

World
Watch
Research

Bangladesh: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2021

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Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2022	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic.....	5
External Links - Introduction	5
WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Bangladesh.....	5
Brief country details	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Specific examples of positive developments	7
External Links - Situation in brief	7
WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Bangladesh	8
Links for general background information	8
Recent history	8
Political and legal landscape	9
Religious landscape	11
Economic landscape.....	12
Social and cultural landscape.....	13
Technological landscape	16
Security situation	17
Trends analysis	19
External Links - Keys to understanding	20
WWL 2022: Church information / Bangladesh	22
Christian origins.....	22
Church spectrum today.....	23
WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Bangladesh.....	23
Reporting period	23
Position on the World Watch List	23
Persecution engines	24
Drivers of persecution.....	26

Areas where Christians face most difficulties	28
Christian communities and how they are affected	28
The Persecution pattern.....	29
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life	30
Violence.....	37
5 Year trends	39
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	41
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	42
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	42
Future outlook.....	44
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	44
Further useful reports.....	45



Woman in Bangladesh (c) IMB.org

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Bangladesh

Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Bangladesh: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
171,500,000	1,103,000	OD estimate

Map of country



Bangladesh: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	68	29
WWL 2021	67	31
WWL 2020	63	38
WWL 2019	58	48
WWL 2018	58	41

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Bangladesh:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials, Political parties, Violent religious groups
Religious nationalism	Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Violent religious groups, Ethnic group leaders, Political parties, Government officials
Ethno-religious hostility	Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Violent religious groups, Ethnic group leaders, Political parties, Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Converts from a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or an ethnic/tribal background suffer the most severe restrictions, discrimination and attacks in Bangladesh. They often gather in small house-churches or secret groups due to fear of attack. Evangelistic churches - many of them Pentecostal - working among the Muslim majority face persecution, but even historical churches like the Roman Catholic Church are increasingly faced with attacks and death-threats. Tribal Christians like the Santal, face an increasing double vulnerability (belonging to both an ethnic and religious minority) and struggle with land-grabbing issues and violence directed against them. Christians among the Muslim Rohingya, who fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar, are facing harassment and strong pressure from their community as well.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Bangladesh 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)

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

15/22 July 2021: A Baptist church in Rangamati district (Chittagong Hill Tracts) was [attacked](#) by Buddhist mobs and severely damaged (UCA News, 5 August 2021).

10 February 2021: A church in northern Bangladesh was [attacked](#) and looted in Lalmonirhat district. The police did not acknowledge the presence of a church and claimed a land dispute as motive for the attack (UCA News, 16 February 2021).

7 October 2020: A Catholic tribal woman, Rukhia Raut (23), was brutally murdered by Muslim youths after she was gang-raped. She came from a poor tribal family in the northern part of the country and was a final year student at the Carmichael University in Rangpur.

Specific examples of positive developments

The Anti-Corruption Commission [charged](#) four suspects with fraud in a land-grabbing case against a Presbyterian Church in Sylhet. Church officials said this was the first time this has happened (UCA News, 5 July 2021).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention 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>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: attacked - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladeshi-christians-living-in-fear-after-mob-attacks/93583>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: attacked - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/christians-demand-justice-after-attack-on-bangladeshi-church/91418>
- Specific examples of positive developments: charged - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/four-charged-with-grabbing-protestant-land-in-bangladesh/93148>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Bangladesh

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/bangladesh/	16 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12650940	16 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2020_BGD.pdf	16 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/bangladesh/	16 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	16 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	16 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Bangladesh not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/bangladesh/freedom-world/2021	16 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/country/bangladesh/freedom-net/2020	16 July 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/bangladesh	16 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/bangladesh	16 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#bd	16 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	https://rsf.org/en/bangladesh	16 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/bangladesh	16 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BGD	16 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/bangladesh/	16 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Bangladesh is not included)	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh	16 July 2021

Recent history

Bangladesh has a long history of unrest and is a relatively young state, achieving independence by war from Pakistan as late as 1971, meaning that it celebrated its 50th anniversary only in 2021. Since independence, civilian governments and military rule have taken turns in power. Elections are regularly accompanied by much violence, with the opposition denounced as having ties with militant Islamic groups and in recent years barely existing anymore.

Bangladesh has headed in an authoritarian direction since 2015 and has not had an effective parliamentary opposition since the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) boycotted national elections in 2014. Instead of parliamentary debate, 2015 saw the BNP taking to the streets and the government (under Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina) cracking down on free expression and civil society. Key opposition leaders were arrested, accused of serious offenses, some of which were apparently trumped up. Many remained in hiding, fearing arrest. Opposition leader Khaleda Zia and her son were arrested and sentenced in February and October 2018. In March 2020, Zia was [temporarily released](#) on humanitarian (read: health) reasons (Benar News, 25 March 2020), the release was [extended](#) for six more months in September 2020 (Benar News, 15 September 2020). Security forces committed serious abuses including killings, 'disappearances' and arbitrary arrests, with few investigations or official prosecutions being made.

The elections in December 2018 were not better: At least 17 people across the country were killed and observers reported incidents of vote-rigging, marring the results and disadvantaging the opposition. Sheikh Hasina consequently won her third consecutive term as Prime Minister and does [not need to fear](#) any control from parliament, as her party won an astonishing 96% of the vote; the opposition has thus been effectively wiped out (BBC News, 31 December 2018).

Christians are not normally active in politics and try not to get too involved in political matters, but of course they find themselves in the same polarized political situation and face the heavy-handedness of the authorities and security services like everybody else. As a religious minority, they are even more vulnerable since they lack sources of support and political ties; hence they can easily be used as scapegoats.

Political and legal landscape

Traditionally, relations between the Christian community and government have been good. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina even appointed a Catholic woman as her personal assistant in July 2014. But a series of killings of secular journalists as well as members of different religious minorities have scared the latter and made them act more cautiously. Although the series of killings ceased in the WWL 2022 reporting period, some members of religious minorities, including Christians, are considering [leaving the country](#), if they can afford it (UCA News, 5 February 2021). Political violence continues, between but also within parties, but rarely affects Christians. According to Human Rights organizations like [Odhikar](#), extra-judicial killings as well as lynchings are on the rise (Odhikar, Annual Report 2019, 8 February 2020). [Death threats](#) against atheist or human rights bloggers continue to be reported (DW, 24 August 2020).

The government is struggling to fight the radical Islamic groups which are growing stronger in influence, adding to the general insecurity. Before national elections in December 2018 took place, opposition BNP politician Khaleda Zia was sentenced to an additional two years in prison on corruption charges in October 2018. In her election campaign, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appeared to be wooing conservative Islamic circles in her speech at a gathering of madrassas in November 2018, by stating: "Anyone who pronounces offensive comments against [Islam] or against the Prophet Muhammad, will be prosecuted according to the law", and by pointing out that the [religion of the country is Islam](#) (Asia News, 5 November 2018). At the same time, she stated that there is no room for Islamic militancy in Bangladesh.

It remains to be seen how her government will walk this tightrope in the years to come, especially as this statement was given at a meeting hosted by an association of conservative Qawmi madrassas, whose degrees the government recognizes as being equal with a [Master's degree](#) (BdNews24, 13 August 2018). The [death](#) of the leader of Islamist organization *Hefazat-e-Islami* in September 2020 saw the group shift their political alliances taking a more radical stance against the government (Benar News, 21 September 2020). A red line was crossed when *Hefazat-e-Islami* called for demonstrations against the visit of India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, who came as an official guest of honor to the celebrations of Bangladesh's 50th anniversary in March 2021. Thousands clashed with police across the country and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced that the state would deal severely with all groups calling for violence. As a result, the authorities [arrested](#) almost a thousand members of *Hefazat-e-Islami*, among them 21 leaders (The Diplomat, 19 May 2021). At the same time, it is highly unlikely that the government will revive plans to [return to the purely secular](#) constitution of 1972, although a minister did refer to plans to do this (The Print India, 25 October 2021).

The fight against *Hefazat* may also have a personal note for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as the group claimed all statues erected in Bangladesh as being "un-Islamic". For the 50th anniversary of the country, there were several [statues](#) of Bangladesh's founding father (and real father of Sheikh Hasina), Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, erected all over the country (ORF Online, 21 January 2021). Although the state's fight against radical Islamic groups continues and has seen some successes, new groups are emerging while others are going underground. This complicated security situation leaves Christians as a religious minority vulnerable and the surprise killing of a Christian woman and her daughter in May 2020 show that attacks can happen without any warning or apparent reason.

Despite its female leadership, Bangladesh's laws remain largely discriminatory towards women and girls. Under Muslim and Hindu laws, women and men do not enjoy the same marriage rights. For example, polygamy is permitted for men but not for women ([OECD, 2019](#)). Child marriage is an area of particular concern, with 59% of girls married by 18. Whilst the minimum legal age is 18 years for girls, the Child Marriage Restraint Act (2017) includes loopholes that allow child marriage in "special cases" ([Girls Not Brides, 2020](#)). In a [2016 Periodic Report](#), the CEDAW committee criticized Bangladesh for failing to outlaw marital rape and for not providing adequate pathways to justice for victims of crimes. Divorce laws (which vary in accordance with the religious or civil law that the marriage occurred under) largely favor men, trapping women in abusive relationships. Under Sharia law, men can divorce their wives by *talaq*, whereas women must go to court ([Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961](#)). There is no provision for divorce under Hindu law.

Religious landscape

Bangladesh: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	1,103,000	0.6
Muslim	152,631,392	89.0
Hindu	15,586,986	9.1
Buddhist	1,246,639	0.7
Ethno-religionist	737,195	0.4
Jewish	200	0.0
Bahai	12,586	0.0
Atheist	13,485	0.0
Agnostic	135,852	0.1
Other	32,335	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 2021) (Adapted according to OD-estimate)

Home to over 150 million Muslims, mostly Sunni, up until recently Bangladesh managed to stay clear of the kind of radicalism that has plagued other parts of the world and South Asia. However, there are definite signs that this is changing. The government's decision in January 2017 to make its [school textbooks](#) more suitable for conservative Islamic groups is one sign in this respect (New York Times, 22 January 2017). By having the letter 'o' now explained by depicting a devout Muslim girl's "orna" (a scarf worn at the beginning of puberty) is just one example of a creeping Islamic drive beginning in textbooks for first-graders. A textbook for sixth-graders replaced a trip report to the north of India (a neighboring country) with a report about the Nile in Egypt. Other books have changed as well, for example in no longer using Hindu or Christian-sounding first names. However, this new drive is not supporting violence: The government decided to [ban chapters on jihad](#) in secondary-school textbooks (UCA News, 27 October 2017).

In May 2018, the ruling Awami League accepted a 1 billion USD financial package from Saudi Arabia for building [560 mosques](#) across the country (UCA News, 16 May 2018). As the funding did not materialize, the state of Bangladesh stepped in, a fact which led Catholic leaders to ask for [equal funding](#) of all religious institutions and buildings (UCA News, 11 June 2021).

Just over 9% of the population is Hindu and they suffer from attacks by radical Muslims as well. Buddhists and ethnic religions complete the mix of religions in Bangladesh, and although small in number, converts from these religions can come under strong pressure from their families and community. Christians are a tiny minority, experience marginalization and, if they belong to ethnic minorities, face a double vulnerability. Christian converts from all backgrounds come quickly under pressure from either radical Islamic groups or their respective neighborhoods. They are facing much violence. Churches and all minority religions tend to stay clear of politics; however, they notice a growing Islamic conservatism and radicalization in the country and Christian and other minorities are running several lobby groups.

Economic landscape

According to [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 343 onwards):

- **Gross National Income:** 4,976 USD (2017 PPP USD)
- **Rate of multidimensional poverty:** The rate of people living in multidimensional poverty is 24.6%, the rate of people vulnerable to it is 18.2%. 24.3% of the people are living below the national poverty line
- **Remittances:** Remittances make up 6.07% of the total GDP

According to the World Bank (Country overview):

- Bangladesh is classified as a lower-middle income country
- **GDP per capita (PPP constant 2017 international USD):** 4,754 (2019)
- **GDP per capita growth rate:** 7.0%
- **Poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP):** 38.8% (2016)
- "Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in poverty reduction, supported by sustained economic growth. It has been among the fastest growing economies in the world over the past decade, thanks to a demographic dividend, strong ready-made garment (RMG) exports, and stable macroeconomic conditions. As a result, Bangladesh reached lower-middle-income status in 2015 and is on track to graduate from the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) list in 2026. Poverty declined from 44 percent in 1991 to 15 percent in 2016, based on the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day (using 2011 Purchasing Power Parity exchange rate). Moreover, human development outcomes improved along many dimensions."

At the same time, Bangladesh is ranked as one of the world's most corrupt places, taking the 146th of 198 places in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI 2020). Its political system has repeatedly been jolted by instability. And yet, the country could become the only upper-middle income economy in South Asia by 2024. A key driver has been the country's \$26 billion clothing industry, which accounts for around 80% of its exports. As with other countries in a similar situation, Bangladesh has accepted infrastructure projects and other assistance from China, however, as far as can be seen, without yet becoming economically dependent on the country. As the economy has grown, the number of Bangladeshis living in poverty has fallen and social indicators have improved, with the government putting money into initiatives to empower women and improve food security. A remark made by the Chinese envoy which could be read

as warning Bangladesh against joining the US-led "Quad" (a strategic partnership between the United States, India, Japan and Australia) was immediately rebuked by state authorities and the country's [autonomy](#) stressed (Benar News, 11 May 2021).

But stark challenges remain: Bangladesh's territory is deeply vulnerable to the forces of nature, as could be seen by super-cyclone Amphan devastating parts of the country in May 2020 and the subsequent [heavy flooding](#), inundating a third of the country (The Guardian, 24 July 2020). Despite its status as a developing country, it took in almost one million Rohingya refugees in a very short period of time (from 2017 onwards), making Cox's Bazar the largest refugee camp in the world. This has brought many additional economic and social challenges, as could be seen when parts of the camp were set [on fire](#) in March 2021 (Norwegian Refugee Council, 22 March 2021).

The COVID-19 crisis has put all economic progress in jeopardy and it may take longer for Bangladesh to recover than for other countries. Millions of workers in the clothing industry and state-run mills have been laid off and security nets are virtually non-existent, although the state has poured out financial assistance. The timing of natural disasters striking right after a three-month lockdown in May 2020 has added to the challenge. Christians, who often belong to the poorer parts of society, will feel these harder socio-economic times even more, especially those belonging to the ethnic minorities.

Against this fragile economic background, women remain the most economically vulnerable, in part due to low education rates, patrilineal inheritance laws and fewer employment opportunities ([OECD, 2019](#)). While more and more women have been empowered to join the [workforce](#) and have gradually gained some independence, since 2016 there has been a significant drop in female employment, especially since the female dominated garment industry has been severely affected by the pandemic (Georgetown, 2021). Greater parity has been achieved in the context of education, with secondary school enrolment rising from 39% in 1998 for girls, to 67% in 2017 ([World bank, June 2019](#)). This contributes towards reduced economic dependency of women on men, although experts note that these dynamics can in themselves be exploited, with male relatives taking their earnings and pressurizing them to earn more ([TRT, Nov 15 2017 broadcast, 17.15 onwards](#)). Whilst Christian female converts struggle to gain economic independence, Christian male converts (typically the primary financial provider) may struggle with not being able to provide, should they lose their job.

Social and cultural landscape

Bangladesh is densely populated: It is the world's eighth most populous nation with over 171 million people, the third most populous Muslim nation after Indonesia and Pakistan and has the highest population density behind some city and island states. It is still among the world's poorest, despite remarkable progress in recent years.

According to the [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 343) and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Bengali at least 98%, indigenous ethnic groups 1.1% (2011 est.). Among those groups are Meitei, Tripura, Marma, Tanchangya, Barua, Khasi, Santals, Chakma, Rakhine, Garo, Bihari, Oraon, Munda and Rohingya. The state recognizes 27 ethnic minorities, and there are estimations that up to 75 minorities may live in Bangladesh.

- **Main languages:** Bangla 98.8% (official, also known as Bengali), other 1.2% (2011 est.)
- **Urbanization rate:** 37.4%
- **Literacy rate:** 73.9% (of ages 15 and above)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 6.2 years (for girls: 5.7 years, compared to 6.9 years for boys).
- **Health and education indicators:** Per 10,000 people, Bangladesh has 5.8 physicians and 8 hospital beds. The pupil teacher ratio in elementary school is 30:1.

According to the World Bank (Country profile):

- **Population age:** 27.2% of the population is under 14 years old, 5.2% is above 65 (2019).
- **Education:** The completion rate for primary education is 67.8% (most recent available data from 2010).
- **Unemployment:** 5.3%; the rate of vulnerable employment is 53.9% (modeled ILO estimate).
- **IDPs/Refugees:** According to the UN's [IOM](#), in 2017 at least one million migrant workers from Bangladesh were employed abroad. In Bangladesh, migration focused on the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar and, according to the May 2020 [UNHCR dashboard](#), more than 860,000 Rohingya refugees are living in Cox's Bazaar district alone. Overall, Bangladesh hosts almost [one million](#) Rohingya refugees (UNHCR press release, 2 June 2021).

According to the UNDP's HDI 2020:

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.632, Bangladesh ranks 133rd of 189 countries, in the group of countries with "medium human development". The country enjoyed a very fast growth, which only recently decreased slightly.
- **Life expectancy:** 72.6 years
- **Median age:** 27.6 years.
- **GINI coefficient:** 32.4
- **Gender inequality:** On the Gender Inequality Index, Bangladesh has a score of 0.537 and ranks 133rd of 162 listed countries. The labor force participation rate is 36.3% for women, compared to 81.4% for men.
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 4.2% and 55.3% of the population are in vulnerable employment. The rate of unemployed youth is 11.9%, the rate of youth neither in school nor employment is 26.1% (between 15 and 24 years of age)

Despite all the economic growth, income distribution is unequal and poverty is still a big problem. This inequality was already pronounced before the COVID-19 crisis struck, but the consequences of the pandemic may push [more than 16 million people](#) back into the category of being poor in 2020 (Asia News, 25 July 2020). Although numbers are still hard to come by, millions of clothing and other workers have lost their employment and this puts the rural areas under a double problem: Families in rural areas have normally been able to survive economically due to receiving remittances sent back by family members working in the cities - however, these funds are not available anymore. And the fall-back option of moving back to the rural areas to do farming has anyway been severely limited by the natural disasters which have befallen the country in 2020. It seems likely that the 38.6% of the complete workforce employed in agriculture will struggle to make ends meet as well.

Literacy and education continue to be a [major challenge](#) for Bangladesh and even when the school enrolment figures are high, so is the number of drop-outs, even at primary school level (18%). The drop-out rate is 30% at the secondary level (UCA News, 8 September 2020). And while the World Bank is praising progress on the one hand, it cautions that much remains to be done on the other:

"Bangladesh has made remarkable gains in ensuring access to basic and secondary education in the past two decades. In 2018, the country's net enrollment rate at the primary school level reached above 97 percent, and that at secondary school level, around 69 percent. With nearly 8.1 million girls in secondary schools in 2018, Bangladesh is among the few countries to achieve gender parity in school enrollment and has more girls than boys in secondary schools. Improving the quality of education remains the largest challenge for Bangladesh at all levels. However, around 18 percent of children ages 6-11 remain out of school – either having never enrolled or dropped out before completing grade 5. Socio-economic issues coupled with less women-friendly environment at the post-secondary level also marks slow gains in female labor force participation. Due to high level of early drop outs in Bangladesh in previous years cumulative size of youth who are Not in Education, Earning or Training (NEET) with less than primary education is estimated at around 12 million at this moment, most of whom are women from rural areas. Bangladesh is actively aiming at providing non-formal education and basic skills development to support to this group including basic knowledge on hygiene practices, social coherence, road safety, economic opportunities and so on."

The approximately one million Muslim Rohingya refugees from neighboring Myanmar had already been putting the country's economy and social fabric under enormous stress since 2018, especially in the district of Cox's Bazar (see *Security situation* below). This pressure will not ease swiftly. In a very positive development, Bangladesh's authorities announced at the end of January 2020 that they would [provide formal education](#) for Rohingya refugee children, in cooperation with UNICEF (Reuters, 29 January 2020). But these programs have been affected by the COVID-19 restrictions as well and the process of (voluntarily) [re-locating refugees](#) to a camp located on an island named Bhashan Char, which observers describe as "flood-prone", has created a lot of anxiety in the refugee community (Reuters, 4 December 2020). However, it was visited by UN officials in May 2021 and basically [endorsed](#) for relocating up to 100,000 people (Benar News, 2 June 2021).

According to World Christian Database's April 2021 estimates, just over 89% of the country's population is Muslim. While Bangladesh is largely ethnically homogenous - with 98% of the population being Bengali - minorities like the Chakma exist as well. Additionally, there are the so called "Hill Tribe People" in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (e.g. the Garo and the Santal) who include a large number of Christians among them. The Hill Tribe People are neglected and discriminated against by the authorities and harassed by the majority community, e.g. by land-grabbing (a recurrent issue in the WWL 2022 reporting period), including the destruction of houses and fields. These Christians face a double vulnerability, being tribal and Christian. They may experience a certain amount of protection from the spread of the COVID-19 virus due to their remoteness, but they may also be discriminated against or even excluded from government assistance and support.

Bangladesh is a deeply patriarchal society in which men and women are expected to assume traditional gender roles; reflecting this, over 50% of men in Bangladesh think it is unacceptable for women to have paid work ([Georgetown, 2020](#)). It is extremely challenging for both male and female converts to Christianity to find acceptance within their families and communities; conversion is viewed as a betrayal of the national religion and culture. Due to the patriarchal norms, men often convert first and are beaten for betraying their religion and culture. Women too face physical violence and are commonly sexually assaulted. There is broad societal acceptance for gender-based violence. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2020) 70% of married women have experienced some form of intimate partner abuse (dowry-related violence is particularly prevalent). Only 3% of victims take legal action, reflecting how notoriously difficult it is for victims to access justice and the social stigma attached to sexual violence.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 69.8% penetration - survey date: March 2021
- **Facebook usage:** 27.9% penetration – survey date: March 2021

According to UNDP's HDI 2020 data:

- **Mobile phones:** The subscription rate is 97.3 per 100 people.

The internet penetration rate is listed as 15.0% by UNDP's HDI data. According to the GSMA Intelligence group ([Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020](#)), there is a gender gap in relation to mobile phone ownership and internet usage; 61% of women own a mobile phone compared to 86% of men. Lack of family approval was identified as one of the primary barriers for women regarding phone ownership. The study further reveals that men and women have an equal awareness of mobile internet services. In relation to internet usage more broadly, the UNDP's HDI data reveals that 5.1% of women are internet users, lower than the population average of 15%. Social media is becoming a platform for raising awareness and calling for swift government action towards gender-based violence (GBV), exemplified in the conviction of those who killed a student who publicly accused her school teacher of sexual harassment ([BBC News, 24 October 2019](#)).

According to Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020:

- Bangladesh registered a considerable decrease in freedom and is considered "partly free", dropping two points in the Freedom on the Net index. Concerning the media landscape, the report states: "The online media landscape in Bangladesh is vibrant, with a number of online outlets that give voice to a range of views. Even with the increased level of censorship during the coverage period, people are able to access a variety of local and international news sources that convey independent, balanced views in the main languages spoken in the country. The ability to access localized information and create content in Bengali has contributed to the popularity of local blog hosting services." There have been shutdowns of Internet services before important political events like the December 2018 elections.

- "Constraints on internet freedom in Bangladesh tightened during the coverage period. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the government ramped up its efforts to restrict the online space and suppress those criticizing the government's response. Authorities blocked critical websites, enhanced targeted violence, and arrested journalists and users alike. New investigative reporting also shed light on the government's capacity to manipulate content and deploy technical attacks. The ruling Awami League (AL) party has consolidated political power through sustained harassment of the opposition and those perceived to be allied with it, as well as of critical media and voices in civil society. Corruption is a serious problem, and anticorruption efforts have been weakened by politicized enforcement. Due process guarantees are poorly upheld and security forces carry out a range of human rights abuses with near impunity."
- Internet access is more readily available in urban areas and urbanization in Bangladesh is increasing, although the rates are lower than in some neighboring countries. Another limitation to Internet access is its affordability for the still large low-income segment of society. This is also true for the Christian minority, especially when it lives in rural areas and belongs to the ethnic minorities. Freedom House said: "During the coverage period, the cost for data packages decreased, although internet access remains expensive for many lower-income individuals. Gender disparity in internet access and limited connectivity in rural areas are pressing issues. The government also continued to prevent Rohingya refugees from purchasing SIM cards."

According to a media report, the Digital Security Act (passed in October 2018) has enabled the authorities to [block access](#) to more than 18,000 Internet sites (UCA News, 1 March 2019). This process of blocking websites has highlighted some interesting things to note: i) It has shown what potential power lies behind this digital security law; ii) It indicates how conservative the government is becoming; iii) It has the welcome side-effect of acting as a tool for wooing Islamic groups. Human Rights Watch reported about and [protested](#) against the government policy in January 2020 (Human Rights Watch, 8 January 2020). The [two day blocking](#) of Radio Free Asia's sister site, Benar News, in March 2020 shows that the government is determined to control political narratives, e.g. in how it copes with the COVID-19 crisis (Benar News, 4 April 2020). As of February 2020, since the Digital Security Act came into law, [more than 2000 cases](#) have been opened against alleged perpetrators, often journalists (DW, 3 March 2021). This shows another affect of the law as it will increase self-censorship and fear about reporting.

Security situation

A dangerous new challenge to the Muslim-majority nation is the threat of radical Islamic violence. Police have claimed that most of the suspects behind recent attacks have been members of *Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh* (JMB) - a banned Islamist group. In many cases, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group (IS) have taken credit for attacks and threatened more, as in a video released in [Summer 2019](#) (Benar News, 12 August 2019).

The government of Sheikh Hasina has played down the threat from transnational Islamic militants time and again, blaming home-grown Islamic radicals linked to the political opposition instead. There is no clear consensus on the veracity of the claims, even amongst the region's top terror analysts. It is indeed true that the opposition has had close links with right-wing Islamists

in the past, but if this analysis still holds true now that the opposition is in disarray remains unclear. At the end of July 2020, there were reports that members of the Neo-JMB, the group which attacked Holey Artisan Café in 2016, were [planning another attack](#) for Eid al-Adha (UCA News, 28 July 2020), but this did not happen. While authorities say the terror threat is [under control](#) five years after this major attack, not all experts are so sure about that (Benar News, 29 June 2021).

The radicalization of [women in Bangladesh](#) has been used not only to spread IS propaganda but also as a weapon of attack by the already mentioned JMB (Jamestown Foundation, 12 February 2021). One of the reasons why women are being instrumentalized for attacks, is that they are still less likely to be suspected and searched by the authorities or security personnel. This confirms a trend which has already been observed for several years in Southeast Asia, especially in attacks in the Philippines and in Indonesia, most prominently in the attacks against churches in Surabaya in 2018.

The large number of predominantly Muslim refugees from Myanmar has been a challenge for the authorities, but so far radicalization and violence has been largely confined to the refugee camps. The International Court of Justice ordered that Myanmar carry out [provisional measures](#) to protect the Rohingya minority (New York Times, 23 January 2020), but it is hardly probable that any repatriation will take place now that the erstwhile ruling NLD in Myanmar was ousted by a [military coup](#) at the beginning of February 2021 (Vox, 2 February 2021).

On the one hand, Christians benefit from the generally stronger action taken by the authorities against radical Islamic groups like *Hefazat-e-Islami* (see *Political and legal landscape* above and *Trends* below) and the reduction in killings. On the other hand, security for Christians remains fragile as the incident from the end of May 2020 (reported above) showed. Additionally - although the problem this time does not involving high-profile attacks - there is the situation of the Chittagong Hill Tribes, among whom there is a significant minority of Christians. The situation can best be described by the term one observer used - "[elusive peace](#)" (International-LaCroix, 7 December 2019). Land disputes against ethnic minority Christians continue and in the WWL 2022 reporting period, this even involved a [church being destroyed](#) (UCA News, 3 March 2021). Christians also lose their livelihood by such attacks, as was illustrated when Betel nut fields were [destroyed](#) in June 2021 (UCA News, 2 June 2021). Finally, the few Christians among the Rohingya refugees suffered from [attacks and](#) abductions at the end of January 2020 (Asia News, 4 February 2020). Their security situation may arguably be the worst of all Christians in Bangladesh.

As highlighted in [a 2018 Oxfam report](#), Rohingya women's and girls' experiences of displacement are particularly challenging due to societal and cultural norms which restrict their freedom, and widespread gender-based violence. Abduction remains a significant threat for Christian women and children, including in refugee camps, according to a Human Rights Watch report ([HRW, 13 February 2020](#)). This occurs typically for the purpose of forced marriage, trafficking or sexual violence ([Christian Post, 6 January 2017](#)).

Trends analysis

1) Decisive action against Islamist groups?

After the Awami League consolidated its one-party rule, not least by limiting the freedoms of opinion and press and strongly acting against any dissent and thus showing increasingly signs of *Dictatorial paranoia*, it tried to appease some Muslim conservative groups. Prime Minister Hasina had seen it necessary before the December 2018 elections to state: "Anyone who pronounces offensive comments against [Islam] or against the Prophet Muhammad, will be prosecuted according to the law" (emphasizing that the [religion of the country is Islam](#)), which was a rather discouraging message for the future of the Christian minority in Bangladesh (Asia News, 5 November 2018). The new leadership of *Hefazat-e-Islami* has close ties with [the opposition](#) BNP and challenged the government. After fierce protests against erecting statues of the nation's founder and the visit of India's Narendra Modi as a guest of honor for the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh (referred to in *Political and legal landscape* above), the authorities [cracked down hard](#) on the organization and its leadership (The Diplomat, 17 May 2021). However, even though this policy is now implemented, it remains to be seen if this also means that the days are over for the government accommodating Islamist groups, which would likely lead to religious minorities such as Christians facing less pressure from Islamic militants. At the same time, if experience in other countries is anything to go by, even a ban of *Hefazat-e-Islami* would not necessarily change anything, as such groups simply re-organize and re-brand. Given their political clout, it is very well possible that the Awami League will try a [carrot-and-stick approach](#) with Islamist groups (East Asia Forum, 26 June 2021).

A potential game-changer (not just for the Islamist scene in Bangladesh) may prove to be the take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban on 15 August 2021. [Social media](#) in Bangladesh was awash with praise and rejoicing (Deutsche Welle, 25 August 2021): "Go ahead (Taliban), the future world is waiting for you to lead it!" or "I'm so happy to see the victory of Islam before my death. I was never that happy before in my entire life!" The above are just two of thousands of similar reactions, all claiming that finally, Islam has won. It remains to be seen whether this new morale boost for Islamists will translate into increased violent action. If so, this will most likely mean operations targeting security forces or religious minorities, including Christians.

2) The consequence for the Christian minority - a very high level of persecution, resulting from a mix of persecution engines and drivers

The persecution of Christians in Bangladesh is at a very high level (very high being defined in WWL methodology when a country scores 61-80 points) and shows a variety of actors and Christians affected, especially converts from different religious backgrounds. The situation is particularly bad for Christian converts from a Muslim background. Since the large attack on the Artisan Bakery in July 2016, IS has claimed a number of attacks through its media affiliates, but the government has consistently denied any IS presence in the country. Other attacks have been claimed by local Islamist groups.

Christians continue to live in fear of possible attacks, although the immediate threat has decreased somewhat due to a strong crackdown on radical Islamic groups by the authorities. Death-threats are still being issued against pastors, but not as widely as before. Forced marriage,

rape, discrimination in the distribution of public resources and mob attacks against Christians are all increasingly common. An additional challenge is the situation in the Rohingya refugee camps, where radical groups have started to emerge and an increasing number of refugees are [fleeing](#) the camps due to the dire security and humanitarian situation (Benar News, 5 August 2021).

The situation of the ethnic minority Christians remains difficult: The continuing cases of land-grabbing (with virtually no support for the Christians from the authorities) often result in whole Christian families and communities losing their livelihoods.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: temporarily released - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/Khaleda-Zia-freed-03252020133058.html>
- Recent history: extended - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/BD-Zia-09152020163138.html>
- Recent history: not need to fear - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46718393>
- Political and legal landscape: leaving the country - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/oppression-of-minorities-hinders-harmony-in-bangladesh/91291>
- Political and legal landscape: Odhikar - http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Annual-HR-Report-2019_Eng.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: Death threats - <https://www.dw.com/en/blogger-faces-death-threats-for-criticizing-islam/a-54678246>
- Political and legal landscape: religion of the country is Islam - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Sheikh-Hasina-Whoever-insults-Islam-will-be-punished-according-to-the-law-45387.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Master's degree - <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2018/08/13/bangladesh-readies-new-law-to-recognise-qawmi-madrassa-degrees>
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- Political and legal landscape: arrested - <https://thedi diplomat.com/2021/05/bangladesh-cracks-down-on-hardline-islamist-group/>
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- Political and legal landscape: Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 - <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-305/section-13539.html>
- Religious landscape description: school textbooks - <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/22/world/asia/bangladesh-textbooks-radical-islam.html>
- Religious landscape description: ban chapters on - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladesh-govt-bans-jihad-from-madrassa-texts/80639>
- Religious landscape description: jihad - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladesh-govt-bans-jihad-from-madrassa-texts/80639>
- Religious landscape description: 560 mosques - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladeshs-560-mosques-project-comes-under-fire/82315>
- Religious landscape description: equal funding - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/bangladeshi-catholics-demand-share-of-state-cake/92839>
- Economic landscape: UNDP's full 2020 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Economic landscape: autonomy - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/bd-ch-quad-folo-05112021153119.html>

- Economic landscape: heavy flooding - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/24/a-critical-situation-bangladesh-in-crisis-as-monsoon-floods-follow-super-cyclone>
- Economic landscape: on fire - <https://www.nrc.no/news/2021/march/the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp-is-on-fire/>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019) - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/BD.pdf>
- Economic landscape: workforce - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>
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- Economic landscape: TRT, Nov 15 2017 broadcast, 17.15 onwards - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hNMMBCel1o>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP's full 2020 report - <http://hdr.undp.org/en>
- Social and cultural landscape: IOM - <https://bangladesh.iom.int/sites/default/files/publication/Annual%20Migration%20Report%202017%20-%20Final%20Layout%20-%202020%20June%20%202019.pdf>
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- Social and cultural landscape: one million - <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/6/60b7a1d94/unhcrs-assistant-high-commissioners-conclude-four-day-visit-bangladesh.html>
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WWL 2022: Church information / Bangladesh

Christian origins

Christianity made its first definite inroads into the region now called Bangladesh in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Portuguese traders and Roman Catholic missionaries reached its shores close to the city of Chittagong, in what was then called “Bengal Sultanate”, and built its first churches. The renowned Baptist missionary, William Carey, arrived at Serampore in West Bengal in 1793. This Englishman heralded a new missionary era in Bengal, translating and printing the Bible in Bengali and the first dictionary of the Bengali language. He also helped develop Bengali type-faces for printing and established Serampore Mission and College besides publishing newspapers and periodicals. The school system in Bangladesh is indebted to William Carey’s work. With Carey came the Baptist Missionary Society (British) in 1793, followed by Church Missionary Society (British) in 1805, Council for World Mission (British Presbyterian) in 1862, Australian Baptist Mission in 1882, New Zealand Baptist Mission in 1886, Oxford Mission (British Anglican) in 1895, Churches of God (American) in 1905, Seventh-Day Adventists in 1919, Assemblies of God in 1945, Santal Mission (Lutheran) in 1956, Bangladesh Mission of the Southern Baptist Convention (American) in 1957, and Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (American) in 1958. After the War of Independence in 1971, there was an influx of more Protestant missionary societies in Bangladesh.

Church spectrum today

Bangladesh: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox		0.0
Catholic		46.5
Protestant		39.7
Independent		34.0
Unaffiliated		0.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians		-20.5
Total		100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement		34.1
Renewalist movement		36.0

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

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.

Around half of the Christians in Bangladesh belong to the Roman Catholic Church, who have dioceses spread across the country. Protestants are also found throughout the country, but they are stronger among the ethnic minority tribal regions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Protestant groups include Baptist, Brethren, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventists, Assemblies of God, and the Church of Bangladesh (a union of Anglicans and Methodists).

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Bangladesh

Reporting period

01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

Bangladesh: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	68	29
WWL 2021	67	31

WWL 2020	63	38
WWL 2019	58	48
WWL 2018	58	41

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The WWL 2022 reporting period saw a further increase of 1.3 points in comparison to WWL 2021, continuing a trend over recent years. This increase has two parts: Half of it comes from an increase in violence, where again two killings have been reported, but an uptick in reports on other forms of violence could be observed, too. A further reason for the increase in score was a rise in pressure in the *Private and Family spheres of life*, reflecting the fact that it has been easier for families to watch and restrict converts, as they were mostly confined to their homes due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Besides the various convert groups, the Christian minority in general continues to face discrimination, neglect and violence.

Persecution engines

Bangladesh: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Medium
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Medium
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	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Weak

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

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong), blended with Islamic oppression (Strong)

Politics in Bangladesh is family business and for a long time, it has been a competition between two women. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League showed that she will do everything necessary to stay in power, including getting her rival, Khaleda Zia from the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), sentenced on corruption charges, leading one country expert to call her an "elected dictator". The opposition decided to form an alliance in which the leader of the (mostly secular) Bangladesh National Party has strengthened her Islamic ties and has begun to emphasize the country's Islamic foundations. In the end, this coalition did not lead to any tangible results in the December 2018 election and for the time being, parliamentary opposition in Bangladesh is virtually non-existent. Although Christians and other religious mi-

minorities enjoy more freedom than in many other Muslim countries, they can easily be used as scapegoats, especially in the tense situation the country finds itself in.

Islamic oppression affects all categories of Christian communities in Bangladesh, although the country is officially both a secular and an Islamic country according to the Constitution. It is increasingly difficult to see how this dual system can work in practice, especially as the government is giving in more and more to the demands made by local Islamic groups which are not tied to the opposition, in order to secure their support. However, if these groups switch allegiance, as happened in the WWL 2022 reporting period with *Hefazat-e-Islami*, the government is trying to swiftly deal with them. These Islamic groups are watching minorities, especially converts. They are instilling fear and many of them are inspired by international groups such as the Islamic State group (IS), although the authorities continue to deny any such links. Despite government rhetoric, these links are widely perceived to be real. Families and communities are drivers of persecution and monitor the activities of converts (especially in rural areas) and this restricts everyday life for converts more intensely than radical groups do at the moment. The fact that the government is fighting Islamic groups which are known to have connections to the opposition party does not help bring calm to the volatile political situation.

The Myanmar-Bangladesh border region has become volatile following the sudden influx of Muslim Rohingya refugees in 2017 - estimated to be more than 700,000 - crossing the border from Myanmar. Since around 300,000 Rohingya were previously already living in Bangladesh, this brings their total number to more than one million. They are living in desperate circumstances with little hope of returning in the near future and are putting a great strain on Bangladesh, which is still one of the world's poorest countries. The insurgency group "Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army" (ARSA), which has been attacking border posts in Myanmar, is also active in the Bangladeshi refugee camps. Thus this refugee problem could lead to growing Islamic radicalism in Bangladesh. It is this potential "spillover effect" which adds to the government's nervousness. Given the situation in Myanmar, repatriating them is out of the question and Bangladesh has started to relocate "volunteers" to an island in an effort to relieve the situation in the camps onshore (see above: *Social and cultural landscape*).

Religious nationalism - Buddhist and Hindu (Medium), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Medium) and Clan oppression (Weak)

There are almost twice as many Buddhists and more than 10 times as many Hindus in Bangladesh as Christians. Buddhists are mostly found among the indigenous ethnic people groups of Bangladesh in the areas bordering India and Myanmar - for instance, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (in the south-east), Sylhet Division (in the north-east), Rajshahi Division (in the north-west) and Mymensingh District (north-central). The ethnic minorities of Bangladesh have their own cultural traditions and languages, for instance the Chakma, Tripura and Marma tribal groups. As a result, *Religious nationalism* is mixed with *Ethno-religious hostility* and *Clan oppression*. Over the past years, an increasing number of Chakma have converted to Christianity. This has caused Buddhist and tribal leaders to put more pressure on converts, as have family, friends and local communities - not to mention the radical Buddhists aiming to strengthen local Buddhist and indigenous groups in resisting Christianity. These are all drivers of persecution.

This means that new Christian believers of a tribal background are being forced to follow the age-old norms and values of their community, whether these are religious in nature or not. In majority Hindu communities, leaders and families put pressure on Christian converts to return to Hinduism.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia, blended with Islamic oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Muslim leaders in Bangladesh are often drivers of persecution targeting Christians, especially when Christian communities are seen as evangelistic or openly welcoming converts, as this is often perceived as threatening the Muslim majority. They preaching and warn against Christians, causing negative attitudes to and at times, mobilizing a mob with this.
- **Extended family (Very strong):** For families, it is often hard to accept that their relatives - frequently children - have left Islam to follow the Christian faith. In their eyes, this publicly dishonors the family within society and therefore, in many cases, families cut all ties with converts. In some cases, converts suffer physical attacks from their families as well.

- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** Local radical Islamic groups, specifically *Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh* (JMB), *Jamaat-e-Islami*, *Hefazat-e-Islami* and *Ahle Sunnat* are targeting the Christian minority, singling out converts. A notable trend is the rise of IS attacks in the country, targeting primarily free thinkers and minority religious groups, with the Hindu minority being a particular focus. *Hefazat-e-Islami* was dealt a swift blow by the government, with hundreds of members [arrested](#) in May 2021 (The Diplomat, 19 May 2021) and in the WWL 2022 reporting period there have not been any attacks by them against Christians reported.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials are drivers of *Islamic oppression* often combined with *Dictatorial paranoia*, since they are serving the ruling government. Especially in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, government officials act harshly against Christians and treat them unfairly, for example when land issues are concerned. The army treats ethnic minorities in this region with very high suspicion as well. As already stated, it has become clear over the last years that the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has tightened its grip on power. Whoever is seen as a threat, will be targeted. Even though Christians are widely regarded as being government supporters, as a minority they easily become a target or are used as scapegoats.
- **Normal citizens (Very strong):** Although incidents of mob violence against Christians has decreased due to the COVID-19 crisis, normal citizens still perceive conversion to Christianity as something which is socially undesirable and which places an individual outside society. Therefore, citizens, especially in rural areas, ostracize converts. Members of ethnic minorities, many of them Christian, are watched with suspicion as well.
- **Political parties (Medium):** In an effort to consolidate and if possible increase power, political parties have wooed radical Islamic groups by putting pressure on Christians as well as by stressing the special status of Islam. Local political leaders are often involved in land issues, which affect the Christian minority. Some political parties are cooperating with radical Islamic groups, e.g. with *Jamaat-e-Islami*. Political parties are often not primary drivers of persecution but are used by Islamic groups - especially at the local level - as a vehicle for gaining wider influence. Radical Islamic political parties do not play a role in Bangladesh.

Drivers of Religious nationalism (Buddhist and Hinduist), blended with Ethno-religious hostility and Clan oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Buddhist and Hindu religious leaders are driving persecution against converts. These religions are in a minority position in Bangladesh and perceive themselves as having to face up to a growing radical interpretation of Islam. For this reason, people converting to Christianity is felt to be a further weakening of their ranks. Thus they call for converts to be placed under considerable pressure to give up their new Christian faith.
- **Extended family (Very strong):** What has been stated above for religious leaders is even more strongly the case for a convert's own family. Here, conversion is often identified with shaming the reputation and dignity of the family in the local rural society. Therefore, the Buddhist or Hindu family will put a lot of pressure on converts to bring them back and may even expel them from the village, if this does not succeed.

- **Normal citizens (Very strong):** In the closely-knit minority societies in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, it is not just the family putting pressure on converts. The very act of conversion is seen as putting oneself outside society and the village and as weakening the whole religious group. Encouraged by religious leaders, neighbors and friends put pressure on converts to recant.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, violent religious groups like *Jana Sanghati Samity* (JSS) exist. They frequently threaten pastors and church leaders who are active in the area.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Often, ethnic group leaders put pressure on those putting themselves outside society to come back and rejoin the minority's fight for survival. For this, however, they need to share identity, of which religion is an important part.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Ethnic group leaders are often political leaders as well, so they will use (local) politics as well to put pressure on the Christians.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Apart from what was already said under *Islamic oppression*, local government officials make Christian's lives difficult by getting actively involved in land issues or by staying passive when it comes to investigating attacks against Christians, thereby discouraging the minority.
- **Organized crime (Medium):** Churches and homes of Christians, especially from the ethnic minorities, have been attacked and destroyed by elements connected to the land-grabbing mafia. These are usually local strongmen, often with good connections to local and sometimes even national politicians.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Bangladesh's northern region with the Chittagong Hill Tracts and its many ethnic minorities is a much overlooked hotspot for rights violations against Christians at the hands of both the Muslim majority and the Buddhist minority. In the last years, another hotspot developed when Bangladesh became host to more than 700,000 Islamic refugees from neighboring Myanmar. Most of them are located in Cox Bazar district, at the south-eastern tip of Bangladesh, but relocation efforts within Bangladesh have recently started. The country struggles to take care of them, even with the help of the international community. As repatriation efforts have been constantly stalled, the longer the refugees have to stay in camps, the higher the risk is that some will be prone to Islamic radicalization, affecting Bangladesh as well. The camps have also become a place where a tiny minority of Rohingya converts lives. They face increasing pressure but have no means of escape.

Christian communities and how they are affected

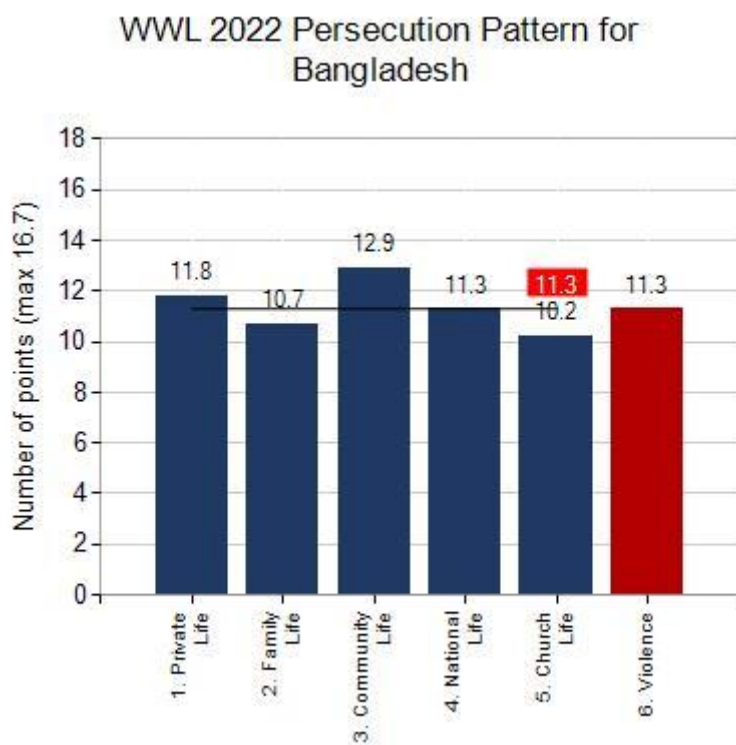
Communities of expatriate Christians: This group includes embassy personnel and foreign workers from the important textile sector. They face being observed and threatened by Islamic militants. This community also includes the Rohingya from Myanmar.

Historical Christian communities: This group includes the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Bangladesh (Anglican). They are frequently threatened and watched.

Converts to Christianity: This category includes converts from a variety of backgrounds: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Tribal. They are facing the strongest persecution, not least from their own families and communities, and often gather in groups secretly.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This group includes Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations. The Assemblies of God, for instance, mainly gather for worship in house churches. They are frequently threatened and at times violently attacked.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Bangladesh shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Bangladesh rose from a score of 11.2 points in WWL 2021 to 11.3 points in WWL 2022. Thus pressure is at a very high level, especially for converts to Christianity. This is particularly the case for converts among the Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar in 2017.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Community* and *Private spheres*, where converts are particularly affected, but all categories of Christian communities face pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*.
- Violence against Christians increased from 10.6 points in WWL 2021 to 11.3 points in WWL 2022, reaching the category of 'extremely high'. There were two killings and a greater number of arrests reported than in WWL 2021. The main reason for the overall increase in Bangladesh's total WWL score was this increase in the violence score.

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 2021 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: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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)

Converts have to be very cautious and often prefer to keep their conversion a secret from their family. Those who choose to speak of their conversion are regularly harassed, bullied, often threatened and forced to remove their blogs and Facebook page. Under the "Digital Security Act", adopted in October 2018, defamation, hurting religious sentiments, causing deterioration of law and order, and instigating against any person or organization through publishing or transmitting any material in websites or in electronic form can lead to a maximum 14 year prison sentence. Due to the pandemic, many Christian activities went online and content about Christian faith frequently faced a barrage of slandering and verbal abuse.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

Given the pressure on converts as well as on those who actively invite others to follow the Christian faith, most converts prefer to stay as invisible as possible in order not to make themselves targets. With the growth of radical Islamic influence, more Christians now prefer to keep a low profile and avoid contact with anyone outside their own group, because in a growing part of the majority religion, conversion is seen as a grave sin deserving punishment and, in some circles, even death.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Bangladesh is one of the few secular Muslim-majority nations and therefore conversion is permitted by the law. Article 41(1)(a) protects the citizen's fundamental right freely to profess, practice, and propagate religion of Bangladesh Constitution. The freedom guaranteed in this Article is the right of man to entertain such religious views as appeal to his individual conscience without interference by any person or power, civil or ecclesiastical, is as fundamental in a free state as is the right life and liberty. So from a legal standpoint, the conversion process seems to be very simple: The law provides that the convert goes to a lawyer presenting a written signed document, which states he or she changed religion for personal reasons, under no pressure and of their own free will. In practice, for any Christian, Buddhist or Hindu who wishes to become a Muslim, this procedure is almost a mere formality. In contrast, for a Muslim to become a Chris-

tian, it is normal to encounter pressure from the lawyer, who sometimes even refuses (illegally) to register the conversion. As Islam is the state religion and the religion of the vast majority, Muslims who convert to Christianity face strong societal and family pressure in addition to such legal issues.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.00 points)

Especially for new converts, it has been very risky to meet with other Christians, even more so when they come from the outside like a different village or the city. Most of the converts prefer to stay secret believers out of fear from society and family. If any Christians meet with them, community people start to ask questions and monitor their activities. There have even been cases where roads have been blocked when people knew that Christians want to meet. This is not only true for converts from a Muslim background, but also applies to those from a Buddhist or Hindu background.

Block 1 - additional information:

People seen as converting or proselytizing can be detained and accused of criminal offences. Christians who are not converts have more freedom in their private lives, however. Converts and Rohingya Christians cannot have any Christian images or symbols visible because it is too risky for their safety. There were reports of violent attacks when Christians displayed Christian images. Particularly in rural areas, Christians are cautious and tend to avoid visibility because of fear of attacks.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)

Bangladesh's education system gives every student the opportunity to study their own religion, be it Islam, Buddhism or Christianity. The subject 'Religion' is one of the compulsory subjects in the Primary and High School Public Examinations. But many Christian students face problems at school for studying their own religion. There is a bias towards Islamic religious education in state schools which is not just apparent in law but also in practice, since there are many more options for Islamic religious education compared to non-Islamic religious education. Schools simply pay no attention to minorities and in many cases, school teachers are not teaching Christianity, so that parents have to educate them at home. In many cases, Christian children are forced to study non-Christian teachings and use Islamic textbooks at school. It is also happening that, at schools run by historical churches, children of parents from other categories of Christian communities are not allowed to study

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Children of converts are often scolded by teachers and even by the headmasters, who put pressure on children and parents alike to return to Islam. Many children therefore try to avoid school as it is hard to stand the pressure. Sometimes, children are threatened, but often they are promised material and other benefits for them and their family if they return to Islam. Seeing

their teachers as a role model, fellow pupils frequently mock Christian schoolchildren, which can reach the point where the latter refuse to go to school or leave the house at all. For many classes, there is an opportunity of receiving scholarships for good students and help with financing fees for poor students and for girl students. However, in many cases Christian children have been excluded from these opportunities. There are two main reasons for this: One is that the authorities think Christians are receiving money from foreign contacts and secondly, it seems they deliberately want to make life difficult for Christian children and especially Christian converts.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.25 points)

For churches belonging to the historical Christian communities, it is usually no problem to conduct baptisms as long as they are carried out within the church compounds and do not attract too much attention. Villagers are known to disturb and hinder baptisms from other churches and some church leaders refuse to baptize converts from a Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim background in local churches for fear of reprisals, since baptisms are seen as the ultimate sign of breaking with their old belief and relationships. Converts are usually sent to other cities or areas to be baptized. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, there have again been cases where baptisms of converts led to them being expelled from their family homes, when the baptism became known.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

This is especially a problem which is faced by parents who are converts. If the children are forced to continue attending Islamic classes and use Islamic textbooks, this interferes with the parents' rights of raising their children according to their beliefs. Frequently, pressure and interference from the wider family is even stronger, so that uncles, aunts or grandparents try to influence and derail the parents' efforts. There have been reports about this for convert children from a Hindu background too.

Block 2 - additional information:

Once converts are discovered, they often face the threat of divorce (if married) and can lose their inheritance rights, especially in rural areas. Organizing a Christian wedding or funeral can be difficult or even impossible for converts. Such instances are often used by family members to put pressure on the convert to return to their previous faith. Converts are often isolated from their families and may even be forced to leave their homes.

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)

Christians have often faced the problems listed in this question. Although the courts have ruled that people cannot be forced to wear skull caps, veils or other religious clothing in workplaces,

schools and colleges, many still follow traditional dress codes and put pressure on Christians to do the same. Similar reports are obtained from Hindu-majority communities.

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.). (3.50 points)

In general, people are very curious to know about Christians and to learn about their lifestyle and activities, as they are a minority. That is one reason why Christian activities are monitored, especially by the local community. When traditional churches organize programs inside or outside the church, neighbors are always curious. This has a downside, however. Christians, especially converts, have also been monitored by local leaders, vigilante groups and violent groups. Another reason is that under Section 295A of Bangladesh's Penal Code (1860), any person who has a "deliberate" or "malicious" intention of "hurting religious sentiments" is liable to imprisonment. Vigilante groups are monitoring Christians closely and report anything coming close to this to the authorities. (Section 295B lists the new offence of "insult to the Quran" and carries the maximum sentence of life imprisonment.) Further, where Christian meetings are considered too large or are understood to be carrying out proselytizing, local residents have called in the police to interrogate the Christian leaders involved.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Article 28 (1) of the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh declares: "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" and Article 29 ensures the equality of opportunity in public employment, but minorities and especially Christians have faced many problems in this respect. Due to their low social status, it is already more difficult for Christians to find work than Muslims. Often, when they finally manage to be invited to a job interview, they discover that the questions are less about their skills and more about their faith. This is particularly experienced by converts. And if Christians do gain employment, frequently they will not be promoted or given benefits coming with the job. Others are discriminated against at the workplace. In one case in the WWL 2022 reporting period, when an employer found out that a certain employee was a convert, the latter was immediately dismissed and did not receive his due salary.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

In cases of (suspected) conversion, Christians have been interrogated by the police and/or vigilante groups and threatened. Converts often face a whole group of people interrogating them about their faith and trying to bring them back, as there is the widely perceived misunderstanding that people convert to the Christian faith for money. Local police are mainly interested in keeping the peace and will therefore give in to the demands of the Muslim majority. In one case in the WWL 2022 reporting period, the police asked questions like "Why did you convert from Islam to Christianity? Why are you converting other people to Christianity? We will not accept your complaint."

Block 3 - additional information:

There were reports all over Bangladesh that many Christians who tested positive for COVID-19 not only did not get assistance but were also discriminated against by health officials. They were told their infection was the result of their sinful act of conversion to Christianity and were denied treatment as a result. Christians are also being discriminated against in their business lives. Some Christians have had to give up their shops or other businesses due to pressure and boycotts by the Muslim majority. Sometimes, agricultural land has simply been taken away from them or plantations have been destroyed. Due to government policy, Christian schools have to choose students with the best grades for enrolment, even though their policy advocates for a quota for disadvantaged students from a minority background. Christians from a variety of backgrounds are facing disadvantages in their education. Few Christians get the chance to attend BA or MA degree courses at a college or university.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

Non-Muslim religious bodies are not required to register with the government; however, all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including religious ones are required to register with the government's NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign financial assistance for social development projects. In November 2017, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina instructed the authorities to monitor NGO activities in Bangladesh. The NGO Affairs Bureau regularly monitors foreign-funded NGO activities. The Foreign Donations (Voluntarily Donations) Regulation Bill has effectively closed many Christian NGOs, especially smaller ones. It has also made operations for the remaining NGOs more complicated. NGOs that predominantly work on civil and political rights issues face constant obstacles from the authorities, including being barred from accessing funds. These NGOs are denied permission for their proposed projects from time to time by the NGO Affairs Bureau (under the Prime Minister's Office) and have been subject to escalating harassment and surveillance.

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

In almost all cases where Christians are the victims of an incident, no perpetrators are found or punished. This is even true when it is about violent attacks and there is a high degree of unwillingness on the part of the authorities to even start proper investigations. It remains to be seen if the decision against land-grabbers in the WWL 2022 reporting period (See above: *Specific examples of positive developments*) will change anything. Christians still struggle to get justice, even when they are facing [violent attacks](#) (UCA News, 16 February 2021).

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.25 points)

In Bangladesh, Christians not only have to deal with the authorities refusing to recognize conversions, but also with officials willfully inserting wrong information into the government

database. This is especially true for converts, but also for other categories of Christian communities. The government has a digital site for storing personal population data collected during the National Identity Card census, but for many Christians the religious information appearing there is not correct and most are unaware of that. As a result, Christians who are not members of one of the traditional denominations are often excluded from the statistics. One of the reasons for this is that the names and surnames of converts indicate their Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim origins, since they do not change their names after conversion. So, instead of asking or checking the papers, officers put information as per their understanding. The government provides the Smart NID card free of charge to all adult citizens of Bangladesh. But because of these mistakes, changing the information is very difficult for Christians and only possible after a long and expensive process.

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.25 points)

In Bangladesh, religious pictures and symbols - also statues - are thought to encourage the worship of idols. Many mission schools have removed the cross and other Christian symbols to avoid offending the 'sensitivities' of local Muslims; churches in certain areas avoid showing these symbols prominently as well. Converts in their congregations do not use visible Christian symbols. Historical churches are more free in this respect, as are Christians living in urban areas. Still, every WWL reporting period there are reports of attacks against churches because of visible religious symbols.

Block 4 - additional information:

Bangladesh has a secular government and its secularism is even laid down in the country's Constitution, which states at the same time that Islam is the state religion. Christians are frequently slandered, especially in rural areas. Sermons preached by radical Islamic clerics often contain inflammatory hate speech and discriminatory language towards religious minorities, which create an environment of fear and intolerance. However, as a reflection of the diversity of Bangladesh, the most prominent example for this in the WWL 2022 reporting period came from a [Hindu preacher](#) (UCA News, 15 June 2021). Numerous Christian leaders have also been threatened. Media reporting about Christians is often biased, predominantly from Islamic TV channels.

The government is responsible for the fair distribution of humanitarian aid during the COVID-19 crisis, as well as during the huge floods and storms Bangladesh has faced. Local authorities are giving a lot of assistance, but there are many reports that Christians, especially those who come from a Muslim or from a Buddhist background, are not eligible to receive support. Thus, when they approach the village leaders, many are saying: 'Well, you're Christian. You became a Christian, so you have no part in this support.'

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

The monitoring is not usually carried out by the state, but by local radical Islamic groups or wider society, which may also take the law into their own hands by interrogating and punishing Christians. Since Christians are constantly suspected of carrying out missionary work, the monitoring is widespread, whereas its intensity depends on how active the churches are. Radical Islamic groups (and sometimes neighbors too) often take a page from Prime Minister Hasina's speech, where she said that whoever hurts religious sentiments will be punishable by law and so preachers and teachers, additionally to the converts themselves are monitored and threatened.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

As stated above, many pastors and church leaders refuse to baptize converted Muslims for fear of reprisals. Converts are advised to travel to a different part of the country to get baptized. But even then and there, they cannot be openly integrated into the church as converts. Once their status is known, they and the church will face trouble; attacks can take place, roads be blocked and convert and church threatened.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)

Christians have reported that they are being monitored especially in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and in areas where they are suspected of carrying out evangelism among Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. In these areas, the vigilante groups and authorities apparently receive names and details of all participants and key leaders of churches through informers. Due to the measures imposed to combat COVID-19, many church activities had to be carried out online, which was not always possible in rural areas with little, if any, Internet access. It also comes with additional risks as the government has increased its monitoring of all online activities as a means of fighting against religious extremism.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

For the past few years, home-grown Islamic militant groups have been appearing all over the country. The Christian minority is often targeted by such groups since their missionary zeal is perceived as being dangerous. Targets for harassment and intimidation are pastors and church leaders, especially among the convert community, as they are most visible within the church communities and carry the blame for "misguiding" people and converting them.

Block 5 - additional information:

In general, churches are able to function in Bangladesh but restrictions are increasing and it is reported that training has become more difficult, as it is often disrupted. Villagers are suspicious of Christians, and where there has been training for Christian leaders, they will ask for details

about who is attending and what the training involves. Openly offering and distributing Bibles has been hindered and faces strong opposition. While work among youth has not been forbidden, the conversion of minors is punishable and generally seen as unethical.

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.

Bangladesh: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	2	2
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	200	90
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	1
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?	81	143
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	11	4
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	5	6
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	4	2
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	400	284
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?	135	78
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?	10 *	4
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	200	91
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

For the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** For details, see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period.*
- **Christians attacked:** Christians, especially converts from all backgrounds, face attacks from members of their surrounding community, often organized by radical religious groups and acting as mobs. Converts' families can be another driver of violence in an effort to make them return to their original faith.
- **Christians arrested:** There were reports of at least 81 Christians who were detained or arrested and imprisoned. However, details cannot be published for security reasons.

- **Churches attacked:** At least 200 churches (or places where Christians gather) were attacked, mainly by members of local communities.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Christian homes have been attacked in a variety of places, many by community members, some by land-grabbers. Reports came in from all over Bangladesh and from converts of all backgrounds. No details can be given for security reasons.
- **Christians abducted:** There have been reports of at least 11 Christians being abducted, including a Rohingya Christian. For security reasons, no details can be given.

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

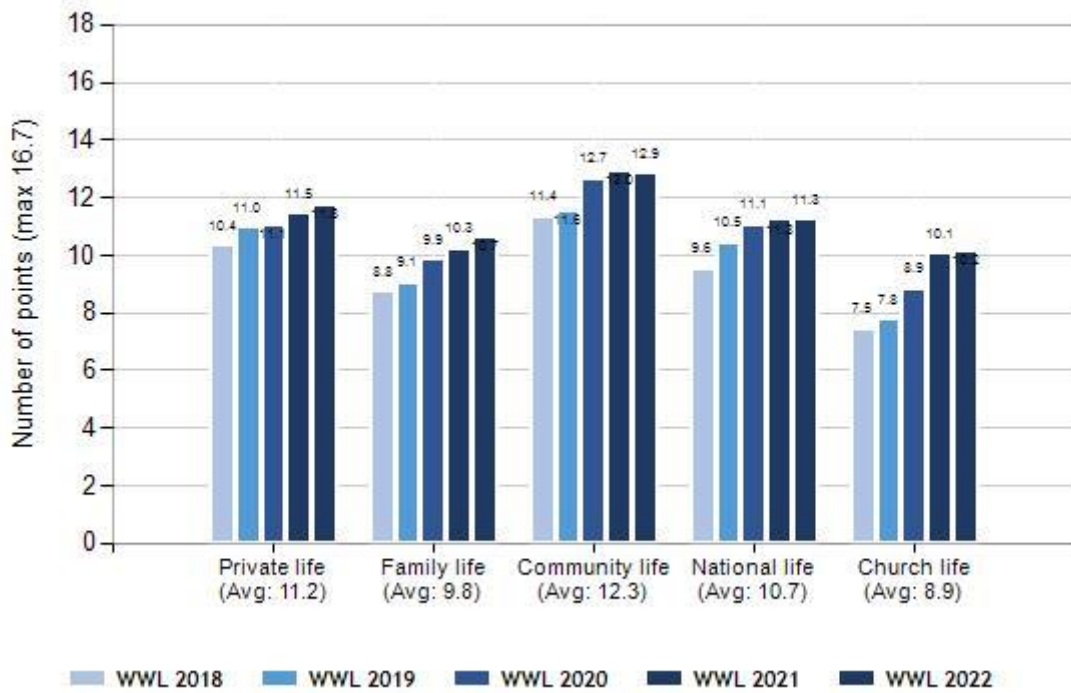
Bangladesh: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history		Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022		11.3
2021		11.2
2020		10.7
2019		10.0
2018		9.5

In the first two reporting periods shown (WWL 2018 - WWL 2019), the average pressure on Christians was stable within the range of 9.5 - 10.0 points. However, WWL 2020 saw a jump to 10.7 points, continued by a further increase in WWL 2021 and WWL 2022.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

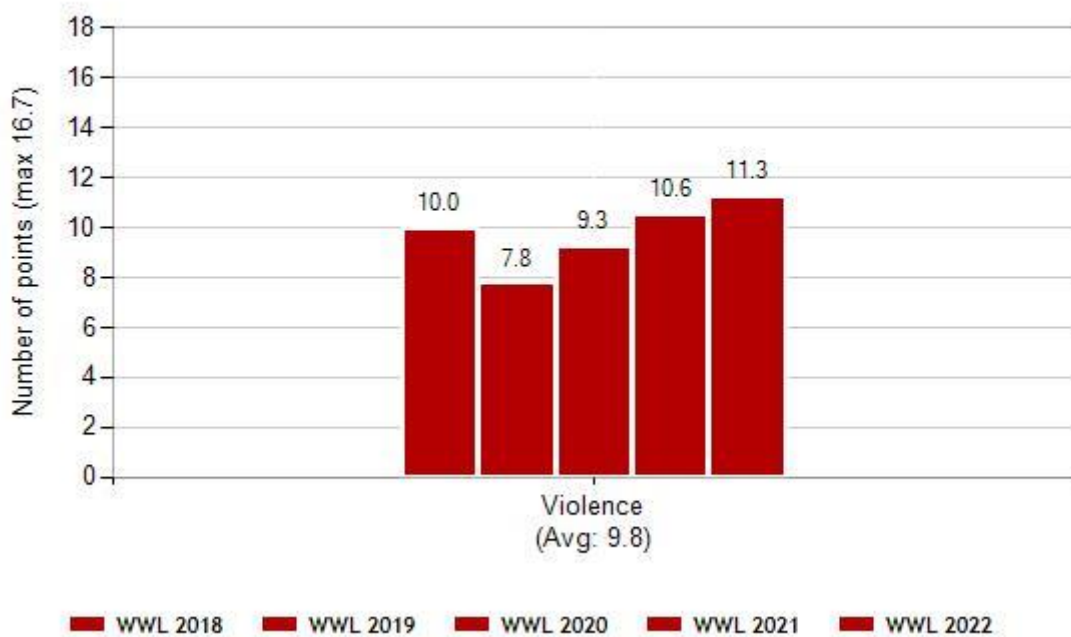
After a spike in pressure and violence in WWL 2017 (immediately prior to the five-year period shown below), the pressure on Christians gradually increased again over all spheres of life, partly due to the influx of Rohingya refugees in 2017 and the increased pressure reported on the Christian converts among them, but also due to an improved reporting from the tribal areas. The level of pressure in all spheres (including *Private life*) is now higher or at the same level as it had been in the WWL 2017 spike.

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Bangladesh
(Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Bangladesh
(Violence)



Having spiked in WWL 2017 (scoring 12.2 points), the level of violence then decreased in the next two reporting periods reflecting the fact that the authorities had begun to act decisively against violent Islamic militants. However, WWL 2020 saw an increase in the level of violence again. This increase continued in WWL 2021, with the attack against Rohingya Christians contributing to the increase. WWL 2022 saw a further increase, with more arrests, attacks and damage to homes and shops being reported. The level of the peak year WWL 2017 has not been reached, however.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Bangladesh is culturally class-based and patriarchal. Despite the country being led by female politicians for many years, Bangladesh is still a country where it is normally dangerous and difficult to be a woman. It has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with [59% of girls](#) being married before they turn 18 (Girls Not Brides). Although the overall child marriage rate in Bangladesh has declined and altered in structure in recent decades, the rate of child marriage continues to be the highest in the world.

In this context, women and girls – particularly converts – are most vulnerable to rights violations from their nuclear family, extended family, friends, neighbors and local community. Conversion is viewed as a betrayal of their culture and religion and as such, Christian women and girls can face harassment from their community, especially if they do not conform to expected modes of dress. Because women and girls are mostly dependent on males, sexual assault, rape, forced divorce and forced marriage are common forms of religious persecution. They are not only abused physically, but also mentally, and can be targeted through house arrest, isolating them from churches and communities. According to [reports](#), violence against women and girls in Bangladesh increased during the COVID-19 crisis and female Christians have been vulnerable to these forms of persecution (UN Women and others, March 2021). A country expert explained some of the family and community dynamics in this way: “Oftentimes the fundamentalists rape minority women including underage girls in front of their families as a consequence of continuing to live in a Muslim country, as they claim it.”

Abduction and forced marriage remain a significant threat facing Christian women and girls, including in [refugee camps](#) (Human Rights Watch, 13 February 2020). Many kidnapped girls remain missing and law enforcement has been inadequate. A country expert commented: “In spite of innumerable instances of kidnap and rape, law enforcement has turned a blind eye to

the issue and utterly fails to do anything to discourage the practice.” Victims of sexual abuse struggle to move on from the trauma, particularly if they become pregnant by their abuser.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

One result of the patriarchal cultural norms in Bangladesh is that males generally become Christians first, followed by their families later. As leaders within their families, men and boys often face persecution first. They are commonly beaten for ‘betraying their culture and religion’ and threatened. Pressure from community members and local Muslim leaders has also caused men to flee from their homes.

Christian men have been targeted by the authorities; sometimes they are also accused of bribing people into becoming Christians and become entangled in drug dealing by so-called ‘friends’ for the purposes of attracting the attention of the police. Church leaders in particular can be at risk of arrest, although imprisonment is still rare.

As men are the main providers, if they lose their job because of their faith – or are imprisoned – it will affect their whole family. The additional economic hardships of the COVID-19 crisis has pushed many families to breaking point. A country expert commented: “As a male-dominated country, according to the family structure of Bangladesh, males are in the position of leading the family and other family members depend on them. If persecution comes among men, it's obvious that this will severely affect other members of Christian families and communities.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department IRFR 2020 (p.1):

- "Members of religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, who were sometimes also members of ethnic minorities, stated the government remained ineffective in preventing forced evictions and land seizures stemming from land disputes. The government continued to deploy law enforcement personnel at religious sites, festivals, and events considered possible targets for violence. In January, the Election Commission rescheduled local Dhaka elections after students and faith groups protested scheduling the elections during a Hindu festival. In October, media reported a crowd of several hundred

persons beat to death a Muslim visiting a mosque after a rumor spread that he desecrated a Quran in Lalmonirhat District, Rangpur Division near the country's northern border. The man's body was then set on fire."

- "In July, according to press and Sufi Muslims, a Sufi follower was stalked and killed outside a Sufi shrine in Gazipur. In July, press reported local residents exhumed the body of an Ahmadi Muslim infant buried in an Islamic cemetery and dumped the body at the side of the road in protest of the infant's burial, because they considered her family to be 'infidels'; the body was later buried in a government cemetery. According to leaders in the Hindu community and media, in November, a crowd of several hundred looted, vandalized, and set on fire Hindu family homes in Cumilla District after rumors spread that local Hindu residents supported Charlie Hebdo's publication in France of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, initially published in 2015 and reprinted in September."

On 13 October 2021 (outside the reporting period for WWL 2022), a violent Muslim mob attacked several Hindu temples across Bangladesh, after footage went viral showing how a Quran being placed on the knee of a figure of Hindu monkey god Hanuman. According to one [report](#), since 2013, 3710 cases of violence against the Hindu minority have been recorded (UCA News, 20 October 2021). Hindus are the second largest religious group in the country behind Sunni Muslims. Hindus are subject to discrimination and violence, and some women and girls have been forcefully converted.

All religious minorities are prone to discrimination and violence, this includes Islamic minority groups like Shiite and Ahmadis as well as Hindu and Buddhist minorities. There have been calls - still unheeded - to [declare the Ahmadi minority non-Muslim](#) (UCA News, 18 April 2019). Societal hostility against Ahmadis is far-reaching. In July 2020, radical Muslims [dug up](#) the corpse of a three day old Ahmadi girl from a cemetery in the eastern city of Brahmanbaria because she was not Sunni (Daily Mail, 11 July 2020).

One country expert explained about the situation for Hindus in more detail: "Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost due to the now-defunct Vested Property Act. Although an Awami League government repealed the Act in 2001, the new government did not take any concrete measures to reverse the property seizures that occurred under the Act. The Vested Property Act was an East Pakistan-era law that allowed the government to expropriate 'enemy' (in practice Hindu) lands. Under the law, the government seized approximately 2.6 million acres of land, affecting almost all Hindus in the country. According to a study conducted by a Dhaka University professor, nearly 200,000 Hindu families lost approximately 40,667 acres of land since 2001, despite the annulment of the Act the same year."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

As long as Bangladesh is struggling with radical Islamic groups from inside the country and from abroad, the Christian minority will be facing challenging times and converts in particular are likely to be vulnerable to attack. The fact that the government is both fighting Islamic militancy, when it turns violent, and wooing Islamist groups, does not give the Christian community much confidence for the future. Additionally, the country faces serious challenges coming from the madrassa system, regardless of whether the official number of 22,000 madrassas is correct or estimations of 70,000 apply. In officially registered madrassas around 2 million students are trained, whereas in not-registered, "private" madrassas there are said to be more than 4 million students. As in Pakistan, these madrassas are potential hotbeds for training students in hatred and violence, as became evident by the fact that nine of the perpetrators of the Dhaka attack in July 2016 were madrassa students. Christians are also targeted by radical Muslims because they are seen as being allied with the government (due to their preference for retaining secularism as set out in the Constitution). Politics in the country frequently involves the use of violent means and often enough innocent by-standers suffer and are even killed.

Religious nationalism - Buddhist and Hinduist

Given that Bangladesh has sizable Hindu and Buddhist minorities as well, and that in times of increasing pressure from the majority society, religion becomes a particularly important factor of identity, converts from a Hindu and Buddhist background will continue to face strong opposition from their family, neighbors and religious leaders.

Dictatorial paranoia

Elections on 30 December 2018 saw a landslide victory for Sheikh Hasina's Awami League and made her the longest ruling prime minister in Bangladesh's history. The fact that the opposition (and international observers) doubted the fairness of elections, points to a continuation of the Persecution engine *Dictatorial paranoia*. Christians as a minority may find themselves in the crosshairs of political infighting. In former Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha's 2018 publication entitled „A broken dream: Human rights, rule of law and democracy”, it is claimed that state security agents [intimidated and influenced judges](#) to rule in favor of the government, illustrating how fraught politics are in Bangladesh (UCA News, 27 September 2018). He claimed [political asylum](#) in Canada in July 2019 (Benar News, 26 July 2019). An arrest warrant was issued against him and he has been [sentenced in absentia](#) for alleged corruption to a prison sentence of 11 years (Al-Jazeera, 10 November 2021). This Persecution engine seems therefore here to stay: Whoever is perceived as a threat by the rulers, will be targeted and brought down, no matter how high his position.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: arrested - <https://thedi diplomat.com/2021/05/bangladesh-cracks-down-on-hardline-islamist-group/>

- Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points): violent attacks - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/christians-demand-justice-after-attack-on-bangladeshi-church/91418>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: Hindu preacher - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/hindu-leader-in-bangladesh-under-fire-for-satanic-jesus-comments/93303>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 59% of girls - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/bangladesh/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: reports - https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/covid-19_and_vaw_insights_from_big_data_analysis_final.pdf
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: refugee camps - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/13/christians-abducted-attacked-bangladesh-refugee-camp>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: report - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/religious-fanatics-gain-strength-in-muslim-majority-bangladesh/94609>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: declare the Ahmadi minority non-Muslim - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/cleric-demands-bangladesh-ahmadis-be-declared-non-muslim/85004>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: dug up - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8513445/Muslim-fanatics-dig-three-day-old-girls-body-cemetery.html>
- Future outlook: intimidated and influenced judges - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/former-chief-justices-book-causes-furore-in-bangladesh/83456>
- Future outlook: political asylum - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/Bangladesh-politics-07262019175417.html>
- Future outlook: sentenced in absentia - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/10/bangladesh-sentences-former-chief-justice-jail-corruption>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Bangladesh>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Bangladesh>