christians is concentrated in - but not limited to - provinces in Sumatra and Java (around 75% of the country's population). Another hot-spot, which has recently become violent again against Christians, is Aceh.

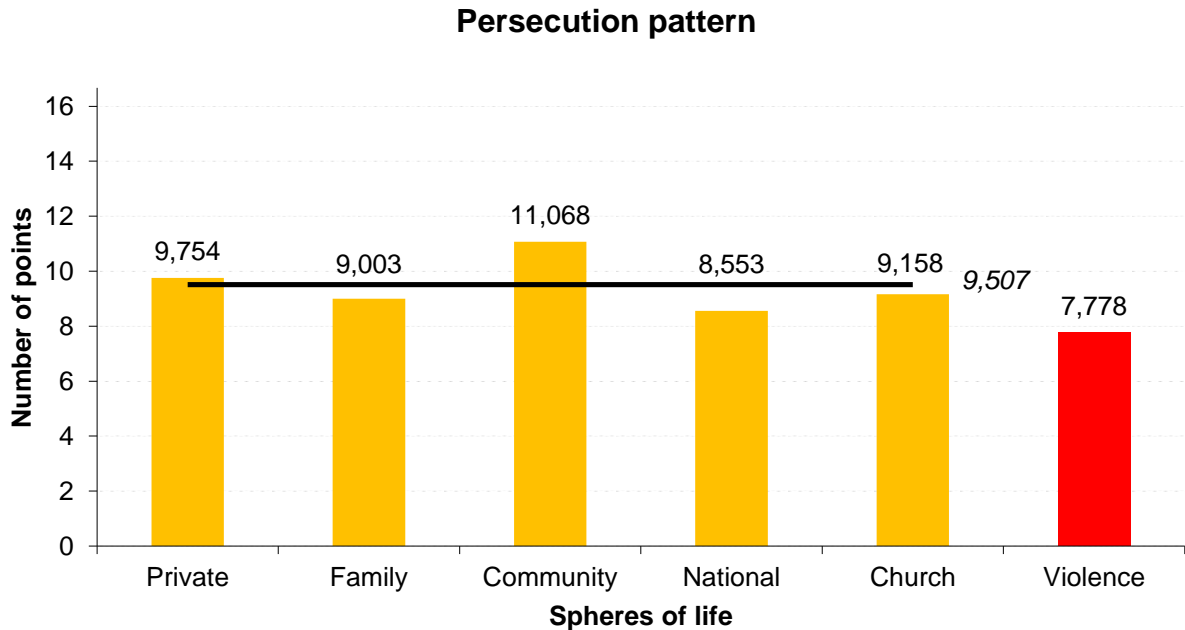
In general, radical Islamic organizations are still the main source of persecution for most Christians, including MBBs. However in some regions, where Islamic influence is strong and where Sharia law or by-laws are implemented, local government bodies take an increasingly active role in creating pressure on minority groups, including Christians. For example, in most church closure cases, the drivers of persecution are local government officials (such as mayors or heads of villages). According to observers inside the country, the government continues to mastermind Islamization attempts in Papua, even though on a smaller scale. "Papua is the only region in the country where Muslim evangelists are being salaried by the state," as one expert said. The underlying motive is political, i.e. to ensure that Papua remains an integral part of the country. Papua shares different racial and cultural identity with the west and middle part of Indonesia. Religion is the only means available to the government for building up a common identity. (This whole region - perhaps one of the wealthiest in terms of natural resources - is riddled with separatist movements.) This leads to competing views about Papua's future: some are aiming for a free but Christian Papua, while others want an integrated but Muslim Papua.

Other religious minorities like Ahmadis or Shiites are affected both by violence from radical Islamic groups and by being totally neglected by the government as well. In fact, the Ahmadis are the most persecuted groups in Indonesia. To end on a more positive note, the home minister announced in May 2015 that the government had abolished the practice that every Indonesian citizen is obliged to follow one of six officially recognized religions. People now can choose their religion freely, what does not mean that converts from Islam do not face problems in this respect anymore.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Indonesia presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score for the first five blocks depicting pressure on Christians is 9.507, a significant increase from 8.656 last year. The score for the violence block – 7.778 - is also higher than last year (6.482). This suggests the overall level of persecution is rising. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, persecution is strongest in the *private* and *community spheres*. These are the two spheres where converts face the most problems, especially if they are the only believers in a family or a community. Discrimination in dealing with authorities as well as in employment and in the community affects all types of Christianity. The relatively high score in

the *church sphere* reflects the discriminatory approach against church buildings as explained under *church sphere* below.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** While in general, Christians enjoy freedom from fear to live their Christian life, the situation for converts is different. They always have to be 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 being discovered can trigger even violent reactions. Meeting with other Christians can become challenging in these circumstances 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. This is true for other types of Christianity in hot spot areas in Indonesia as well. In these areas, Christians are also closely monitored as are known converts generally; many have faced house arrest, in some cases also physical or mental abuse.
- **Family sphere:** Once converts are discovered, they often face the threat of divorce and will lose their inheritance rights, which happens to Hindu converts as well. Organizing a baptism or a Christian wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible in the hot- spot areas. Children of Christians 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. Converts can be isolated from their families and even be kicked out by them.
- **Community sphere:** Converts face strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to recant the Christian faith, even though conversion is not forbidden by law. Especially in areas like Aceh and other hot-spot areas, Christians experience discrimination in their private lives as well

as in their business lives. Children of Christians report facing discrimination and bias from teachers and co-students in schools and there are reports of children of poor Christians from remote areas in various provinces being lured (free-of-charge) into Islamic boarding schools with the promise of receiving an education. Christian students in Muslim dominated areas receive poor marks in religious education, regardless of their actual achievement, in order to prevent them from reaching the minimum requirements needed for applying for civil service employment.

- **Church sphere:** Churches continue to face massive problems in the registration of congregations and in the construction of church-buildings. Based on the revised Joint Ministerial Decree in 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 and the inter-faith harmony forum. Many churches find the permit extremely hard to get even if they have met all the necessary requirements. And even if they get the permit, there is sometimes a lack of protection which should be provided by the government and local police. To give just one example: in December 2014, about five thousand people belonging to the Bekasi Muslim Society (*Masyarakat Muslim Bekasi*) held a demonstration in front of the office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the Bekasi district. Their action aimed to express their refusal to allow the development of the Catholic Church in Lippo, Cikarang. They considered the church building permit to be invalid. Based on a survey of 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 and other religion's worship houses, but of course churches as well. In general, producing or distributing religious materials and bibles is no problem, but there are exceptions in the hot-spot areas.
- **Violence:** Persecution in Indonesia is not particularly violent, but outbursts of violence against Christians still happen. While the killing of Christians is generally an exception, the closing and/or destruction of churches happens on a regular basis. In the reporting period, there were more than 20 churches attacked, closed and destroyed at various locations in the country. Internationally highlighted was the case of Aceh, where in mid-October 2015 at least nine churches were forcibly closed and broken down. In the resulting unrest, more than 8,000 Christians were forced to flee their homes. The provincial government announced that it has an additional 13 churches on a watch-list and has given them six months to apply for a building permission/registration. Another noteworthy and sad anniversary was the hundredth celebration of a worship service outside the presidential palace in September 2015. The GKI Yasmin church in Bogor, 60 kilometers outside Jakarta, had applied for a registration for their church, which was denied by the administration. In the end, the Indonesian Supreme Court ruled that the church had kept all legal demands and consequently had to be allowed to worship in their building which had been sealed off by authorities. But – at the time of writing (November 2015) - the mayor of Bogor and his successor are refusing to implement the court's ruling.

6. Future outlook

Christians remain vulnerable to societal discrimination and – at times and especially in the hot-spot areas – to violence. The implementation of law will no doubt stay weak and it is not clear at all how the government will be able to cope with the growing strength of radical Islamic groups, let alone with an influx of returning battle-hardened war veterans from Syria and Iraq. It remains to be seen as well whether the largest Muslim organizations in the country – *Nadhlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* – will follow a comparatively liberal approach or not. NU itself has expressed deep concern of the ongoing influence by the salafi and radical group. They also put a persistence effort in promoting pluralism within their body and followers. The growing disappointment with Joko Widodo's government – in realizing that expectations have been unrealistic – and the increasingly challenging economic environment will add to volatile circumstances and at times violent reactions in which religious minorities like the Christians can easily act as scapegoats.

Mali – Rank 44

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

This year Mali scores 55 points, ranking 44. This is higher than the score of WWL 2015 (52 points; rank 40), but still considerably lower than Mali's score on the WWL 2013 at the highest point of the Islamist invasion. The current score is still high accounting for the continuing pressures on Christians in the country. After the French military intervention in January 2013, the threat of Islamists has not completely been averted, and in the north there is still no normal Church life possible. The Christian presence and infrastructure there has been largely destroyed and many of the Christians who fled are still afraid to return.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engine in Mali is *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Mali has always been a typical West-African state with a (mostly) moderate Islam and a constitutionally secular political system, proscribing religious political parties, even though a high percentage of its population is Muslim. Religion is understood to be private and generally stays clear of politics. Christians have always had sufficient space in Malian society, including foreign Christian missionaries. In the north, the situation has been more difficult than in the south, but until the Islamist takeover in 2012 international missionaries had been able to work there. The situation for Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) has always been more challenging than for other Christians, but the pressure and/or violence against MBBs has intensified as a result.

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. Since the fighting started in March 2012, tens if not hundreds of thousands of Malians fled from the north to the south or to neighboring countries, including a small group of Christians.

It will take a long time to build up a Christian presence again in the north of Mali. At the same time, the Church in southern Mali has also been negatively affected by the increasing visibility of various Wahhabi groups. Although the occupation of the north came to a halt, 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.

3. Context

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 an overall peace deal putting 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.

The BBC (20 June 2015) reported that the Tuareg rebels belonging to the Azawad Movements Coalition have finally [agreed to the peace deal](#) after their demands (including greater political competences, a regional security force and more investment in the region's development) were met by the government. The question is whether the peace deal will work, considering earlier peace deals have all failed. The peace deal in itself fails to achieve justice for victims of the violence and their families. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported, around 140.000 Malian refugees, of whom a small percentage are Christian, [still live abroad](#). Moreover, the risk that radical Tuaregs will yet again turn to radical groups that are linked to Al-Qaeda is still present. [Islamist gunmen sieged a hotel](#) in the central Malian town of Sevare and killed 13 people (BBC, 9 August 2015). The siege ended when government troops stormed the building.

4. Types of Christianity affected

Mali is home to the following types of Christianity:

- **Historical Christian communities**, such as Roman Catholic churches and a significant number of various protestant denominations. Among the less than five per cent of Malians who are Christians, the majority belong to historical Christian communities.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs): These small communities of MBBs in Mali are mainly to be found among the Bozo and the Dogon, but there are also some MBBs living elsewhere in the country.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** (such as baptist, evangelical and Pentecostal communities).

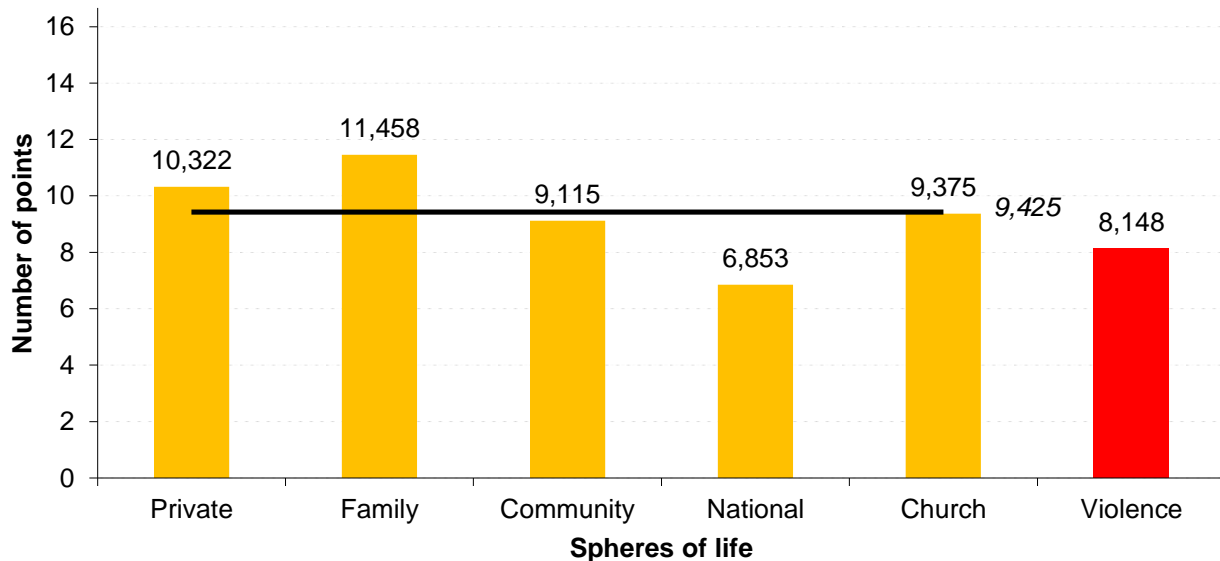
Even though most Christians live in the south of the country, they feel threatened by the Islamists in the north. The French-led intervention has minimized the threat from the Islamic militants,

however, by driving many of them out of the country and away from the major northern cities. There are no indications that normal church life can safely resume in northern Mali.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Mali presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (9.425), showing the pressure on Christians, is lower than last year (9.981). The score for the violence block is however much higher, rising from 2.593 (WWL 2015) up to 8.148. The level of pressure decreased, mostly in the *private* and *national spheres*, but the level of violence has increased substantially as a result of terrorist attacks during the reporting period. It suggests a volatile persecution situation. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure is highest in the *private* and *family spheres*, lowest in the *national sphere*, and around average in the *community* and *church spheres*. The relatively high score for *violence* indicates that radical forces are increasingly stirring up the situation for Christians and the wider society in a negative way. This is typical for a situation in which persecution is not yet defined by the most radical expressions of Islamic extremism but by more moderate expressions that however still do not give much leeway to Christians.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private and family spheres:** For MBBs it is particularly difficult to live out their faith in the *private* and *family spheres*, as their family environment is usually hostile to their conversion. There has always been some pressure on Christians in the south, particularly towards MBBs.

- **Community sphere:** Christians in the north have felt less safe to openly participate in the affairs of the community than in the past due to the influence of Islamist groups. Although the Islamic militants have been driven out, they have not been eradicated and fears of possible new insurgencies remain. Even local Muslims do not like Christians to return and Christian property has often been taken and occupied by others.
- **National sphere:** The level of pressure in the past year at national level was less than in the previous two years; 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:** Most of the killings are carried out by radical Muslims, and among those killed include peacekeepers and NGO workers as well as civilians. For instance: in September 2015 three NGO workers were killed in Ouro Aly Tem village, Mopti region of northern Mali. Dr Mohamed Ibrahim Yattara, president of the Baptist Church in Mali confirmed that more than 15 churches in rural areas had been destroyed. Some of these churches are found in places such as the Ouonkoro, Mopti region, Toulé in Ségou region, Gouma-Rharous, Timbuktu region and Sevare. One church was attacked as radical Muslims came looking to kidnap the pastor. It is possible that incidents are underreported. Many Christians who fled the Islamist onslaught in 2012-2013 have returned to their northern homes and churches (many of which had been destroyed in their absence). These Christians are very likely facing significant persecution (with places of worship being attacked) as the north remains very unstable with various Islamist factions present.

6. Future outlook

1. The main trend Mali is facing is the rising influence of militant Islam and Wahhabism in the country. This trend is clearly more pervasive in the north than in the south, but even some members of sub-Saharan African tribes joined the Islamist militants during the civil war in 2012, especially the group MUJWA, which was created by AQIM in an effort to appeal to sub-Saharan Africans. MUJWA's propaganda, for example, was geared toward venerating West African "black" jihadi leaders of the 19th century, such as Usman dan Fodio, as opposed to Arab or northern African leaders who would appeal to AQIM members. The small community of Christians has greatly suffered because of the conflict.
2. Radical Islamic militants continue to be active in Mali, notwithstanding the peace deal that has been signed, and will remain a threat in the years to come. A new development is that Islamist militants, who used to focus on the north, now also perpetrate attacks in the south and center of the country. Church life has been under threat in the north of Mali, but this threat is now expanding to other parts of the country as well.

Turkey – Rank 45

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 55, points Turkey ranks 45 on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL 2015, Turkey ranked 41 with a score of 52 points. The increase is partly due to an increased level of violence and, apart from that, is distributed equally across the *spheres of life* with the exception of the *family and church spheres*, which more or less retained the same score as last year.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engine affecting Christians in Turkey is *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** *Islamic extremism* affects all Christians in Turkey. It is intensified by a huge level of nationalism. The biggest pressure is on Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). Family, friends and community will exert heavy pressure on these MBBs to return to Islam, the faith of the fathers. When the family opposes the conversion, they will not want relatives, neighbors or acquaintances to know about it, as a matter of family honor. The high level of nationalism increases pressure on converts. The general opinion is that a true Turk is born a Muslim, as confirmed on each citizen's ID card. Conversion is not only a question of family honor that is 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. They are hardly regarded as full-fledged members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions. In August 2015, 15 Turkish protestant pastors received death threats coming from Islamic State; in the months following some were targeted in an Islamic State video. The basic message: Convert or die!

3. Context

There are three big trends in Turkey at the moment: the presence of radical Islam, the ethnic conflict and the changing political scene. Each of these trends is linked to each other, and all of them will affect the Church in Turkey.

The presence of radical Islam

The rise of Islamic State in neighboring Syria and Iraq has affected Turkey as well. Though the government of President Erdogan has never openly sided with Islamic State, there have been lots of under-the-radar developments that question the sincerity of the government. There were reports in the Turkish media about shipments of weapons to Islamic State carried out by the Turkish secret service, MIT. Recently the head of MIT, who is also very close to the president, openly condemned the Russian attacks on sincere Muslims, and mentioned Islamic State as "a reality and ... a well-organized and popular establishment".

There have also been reports in the media about IS cells operating all over Turkey, of IS recruitment points in Turkey and of wounded IS fighters being transported to Turkish hospitals.

When a number of major bomb attacks were carried out in the period July-October 2015, in which dozens of people were killed, investigations led to suspect that Islamic State was behind them. For reasons that possibly no one understands, Turkey never reacted by attacking IS. Instead they consistently bombed positions of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in Iraq and Turkey. Here is a link to the ethnic conflict.

The fact that Islamic State is active in Turkey was confirmed in August 2015 when fifteen Turkish Protestant congregations and their leaders were targeted by a strident campaign of death threats sent to their Facebook, email, websites and mobile telephones. This was reported by [WWM](#).

The ethnic conflict

In July 2015 a bomb attack in Suruç on the Turkish border with Syria killed many, mainly Kurds. The reaction of the Kurds in Turkey and beyond gave the Turkish regime an excuse to end the peace process with the Kurds that had been going on since the 1990's. This was all ended in one blow and the Turkish police, army and air force began attacking and bombing Kurdish positions in Turkey, but also in Iraq.

Kurds struck back and Turkey reacted to that, to which the Kurds reacted etc. The country slid back to a state of civil war and the number of casualties continues to grow. It is utterly unsafe to travel, particularly in the south-east, where Syrian Orthodox Christians used to live.

Paranoid nationalism, always an important factor in Turkey, exploded and all minorities (ethnic, religious) felt it. Greek, Armenian and Syriac Christians came under threat. But ethnic Turks who had converted to Christianity received death threats (see above). Not only from Islamic State but also from 'ordinary' Turks – a real Turk is a Muslim. This of course touches on the presence of radical Islam.

The changing political scene

In the June 2015 parliamentary elections President Erdogan suffered his first defeat when his party AKP failed to gain the majority in parliament. The reason was the fact that many Kurdish voters left the AKP and voted for the Kurdish party HDP (here is the link with the ethnic conflict again). It was clear from the campaign that if AKP would have gained a majority the Turkish constitution would have come under review resulting in the establishment of a presidential democracy – a state where the president (and not parliament) takes the final decisions.

Erdogan must have been utterly disappointed and did everything he could to block the formation of a coalition government. According to the constitution if a coalition was not formed in time, the president has the right to call new elections. The deadline passed and Erdogan announced new parliamentary elections for 1 November.

The 1 November elections took place in a tense, polarized atmosphere. The outcome was that the AKP got back its majority in parliament so the formation of a coalition was no longer necessary. Immediately after winning, Erdogan and the AKP announced the top priority was a new constitution which would ensure presidential rule. The elections brought no real changes in the other major trends. The conflict with the Kurds has continued, and Turkish reluctance to act against Islamic State has continued.

The AKP is responsible for gradually dismantling Turkish secularism, which was established by Kemal Ataturk in 1923. Instead, the AKP has an agenda of Islamizing the country. This appeals to great numbers of conservative voters, especially in the countryside. Here is the link to the religious conflict. Few people doubt that Erdogan will continue his Islamizing agenda now that the AKP has won. And Turkey will change into a virtual dictatorship as well because all power will move to the president. Media censorship is already high in Turkey. There is no freedom of the press.

On the international level the Turkish regime has made a great shift in the past decades. The country has moved to support Islamic regimes like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas/PLO in Israel/Palestine. The Turkish government is staunchly hostile towards Israel and the Syrian President Assad. President Erdogan has made it no secret that he sees Turkey as a leading country in the region, a feeling that will find little sympathy in the Arab Middle East which still has very negative feelings regarding the Ottoman past (something revered by Erdogan).

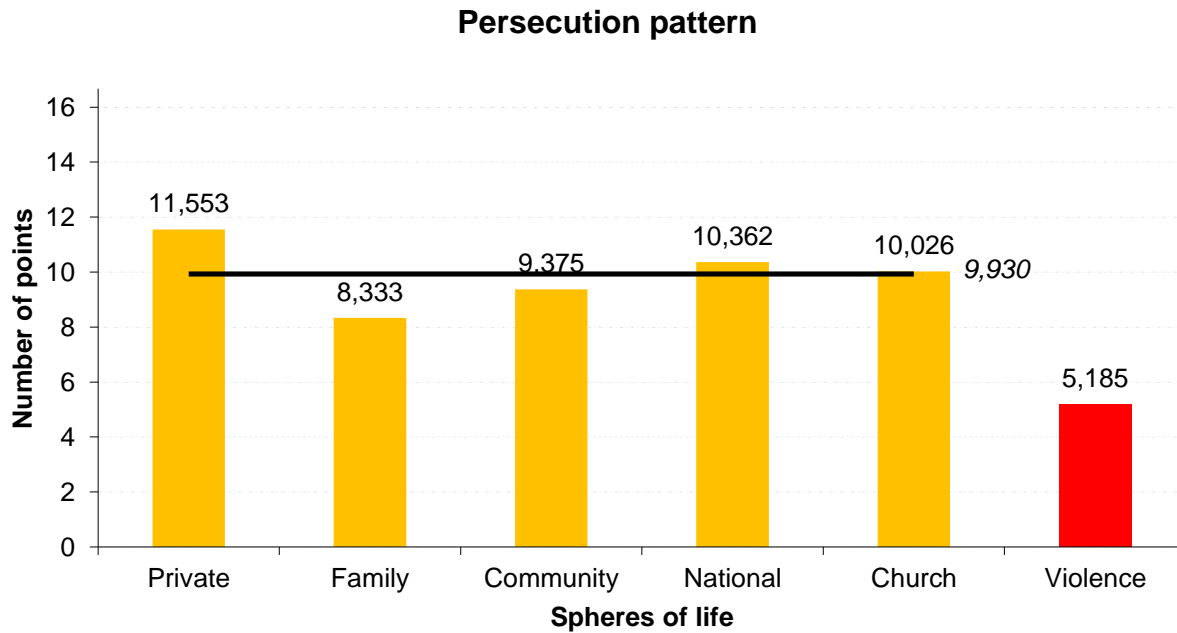
4. Types of Christianity affected

All types of Christianity in Turkey exist and are experiencing persecution:

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians** are present in Turkey (mainly in the bigger cities), such as East African (Eritrean & Ethiopian), Iraqi, Iranian, Egyptian, Afghan, North African communities, many of whom can enter Turkey initially without visas. They are not registered/recognized, so although most of the time they can function quietly, this changes when they attract Turkish citizens.
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as the Armenian, Greek, Assyrian, Syriac Orthodox and Catholic churches are all monitored regularly and subjected to certain 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.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs) 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.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** consisting of Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are mostly small groups who find it most difficult to function; some are unable to afford a rented place of worship. Many of them are still meeting in their homes which might be opposed by their neighbors.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Turkey presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks (9.930), showing the pressure on Christians, is comparable to last year (9.829). The score for the violence block is markedly higher: 2.407 (WWL 2015) to 5.185. This suggests that the ever present pressure on the Church is now translating into more open violence. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure is strongest in the *private, national and church spheres*. Pressure on MBBs is especially acute in the *private sphere* and is mainly exerted by the social environment. The overall pressure is fired by Turkish nationalism and a regime that aims to Islamize the country.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, there is likely to be social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity or from one Christian denomination to another. This leads believers to sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Christians who hide their identity from their family and relatives would also hide praying, Bible, Christian materials, access to Christian television and websites, etc. There's often self-censorship for those who hide their Christian identity, which also keeps them from meeting fellow believers. Displaying a Christian symbol such as a cross would mean that others notice it and for those hiding their Christian identity this would be risky. Even if individuals are open about their beliefs they might be reluctant to wear such symbols at work or school, or in daily life fearing negative reactions. Conversion to Christianity is widely considered to be unacceptable. In more conservative families it is more difficult for converts to be open about their Christian belief - in particular for women. MIT (Turkish Intelligence Service) members are known to attend Turkish services to observe participants and monitor the content. This does not happen in villages with homogeneous Christian population in the south east. MBBs are under close watch

by their families and communities and are sometimes put under house arrest by their families in an attempt to force them to recant their new faith.

- **Family sphere:** It is difficult process for a convert to change the religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity. If the ID card reads Muslim, children of converts are obliged to attend Islam courses at school. Unless MBB parents change the religion on their cards, the child automatically gets Sunni affiliation. Once MBBs are discovered, they can face the threat of divorce and lose their inheritance rights. Organizing a baptism, Christian wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible. MBBs can be isolated from their families and even forced to leave the family home.
- **Community sphere:** The desire to turn Turkey into a more conservative and Islamic society makes life more difficult for Christian minorities. Discrimination and hate speech on the grounds of ethnicity and religion has become more prevalent over the past couple of years. Pressure from Islamic State has become visible after they threatened 15 Protestant pastors in July 2015, though the number of physical attacks has remained low. At times, the MIT (Turkish Secret Service) has "spies" either planted in churches or sends people to church services to check on sermons, but this only happens sporadically and certainly not in Christian majority villages. Turkish society is becoming more conservative and Islam begins to feature more prominently. Christians can feel pressured into taking part in various community events (like breaking the fast) in order to feel more included, even though these usually tend to involve non-Christian religious ceremonies. MBBs face strong pressure by their family, friends and neighbors to recant the Christian faith. There are concerns about education rights of the non-Muslim minorities in the country. 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. There were also complaints about the derogatory depiction of minorities in textbooks. There are Christians who study at Turkish universities but they are barred from reaching higher positions or professorships at university level. However, discrimination already starts earlier. Muslim pupils can use the points they collect through the participation in religious classes for their entry to university. Moreover, certainly in rural areas, Christian pupils are discriminated against in classes, by both teachers and other students. Continuous discrimination against Christians in the work space takes place. They 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. In the reporting period there were incidents where members of Christian churches and communities were called in for interrogation; however this is not a systematic process. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the bias against Christians and all non-Muslim minorities in the country has increased over the past year as government representatives and policymakers ramped up their divisive and alienating rhetoric against minorities of all kinds (be it discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, sexual preference, etc.). Christians are marginalized in Turkey – one source even mentioned them as having *dhimmi* status.

- National sphere:** Turkish nationalism and, since the AKP came to power, Islamism have been important forces, both aimed against (Christian) minorities. Turkey has not fully implemented the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Turkish constitution is very restrictive in its approach towards rights of religious minorities. The European Union has repeatedly criticized shortcomings in Turkey's respect for freedom of religion and called on Ankara to respect the right to different lifestyles, both secular and faith-based, and to protect the rights of the country's religious minorities. Changing religious affiliation on ID cards is a difficult process for converts, and discrimination on these grounds is widespread. Turkey has universal military conscription and every male Turkish citizen has to serve in the military regardless of their race or religious beliefs. Conscientious objectors are prosecuted and can serve time in prison. The military service, due to its nature, is an extremely nationalistic environment and there were reports of discrimination against religious minorities in the past. The increasingly authoritarian attitudes of the ruling AKP since 2012 has made the situation worse for Turkey's religious minorities. MBBs, particularly those who are church leaders in the southeast, are sometimes given disrespectful treatment by police and security forces because of their open Christian identity. Difficulties in obtaining permits for building churches or for getting place-of-worship status imply discrimination also in employment in public service. The confiscation of land belonging to Syriac Orthodox Christians in rural areas takes place not only by local Kurds but also through government institutions. There are only four Christians in parliament, while there are no Christian public servants in the judiciary and military. The rise of nationalism in the country caused issues for non-Muslim business owners in the past. Christians have no visibility in state-controlled - or more accurately - in AKP-controlled media. Local media and columnists in particular have been biased against Christians. There have been several reports of intolerance, hate crime, and bigotry against Turkey's protestant community that includes potential arson and threats to local churches. MBBs are also under significant pressure through tactics of humiliation and threats. Displaying Christian symbols is less of a problem in big cities, but the further eastwards, the bigger the pressure becomes. Diyarbakir and areas further east of the city are increasingly becoming Islamized, leading to more tensions and threats against churches and their believers to stop displaying religious symbols. Government and judicial officials appear to be protecting the murderers (and conspirators behind them) in high-profile Christian cases still on trial for many years now; and media propaganda tends to present the victims to the Turkish public as guilty of fabricated misconduct. There are concerns about the impartiality of the judiciary in court cases that involve Christian minorities. Especially the small Protestant community has significant mistrust of the judiciary. Converts are especially frowned upon in the society. The impunity accorded to perpetrators of hate speech has been an important factor that has dented the non-Muslim's trust in courts.
- Church sphere:** It is almost impossible to register as a new church, although small congregations can register as 'associations.' The Turkish secret service (MIT) closely watches Christian groups and their activities. It is impossible to repair or renovate church buildings, and church buildings, seminaries or schools that have been confiscated in the past are not being returned. Organizing activities outside churches are generally regarded as evangelism and hence obstructed. Openly integrating converts is made difficult. Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic leaders must be

approved with government permission, 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 is impossible. 15 Protestant leaders received death threats from Islamic State. Christian materials are available in the Turkish language, but their distribution remains sensitive. The establishment of foundations that aim to support a new religious community is prohibited by Turkish Civil Code Article 101. At times, the renewal of visas or residence permits for foreign Christian workers is refused without explanation.

- **Violence:** Persecution in Turkey is not very violent currently, but violence has increased since the previous WWL. In the reporting period, eight churches were attacked and a number of Christians were injured. On 28 May 2015 it was reported that young people were stoning Christian helpers at the Yezidi refugee camp in Şırnak. On 26 May a woman refugee had a miscarriage when she was pelted with stones by three youths outside the camp.

6. Future outlook

With President Erdoğan remaining at the helm of the Turkish government for the foreseeable future, Turkey is expected to continue on its current path of gradually enforcing Islamic influences, of following an increasingly strongman ruler, and of continued discrimination against its Christian and other religious minorities. The renewed fighting targeting the Kurdish population will stimulate Turkish nationalism to new heights, which will impact all Christians in Turkey, but converts most of all. The presence of Islamic fundamentalists in Turkey has already proven a huge threat for protestant pastors; MMBs can expect similar treatment.

Colombia – Rank 46

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

Colombia ranks 46 and obtains 55 points on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. (It received the same number of points in WWL-2015, but previously ranked 35). This persistent high score can be explained mainly by the overlap of four distinct persecution engines, and the high level of faith-related violence.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engines *Organized corruption and crime* and *Tribal antagonism* and to a lesser extent *Secular intolerance* and *Denominational protectionism* coexist in various parts of the territory of Colombia.

- ***Organized corruption and crime:*** In specific areas, revolutionary and anti-revolutionary paramilitary groups – intimately linked to organized crime – operate within a context of impunity, corruption, anarchy, drug wars and structural violence. Within such a context, Christians are a vulnerable group that, because of its mere presence, constitutes a threat to the hegemony of criminal organizations. Christianity represents an alternative way to behave in society, especially for young people, which makes churches a direct competitor to criminal organizations. In Colombia, both guerrilla and paramilitary groups control almost half of the country's territory. This is also the least populated part of the country.
- ***Tribal antagonism:*** In Colombia, tensions can be observed regarding conversion within the indigenous communities. Indigenous converts to Christianity are particularly vulnerable to suffer persecution. Open Doors researchers report that converts to Christianity in the Cauca region are regularly denied access to basic social services or equal participation in decision-making. They risk being tortured or displaced.
- ***Secular intolerance:*** This persecution engine is slowly becoming more prevalent in Colombia. There are repeated expressions of intolerance towards Christians participating in the public sphere, particularly in public universities.
- ***Denominational protectionism:*** There continue to be hostilities between different Christian denominations, particularly traditional Roman Catholics oppose new religious movements, including evangelical and pentecostal communities. This persecution engine is a concern mainly in rural communities where evangelicals are harassed for not participating in traditional religious events. The national level is also affected as some of the country's legislation continues to favor Roman Catholicism over other expressions of Christianity. This engine is nevertheless losing influence. Most legal obstacles for non-traditional forms of Christianity have been eliminated by the country's 1991 Constitution.

3. Context

Colombia is a country with multiple realities. Colombia is officially a modern democratic country where the rule of law is established and religious freedom is guaranteed. However, large areas of the country are under the control of criminal organizations, drug cartels, revolutionaries and paramilitary groups.

In a context of generalized impunity, all inhabitants of Colombia suffer from the conflict that has lasted for decades, but Christians are specifically vulnerable to such hostilities. Contrary to what President Santos, re-elected in 2014, carries out, the country is not becoming safer. Notwithstanding the dialogue between the Colombian government and FARC (carried out in Cuba during 2015), many Christians continue to be targeted because of their individual activities as influential pastors (leaders of public opinion), political leaders, journalists, lawyers, human rights advocates, indigenous rights advocates or environmental protection advocates, and when they do they are seen as a threat to the interests of criminal networks.

In specific areas, revolutionary and anti-revolutionary paramilitary groups – intimately linked to organized crime – operate within a context of impunity, corruption, anarchy, drug wars and structural violence. Within such a context, Christians are a vulnerable group that, because of its mere presence, constitutes a threat to the hegemony of criminal organizations. Christianity represents an alternative way to behave in society, especially for young people, which makes churches a direct competitor of criminal organizations.

In Colombia, tensions caused by conversion within the indigenous communities can be observed. Converts to Christianity are seen as a threat to the power of local fiefs and indigenous ancestral traditions, and are particularly vulnerable to suffer human rights abuses. Open Doors researchers report that converts to Christianity in the Cauca region are regularly denied equal participation in decision-making, and risk being tortured or displaced.

Indigenous territories in Colombia are protected by a national law that gives them autonomy. Because of this autonomy, government security forces (police and military) are constitutionally prohibited from entering these territories. The indigenous territories are administrated by indigenous organizations, but some are so weak that they are being infiltrated by guerrillas. Because there is virtually no government presence or enforcement of the rule of law, these territories have become a safe haven for the guerrillas' drug trafficking activities. A part of this dynamic can be explained by the alliances that exist between indigenous populations and guerrillas. Open Doors sources indicate that indigenous populations receive material support from guerrillas to persecute indigenous converts to Christianity.

As Open Doors researchers have reported, since 2011, more than 150 churches were ordered to be closed. More than 200 cases were recorded of Christians being forcibly displaced in the departments of Cauca, Huila and Córdoba, and hundreds more were threatened with displacement. Numerous houses and shops of Christians have also been damaged.

4. Types of Christianity affected

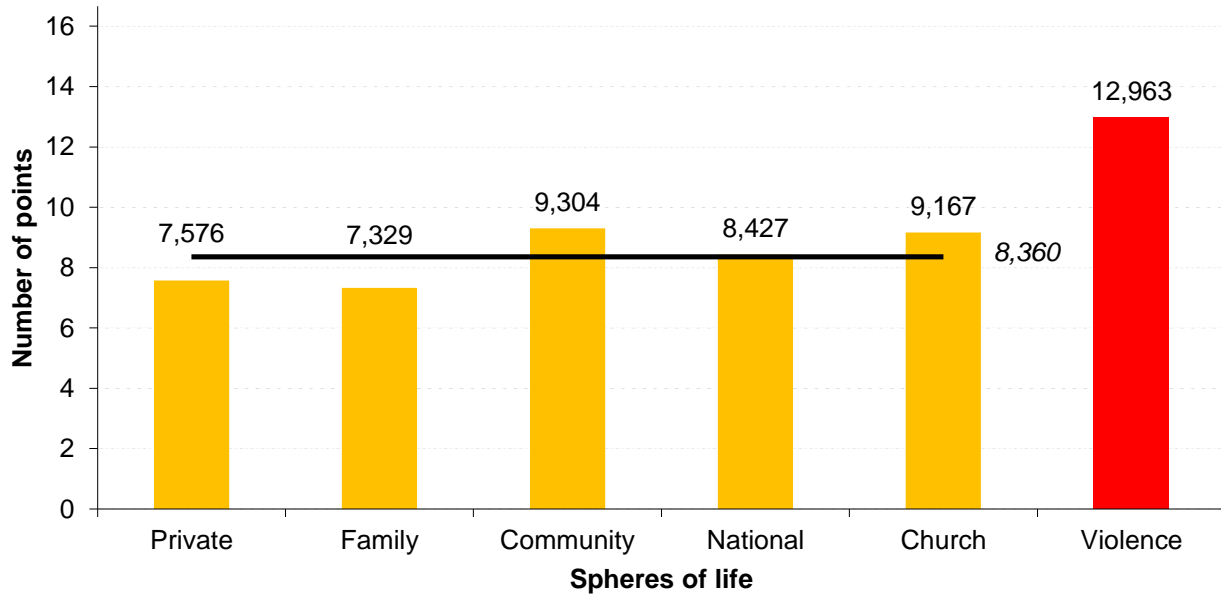
Three types of Christianity can be distinguished in Colombia. All types of Christianity can become victims of *Organized corruption and crime* by criminal groups, though it affects mostly the more outspoken Christians who play prominent roles in social or public life, or fulfil leadership positions, both at community and national levels. *Secular intolerance* affects all types of Christians in the larger cities that are under government control. *Denominational protectionism* mainly affects non-traditional protestant groups.

- **Historical Christian communities:** Colombia is home to large historical Christian community composed mainly of Roman Catholics. This group is mainly vulnerable to suffer persecution for *Organized crime and corruption* and *Secular intolerance*.
- **Christian converts** from indigenous traditional religions: Converts to Christianity within indigenous communities are seen as a threat to the power of local fiefs and indigenous ancestral traditions. This is where the persecution engine *Tribal antagonism* comes into play. Open Doors estimates that around thirty per cent (400,000) of the total indigenous population is Christian, both Roman Catholic and protestant, and that around forty per cent of them (165,000) face persecution in some form. Because they are seen as a threat to the perpetuation of the indigenous culture and traditions, the rural Christian indigenous population of a number of autonomous territories of Colombia (e.g. in the Cauca, Córdoba and Putumayo departments) face hostility.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches:** Colombia has a growing number of baptist, evangelical and pentecostal communities. This group is vulnerable to suffer persecution for *Organized crime and corruption* and *Secular intolerance*, and in rural areas also from *Denominational protectionism*.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* of Colombia presents the scores for *Organized corruption and crime*, *Tribal antagonism* and *Secular intolerance*. The average score of the first five blocks, which show the pressure on Christians, is 8.360 points, compared to 8.797 last year. The violence score is 12.963 points, which is slightly higher than last year when it was 11.111 points. The average pressure decreased slightly while the violence increased. The overall effect is neutral. Still it suggests the situation is volatile. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure is highest in the *community* and *church spheres*. The level of violence in Colombia continues to be high.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

Organized corruption and crime expresses itself throughout all *spheres of life* instilling a culture of fear, with a particular emphasis on the *community, national and church spheres*. *Tribal antagonism* is restricted to indigenous communities. This engine expresses itself mainly in the *family, community and church spheres*. Sometimes, this engine overlaps with *Organized corruption and crime*, particularly when guerrillas conspire with indigenous tribal leaders against Christians. *Secular intolerance* is a concern mainly in the *national and church spheres*.

- **Private sphere:** In the *private sphere*, pressure on Christians is mainly an issue within *Tribal antagonism* where conversion from indigenous traditional beliefs to Christianity is not tolerated and is seen as a threat to the community’s ancestral traditions.
- **Family sphere:** In tribal areas, baptisms and other family-related expressions of Christianity need to be carried out in secret. In the community sphere, Christians face all forms of harassment and discrimination, including exclusion from basic social services. Christian schools are hardly tolerated. In families, conversion from indigenous traditional beliefs to Christianity is not tolerated as it is seen as a threat to the community’s ancestral traditions. For this reason, baptisms and other family-related expressions of Christianity need to be carried out in secret.
- **Community sphere:** In the *community sphere*, drivers of *Organized corruption and crime*, such as criminal organizations or guerrillas cause Christians difficulties in their daily lives by monitoring their activities and preventing anything that goes against their interests. Christians particularly experience hindrances as far as access to education, health and other social services are

concerned. In the community sphere, Christians face all forms of harassment and discrimination, including exclusion from basic social services. Private Christian schools are hardly tolerated.

- **National sphere:** In the *national sphere*, due to *Secular intolerance*, some public expressions of Christianity are hindered or ridiculed. Non-discrimination legislation in some cases also reduces the freedom of Christians to express their views on marriage and other family issues. Also in the *national sphere*, criminal groups many times take over the traditional roles of the state, which in practice means there is no rule of law and harm inflicted on Christians is left unpunished.
- **Church sphere:** *Organized corruption and crime* significantly reduces the freedom of Christians to gather, as church services are constantly monitored and the content of preaching is censored if they threaten the hegemony of the drivers of this engine. In indigenous areas, the freedom of Christians is also very much restricted, as any Christian activity is considered a threat to the political power of indigenous leaders. It happens that church services or open air activities are often disrupted by groups that are drivers of *Secular intolerance*. Moreover, explicitly Christian views are less tolerated in the public education system. In *Tribal antagonism*, the freedom of Christians is also very much restricted, as any Christian activity is considered a threat to the political power of indigenous leaders.
- **Violence:** Levels of faith-related violence in Colombia, attributable to both *Organized corruption and crime* and *Tribal antagonism* are high. As a part of *Organized corruption and crime*, during this reporting period, at least six Christians have been killed for their faith by guerrillas, paramilitaries and other criminal organizations. The latter have also ordered the closure of about twenty churches, sometimes because these churches have criticized their activity or because they are viewed as accomplices of the government or groups that oppose them. Numerous Christians have also been displaced from their lands. Violence against Christian women also continued this year. As a part of *Tribal antagonism*, at least three churches have been attacked and closed as a result. During the current reporting period, numerous cases were recorded of Christians being forcibly displaced in the departments of Cauca, Huila and Córdoba, and hundreds were threatened with displacement. Houses and shops of Christians have also been damaged.

6. Future outlook

1. The autonomy of the indigenous territories, which makes them a state within the state, is not likely to be abolished as it is firmly grounded in the Constitution. What seems positive on paper – giving the indigenous communities the right to administer themselves – is in practice highly anti-democratic because it gives traditional indigenous rulers unlimited power in their territories. For this reason, the position of indigenous Christians will remain extremely difficult, since human rights cannot be enforced in the indigenous territories.

2. Violence in Colombia will remain a structural phenomenon, even despite the peace talks. In areas where the government has lost control of public security, drug cartels and illegal armed groups still continue to operate with impunity. This means that these criminal gangs will continue to target Christians.

3. Colombia has probably regained its position as the world's principal cocaine producer. Citing estimates from the White House, the cultivation of coca in Colombia rose 39 percent during 2014 to 112,000 hectares, which is equivalent to a drug production of 245 tons. InSight Crime believes that these estimates, although high, are still an underestimation of the true amount of cocaine produced annually in Colombia. The main reason for the increase in coca crops, according to this organization, is FARC's increasing control over coca production (70%) and its persuasion of local farmers to get involved in it and to oppose eradication programs. FARC's increasing control of coca production is of concern on many fronts. It will certainly place even more pressure on the peace process between the Colombian government and the guerrillas, of which drug trade is an important element. If a peace deal is brokered, farmers will expect post-conflict benefits to give up their production. There is also a great risk that middle-ranking FARC commanders will "criminalize" and switch to drug trade full time. And should the peace talks break down, the cash injection due to the drug trade will allow the FARC to strengthen its organization and continue with its guerrilla war. In either scenario, peace is still very far away. For Christians this is extremely bad news, because it means that *Organized corruption and crime* is likely to remain a very strong persecution engine in the future.

4. The BBC reported on 24 September 2015 that there was an important [breakthrough deal](#) in the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC, Colombia's largest guerrilla group. The deal includes the creation of special courts to try crimes committed during the conflict, a truth commission and an amnesty law, which will be effective within six months. It is undeniable that this agreement is a major step forward but it must not be forgotten that Colombia has been at war with itself for decades. It will not be that easy to achieve lasting peace. The scope of this agreement is of concern: it only binds the FARC. Other guerrilla and counter-insurgency groups and criminal gangs present in the country will continue to be active. Moreover, there are concerns that the FARC members on the ground will not follow the peace agreement negotiated by their leaders and will continue with their very lucrative drug trafficking business. This will not change the situation for Christians in the country.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) – Rank 47

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 55 United Arab Emirates (UAE) ranks 47 in the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL 2015, the country ranked 49 with a score of 49. The increase in the score is mainly due to the increase in hostility towards Christians. Radical Sunnis are posing threats against the Christian communities in the country. Like in the years before, Christians are facing persecution in various spheres of life.

2. Persecution engines

The main persecution engine in the United Arab Emirates is *Islamic extremism*. There is also *Dictatorial paranoia* (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- ***Islamic extremism***: Islam dominates private, public life as well as the political discourse of the kingdom. Consequently, all citizens are defined as Muslims. The law of the kingdom does not recognize conversion from Islam to Christianity, and the legal punishment is death. To avoid death, social stigma or other penalties, Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) are at times compelled to return to Islam, hide their faith, or travel to another country where their conversion is allowed. In addition, the government does not allow any formal or informal education that includes religious teaching other than Islam. Evangelism is prohibited, but non-Muslim groups can worship in dedicated buildings or private homes. This is compounded by the rise of Sunni radicalism in the name of Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq.
- ***Dictatorial paranoia***: The country is ruled by a dynasty that does not recognize various fundamental rights. The rulers exert pressure on the society so that there is no dissent. As there is an overlap of the *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia* engines, the government also shows characteristics of *Islamic extremism* by limiting the rights of Christians compared to non-Christians.

3. Context

The United Arab Emirates is one of the most strategically important and relatively stable countries in what is otherwise a very volatile region. Having a population of less than ten million (of which the expatriates make-up around eighty per cent), UAE is one of the free and stable economies in the region. The country is a hub for international financial and construction companies. Bordering the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, Oman and Saudi Arabia, the UAE is a powerhouse in terms of attracting international actors. The UAE's per capita GDP matches with those of leading West European nations. Its high oil revenues and its moderate foreign policy stance have allowed the UAE to play a vital role in the affairs of the region. The UAE has essentially avoided the "Arab Spring"

unrest seen elsewhere in the Middle East. In 2011, in a bid to ease negative sentiment against the government and potential unrest, the government announced a multi-year, \$1.6 billion infrastructure investment plan for the poorer northern emirates and promised political reforms.

In terms of politics and administration, all decisions about political leadership 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. There is no space for or recognition of political parties, according to Freedom House which [rated](#) the country as “not free”. On its [World Press Freedom Index](#), Reporters Without Borders also puts the country among those that put high restrictions on the freedom of the press. The constitutional provision regarding religious freedom has claw-back-clauses. On the one hand, it provides for religious freedom; on the other hand, it puts a very restrictive condition stating that the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals. Apostasy is punishable by death. Nevertheless, it is one of the countries that joined a coalition that was created to fight against the Islamic State.

4. Types of Christianity affected

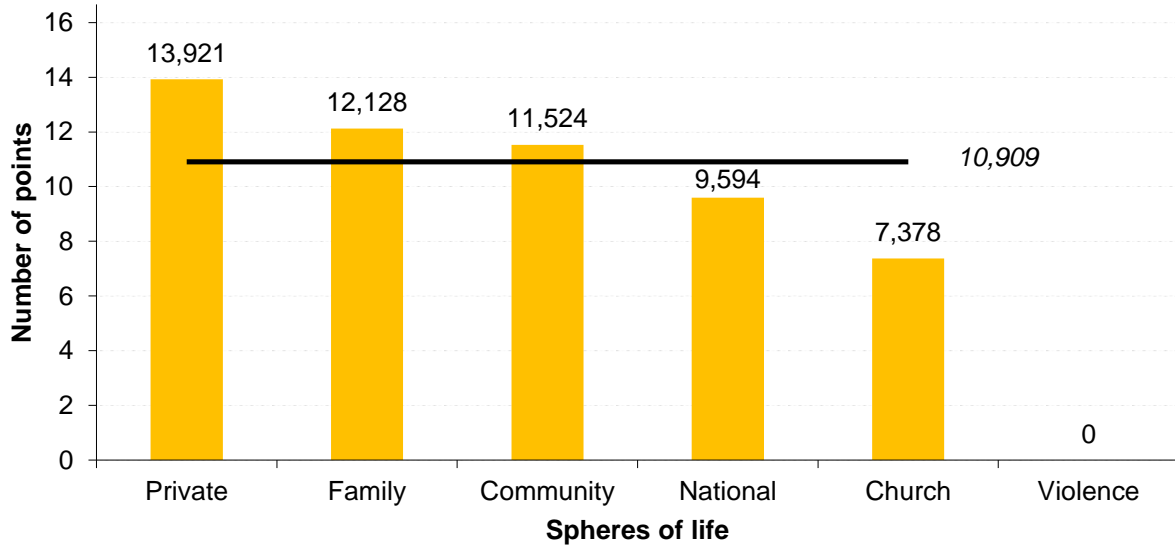
Two types of Christianity are affected by persecution: expatriate Christians and MBBs.

- **Expatriate Christians:** UAE has a significant number of expatriate Christians. This group enjoys some freedom but also faces restrictions. African and Asian expatriates have a little more freedom than converts, but not as much as Western expatriates; that is as long as they do not evangelize Muslims.
- **Converts from a Muslim background (MBBs):** MBBs are the most vulnerable group in the country. The legal framework does not protect them both from persecution and prosecution. MBBs are under severe pressure from relatives, family and Muslim society due to the Islamic government, law, and culture.

5. Spheres of life and Violence

- **Explanation of the *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for United Arab Emirates presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks (10.909), showing the pressure on Christians, is considerably higher than last year (9.815). The score for the violence block is zero (last year 0.185). All but one *spheres of life* show an increase in their scores. The highest increase is in the *community* and *family spheres*. This suggests that the increase in persecution stems from social actors. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure is highest in the *private sphere*, followed by the *family* and *community spheres*. While the situation of Christians in the kingdom is generally negative, the differences in the extent of religious freedom of expatriates and the (few) Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) are visible in most of the *spheres of life*. The squeeze is systemic on MBBs. More than the regime, social actors seem to be responsible for the persecution pressure in United Arab Emirates.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Christians’ private lives have been complicated by many factors, which is reflected in the high score in this block. Conversion from Islam to any other religion is prohibited. Due to the serious social discrimination and stigma against Christians, openly possessing Christian materials is very dangerous especially for Muslims who might be converting or who are already converted but have not risked being identified as Christians for safety reasons.
- **Family sphere:** This is the second most restricted sphere of life in the kingdom, 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:** UAE society is very conservative. The community ostracizes any converts or suspected MBBs. A researcher stated: “There are no specific laws or active practices prohibiting Christians for 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:** The attitude of the government towards Christian from a national to a local level is negative. This is compounded by the following: Islam is the state religion and Sharia law being the principal source of legislation and Courts use legislations the principal source of which

is Islamic law. This means Christians have to live the way others tell them to live not their own Christian faith.

- **Church sphere:** There are more than 35 churches (not including house churches) in the country. In December 2014 an Armenian church was built. Yet Christians face serious problems in this *sphere of life*. Christians face restrictions in importing materials as well. A researcher explained: “Customs authorities routinely reviewed the contents of religious materials imported into the country.” Furthermore: “The law does put some form of limitation in the importation, possession or distribution of religious literature, clothing or symbols. In addition, due to the existing societal prejudice, discrimination and abuse on Christians openly distributing Bibles and other Christian materials is very dangerous especially if it is distributed to Muslims.”
- **Violence:** No violent incidents were recorded in the reporting period.

6. Future outlook

The rise of the Sunni Islamic State (IS) in the region is another headache that almost all countries of the Middle East and the Gulf are worried about. There are reports that citizens of UAE have joined IS. On the other hand, UAE is one of the countries that joined the coalition to fight against IS. In order to deal with the problem of radical Islam in their own society, these countries have been introducing (new) legal and policy schemes. On 25 July 2015, the UAE enacted a law that targets intolerance. The government claims that the law is intended to prohibit discrimination on grounds of “religion, caste, creed, doctrine, race, color or ethnic origin.” The law also criminalizes “any action that encourages religious hatred or insults religion, and calls for punishing those who label other religious groups as infidels or unbelievers.” Generally speaking, this is good news for Christians as they are the primary victims of religious extremism. However, it is very important not to mix the intention of the government and its implementation. These countries are issuing such laws not for the sake of protecting minorities, but rather to defend their government’s power and interest. This is particularly true considering the fact that the IS is a threat to the existing boundaries between states in the region as well as the ruling families. Having said that, it is commendable to have a law introduced aimed at combatting intolerance in countries like UAE where there are many expatriate Christians. Judging by past experience and the existing situation, the future for Christians in the country remains precarious.

Bahrain – Rank 48

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015 / Revised 2016-01-14

1. Position on the World Watch List

With a score of 54 Bahrain ranks 48 in the World Watch List (WWL) 2016. In WWL 2015, the country had dropped from the list with a score of 48 points. The main reason the country has come back again into the Top 50 is because radical Islam in the country is rising as a result of the Islamic State influence in the region. Also, it has become apparent that the government is now more authoritarian in trying to control a society which is being shaken by what is happening in the region.

2. Persecution engines

The main persecution engine in Bahrain is *Islamic extremism*. *Dictatorial paranoia* also has a strong presence (blended with *Islamic extremism*).

- **Islamic Extremism:** *Islamic extremism* in Bahrain should be seen in line with what is happening in the whole region. The region is in a chaos and society has become very conservative. The legal framework is also a manifestation of this extreme view. The Bahraini constitution has incorporated provisions that apparently contradict each other. It declares that the religion of the state is Islam, and Sharia (Islamic law) is a principal source for legislation. Yet it states that “the State guarantees the inviolability of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country.”
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The country’s ruler endeavors to stay in power at all costs. The minority Sunni-family is ruling with the help of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni majority countries in the region. Freedom of assembly, freedom of association, due process of law and other fundamental rights are constantly violated by the government.

3. Context

Bahrain, a country where Iran and Saudi Arabia show off their political powers, is ruled by an authoritarian regime. During the demonstration by the majority Shiite population against the Sunni government, the country became a scene of competition between Saudi Arabia, who sent its troops in support of the Bahraini government in order to extinguish the spark of revolution coming from the Arab Spring in 2011, and Iran, whose action was limited to threatening rhetoric. This mainly Shia-Islamic country is relatively tolerant in general because of its international position in banking and trade. 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, but proselytizing Muslims is illegal. Since the number of compounds allotted for worship is limited, dozens of different congregations must use the same building. They are not allowed to advertise their services in Arabic, but they can in English. The constitutional provision regarding religious freedom is full of contradiction. Furthermore, the effect of the ideology of Islamic State (IS) - Caliphate- can be seen in

the country. Some of the Sunni Wahhabis supported by Saudi Arabia are showing sympathizes with the Caliphate idea. This is further fueled by the Sunni-Shia fragile relationship in the country.

The ruling family in Bahrain dominates the country with a complete authoritarian approach. According to Freedom House [report](#), the country is rated “not free”. World Press Freedom Index also puts the country at rank 163 out of 180 countries. As per Amnesty International [report](#), the country has continued to “stifle and punish dissent and to curtail freedoms of expression, association and assembly.” It is within this context that the life of Christians should be understood.

4. Types of Christianity affected

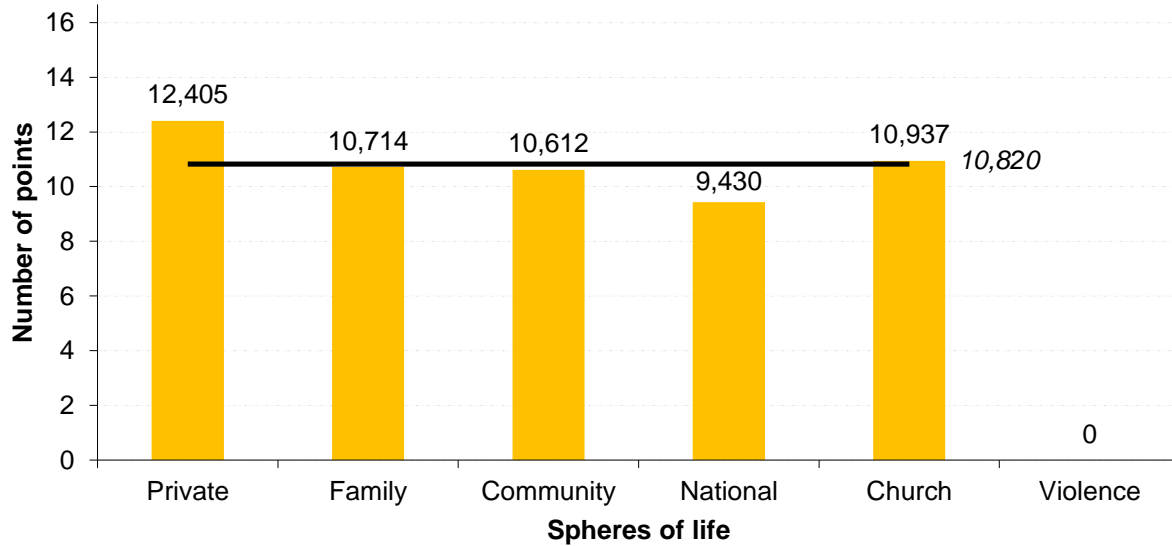
There are two types of Christianity in Bahrain:

- **Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians:** The majority of these consist of foreign migrant workers. These 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. Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship but often denied additional legally recognized facilities. Roman Catholic, Protestant and Syrian Orthodox are the main Christian denominations that fall under this category.
- **Christian converts (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs):** In Bahrain, MBBs are under considerably more pressure than the expatriate communities. Traditionally, society is not tolerant towards converts from Islam to other religious groups. Families and communities have often shunned them. MBBs generally do not dare to talk about their conversion. Pressure comes mostly from family and community, to a lesser extent from the state.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern*:** The *persecution pattern* for Bahrain presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks, showing the pressure on Christians, is high (10.820). The score for the violence block is zero. This suggests persecution is gradually building up in a process of increasing pressure, without creating open violence. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure (caused largely by fear) manifests itself in the different *spheres of life*. Pressure is highest in the *private sphere* especially for MBBs. This is followed by the *church, family and community spheres*. It is not only the regime but also social actors that create persecution pressure in Bahrain.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private Sphere:** Christians - especially MBBs - face serious persecution in their private life. The surrounding society does not accept conversion. And anyone who is suspected of conversion will be discriminated against. For those who live with their families/parents, having Christian materials, worshipping and displaying Christian images like crosses can cause serious persecution.
- **Family Sphere:** Christians suffer, for instance, on issues related to marital status. Mixed marriage is only allowed for Muslim men. Muslim women cannot marry a non-Muslim men. Any such marriage will not be recognized. The same holds true for MBBs. 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.
- **Community Sphere:** Christians, especially MBBs, face many challenges right from the start: from neighborhood playgrounds to local schools. An unnamed source 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.”
- **National Sphere:** Over seventy percent of the population is Muslim. Islam is the state religion. Sharia law is the principal source of legislation. Christians only constitute about nine percent of the population. Family and societal discrimination based on religion are commonplace. As a

result, for example, publicly expressing Christian faith in written form carries serious risks. Therefore, a Christian's life in the national sphere is very restricted.

- **Church Sphere:** Church life in Bahrain is not free from persecution. 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 places of worship that exist in the country cannot accommodate the large expatriate population. One country observer states: "Holding a religious meeting of five or more persons, without a permit is illegal. Construction of places of worship requires approvals from a number of national and municipal entities. The approval process is also cumbersome."
- **Violence:** No violence was recorded in this reporting period.

6. Future outlook

The future of Christians in the country is likely to be shaped by two things: the newly emerging anti-Christian focus on the Caliphate and the current situation in general. To start with the new trend in society, it can be said that the region in general is in turmoil caused by the renewed interest in the ideology of establishing a Caliphate. This is worrying for the safety and security of Christians in the region. The old established system is also 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. This can also mean Muslims are forbidden to change their faith. MBBs are still considered Muslims by the state and a legal challenge to this was not permitted, which has strong implications on family law. However, in terms of religious freedom for foreign Christians, Bahrain remains relatively tolerant. On the positive side, despite some restrictions in the country against Christians, Christians have managed to hold some very important posts in the country. Since the restoration of the constitutional monarchy in 2002 Christians have been represented in the Upper House. Alice Samaan, the current Bahraini Ambassador to the UK, has become the first Christian to chair a parliamentary session in Bahrain in 2005. In 2014, the King gave land to the Catholic Church to construct the first Catholic cathedral in the country. Based on the existing situation, it can be said that the situation for Christians in the country will at best remain the same, but may deteriorate as the impact of the Islamic State is growing in the region.

Niger – Rank 49

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List 2016

Niger scores 53 points on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, re-entering the WWL top 50 at rank 49. Last year it scored 46 points but did not enter the WWL 2015. The increase in points is mainly explained by the growing influence of radical Islam in the country. The main persecution dynamic in Niger is *Islamic extremism*. In recent years the country has been gradually shaking off the characteristics of a typical West-African state with a (mostly) moderate Islam and constitutionally secular state. Now, there are indications that the government operating in a secular state does not keep enough distance from Islamic religious leaders. Since 1991, dozens of Islamic associations have emerged, including Wahhabi groups. These organizations have been mostly concerned with the perceived erosion of Niger's religious identity by the secular democratic state.

2. Persecution engines

The persecution engine in Niger is *Islamic extremism*:

- ***Islamic extremism***: In Niger, the population is made up of a very high percentage of Muslims (more than 98 per cent). The Christian population is estimated at 66,600. Even though a high percentage of its population is Muslim; religion is understood to be a private and confessional matter and generally steers clear of politics.

There are now indications, however, that the separation of religion and state is increasingly under pressure. Radical Muslim clerics of the *Izala* group are present who are known to be a radical group also in Nigeria. Other Islamic pressure groups like *Tariqa* ("the way" in Arabic – the Sufi way of approaching Allah) are active in specific parts of the country (e.g. Maradi, Niamey). *Izala* and *Tariqa* create pressure on minority religions and on Muslims they consider to be deviating from Islam.

3. Context

The religious situation in Niger is embedded in the wider context of Islam in West Africa. An external analyst states that the dominant strand of Islam which emerged in West Africa is a largely moderate and tolerant, Sufi-inspired, syncretic Islam. This Africanized form of Islam draws extensively from local traditions and superstitions. It was spread throughout West Africa by two main religious brotherhoods, the *Qadiriyya* and *the Tijaniyya*.

Up until the 1990s, Niger's numerous military regimes clamped down on real and potential sources of dissent or threat. To this end, religious leaders were kept at arm's length and monitored. Before

1990, the Islamic Association of Niger (IAN) was the sole legal representative of the Muslim community, and served as an auxiliary to the military. However, after the liberalization of the associational law in 1991, dozens of Islamic associations emerged, including Wahhabi groups. These organizations have been mostly concerned with the perceived erosion of Niger's religious identity by the secular democratic state. For example, in 2011, they successfully scuttled plans to adopt a new family law that gave more rights to women. These associations also challenge the supposed pagan practices of the brotherhoods.

In Niger, Wahhabis mostly belong to the *Izala* movement. Like the *Izalas* in Nigeria and Benin, the Nigerien *Izalas* reject Sufi Islam and other “un-Islamic practices”. The *Izalas* are noted for their effective grassroots proselytization campaigns. The creation of a National Islamic Council (NIC) in 2003 received widespread support from Sufi leaders who viewed it as a tool to control the *Izalas* who have been involved in a number of violent incidents over the years. The main danger of movements like *Izala* is their efforts to very seriously pressurize the living space of “deviant Muslims”, together with or followed by adherents of minority religions like Christianity. As recent history has shown, violent actions are still part of that pattern.

Another important trend in Niger is that the Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram is increasingly becoming active outside the borders of Nigeria. Mission News Network reported on 4 November 2015 that [Boko Haram](#) is continuing to cross Nigerian borders and wreak mayhem in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, with the objective of implementing Sharia law in these countries.

4. Types of Christianity affected

The country has three types of Christianity:

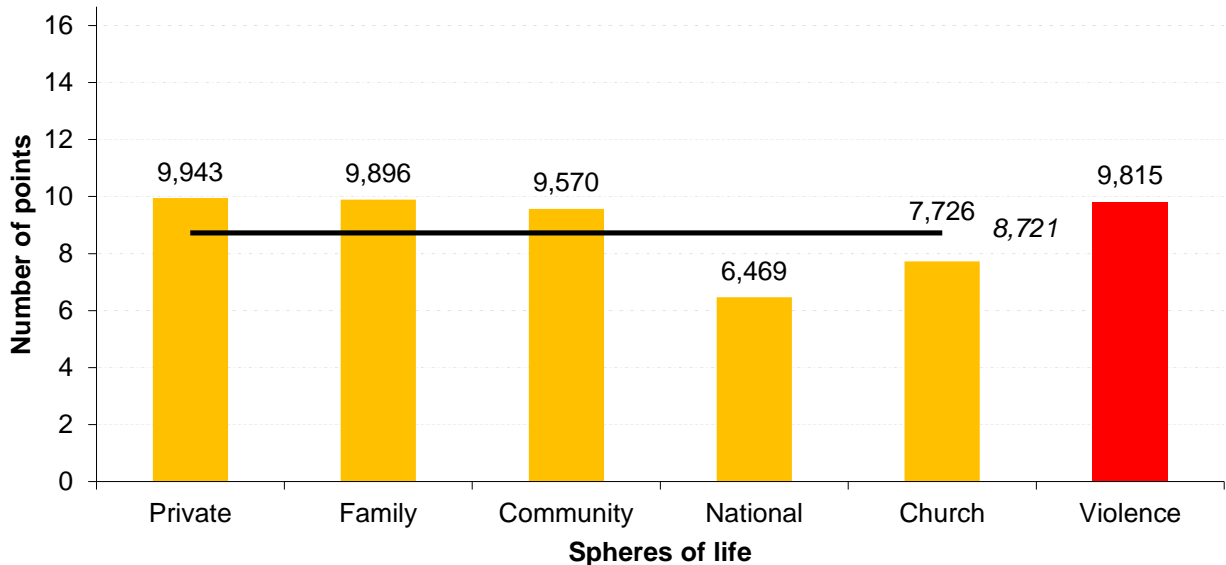
- **Historical Christian communities**, such as Roman Catholic churches: All types of Christianity in Niger face pressure in various *spheres of life*, including this type.
- **Christian converts** from a Muslim background (MBBs): In some cases, the pressure on MBBs is particularly pronounced, especially in the *private, family and community spheres*. Parents and relatives may oppose the conversion to Christianity yet the government does not.
- **Non-traditional protestant churches** such as baptist, evangelical and pentecostal groups: This type of Christianity also faces pressure. What is remarkable is that MBBs often join already existing churches.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of *persecution pattern***: The *persecution pattern* for Niger presents the scores for *Islamic extremism*. The average score over the first five blocks, showing the pressure on Christians, is 8.721. The score for the violence block is high: 9.815. Niger did not rank on the WWL 2015. This suggests that, although the pressure on Christians is increasing, it is still relatively moderate. However, small incidents can spark very high levels of violence. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, the pressure is highest in the *private, family and community*

spheres. This is typical for a situation in which moderate Islamic expressions predominate above radical expressions, but the high score for *violence* shows the increasing threat of radical Islamic expressions against Christians and the society in general.

Persecution pattern



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- Private sphere:** Performing acts of worship is risky for converts to Christianity. Family members and the community persecute converts at this private level since conversion is demonized in the country. Other Christians do not face this form of persecution and are generally allowed to practice their faith within their communities.
- Family sphere:** In an Islamic society a child of Muslim parents is considered to be a Muslim. So the family of converts will consider the children of converts to be Muslims and, in case of divorce or death, claim the children as Muslims.
- Community sphere:** Christians are being discriminated in the *community sphere* in many ways. Hostility towards Christians comes more from society – i.e. (extended) family and local environment - than from the government. Also, the whole Christian community in Niger is monitored by individuals and fanatics groups working for Arab NGOs who clearly have the objective of establishing an Islamic state in Niger.
- National sphere:** Niger’s constitution and laws respect freedom of religion in theory, but in practice proselytism is nevertheless restricted and dangerous. Genuine pluralism and civil society is such a nascent concept in Niger that there are no Christian civil society groups.

- **Church sphere:** Christians have been clearly hindered from gathering in the reporting period as demonstrated in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015. Although this appears to have been a one-off incident sparked by international outrage, the event shows the potential for persecution against Christians at only mild provocation.
- **Violence:** Niger has suffered dozens of terror attacks in the reporting period; however, it is unclear how many Christians have been specifically killed in the violence. According to Open Doors field contacts, at least two Christians were killed in January 2015 during the so-called “Charlie Hebdo” attacks. In these attacks alone, at least 70 churches (together with church facilities) were destroyed in the violence in Zinder and Niamey. In total, 82 churches, Christian schools and houses including orphanages were destroyed during the reporting period. At least 2000 Christians were threatened and forced to leave their homes during the violence in January 2015. These attacks are very significant. Never before have Christians in Niger been attacked at this scale and with this effect.

6. Future outlook

1. The future for the Church in Niger seems worrying. The dynamic described in this persecution profile seems to point to a potential increase of pressure (squeeze) and plain violence (smash). A considerable part of the southern third of the country seems prone to persistent Islamic hostilities. The proximity of hardline Islamic groups in the upper north of Nigeria and northern Mali (Azawad) is far from reassuring. The churches are reported to be weak – concentration in the political capital, rivalry among different types of churches, weakness of outreach programs. The churches do not seem prepared for higher pressure from radical Islam.
2. Since Buhari took office in May 2015 as president of Nigeria, the violence caused by Boko Haram has not only intensified but is also increasingly regional, including in Niger. As Boko Haram is being forced out of Nigeria by joint forces of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger, it has become clear that the group is focusing on expanding its military operation to different parts of the region. In a region that has already seen atrocities like in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria, having the same brutal terrorist group in Niger is a significant challenge to Christians in the country. Christians in Niger are the minority and can easily be identified and targeted. Continued terrorist attacks can therefore be expected in Niger that is facing unprecedented religious violence, which the security forces of these countries can hardly cope with. Primary targets of Boko Haram have always been Christians and those Muslims, whom they consider too moderate.

Oman – Rank 50

Reporting period: 1 November 2014 - 31 October 2015

1. Position on the World Watch List

Oman scores 53 points on the World Watch List (WWL) 2016, and ranks 50. In WWL 2015, the country scored 55 points and ranked 39. The slight decrease in the score is mainly as a result of the government trying to show the international community that it is different to other countries in the region when it comes to accepting other faiths in the country. Omanis are the followers of Ibadi Islam, which is tolerant to others.

2. Persecution engines

Islamic extremism (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Dictatorial paranoia* are the two engines that impact the life of Christians in Oman. *Dictatorial paranoia* is blended with *Islamic extremism*.

- **Islamic extremism:** Islam is the state religion, and legislation is mainly based on Islamic law. All state school curriculums 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. An MBB faces problems under the Personal Status and Family Code, which prohibits a father from having custody over his children if he leaves Islam. The society shuns those who leave Islam, even though they do not encourage violence.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** Oman has been ruled by a dynasty that does not respect the will of the people. There is discontent among the Omanis. They believe that the government is authoritarian, even though they accept that the economic reform has been beneficial. According to BTI [2014 report](#), “Since the start of the millennium, Oman has undergone some degree of economic reform but limited political reform.” Instead of fulfilling its commitment to contain the popular protest of the 2011, the regime has decided to concentrate on stabilizing and consolidating its power. Consequently, there have been arrests and harassment of lawyers, student leaders, and human rights activists. In this context, the freedom of religion and expression have been curtailed by the regime.

3. Context

History: Located at the confluence of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, Oman had been one of the influential sultanates during the medieval period. Arab is the official language, and more than half of Oman’s population is Arab. Islam is the state religion. The Portuguese occupied the country for 140 years (1508-1648). Ottoman Empire also occupied it. The country maintained its independence while at the same time agreed treaties of friendship and cooperation with Great Britain since 1798. By the 18th century, the sultanate was so powerful and took control of the coasts of present-day Iran and Pakistan, colonized Zanzibar and Kenyan seaports, brought back enslaved Africans, and sent boats trading as far as the Malay Peninsula. The country was finally subdued by

British forces. Large numbers of ethnic Baloch—who migrated to Oman from Iran and Pakistan over the past several centuries also live in the country. The country is ruled by a monarchy with two advisory bodies (State Council and Consultative Council).

Politics and law: The current sultan came to power in 1970 after deposing his own father. The sultan is credited for abolishing slavery in the country and giving Oman a strong economy. The Sultan is also credited for bringing security and stability to a country that has a history of war and conflict. Even as many Arab states have succumbed to sectarian violence and political tumult, the sultanate of Oman has stood out as a beacon of tranquility and tolerance. He is also credited with introducing some democratic reforms. For example, In 1997, the Sultan granted women the right to be elected to the country's consultative body, the Shura Council (Majlis al-Shura). In 2003, the sultan extended voting rights to everyone over 21; previously, voters were selected from among the elite, and only about a quarter of the population was allowed to vote. The constitutional provision regarding religious freedom is full of contradictions. On the one hand, it provides for religious freedom, and on the other hand it states that the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals.

Society and Ibadi Islam: Oman was one of the countries reached by Islam within Muhammad's lifetime. Omanis practice a unique brand of Islam called Ibadhism, which remains a majority sect only in Oman. Ibadhism has been characterized as "moderate conservatism," with tenets that are a mixture of both austerity and tolerance. According to [experts](#) on the sect, the followers of Ibadi sect are not violent in comparison with Sunni or Shi'a. They do not believe in violence, even towards those who leave Islam or who are not Muslims: "They focus on 'dissociation', which is usually an internal attitude of withholding 'friendship' (*wilaya*).” Thus, even though Islam dominates the lives of Omanis, there is also a tendency to tolerate Christians not found in some of the neighboring countries. This tolerance is strengthened by the policy adopted by the sultan, who is trying to present the country as a symbol of tolerance as well as diplomacy, especially by attempting to mediate in international talks with some of the militant groups in the region.

Human Trafficking and the Yemen effect: Even though Oman has shown transformation since the 1970s, the country is accused of not doing enough to tackle problems related to human trafficking. According to a US State Department [2014 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) "Oman is a destination and transit country for men and women, primarily from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Nepal, Kenya, and Indonesia, who may be subject to forced labor and, to a lesser extent, sex trafficking." The country is also facing challenges caused by the warring factions in Yemen. The Houthis and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as well as the government of Yemen have been waging war one against each other. Iran and Saudi Arabia are again waging a proxy war within Yemen. As a country bordering Yemen, Oman is feeling the heat.

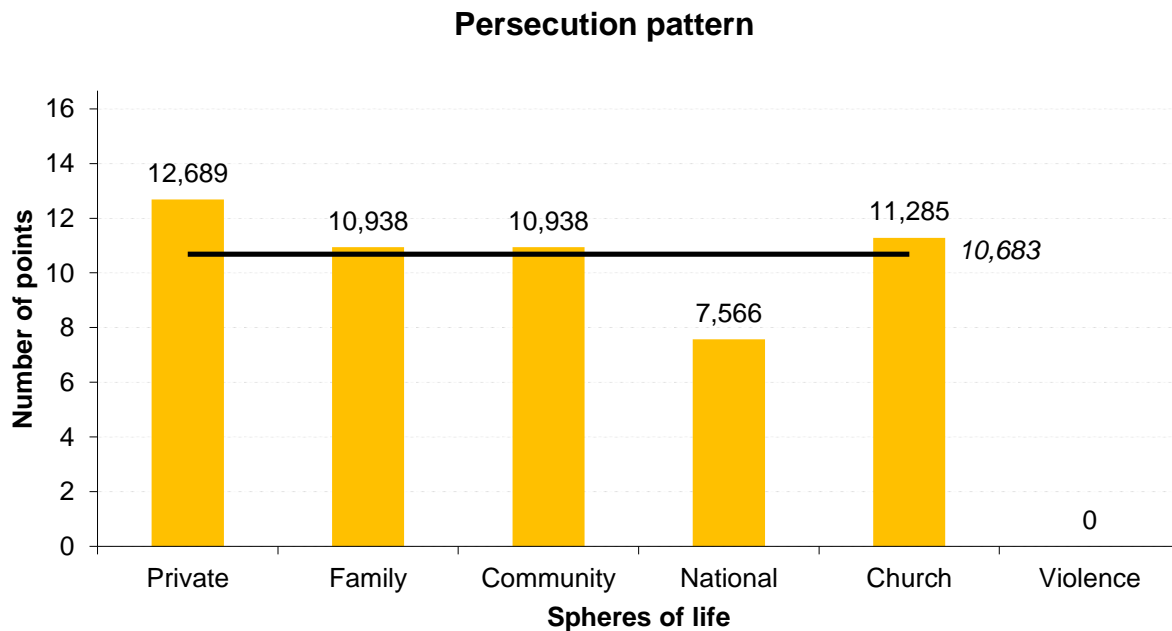
4. Types of Christianity affected

The following types of Christianity are present in Oman:

- **Communities of expatriate Christians:** There are a number of Christians in Oman, and they are centered in the major urban areas of Muscat, Sohar, and Salalah and include Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant congregations. There are more than sixty different Christian groups, fellowships, and assemblies active in the Muscat metropolitan. All religious organizations must register, and Christian meetings are monitored for political messages and nationals attending. Foreign Christians are allowed to discretely worship in private homes or work compounds. Their facilities are restricted in order not to offend nationals.
- **Converts from a Muslim background (MBBs):** There are few MBBs in Oman. MBBs risk persecution from family and society. MBBs can lose their family, house, and job and could even be killed, though no violent incidents were documented in the reporting period.

5. Spheres of life and violence

- **Explanation of persecution pattern:** The *persecution pattern* for Oman presents the scores for *Islamic extremism* (blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*). The average score over the first five blocks (10.683), showing the pressure on Christians, is very slightly lower than last year (10.919). The score for the violence block is zero (same as last year). All but one *spheres of life* show a decrease in their scores. The highest decrease is in the *national sphere*, while the *community sphere* increased its score. This suggest that though the regime might be releasing the pressure slightly, social actors partly compensate for it. As the *persecution pattern* below shows, pressure is highest in the *private sphere*, followed by the *church, family and community spheres*. Unlike many other neighboring countries, Oman is fairly tolerant regarding other religious expressions. Nevertheless Christians in the sultanate face persecution in various *spheres of life*.



(Please note: The numbers above are displayed to three decimal places. They are not to be read as thousands.)

- **Private sphere:** Oman is one of the few countries where Islam is the state religion, but conversion is not a crime. Yet there are consequences, especially on issues related to family matters. One observer states: “The basic law declares that Islam is the state religion and sharia law is the basis of legislation. There are societal discrimination and abuses based on religious affiliation, beliefs and practice. Close to seventy percent 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:** In the *family sphere of life* Christians face a wider range of problems. MBBs can only marry under Islamic rites. One field researcher adds: “A convert husband will lose his right to custody upon divorce. That is what the personal status and family code clearly puts.”
- **Community sphere:** In the community Christians have to take all necessary precautions to avoid discrimination, harassment, and bullying. The challenge is very strong for converts especially concerning the school curriculum. An observer notes: “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.”
- **National sphere:** The basic law prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. However, since Islam is the state religion and Sharia law is the principal source of legislation, courts use Islamic law for legislation. For this reason, achieving equal treatment for Christians in courts of law is a big challenge. In general, with a combination of *Islamic extremism* and *Dictatorial paranoia*, Christians face great difficulties to live out their Christian life.
- **Church sphere:** For Christians, gatherings for faith-related purposes are not an easy task, even in private homes. Building a church is difficult as well. Registration is difficult, though not impossible, to obtain. A field researcher adds: “The government doesn’t permit gathering for religious purposes in private homes or any location other than government approved houses of worship. The government must also approve construction and leasing of buildings by religious groups.”
- **Violence:** There have been no incidents of violent persecution in Oman recently.

6. Future outlook

The future of Christians in Oman is shaped by social, political, and regional factors. Looking at the situations of many countries in the Middle East and the Gulf, it is very difficult to envision anything positive. Oman is not an 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. There have been reports that the health of sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said has been deteriorating. The sultan is believed to be the main force behind the security and stability of the country. Thus, if he is gone, the country might fall into the hands of radical Muslims. Furthermore, the situation in Yemen might 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. 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.”

Seen from what is happening, the following two possible scenarios are likely for the future: a) If the crisis in Yemen continues, it will create problems in Oman, which could seriously affect Christians and other minorities; b) If the government keeps endorsing the idea of religious harmony, then the influence of radicalization might be reduced. The general situation of Christians would then remain the same as at present.