

WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

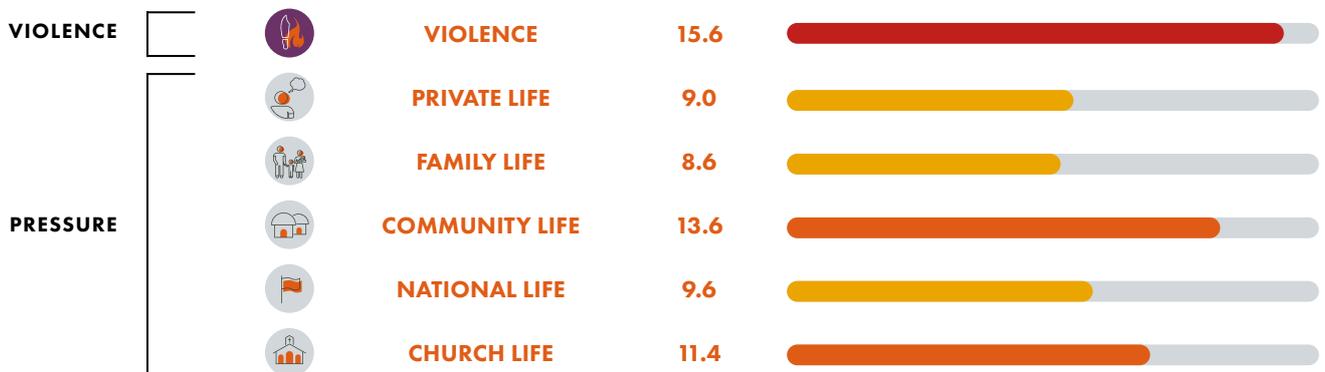
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
31

Central African Republic



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 Central African Republic (CAR) has been embroiled in conflict since 2013 and most of the country is occupied by armed militia groups, responsible for a range of human rights abuses. Christian leaders who have publicly denounced the violence have been threatened and church buildings have been burned and ransacked. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of Christians who have been forced to live in camps and lose their homes and livelihood. Converts to Christianity also face violations from their immediate family members. The local community will often ostracize Christian converts and might also try to force them to renounce Christianity through violence.

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

Quick facts

LEADER

President Faustin Archange Touadera

POPULATION

5,023,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

3,780,000 (75.3%)²

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



Context

| Main Religions | Number of adherents | Percentage |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Christians | 3,780,000 | 75.3 |
| Muslims | 664,000 | 13.2 |
| Ethno-religionists | 527,000 | 10.5 |
| Agnostics | 37,900 | 0.8 |

Source³

Since its independence in 1960, the CAR has been mired in violence driven by overlapping tensions between armed groups, religious and ethnic groups, and herders and farmers. The mainly Muslim group, Séléka, staged a coup in 2013 that gave rise to deadly conflict along religious and ethnic lines. Since President Touadera was elected in 2016, he has made reconciliation his priority and a Political Peace Agreement was signed in 2019. However, there are still some clashes involving the mainly Muslim Séléka and the self-defense groups, called anti-Balaka. Although the anti-Balaka are frequently referred to as Christians, they are mostly Animists in faith and churches have strongly disassociated themselves.

The [2016 Constitution](#) provides for freedom of religion

and this is generally respected in practice. Relations between Muslims and Christians have appeared good at surface level, but there are some tensions. In particular, converts from Islam to Christianity face violations and Christians living in Muslim dominated areas have reported discrimination and attacks on churches by ex-Séléka groups. Anti-Balaka rebel groups also attack churches and any Christians who oppose their activities. At the end of 2020 the environment became even more complex when several groups united in the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) under former ruler Françoise Bozise. These CPC tried to disrupt elections after the constitutional court ruled that the latter was not allowed to contest in those elections. The CPS and the original groups continue to hold societies captive through violence and extortion.

How the situation varies by region

Rights violations against Christians are most severe in the northern and eastern parts of the country, which is dominated by the Muslim population and where Séléka splinter-groups are operating. There are also difficulties for Christians in the eastern part of the country, bordering Sudan.

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 is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics and schools. During and after the Séléka coup, many of their churches were looted. The Catholic Church has been a strong voice calling for peace and reconciliation and has also provided places of refuge for civilians, both Muslim and Christian, fleeing attack. As a result, Catholic churches have often been targeted for attack.

Converts to Christianity

Converts with a Muslim background experience opposition and pressure from family members to renounce Christianity if their conversion becomes known. Most do not worship in public due to the fear of attacks by Muslim agitators, especially in the northern Muslim-dominated areas of the country.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Evangelical and Pentecostal communities have been subject to attacks by ex-Séléka militants. Recently, the number of people joining these Christian congregations has increased dramatically.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Islamic oppression:

Violence against Christians is perpetrated particularly by offshoots of the Séléka militia e.g., the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central African Republic (FPRC) and the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC). Islamic oppression is also evident in the violations experienced by Christians in predominantly Muslim parts of the country. Islamic leaders impose a huge tax on Christian businessmen and often loot the shops of Christians to reduce them to poverty. Families and communities of converts to Christianity from Islam will often violate their rights in the northern part of the country and areas that border Sudan.

Dictatorial paranoia:

This is particularly evident where anti-Balaka militants attack churches and Christians, especially those who oppose their violent activities. While the group claims to protect Christians, it has become evident over the years that this is untrue since they attack Muslims and Christians alike. This state of lawlessness means the community has little protection from the criminal acts of these groups.

Clan oppression:

Clan oppression comes from animist/ATR and tribal groups. In CAR, ethnic and religious motives often go together. Some ethnic minority groups are specifically targeted, for instance, Ba'aka pygmies are forcibly recruited for labor. Anti-Balaka groups sometimes force Christians into their ranks.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Years of violence and political instability have left Christian women and girls particularly vulnerable to rape, displacement, abduction, and forced marriage as forms of religious persecution. Sexual abuse results in shame, trauma, and often pregnancy, with high rates of sexual violence discouraging parents in high-risk areas from sending their girls to school. Dependence on family means that family-driven persecution affects women more, with financial need also a significant factor. In Muslim-dominated areas, women are pressured to follow an Islamic dress code, and converts face house arrest and forced marriage to an older Muslim.

- Abduction
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Economic harassment via fines
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home - expulsion
- Targeted seduction
- Trafficking
- Violence - sexual
- Violence - verbal

MEN

Men are killed for their faith or detained by radical militias. Pastors are especially targeted, falsely accused and even attacked during church services. Men are also discriminated against in jobs, as Islamic leaders occupy all marketplaces, control trade, impose large taxes on Christian businessmen, and even loot Christian's shops to keep them in poverty. Christians

are forcibly recruited into rebel militant groups, discriminated against in national military service, and targeted for torture and assault. Abduction, killing, threats and the tactical impoverishment of men greatly affects Christian families.

- Abduction
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Violence - death
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological

WWL 5 year trend

| WWL Year | Position on Open Doors World Watch List | Persecution score out of 100 |
|----------|---|------------------------------|
| 2022 | 31 | 67.67 |
| 2021 | 35 | 65.69 |
| 2020 | 25 | 67.92 |
| 2019 | 21 | 69.71 |
| 2018 | 35 | 60.93 |

The increase of two points in WWL 2022 is a result of the deepening conflict in the country which affects Christians in all aspects of their lives. Many jihadist groups have joined and form alliances with other armed groups. Some groups have foreign fighters who are fighting to establish a Sharia state while other jihadists are purely in for the greed of power. The score for violence remained at an extreme level (15.6 points) impacting pressure in all spheres of life.



Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **In January 2021**, it was reported that [churches have been used as places of refuge](#) for people who are fleeing attacks. This in turn makes the church a target.
- **In June 2021**, an armed group attacked a convoy made up of Christian missionaries returning from another church convention near Alindao-Bambari axis. The attackers set fire to all seven of their vehicles.

| WWL Year | Christians killed | Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted | Christians forced to marry | Christians internally displaced |
|----------|-------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2022 | 29 | 10 | 10 | 100 |
| 2021 | 35 | 100 | 100 | 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

Converts to Christianity from Islam experience severe violations from family members if their conversion becomes known. Financial help can be cut off. In the Muslim-dominated north, where Séléka splinter groups operate, converts risk their lives if they own Christian materials. When ex-Séléka fighters come into a house and find someone reading a Bible, they have been known to kill them immediately.

Family life

Often, after a spouse has converted to Christianity, extended families and the local community will put pressure on the non-convert to divorce. In addition, converts almost automatically lose family inheritance rights. In areas controlled by rebel groups, where children's parents have been killed or have been forced to flee, any children left behind remain at the mercy of the attackers. Some have been brutally killed.

Community life

The government has lost effective control over many areas. In Muslim-dominated areas, Christians are often discriminated against, especially where Sharia law is more or less officially implemented. Monitoring by some rebel groups and their supporters has been common. In some instances, there are some vigilante groups that monitor for jihadists. In the context of the ongoing conflict, Christians (especially young girls) suffer from attack and abduction. Muslim community members usually do not want to share community resources (such as healthcare) with converts to Christianity, especially in the remote northern part of the country.

National life

In areas controlled by ex-Séléka militants, all transportation facilities are under Muslim control thus making movement for Christians difficult. When violence flares up, pastors are particularly vulnerable when travelling between churches to carry out their work. In regions where rebel groups wield power, Christians are discriminated against and sometimes attacked, forcing them to flee home and country.

Church life

Although there is no official surveillance from the government, civilians are watched by various rebel groups to discover their possible links to other groups. Many attacks have been reported, with church services being interrupted and churches burned.



International obligations & rights violated

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

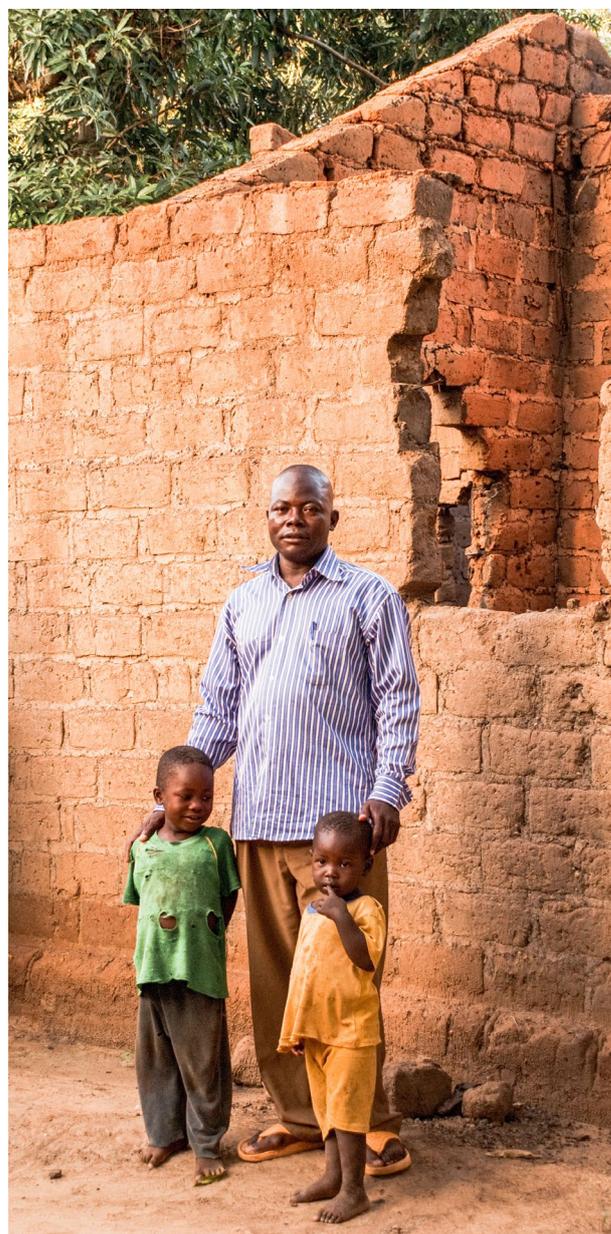
1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination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

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

- Christian converts in Muslim-majority areas experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are physically attacked for sharing their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are killed because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 6.1)
- Christian women and girls are raped and sexually abused because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Situation of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department's IRF 2020 report](#), Muslim civilians in southern parts of the country (where they are a minority) have at times been targeted and attacked by the predominantly animist anti-Balaka groups. [The International Criminal Court](#) currently has two war criminals on trial, both leaders of anti-Balaka forces. In the context of the ongoing conflict, religious minorities are not the main targets. However, adherents of small religious minorities do face challenges in the communities where they live. However, adherents of small religious minorities do face challenges in the communities where they live.



Open Doors in Central African Republic

Open Doors, through local partners and churches, has been involved in CAR for a number of years. From 2013, our programs provided support to the church in crisis following the coup by the Islam-dominated Séléka forces. Our vision for CAR is a church that is mature, autonomous and able to deal with trauma and persecution. Our programs include:

- Persecution preparedness
- Economic Empowerment
- Trauma care



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.
