

WORLD WATCH LIST 2023

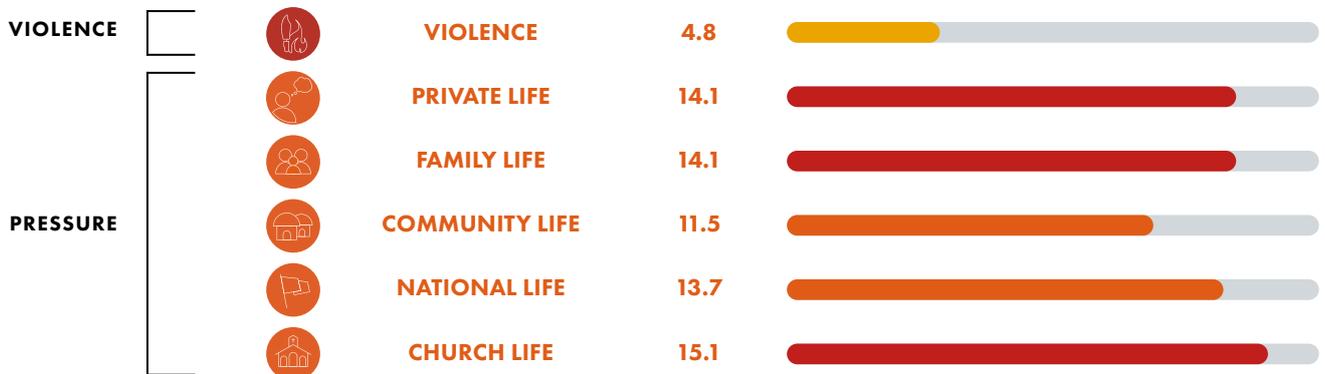
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
19

Algeria



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

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

Quick facts

LEADER

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune

POPULATION

45,350,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

139,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



Context

Main Religions	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	139,000	0.3
Muslims	44,571,000	98.3
Agnostics	606,000	1.3
Others	14,400	0.0

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

Source²

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

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

[least 17 churches](#) affiliated with the Algerian Protestant Church Association (EPA), the umbrella organization for Protestant churches in Algeria. Government control of both social media and other methods of communication is strict. Christians sharing their faith online can face pressure. Several Christians are currently in prison under blasphemy and proselytizing charges.

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

An estimated 98.2% of Algerians are Muslim, almost all of them Sunni. Most Christians are converts from Islam. The EPA was officially recognized by the government in 1974. Its member churches are required to obtain their own registration. None of them has succeeded in doing this. In 2013, the EPA had to re-apply for recognition after a new non-governmental organization (NGO) law was introduced. However, the government has still not responded to this application, leaving the EPA in legal limbo. The Constitution bans non-Muslims from holding high-level government positions. Because Algeria’s Constitution and government forbid activities ‘that are contrary to the country’s values or public morals’, non-Muslim and non-religious groups must keep a low profile in order to avoid persecution, discrimination and intolerance.

¹ Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

² Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

How the situation varies by region

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

Who is affected?

Communities of expatriate Christians

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

Historical Christian communities

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

Converts to Christianity

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

Non-traditional Christian communities

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

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Islamic oppression:

Islam has a significant influence on Algeria's government, which translates into restrictions on the freedom of Christians. Islamist pressure on government and society, in combination with pressure from family members on Christian converts from a Muslim background, has led to persistent difficulties for Christians. Islamist groups are exerting pressure on a government that cannot risk losing popularity by deviating from Islamic convictions held by its citizens. Although the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is still banned, Islamists are becoming more visible, and they monitor the activities of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities (such as the small Jewish and Baha'i communities).

Dictatorial paranoia:

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

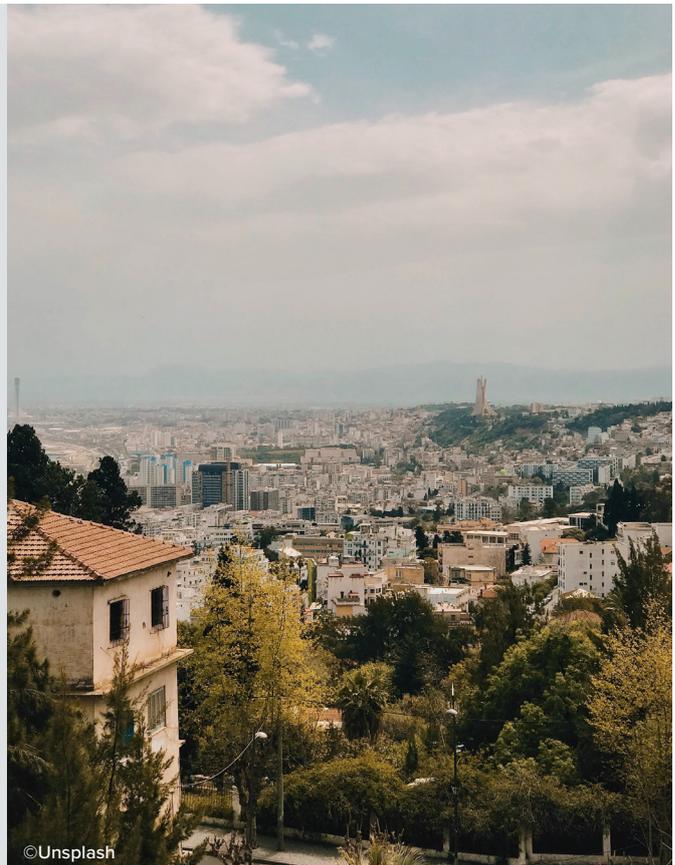
Clan oppression:

Islamic oppression forms the root course of family and community pressure on converts to Christianity, but especially in the Arab part of the country notions like "the protection of the family honor" do play an important role as well. With the support of local (village) elders, pressure is exerted by both direct family members and in a later stage the whole

community to force the convert to renounce the new faith and adhere to the traditional values of both the family and community. In urban areas, the influence of the elders is waning and there is often no wider community to exert pressure. However, family pressure often remains high.

Ethno-religious hostility:

Most Algerian Christians are found in the Kabyle region, which is located in the northern part of the country. Since independence, there has been political tension between this region and the central government in Algeria. Issues of ethnic identity, culture and language figure prominently in the difficult relationship between the government and residents of the Kabyle region, most of whom are ethnic Berbers while the dominant ethnic identity in the country is Arab. Ethnic tension and antagonism also spill into religious life and contribute to freedom of religion violations against Christians in the Kabyle region.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Algerian women are generally disadvantaged in law and society, compounding the pressures that Christian women experience for their faith. They face job loss, harassment at work or school, sexual assault and death threats (particularly if unveiled). Female converts face severe violations from family, including beatings, threats, house arrest and forced marriage or divorce. In addition to restricting women's access to meaningful community, families also prevent converts from accessing Christian radio or television channels. Considering this pressure and violence, many female converts opt to hide their faith and live as secret believers.

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

MEN

Algerian Christian men regularly experience community and economic pressure, facing harassment in workplaces and communal spaces. As men are the main providers in Algerian families, losing work can have a crippling effect on the whole family, creating fear and a sense of helplessness. While not common, men are also more likely to be detained, which also affects their ability to work. Families are often the source of additional violations, such as physical beatings and threats. They suffer ostracism and rejection not just from their families, but from the wider community too.

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by the government
- Violence – physical
- Violence – verbal

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2023	19	73
2022	22	71
2021	24	70
2020	17	73
2019	22	70

The score for Algeria increased by 2 points in WWL 2023 compared to WWL 2022. Growing government restrictions and increasing pressure on the church has resulted in a higher score. Four new churches received orders to close and ceased activities during the reporting period, in addition to the 16 churches closed earlier. Furthermore, Christians were prosecuted and sentenced on charges ranging from “practicing worship without prior approval”, “shaking the faith of a Muslim” to “poisoning the minds of youths”. Pressure remained at a very high level (or above) in all spheres of life.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **April 2022:** The church of “Aouchiche” in Bejaia was informed it had to cease gathering for worship immediately, following an administrative closure order issued by the governor on 21 March 2022.
- Several other churches were told to cease activities.
- More than 15 Christians were arrested and prosecuted on different charges ranging from “proselytism” to “practicing worship without prior approval”.
- At least 10 Christians faced physical and mental abuse from their family members, as well as from the government. Several Christians had to relocate because of these pressures.

WWL Year	Christians imprisoned or punished by the government	Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted	Christians forced to flee their countries	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed
2023	19	10*	4	4
2022	4	10*	0	4

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



Private life

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

Family life

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

Community life

Monitoring of individuals, especially Christians, occurs regularly. Those in leadership positions are likely to have their phones tapped and e-mails read. Gathering outside of church buildings as Christians is illegal and churches will be hindered if they do. This pressure is less intense in the Kabyle region, although Christianity faces opposition in all parts of the country. Christian school children living in more conservative Islamic

areas must hide their faith, or they face discrimination from teachers and restricted access to universities. This is especially true for children of known converts. Similarly, converts will hide their faith or face discrimination when applying for a job. Christians, whether converts or not, do not have access to senior positions in government.

National life

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

Church life

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



International obligations & rights violated

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

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

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

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



Situation of other religious minorities

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



Open Doors in Algeria

Open Doors raises prayer support for believers in Algeria.

About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the Full Country Dossier produced annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2023 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The Full Country Dossier for this country can be accessed [here](#) (password: freedom). The latest update of WWL methodology - as well as the complete WWL 2023 ranking and reports - can be found [here](#) (password: freedom).

Many photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
