

WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

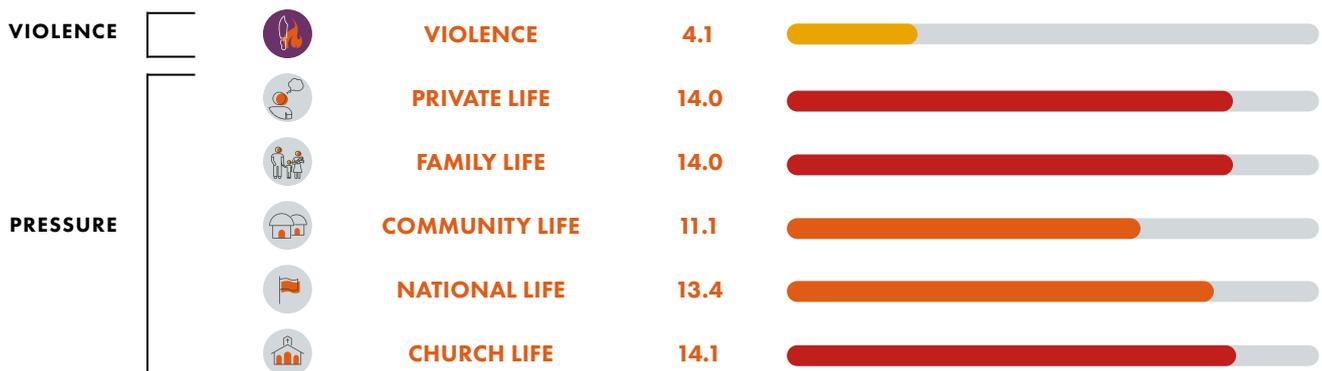
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
22

Algeria



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).¹ Red = extreme level, orange = very high, yellow = high

Key findings

The major sources of religious freedom violations are society, radical Islamic teachers and state officials who adhere to the views of such teachers. Algerian Christians, most of whom are converts from Islam, face violations especially from family members and the wider community, including local ethnic leaders and elders. State officials at various levels exert pressure to restrict Christians' freedom and encourage them to renounce their faith. There are laws that regulate non-Muslim worship, including a legal prohibition on anything that would 'shake the faith of a Muslim' or be used as a 'means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim to another religion'. Christians also suffer discrimination and harassment as family members and neighbors try to force converts to adhere to Islamic norms. The pressure and danger faced by Christians is particularly high in the rural and religiously more conservative parts of the country. Christians are prosecuted and imprisoned on blasphemy and proselytizing charges. Many churches remain sealed.

¹World Watch Research measures pressure across all spheres of life as well as violence (full methodology [here](#) – password: freedom).

Quick facts

LEADER

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune

POPULATION

43,969,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

134,000 (0.3%)²

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



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Context

Main Religions	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	134,000	0.3
Muslims	43,183,000	98.2
Agnostics	620,000	1.4
Others	13,400	0.0

OTHERS include Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian. Source³

Algeria is a constitutional semi-presidential republic in which the President is the head of state and the Prime Minister the head of government. However, Algeria is de facto being led by its powerful army and a select group of powerful businessmen and politicians, known as 'Le Pouvoir' (the Power). For this reason, Algeria is rated as an 'authoritarian' and 'not free' country. A referendum on a newly drafted Constitution was held on 1 November 2020. However, a record low turnout (23.8%) demonstrates that Algerians were not optimistic about real political change.

Ordinance 06-03, passed in March 2006, severely limits non-Muslim worship. The government has not registered any new churches since its enforcement, so Christians continue to meet in private homes or business properties. This is forbidden, with punishment of up to three years of prison and a fine of 300,000 DA (3,000 Euros). From November 2017 onwards, the ordinance has been used to [close at least 16](#)

[churches](#) affiliated with the Algerian Protestant Church Association (EPA), the umbrella organization for Protestant churches in Algeria. Government control of both social media and other methods of communication is strict. Christians sharing their faith online can face pressure. Several Christians are currently in prison under blasphemy and proselytizing charges.

Algerian Christians experience discrimination because of their faith while looking for employment in both the private and public sphere. As a result of Algeria's patriarchal Islamic norms, both men and women face significant pressure if their Christian faith is discovered. Men are driven out of their homes while women are at the receiving end of domestic violence.

An estimated 98.2% of Algerians are Muslim, almost all of them Sunni. Most Christians are converts from Islam. The EPA was officially recognized by the government in 1974. Its member churches are required to obtain their own registration. None of them has succeeded in doing this. In 2013, the EPA had to re-apply for its recognition after a new non-governmental organization (NGO) law was introduced. However, the government has still not responded to this application, leaving the EPA in legal limbo. The Constitution bans non-Muslims from holding high-level government positions.

Because Algeria's Constitution and government forbid activities 'that are contrary to the country's values or public morals', non-Muslim and non-religious groups must keep a low profile in order to avoid persecution, discrimination and intolerance.

²Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

³Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

How the situation varies by region

Most Christians live in the Kabyle region in the north of Algeria. The Kabyle people are a Berber ethnic group and speak their own Berber language, in contrast to other Algerians with an Arab background. The Kabyles were [discriminated](#) against and neglected by the Algerian government for many years, which created an environment for the Christian community to develop, although pressure from both government and society remains strong. In the Arab part of the country, especially the south, circumstances are difficult for Christians and the number of churches is very low. Violent Islamic militants do not have a wide support base among the people, but Islam holds a firm grip over the country, also due to the growth of the Salafist movement.

Who is affected?

[Communities of expatriate Christians](#)

This group includes sub-Saharan migrant Christians and some western expatriate Christians. The sub-Saharan African Christian students face discrimination at universities and in day-to-day life in the cities.

[Historical Christian communities](#)

The Roman Catholic Church faces restrictions outside places of worship but churches are allowed to exist, where registered. Catholic churches (including the cathedral in Algiers, the seat of the Archbishop) can conduct services without government interference.

[Converts to Christianity](#)

The vast majority of Christians in Algeria are converts from a Muslim background and they face discrimination and on-going pressure from the state and family members. Since the law prohibits public assembly for the purpose of practicing a faith other than Islam, except for registered churches, these converts usually congregate in private homes for religious services.

[Non-traditional Christian communities](#)

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

[Islamic oppression:](#)

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

[Dictatorial paranoia:](#)

This is evident in the autocratic nature of Algeria's government, which imposes restrictions on Christians. With a further number of church closures and the use of physical violence against Christian demonstrators, it seems that the government has increased its pressure on the church. The motives for this new wave of violence are unknown, but some of the government's measures could be seen as attempts to appease the Islamist segment of society. Furthermore, the anti-colonial and revolutionary roots of the ruling party which has been in power since independence, provides it with an ideological perspective that makes it suspicious of Christian missionary activities. This is especially the case when activities are allied to churches and Christian groups in the West.

[Clan oppression:](#)

Most Algerian Christians are found in the Kabyle region which is located in the northern part of the country. Since independence, there has been political tension between this region and the central government in Algeria. Issues of ethnic identity, culture and language figure prominently in the difficult relationship

between the government and residents of the Kabyle region, most of whom are ethnic Berbers while the dominant ethnic identity in the country is Arab. The ethnic tension and antagonism also spill into religious life and contribute to freedom of religion violations against Christians in the Kabyle region.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Algerian women in general are disadvantaged in law and society, compounding pressures that Christian women experience for their faith. They face job loss, harassment at work or school, sexual assault and death threats (particularly if unveiled). Female converts face severe violations from family, including beatings, threats, house arrest and forced marriage or divorce. Access to meaningful community, Christian radio or television is restricted. In the west and south of the country, pressures are more severe. There, converts risk being killed to restore the perceived family honor. As such, many hide their faith.

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied custody of children
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family/house arrest
- Violence - death
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological
- Violence - verbal

MEN

Men regularly experience economic pressures, caused by workplace harassment and job loss, which can have a crippling effect on families. Occasionally they may also be detained. Families also represent a source of pressure, particularly for male converts who risk being physically beaten, verbally insulted and threatened. Men are more likely to be forced out of their home and ostracized. On discovery of their faith, they may also be beaten and taken to the local mosque by force. As such, many men live as secret believers or choose to emigrate.

- Denied access to social community/networks

- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Forced out of home - expulsion
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological
- Violence - verbal

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution score out of 100
2022	22	70.53
2021	24	69.61
2020	17	73.48
2019	22	69.55
2018	42	57.64

The score for Algeria increased by one point in WWL 2022, compared to WWL 2021. Growing government restrictions and increasing pressure on the church has resulted in a higher score. More churches were closed and several Christians were sentenced and imprisoned on charges of blasphemy and proselytizing. Pressure remained at a very high level in all spheres of life.



Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **In December 2020 and January 2021**, three Christians from Muslim backgrounds were convicted under blasphemy laws, sentenced to imprisonment and fined.
- **In June 2021**, an administrative court of Oran issued an implementation order to close three churches, which had remained open despite an earlier court order to close them. The three churches have not yet been sealed, but the order leaves the members of those churches in great uncertainty.
- **In September 2021**, a pastor and his assistant lost their appeal against a one-year suspended prison sentence and a heavy fine. In 2017 the police raided their Christian bookshop and confiscated Christian materials which allegedly ‘agitated the faith of Muslims’. They were charged and convicted of ‘proselytizing’.

WWL Year	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians imprisoned or punished by the government	Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted	Christians physically or mentally abused
2022	4	4	10	11
2021	4	0	10	50

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - see [here](#) for full results. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given which in reality could be significantly higher.

Private life

Christians who openly share their faith on social media have been prosecuted on charges of blasphemy, or have been attacked by radical Muslims. Christians are careful not to display symbols such as crosses, as hostility towards Christians is common. Algeria’s anti-proselytism and blasphemy laws affect the freedom of Christians to privately share their beliefs, even with immediate family members. Under Ordinance 06-03, proselytizing is a criminal act that carries a prison sentence of between one and three years.

Family life

Religious education, based on Islamic principles, is mandatory in all public primary and secondary schools. In many cases, the Muslim husband or wife of a convert will want a divorce or will be forced into it by family members. Children will be kept away from the convert. Adoption is only permitted for Muslims. If a child’s father is a Muslim, the government considers the child Muslim. Converts are still considered as Muslims by the government, and thus their children too.

Community life

Monitoring of individuals, especially Christians, occurs regularly. Those in leadership positions are likely to have their phones tapped and e-mails read. Christians have to be discreet when gathering outside of church buildings. This pressure is less intense in the Kabyle

region, although Christianity faces opposition in all parts of the country. Christian school children living in more conservative Islamic areas must hide their faith or face discrimination by teachers and in access to university. This is especially true for children of known converts. Similarly, converts will hide their faith or face discrimination when applying for a job. Christians, whether converts or not, do not have access to senior positions in government.



National life

Islam is the state religion according to Algeria's Constitution and government institutions have to act in accordance with Islamic values. Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities, especially if the Christian is a convert or an immigrant from sub-Saharan Africa. Reportedly, this attitude has improved slightly in some places in the Kabyle region, where, for example, some children (of converts) have been registered with a Christian name. Converts from Islam to Christianity can suffer violations from their family members, who carry them out with impunity since the government regards domestic abuse as a family issue.

Church life

Christian gatherings continue to be closed despite the changes in government leadership. Churches are not allowed to organize activities among Muslim youth and minors are not allowed to attend a church alone; an adult always has to be present. Printing Christian materials is forbidden under Ordinance 06-03. It is difficult for foreign Christians to obtain a visa and visit Algerian churches due to constant monitoring.



International obligations & rights violated

Algeria 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 against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

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

- Christian leaders are monitored and their activities actively watched (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Churches are arbitrarily closed by the Government (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 20)
- Christian women and girls are raped and sexually abused because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christians cannot discuss their faith with non-Christians or proselytize (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christians cannot adopt children or serve as foster parents (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians are falsely accused and charged of blasphemy (ICCPR Art. 19)

Situation of other religious minorities

Algerian Jews, Ahmadiyya and Shia Muslims face varying levels of pressure and violence. The Ahmadiyya face more severe violations, including criminal charges for ‘denigrating the dogma or precepts of Islam’. They face hostility from public officials and are denied their right to form [associations](#). In addition, atheists and those who openly question Sunni Islamic doctrine are likely to face hostilities in Algeria.



Open Doors in Algeria

Open Doors raises prayer support for believers in Algeria.

About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the full Country Dossier produced annually by 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: © 2021 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The full Country Dossier for this country can be accessed [here](#) (password: freedom). The latest update of WWL methodology, as well as the complete WWL 2022 ranking and reports, can be found [here](#) (password: freedom).

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
