

World  
Watch  
Research

# Ethiopia: Full Country Dossier

February 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

February 2024

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Ethiopia

## Brief country details

Ethiopia: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
123,771,000	74,679,000	60.3

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Ethiopia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	69	32
WWL 2023	66	39
WWL 2022	66	38
WWL 2021	65	36
WWL 2020	63	39

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Ethiopia:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Clan oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders

*Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.*

### Brief description of the persecution situation

The freedom of Christians in Ethiopia is marred by violations across all three categories of Christian communities in the country, with some denominations facing more severe mistreatment than others. Non-traditional Christian groups endure the harshest violations from both local authorities and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background, especially in the eastern and south-eastern regions, and 'cross-denominational converts' from Orthodox backgrounds face significant mistreatment from their families and communities. In certain areas, Christians are denied access to community resources and face social ostracization. For instance, regions like Somali state and parts of Oromia are prone to attacks on churches by Islamic mobs. Moreover, the ongoing political violence in the country over the last three years has exacerbated the vulnerability of Christians, exposing them to increased pressure and violence.

### Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Ethiopia has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
4. [Convention against Torture](#) (CAT)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Ethiopia is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts are ostracized and denied their right to freedom of religion or belief (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are denied their right to freedom of expression (ICCPR Art. 19)

- Christian peaceful religious gatherings are restricted, in violation of the right to peaceful assembly (ICCPR Art. 21)
- Christian women are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23.3; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Christian women are denied their equality of rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution (ICCPR Art. 23.4 and CEDAW Art.16)

### Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Many converts are subjected to house-arrest and denied access to community resources.
- Converts also face restrictions on private worship, further limiting their ability to practice their faith.
- Non-traditional Christian communities and 'cross-denominational converts' from Orthodox backgrounds also endure hardships and face rising pressure and violence.
- Attacks on churches by Islamic mobs have taken place in areas such as Somali state and parts of Oromia.
- The ongoing political violence in Ethiopia has left Christians increasingly vulnerable to further violations of their religious freedom.
- According to Freedom House's Freedom in the World Index 2023 Ethiopia: In November 2022, "Amharic speaking militants raided a protestant church in a village in the East Wollega Zone of Oromia and killed 15 participants of the church service, including church leaders."

### Specific examples of positive developments

In November 2022 there was a peace agreement between the TPLF and the federal government. In 2023, the government and the Oromo Liberation Army started negotiations to end the conflict in Oromia.

### External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>



# WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Ethiopia

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Ethiopia report	AI Ethiopia 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/ethiopia/report-ethiopia/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/ethiopia/report-ethiopia/</a>	4 July 2023
BBC News Ethiopia profile - updated 26 April 2023	BBC Ethiopia profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349398">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349398</a>	4 July 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Ethiopia Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ETH">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ETH</a>	4 July 2023
CIA World Factbook Ethiopia - updated 22 June 2023	World Factbook Ethiopia	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/</a>	4 July 2023
Crisis24 Ethiopia report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Ethiopia report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/ethiopia">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/ethiopia</a>	4 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Ethiopia profile 2023	EIU Ethiopia profile 2023	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/ethiopia">https://country.eiu.com/ethiopia</a>	4 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Ethiopia	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	4 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Ethiopia not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Ethiopia	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2023</a>	4 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Ethiopia	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-net/2023</a>	30 January 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Ethiopia profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/ethiopia/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/ethiopia/</a>	4 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Ethiopia report	Girls Not Brides Ethiopia	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/ethiopia/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/ethiopia/</a>	4 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Ethiopia country chapter	HRW 2023 Ethiopia country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ethiopia">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ethiopia</a>	4 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Ethiopia	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#et">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#et</a>	4 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Ethiopia	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/ethiopia">https://rsf.org/en/ethiopia</a>	4 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Ethiopia	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/eth">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/eth</a>	4 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Ethiopia	UNDP HDR Ethiopia	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/ETH">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/ETH</a>	4 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Ethiopia	IRFR 2022 Ethiopia	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/</a>	4 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Ethiopia not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Ethiopia data – 2021	World Bank Ethiopia data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57barr=ydd=yinf=nzm=nccountry=ETH">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57barr=ydd=yinf=nzm=nccountry=ETH</a>	4 July 2023
World Bank Ethiopia overview - updated 27 March 2023	World Bank Ethiopia overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview</a>	4 July 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Ethiopia - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Ethiopia	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefe5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-eth.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefe5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-eth.pdf</a>	4 July 2023

## Recent history

For many centuries Ethiopia was part of the Aksumite Empire, which included present-day Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia but this came to an end around 940 AD. Thereafter different dynasties ruled the country. In 1974 the army deposed the last king of the Solomonic dynasty and took control of the state. The military junta led by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam followed Socialist ideology. After the ousting of the army by rebel forces in 1991, the current ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) - rebranded as the Prosperity Party after its dissolution, came to power and a constitution was finally drafted and adopted in 1995. The Eritrean–Ethiopian War took place from May 1998 to June 2000. In June 2018, the new Ethiopian prime minister, Dr Abiy Ahmed, signed a peace treaty with Eritrea formally ending that war. Both countries removed some of their armed forces from the front.

Before that, however, developments in Ethiopia had been changing thick and fast. In 2015, the then ruling party claimed to have won 100% of the contested parliamentary seats, a claim that sent a shock among human rights groups and those who work on issues of democracy and rule of law. Although the country is said to have been developing at a very good rate in terms of economic development, in November 2015 the country faced a series of violent protests. Human rights groups reported that hundreds of people had been killed by security forces and thousands put in jail. The demonstrations started peacefully in the Oromia region and expanded to the Amhara region with demands for the respect of political, civil, social, and economic rights. In

response, the government imposed martial law in October 2016.

The top leadership, beleaguered by more than two years of relentless protests and political unrest, held a closed-door meeting and came out announcing in January 2018 that it acknowledged its failures and the resulting public grievances, would [release political prisoners](#) and would close the infamous torture center Maekelawi (Human Rights Watch - HRW, 3 January 2018). After releasing political prisoners in early February 2018, including prominent opposition figures and journalists, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn [tendered resignation](#) unexpectedly, saying he would continue in office in a caretaker role until the ruling coalition EPRDF elected a new leader and the country's parliament appointed that person as prime minister (CNN, 15 February 2018). After intensive behind-the-scene deliberations, Dr Abiy Ahmed was elected as chairman of the ruling party and eventually became prime minister. Since he assumed office in April 2018, he has introduced a series of reforms including the release of thousands of political prisoners and proposing the privatization of some of the companies owned by the state. Other very important diplomatic and economic reforms were also introduced.

However, during the period between the resignation of the former prime minister and swearing-in of the new prime minister, the country saw a new state of emergency declared, and its army [kill civilians](#) in a southern town, causing many to flee across the border to Kenya (Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, 12 March 2018). Then, on 10 April 2018, the US House of Representatives passed a non-binding [resolution](#) on Ethiopia, calling on the Ethiopian government led by the new prime minister to demonstrate a commitment to human rights, democracy, and rule of law and indicating future cooperation to be tied to it (HRW, 10 April 2018). In May and early June 2018, the Liyu police unit of the Somali regional state carried out [new rounds of killings](#) and the burning of houses in a neighboring regional state (Amnesty International - AI, 11 June 2018). In late June 2018, a deadly bomb blast considered an [assassination attempt](#) on the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed hit a huge rally in Addis Ababa's Meskel square which had been called in support of the prime minister (CNN, 24 June 2018).

June 2018 was also a month during which significant positive events were registered under the leadership of the new prime minister. The state of emergency imposed in February was lifted two months earlier than its official date of expiry; the country's state-controlled telecoms and state-owned airline businesses were made open to private and international investors for the first time; parliament lifted proscription on three opposition groups and their members exiled abroad; the government also publicly admitted security forces relied on [torture](#) and it committed to legal reforms of repressive laws (HRW, World Report 2019). The government announced it was fully accepting the Algiers agreement and the decision of the boundary commission to end hostilities with Eritrea and in July 2018 the [historic peace deal](#) with Eritrea was signed (HRW, 18 July 2018). In October 2018, there was a cabinet reshuffle and the appointment of the [first female head of state](#) in the country's history (Al-Jazeera, 25 October 2018). In the same month, history was made as women held 50% of cabinet positions.

However, in 2018, the country saw a rise in communal violence which resulted in the displacement of [millions](#) of people (HRW, World Report 2019). In 2019, there was allegedly an attempted coup at the regional level which led to the killing of the president of the Amhara regional state and top leadership. The army's chief of staff was also killed. Some activists accused the govern-

ment of imprisoning hundreds of people using the coup attempt as a pretext. But the government claimed that the arrested individuals were engaged in criminal activities that warranted their arrest. In 2020, the country saw more protests and violence - and also further human rights violations by security forces were [reported](#) (AI, 29 May 2020). In some places, Christians were targeted and attacked as well.

In November 2020, the federal government ordered its troops to conduct an operation in the northern part of the country after the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) attacked the Ethiopian National Defense Forces without any provocation or warning. The conflict in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the Horn of Africa in recent years. Massive human rights violations including rape, extra judicial killings and displacements were reported. Churches were attacked, priests were killed. However, it is important that this is seen in the correct context:

- First, this is a conflict between the federal government and the regional government after the Tigray regional state attacked the federal army.
- Secondly, there is an element of ethnic conflict: In Western Tigray in particular, it is very contested who owns a given piece of land.
- Thirdly, it is true that churches and church leaders have been targets, but that happened within the wider context of the conflict, not because of their Christian faith. It is important to underline that thousands of civilians were killed. These factors mean that the situation is not one where Christians have been specifically targeted for their faith.

According to Amnesty International (AI, Ethiopia 2022), "government security forces and armed groups were responsible for the unlawful killings of civilians, which in some cases may have amounted to war crimes." The [evidence of some of those crimes was burned](#) and eliminated; mass graves were being dug up to burn hundreds of bodies and transport the remains away, according to BBC World News on 7 May 2022. Tigray forces likewise committed widespread atrocities against the local Amhara population (including [raping women and girls](#)), in the areas of the Amhara region they captured following renewed fighting that led to the withdrawal of government forces from Tigray and their southward retreat (AI 2021/22 Report, p.164).

This conflict has had a devastating impact on Tigray and Amhara regions in terms of food security: The WFP stated in January 2022 that 40% of people in Tigray were suffering "[extreme lack of food](#)" (AI-Jazeera, 28 January 2022). The USA sanctioned Ethiopian officials and [removed the country from a favorable trade program](#) due to their alleged gross human rights violations, unwillingness to de-escalate the conflict and refusal to open corridors to deliver humanitarian relief (AI-Jazeera, 2 January 2022). The fighting seems to have eased since March 2022, however, after Ethiopia's government declared an indefinite [unilateral truce](#) (AI-Jazeera, 24 March 2022) and the TPLF rebels followed suit by agreeing to a cessation of hostilities and declaring their [withdrawal from the areas of Afar region](#) which they had held (AI-Jazeera 25 April 2022). This development opened the door for delivering humanitarian relief to the affected areas and renewed hope for political and diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

In June 2022, it [was reported](#) that the government and the TPLF had agreed to high level negotiations as a major step towards ending the almost two-year conflict (Reuters, 14 June 2022). Despite the high hopes, a full blown war erupted shortly after the June 2022 agreement.

After the federal government captured several key towns, a [breakthrough agreement](#) was announced from negotiations in Pretoria (South Africa). A permanent cessation of hostility was agreed along with "a detailed program of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for the TPLF combatants" (CNN, 3 November 2022).

In [May 2023](#), the Ethiopian government initiated peace negotiations with a faction of the Oromo Liberation Army in Zanzibar. Although no deal was reached, the talks were reported to be productive. Additionally, in 2023, the peace process between the Tigray administration and the Ethiopian government, which began in late 2022, entered a crucial phase as the Tigray administration started demobilization efforts and engaged more frequently with the federal government and international partners.

Furthermore, Ethiopia expressed its commitment to resolving the issue with Egypt concerning the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). In July 2023, the Ethiopian Prime Minister [visited Cairo](#), and Russia also [offered](#) to collaborate with Ethiopia and Egypt to find a solution to the GERD crisis. However, the civil war in Sudan, which started in April 2023, has put Ethiopia in a delicate position as the conflict in Khartoum has the potential to spill over and affect the wider region.

## Political and legal landscape

The [1995 Constitution](#) established a federal form of government. The form of federal government and the ideology behind 'what sort of federal arrangement' - i.e, language and settlement pattern - was supported by the TPLF and other ethnic-based political parties. The TPLF was the main body ruling with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) until April 2018. During the armed struggle in the 1970s and 80s, they articulated a very specific role for ethnicity in Ethiopia, which they established after coming to power. Hence, ethnicity served as the primary identity marker, not religion. However, for certain ethnic groups, religion still plays an important role in their identity. For example, the Amhara and Tigray historically have close ties with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), the ethnic Somalis are Muslims. Nonetheless, it is important to note that political mobilization still takes place primarily along ethnic lines. While religious-based conflicts still do erupt, insecurity in Ethiopia mainly involves ethnic-based armed groups. These groups are motivated primarily through feeling marginalized by the Tigray-dominated society, rather than on the basis of religion.

After the TPLF lost control of the federal government (after the series of protests starting in 2015 forced the prime minister to resign) many Ethiopians believed that the new prime minister, Dr Abiy Ahmed, would successfully solve the problems the country has been facing. However, according to [International Crisis Group](#) reporting on 15 April 2020, "the prime minister has struggled to maintain order as a divided and discredited ruling coalition increasingly lost its grip on the systems it had used for decades to maintain control over a diverse and sometimes restive population. Rival regional, ethnic, and political factions clashed over ideology, power, and resources, killing thousands of people, and displacing more than three million." To revitalize the transition, in late 2019 the prime minister and his allies created a new ruling party called the Prosperity Party. The TPLF refused to join. Tensions continue to escalate between the different ethnic groups.

The International Crisis Group article of 15 April 2020 also explains how the government has come under fire from opposition parties for failing to create conditions for fair elections, which it had promised would be in place before polls took place on the constitutionally prescribed schedule. They complained that the government is resorting to tactics belonging to past authoritarian days, including the arrest and harassment of activists, and denial of permission for meetings and rallies. They also accuse the new Prosperity Party of using government resources for its own advantage.

After five years of political turmoil, the country was scheduled to hold elections in August 2020. However, due to the public health risks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, on 31 March 2020 the electoral board [suspended](#) preparations for the elections (Reuters, 1 April 2020). Consequently, on 10 April 2020, parliament approved a five-month state of emergency, giving the authorities sweeping powers to battle the COVID-19 crisis. The general election (for voting in officials to the House of Peoples' Representatives) was finally held on 21 June 2021. The ruling party won the election with what can be called a landslide victory. The government's early lifting of the state of emergency in February 2022, the release of high-profile political prisoners (including some under house arrest) and the launching of national dialogue appeared to have opened an avenue for settling fundamental political questions facing the country through negotiation and compromise. However, views on whether the announced [national dialogue could be realized](#) were initially mixed (Al-Jazeera, 27 January 2022), reflecting the deep divide among the Ethiopian elite on the prognosis of potential political and structural issues for delivering inclusive peace.

According to Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2023 Ethiopia:

- "Ethiopia remains beset by civil war and intercommunal violence, abuses by security forces and violations of due process are still common, and many restrictive laws remain in force. Since late 2020 and until November 2022, fighting between the Federal Government and the Tigray Defense Force (TDF) has led to the displacement of millions and credible allegations of atrocity crimes, and violence has spilled over into neighboring regions."
- The country is rated 'not free' with a score of 21/100.

In June 2023, [the USA lifted](#) the human rights violation designation on Ethiopia, indicating a potential improvement in the country's human rights situation (FP News, 29 June 2023). Additionally, Ethiopia sought reinstatement to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) program. This move came after a US Senator from Virginia, [Mark Warner](#), advocated for Ethiopia's status to be reinstated in AGOA, expressing support for the country's efforts to regain access to the trade benefits provided by the program (AGOA News, 5 April 2023).

The recent internal conflict in Ethiopia (2023), specifically in the Amhara region, has escalated due to claims by the regional armed group Fano, asserting that the federal government has neglected the legitimate causes of the Amhara people. Reports indicate civilian casualties amid the unrest, highlighting the severity of the situation.

Conversely, Ethiopia's government has engaged in two rounds of peace talks with the Oromo Liberation Army, held in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. Despite the fact that no specific agreement came out of these discussions, both parties' commitment shows a sincere desire to end the con-

flict in Oromia. This conflict has led to civilian deaths and substantial damage to properties, underscoring the urgency of seeking a peaceful resolution.

The Ethiopian government has also tried to engage as a neighboring mediator in the conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese army. In July 2023, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, primarily discussing the ongoing [Sudanese crisis, among other things](#). Reports suggest a division in support, with Egypt backing the Sudanese army while Ethiopia is reported to support the RSF faction. This regional involvement underscores the complexities and differing perspectives surrounding the Sudanese conflict.

### **Religious perspective**

In 2023, Ethiopia witnessed religious issues, particularly concerning Muslims and the Orthodox Church. Oromo Orthodox clergy led a break away team, accusing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of discrimination. Additionally, there was a notable division between the Tigray Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Tigray Church accused the leadership of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of supporting the war campaign against the Tigray people. Efforts to reconcile the differences by the Ethiopian Church did not yield meaningful results, as the Tigray Church appointed its own leadership. These divisions created tensions and challenges within the religious landscape of Ethiopia.

Past and present governments have attempted to mobilize support by controlling religious groups and influencing religious life in the country. For example, after coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF party replaced the patriarch of the Orthodox Church - a position that is typically held for life. This implies that the role of the government in religion is stronger than the influence of religious groups on the government. Moreover, the interference of the Ethiopian government often generates resentment among the population since religious institutions are perceived as being co-opted. In addition, a formal political organization on a religious basis is technically outlawed in Ethiopia. Within this context, Protestant churches are considered to be largely (apolitical) agents of Western ideology and interests. Various informal, politically organized religious groups do exist, especially within Ethiopia's diaspora, but the dominant narrative within Ethiopia's political system remains tied to ethnicity. Against this backdrop Muslim groups have become more active, which has led to the development of specific religious-based publications, such as YeMuslimoch Guday (Muslim Affairs) and Sewtul Islam.

Ethiopia has always had deep Christian roots, but there is also a very substantial Muslim minority of 34.3% according to WCD 2023 estimates. Salafist streams have been present since the 1930s but have been growing in influence among the Ethiopian population in all areas in recent years. There have been claims that the marginalization policy which left the Muslim community devoid of any political or economic influence in the country under previous regimes is continuing under the current administration. The government, however, refutes such allegations. The current prime minister has released all Muslim leaders who had been arrested when the previous prime minister was in office. He also mediated between the two factions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and as a result, the exiled former Patriarch also returned to Ethiopia before his [death](#) in March 2022 (Addis Zeybe, 4 March 2022).



The apolitical character of the Protestant movement, including converts from Islam and some former members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), has brought these Christians into increasing conflict with the Ethiopian government and the two main religious bodies in the country. Experts believe that the current political dynamics might improve relations between Orthodox and Protestant Christians. There are still others who believe that the main problem that emanates from the EOC is from ultra-conservative groups not from the leadership. It is unlikely that the 2018 change in the leadership of the Ethiopian government has altered the view of these ultra-conservative groups. Indeed, ultra-conservative groups in the ranks of the EOC are becoming very vocal; for instance, they are continually pushing for a tougher stance against any reformist influence in the EOC and against the general Protestant movement in the country.

### Gender perspective

By law, men and women have equal rights to enter marriage and must freely consent to the union (Family Code, Articles 6 and 12). Child marriage rates are on the decline, but nevertheless remain high in Ethiopia, with 40% of girls and 5% of boys marrying before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides Ethiopia). The legal age for marriage (18) is rarely enforced and early marriages are particularly common in the case of religious or customary marriages. Child marriage is commonly cited as the main reason women file for divorce. Regarding custody, children under five years commonly live under the custody of the mother, and those over five are placed with their father ([OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023](#)). Domestic violence is criminalized (under Article 564 of the Criminal Code) but is rarely reported to the police due to a lack of trust in the authorities, and the widespread societal belief that it is a private matter ([Semahegn and Mengistie, August 2015](#)).

### Religious landscape

Ethiopia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	74,679,000	60.3
Muslim	42,402,000	34.3
Hindu	8,500	0.0
Buddhist	1,900	0.0
Ethno-religionist	6,531,000	5.3
Jewish	17,100	0.0
Bahai	28,900	0.0
Atheist	13,300	0.0
Agnostic	89,100	0.1
Other - includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.	0	0.0

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Historically, Ethiopia has always had deep Christian roots. The main Christian groups in Ethiopia are the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the various Protestant denominations. The latter entered the country from the 19th century onwards. According to Islamic tradition, Islam has a long history in Ethiopia dating back to the *hijrah* (flight of Muslims to Axum in northern Ethiopia in 615 AD). However, the Roman Catholic Church (introduced in the 16th century) shaped the identity of Ethiopia to a large extent. In fact, Ethiopia presents itself as a bulwark of Christianity surrounded by Islamic neighbors. Within the context of the “global war against terror”, this narrative is often employed by Ethiopians.

This does not change the fact that Ethiopia has a very substantial Muslim minority. Sufism has a long tradition, and the more conservative Salafist streams have been present since the 1930s, expanding from the 1960s onwards. These conservative streams were originally concentrated along Ethiopia’s eastern fringes, but have been growing in influence among the Ethiopian population in all areas and causing deep concern for the present government. The Muslim community, especially the leadership, has become very assertive.

Relations between Orthodox and Protestant Christians are strained. Ultra-conservative groups within the EOC are constantly pushing for a tougher stance against the emerging EOC reformist movement and Protestant church activity.

## Economic landscape

According to World Bank's Macro-Poverty Outlook 2023 Ethiopia:

- **Economic growth:** The Ethiopian economy showed resilience with strong agriculture and services output, leading to higher-than-expected GDP growth of around 6.4% in FY22. However, the growth rate still lags behind pre-COVID-19 levels, indicating ongoing challenges. The economy remains susceptible to external shocks, especially disruptions in global food and supply chains, which could impact its stability and growth prospects in the future. The projected growth for FY23 remains robust at around 6%, as the impacts of recent domestic and external shocks subside. Improved crop production in the northern regions, contingent on sustained peace, along with reduced external price and supply shocks, is expected to mitigate inflation and poverty risks. Swift and effective implementation of crucial macroeconomic and structural reforms outlined in the Homegrown Economic Reform 2.0 plan could further boost growth in FY23 and the medium term. However, the main downside risk lies in the resumption of significant conflict, which could impede reform implementation and hinder foreign exchange inflows from development assistance and investment.
- **Inflation:** Inflation in the country continues to be driven primarily by direct monetary financing, leading to a high rate of 33.9% as of January 2023. The combination of overlapping crises, including the war in Ukraine, persistent droughts, and surging global food and fuel prices, has further intensified the inflationary pressures. Staple food prices remain significantly above average, particularly in conflict and drought-affected regions. Additionally, higher non-food inflation has been observed due to the gradual removal of fuel subsidies, wider parallel market premiums, and looser fiscal policies, all contributing to the overall inflationary environment.



- **Short term outlook:** In FY23, fiscal pressures are anticipated to persist, but they are expected to ease over the medium term due to revenue reforms aimed at strengthening value-added tax and excise collections, including the introduction of new tax sources like property taxes. These reforms are projected to support fiscal consolidation and alleviate budget financing challenges. Critical foreign exchange reforms will be essential for restoring productivity-led growth by removing price distortions, improving resource allocation, and mitigating external payments risks. Additionally, Ethiopia's external financing pressures can be alleviated by favorable debt treatment under the G-20 Common Framework and the resumption of official external inflows. However, the success of these measures is contingent upon the effective implementation of reforms. Inflation is expected to remain high through FY24, but it is projected to decrease over the medium term as supply bottlenecks ease and fiscal and monetary policies are tightened.

According to the World Bank Ethiopia overview:

Ethiopia has experienced strong economic growth over the past 15 years, with an average annual growth rate of nearly 10%, driven by capital accumulation and public infrastructure investments. However, growth slowed down in recent years due to various shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, although agriculture remained relatively resilient. Despite this robust growth, poverty reduction has been modest compared to other fast-growing countries, and inequality has increased. Additionally, ongoing conflicts pose a risk to the country's economic and social development progress.

To sustain growth and foster a more private-sector-driven economy, the Ethiopian government has launched a 10-Year Development Plan based on the Home-Grown Economic Reform Agenda. The plan aims to introduce competition in key sectors, improve the business climate, and address macroeconomic imbalances to ensure continued economic progress in the coming years.

According to [Heritage Foundation's 2023 Economic Freedom Index](#) (accessed 31 January 2024):

Ethiopia's economic freedom score for 2023 is 48.3, ranking it 155th among countries worldwide. This score decreased by 1.3 points compared to 2022. In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, Ethiopia is ranked 38th out of 47 countries, and its overall economic freedom is below the global and regional averages.

The country's progress towards greater economic freedom has been uneven, with significant challenges in critical policy areas. The lack of an independent and fair judiciary hampers the rule of law and long-term economic development prospects. Corruption remains widespread, and government services suffer from inefficiency. Open-market policies have seen limited advancement, impacting the overall economic landscape.

### **Gender perspective**

As far as addressing the conflict-induced displacement, violence against vulnerable communities and destruction of infrastructure is concerned, the World Bank came to Ethiopia's aid by approving a \$300 million International Development Association (IDA) grant for the [Response-Recovery-Resilience for Conflict-Affected Communities in Ethiopia Project](#).

According to the World Bank's Press Release No. 2022/065/AFE of 12 April 2022:

- “The project will support efforts to address the immediate needs of communities, rehabilitate/recover infrastructure destroyed by conflict, and increase community resilience to the impacts of conflict in a sustainable manner. Specifically, the project will help to improve access to basic services, as well as rebuild climate-resilient infrastructure, prioritized by communities. To urgently meet the needs of conflict-affected communities, mobile units will be dispatched to provide key services including in the areas of education, health, water, and sanitation. The project will also provide GBV [gender-based violence] survivors with improved access to the services and comprehensive care needed to recover from the impacts of the violence they experienced. Furthermore, it will support prevention interventions to address the underlying norms and dynamics that perpetuate GBV.”

Within this context women are typically financially dependent on men due to gender gaps in relation to access to education and employment ([USAID, 2 December 2020](#)). Making it additionally challenging for women to attain financial independence, customary and religious practices deny women their due inheritance, despite equal rights being enshrined in law.

## Social and cultural landscape

In general, Ethiopia is a country with more than 80 different ethnic groups each with its own language, culture, customs and tradition. Despite its lauded economic growth, Ethiopia still remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Ethiopia and World Factbook Ethiopia:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Oromo 35.8%, Amhara (Amara) 24.1%, Somali (Somalie) 7.2%, Tigray 5.7%, Sidama 4.1%, Gamo-Goffa-Dawuro 2.8%, Gurage 2.6%, Wolaita 2.3%, Afar 2.2%, Silte 1.3%, Kefficho 1.2%, Other 10.8% (2022 est.)
- **Main languages:** Oromo (official working language in the state of Oromiya) 33.8%, Amharic (official language) 29.3%, Somali (official working language of the state of Sumale) 6.2%, Tigrigna (Tigrinya) (official working language of the state of Tigray) 5.9%, Sidamu 4%, Wolayta 2.2%, Gurage 2%, Afar (official working language of the state of Afar) 1.7%, Hadiyya 1.7%, Gamo 1.5%, Gedeo 1.3%, Opuuo 1.2%, Kafa 1.1%. other 8.1%, English (major foreign language taught in schools), Arabic (2007 est.)
- **Urban population:** 22.7% of the total population (2022)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.4% annual rate of change (2020-2025)
- **Median age:** 19.8 years (2020)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 8.8 years (Female 8.3, Male 9.3). This gender gap widens at the tertiary level. (9 years according to CIA Factbook 2022)
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 51.8% (2017)
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 77.9%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 2.1%
- **Labor force participation rate:** Female 73.4%, male 85.8%.

According to [UNHCR Ethiopia refugee statistics as of June 2023](#):

- **Refugees:** "Ethiopia is the third largest refugee hosting country in Africa, home to over 926,000 refugees and asylum seekers—mainly from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. Following the outbreak of armed conflict in Sudan (April 2023) and Lascanood Somalia (February 2023), Ethiopia is receiving thousands of forcibly displaced people at several points of entry. UNHCR and the Government of Ethiopia through the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS), in partnership with regional authorities, other UN agencies and NGOs are working to provide safe asylum access, documentation, protection and solutions to those who need humanitarian support."

According to [UNHCR Operational Data Portal](#) (Last updated on 31 May 2023):

- **IDPs:** There are 3,143,255 IDPs in Ethiopia. The report also noted that "Due to operational constraints, IDP figures for the Tigray region are not included. In addition, parts of the Afar region remain inaccessible due to ongoing conflict and insecurity which has likely lowered the number of IDPs reported for the area. Though DTM expanded access in the Benishangul Gumuz region this round, access was still limited." The report adds that there are an estimate of 1,887,154 IDP returnees.
- "Ethiopia continues to face a massive chronic displacement situation fused by layers of new forced population movements throughout the country due to conflict, inter-communal violence, natural hazards, and impacts of climate change notably in southeast Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali regions."

According to UNDP HDR Ethiopia:

- **Human Development index:** Ethiopia ranked 175 out of 191 countries in the world with a value of 0.498
- **Average life expectancy at birth:** 66.6 years
- **Gender development index (GDI):** 0.921
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** 0.520. This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Ethiopia ranks 129th out of 170 countries (2021).

### Gender perspective

In Ethiopia's patriarchal context, a woman's worth is commonly measured in terms of her role as a wife and mother ([Wright A: Global Majority E-Journal, Vol.11, No.1, June 2020, pp.47–60](#)). Despite legal protection aimed at providing gender inequality, social and cultural norms that place women as subordinate remain prevalent. According to [UN Women \(2021\)](#), 20% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the last 12 months. Many choose to remain in abusive marriages due to the stigma and shame attached to divorce, as well as the fear of losing property or child custody. Improving access to justice for victims was highlighted as a key recommendation by a [2019 CEDAW committee report](#) (pp.3-4).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Ethiopia):

- **Internet usage:** 17.7% of the total population – survey date: December 2021 (Most recent survey at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 6.3% of the total population – survey date: January 2022

According to World Bank Ethiopia data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 38.7 (per 100 people)

According to a [2017 World Bank report](#), men are twice as likely as women to have access to a mobile phone and the internet. An article in the [British Medical Journal](#) (March 2020) further indicated a gender gap of 25% in mobile phone ownership. In light of this, it is more challenging for female Christians to access Christian resources and digital community. Indicating that this gender gap is closing, [Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20](#) highlighted Ethiopia as one of the top ten countries that reported recent gains in women's cell-phone use (p.35).

Ethiopia has poor technological infrastructure caused by communal violence, civil war repression and other man-made or natural disasters. However, the government has been investing in infrastructure in many forms (buildings, roads, technology institutes etc.): In February 2022, Ethiopia [began producing electricity](#) from its massive hydropower plant Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) (Al-Jazeera, 20 February 2022). However, its communication technology is still lagging far behind. The country has only one telecommunication provider owned by the government. This company provides cell-phone, Internet and landline services.

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Ethiopia report (covering 1 June 2022 - 31 May 2023):

- Ethiopia was listed as 'Not free', having a low score of 26 points
- (A1) "Despite marginal gains in internet access, Ethiopia remains one of the least connected countries in the world. ... Internet penetration rates vary substantially between urban and rural areas ... . The electricity infrastructure is somewhat unreliable, and internet access was inhibited by power outages and protracted conflict during the coverage period".
- (A3) "The Ethiopian government's predominant control over the country's telecommunications infrastructure via Ethio Telecom enables it to restrict information flows and access to internet and mobile phone services. As a landlocked country, Ethiopia has no direct access to submarine cable landing stations; instead, it connects to the international internet via satellite, a fiber-optic cable that passes through Sudan and connects to its international gateway, and another that passes through Djibouti to an international undersea cable. All connections to the international internet are completely centralized under Ethio Telecom, allowing the government to cut off traffic at will."
- (A4) "China is a key source of investment for the Ethiopian telecommunications industry. Two major Chinese firms, ZTE and Huawei, were involved in upgrading Addis Ababa's mobile broadband networks to 4G technology and expanding 3G networks elsewhere."

- (C3) "Online journalists were arrested in large numbers during the coverage period, as the government cracked down on media outlets and reporters in reprisal for their work."
- (C7) Four online journalists and activists were abducted by security forces during the coverage period, and several journalists fled the country to avoid renewed detentions.

## Security situation

Security in Ethiopia has become precarious since the changes that materialized in 2018. For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW 2023 country chapter Ethiopia) lists some of the major security issues:

- "The two-year armed conflict in northern Ethiopia, which began in November 2020, continued to inflict a terrible toll on civilians. A truce was reached by the main warring parties in November. State security forces and armed groups committed serious abuses, in other regions, notably Oromia. Authorities sporadically cut internet and telecommunication services in conflict-affected areas, with internet and other forms of communications cut in Tigray since June 2021.
- Conflict and unrest in several regions, followed by drought also exacerbated one of the world's largest humanitarian catastrophes. Over 20 million people required humanitarian assistance in 2022.
- In western Oromia, fighting between government forces and armed groups resulted in serious abuses committed by all sides.
- Journalists, civil society organizations, and outspoken public figures in the country faced an increasingly hostile and restrictive reporting environment."

The [US State Department](#) Travel Advisory (last updated on 31 July 2023) states: "The security situation in Addis Ababa is stable. However, there is sporadic violent conflict and civil unrest in other areas of Ethiopia, and the security situation may deteriorate without warning."

International Crisis Group also mentioned that even though the agreement between TPLF and the federal government and the start of a peace negotiation between Oromo Liberation Army and the federal government were positive steps "toward ending the long-running insurgency in Oromia, both sides' uncompromising stances impeded progress and violence continued. The decision on the TPLF's political party status marked a setback in otherwise improving federal-Tigray relations" (ICG, [Crisis Watch Digest Ethiopia - May 2023](#), published on 13 June 2023).

Putting the country's risk level 'High', Crisis24 stated (Crisis24 Ethiopia report):

- "Ethiopia has continued to face ethnic-driven clashes, religious tensions, armed groups attacks, civil unrest, COVID-19-related economic hardship, border disputes due to increasing claims of self-autonomy, and ongoing conflict in Tigray region. The ruling Prosperity Party (PP) has also been hindered by regional issues such as the border conflict between Sudan and Ethiopia over the Al-Fashqa area and the controversy between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia over the filling of the controversial Grand Ethiopia Renaissance Dam (GERD)."
- "The military confrontation between the federal government and the former Tigray state ruling party (TPLF) ceased on Nov. 2, 2022, after both parties signed a peace agreement in

Pretoria, South Africa. Since then, several steps have been implemented, including the formation of an Interim Regional Administration (IRA) led by Getachew Reda, a former advisor to the president of Tigray and executive committee member of Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The move comes after parliament's removal of the TPLF from the designated terrorist list in March 2023. Despite the progress, key issues remain, including the complete disarmament of the TPLF's forces and the withdrawal of non-government forces (Eritrean troops and Amhara militias) from rural areas of Tigray. The IRA will be in place until regional elections are held; the date has not yet been set."

## Trends analysis

### 1) The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is losing its exclusive position

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations in Africa and was one of the first countries to adopt Christianity as its state religion. In the past few decades, various Christian denominations have emerged, causing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to lose its exclusive position as the sole Christian denomination in the country (and hence also its privileges in relations with government and society). The current administration under the leadership of Dr Abiy Ahmed looks set to help defuse some of the problems faced by Protestant Christians, especially at the hands of the EOC. There have been divisions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Tigray Orthodox Church decided to separate from the main Ethiopian Orthodox Church and appointed its own leadership. Efforts made by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's leadership to address the issue during a visit to Tigray in July 2023 did not lead to a resolution. Additionally, in 2023, a group of Orthodox clergy from Ethiopia attempted to split from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but the intervention of the Prime Minister helped calm the situation, at least for the time being.

### 2) Ethiopia continues to face serious communal violence

The pace at which the country has undertaken political reform has attracted global attention. However, that reform has been met by other challenges which have resulted in killings and the destruction of property. Communal violence has caused the displacement of millions. Government security forces have been involved in gross violations of human rights. It will always be difficult to navigate the complex realities of the country - the political actors have very divergent views and there are also neighboring countries that might interfere. These varying political views have already shown the tension they can create in the violence of October/November 2019 and June/July 2020, following the assassination of an Oromo activist and singer. It appears that inter-religious tension is also adding to the deteriorating security problem in some parts of the country (see above: *Security situation*). Even though the permanent cessation of hostility was agreed between the TPLF and the Ethiopian government in November 2022, there are still doubts about its successful implementation. Some point to the even more dangerous situation in Oromia region, the largest region in the country. The communal violence in this region has caused many civilian casualties.

### 3) Regional Conflicts

A number of conflicts across various regions have characterized the situation in Ethiopia. Between 2020 and 2022, tensions escalated between the federal government and the TPLF.

Over the last four years, ongoing clashes have occurred between the Oromo Liberation Army and the federal authorities. Since June 2023, a new conflict has emerged between the federal army and the Fano militia in the Amhara region. These conflicts are intricate and interconnected, suggesting that resolving one might spark another. The concerning trend indicates the potential for these conflicts to spread further across other regions within Ethiopia.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: release political prisoners - <http://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/03/ethiopia-free-political-prisoners-close-prison>
- Recent history: tendered resignation - <https://edition-m.cnn.com/2018/02/15/africa/ethiopian-prime-minister-resigns-intl/index.html>
- Recent history: kill civilians - <https://ahrethio.org/2018/03/12/ethiopia-killings-arrests-under-new-state-of-emergency/>
- Recent history: resolution - <http://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/10/us-house-resolution-ethiopia-passes>
- Recent history: new rounds of killings - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/ethiopia-abusive-police-unit-must-be-stopped/>
- Recent history: assassination attempt - <https://edition-m.cnn.com/2018/06/24/africa/ethiopia-blast-ahmed/index.html>
- Recent history: torture - <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/ethiopia>
- Recent history: historic peace deal - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/18/eritrea-ethiopia-peace-deal-offers-hope-reform>
- Recent history: first female head of state - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/sahle-work-zewde-named-ethiopia-woman-president-181025084046138.html>
- Recent history: millions - <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/ethiopia>
- Recent history: reported - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/2358/2020/en/>
- Recent history: evidence of some of those crimes was burned - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61335530>
- Recent history: raping women and girls - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WEBPOL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf>
- Recent history: extreme lack of food - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/15/ethiopia-parliament-votes-to-lift-state-of-emergency>
- Recent history: removed the country from a favorable trade program - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/2/us-removes-ethiopia-mali-and-guinea-from-agoa-trade-programme>
- Recent history: unilateral truce - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/24/ethiopia-declares-truce-to-allow-aid-into-tigray>
- Recent history: withdrawal from the areas of Afar region - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/25/tigray-rebels-leave-ethiopia-afar-region-officials>
- Recent history: was reported - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-abiy-says-committee-formed-negotiate-with-tigray-forces-2022-06-14/>
- Recent history: breakthrough agreement - <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/02/africa/ethiopia-cessation-hostilities-intl>
- Recent history: May 2023 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/first-round-peace-talks-between-ethiopia-oromo-rebels-ends-without-deal-2023-05-03/>
- Recent history: visited Cairo - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/egypts-sisi-ethiopia-pm-discuss-sudans-crisis-ethiopian-dam-presidency-2023-07-12/>
- Recent history: offered - <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-and-gerd-uneasy-balancing-act>
- Political and legal landscape: 1995 Constitution - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5a84.html>
- Political and legal landscape: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/managing-politics-ethiopia-covid-19-crisis>
- Political and legal landscape: suspended - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-election-idUSKBN21I2QU>



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- Political and legal landscape: the USA lifted - <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/29/ethiopia-tigray-war-human-rights-violations-designation-biden-us-government/>
- Political and legal landscape: Mark Warner, - <https://agoa.info/news/article/15975-us-senator-requests-return-of-ethiopia-to-agoa.html>
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- Political and legal landscape: death - <https://addiszeybe.com/ethiopia-mourns-the-death-of-its-patriarch-abune-merkorios>
- Political and legal landscape: (OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023) - <https://www.oecd.org/stories/gender/social-norms-and-gender-discrimination/sigi/dashboard?country=ETH>
- Political and legal landscape: Semahegn and Mengistie, August 2015 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4553009/>
- Economic landscape: Heritage Foundation's 2023 Economic Freedom Index - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/ethiopia>
- Economic landscape: Response-Recovery-Resilience for Conflict-Affected Communities in Ethiopia Project - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/12/world-bank-supports-ethiopia-s-conflict-affected-communities-targets-over-five-million-people>
- Economic landscape: USAID, 2 December 2020 - <https://www.usaid.gov/ethiopia/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Ethiopia refugee statistics as of June 2023: - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101981>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Operational Data Portal - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth>
- Social and cultural landscape: Wright A: Global Majority E-Journal, Vol.11, No.1, June 2020, pp.47–60 - [https://www.american.edu/cas/economics/ejournal/upload/global\\_majority\\_e\\_journal\\_vol-11\\_no-1\\_wright.pdf](https://www.american.edu/cas/economics/ejournal/upload/global_majority_e_journal_vol-11_no-1_wright.pdf)
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Women (2021) - <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/africa/ethiopia>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2019 CEDAW committee report - <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2005243/N1907214.pdf>
- Technological landscape: 2017 World Bank report - [https://globalindex.worldbank.org/sites/globalindex/files/chapters/2017%20Index%20full%20report\\_spotlight.pdf](https://globalindex.worldbank.org/sites/globalindex/files/chapters/2017%20Index%20full%20report_spotlight.pdf)
- Technological landscape: British Medical Journal - <https://gh.bmj.com/content/5/5/e002524>
- Technological landscape: Georgetown’s Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/ethiopia/>
- Technological landscape: began producing electricity - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/20/ethiopia-electricity-production-gerd-blue-nile-mega-dam>
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## WWL 2024: Church information / Ethiopia

### Christian origins

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations in Africa to accept Christianity. Christianity entered the country in the [fourth century](#) - during the Axumite period - when the royal family became Christians - and the Christian faith gradually came to dominate the land (Smithsonian Magazine, 10 December 2019). Following the acceptance of Christianity by the ruling elite, the Ethiopian church created a strong relationship with the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt. As a result, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church received its Patriarch from Alexandria, Egypt, right up until 1959. Orthodox Christianity remained the state religion until 1974. (Source: Melton J.G. & Baumann M., eds., *Religions of the world, 2010, p.1004.*)

The second form of Christianity to enter Ethiopia was the Roman Catholic Church. This was the result of the relationship between Ethiopia and the Portuguese during the 16th century. The Portuguese tried to change the Ethiopian state religion to Catholic. This attempt caused bloodshed as the peasants reacted angrily. As a result, Catholic missionaries were expelled from the country and were not allowed to return until the 19th century. Ethiopia followed a 'closed door policy' for 150 years from 1632 onwards. Today a community of several hundred thousand Roman Catholics exists in Ethiopia and is led by the Archbishop of Addis Ababa.

The third type of Christianity to enter Ethiopia was Protestant. It managed to enter the country "through the efforts of a spectrum of Lutheran missionaries, beginning in 1866 with some from the Swedish Lutheran Mission". In the second decade of the 20th century, Swedish missionaries representing the Independent True Friends of the Bible arrived in the country. These united with the Swedish Lutheran Mission to coordinate work. Missionaries from different parts of the world continued to arrive: "German missionaries from the Hermannsburg Mission arrived in 1927. Missionaries from Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and the United States arrived through the 1940s and 1950s. Much of the Lutheran work was brought together in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. American Presbyterians arrived in 1920 and began work among the [Oromo] people. When the Italians arrived, the Presbyterian missionaries were expelled, and before leaving they organized their mission as the Bethel Evangelical Church. In the mid-1970s, it merged into the Mekane Jesus Church." (Source: *Religions of the world, p.1006.*)

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church tried to restrict the influence of the missionaries among the populace. However, attempts to remain the sole Christian witness in the country were also rendered futile by the arrival of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). SIM launched its [expansive work](#) in Ethiopia in 1927 under the direction of Dr Thomas A. Lambie (Dictionary of African Christian biography, accessed 24 August 2020).

The expulsion of Italy and the conclusion of World War II brought more Christian groups into the country. The Baptist General Conference of America entered the country in 1950 with its first organized mission in Ambo - West of Addis Ababa. (Source: *Brackney W.H., Historical Dictionary of the Baptists, p.201.*) "Pentecostalism came into the country in the post-war years, and two large indigenous churches have resulted, the Full Gospel Believers Church and Gods All Times Association. Both of these churches have been encouraged by assistance and personnel from Scandinavian Pentecostal bodies." (Source: *Religions of the world, p.1006.*)

## Church spectrum today

Ethiopia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	50,801,000	68.0
Catholic	1,102,000	1.5
Protestant	20,096,000	26.9
Independent	2,847,000	3.8
Unaffiliated	212,000	0.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-379,000	-0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>74,679,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	23,253,000	31.1
Renewalist movement	15,450,000	20.7

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Religion in Ethiopia is complex due to historical claims, competitiveness and accusations of heresy. A previous US State Department IRFR report stated ([IRFR 2019](#)): "[S]ome Protestants and Orthodox Christians accused one another of heresy and of actively working to convert adherents from one faith to the other, increasing tension between the two groups."

In terms of geographical location, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is dominant in Amhara, Tigray and Central Oromia, while Protestant Christians dominate in Western Oromia and SNNP.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The geographical distribution of violations against Christians in Ethiopia depends upon which Persecution engines are dominant.

- The hotspots for violations due to *Christian denominational protectionism* are to be found in the Amhara region, Tigray and some parts of Oromia.
- Hotspots for *Islamic oppression* are in some parts of eastern and western Oromia, Afar and the Somali region. Gurage, Silte and Alaba are also some of the areas where violations are most severe.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

Three of the four Christian communities in the country face violations of their basic rights but the sources and level of severity of violations vary.

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** These are not involuntarily isolated and so have not been scored as a separate category in WWL analysis.

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

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

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This category includes Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations which have a large presence in the country. It also attracts serious violations mainly from the government, EOC and Islamic groups. It is growing very fast compared to other types of Christianity. A country researcher states: "Many parts of southern Ethiopia, as well as parts of Oromia, are dominated by Evangelicals/Protestants. As the majority in these communities, they do not face [serious] violations. But Protestants who live in parts dominated by Muslims and Orthodox Christians face various forms of rights violations." This category of Christianity is seen as a threat by many ultra-conservative Orthodox Church followers and the Muslim community as it keeps growing in number and influence. As a result, they face pressure and violence from many sides.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: fourth century - <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/church-unearthed-ethiopia-rewrites-history-christianity-africa-180973740/>
- Christian origins: expansive work - <https://dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/lambie-thomas3/>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: IRFR 2019 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/>

# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Ethiopia

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Ethiopia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	69	32
WWL 2023	66	39
WWL 2022	66	38
WWL 2021	65	36
WWL 2020	63	39

The overall score for WWL 2024 rose by 3 points to reach 69 points. The average pressure maintained a persistently high level of 10.9 points, notably concentrated in the *Community* and *Church spheres*. Violence surged from 10.6 points to 14.4, with political violence spreading across numerous regions, endangering Christians. Tracking persecution has become increasingly challenging, due to distinctions between faith-based and ethnically or politically driven killings becoming increasingly blurred. Although a peace agreement was achieved in November 2022, new conflicts emerged, notably in the Amhara region. Both Amhara and Oromia saw Christians becoming victims due to the convenience of persecutors targeting them with relative impunity.

## Persecution engines

Ethiopia: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Strong
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very weak

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

### **Islamic oppression (Strong)**

This Persecution engine poses a real threat to Christians, especially in areas dominated by Muslim communities. One country researcher reports that radical Islam "continues to be a problem in Ethiopia. As Islamic countries have been competing to get the upper hand in Africa, they continue to pour in considerable funds that is used in spreading Islam through the establishment of schools of religious learning as well as direct aid to the needy attaching conversion to Islam as a condition." With the rise of radicalism in the region and beyond, radical (or political) Islam is growing at the local, regional and national levels. In the process, various types of Christianity have become increasingly vulnerable to pressure in almost all spheres of life. Particularly in rural areas where they are in the majority, Muslims harass Christians and often deny them access to communal resources.

Furthermore, Christians are victims of violence. Converts from Islam to Christianity will be ostracized and often denied family rights such as inheritance rights and child custody. It is also important to note that the growth in radical Islam in neighboring Somalia and Sudan is spilling over into Ethiopia. A country expert stated: "The [Persecution] engine's presence varies from one geographical area to another mainly depending on the number of Muslims in a particular region. The north-eastern part of the country [made up] of mainly Afar region, the eastern regions including Somali, Dire Dawa and Harar and certain parts of the Oromia region are mostly dominated by Muslims. Because of conflicts that resulted because of actions of [radical] Islamic groups in certain parts of the country, Christians were targeted, sustained bodily injury and were forced to flee from their homes, among other injustices suffered. In the past few years, there is a growing trend in the spread of [radical] Islamic views in the country."

### **Christian denominational protectionism (Strong)**

One country researcher reports: "The EOC considers itself as the only 'true' Christian denomination. It is particularly opposed to Evangelical Christians, This Persecution engine is mainly driven by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) viewing them as followers of a Western religion that poses a threat to Ethiopian nationalism and culture that has long been preserved by the EOC. It is common to hear sermons and songs that strongly criticize Evangelical Christians. Priests and other teachers in the EOC openly condemn socializing with Evangelicals sometimes going as far as to ban their members from speaking to 'the heathens'. There is also growing antagonism on the part of some Evangelical churches against the EOC going into a series of hateful to-and-fro between the two sides."

The EOC has been seriously violating the rights of Christians who leave their ranks to join (mostly) Protestant churches, or who join the renewal movements within the EOC. Violations manifest themselves in various ways. For example, EOC members will sometimes attack them physically. The EOC members also use their connections in government to curtail the development of non-Orthodox churches. They also lobby the government to bring in laws that restrict the expansion of Protestant Christianity. For example, the law that governs the registration of churches exempts the Orthodox Church from this requirement. EOC also uses its powerful media to demonize Protestants and those who are supporters of the renewal movement. A country expert adds: "Again this comes from followers of the majority Christian denomination in the country, the Orthodox Christian Church. However, it is worth noting that

not all followers of the Orthodox church are of this opinion. The victims of these violations are mainly followers of Christian denominations who are relatively new to the country and are mainly Protestant. These violations are prevalent mostly in the northern and central parts of the country where the Orthodox church has the majority of the population as its followers. It is also relevant to mention here that violations against those who belong to the so-called new forms of Christianity get extremer as one goes out of the city towards the rural areas of the country."

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)**

In former years, the Ethiopian government had become more authoritarian and restricted rights for civil society and religious institutions. The previous Ethiopian government had shown itself to be suspicious about religion in general and Christians in particular.

- First, religious groups seem able to organize and assemble people very efficiently and effectively. This causes concern about their perceived ability to organize activities that hypothetically could bring about a regime change.
- Secondly, the previous government was suspicious that Protestants (especially non-traditional church groups) could be foreign agents seeking to bring about a regime change, although there is no evidence to support this notion.

However, even though there have been positive changes at the federal level, in terms of personnel and attitude as well as change in laws and regulations, the bureaucratic system that was built over a century remains formidable to Protestants. This is particularly true at the regional level where persecution in the hands of officials remains higher.

### **Clan oppression (Medium)**

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

## Drivers of persecution

Ethiopia: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			MEDIUM	STRONG		VERY WEAK	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK
Government officials					Very weak		Very weak	Medium	Very weak
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong			Medium					
Religious leaders of other churches					Strong				
Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs	Strong				Strong				
One's own (extended) family	Strong				Medium				
Political parties							Very weak	Weak	
Organized crime cartels or networks									Very weak

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Muslim religious leaders have engaged in inciting violence against Christians through their sermons and tacit approval of Christian discrimination.
- **Extended family (Strong):** The families of converts do not accept the idea of a family member leaving Islam and joining Christianity. They, therefore, shun converts and harass and disown them.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** In some parts of the country where Muslims are dominant, ordinary citizens oppose Christianity and evangelization. They especially oppose conversion.

### Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Leaders of other churches (Strong):** The main drivers are priests and ultra-conservative groups within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (who also influence family and ordinary citizens). Regarding the role of EOC leaders and members, one researcher states: "There is a clear religious demographic change in the country mainly due to the rapid expansion of new forms of Christianity, especially the Protestant Church. Such rapid expansion is not welcomed by the leaders and followers of the Orthodox Church. Resentment against the new forms of Christianity manifests itself at various levels by acts of both EOC leaders and



- followers. Things are getting better in the capital city and in other major cities and areas like the southern and southwestern part of the country where the new forms of Christianity are getting strong.”
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Ordinary citizens have also been perpetrating violations against other church groups, especially the Protestant church. A country expert summarized: "Despite a claim of peaceful co-existence among different religions in the country, the facts on the ground show a different story. For a number of reasons including but not limited to teachings by religious leaders and lack of exposure to religious diversity, it is very common for private citizens to engage in acts of violence against Christians. Attacks by teenagers on Protestant churches, refusing to lease buildings for use as a church, abusing Christians who tried to preach the gospel in public places (both verbal and physical abuse) and many other violations are perpetrated by individuals and mobs."
- **Family (Medium):** In the context of conversion or changing denomination from Orthodox to Protestant, families are known to put family members under house-arrest, shun them, disown them and exclude them from inheritance.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

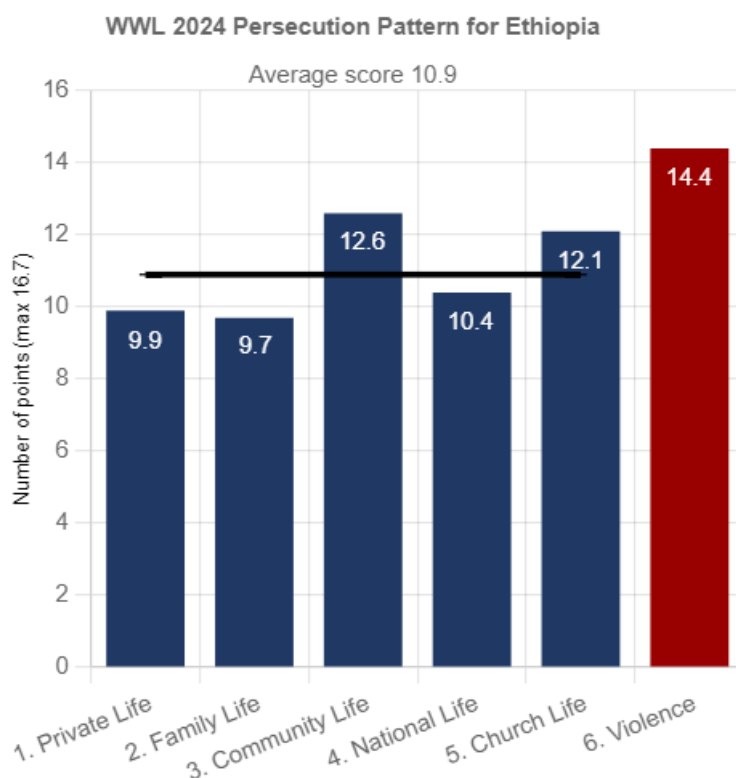
- **Government officials (Medium):** The degree of complicity in violations of religious freedom varies from region to region; mid-level and lower-level officials have especially been actively opposing the so-called new forms of Christianity. Officials at the local level have more control over the day-to-day activities and thereby perpetrate most violations including (but not limited to) the refusal to grant permits for meetings and worship.

#### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** The drivers here are community leaders. This engine is active in some remote regions, and in some areas it is blended with *Islamic oppression*. Thus, these two Persecution engines share drivers. For example, in Afar and Somali regions, religion (i.e. being Muslim) is a part of belonging to the community. A country expert stated: "This is the case mostly in relatively remote parts of the country where ethnic group leaders will have a huge influence. In some areas wherein the majority of the population is Muslim, there are cases where the leaders of ethnic groups actively advocate hostility towards Christians in the area. This resulted in the death, injury, and displacement of Christians in such areas. The tension among different ethnic groups in various parts of the country is having - and will continue to have - an adverse impact on the lives of Christians who could be subjected to attacks just because of their ethnic and religious background."



## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Ethiopia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Ethiopia is at the very high level of 10.9 points, a slight decrease from the previous year of 11.2 points.
- Except for the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*, there is no sphere of life where the pressure on Christians scores less than 10 points; which shows that - despite Ethiopia being a Christian majority country - Ethiopian Christians face a high level of violations of freedom of religion. Pressure in *Community life* is particularly high with a score of 12.6 points.
- The score for violence against Christians increased from 10.6 points in WWL 2023 to 14.4 points in WWL 2024.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

### **Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)**

The challenges faced by individuals converting from a Muslim background in Ethiopia are significant and deeply rooted in societal and familial pressures. Reports depict harsh backlash from communities and families, including ostracism, threats, and sometimes violence. Similarly, those seeking to switch denominations (e.g. leaving the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) also face formidable obstacles. It is viewed as betraying the faith of one's ancestors and can result in social exclusion and even disownment.

### **Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.75 points)**

The possession of Christian materials, such as Bibles or other religious literature, is particularly dangerous for Christians who have converted from Islam.

### **Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.75 points)**

The act of openly expressing one's Christian faith on social media platforms carries significant risks for individuals who have converted from Islam in particular. Writing about one's Christian beliefs in a public forum can lead to increased surveillance, scrutiny, and potential persecution, making many converts opt for anonymity or self-censorship to avoid detection.

### **Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.50 points)**

This issue is particularly evident in a context of *Christian denominational protectionism* or *Islamic oppression*. Many converts find themselves effectively confined to their homes; if they are seen engaging in a form of worship which the family opposes, it can lead to increased hostility and surveillance and, in some cases, expulsion from their communities.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)**

Children of Christian converts in various regions encounter persistent challenges, including harassment and discrimination rooted in their parents' religious choices. This issue is emblematic of the broader struggles faced by Christian families, where the discovery of a family's conversion to Christianity triggers not only discrimination against the parents but also adverse consequences for their children such as bullying and exclusion and biased treatment in educational and social settings.

### **Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (2.75 points)**

Especially in Muslim-dominated communities, Islamic burial rites have been imposed on de-

ceased Christian converts.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.75 points)**

In Muslim-dominated areas with a minimal Christian population, it is common for Christian children to be compelled to attend Islamic classes. Similarly, in Orthodox-dominated regions, non-Orthodox Christians have to attend classes aligned with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Some of the teaching denigrates non-Orthodox Christians.

**Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.75 points)**

This is a prevalent issue affecting converts from Muslim backgrounds and those who transition from the Orthodox to non-Orthodox churches. It is not uncommon for Christians in these categories, especially women, to be expelled without any property or custody of their children during divorce cases.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)**

Obstruction of Christians in their daily lives is not uncommon, with some receiving life-threatening messages, facing restrictions on farming certain days, and experiencing bullying at workplaces or schools. While affecting all Christian groups, the intensity of these challenges is notably higher for converts from a Muslim background and those leaving the Orthodox Church to join non-traditional Christian groups.

**Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.25 points)**

The inability to share community resources is a longstanding issue for Christians in Muslim-dominated areas and those leaving the Orthodox Church to join non-traditional groups. Systematic denial of access to common resources like grazing land and water is reported, with attempts to use them potentially leading to more severe forms of persecution, including violence.

**Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.25 points)**

In regions marked by ethno-religious influences, Christians are at times forced to engage in local community rituals, and in Muslim-dominated areas, there is often pressure for them to at least not eat in public during Ramadan.

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.00 points)**

Monitoring practices vary from region to region. In Orthodox-dominated areas, non-traditional church pastors may face high levels of surveillance from Orthodox youth. Similarly, in Muslim-dominated areas, constant monitoring of Christians' activities contributes to an environment of fear.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)**

Over the years, there have been many church attacks, beatings of Christians, and damage to Christian property where the perpetrators have not been brought to justice.

**Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Religion plays a significant role in determining access and discrimination, particularly evident in the Amhara region where the Orthodox Church has strong ties with government institutions. In this context, Protestants often face discrimination.

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.00 points)**

Ethiopia has experienced a restrictive culture towards civil society for over a decade. While the laws have changed in the past three years, the practice remains the same at the local level, limiting civil society organizations to providing services rather than addressing human rights issues, including freedom of religion.

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (2.75 points)**

Freedom of expression remains a critical issue in Ethiopia, with significant limitations, especially at the local level. Christians advocating for truth and justice face serious challenges, despite some improvements in the overall situation.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)**

In Orthodox-dominated areas, non-traditional church groups will often encounter opposition if they organize outdoor activities in public. Similarly, in Muslim-dominated regions, Christian groups can face mob attacks and closures of their churches by local authorities, if they organize public events outside church premises.

### **Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.50 points)**

In Muslim-dominated areas, working with youth can attract attacks, impacting all Christian groups. In Orthodox-dominated areas, many non-traditional church workers involved in youth work face intimidation, harassment, and their churches may be attacked.

### **Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.25 points)**

### **Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.25 points)**

Registration used to be a significant problem at the national level, and while there have been improvements in the last few years, the issue persists at the local level. This persistence is attributed to the connections between some local officials and the drivers of persecution in those areas. These drivers impose bureaucratic barriers to registration that are complex and difficult to fulfill.

## **Violence**

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

### **2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons**

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion*

from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

### 3. The use of symbolic numbers

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Ethiopia: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	15	2
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	284	22
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	24	20
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	3	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	1	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	252	100 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	14	10
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	350
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

## 5 Year trends

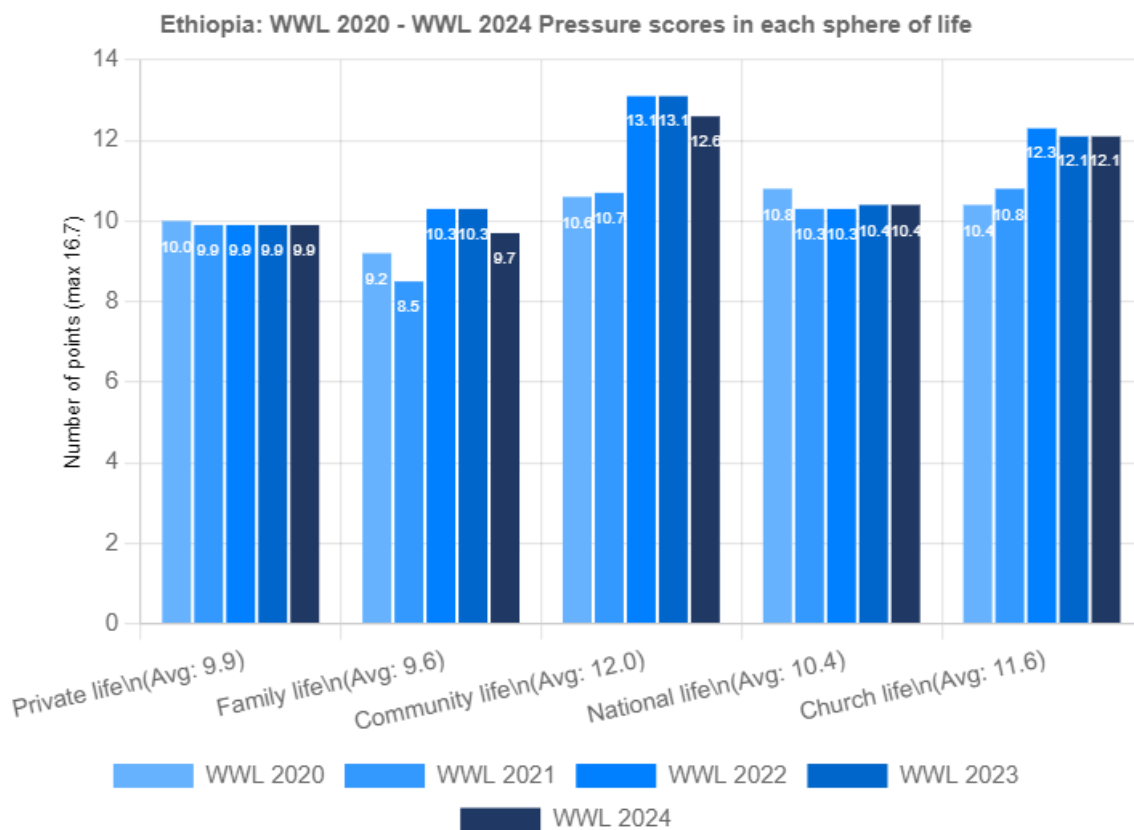
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Ethiopia: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.9
2023	11.2
2022	11.2
2021	10.0
2020	10.2

In the table above it can be seen that the average pressure on Christians has consistently been between 10.0 points (high pressure) and 11.2 points (very high pressure).

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the average pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* has been consistently above 9.5 points over the five WWL reporting periods. The *Community sphere*

scored the highest five year average with 12.0 points, followed by the *Church sphere of life* with a five year average of 11.6 points.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows how violence against Christians has consistently scored at a very high or extremely high level. Ethiopia is a Christian-majority country with no attacks from active jihadist militants. Therefore, for the country to have an average violence score of 12.2 points is extremely worrying.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-



Christian women and girls in Ethiopia sit at the vicious intersection between religious persecution and gender violence, exacerbated by the conflict in Tigray, food insecurity and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted in crisis-affected regions. Access to sexual and reproductive health services, maternal care and psychosocial support for survivors of gender-based violence have been severely compromised by the extensive damage and destruction of health services ([UNFPA, 24 October 2022](#)). As humanitarian crises across the country increase, women and girls become increasingly vulnerable to other forms of violence, including religious persecution.

Despite the long history of Christianity in Ethiopia, many Christian women remain vulnerable to religious persecution. A country expert describes the situation facing Christian women and girls as follows:

- “[There are] various factors [that] contribute to the heightened vulnerability of Christian women and girls to persecution. Notably, traditional beliefs play a significant role, as evidenced by the belief that if a family curses a girl, she may face severe consequences, potentially leading to her death. Furthermore, the community's tendency to be more forgiving of domestic violence against women exacerbates the challenges faced by Christian women and girls. In Muslim-dominated areas, the conversion of Muslim children to Christianity adds another layer of vulnerability, particularly for girls, who may experience societal shame and the risk of eviction or separation from their families. Additionally, cultural practices influenced by traditional laws and beliefs often relegate women to second-class citizenship, limiting their rights, property ownership, and decision-making autonomy. This situation is further complicated by the existence of religious laws in certain areas, contributing to [their] heightened vulnerability”.

Violations of basic rights against Christian women in Ethiopia often occur in the form of bridal abduction to a non-Christian. This is facilitated by a general situation in which abduction and forced marriage [remain present](#) at a national level despite having been prohibited and criminalized by law (UNICEF, 13 June 2022). Experts have explained that the rising violence in the country compounded by the severe drought has [quadrupled](#) the prevalence of child marriage in some regions (The Guardian, 30 April 2022). 40% of girls are married under the age of 18 and sources reveal that early and forced marriage particularly occurs in rural parts of the country (Girls Not Brides Ethiopia).

Christian teenage girls (and converts in particular) can be forced to marry a follower of a different religion after abduction or family arranged marriage. Christian girls can also be secretly convicted on economic grounds and married by Muslim men without their parent’s consent. Following her 'marriage', the Christian wife is expected to take on the religion of her new husband. Speaking on this discreet tactic of conversion and subterfuge, a country expert disclosed that “the cases of abduction in [the northern] region is being reported day by day when a Muslim follower converts to Christianity, they [...] plan on how to trap them [...] and force them to turn back to Islam [...] When someone converts, particularly women or girls, their families often abduct them immediately and hand them over to other Muslims, disregarding their ages [...] During the abduction, many girls lost their lives in the chaos”.

Families that do not conform to these cultural norms are often threatened and ostracized. Christian women and girls face these threats, not only in the context of war or violence but also in everyday life. In Muslim majority areas, women may be forcefully married off to Muslim men if they attempt to convert from Islam. Tribal leaders also incite relatives to castigate Christian girls that object to such marriages. This leaves some girls – especially converts – no choice but to “go from one place to another [in order to] not marry an unbeliever and hide, resulting in dropout of schools and psychological damage.”

Sexual violence directed at Christian women and girls is also widespread. This form of violence is weaponized to manipulate social control and destabilize communities. Rape in particular is seen as an effective means of punishing Christian women and girls due to the severe consequences for her and her community. A country expert explained: “If a girl is raped, the community isolates her; she will not be able to marry or learn; her family will be embarrassed, and, if a woman is raped, her future will be ruined by the word of the event. The violated girl's marriage would be frowned upon by the community.” Women and girls face an elevated risk of sexual violence, forced and child marriage, abduction as well as physical and verbal abuse; “this persecution includes being forced and raped, taken away from their families, and compelled to wander to different places”.

Female converts from Islam face the most severe violations, particularly at the hands of family members. They may be deliberately isolated from other family members and from their church community, put under house arrest in order to protect the family's honor, physically abused and forcibly married to a Muslim. “Isolation from family is normal. Arresting, whipping, beating remains. Even worse, it is common practice to house-arrest someone as though they were sick,” a country expert adds. When a Muslim wife converts to Christianity, forced divorce is the most likely outcome. Even if her spouse does not seek a divorce, his family will pressure the spouse to divorce and claim custody of the children, to protect the family name and ensure their grandchildren are given an Islamic upbringing. In areas where Christianity is a minority religion, a (de facto) divorce is most likely to take place outside courtrooms; the elders presiding over a tribal court see Christian faith as a dangerous deviation and will likely grant custody to the other spouse in order to prevent the spread of Christianity in the community.

The persecution of women and girls has profound implications for Christian families and communities. One notable aspect is the psychological impact, highlighting the emotional toll experienced by women and girls who face persecution. A country expert emphasizes the multifaceted nature of this impact:

- “ it [has] spiritual, physical, and economic aspects, resulting in a diminished sense of confidence and self-esteem within the community”. According to this year's report, when women and girls experience harassment or assault, the consequences extend to their families: “in cases of rape, the community often isolates the victim, affecting her ability to marry or pursue education. This, in turn, brings shame to the family and can harm the future prospects of the affected individuals. For married girls, the repercussions can include social disdain from the neighborhood. Additionally, considering the societal roles of women as primary caregivers and homemakers, the persecution of women leads to orphaned children, child neglect, and the overall breakdown of families. These adverse effects rever-

berate through the entire Christian community, impacting not only the victims but also the younger and older members of the affected families”.

Christians often face difficulties in their inheritance after their decision to convert. Even though laws do not discriminate according to religious practice or belief, a lot of people deal with inheritance rights through traditional systems in the community rather than through the official state process. It is in this way that new converts may experience exclusion discrimination, leading to disinheritance.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men and boys are subject to specific forms of religious persecution that follows trends of physical and psychological violence. A country expert describes how the persecution of men and boys significantly impacts Christian families and communities, stating that “while there is a general sentiment across various perspectives that persecution affects both genders, there are specific ways in which the targeting of men and boys exacerbates the challenges faced by Christian communities. Men, often seen as primary breadwinners and pillars of security for their families, are more frequently targeted by abusers. This targeting is driven by the understanding that by harming men, persecutors can inflict substantial harm on congregations. The repercussions extend beyond the individual, as families lose primary breadwinners or caregivers, affecting the livelihood and security of the entire family unit”. WWL 2024 research indicates that men and boys are perhaps more frequent victims of persecution, leading to the fragmentation of families and a sense of insecurity within communities. This dynamic underscores the broader impact of persecution on Christian families, transcending individual gender lines and affecting the fabric of these communities.

In general, Christian men in Ethiopia are more likely to suffer physical attack and displacement than women and girls, although rampant violence in the country has challenged this trend by exacerbating attacks and displacement for all. Nonetheless, given the scale of civil unrest, boys and men are particularly prone to conscription into armed and paramilitary forces. They may also be robbed of their possessions, or even killed during raids. It is deemed more strategic to attack men and boys, especially church leaders, as they are usually the propagators of the Christian faith and providers for their families; attacking them weakens their whole family and the Christian community in general.

The government also plays a role in violating men's religious freedom through imprisonment. Men are particularly at risk of this in Muslim-dominated areas. In addition, there are numerous instances and allegations of government interference in church elections and appointments. Since the majority of church leaders are men, these violations predominantly affect Christian men. The allegations target almost all leaders of major churches in the country, accusing them of being pro-government and of receiving appointments through government influence. Detention of Christians is highlighted as a common issue; a country expert stated that “pastors were detained because of their faith and churches in the Afar regional state were closed by Muslims in the community [...] since [it is] an Islam-dominated region, all officials, police, and courts are Muslim, so they cannot protect Christians. The community continues attacking Christians [...] the situation has brought fear, frustration and confusion”. New reforms continue to be discussed, however, and there is some hope that in future years this will become less common.

When new believers come to the Lord, “ministers and missionaries are hunted down by extremists,” a country expert revealed. Converts have reportedly been forced to flee their towns and settle elsewhere to avoid attacks and harassment. Although unverified, there are claims that Christian men have been lured into marriages by women “trained to catch Christian men.” This idea of targeted seduction is reported to control an individual’s religious freedom through marriage and financial support, “beautiful women are trained to catch Christian men, even if it is outside of their own religion”.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Religious minorities in Ethiopia are affected by the broadcasting legislation, the role of faith in education, and the civil society law. Generally, the civil society law requires an application for registration for any religious group except for Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews. In addition, the registration law requires a minimum membership of 50 persons for registration as a religious community and a minimum of 15 persons for a ministry or association to be registered and granted permission. This has had serious impact for newer religious minorities: In some areas, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses (where their numbers are less than 50) struggle to have an official place of worship. This is particularly true where majority groups are known to be hostile towards religious minorities.

## Future outlook

In 2021 and 2022, Ethiopia went through challenging times: Civil war. It started as a declaration by the Ethiopian federal government in early November 2020 that it was undertaking a law enforcement operation against the Tigray peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), a party that governs Tigray, one of the federating units. After two years of death and destruction, a peace agreement was finally reached in November 2022.

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

The challenge posed by radical elements in the Muslim community is likely to remain a danger for Christians in the future. It is also important to note that there is a great amount of interest

in Ethiopia coming from Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Saudi Arabia played an [important role](#) in bringing peace to Ethiopia and Eritrea (DW, 23 September 2018) which ultimately led to the Ethiopian PM winning the Nobel Peace Prize. It has been widely reported that most of the weapons in Ethiopia come from Turkey through illegal trafficking. The war in the northern part of the country ran the risk of emboldening potential jihadists thinking that it is a case of 'now or never' for taking action. In fact, Al-Shabaab tried to infiltrate Ethiopia by sending in around 500 of its fighters in [June 2022](#) (Reuters, 29 July 2022).

### **Christian denominational protectionism**

Ethiopia has seen continuous struggles between the different church denominations and this weakens the possibility of a unified Christian response to the religious freedom violations occurring in the country. In this regard, the EOC has been ruthlessly accusing and oppressing Protestants. According to some EOC hardliners, Protestantism is working to dismantle the EOC. Some ultra-conservative Orthodox Christians are also opposing the new prime minister because he is a Protestant. As it stands, *Christian denominational protectionism* is becoming a stronger influence, with some EOC members also politicizing religion in the country.

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

This Persecution engine is weakening fast. Prime minister Abiy Ahmed has lifted some of the restrictions imposed on civil society and churches. At least at the national level, this engine is less evident as a result. However, at regional levels, things are not improving as fast as many had hoped. In some regional states, there have been no meaningful reforms. Furthermore, as ethnic conflict is threatening the reforms already underway, the country is in 'save Ethiopia' mode. Now that the TPLF agreed to disarm and a permanent cessation of hostilities has been made possible through the Pretoria agreement, the Ethiopian prime minister is emboldened. If things do not go the way the Ethiopian government wants, it is likely that the prime minister will react heavy-handedly, this might have a chilling effect on the freedom of religion in general.

### **Clan oppression**

In areas where the majority of the population belongs to one ethnic group (e.g. Somali and Afar), leaving Islam also means leaving the ethnic group, its culture and values. These groups are politically powerful, so if the government does not devise a mechanism whereby it can enforce the protection of religious freedom (especially the right to preach, worship and convert), this engine will remain evident as a source for violations in the future.

## **External Links - Persecution Dynamics**

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UNFPA, 24 October 2022) - <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/news/ethiopia-conflict-climate-shocks-women-and-girls-are-disproportionately-affected>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: remain present - <https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/stories/i-was-forced-marry-man-twice-my-age-exchange-some-cattle>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: quadrupled - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/30/ethiopian-drought-leading-to-dramatic-increase-in-child-marriage-unicef-warns>
- Future outlook: important role - <https://www.dw.com/en/arab-gulf-states-in-the-horn-of-africa-what-role-do-they-play/a-45602930>

- Future outlook: June 2022 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/clashes-between-ethiopian-forces-al-shabaab-leave-scores-dead-state-news-agency-2022-07-29/>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Ethiopia>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.