

World  
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Research

## Cameroon: Full Country Dossier

February 2023



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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).

# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Cameroon

## Brief country details

Cameroon: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
27,912,000	17,032,000	61.0

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

## Map of country



Cameroon: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	65	45
WWL 2022	65	44
WWL 2021	64	42
WWL 2020	60	48
WWL 2019	54	56

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Cameroon: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Non-Christian religious leaders, Organized crime cartels or networks, One's own (extended) family
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Muslims in Cameroon are severely hindered if they want to convert to Christianity, and in predominantly Muslim parts of the country, there has been a process of radicalization. Converts from Islam are threatened when Bibles or other Christian literature is found in their possession. Converts are not free to express their faith or Christian views, be it to immediate family members or others since doing so exposes them to grave risk. Many Christians with a Muslim background face problems with local communities in remote areas in the northern regions, and there have also been cases of children of Christians in the north being forced by non-Christian relatives to attend Islamic classes. Female converts are often coerced into marriage with non-Christians. Christian women also face the danger of abduction by Boko Haram. Church activities have been hindered or disrupted in areas where Boko Haram has been active. Due to the displacement of people, churches have not been able to function normally in those parts of the country. In other areas, security injunctions have set heavy restrictions on church activities. In addition, the government is putting immense pressure on Christians who speak publicly against injustice and lack of freedom of religion in the country.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Cameroon 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 on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
4. [Convention against Torture](#) (CAT)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian converts face coercion, violence, and harassment, including the loss of a job or opportunities for further education unless they renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- Christian peaceful religious gatherings are restricted by Boko Haram, security restrictions, and denial of registrations or meeting permits (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 21)
- Christians face discrimination in the public and private work force (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- For a fear of reprisals due to a lack of security, Christians are denied their right to freedom of expression (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian women are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23 and CEDAW Art. 16)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

**16 September 2022:** Ambazonian separatists abducted a Catholic priest and a nun in Nchang village in the South West region for not respecting a curfew imposed by the separatists. They set fire to the village Catholic church as a further warning.

**15 July 2022:** Boko Haram militants attacked Koza in the Far North region, killing 4 people. Properties, including a church and shops were looted and destroyed.

**24 June 2022:** Suspected Boko Haram militants killed a civilian in Bargaram in the Far North region. They also burned down a church and looted several valuable objects.

**15 June 2022:** ISWAP or Boko Haram fighters attacked Gharama and Ngormi villages in the Far North region, killing 6 civilians. Civilian houses and a church were set on fire.

As per the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- **October 2021:** "In October, government forces accompanied by local Muslim Mbororo herders killed at least seven individuals in the mostly Christian town of Wum, North West Region, according to multiple sources. The attackers burned one of the victims alive and burned 13 houses. The attacks occurred shortly after separatists killed a soldier in Wum. According to multiple Wum residents, the involvement of Muslim Mbororos in mili-



tary campaigns against local populations, who are mostly Christian, significantly worsened traditionally tense relations between the two communities."

- **October 2021:** "On October 5, according to media and civil society sources, government forces looking for separatists destroyed part of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) church building in Luh, North West Region. According to the pastor of the church, the soldiers deliberately shot at the building multiple times, damaging the walls and destroying the windows."
- **October 2021:** "According to CBC Pastor Vincent Tawa, on October 6, government forces looking for separatists attacked church buildings in Kikaikum, North West Region. Tawa said the soldiers broke into the CBC church compound, destroyed the church residence, and invaded the Full Gospel church building, destroying church property inside."
- **October 2021:** "On October 24, five armed individuals on motorbikes abducted the congregational chairperson of the Ntamulung Presbyterian Church, Anastasia Nana, in Bamenda, North West Region. The abduction took place at the church compound at the end of a worship service." She was released the next day but it was not made public whether the separatist gunmen had received a ransom in exchange for her release.

## Specific examples of positive developments

None.

## 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 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 against Torture - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

# WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Cameroon

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 113-116)	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf">https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf</a>	21 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13146029">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13146029</a>	21 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/CMR">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/CMR</a>	21 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cameroon/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cameroon/</a>	21 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/cameroon">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/cameroon</a>	21 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.58)	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>	21 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	29 July 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Cameroon not included	Democracy Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/cameroon/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/cameroon/freedom-world/2022</a>	21 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Cameroon not included	Freedom on the Net 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cameroon">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cameroon</a>	21 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#cm">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#cm</a>	21 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/cameroon">https://rsf.org/en/cameroon</a>	21 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/cmr">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/cmr</a>	21 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/CMR">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/CMR</a>	21 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/</a>	21 June 2022
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview</a>	21 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CMR">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CMR</a>	21 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp.14-15)	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf</a>	21 June 2022

## Recent history

Cameroon is a West African country sharing borders with Gabon, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria. Europeans first entered the region when the Portuguese explorer, Fernando Po, led an expedition up the Wouri River in 1472. In 1520, the Portuguese established a sugar plantation which was later taken over by the French in the 1600s. In 1884, the agreement between Germany and local chiefs put the country under German domination. At the end of WWI, the country was taken away from Germany and divided into two with France getting a mandate over 80% of the area, and Britain getting a mandate over the remaining 20%. In 1960, the French colony became independent. The following year, the northern part of British Cameroon voted to join with Nigeria while the southern part voted to join French Cameroon leading to the formation of the first Cameroon Republic, officially known as the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Source: [History World](#), last accessed 2 February 2023).

From 1960 until 1982, Ahmadou Ahidjo ruled the country as president with an iron fist. He abolished the federal government structure in 1972, followed by more repressive measures against his opponents. In 1982, he was replaced by his deputy Paul Biya (Source: [Cameroun Web](#), last accessed 12 February 2023). Today, more than three decades have passed but Paul Biya's dictatorial regime continues to govern the country.

Since late 2016, Cameroon's Anglophone regions (i.e. North West and South West) have been engulfed in a crisis which started when English-speaking lawyers, students and teachers began protesting against what they saw as their cultural marginalization and under-representation in the central government. This was met with a heavy-handed government response and over the years many innocent civilians have been killed, arbitrarily detained and physically abused by the government security forces (HRW 2022 country chapter).

The [heavy-handed response by the government](#) resulted in the formation of several non-state armed groups and fueled existing separatist sentiment; the subsequent violent confrontations also forced more than half a million people to flee their homes (Refugees International, 29 May 2019). Similar acts of violence in September 2018 that involved both armed secessionists and security forces took a greater death toll on civilians and showed the escalation of the situation, which led the UN and African Union to issue a joint communiqué calling on the government to facilitate access to humanitarian and human rights organizations ([HRW 2019 country chapter](#)).

Today, the civil war continues unabated in the Anglophone regions of the country. Hundreds of civilians have been killed since January 2020 in the North West and South West regions. In March 2020, a separatist group, calling itself "Southern Cameroons Defence Forces" (SOCADEF), called for a ceasefire when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. In June 2020, government officials held peace talks in the capital, Yaoundé, with the leaders of the Ambazonia Interim Government, a major separatist group. Neither initiative led to an end to the violence ([HRW 2021 country chapter](#)).

In this ongoing civil war, Christians are impacted both directly and indirectly. There are direct attacks targeting Christians from both sides of the conflict if they do not support their cause. The indirect impact comes from the government focusing its attention on combatting separatists, which has given Boko Haram the opportunity to take advantage of security loopholes left by the security forces.

## Political and legal landscape

Cameroon is a unitary republic with a president as head of state. Since the country has had experience with German, French and British occupation, the country's legal system is based on a mixture of English common law and the Napoleonic Code. The parliament is bicameral: The National Assembly (the lower house) has 180 members and the Senate (the upper house) has 100 members.

Christians are very active in the political sphere but suffer from the rampant corruption and lack of democracy. Many Christians have complained that government officials are not giving them the protection accorded to them by the law, if they do not openly support the government.

### Presidential election (2018)

On 7 October 2018, the country held a [presidential election](#). The turnout of 54% was far lower than in previous elections and was just 10% in English-speaking regions. The six-term octogenarian President Paul Biya was declared the winner on 22 October following the dismissal of a petition filed by multiple opposition candidates at the constitutional court alleging fraud and irregularities (The Guardian, 22 October 2018). On 6 November 2018, 85-year-old Biya was sworn-in for a seventh term as president. In late January 2019, Maurice Kamto and several Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) officials were arrested by security forces after the party held nationwide rallies calling for a recount of the 2018 presidential vote. The government used force to disrupt the CRM's rallies and relied on the same tactics when the party held rallies to call for Kamto's release in June 2019. Kamto was tried on charges of insurrection and rebellion in September 2019, but President Biya ordered his release in October. The government also banned CRM rallies.

## Parliamentary and regional elections (2020)

Parliamentary elections were held in Cameroon on 9 February 2020, together with municipal elections. The Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) retained its majority in parliament, winning 139 of the 167 seats. Cameroon also held regional elections for the first time in December 2020. President Biya hoped that the first ever regional vote would appease critics who were claiming he was neglecting the 10 provinces, and that it would also end a bloody four-year insurgency in the west by English-speaking separatists. The government viewed the polls as a step towards greater regional autonomy, but opponents claimed that the vote would only tighten President Biya's hold on power and boycotted the regional elections. As a result, President Biya's ruling party [won control](#) of nine out of 10 regional councils (Reuters, 10 December 2020).

## Events in 2021

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022:

- In December 2021, members of the opposition Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM), who had been arrested in September 2020 during a peaceful protest, received prison sentences of up to seven years for “rebellion.”
- A November 2021 report by the Supreme Court's Chamber of Accounts noted numerous “weaknesses and abuses” in the government's management of COVID-19 funding, and found that more than 21 billion CFA francs (\$34.8 million) had been diverted from the government's COVID-19 fund.
- In May 2021, the government committed to investigating why “most of a \$335 million loan” from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) could not be accounted for.
- The conflict in the Anglophone regions wore on, with frequent reports of violence and deaths at the hands of both separatist and government forces throughout 2021, including numerous deadly attacks on civil servants, students, teachers, and schools by separatists.

## Gender perspective

Cameroon's legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. In particular, marriage is a place where violent repression of women takes place, especially of female converts. Whilst forced marriages are prohibited, polygamy is legal (for men) and widely culturally accepted (Civil Code, Ordinance 81-02, Art. 49, 1981). The minimum age for marriage is 15 for girls (with parental permission) and 18 for boys; according to [Girls Not Brides \(2022\)](#), a total of 31% of girls are married by the age of 18, with most early marriages occurring in the North. Within marriages violence is pervasive, and due to a lack of legislation addressing domestic violence or marital rape, victims have no recourse to justice or protection ([Home Office, Country Background Note, December 2020](#)). Human rights advocates have campaigned for the cessation of harmful practices towards widows, which include a widow being publicly blamed for the death of her husband, being forced to have sexual relations with one of her husbands' male relatives, being forcibly shaven and unclothed, and being imprisoned within her own home ([Global Fund for Widows, 15 December 2020](#)).

## Religious landscape

Cameroon: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	17,032,000	61.0
Muslim	5,608,000	20.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	520	0.0
Ethno-religionist	4,964,000	17.8
Jewish	81	0.0
Bahai	70,900	0.3
Atheist	53,300	0.2
Agnostic	166,000	0.6
Other	16,900	0.1
<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 2022)

As per the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The North West and South West regions are largely Protestant, and the South, Center, East, Littoral, and West regions are mostly Catholic. The Mbororo ethnic community is mostly Muslim and located primarily in the North, Far North, Northwest, Adamawa, and East regions; the Bamoun ethnic group is also predominantly Muslim and located in the West region. Many Muslims, Christians, and members of other faiths also adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs."
- "In June 2021, approximately 50 Pentecostal churches that had been functioning in secret in Yaounde submitted their registration documents to the prefect of Yaounde I subdivision and expressed the desire to be recognized officially, according to a local media outlet. As of the end of the year [2021], the churches in question remained unregistered. According to a local religious leader, the government was reluctant to register many faith-based organizations, such as Pentecostal churches, partly because they 'lacked the ability to coordinate their actions and activities', unlike Catholic and mainline Protestant churches."

## Economic landscape

According to Heritage Foundation's [2022 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- Cameroon's economy is categorized as 'mostly unfree'.
- "Cameroon's economic freedom score is 52.9, making its economy the 136th freest in the 2022 Index. Its overall score has decreased, primarily because of a decline in property rights. Cameroon is ranked 27th among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages."
- The Country's GDP stands at USD 96.8 billion.

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook (2022):

- "The current growth level is too low to achieve a substantial poverty reduction. Although the poverty rate has declined over the last decade, the absolute number of poor people has increased consistently due to population growth. The COVID-19 crisis has reversed progress in poverty reduction, with the poverty rate estimated to have increased in 2020. The debt stock has been rising since 2016, calling for improved debt management to attract new investment. For growth to accelerate and become more inclusive, the government's role needs to shift from being the main driver of economic activity to: (i) providing a stable and fair regulatory environment and adequate infrastructure services; and (iii) effectively delivering basic services to the population."

### Gender perspective

Women and girls are among the most economically vulnerable in Cameroon, in part due to limited education and employment opportunities ([OCHA, 2019](#)). Making it additionally challenging for women to achieve economic independence, customary practices often deny widows their due inheritance, overriding statutory provisions. In some communities women are viewed as the property of their husband, or forced into levirate marriages ([OECD, 2019](#)).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The country has more than 200 ethnic groups. Bamileke-Bamu 24.3%, Beti/Bassa, Mbam 21.6 %, Biu-Mandara 14.6%, Arab-Choa/Hausa/Kanuri 11%, Adamawa-Ubangi 9.8%, Grassfields 7.7%, Kako,Meka/Pygmy 3.3%, Cotier/Ngoe/Oroko 2.7 %, Southwestern Bantu 0.7%, foreign/other ethnic group 4.5 % (2018 est.)
- **Main languages:** 24 major African language groups, English (official), French (official)
- **Urban population:** 58.1% of the total population (2021)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.43% annual rate change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 2.77% (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 18.7 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years of age and older):** 77.1%
- **Expected years of schooling:** 12.1 years; (11.3 years for females and 12.9 years for males)
- **Employment population ratio (15 years of age and older):** 73.5%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 3.4%

- **Unemployment, youth (15-24 years of age):** 5.8%

According to the [UNHCR fact sheet](#) (April 2022):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** Cameroon hosts 1,941,349 persons of concern to UNHCR: 485,729 refugees and asylum seekers, 936,767 internally displaced persons, and 518,853 returnees (former IDPs).

According to the UN Global Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **Human Development Index:** Cameroon is ranked 153 out of 189 countries with a value of 0.563
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 59.3 years
- **Gender Development index (GDI):** 0.864
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** 0.560. Cameroon ranks 150th among a total of 189 classified countries. This is nine places lower than the previous year, indicating how the status of women and girls has been in a downward trajectory.

Cameroonians often have large, extended families with both [polygamous](#) and monogamous marriages (DW, 26 July 2016). Due to the traditional encouragement to have large families, more than 60% of the current Cameroonian population is under 25 years of age.

### Gender perspective

Cameroon is a heavily patriarchal society, which treats women and girls as inferior to men in daily life. By law, men are the head of the household and make decisions on behalf of the family (Ordinance 81-02, Art. 212-214, 1981; Constitution, 1996). According to the [CSPPS \(2020\)](#), the COVID-19 crisis magnified the gap between men and women. 56% of women have reportedly experienced sexual violence and domestic violence is reportedly rampant ([Reliefweb/GenCap, 17 October 2019](#)). Whilst primarily a danger for women, men and boys are not exempt from the threat of sexual violence – of all reported cases of sexual violence, 11% of victims are male.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 33.1% of the population – survey date: 31 December 2021 (Most recent survey at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 17.6% of the population - survey date: 31 December 2021

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people):** 83

Cameroon has displayed efforts to reduce the gender gap in the information and communications technology sector (ICT); the number of female Internet users has reportedly risen in recent years ([UN Women, 2015](#); [Web Foundation, 2015](#)). According to [Napoleon Cat \(January 2023\)](#), 43.7% of Facebook users are female, compared to 56.3% male. This indicates that a gender gap in relation to technology access remains.

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (Publication date: February 2023):

- "The investment programs among operators over the next few years will considerably boost mobile broadband services in rural areas of the country, many of which are underserved by fixed-line infrastructure."
- "The ICT sector in Cameroon is making steady progress, enabling the country to make better use of the digital economy. About 95% of all electronic transactions are carried through the m-money services operated by MTN Cameroon and Orange Cameroon. The government has also been supportive, having launched its 'Cameroon Digital 2020' program, aimed at improving connectivity nationally."
- "Improved submarine and terrestrial cable connectivity has substantially increased international bandwidth, in turn leading to reductions in access prices for consumers."

## Security situation

### Attacks by ISWAP and Boko Haram

According to the HRW 2022 country chapter:

- "In the first half of 2021, attacks and raids by the Islamist armed group Boko Haram increased in the Far North Region, with at least 80 civilians killed. On January 8, a Boko Haram suicide attack killed at least 14 civilians, including 8 children, and wounded 3 others, including 2 children. The presumed death in May of Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, ... helped consolidate ISWAP's power and increased insecurity in Cameroon's Far North region."

ISWAP have been attacking security forces and civilians on a frequent basis around Cameroon's Lake Chad area and around Maroua. State resources are being invested in combatting the Anglophone insurgency instead of being used against Boko Haram and ISWAP. This has given the Islamic militant groups more freedom to recruit, organize and mount attacks against Christians. 2021 and 2022 have not brought any meaningful change in this respect.

### Insurgency in the Anglophone region

According to a [Crisis 24 alert](#) published on 4 January 2023:

- "Separatist activism is likely to continue in the South West and North West regions of Cameroon through at least mid-2023. The threat of violence remains elevated in the English-speaking regions as various armed groups continue to call for secession, highlighting the dangers for those operating or traveling in the impacted areas. The situation has remained tense since October 2017, when secessionists unilaterally proclaimed the independence of the so-called state of Ambazonia, which is unrecognized internationally."
- "Security forces frequently skirmish with Ambazonia secessionist militants (also called 'Amba boys'), regularly leading to casualties. Separatists have carried out ambushes targeting security forces and government officials involving improvised explosive devices. There are also reports of militant abuses, including kidnappings and killings, against the local population. Militants often issue stay-at-home orders (also known as 'ghost cities'); residents who do not comply with such measures may face intimidation and violence."



- "While many kidnappings go unreported, it is estimated that dozens to hundreds of people are kidnapped each year in both the Northwest and Southwest regions. Targets notably include prominent members of civil society, politicians, security forces, teachers, and priests, among others. Militants may target foreign nationals due to their perceived worth in the event of a ransom demand. High-profile individuals have been kidnapped in recent months, including a senator and her driver, who were seized by ADF militants in Bamenda April 30 [2022]".

As stated in HRW 2022 country chapter:

- "As the crisis in the Anglophone regions continued unabated for the fifth year, over 712,000 people were internally displaced in the Anglophone regions and in the Francophone Littoral, West, and Centre regions as of August 2021, and at least 2.2 million people were in need of humanitarian aid.
- "At least 4,000 civilians have been killed by both government forces and armed separatist fighters since late 2016 in the North-West and South-West regions, as separatists seek independence for the country's minority Anglophone regions."
- "Separatists, who have violently enforced a boycott on education since 2017, continued to attack students and education professionals."

### **Violations by government forces**

As stated in HRW 2022 country chapter:

- In responding to the armed conflict, government forces have also been responsible for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including unlawful killings and arbitrary arrests.

### **Gender perspective**

The COVID-19 crisis, the conflict in the Anglophone region and the jihadist presence in the North have created a cocktail of pressure and violence for men and women alike; women in particular are exposed to gender-based violence (US State Department IRFR 2021). Christian women and girls risk being abducted, forcibly married to fighters and forced to convert to Islam. Christian men and boys, particularly church leaders, are also vulnerable to abduction. They may be forced into the ranks of militias, used for forced labor, or tortured and killed.

## **Trends analysis**

### **1) The battle against Boko Haram and ISWAP affects the whole region**

A significant part of West Africa has become a battleground between government forces and Islamic militants, with Boko Haram actively attacking Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. For example, in October 2022, [Boko Haram](#) "militants managed to take control of the Cameroonian army's advanced post in Djibrilli, on the border with Nigeria" (Africa Intelligence, 27 October 2022). Coupled with the fact that the Cameroon government is not respecting or protecting the rights of its citizens, the future of the country does not look bright.

## 2) Radical Islamic ideology has made deep inroads

In the northern part of the country where radicalization and militancy is taking place, the life of Christians is particularly hard. Even if Boko Haram and ISWAP were to be defeated, social harmony is unlikely to result since Islamist ideology has already made deep inroads among Muslim youth in the region. If things continue as they are, there might be sectarian violence on a scale as occurred in the Central African Republic (CAR) in the last years. The COVID-19 crisis resulted in jihadists having more opportunities for organization and action.

## 3) The government has become more repressive

What started off as a protest movement by Anglophone Cameroonians has led to civil war. In response, the government has become increasingly repressive and has been accused of serious human rights violations. As it is focusing more and more on suppressing political dissent and opposition, the government has become distracted from its fight against Boko Haram.

## 4) The Anglophone crisis is deepening

The Anglophone crisis is deepening as the conflict is becoming more protracted than initially expected. In July 2020, it was reported that government and separatists had started to hold peace talks. However, [little progress](#) was made by the end of 2021 (Africa Intelligence, 8 November 2021) and commentators argue that the "political and economic spoils of the war have reduced the incentive to find a negotiated settlement" (New Humanitarian, 19 July 2022). If negotiations indeed fail, the country will be in a deep crisis for years to come. In September 2022, hundreds of Cameroonian women held a protest arguing that despite the fact that women count for more than half of the Cameroonian population, they [are underrepresented](#) in the peace talks (VOA News, 20 September 2022).

In the context of the above-mentioned crises in the country, Christians are becoming increasingly vulnerable to attack.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: History World - <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=pau>
- Recent history: Cameroun Web - <https://www.camerounweb.com/CameroonHomePage/people/person.php?ID=1253>
- Recent history: heavy-handed response by the government - [https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/5/28/crisis-denied-in-cameroon-government-refusal-to-recognize-suffering-in-nwsw-deters-donors?gclid=Cj0KCCjws\\_r0BRCwARIsAMxfDRiNNM5F4-9K6toVx60UBgM9ohd6yEkzahVvLIHxS01nTgW6yqAXkbAaAnuJEALw\\_wcB](https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/5/28/crisis-denied-in-cameroon-government-refusal-to-recognize-suffering-in-nwsw-deters-donors?gclid=Cj0KCCjws_r0BRCwARIsAMxfDRiNNM5F4-9K6toVx60UBgM9ohd6yEkzahVvLIHxS01nTgW6yqAXkbAaAnuJEALw_wcB)
- Recent history: HRW 2019 country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/cameroon>
- Recent history: HRW 2021 country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/cameroon>
- Political and legal landscape: presidential election: - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/paul-biya-cameroon-85-year-old-president-wins-re-election-landslide>
- Political and legal landscape: won control - <https://www.reuters.com/article/cameroon-election-idINKBN28K145>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides (2022) - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/cameroon/>

- Political and legal landscape: Home Office, Country Background Note, December 2020 - [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/948164/Cameroon\\_-\\_Background\\_-\\_CPIN\\_-\\_v1.0\\_\\_final\\_\\_Gov.uk.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948164/Cameroon_-_Background_-_CPIN_-_v1.0__final__Gov.uk.pdf)
- Political and legal landscape: Global Fund for Widows, 15 December 2020 - [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5fce889a3c0f6e35f56692ce/5fdce6b05dc11341870eac54\\_Cameroon%20final.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5fce889a3c0f6e35f56692ce/5fdce6b05dc11341870eac54_Cameroon%20final.pdf)
- Economic landscape: 2022 Index of Economic Freedom - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/cameroon>
- Economic landscape: OCHA, 2019 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/data-gender-equality-cameroon>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/CM.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR fact sheet - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92351>
- Social and cultural landscape: polygamous - <https://www.dw.com/en/polygamy-continues-among-camerorens-traditional-rulers/a-19420852>
- Social and cultural landscape: CSPPS (2020), - <https://www.cspps.org/toughest-battles-Cameroon-fought-by-women-girls>
- Social and cultural landscape: Reliefweb/GenCap, 17 October 2019 - [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/data\\_on\\_gender\\_equality\\_in\\_cameroon-hno\\_2020-17\\_oct\\_19.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/data_on_gender_equality_in_cameroon-hno_2020-17_oct_19.pdf)
- Technological landscape: UN Women, 2015 - [https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national\\_reviews/cameroon\\_review\\_beijing20.ashx](https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national_reviews/cameroon_review_beijing20.ashx)
- Technological landscape: Web Foundation, 2015 - <https://webfoundation.org/2015/10/narrowing-camerorens-gender-gap-reasons-for-hope/>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat (January 2023), - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-cameroon/2023/01/>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Cameroon-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: Crisis 24 alert - <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/01/cameroon-separatist-activism-likely-to-continue-in-the-southwest-and-northwest-regions-through-at-least-mid-2023>
- Trends analysis: Boko Haram - <https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-africa/2022/10/27/boko-haram-attack-puts-armed-forces-on-high-alert,109839018-gra>
- Trends analysis: little progress - <https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-africa/2021/11/08/swiss-mediators-relaunch-stalled-peace-talks-with-anglophone-separatists,109703334-art>
- Trends analysis: are underrepresented - <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroonian-women-say-they-are-underrepresented-in-peace-talks-/6755115.html>

## WWL 2023: Church information / Cameroon

### Christian origins

The Portuguese brought Christianity to the country in 1429. However, the Roman Catholic Church only officially started establishing congregations in the country towards the end of the 19th century. The London Baptist Missionary Society (LBMS) sent missionaries in 1845 who were part of a wider influx of European merchants and explorers looking for business opportunities and raw materials. The first LBMS missionaries were led by Alfred Saker along with a group of West Indian Baptist preachers mainly from Jamaica. US Presbyterians came in 1879.

When Germany began colonizing the region in 1880, Protestant work was taken over by German Baptists and Basel missionaries. German Catholic missionaries opened the first successful Catholic mission in 1890.

*(Source: Sundkler B. and Steed C., A History of the Church in Africa, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.750-756.)*

## Church spectrum today

Cameroon: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	1,400	0.0
Catholic	7,508,000	44.1
Protestant	6,398,000	37.6
Independent	1,724,000	10.1
Unaffiliated	1,400,000	8.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,031,400</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,215,000	13.0
Renewalist movement	2,534,000	14.9

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

**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.

Most Christians belong to the Roman Catholic Church. As stated succinctly in the US State Department IRFR 2021:

"Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The North West and South West Regions are largely Protestant, and the South, Center, East, Littoral, and West Regions are mostly Catholic."

"There is a growing number of Christian revivalist churches."

- "State-sponsored radio stations and the sole state-sponsored television station continued to broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services and ceremonies regularly on national holidays and during national events. Government ministers and other officials often attended these ceremonies."

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Governance and security in Cameroon are major problems, with the country facing violence in three regions: 1) Far North - where Boko Haram continues to mount attacks; 2) North West and 3) South West, which are both areas where the Anglophone insurgency is based.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Communities of expatriate Christians do not exist as a separate category for WWL analysis, since expatriates are free to interact with other Christian groups.

**Historical Christian communities:** According to World Christian Database statistics, Roman Catholics make up 42.2% of the Christians population. However, there are also several Protestant denominations (e.g. Presbyterians) who can also be considered as belonging to this category. They do not suffer as much persecution as convert communities, but nevertheless, some congregations have been affected by Boko Haram violence; also, the *Dictatorial paranoia* of the government undermines the autonomy of Historical Christian communities.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts from Islam to Christianity are the most persecuted Christian group in the country, whether they meet in secret or riskily share fellowship with other Christians. Convert Christians in Protestant churches, are often persecuted by family and community in the northern regions, Adamawa and in the Eastern and Western regions. Some converts were reportedly threatened during Boko Haram attacks to reconvert to Islam. Therefore, this community of Christians faces the risk of pressure, ostracism and violence. This often leads to forced displacement to safer parts of the country. Those who convert from ethnic religious beliefs to Christianity also face pressure from their community and families to renounce Christianity, but the pressure is less intensive.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This is a growing category in Cameroon; Baptist and Pentecostal groups are examples. While some Pentecostal churches have criticized the government and have faced threats of closure, others have tried to align themselves with the government, campaigning and mobilizing funds for the ruling party during elections. Pressure exerted by the government undermines the freedom of such churches. These churches also face threats and violence from groups like Boko Haram in the north. *Islamic oppression* in the north has also made the evangelistic efforts of such groups risky (as well as integration of Christians with a Muslim background).

## WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Cameroon

### Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

### Position on the World Watch List

Cameroon: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	65	45
WWL 2022	65	44
WWL 2021	64	42
WWL 2020	60	48
WWL 2019	54	56

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Cameroon scored 65 points, the same as in WWL 2022. The average pressure on Christians in Cameroon was high at 9.9 points, with highest scores in the *Church* and *Community spheres*. Violence was extremely high at 15.9 points. Boko Haram remained a very potent force that has kept targeting Christians in the northern part of the country. The civil war in the western part of the country also affected Christians as the separatists also forced churches either to pay tax ('protection money') or to speak no ill about the misdeeds of the rebel group. The government also kept up pressure on Christian groups; for example, there is no room for any Christian leader to criticize the human rights conditions and the corruption in the country. The existence of rampant corruption in the country has also made security and the rule of law virtually non-existent in many areas. Finally, established church denominations also persecute other Christian groups where the increasing number of non-traditional Christian communities is seen as a threat.

## Persecution engines

Cameroon: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

*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.*

### Islamic oppression (Very Strong)

This persecution engine is particularly evident in the north, in Adamawa, and also in some eastern regions. *Islamic oppression* affects primarily Christians with a Muslim background who are persecuted by their family. The Boko Haram Islamic insurgency also poses a constant threat to the life and security of Christians and has caused the displacement of many Christians from Adamawa, the north and the extreme northern regions. In remote areas in these regions, some Muslim leaders believe that Islam should be the only religion present. Although Cameroon has generally been a country showing religious tolerance, the memories and legacies of Fulani-led *jihad* in previous centuries in the northern regions lingers on: It was through *jihad* that the indigenous population was forcibly converted to Islam. The violence and activity of Boko Haram have brought these memories alive and is undermining the history of peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims in modern-day Cameroon.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

During the past three decades of Paul Biya's rule, the regime has been responsible for a whole series of political arrests, killings and persecution of Christians. The Anglophone region of the country has been particularly affected by this due to the independence movement active in the area.

### Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Cameroon is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. The dictatorial regime of Paul Biya is responsible for the rampant corruption that weakens the country's political structure. Although the country has oil resources, it still lags behind most African countries in economic development. Corrupt officials in the northern part of the country have been responsible for the persecution of Christians by not taking appropriate action to protect Christians under attack by radical Islamic groups. Corrupt officials have also been responsible for persecuting Christians who have views opposing the government.

### Clan oppression (Medium)

A significant number of the population adhere to traditional belief systems - and there are also Christians who mix traditional beliefs with Christianity. In areas where Christians oppose such practices, they will face persecution.

### Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)

Well-established denominations do not welcome the activities of new church groups in the country. For example, [in 2018](#), Cameroon's Protestant, Baptist, and Catholic churches called on the government to shut down a number of Pentecostal churches (DW, 21 March 2018).

## Drivers of persecution

Cameroon: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	MEDIUM			STRONG	STRONG
Government officials								Strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders				Strong	-				
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Medium				
Violent religious groups	Very strong								

Cameroon:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	MEDIUM			STRONG	STRONG
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak								
One's own (extended) family	Medium								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong							Strong	

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** The main drivers are militant groups like Boko Haram who engage in violent attacks targeting both Christians and Muslims who do not adhere to the same interpretation of Islam as them. In addition to these groups, government officials at the local level who sympathize with such groups also contribute to the persecution of Christians.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Some Islamic preachers encourage the persecution of converts in their teaching. Such teaching supports the activities of Boko Haram.
- **Family members (Medium):** Family members and neighbors will put pressure on converts to return to Islam.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** People from wider society also put pressure on converts in the northern part of the country.
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (Medium):** Organized crime cartels and criminal networks have also played a major role in making Boko Haram more potent in the country. These networks are not limited to Cameroon itself; it is a regional issue.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** Paul Biya's dictatorial regime has been ruling the country since 1982. Recently there has been a growing opposition movement throughout the country against his regime. Most opponents are Christians since Cameroon is a Christian majority country. Several Christian leaders have been arrested, tortured, and killed by government officials because they oppose the government's inhuman treatment of political opponents.
- **Organized corruption (Strong):** Government officials also participate in organized crime networks. This has made rule of law a luxury. Even violent religious groups and other groups have benefited from this role of government officials.



### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Boko Haram engages with criminal networks to bribe officials and to traffic people and arms.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Paul Biya’s regime supports corrupt officials in order to maintain its grip on power. Corrupt officials have taken part in the persecution of Christians in the Muslim-dominated parts of the country. There are also numerous cases where corrupt officials have arrested and killed Christian political opponents of the government.

### Drivers Clan oppression

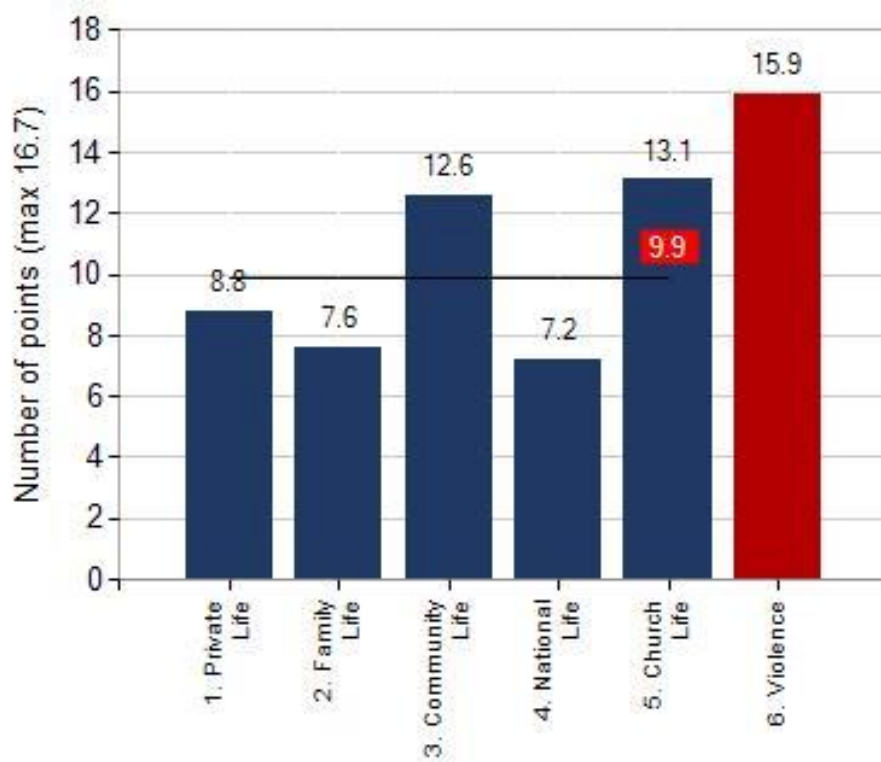
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In this category of drivers are ethnic leaders, adherents of traditional belief systems, family members, and even some Christians who are mixing traditional beliefs with Christianity.

### Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Christian religious leaders (Medium):** The leaders of well-established church denominations sometimes influence the authorities to crack down on smaller church groups in the country.

## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Cameroon



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Cameroon shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Cameroon is high at 9.9 points, the same as in WWL 2022.
- The *Church sphere* score is the highest with 13.1 points, followed by the *Community sphere* score with 12.6 points.
- The score for violence is extremely high at 15.9 points an increase from 15.4 points in WWL 2022 (15.4 points).

## 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 2023 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: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

#### **Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.75 points)**

This issue is the case in areas that are affected by Boko Haram. In the context of the ongoing incursion and expansion of Boko Haram, Christians often find it risky to own Christian materials. Converts, in particular, are threatened if Bibles or other Christian literature are found in their possession. There are some Christians who do not take their Bibles home but choose to leave their copies in the church building. The risk is far more acute for converts.

#### **Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.75 points)**

Speaking about one's Christian faith is risky in certain contexts, particularly in the northern part of the country where extended family members are Muslims. Especially converts see their rights to have a discussion about their faith extremely limited and often face opposition from the wider family should they mention faith issues. They are often insulted and rejected. Thus, it is very common for Christian converts to hide their conversion. This is also an issue for those who join new denominations, so becoming 'traitors' in the eyes of the well-established traditional churches.

#### **Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.75 points)**

Meeting at places of worship or in a private setting can be difficult in some situations. For Christians in general, but especially for converts from Islam in the north, it is very risky to meet with other Christians. If they do try to meet up, the non-Christian local community is likely to think that these Christian groups are trying to convert others. The presence of Boko Haram has made it further difficult, with security becoming an acute challenge for Christians.

**Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.25 points)**

The risk is present in the context of growing jihadism in the northern part of the country and - to a lesser extent - in the context of cross-denominational changes in loyalty. Converts are not free to express their faith be it to immediate family members or others. In some cases, especially in north Cameroon where family members are Muslim, Christians have faced harassment when they discuss their faith with them.

**Block 1 - Additional information**

*In WWL 2023, it was convert Christians who faced the severest forms of persecution in the Private sphere. They cannot worship in the presence of their families or in their community. They often find it difficult to possess Christian materials. In addition, they struggle to meet and also live a life as Christians. In the northern part of the country, even non-convert Christians have to hide their faith in order to protect themselves from Boko Haram.*

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.75 points)**

For most categories of Christian communities in the country, there is little or no persecution in this regard. However, Christians with a Muslim background in the northern part of the country do face difficulties. A country researcher states: "In some parts of the country - especially in northern Cameroon (e.g. Touboro) - Christian spouses have been refused custody of children by non-Christian spouses. Official divorce is rare, but couples do separate. Especially in the North, Christian spouses will not be allowed to continue raising their child, let alone have custody over it. This situation mostly affects women. There is also a cultural element to this."

**Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (2.75 points)**

This issue affects converts mostly, particularly female converts. A country researcher explains: "According to Islamic law, when someone becomes a Christian, they lose their right to inherit from their parents. It is believed that the Quran does not permit the inheritance of a Muslim to be given to a Christian, so if a man is a Muslim and his child converts, that child is entitled to nothing. In some parts of the country especially the northern part, there have been some instances where a convert lost his farmland including his house."

**Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.50 points)**

For most categories of Christianity in the country, there is little persecution in this regard. However, Christians with a Muslim background in the northern part of the country (and sometimes also those who leave an historical church to join a non-traditional church) face forced separation from their children as a form of leverage to force parents to renounce their faith.

Some converts will hide their faith so as not to be forced to leave their families. If the news of conversion is heard by the community/family, separation is sure to follow.

**Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (2.25 points)**

Conversion is not illegal, but it is often not accepted in practice. Christians with a Muslim background in the northern part of the country face the threat of divorce. There are several instances where female converts have to choose between either their husband or their Christian faith (which would lead to divorce). Such pressure to renounce faith is part of the tactics employed by the community and radical groups as a warning to others not to consider leaving Islam.

**Block 2 - Additional information**

*In WWL 2023,, the Family sphere was once again an area where Christians converts face serious persecution. It is always difficult for them to celebrate weddings and Christian holidays or raise their children in accordance with Christian faith. They also face discrimination when it comes to inheritance and marriage. The status of a convert in their family diminishes completely.*

## 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.). (3.50 points)**

This is a typical problem in areas where jihadists operate: Many Christians with a Muslim background face problems in local communities in remote areas of the northern region. If they are recognized as Christians, they are despised and discriminated against simply for their faith. Educational opportunities for Christians are also restricted. Many Christian headteachers have been compelled to close their schools in the Far North region, fearing attacks by Boko Haram. Harassment and obstruction is not limited to converts from a Muslim background: Those who leave an historical church to join one of the newer, non-traditional churches also face such pressure.

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

Discrimination against Christians often happens in government institutions, and in companies where Muslims are the majority. However, it can also happen in public and private institutions where denominational favoritism is inherent.

**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.). (3.25 points)**

Monitoring occurs both in the context of the Anglophone insurgency and Boko Haram operations. Many Christians with a Muslim background face problems with monitoring by local

communities in remote areas of the northern regions. For fear of retaliation, Christians also practice self-censorship, especially when gathering for a meeting or using social media. This is the case mostly in the northern part of the country. Pastors, churches and missionary groups are also sometimes closely watched by government intelligence agents, especially those perceived as being critical of the government.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.00 points)**

Forcing a person to renounce their 'foreign' faith, is one of the typical characteristics of communities where conversion is taboo or where other religions are seen as being impure. In Cameroon, this is the case mostly in the northern part of the country and it affects all Christian groups, both men and women. However, converts are affected the most. Where a Muslim's conversion to Christian faith has become known, he faces losing his job or opportunities for further education, unless he returns to Islam.

**Block 3 - Additional information**

*In WWL 2023, the Community sphere of life was one of the worst areas for Christians facing pressure. Many Christians struggle to participate in communal institutions or share communal resources. They are also monitored by the locals. In areas where Boko Haram is active, there is huge fear that Christians, their homes and churches can be easily recognized and attacked. It is an area that makes Christians very vulnerable.*

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)**

Cameroon is one of the countries in West Africa that is known for repressing views and opinions. The dictatorial nature of the government makes it very sensitive and hostile to actual or perceived criticism. Therefore, churches and Christians are forced to act carefully when expressing their opinion about public matters from the perspective of their faith. One country expert noted: "Especially in the Anglophone regions, the freedom of expression and belief was threatened even more, with Internet shut-downs and people being arrested. In the far northern part of the country, people were met by restrictions due to Boko Haram's presence."

**Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.25 points)**

There is no law which specifically requires Christians to act against their conscience. However, there are difficulties for some Christians where the law requires people to swear an oath. Also, corruption affects all citizens, including Christians, for instance when they are compelled to participate in unethical practices in government or civil institutions and businesses.

**Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (2.75 points)**

In some areas (especially in the northern part) of the country, impunity is rife. A country researcher states: "Security or armed forces have gone unpunished when they arrested arbitrarily, abused, tortured or killed civilians (e.g. supposed Boko Haram supporters in the north, or supposed separatists in the Anglophone regions ...)". Since Muslims dominate the governmental structure in most of the northern provinces, cases that come before the lower courts are likely to end up in favor of the Muslim party.

**Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (2.50 points)**

There are no laws that prevent Christians from traveling freely within the country. However, Christians face systematic discrimination that hinders them when traveling. The situation with Boko Haram in the northern part of the country has anyway created a volatile environment and made traveling dangerous.

**Block 4 - Additional information**

*In WWL 2023, the National sphere of life is inked to the role of Dictatorial paranoia. Non-traditional Christians and others who do not actively support the government face restrictions and cannot obtain registration permits and licenses. Those who speak publicly against injustice, corruption and violations of human dignity face harassment and are subjected to surveillance.*

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)**

This is one of the biggest issues the churches in various parts of the country face, and involves all existing Persecution engines. Church activities have been hindered and sometimes churches have been attacked in areas where Boko Haram is active. Also, due to the displacement of thousands of people, many churches are unable to function normally. Clashes between government armed forces and separatists have disrupted Christian activities in the Anglophone provinces.

**Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)**

Cameroon has made the registration of churches extremely challenging by refusing renewal or applications for a first permit. Indeed, registration has become one of the main areas where Christians experience difficulties. The government has approved no new religious groups since 2010. Although many churches operate without registration and are rarely punished for doing this, the lack of registration can always be used to threaten a church with closure whenever the government feels the churches in question have not sided with it politically.

### **Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points)**

Permission for outdoor events is often not given in Muslim areas. Such activities would risk provoking an attack by Boko Haram. In addition to the potential lack of security, government threats and restrictions on freedom of assembly and association play a big role in restricting church activities outside their worshipping places.

### **Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.50 points)**

This issue is linked to the difficulty churches experience in getting a license to operate in the country. By refusing some church groups permits to operate, the government also hinders the construction of new churches is hindered. In Cameroon's Far North region, where Boko Haram is active, Christians would provoke attack if they were to build a church.

### **Block 5 - Additional information**

*The Church sphere has seen the highest levels of pressure in the WWL 2023 reporting period. Many churches were forced to close down due to the insecurity. Some churches were deliberately taken over to use as a military base. Some churches were intentionally attacked. In some situations, Christians found it unsafe to meet inside their places of worship.*

## **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.

Cameroon: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10 *	27
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?	10	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	2	0
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?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	25	4
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100 *
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?	100	270
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?	100	10 *



6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100

## 5 Year trends

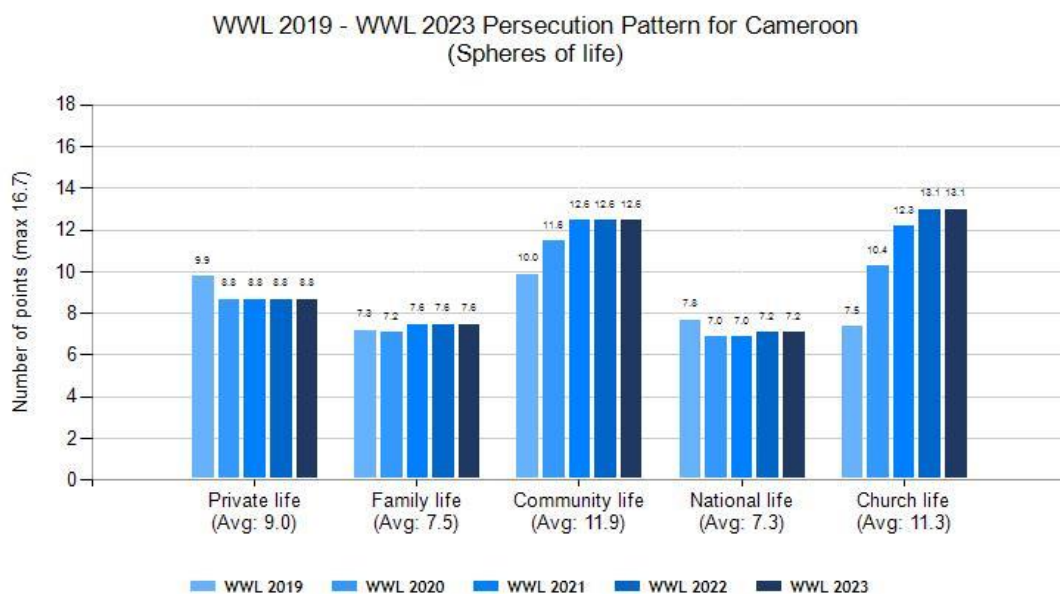
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Cameroon: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	9.9
2022	9.9
2021	9.7
2020	9.0
2019	8.5

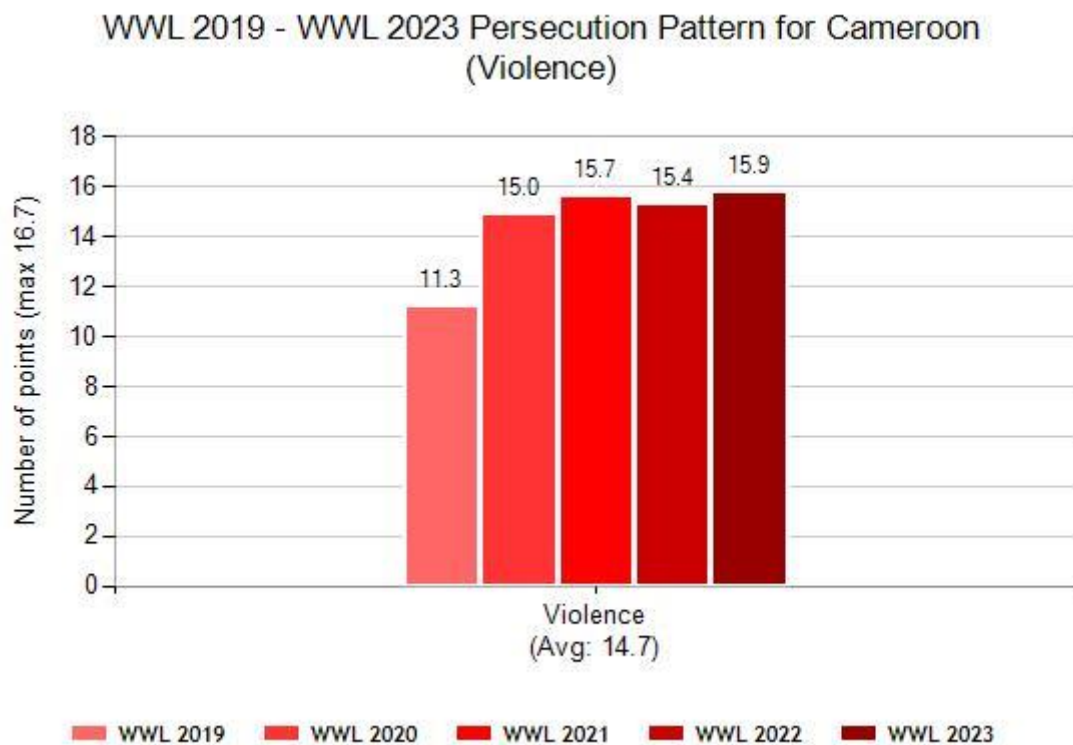
The chart above shows that, over the last five WWL reporting periods, the average pressure on Christians in Cameroon has increased from 8.5 points in WWL 2019 and seems now to have levelled off within the range 9.7-9.9 points.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Rises in pressure over the last five reporting periods were particularly noticeable in the *Church* and *Community spheres of life* (although the latter has now seems to have stabilized at the level of 12.6 points). Pressure in the *Church sphere of life* is caused by the operation of the Persecution engines *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression* coupled with the ongoing Anglophone crisis. Pressure in the *Private, Family* and *Community spheres*, all of which appear to have stabilized in the last few reporting periods, particularly affects converts.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows how violence against Christians rose sharply in WWL 2020 and is now at its highest level (15.9 points). Although Cameroon is a Christian majority country, Christians are being subjected to an extremely high level of violence.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual

Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Cameroon is a secular country, yet the Far North region continues to suffer from the violent presence of Boko Haram. Christian women in northern Cameroon are subject to several forms of persecution related to their status in society. Boko Haram continues to regularly abduct women and girls, forcing them into marriage with one of their members or subjecting them to forced labor and rape. They are further put under extreme pressure to renounce their faith and [embrace Islam](#) (USDS: “2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon”). A country expert summarizes some of the risks: “Christians living in the Far North region that has been terrorized by Boko Haram are under a constant threat of abduction by Boko Haram fighters. These Christians are also sometimes forced to marry Boko Haram leaders and fighters.” Exemplifying just how repressive these militants are, country experts indicate that several girls have been forced to act as suicide bombers to further decimate Christian populations.

Compounding these pressures, strong governance is lacking in Cameroon. [Multiple reports](#) of sexual violence and other “pervasive” human rights violations by the military and armed separatist groups have spurred no significant government action (Al-Jazeera, 29 April 2021). Cameroonian authorities have impeded several local human rights NGOs by “harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening violence against NGO personnel,” according to a country expert (HRW 2022 country report).

Female converts to Christianity from a Muslim or Animist background face further pressure within family and community. Linked partly to a lack of education, women in Cameroon are dependent on their husbands or fathers; when they decide to convert to Christianity, it can be considered an act of defiance. They can be denied the opportunity to socialize with other Christians and to go to church. Unmarried converts risk being forcibly married to a non-Christian, particularly in the north of the country. Cases of house arrests and forced confinement of Christian women and girls are rarely reported but are “very prominent, especially in families of Muslim converts.” Married converts conversely face the prospect of divorce, the loss of custody of their children, disinheritance, and eviction from the home. “When one half of a couple converts, the tendency is to alienate the wife and children for the man’s case, or to send the woman out of the house in order to put pressure on them so they denounce their new faith”, an expert shares.

Poverty and [financial dependency](#) make Christian women and girls more vulnerable to these various pressures (Reliefweb, 23 October 2019). According to an expert, these pressures are the “combined effect of pre-existing cultural and traditional discriminatory norms and practices, gender discrimination and socio-economic vulnerability caused by the crisis.” Women are also more likely to be employed in informal low-wage jobs that are highly susceptible to disruption during public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic ([World Bank, 25 May 2022](#)). Displaced Christian women also face severe economic hardship in Muslim-dominated regions. An expert disclosed: “They are given irregular and meager wages by their Muslim employers. If they try to speak against this harsh treatment or demand regular pay and better wages, they are

beaten and maltreated.”

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Boko Haram also poses a major threat to Christian men and boys living in the northern regions of Cameroon, particularly church leaders. Going to school remains risky for boys as well as for men who are teachers, as evidenced by the chain of attacks on education since the [reopening of schools](#) in September 2022 (VOA, 15 September 2022). Men have been abducted by militant groups, tortured, and used for forced labor. Others have been forcibly recruited into the ranks of militias. This leaves Christian families without a family head and provider, making them vulnerable to attacks themselves. Communities have become reduced in size due to such attacks, compounded by many men leaving the locality for safer areas. In the North West and South West regions, according to a country expert, men and boys are most at risk of threats to life because they are accused of supporting either military forces or separatist groups. An expert summarizes: “The proliferation of the Islamic militants in the North poses a major source of persecution for Christians. In their bid to establish a Sharia state, Jihadist religious leaders have mainly targeted the clergy, students, political leaders and humanitarian workers to advance their course. Under the period of review, students in mission schools have been reportedly killed, archbishops and teachers affiliated to the church have been kidnapped and molested by separatist groups and Boko Haram.” Conflict in the Anglophone region has also fueled instability in the country and caused many people to flee, including Christians.

Christian men also face discrimination in the areas of job opportunities and promotion. Furthermore, they also experience hindrances from government officials when they oppose corruption and violence. Several Church leaders have reportedly been arrested on false charges, tortured, and killed by government officials in response to their criticism of the government's [inhumane](#) crackdown on political opposition (US Embassy, 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices/Cameroon, 12 April 2022). When a man refuses to get involved in unethical practices because of his Christian beliefs, he is taunted and called a coward. When jobs are refused due to discrimination, the family cannot thrive. Boycotts also affect Christian families economically, financially, and psychologically. The lack of economic alternatives [lends fertile grounds](#) for the recruitment of more men and boys into armed groups (Reliefweb, 28 May 2021).

Male converts to Christianity also face pressure from family and community members. They may be rejected by their nuclear families and be denied their due inheritance. A country expert comments: “Men too are also coerced into marrying Muslim girls to prevent them from staying Christians. Muslim girls are sent to seduce them and eventually get pregnant so the man will be forced to marry them.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Any religious groups that have not openly supported the government face hostility from the authorities. In areas where Christians are the majority, Muslims are sometimes ostracized because the community sees them as likely Boko Haram sympathizers.

## Future outlook

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

The incumbent president has been in power for decades. He has been accused of violating the rights of the citizens. His government has restricted freedom of association, religion and expression. Some Christian groups are being denied licenses to operate in the country. As it stands there are no signs that the nature of the government will change.

### **Islamic oppression**

The northern part of the country has seen devastating attacks by Boko Haram. This militant group has regrouped while the Cameroon government has been occupied with the Anglophone conflict. Attacks by Boko Haram are a regional issue and will likely remain a challenge for Christians in the country in 2023 and beyond.

### **Organized corruption and crime**

The existing rampant corruption has made the life of most Cameroonians difficult and is also helping Boko Haram to operate. This issue will likely remain a challenge for the country in general and Christians in particular where they oppose it.

### **Clan oppression**

Significant number of Cameroonians are still practicing traditional belief systems. However, Christians preachers are active in those areas and it is most likely that this Persecution engine will decrease in importance as those who adhere to such traditional belief systems are increasingly exposed to education and other religious views.

### **Christian denominational protectionism**

This Persecution engine might grow in importance in the country. The differences between the churches are not so often about theology, but rather about who has the most members and best church buildings. If, in the future, the government chooses to allow non-traditional Christian groups (often Pentecostals) to operate without restriction, *Christian denominational protectionism* is likely to rise sharply.

## The Anglophone crisis

According to a [report](#) by the International Crisis Group published on 23 February 2022:

- "On 16 April 2020, intelligence chief Maxime Eko met separatist leader Sisiku Ayuk Tabe, who had proclaimed himself interim president of the two regions in 2017 and was sentenced to life imprisonment in Yaoundé's maximum-security facility two years later. Together with three other imprisoned separatist leaders, they discussed conditions for talks, holding a follow-up meeting in July 2020. The separatists demanded the release of Anglophone prisoners, the army's return to the barracks, a ceasefire declaration and negotiations to be held outside Cameroon. But a hardline government faction intervened, angrily objecting to the separatists' terms when the media published details of the second meeting. The government responded by dismissing news of the talks as unfounded and ceasing all contact with the jailed separatists, dashing embryonic hopes for progress."

As stated in the *Trends analysis* above: The Anglophone crisis is more protracted than initially expected. If peace negotiations fail to materialize, the country will be in a deep crisis for years to come. However, successful peace negotiations are unlikely under Paul Biya's presidency.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: n 2018 - <https://www.dw.com/en/cameroons-pentecostal-churches-under-fire/a-43070272>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: embrace Islam - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Multiple reports - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/29/gender-based-violence-pervasive-in-cameroons-anglophone-regions>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: financial dependency - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/data-gender-equality-cameroon>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: World Bank, 25 May 2022 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2022/05/25/assessing-the-damage-early-evidence-on-impacts-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-girls-and-women-in-africa>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: reopening of schools - <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-officials-say-rebels-attacking-schools-/6749097.html#:~:text=FILE%20-%20Pupils%20stand%20in%20line,school%20year%20started%20on%20Sept.>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: inhumane - <https://cm.usembassy.gov/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices-cameroon/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: lends fertile grounds - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-s-underfunded-crisis-hampers-action-gender-equality>
- Future outlook: report - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/307-rebels-victims-peacebuilders-women-cameroons-anglophone-conflict>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Cameroon>