

WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

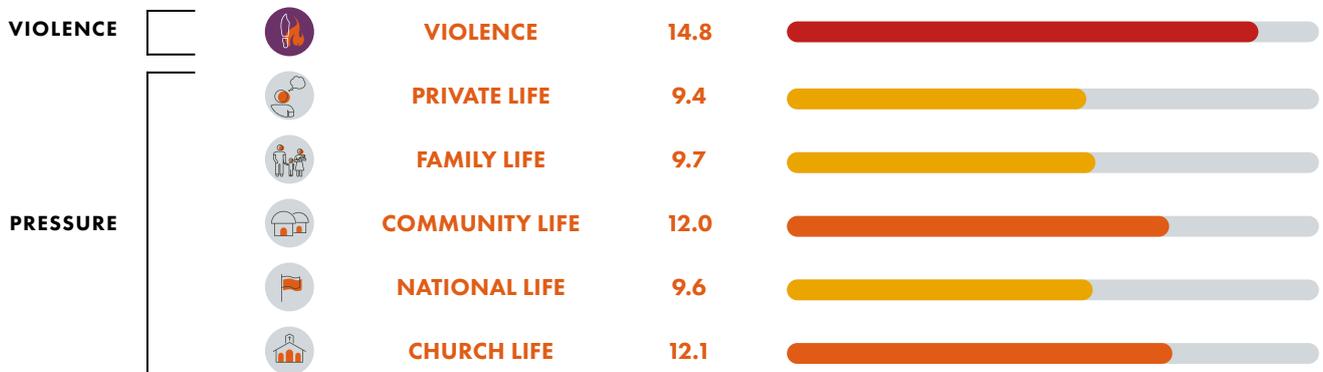
WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
32

Burkina Faso



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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

Christians are being targeted and killed by jihadists, and churches destroyed. Christians from Muslim backgrounds experience the most violations from family and community, who reject them and try to force them to renounce their Christian faith. Christians are afraid to express their faith in public because of such threats. Hundreds of churches have been closed due to jihadist activities.

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

Quick facts

LEADER

President Roch Marc Kabore

POPULATION

21,497,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

5,093,000 (23.7%)²

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



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Context

Main Religions	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	5,093,000	23.7
Muslims	12,037,000	56.0
Ethno-religionists	4,242,000	19.7
Agnostics	120,000	0.6

Source³

Burkina Faso is transitioning to democracy after years of political turmoil and military dictatorship. In 2014, an uprising forced President Blaise Compaoré out of power after 27 years of rule. A military coup followed in 2015, but leaders agreed to transfer power to a civilian government through elections. Political freedom and the situation of human rights has greatly improved since then. Burkina Faso remains one of the least developed countries in the world. Nearly 80% of people practise subsistence farming for their survival.

Christians have made a huge contribution in stabilizing and leading the country to independence, but they have also been targeted by jihadists which are growing in influence in the Greater Sahel region. Militant Islamic groups operating in the country include Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitoun, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram.

How the situation varies by region

The northern and eastern parts of the country are the main areas Christians experience pressure and violence, particularly outside the main cities. In the western part of the country, ethno-religious groups also put pressure on Christians. The government is losing control over territories beyond major cities, making it easier for jihadists to effectively control rural areas in many parts of the country.

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

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Who is affected?

Communities of expatriate Christians

This category does not exist.

Historical Christian communities

The Roman Catholic Church is the most dominant Christian denomination in the country. Most of the country's political leaders have been Catholics. Catholics face fewer violations compared to other Christian groups due to their large numbers.

Converts to Christianity

Converts to Christianity are from a Muslim or traditional African religious background. There are also inter-denominational Christian converts. Converts from a Muslim background experience the highest levels of pressure from their families and communities.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are found mostly in major cities and are targeted by Islamic radical groups more often than historical Christian groups. Islamic oppression is boosting clan oppression as radical Islamic attacks erode social cohesion.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Islamic oppression:

Burkina Faso has experienced several Islamist attacks in recent years, especially in the north and occasionally in the capital. Ansar ul Islam, formed in 2016, has tried to impose its laws in the north through violent and non-violent means, and Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslim has ties with local militant groups. Its preachers encourage young people to blame their misfortune on the French and the corruption of morals through the West.

Organized corruption and crime:

In many countries in the Sahel region, organized corruption in governance is enabling the jihadists to recruit, buy weapons, and operate with impunity. Crimes committed include kidnapping and theft, and are conducted by a variety of groups in various parts of the country. Foreign aid workers are especially targeted.

Clan oppression:

This source is often mixed with Islamic oppression as ethnic-based violence involves both faith and ethnicity. There have been instances where Muslim ethnic groups have attacked Christian ethnic groups.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Islamist groups are influential in the regions, particularly the east, and central government is weak. In this context, there is high potential for abduction by militants. Females may be forced into marriage, used as labor, and put under intense pressure to convert to Islam. Sexual violence is a common tool for attacking Christian communities. In particular, daughters of Christian leaders are targeted for rape and seduction. Converts from an Islamic or traditional religious background face further pressure, including forced marriage, denied education, family expulsion, death threats and house arrest.

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home - expulsion
- Targeted seduction
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological
- Violence - sexual

MEN

Islamic militant groups operating in the Sahel region often forcefully recruit their members from countries such as Burkina Faso. Christian men and boys are targeted for forceful recruitment and physical attacks. The abduction and killing of Christian men causes fear and trauma in Christian communities, as well as economic fragility as they are normally the family

providers. Many men and boys often flee affected areas for safer areas in the country, neighboring countries or even countries abroad. Converts from a Muslim background face further challenges; conversion is considered a betrayal by some families, resulting in rejection and denial of inheritance.

- Abduction
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Forced to flee town/country
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution score out of 100
2022	32	67.65
2021	32	66.64
2020	28	66.09
2019	61	47.60
2018	0	0.00

The two-point increase is due to the fact that pressure on Christians is increasing in the whole country. The jihadists are expanding. Many churches and Christian organizations providing social services, including schools, are being closed. Church and community spheres are extremely under pressure.



Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **In May 2021**, armed men, suspected to be jihadist militants, attacked a baptism ceremony in Oudalan province, killing 15 people.
- **In January 2021**, a Roman Catholic priest was found dead just days after being abducted by Islamic militants in Toumousseni (20 kms from Banfora).

WWL Year	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted	Christians internally displaced
2022	100	100	100	100
2021	38	10	10	1000

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, particularly converts from Islam, face hostile reactions if they discuss their faith with others. In some remote areas, Christians must ensure they do not have Christian materials at home because militants can show up at their doors and search. Conversion, though not forbidden by law, is opposed by Muslims in certain areas and can lead to a convert being treated as an outcast.

Family life

In some schools where leaders or founders are predominantly Muslim, Christian students face pressure to receive Islamic teaching. This has been reported in cities like Bobo Dioulasso and others, and even in the capital Ouagadougou. It has been reported that Islamic militants killed teachers who did not teach Islam. Converts lose their inheritance rights. All Christian groups must make sure they do not celebrate Christian weddings or festivals in areas prone to attacks by jihadists.

Community life

Christians are targeted especially in the northern region which shares a border with Mali. Soum Province seems to be the epicenter of Islamic militant activity. Here, Christians have been kidnapped and security forces attacked. The Ansar al-Islam movement has launched attacks and intimidated school teachers into replacing French with Arabic as the language of instruction in schools. Schools not offering classes on Islam have been burned down. Many Christians have fled their homes. Forced marriages have also been used as a weapon to force female converts to return to Islam. Where Christians are a minority, they are often hindered from accessing community resources.

National life

Churches experience difficulties in obtaining permits from the administrative authorities for things like purchasing land. The spread of anti-Christian sentiment has helped create a mindset which regards Christians as enemies. In northern, eastern and western parts of the country where Islam is strongly represented and radical ideology has a foothold, Christians are increasingly regarded as the enemy.

Church life

Despite the fact the country is officially secular and Christians make up over 20% of the population, many churches live in fear of attack and are closely monitored by militant groups and community leaders in the northern, eastern and western parts of the country. In many predominantly Muslim communities, church work among the youth is very restricted. The sale or distribution of Bibles and Christian materials is not impeded by the state, but these activities cannot be carried out by converts from traditional African religions or Islam without risking serious trouble.



International obligations & rights violated

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

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
2. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
3. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
4. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

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

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian converts from a Muslim background are ostracized, faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with loss of inheritance (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by militant groups (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16)
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)

Situation of other religious minorities

Islamic radicalization is growing and certain mosques and madrassas are teaching radical versions of Sunni Islam, causing even Sufi Muslims to be under threat. This is also making life difficult for more moderate Muslims; in October 2019 there was a militant attack on a [mosque](#) in the village of Salmossi, in the northern province of Oudalan.



Open Doors in Burkina Faso

Open Doors started working in Burkina Faso in 2019, as jihadist violence increased radically. Our vision is to see the church increasingly able to respond biblically to persecution by spiritually empowering Christians, and caring for the most affected.



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.
