

World
Watch
Research

Comoros: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2023

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2023	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Comoros.....	5
Brief country details	5
Map of country.....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	6
Specific examples of positive developments	6
External Links - Situation in brief	7
WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Comoros	7
Links for general background information.....	7
Recent history	7
Political and legal landscape	8
Religious landscape	10
Economic landscape.....	11
Social and cultural landscape	12
Technological landscape	13
Security situation	13
Trends analysis	14
External Links - Keys to understanding	14
WWL 2023: Church information / Comoros	15
Christian origins.....	15
Church spectrum today.....	15
Areas where Christians face most difficulties	16
Christian communities and how they are affected	16
WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Comoros	17
Reporting period	17
Position on the World Watch List	17
Persecution engines	17

Drivers of persecution.....	18
The Persecution pattern.....	19
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	20
Violence.....	24
5 Year trends	26
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life.....	26
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	28
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	29
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	29
Future outlook.....	30
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	30
Further useful reports.....	30



(c) Alamy

Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

Copyright note

This document is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2022 Open Doors International.

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 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Comoros

Brief country details

Comoros: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
907,000	4,600	0.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Comoros: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	42
WWL 2022	63	53
WWL 2021	62	50
WWL 2020	57	54
WWL 2019	56	51

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Comoros: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Government officials
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Christians in the country are expected not to discuss their faith in public. If they do, they are likely to face legal consequences. In some parts of the country, radical groups threaten Christians with violence. Proselytization by any religion except Islam is illegal and converts to Christianity can be prosecuted. Converts from a Muslim background face the severest difficulties and are put under pressure not to practice their faith, leaving them little option but to live out their faith in secret.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
2. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
3. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christian parents cannot raise their children according to their religious values (CRC Art. 14);
- Christian female converts run the risk of being forcibly married to Muslim men or forcibly divorced (CEDAW Art. 16)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Converts from Islam to Christianity are shunned by family members
- Women converts are often forced to marry a Muslim against their will.
- Christians face being bullied and harassed on the street and at work.
- Christians face fines or imprisonment for engaging in religious discussions in public or for preaching in public outside churches.

Specific examples of positive developments

None.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.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 on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Comoros

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries, Comoros not included	AI country report 2021/22	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13229685	24 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries, Comoros not included	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en?cb=00000	
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/comoros/	24 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/comoros	24 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries, Comoros not included	EIU 2021	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	24 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Comoros not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/comoros/freedom-world/2022	24 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Comoros not included	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries, Comoros not included	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022	
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#km	24 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/comoros	24 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/com	24 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/COM	24 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/comoros/	24 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Comoros not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/comoros	24 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=COM	24 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 20-21)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf	24 June 2022

Recent history

After years of political instability following independence from France in 1974/5, the Comoros archipelago underwent a democratic transition in 2006. In that year, Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi became president of the Union of Comoros in an election that international observers described as generally free and fair. This was the first peaceful and democratic transfer of power in the country's history. In 2008, the Union Army of National Development launched a successful and bloodless military coup that led to the removal of the former president of Anjouan Island, Mohamed Bacar, who then fled the country. Moussa Toybou was then elected president in a generally free and fair process in 2008. In November and December 2010, elections were held to decide on a new Union president on the Archipelago as well as separate governors for each of the three islands. Again, [in 2016](#), the country passed the test of holding peaceful elections which the former coup leader Azali Assoumani won, having served previously as president from 2002–2006 (Africa News, 16 May 2016). Since then, the country has remained politically stable.

In March 2019, the country held presidential elections and, as reported by [Reuters](#) on 27 March 2019: "The Comoros election body declared President Azali Assoumani re-elected on Tuesday in a single round after an election the opposition rejected as fraudulent." In the [January 2020](#) general election boycotted by the opposition, the president's party won 17 out of 24 legislative seats (Al-Jazeera, 21 January 2020). [The second round](#) of elections was held in February 2020 and the ruling party won 4 of the remaining five seats (Election guide, 23 February 2020).

Political and legal landscape

The 2001 [Constitution of Comoros](#) (amended 2009) requires a "rotating" presidency of the Union of Comoros in which each of the three islands takes turns at holding a primary round of elections for presidential candidates every four years. As evidenced by the recent elections, power is vested in the government by the people and switches from island to island. This may change in the future, according to World Bank (country overview): "The national congress, convened in February 2018 to assess conditions after 42 years of independence, recommended an overhaul of the system of a rotating presidency among the islands through potential constitutional reforms."

In 2018 and 2019, the opposition reacted against certain changes introduced by the ruling party. The main issues (as reported in [Global Freedom Index 2019](#)) were:

- In 2018: "Electoral authorities said a July constitutional referendum introducing major systemic changes was approved by 93 percent of voters. However, the referendum was boycotted by the opposition, who denounced it as an unconstitutional power grab by President Azali, and it was marred by allegations of intimidation and fraud. Many figures who spoke out against the referendum faced persecution."
- "The referendum extended presidential term limits, abolished the previous system under which the presidency rotated among the country's three main islands, and enshrined Sunni Islam as the national religion. It additionally abolished the Constitutional Court, the country's highest, and transferred its competencies to a new chamber of the Supreme Court."

Following the amendment of the Constitution and the change in the structure of the government, early presidential elections were held in Comoros on 24 March 2019 alongside regional elections. (For further election details, see above: *Recent history*.)

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022:

- Comoros scored a total of 42 points out of 100 in terms of political freedoms and civil liberties, making it "partly free," which is unchanged from the preceding year.

According to the World Bank country overview:

- After constant calls for a good governance and more transparency in the management of public affairs, President Azali Assoumani launched the Inter-Comorian National Inclusive Dialogue on 28 February 2022, with the objective of building a national consensus on the remaining political reforms since the 2018 Constitutional revision and the 2019 presidential election held under the revised Constitution. These political reforms involve the Political

Parties Act, the electoral decoupage, the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission and the status of the opposition. Delegates from around 80 organizations including political parties, private sector and civil society organizations, with notabilities, women and youth included, attend these consultations.

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and citizens draw principles and rules to regulate worship and social life from the Shafi school of Sunni Islam. However, as outlined by the US State Department (IRFR 2021), the Constitution also declares the [equality of rights](#) and obligations for all individuals regardless of their religion or belief. Except for Sunni Islam, proselytizing is prohibited and is punishable with imprisonment of 3 months to 1 year and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs. The law also provides for the deportation of foreigners who do so. No official registration process is required for religious groups. In this kind of legal framework, it is difficult to enjoy freedom of religion.

In the past, some observers thought that the government might not be able to cope with the rise of Islamic militancy in the country which has been encouraged partly by the economic influence of some Middle Eastern countries. However, at present, it seems that the government is navigating this area of concern without creating unnecessary tension.

According to the 2022 "Trafficking Risk in Sub-Saharan-African Supply Chains" report (Verite, accessed 19 January 2023):

- "In 2022, President Assoumani launched an [Inter-Comorian National Inclusive Dialogue](#) to gather consensus on political reforms, revisions to the constitution, the Independent Electoral Commission, and general conditions for favorable and sustainable development."

Gender perspective

In 2013, Comoros was described as the "best country for Arab women" according to a Thomson Reuter poll of gender experts ([Thomson Reuters, 12 November 2013](#)). It topped the list for several reasons, which included: i) Ratifying the CEDAW treaty without making any reservations; ii) higher rates of convictions for sexual crimes; and iii) a high female representation in parliament compared to the region. Women are by no means on an equal legal footing to men, however, particularly in respect to marriage. Among other privileges, men have the right to polygamy and to divorce their wife unilaterally ([OECD, 2019](#)). Women can only enter marriage with the permission of their male guardian (*wali*) (Family Code, Art. 21). Whilst the minimum age for marriage is 18, a judge can authorize marriage at a younger age. The rate of child marriage remains high in Comoros; according to [Girls Not Brides \(2021\)](#) 32% of girls and 10% of boys are married by 18 (making Comoros the country with the sixth highest prevalent rate of child marriage among boys globally).

Religious landscape

Comoros: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,600	0.5
Muslim	892,000	98.3
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	8,600	0.9
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	780	0.1
Atheist	110	0.0
Agnostic	1,200	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Comoros is a majority Muslim country, predominantly Sunni. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Shia Muslims, Sufi Muslims, Ahmadi Muslims and Ethno-religionists together make up a very small minority of the population. According to World Christian Database (WCD 2022), only around 0.5% of the population is Christian.

The government itself observes the Islamic religious holidays as national holidays, such as the Birth of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Kabir and the Islamic New Year. Although classes in Islam are not compulsory in state schools, it is combined with Arabic teaching in state education at the middle school level. Due to the poor quality of state education and the fact that private schools are often unaffordable, Islamic madrassas often fill the educational gap. Indeed, almost all children between the ages of four and seven attend Islamic schools where they learn to read and recite the Quran.

The government favors Islam; in civil society, education and governance there is a strong presence of conservative Islam. This is reflected in Comoros' stance towards NGOs where Christian NGOs face a certain amount of discrimination. Despite Comoros' democratization of society, it appears that Islamic developments in the region - for example, the Islamic revivals in Madagascar, Mauritius and the Maldives - will become stronger, taking into consideration that Western countries are far less active on the archipelago than Muslim majority countries.

Converts to Christianity face serious discrimination in society and are forced to send their children to madrassas in order to learn the Quran.

Economic landscape

According to World Bank's 2022 Macro Poverty Outlook for Comoros, and the African Development Bank Group ([Economic Outlook](#), accessed 19 August 2021):

- **Economic growth:** In 2021, growth went up to an estimated 2.4% after contraction by -0.4% in 2020, mostly due to impacts of the pandemic. In 2022, the growth is expected to slightly expand to 2.8%. According to the World Bank's country overview, the Comorian economy is projected to reach 2.8 % in 2022 on the back of an expansionary fiscal policy, which is still a slow recovery that reflects difficulties in the service sector as well as economic consequences of the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine and associated sanctions on oil, foodstuff and fertilizer prices and tourism.
- **Inflation:** Inflation reached 3.3% in 2019 from 1.7% in 2018 due to high spending on affected populations, state owned enterprises (SOEs), infrastructure and building reparations supply constraints. 2020 saw a downward trend of inflation at 0.8% due to government measures to contain the price of selected imports. The inflation rate rose to 1.4% in fiscal year 2021 despite Comoros' intention to continue its monetary policy under its membership of the Franc Zone. The rate is expected to rise to 6.4% in 2022.
- **Government revenues:** Government revenues rose to 19.7% of GDP in 2021 from 18.2% in 2020. Revenues are projected to fall to 17.3% of GDP in 2022.
- **Budget deficit:** Expected to reach -4.9 in 2022 from -2.5 in 2021.
- **Exports/Imports:** In 2020, exports fell significantly as the country experienced a reduction in export earnings (especially tourism-related) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The current account deficit was only slightly negative in 2020, i.e. -0.7% of GDP compared to -3.9% in 2019, despite the decrease in tourism receipts, lower imports, and an increase in remittances. The primary revenue producers in Comoros are agriculture and tourism. Agriculture accounts for nearly 40% of national GDP. There are few large plantations and most agriculture is carried out on a small scale by local farmers. One of the problems Comoros experiences is that the productivity of agricultural land is decreasing due to both population growth and the slow introduction of technological improvements in farming. This is partly attributable to low education levels among most of the adult population and insufficient availability of sophisticated agricultural equipment.
- **Poverty rate (measured at \$3.2 a day per capita threshold, 2011 PPP):** Due to the slowdown of economic growth in 2020, poverty expectedly increased to 36.9% from 36.3%. However, poverty is expected to fall to 35.9% by 2022.
- **Population density:** The Comoros archipelago is overpopulated with a high population density (around 467 persons per square kilometer). Reasons for this are the combination of a high birth rate and geography.
- **COVID-19:** "Despite the relatively contained first wave of COVID-19 in Comoros in 2020, most economic activity was disrupted due to mobility restrictions and the suspension of international travel, resulting in a drop of tourism receipts. Demand for agricultural products and services (leisure and transport) were the most hit. Notwithstanding this, the limited spread of the pandemic, along with strong support from the diaspora and sustained government health and social spending, led to a smaller contraction in growth (-0.5 percent) than previously anticipated. The newer and stronger COVID-19 second wave since January 2021, and the anticipated challenges to vaccine acquisition and distribution, will

likely delay economic recovery. Recovery may likely start only during the second half of 2021, resulting in a nearly absent growth in 2021 (0.2 percent). Furthermore, the decision of the French government to close its borders, would decrease tourism receipts and aggravate the economic impact of the pandemic.”

According to the [2022 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- **Economic freedom:** “Comoros’s economic freedom score is 50.4, making its economy the 143rd freest in the 2022 Index. Comoros is ranked 33rd among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages.”

Gender perspective

Women are on balance more economically vulnerable than men due to a gender gap in relation to education and employment access (UNDP, HDI 2020). In some regions, such as the Island of Grand Comoros, land and property are passed down the maternal line. In other regions ruled by Islamic law women typically receive half the inheritance of men ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP's HDI profile and the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Antalote, Cafre, Makoa, Oimatsaha, Sakalava
- **Main languages:** Arabic (official), French (official), Shikomoro (official; a blend of Swahili and Arabic) (Comorian)
- **Urban population:** 29.9% of the total population (2022)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 2.97% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 11.2 years (11 years according to the CIA Factbook 2022)
- **Literacy:** 58.8% (2022)
- **Population growth rate:** 1.37% (2022 estimate)
- **Median age:** 20.9 years
- **Unemployment, total (% of the labor force):** 4.3%
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 19.5%
- **Human Development Index:** 0.554, ranking 156 out of 189 countries
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 64.3 years (67.2 according to the CIA Factbook 2022)
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.891

According to World Bank (country overview):

- “The Comoros is densely populated, with approximately 465 inhabitants per km², and more than half of the population (53%) is under the age of 20.”
- “High population density places intense pressure on natural resources and the environment. Due to its location and topography Comoros is among the most climate vulnerable countries in the world, and 54.2 percent of the population live in at-risk areas.”
- “Nearly one fourth of the population is extremely poor, unable to buy enough food to meet the minimum nutritional requirements of 2,200 kilocalories per person per day. One-fourth of the country’s poor citizens currently live just below the national poverty line, and could move out of poverty if their consumption level increased by around KMF 167 per capita (or

\$0.37) per day. However, about 10% of the population is at risk of falling below the national poverty line in the event of unexpected economic shocks."

- "While the Comoros compares reasonably well with lower middle-income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the country's Human Capital Index - at 0.41 - lags behind the global average for lower-middle income countries. Children in the Comoros can expect to complete 8.4 years of schooling by age 18. Girls receive significantly less education than boys, and the rate of adolescent pregnancies is two to three-times that of aspirational peer countries. Chronic malnutrition leads to 31 out of 100 children growing up stunted, which aggravates existing inequalities in the country."

The University of Comoros is the only national university serving the Comoros Islands with a main campus located in the capital, Moroni. It opened in 2003.

Gender perspective

Comorians hold to the matriarchal family system with the women tasked with the role of initiating marriage and building the home for the family. The men still hold religious leadership but culturally, women have a strong influence within the family - which is not common in other parts of Africa, and arguably the world.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 25.4% of the total population – survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 25.1% of the total population – survey date: January 2022
[Napoleon Cat \(December 2022\)](#) reports that 59.4% of Facebook users are men, compared to 40.6% women.

According to World Bank (country profile):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 68 per 100 people

Comoros is not a well-developed country. Its roads and other public infrastructure are basic. There are no large-scale modern industries. The country has a 4G Internet connection with 2 service providers - Comoros Telecom (Societe Nationale des Telecommunications) and Huri.

Security situation

Comoros is a country with low crime and there is no imminent threat from Islamic militancy. However, in terms of the safety for Christians, some radical Muslims known as *djaulas* are known to put pressure on converts from Islam and other Christians. These groups and their followers do not tolerate Christian activities in the country. They subtly work to dissuade Christians from practicing their faith

Trends analysis

1) Consolidation of power

It was feared in 2018 that the constitutional referendum could "[herald a new era of instability](#)" (Constitution Net, 13 September 2018). Even though that feared instability has not materialized in the short-term, it has become evident that the president is consolidating his power. This has led to fear in [some corners](#) that "authoritarianism in Comoros is resurging" (CFR, 31 October 2018).¹ The country has seen harassment, arbitrary arrest and intimidation of journalists. Freedom of the press and the right to freedom of expression have been under some restrictions. Even the 2019 elections were not up to the international standard (see: Global Freedom Index 2022).

2) After a turbulent political history, the country has made significant progress in terms of stability and democracy.

The president and his allies held a referendum in 2018 that abolished the presidential term limit and the rotation of the presidency among the three islands. This created a situation where an antigovernment faction emerged and lives were lost. In October 2018, the [government signed an agreement](#) with the opposition in a bid to avert further clashes (News24, 20 October 2018). However, this agreement is no guarantee that the situation is fully resolved. In January 2020, President Assoumani's party won a resounding victory in a [parliamentary election](#) boycotted by the opposition (Al-Jazeera, 21 January 2020). Since then, in February 2022, the Inter-Comorian National Inclusive Dialogue has been launched. It is hoped this will build a national consensus on the remaining political reforms.

3) The country is dependent on foreign aid

In terms of economy, the country is poor and dependent on foreign aid, especially from the Middle East. This is making the country prone to a sort of 'blackmail' in which Middle Eastern countries put pressure on Comoros to introduce policies which they would not normally ask of other countries.

4) Society and culture is conservative

Society is conservative and leaving Islam is very risky. The government also puts serious restrictions on the activities of Christians and Christian NGOs.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: in 2016 - <https://www.africanews.com/2016/05/16/assoumani-officially-declared-president-elect-of-comoros/>
- Recent history: Reuters - <https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKCN1R80JP-OZATP>
- Recent history: January 2020 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/comoros-president-party-wins-poll-boycotted-opposition-200121081053507.html>
- Recent history: The second round - <http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3505/>
- Political and legal landscape: Constitution of Comoros - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Comoros_2009.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: Global Freedom Index 2019 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/comoros/freedom-world/2019>

- Political and legal landscape: equality of rights - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/comoros/>
- Political and legal landscape: Inter-Comorian National Inclusive Dialogue - https://verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Verite-Trafficking-Risk-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa_Comoros-2022.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: Thomson Reuters, 12 November 2013 - <https://news.trust.org/item/20131111123247-fry3c/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KM.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides (2021) - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/comoros/>
- Economic landscape: Economic Outlook - <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/comoros/comoros-economic-outlook>
- Economic landscape: 2022 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/comoros>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KM.pdf>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat (December 2022) - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-comoros/2022/12/>
- Trends analysis: herald a new era of instability - <https://constitutionnet.org/news/why-comoros-constitutional-referendum-could-herald-new-era-instability>
- Trends analysis: some corners - <https://www.cfr.org/blog/authoritarianism-comoros-resurgent>
- Trends analysis: government signed an agreement - <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/comoros-opposition-sign-government-deal-after-clashes-20181019-2>
- Trends analysis: parliamentary election - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/comoros-president-party-wins-poll-boycotted-opposition-200121081053507.html>

WWL 2023: Church information / Comoros

Christian origins

The Portuguese take the credit for introducing Christianity to the island in 1517. However, this had no lasting effect and the Christian faith was reintroduced by the French when the Island of Mayotte became a French colony in 1843. Following independence in 1975, the evangelical missionary organization, Africa Inland Mission, began to expand its missionary work, but when the government started aligning itself with Muslim countries the missionaries were expelled in 1978. Similarly, the work started by other Christian groups, e.g. the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was also terminated by the government.

Church spectrum today

Comoros: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	2,700	58.7
Protestant	1,400	30.4
Independent	320	7.0
Unaffiliated	230	5.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	4,650	101.1
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		

Evangelical movement	460	10.0
Renewalist movement	360	7.8

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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.

The Christian population in Comoros is concentrated in the main cities, especially in the capital, Moroni, and in Mutsamudu, the main city on the island of Anjouan. The majority of Christians are Roman Catholic.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

All Christian communities in Comoros face persecution. The level of persecution that Christians from a Muslim background experience is far severer than the levels other groups face, no matter where they live geographically.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: The Christians in this group (for instance, the church of the Malagasy people from Madagascar) suffer many restrictions: They are not allowed to integrate converts from Islam, they are not allowed to preach in public outside their churches and if they do so, they will be deported. These communities face persecution primarily from radical Muslims and non-Christian religious leaders, and to a lesser extent from the leaders of political parties and their followers. But the fact that the current government is improving the stability of the country and its relationship with Western countries, many think the situation for expatriates could improve significantly.

Historical Christian communities: These do not exist separate from the expatriate category above.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background face persecution at home from family and community members. Converts always experience persecution from government officials, non-Christian religious leaders, from leaders of political parties and their followers and from radical Islamic groups such as the *djaulas*. If their conversion becomes known, converts will be shunned and completely cut off from their families and friends.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Christians in this category are known for evangelizing, which cannot be done in public in Comoros. The Penal Code declares that “whoever discloses, spreads, and teaches Muslims a religion other than Islam will be punished with imprisonment of three months to one year and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs”. Christians from Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations thus face persecution from the government and radical Muslims.

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Comoros

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Comoros: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	42
WWL 2022	63	53
WWL 2021	62	50
WWL 2020	57	54
WWL 2019	56	51

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The rise in overall score in WWL 2023 was due to an increase in the levels of pressure exerted by the government and the community. The government has said in public that there is no freedom of religion for Comorians but only for non-Comorians residing in the country. Any Christian found preaching will be fined and face a prison sentence that could last for one year. Although at a low level, the score for violence also increased from 0.9 to 1.5 points.

(It should be recalled that Comoros was in the WWL Top Ten countries in the early 1990s until 1998, and in the Top 20 for several years after that.)

Persecution engines

Comoros: 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	Weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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 (Very strong)

Islamic oppression in Comoros is not new; however, its recent growth started with the adoption of a legal framework for introducing a state-sanctioned religion. In 2009, a referendum was held enabling the government of Comoros to change the Constitution, which now declares that Islam is the state religion. This constitutional change severely curtails the existence of other religions. Parallel to the new Constitution, it has become visible that residents are adopting a radical view of Islam, especially on the islands of Anjouan and Moheli. The rise of radical Islamic sympathies among the population at large, government officials, religious leaders and Muslim youth groups in particular, causes anxiety among Christians.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

This engine is re-emerging as an independent force in the country having been previously present but blended with *Islamic oppression*. In the period WWL 2021-WWL 2023, this engine has become increasingly visible in the way the government has chosen to consolidate its power by promoting Sunni-Islam at the expense of all other religions. The government has put serious restrictions on the activities of Christians and Christian NGOs.

Drivers of persecution

Comoros: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			WEAK				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Medium			-				Medium	
Ethnic group leaders				Weak					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Strong								

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Non-Christian leaders (strong):** Muslim religious leaders are at the forefront of *Islamic oppression*. In mosques and madrassas, they regularly teach anti-Christian sentiments. An ultra-conservative group of radical scholars locally known as *djaulas* (many of whom are trained in Pakistan) is pushing the country to a more extreme view of Sharia law in the country and are against Christians.
- **Citizens (Strong):** Similar to other Muslim majority countries, for the majority of Comorians, to leave Islam is unthinkable. The *djaulas* in particular harass, bully and ostracize any Christians they come across. This is particularly severe in the case of converts.

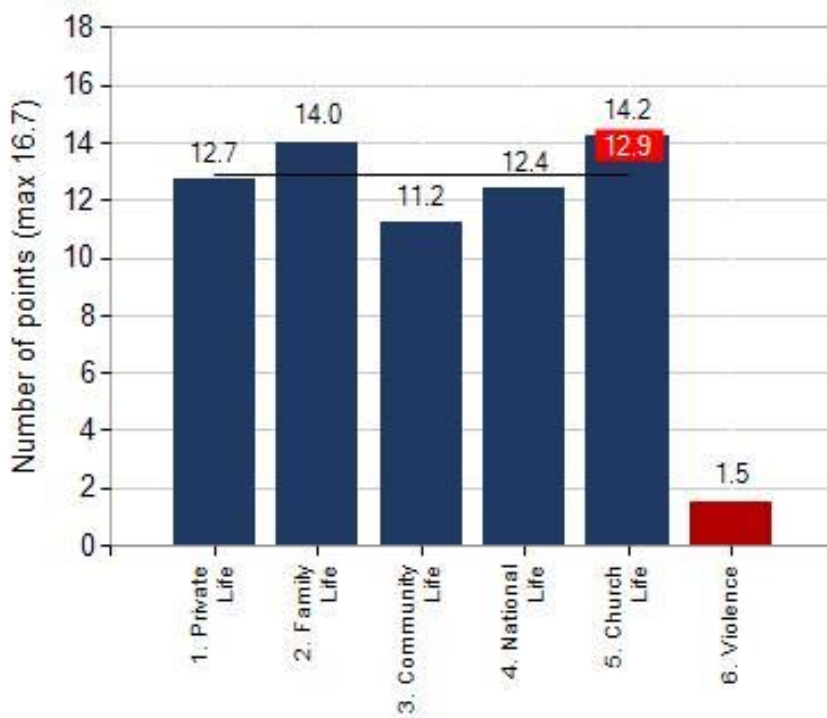
- **Extended family (Strong):** Family and community members discriminate and harass suspected converts from Islam to Christianity. They also deny worshipping space for Christians in general.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The authorities put parents under the obligation to send their children to madrassas. They also prohibit Christians from engaging in religious discussions in public and from preaching in public outside churches.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The government of Comoros has shown its intent by stating publicly that freedom of religion 'does not work' for converts and Christians. As stated above: The authorities also prohibit Christians from engaging in religious discussions in public and from preaching in public outside churches.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Comoros



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Comoros shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Comoros is at a very high level of 12.9 points, a rise from 12.3 points in WWL 2022.
- Pressure is highest in the *Church and Family spheres of life*, both at an extremely high level of 14.2 points and 14.0 points respectively.
- The score for violence is low 1.5, increasing from a WWL 2022 score of 0.9 points.

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 2023 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. (3.75 points)

For those who convert, things will become extremely dangerous. Even converts' contacts (especially Christians) will face serious problems. The government is applying laws that target non-Sunni religious people in the country very strictly. Some of the issues involved are:

- Families who suspect a family member has converted to Christianity will completely cut all contact with that person.
- Proselytizing for any religion except Sunni Islam is illegal, and the law provides for the deportation of foreigners who do so.
- The law prohibits the performance of non-Sunni religious rituals in public places on the basis of “affronting society’s cohesion and endangering national unity”.

In general, although conversion is not officially outlawed, any Comorian nationals who are found to have 'abandoned' their Islamic faith are punished via intense pressure from family and friends. This pressure can include rejection, loss of income and even divorce.

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.). (3.50 points)

Non-Sunni religious expression is prohibited, since it could be considered proselytization. This matter is becoming a serious issue. The government is openly encouraging violence against non-Sunni citizens. Anyone who expresses their Christian faith publicly through any means of communication is liable to face the wrath of community members (or family). Converts in particular can be bullied, attacked or excluded from any family or communal institution. It should be underlined that public preaching is a crime: Any mention or expression of faith can be interpreted as public preaching.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)

This is closely related to the above question (expressing one's faith). This is Comoros, a country where freedom of religion does not exist. The law states that Islam is the only state religion in the country. A country expert reported: "Symbols like the cross would draw more attention from the public as it has been maligned in the mosques as a symbol for Christians/infidels. Converts wearing Christian symbols would be ordered to remove the item or be criticized in public." They will be shunned and can also be violently attacked.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

Proselytization is broadly defined in the country, causing great risk. The law punishes anyone who discloses, spreads and teaches Muslims a religion other than Islam. They will be sentenced to imprisonment of three months to one year and fined 50,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs (\$110-\$1,100). It can also lead to expulsion from one's house and community.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.75 points)

It is always a challenge for parents in Muslim dominated countries to raise their children in accordance with their Christian faith. For converts, this is a major issue that they have to live with. As the government has made known, freedom of religion 'does not work' for Comorian people. The government views all Comorians as Sunni Muslims and hence children of converts are presumed to be Muslims and are registered as such. The parents cannot refuse to send them to the Islamic school which is obligatory for all families.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Celebrating any festivities or occasions in Comoros, except in discreet manner, is a major challenge for non-Sunni religious followers. To make sure that their ceremonies are not construed as 'attempts to preach', Christians keep a very low profile. Celebrating a Christian wedding runs the risk of attracting a mob attack.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

There are numerous occasions where children of Christians have been pressured into attending madrassa schools. The study of Islamic scriptures is mandatory in public schools, even for children of those who are not Muslims. Government officials obligate parents - even Christian parents - to send their children to madrassas.

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.25 points)

For Comorians, there is no right to convert. Thus, all children of converts are considered Muslims. For converts, this is a major issue that they have to live with. Government officials automatically consider all Comorians to be Sunni Muslims; hence children of converts are presumed to be Muslims and are registered as such.

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.). (3.75 points)

This problem is very common and occurs in many parts of the country. All types of Christians face persecution in this regard, however, converts in particular find themselves marginalized, harassed and threatened. They are often seen as outcasts who do not deserve respect and protection.

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.). (3.75 points)

Local communities monitor those they suspect of meeting missionaries or anyone who is suspected of conversion. Open practice of Christianity is prohibited and society keeps a watchful eye on any non-Muslim groups. They also use this opportunity to watch local converts and potential converts.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 points)

This is one of the areas where community leaders and others exert their influence. Communities are conservative and only tolerate Sunni Islam. Christians can only expect to be barred from access to community resources - it is part of normal life for them.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)

Those who have converted face this problem. As a matriarchal society, this is very tough on men who are married and moved to the house of the family of their spouse. It is not uncommon for converts to be forced to recant their faith. This is why they hide their conversion if at all possible.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)

There are many reason why this question scored the maximum of 4.00 points. The laws of the country are clear. Comoros is sliding backwards in terms of freedom of religion. The government publicly encourages citizens to reject all forms of religion except Sunni Islam. Christians are struggling to find places for worship as the government only allows them to gather in two designated places in the entire country. The national political environment is such that freedom of religion is not tolerated. For the scoring of *National life*, the following points were considered:

- The Constitution specifies Islam is the state religion and defines the national identity as being based on a single religion – Sunni Islam.

- The Constitution also specifies that the principles and rules to regulate worship and social life be based on Sunni Islam under the Shafi'i doctrine.
- There continued to be reports that local communities unofficially shunned individuals who were suspected of converting from Islam to Christianity or from Sunni to Shia Islam. A Comorian is considered a Sunni Muslim. There is no acceptance of a Comorian being a Christian.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)

Anything Christians say about their faith can be construed as "an attempt to spread Christianity". That can lead to a fine or even prison sentence. Freedom of expression in the country is very limited. And for Christians, this is even more problematic since they have to navigate the matter both in public discourse as well as at an individual level.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.50 points)

This is one of the most tricky situations in the context of Comoros. First, there is no clear prohibition of conversion, but there are many customs and laws that restrict it. Secondly, the Constitution is clear in stating that "Islam is the state religion and citizens shall draw principles and rules to regulate worship and social life from the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam." The Constitution's preamble "affirms the will of the Comorian people to cultivate a national identity based on a single religion, Sunni Islam" (IRFR 2021). There continue to be reports that local communities shun individuals who are suspected of converting from Islam to Christianity (or from Sunni to Shia Islam). What is important here is that the communities and families get their cue from the national government.

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.00 points)

For converts this is impossible; for foreign Christians, they can only do this in two designated places in the entire country - at the officially recognized expatriate churches in Moroni and Mutsamudu. Displaying church symbols anywhere else would be rejected by the community and Muslim religious leaders.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)

This is often the case in the whole country. In some circumstances this done to identify local converts. Church activities remain under surveillance to ensure that no Comorian national joins them. They are monitored to ensure that Christians do not attempt to make converts of the local population. This has particularly been the case in Moroni and in Mutsamudu. Communities of converts and non-traditional Christian communities do also exist, but they cannot operate officially. Local community members also harass these church communities and monitor them.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)

Registration is extremely hard to obtain in Comoros. The Comorian government does not allow the existing expatriate churches to open new branches (as this would be proof of their numbers growing). No new church has been built or registered in the country for decades. At the same time, converts cannot form a church to be recognized or registered as, under the country's Islamic laws, this would be a punishable offence.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points)

Churches in Comoros have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings as this is seen as proselytization, a crime forbidden by the Penal Code and punishable with a prison term or fine. This provision has not been frequently used because most Christian groups refrain from organizing activities outside the two official church buildings, knowing full well that this could lead to imprisonment.

Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.75 points)

This issue is very common in many Muslim majority countries. The younger generation is closely monitored by the wider society and keenly instructed in the ways of Islam via the madrassas and education system. This makes it particularly hard to spread the Gospel among them. It is also risky for civil society or church groups to make contact with local youth as this can be interpreted as evangelization.

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 5 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. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. 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 WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Comoros: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
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?	0	0
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	2	2
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?	0	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	0
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	18

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?	0	0
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?	0	0
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10	0
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.

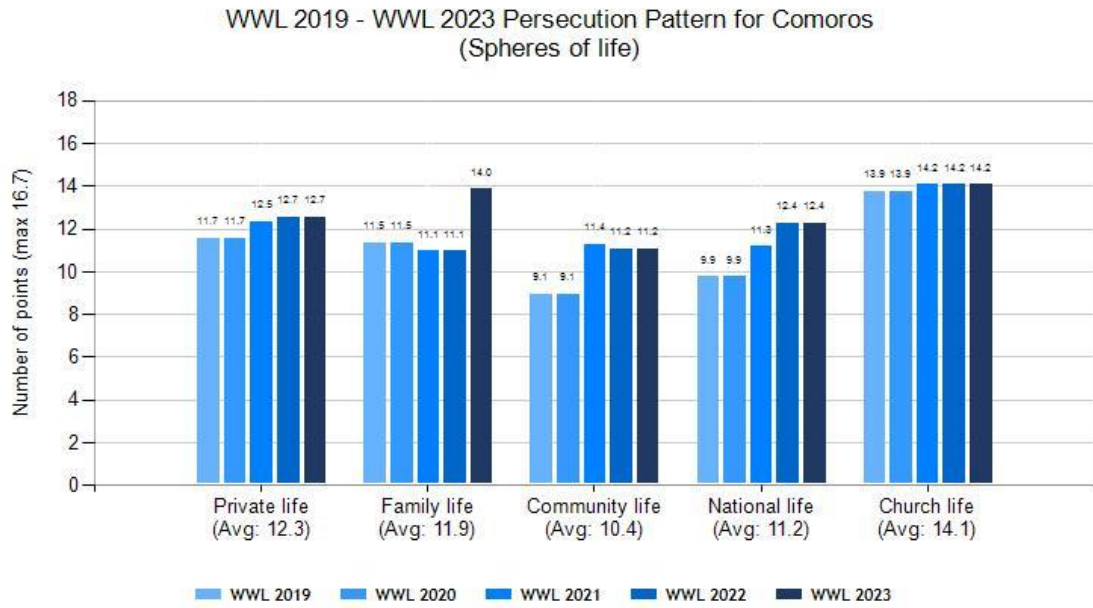
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Comoros: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	12.9
2022	12.3
2021	12.1
2020	11.2
2019	11.2

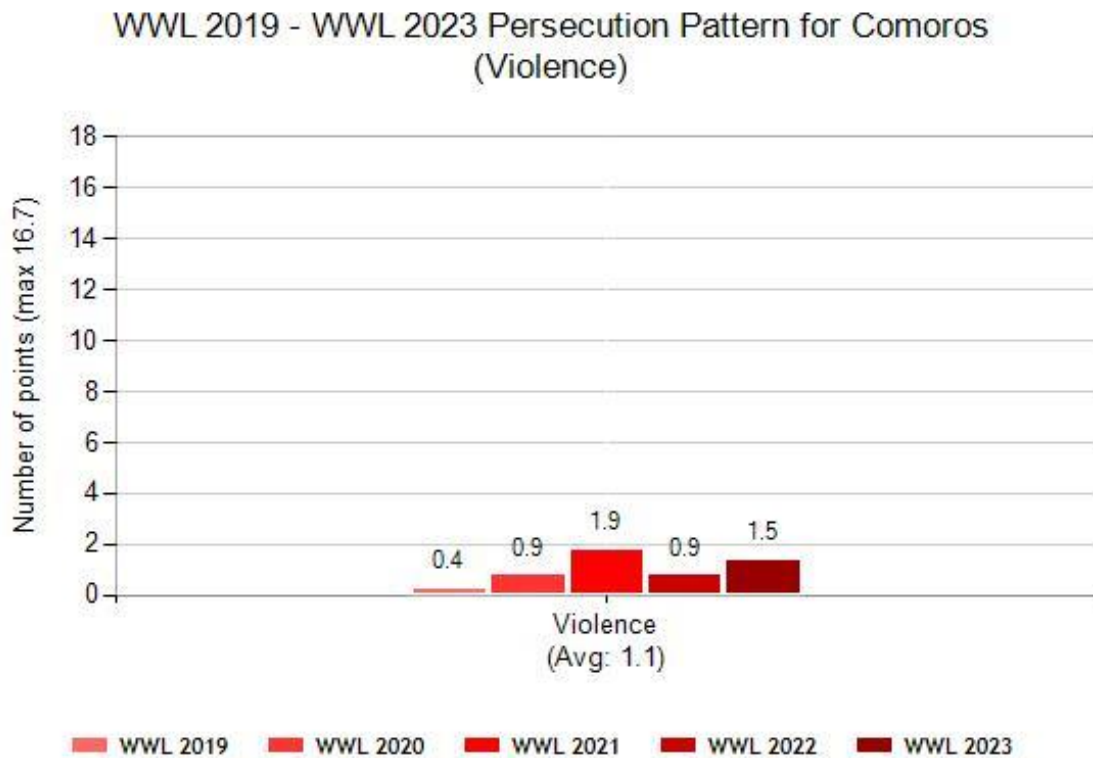
The table above shows that from WWL 2019 - WWL 2022 the average pressure on Christians has been increasing slowly, reaching 12.9 points in WWL 2022. This rise has been due to the government becoming increasingly hostile to non-Sunni religious groups and encouraging society to shun them. This very high level is a warning signal: If higher levels of violence were to occur in the future, the country would have a much higher total score and WWL ranking.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The chart below shows that over the last five WWL reporting periods, pressure in *Church life* has been stable at an extremely high level. Significant increases in pressure can be noted in *National life* and *Private life*, in particular. In *Family life*, there had been a tendency of decreasing pressure until WWL 2023, when pressure shot up to an extreme level.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The violence score has been very low over the WWL reporting periods, except in WWL 2021 and WWL 2023 when the score reached 1.9 and 1.5 points respectively. Again, if the country had had a higher score in this respect, the country would have risen sharply in total WWL score and ranking.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Many Comorian families traditionally have matrilineal inheritance, giving women a good deal of influence in the home that can often serve as a buffer against persecution. Nevertheless, female converts from Islam experience serious difficulties due to their conversion and are kept under close family scrutiny. Women and girls who convert to Christianity before they have received their inheritance, face the danger of being disinherited for their faith, due to the shame that their conversion has brought upon the family. This leaves them at a financial disadvantage, leading to poverty and distress. In addition to being shunned, there is the possibility that they will be forced into marrying a Muslim in order to put pressure on them to return to Islam. There are no reports in the WWL 2023 reporting period that Christians have been subjected to forced marriage, although pressure remains high. Women who refuse to marry face ostracism from their community. Christian women and girls are more vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and abuse, especially at the community level.

Apostasy remains a criminal offence in Comoros although not generally enforced. According to a country expert, sometimes, “the communal aspects of punishment such as isolation, denunciation and verbal or physical abuse at times could even be far worse.” A married woman who converts can be divorced for her faith. In some instances, husbands have been largely accepting of their new-found faith, although they have then come under huge pressure from their family and local community to initiate a divorce. Should a divorce occur however, she will remain responsible for the upbringing of her children and be able to share her Christian faith with them.

Christian women and girls are also vulnerable to trafficking. Comoros is renowned as a [transit hub](#) for traffickers who traffic mostly women and children to the Middle East for sex work and forced labor (USDS, Trafficking in Persons Report: Comoros, 2022).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Forced divorce; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Comoros is a matrilineal society in which the cultural norm is for a married man to move in with his in-laws. Male converts in Comoros are often dependent upon their extended families and lack independence. In this situation, the family has the means to exert a great deal of pressure upon a convert to return to Islam. They are denied equal treatment in the home, verbally abused, and in some cases, occasionally denied food. Often their wife is put under pressure to divorce them and expel them from their home. In rare instances, male converts have faced such extreme pressure and threats that they have fled to another town for safety, although no such cases have been reported in the WWL 2023 reporting period.

Christian men also experience discrimination in the workplace. Employers favor Muslims and as such many Christians are out of work. In addition, because of high corruption levels in public service, most employees pay a bribe to get into positions, a practice that Christians are not willing to condone. The persecution of men and boys affects Christian families and communities greatly. Where Christian men are not able to find work because of being discriminated against, they are not able to provide for their families and become increasingly dependent on women who hold the family wealth.

The government also closely monitors Christian activities and maintains all legal prohibitions against any other religion other than Sunni Islam. This makes Christian preaching, training of Church leaders, and publication of Christian materials extremely difficult. Since the majority of church leaders in Comoros are men, these violations predominantly affect male Christians. According to a country expert, pastors and priests are particularly vulnerable to arrests if what they preach is interpreted as “against social cohesion.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- In 2021, "Shia and Ahmadi Muslims stated that they were not able to worship publicly and that government authorities sometimes attended religious gatherings held in private homes to observe their practices but did not interfere."

Future outlook

Islamic oppression

In the past twenty years, Christians have been under threat from hardliners who openly demand that Comoros is for Sunni Muslims only, with no room for others. Sunni Islam was made state religion under the 2009 Constitution which was ratified by referendum. That also closed any meaningful space for Shia Muslims. It is likely that the influence of radical Islam will continue to increase (or at least maintain its current level), which will mean that pressure on Christians will continue to be high. The positive side is that the country is increasingly improving its stability and general freedom; it reached 'partly free' status as per Freedom House. This would, in the long run, improve the lives of Christians in the country. Yet, if the government keeps pressuring non-Sunni religious groups (including Christians) not to practice their faith in public, this action could embolden the ultra-conservative elements in society which would make Christian life in the country even more difficult.

Dictatorial paranoia

In 2018, a constitutional referendum was held to [extend presidential](#) term limits (Reuters, 30 July 2018). This extension was rejected by both the opposition and civil society who decided to form a [common front](#) (Africa News, 10 October 2020): "In an unprecedented union in the Comoros Islands, the opposition and all civil society movements in both the archipelago and abroad amongst the diaspora have come together to form the new 'common front of the living forces against the dictatorship' to denounce a perceived constitutional coup d'état on the part of President Azali Assoumani." In 2019 President Azali Assoumani won the presidential election. In 2020, in legislative elections, the party of the president (Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros) won with an overwhelming majority. This shows that the president and his party are in full control of the country. There is no sign that freedom of religion can flourish in the current political situation. Noting the fact that "...many Christians keep their faith private to avoid harassment. Proselytizing and public religious ceremonies are prohibited for all religions except Sunni Islam," Freedom House rated the country "partly free" in its Global Freedom Index 2022.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: transit hub - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/comoros/>
- Future outlook: extend presidential - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-comoros-referendum/comoros-holds-referendum-to-extend-presidential-term-limits-idUSKBN1KK11F>
- Future outlook: common front - <https://www.africanews.com/2020/10/10/comoros-opposition-front-united-against-president-assoumani/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

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