
World Watch Research

Turkey / Türkiye: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Turkey: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
86,260,000	257,000	0.3

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Turkey: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	257,000	0.3
Muslim	84,548,000	98.0
Hindu	910	0.0
Buddhist	44,400	0.1
Ethnic religionist	14,600	0.0
Jewish	20,800	0.0
Bahai	25,400	0.0
Atheist	91,100	0.1
Agnostic	1,089,000	1.3
Other	169,000	0.2
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country



Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

The very strong *Religious nationalism* in society puts a lot of pressure on Christians. Society's nationalism leaves almost no space for Christians to make an alternative message heard. In Turkey, nationalism and Islam are intrinsically linked and anyone who is not a Muslim, particularly a convert or someone who openly lives out their different faith, is not seen to be a loyal Turk. Similarly, Turkish secularism is also strongly nationalistic, with Christianity being viewed by both Muslims and secularists as a negative Western influence.

Although conversion from Islam to Christianity is not legally forbidden, converts from Islam can be put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. Likewise, Turkish Christians coming from a more secular background also can face severe pressure at times to recant their new faith. Once known, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights by family members. Some Christians therefore lead a double life and hide their conversion. However, others boldly and openly live out their faith, reflecting diversity both within the Turkish church as well as within Turkish society.

In addition, in recent years the government started to target and ban foreign, mostly Western, Christians from the country, including Christians with Turkish spouses and children. This policy continued in the WWL 2025 reporting period, with several foreign Christians receiving an [immigration restriction code](#) and being refused entry to the country (Real East, 16 August 2023). These codes are usually valid for at least five years; but some Christians have been denied entry even after the code expired. Furthermore, many of those who previously received the N-82 code (requiring them to seek approval prior to returning to Turkey), continue to struggle with the legal and practical consequences, including lengthy court cases, severely hindering them and their families in their daily life.

The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects Christians who do not have a Muslim background. These are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syriacs). They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and their churches encounter a wide variety of legal and bureaucratic obstructions.

Christians from all categories of Christian communities have limited access to state employment, and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government. Converts from Islam can legally and easily change their religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity (even online), but it can be a stressful process and they can still face discrimination at the hands of individual government officials.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

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

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

Christians killed

- **6 November 2023:** A 92-year old Assyrian Christian Gevriye Akgüç was shot and killed in the south-eastern village of Enhil (Turkish: Yemisli) in the Mardin district ([Duvar English, 9 November 2023](#)). Akgüç had fled the village following the murder of several Christians in the area in the '80s and '90s and returned to the village a decade ago. Although the motives of the murder remain unclear, it is likely that his killing is part of the continuing attempt to expel the historical Christians from their homeland. The killing underlines the marginalized position of the few remaining Christians in the area which was a century ago home to one of the largest Christian communities in the wider Middle East.
- **28 January 2024:** Two gunmen belonging to Islamic State attacked the Roman Catholic Santa Maria Church in Istanbul during a church service and killed one person ([Duvar English, 28 January 2024](#)).

Churches attacked and damaged

During the WWL 2025 reporting period, several churches were attacked or damaged, with the IS attack on the Santa Maria Church in Istanbul in January 2024 sending shockwaves through the Christian communities. Another incident took place on 18 December 2023 when two assailants attacked Çekmeköy Kurtuluş Kilisesi (a church near Istanbul) and tore down the church's main entrance sign. The event was reported to the police who apprehended the perpetrators. The pastor informed the media and the situation was reported on TV ([YouTube, 22 December 2023](#)). Each year, a number of (historical) churches and other Christian buildings are the target of hate speech (graffiti), damage or desecration. There are differences in how the police and local authorities handle such situations: Sometimes, perpetrators are arrested and apologies are made; in other cases they respond with indifference. These incidents underline the vulnerable position of the Christian communities in Turkey.

Entry bans

During the WWL 2025 reporting period, the Turkish government continued to ban expatriate Christians from (re)entering the country, often on vague security grounds. Many of the Christians that received bans in recent years had been living in Turkey for years and some are even married to Turkish citizens. They often struggle for a long time with the legal and practical consequences for them, their families and the church communities they belong to. These bans seem to be a deliberate attempt to isolate the Turkish Protestant church.

Christian refugees

Although levels of pressure and violence differ between cities, Christian refugees in Turkey (including converts from Islam to Christianity) often faced high levels of abuse and discrimination from local Turkish communities, the authorities and their own ethnic communities. Converts from Islam to Christianity are particularly vulnerable as they often have no legal status and deportation to their home countries would be very dangerous. Many of those Christians are Iranian, but there are various nationalities present, including Syrian, Iraqi and Afghans. While their refugee status put them at risk, mistreatment becomes worse when their Christian faith becomes known. Threats are not only coming from radicalized Turkish individuals, but also from their own ethnic communities residing in Turkey. Levels of fear are sometimes so high that refugee convert Christians do not dare trying to connect with a local church in Turkey.

Family violence and bullying

Several, mostly young, Turkish Christian converts from Islam to Christianity have faced violence from family members, including mental and physical abuse, ostracization and being expelled from their homes. Several Christian children were bullied throughout the WWL 2025 reporting period. Bullying of especially children of Turkish converts has been a recurring issue for years now.

Threats

During the WWL 2025 reporting period, many Christians, especially pastors, received both verbal and online threats, including death threats.

Specific examples of positive developments

- **New church opened:** For the first time in a hundred years, a new church has been built in Istanbul. The cornerstone of the Syriac Orthodox Saint Ephraim church was laid by President Erdogan himself in August 2019. The president was also present during the opening of the church in October 2023 ([Vatican News, 11 October 2023](#)).
- **Monastery re-consecrated:** In October 2022, the Syriac Catholic Monastery of St Ephrem in southeast Turkey was re-consecrated by Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan, head of the Syriac Catholic Church, who participated in the first service in a hundred years at the monastery ([Vatican News, 24 October 2022](#)).
- **Syriac Orthodox Church restored:** The renovation of a Syriac Orthodox monastery and church in Batman, southeast Turkey, was completed in June 2024. It will mainly function as a museum, but will also be used for religious activities ([Syriac Press, 5 June 2024](#)).

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians

There are expatriate Christians in the country, but they are not involuntarily isolated from other Christian communities. Because these foreign Christians can freely interact with other Christian communities, they are not considered as a separate category for scoring and WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities

These include the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches (the only churches "recognized" in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923), and the Assyrian, Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic churches, all of which are monitored regularly and subjected to controls and limitations by the government; their members are considered 'foreign' in many official dealings, as well as in the minds of the general public. They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter a wide variety of legal and bureaucratic obstacles. For example, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches need permission from the Turkish government to select new church leaders.

Only a couple of thousand Christians remain in the southeast, the historical homeland of the Armenian and other Historical Christian communities. After the Armenian Genocide, they remained under pressure from both the Turkish authorities as well as Kurdish clans, who are regularly trying to claim their remaining land. In addition, this is also the area where the PKK, the outlawed Kurdish militant independence organization, and the Turkish army have been fighting one another for decades. The Historical Christian communities have often become the victim of the ongoing friction between Kurdish separatists and the Turkish authorities. A typical example is the case of Assyrian priest Sefer Bileçen, who was sentenced to two years in prison on charges of supporting the PKK in 2021, after offering food to unknown men in his monastery.

There are also expatriate Christians belonging to Historical Christian churches: There are Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Christians who have residency permits, while there are also Roman Catholics, mostly immigrants from Africa and the Philippines. In the recent past, their ranks swelled due to the thousands of Christian refugees arriving from Syria and Iraq to escape conflict and violence in their homelands.

Converts to Christianity

Christian converts from a Muslim background bear the brunt of rights violations in Turkey. Pressure comes from family, friends, community and even the local authorities. They are considered traitors to Turkish identity. Besides converts from a Turkish background, there are also communities of converts from other countries such as Iran.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Most Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are small churches that typically meet in rented facilities such as storefronts, warehouses, offices or apartment buildings. Some worship in historical church buildings, while others gather in private homes.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Historical Christian groups like the Armenian and Assyrian (Syriac) churches face high pressure and hostility in the south-eastern region of Turkey. For decades, they have been caught between the rivalries of the Turkish army and Kurdish (resistance) groups. Most Christians from those churches do not live in their ancestral region anymore but have moved to western areas of Turkey.

Most Turkish Protestant communities are located in the Western coastal cities, including Istanbul. Those cities tend to be more liberal and secular, while inland areas are more conservative, Islamic and socially hostile towards Christians. However, some urban areas within the bigger cities are conservative as well, while secular groups can be socially hostile to Christians too.

Position on the World Watch List

Turkey: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	67	45
WWL 2024	64	50
WWL 2023	66	41
WWL 2022	65	42
WWL 2021	69	25

The three point increase in overall score was caused mainly by a significant increase in the violence score which rose from 3.1 points in WWL 2024 to 5.4 points in WWL 2025. More church buildings were targeted than in WWL 2024, and there were two reported killings, whereas there were none in WWL 2024. The rise in violence is not unusual for the general pattern of violence targeting Christians in Turkey. Overall societal attitudes toward the Church and the Christian community have not significantly changed and average pressure remained at the same very high level of 12.2 points. Societal hatred remains a serious issue of concern for all Christians, whether they belong to the Historical, Protestant or refugee communities. In addition, the Protestant community continues to be targeted by the authorities with visa refusals, meaning that several expatriate Christians have again been forced to leave the country. During the WWL 2025 reporting

period, asylum seekers and refugees of Christian faith in particular (including converts from Islam to Christianity) from such countries as Iran, Afghanistan and Syria faced significant discrimination and abuse.

Persecution engines

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

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 (Strong) combined with Religious nationalism - Islamic (Strong)

Fanatical nationalism affects all categories of Christian communities in Turkey. The greatest pressure is on Christian converts from a Muslim background. Family, friends and community will often exert heavy pressure on them to return to Islam, the faith of the fathers. The general opinion is that a true Turk is a Muslim. Conversion is not only a question of family honor being hurt, it is also seen as a case of 'insulting Turkishness'. The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects non-convert Christians who are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g., Greeks, Armenians, Syrians). They are hardly regarded as full-fledged members of Turkish society and encounter a wide variety of legal and bureaucratic obstructions. Furthermore, their church buildings are easily recognizable, which tends, at times, to provoke difficulties and cause added pressure.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

Since the attempted coup of July 2016, President Erdogan’s government has dropped its mask of supporting democracy and is openly restricting freedom throughout Turkish society. The media have been curtailed, and all forms of opposition face persecution. In addition, President Erdogan has [declared](#) that "democracy and free press are incompatible" (Ahval News, 3 October 2018), which is not surprising given the many journalists in prison. Although Turkish Christians are not directly targeted by the government at the moment, except for some visa issues (entry bans affecting Turkish Christians

married to an expatriate Christian), the regime has openly declared Sunni Islam to be the religious norm in the country, thus clearly marginalizing Christianity.

Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

This persecution engine has grown stronger in the context of the Kurdish conflict. Syriac Christians in the south-eastern region have particularly felt the pressure from the Syrian civil war and are caught between Kurdish clans, the government and the Kurdish militant group, PKK. Tribal leaders use their power to push the Syriacs out of their homeland in the southeast. This mostly affects rural Christian populations. Many Christians live in large cities in western Turkey and are not strongly affected by this, although social hostility towards ethnic Christian minorities is present in all of Turkey.

Clan oppression (Medium)

Tribal law and customs still play an important role in especially the eastern provinces of Turkey. Converts from Islam are likely to face more pressure there, as conversion to Christianity is not only seen as betrayal of Islam, but also of the family and clan. Similarly, this engine also plays an important role in the pressure from within their own communities faced by refugee converts from countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Drivers of persecution

Turkey: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
		STRONG	STRONG	STRONG	MEDIUM				STRONG
Government officials	Strong	Strong	Medium					Strong	
Ethnic group leaders			Medium						
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	Medium							
Violent religious groups	Medium	Medium							
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	Strong	Strong	Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Medium					
Political parties	Medium	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 / Religious nationalism - Islamic

- **Government officials (Strong / Strong):** President Erdogan seems intent on changing Turkey from being a secular country into a Sunni Muslim one. So far, the changes have been implemented very gradually. One of those steps was the change in the Constitution after the [referendum](#) in April 2017, which gave the president more power and freed the way for him to stand in two more elections (The Guardian, 10 April 2017). In contrast to previous years, the government has now also started to target Turkish Christians: Some non-Turkish spouses of Turkish Christians have been banned from the country. In addition, many expatriate Christians who fulfilled important roles within the Turkish Protestant church have been banned from the country. In the recent past, there have been issues over church property, particularly in the troubled south-eastern region. The government closed down and confiscated church buildings there for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the government said this happened because of reforms affecting land registry laws and the reorganization of municipalities, in other cases the government seized control of churches for security reasons. Although it is difficult to prove whether the government is purposely hindering Christian communities or not, one country researcher is convinced that the government is trying to push the already diminished Historical Christian communities out of Turkey.
- **Extended family (Strong / N/A), non-Christian religious leaders (Medium / Medium) and citizens (Medium / Strong):** Converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. Once discovered, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights.
- **Political parties (Medium / Strong):** In July 2017, the opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP), organized a "Justice March" against the government, which was joined by hundreds of thousands of people. Nevertheless, it seems that none of the opposition parties are vocally supporting the historical Christian or other Christian communities, which leaves them vulnerable to government pressure. In contrast, several parties encourage the Islamic-nationalism narrative.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium / Medium):** The Turkish Grey Wolves are a group that has grown in influence in Turkey, also due to the nationalist rhetoric of President Erdogan. Being fiercely nationalistic, they blend Turkish identity with Islam. The Grey Wolves are not shy of using violence and it is believed that its members have been behind several attacks on Christians, especially Christian refugee communities. In addition, the attack on the Roman Catholic Santa Maria Church in January 2024 shows that a radical Islamic group like Islamic State is also a threat. Furthermore, especially the establishment of new church communities has in some places led to severe threats from Islamic nationalist groups.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The backlash resulting from the attempted coup in July 2016 has led to heightened polarization and public scapegoating of anyone who (allegedly) does not support Turkey or President Erdogan's vision for Turkey. Protestants in particular have felt this deterioration. Christians in Turkey are regularly considered as spies of the West and hate-speech and threats to Protestant churches have increased. The numerous entry bans given to foreign Protestants can also be seen as a result of this development.

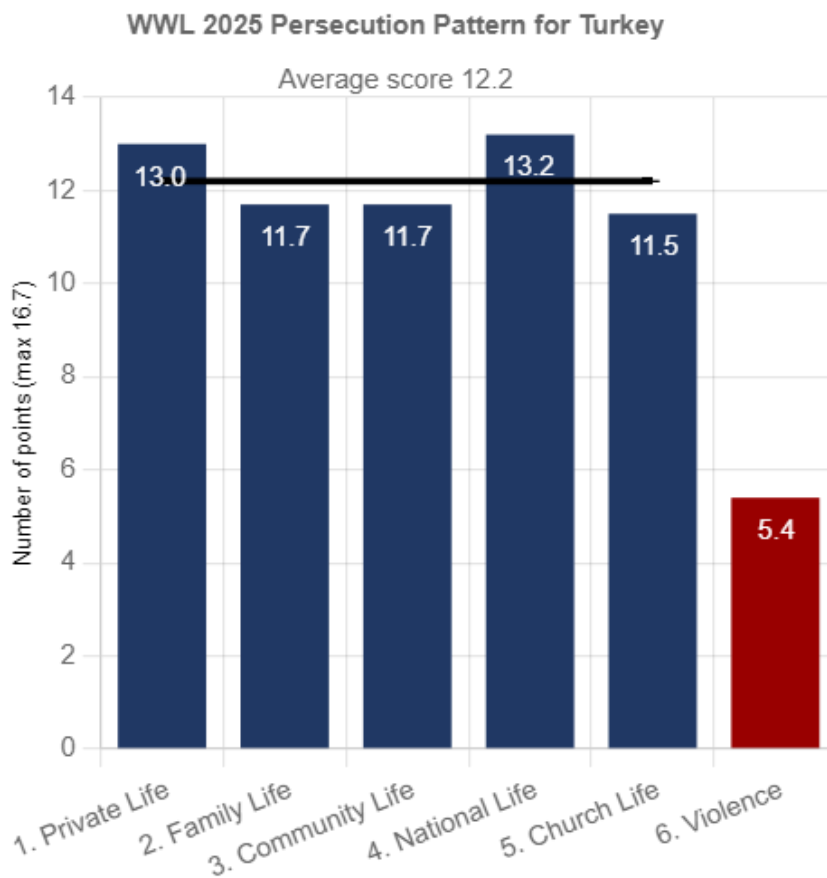
Drivers of Ethno-religious hostility

- **Citizens, including mobs (Strong):** Turkish society is in general hostile towards its ethnic religious minorities. Refugee children in particular have been bullied in schools, while right-wing mobs drove intimidatingly through Armenian neighborhoods in Istanbul during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** In the more rural areas, conservative norms and values are upheld by ethnic leaders. In the southeast, it would seem that Kurdish chiefs are trying to force the historical Syriac community out of the traditionally Christian territory. The Kurdish PKK also seems to be purposely trying to drag the Syriacs into their conflict with the Turkish government for nationalistic reasons.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials often have a negative attitude towards the ethnic historical Christian communities (Armenians, Syriacs and Greeks).

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Citizens and (extended) family members (Medium):** Family ties can be strict within Turkey, and society regards a true Turk to be a Sunni Muslim. Christians, even those coming from historical Christian communities, are seen as foreigners and a conversion from Islam to Christianity is often regarded as shaming the honor of the family.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Turkey shows:

- The average pressure on Christians remained at the very high level of 12.2 points.
- Pressure was strongest in the *National sphere of life* (13.2 points), directly related to the animosity towards Christians (caused both by nationalistic feeling and the societal opposition towards anything Christian). It indicates not only the difficulty Christian individuals experience but also that of Christian organizations operating in Turkey. Media reporting on Christians is also very biased and Christians regularly experience discrimination when engaging with the authorities. The next highest score is for *Private life* (13.0 points) and reflects both the difficulty for converts to openly practice their faith among their family members as well as the pressure on all Christians to be careful about how and with whom they speak about their faith in a climate that is hostile towards Christianity.
- The score for violence increased from 3.1 points in WWL 2024 to 5.4 in WWL 2025. This was mainly caused by a higher number of reported killings and attacks on church buildings.

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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.75 points)

Public expressions of faith in writing (often online) can result in some level of persecution, either in writing or in other forms. Especially converts from Islam to Christianity can sometimes lose their jobs, face harassment by family and friends, or receive threats after their new faith has come to be known.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)

Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, there are likely to be social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity (or from one Christian denomination to another). Although the level and nature of oppression from families varies considerably depending on the background of the family, conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable.

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

Levels of social hostility towards Christianity are high in Turkey and conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable. Discussing one's Christian faith with fellow citizens can lead to harassment and social exclusion.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

Harassment of Christians is common in Turkey and displaying Christian symbols can provoke hostility and (physical) violence.

Block 1 - Additional information

Individually, Turkish Christians with a Muslim background experience the highest levels of pressure in the *Private sphere* where family members can make life difficult, especially for (young) women. However, Turkish society is diverse, with traditional Islamic, secularist, leftist, cosmopolitan, nationalistic, or a combination of these traits, present in families. Hence, family pressure can vary significantly depending from which background a convert comes. In contrast to neighboring countries, Turkish converts do not have to be afraid of being arrested by the police, since conversion is not illegal in Turkey.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)**

If the ID card of a convert parent reads Muslim, the family's children are obliged to attend courses on Islam at school. Although it has recently become easier to get an exemption from Islamic classes, many converts have not changed their religious registration because of the social stigma for them and their children. In addition, the Turkish curriculum is in general influenced by Turkish nationalism and the idea that Christianity is something alien to Turkish society.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.75 points)

Numerous instances of children of Christians being bullied have been reported over the years. Children of Christians, and especially of converts, are often harassed either because of society's religious intolerance or because of nationalist zeal.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.50 points)

Adoption is not a common practice in Turkey, but Christians are the most unlikely citizens to be permitted to adopt a child. In 2013, President Erdogan stated that Turkish children adopted by Christian (and gay) couples in foreign countries should be retrieved and brought back to Turkey. Hence, it is nearly impossible for Christians to adopt a Muslim child.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)

The hostile environment makes it difficult for parents who are converts to raise their children in a Christian way, especially if there is also pressure from the (extended) family.

Block 2 - Additional information

Christian family life is not impossible in Turkey, but significant challenges remain, especially regarding the upbringing of children in a Christian way. Baptisms are not hindered by the authorities, but family

and societal pressure can still force Turkish Christians to conduct them secretly. While marriage registration and other civil procedures are in principal secular in nature and do not cause much hindrance, finding a burial spot to have a Christian funeral can be difficult as the number of Christian cemeteries are few and the deceased has to be registered as a Christian. In theory, Turkish Christians should not be discriminated against in custody, inheritance or divorce cases as the law is secular and not based on the Sharia. However, in practice prejudices and discrimination might occur, especially due to the apparent Islamization of the judiciary under President Erdogan.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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.). (4.00 points)

Individual Christians are being watched by both government and society. Turkish Christians know that all their communication is monitored by the government. Also, Turkish intelligence agencies actively try to recruit informers and there are fears that it is not uncommon for unidentified agents to be participating in church activities. Even newspapers can be a threat, as some media have been publishing negative articles (including names and pictures) about several Christians.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)

Name calling, death threats and other types of harassment are commonly experienced by many Christians in Turkey.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.75 points)

There are compulsory Islamic classes in the school system, although non-Muslim children can opt out. However, there have been reports of societal and teacher discrimination against those who opt out. Christian schoolchildren are regularly discriminated against in classes, by both teachers and other students. There are Christians who study at Turkish universities but they are barred from reaching higher positions or professorships at university level. In addition, thousands of new Imam Hatip schools have been opened in recent years; raising the total number of these Islamic education schools to over 5,000. Hatip schools are playing an important role within the Turkish educational system and are generally inaccessible for Christians.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Christians have no access to state employment and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government.

Block 3 - Additional information

Turkish society is in general hostile towards Christianity, not least because President Erdogan commonly portrays 'the West' as a threat. Turkish historical Christians are generally viewed as 'foreign-

ers'; as the saying goes: "A true Turk is a Sunni Muslim", which summarizes well social attitudes towards Christians. In the once majority Christian southeast of Turkey, the few remaining Christians from the historical Christian communities are still being discriminated and driven out, as abductions and (legal) actions against clergy and monasteries in recent years have shown. Despite this, Turkish society is diverse with the Turkish Christian community being able to flourish in some areas, especially in the western, more liberal coastal areas.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Access to employment in the public sector, state security apparatus and law enforcement is denied to Christians, as is promotion in the army, despite obligatory military service. Although one's religious affiliation is no longer visibly displayed on the new ID cards, it is still registered on the chip in the card.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (4.00 points)

Local media and columnists in particular have been biased against Christians. There have been several reports of intolerance and prejudice against Christians.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

The Turkish Constitution is very restrictive in its approach towards the rights of religious minorities. Although the Constitution does not technically limit the freedom of religion, it clearly promotes 'Turkishness' above all other ideologies.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)

Christians have to be very careful when expressing themselves in public. Social prejudice makes it difficult to speak out and the Turkish government does not accept criticism.

Block 4 - Additional information

In recent years, approximately 115 expatriate Christians, including some with Turkish spouses and children, have received residency bans, resulting in around 250 people leaving the country. While such actions are often justified on security grounds, the situation is complex. Many deportations appear to be linked to various Turkish-led Christian conferences attended by foreigners, though not all cases are directly tied to these events. Additionally, it seems likely that foreign spouses of Turkish Christians and pastors are being targeted to place extra pressure on them.

While Turkish converts can formally change their religious affiliation, family pressure and fear of discrimination prevent some from doing so. In addition, the media have almost been completely taken over by companies linked to the AKP and President Erdogan, and Turkish civil society and NGOs have become increasingly restricted. For instance, a recent NGO law focusing on anti-terrorism allows severe interference by the authorities.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Churches face unique challenges when it comes to obtaining official registration. While the government permits churches to gain legal status through “associations” and “foundations”, most church meeting places are not recognized as official *ibadethaneler* (places of worship). Zoning laws and building size requirements often prevent churches from qualifying for this official status.

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. (3.75 points)

It is very difficult to get official permits for repairing or renovating church buildings. Many church buildings, seminaries or schools that have been confiscated in the past, have not been returned. Building new church buildings is almost impossible. It is an absolute exception - the first time in a hundred years! - that a new church was built in Istanbul. The Syriac Orthodox church of St. Ephrem was opened in attendance of President Erdogan himself in October 2023. ([Vatican News, 11 October 2023](#)).

Block 5.10: Christians have been hindered in training their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)

The training of Christian leaders is impossible to do legally in Turkey. The seminaries of the Historical Christian communities were closed down in the 1970s and have remained closed ever since, despite a campaign by the Greek Orthodox Church to reopen their seminary in Halki. Only unofficial training can take place. Many church leaders are sent abroad for their training.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.75 points)

It remains very difficult to formally establish and run any kind of association with a clear Christian profile. All activities in this area are monitored and Christians struggle even more as they are supported by foreign churches in most cases, which is viewed with suspicion.

Block 5 - Additional information

Church life is restricted in Turkey. Although Christians are able to freely gather for worship, Christian converts do not have their own church buildings; they have to rent spaces or have to use (foreign) historical church buildings. Following the Lausanne treaty, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches need permission from the Turkish authorities to appoint church leaders. All church activities, publications and (foreign) visitors are being monitored; there were recent attempts by the intelligence agencies to recruit church members as informers among both Turkish and foreign refugee Christians. On the positive side, Bibles and Christian materials can be imported, printed and sold openly, although churches refrain from distributing them freely because of (severe) social opposition. Likewise, Christian programs can be broadcast from within Turkey, but some churches censor themselves and keep a low profile to avoid social opposition. Others have an open and active online presence, but have to put up with a lot of hate-speech.

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 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. 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 WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Turkey: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	2	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	4	2
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	8	3
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)?	0	1
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	10 *
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?	0	0
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?	0	1
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	1
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	12

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** Two Christians were killed because of their faith during the reporting period (see above: *Specific examples of violations*).
- **Churches and public Christian properties attacked:** One historical church was attacked, while several other church buildings were vandalized and damaged (see above: *Specific examples of violations*).

- **Christians attacked:** Several Christians have faced attacks, harassment and bullying, both from family and community members.
- **Christians arrested:** At least eight expatriate Christians have been detained for short periods after being designated as a 'security risk'.
- **Christians forced to relocate or leave the country:** Several foreign Christians were forced to leave the country or were not allowed to re-enter. Several Turkish Christians had to relocate because of (family) pressure.

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.

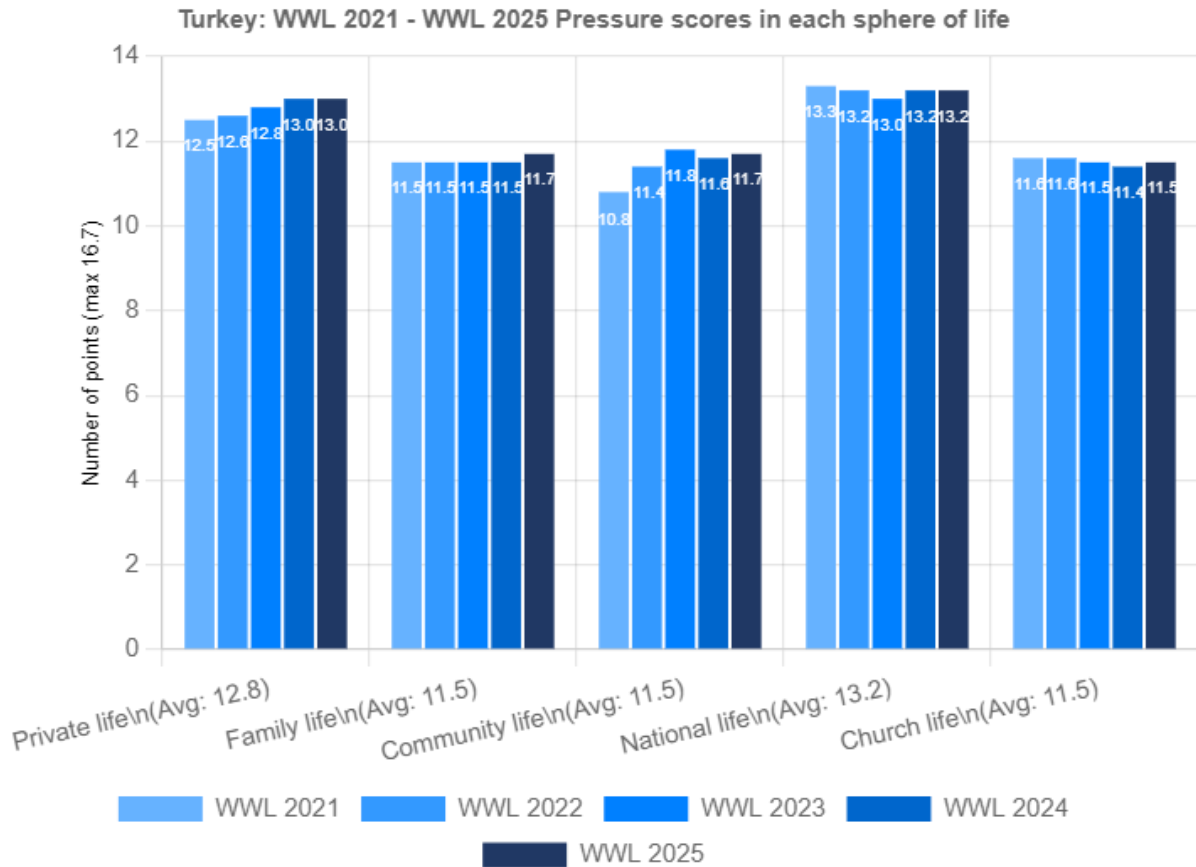
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Turkey: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	12.2
2024	12.2
2023	12.1
2022	12.0
2021	11.9

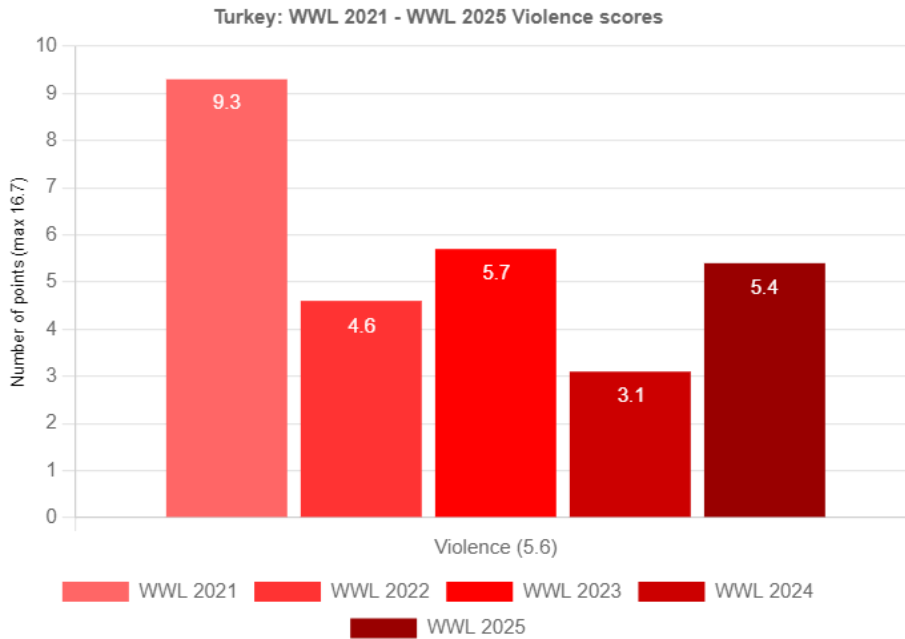
The table above shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has been more or less stable within the range 11.9 - 12.2 points, with a very slightly increasing tendency. The very high level of pressure reflects the challenging political climate Christians find themselves in.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The blue chart below shows that the level of pressure in all *spheres of life* has more or less been stable over the last five WWL reporting periods, with the most obvious rising tendency apparent in the *Private sphere of life*. The very high score for the *National sphere of life* for five consecutive WWL reporting periods reflects the difficult political and public climate for Christians in Turkey.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The red chart above shows that the score for violence targeting Christians in Turkey has fluctuated between fairly high and very high levels. The highest score occurred in WWL 2021 and was mainly caused by the killing of two Christians and a high number of attacks on church properties being

reported. Likely due to less Christian activities being organized during the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer violent incidents were reported for WWL 2022. The rise in WWL 2023 was due largely to a high number of attacks on church properties, with also a high number of Christians being forced to relocate inside the country. In contrast, less church attacks were reported in WWL 2024. During WWL 2025, the Islamic State attack on the Roman Catholic church in Istanbul caused a shockwave through the Turkish church. The total number of incidents also increased again.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Turkey

Female Pressure Points

Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024

Denied access to social community/networks
 Enforced religious dress code
 Forced out of home – expulsion
 Incarceration by family (house arrest)
 Violence – physical

Turkey sees high levels of domestic violence and femicide. Although the country remains part of CEDAW, the Law on Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women (2012) and the National Action Plan on Combating violence against Women (2021-2025), gender inequalities and stereotypes continue to perpetuate child and early marriages and widespread violence against women and girls ([UN Women, accessed 13 January 2025](#)). A country expert summarized as follows: “Generally speaking, women are more vulnerable to persecution in Turkey because their position in society is of inferior status. ... Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence, did anything but help the role of women. Christian or other minority women are particularly vulnerable, even more so in rural areas. Violence and murders of women have massively increased over the past years under Erdogan’s rule.”

Female converts are most vulnerable to persecution, especially in rural areas. Within Islamic society they are already considered to have less authority than men and are subject to familial control. Becoming a Christian, or marrying a Christian, contradicts the expectations on women to bring honor to their family; they are expected to honor their families by their career choices, their relationships and their marriage choices. As the holders of familial honor, the behavior of women and girls impacts how the family and community is perceived. This means that women are controlled and beaten for both real or imaginary shameful behavior. The violation of rights of women and girls affects their families, inspiring anger, fear and anxiety in other family members.

Female converts – particularly those who are unmarried – risk sexual abuse, harassment, rejection and being denied access to church or religious materials. Sexual abuse is rarely talked about in Turkey’s honor and shame culture – as such, many victims carry trauma alone. Reliable statistics for the number of women and girls affected by sexual violence is largely absent due to the stigma associated with reporting. Country experts indicate that female Turkish Christians experience greater levels of mental abuse than men in general.

Christians also face pressure in the public sphere. Given the current increased emphasis on Islam, women are likely to face increasing pressure to meet Islamic expectations of dress and conduct. Those who fail to do so risk being harassed, insulted and even physically harmed.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Turkey	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Denied inheritance or possessions Economic harassment via business/job/work access Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence – physical Violence – Psychological Violence – Verbal

In Turkey, media, police, bureaucratic and communal discrimination and hostility target both male and female Christians. However, men face the additional pressure of interwoven religious and cultural expectations: They are expected to be defenders of Islam and 'Turkishness', concepts which are closely aligned in public perception. Failure to live up to that expectation creates pressure on men that can prevent them from ever stepping foot into a church.

According to sources, men and boys are more likely to be detained or threatened, face job loss and unemployment, or family rejection. Men may be required by their employers to attend Friday prayers at mosques, which is not expected of women. They additionally face physical violence and death threats. During military service men are in an environment where, if their Christian religion is recorded in their ID, they are likely to be viewed with suspicion by their superiors and bullied by their peers. Despite obligatory military service, Christians are unlikely to rise in army ranks, and converts face extra challenges to live as a Christian in the military environment. A country expert shared a story of a convert conscripted into the army who “had to keep his Christian faith basically a secret... maintaining his devotional practices had become a virtual impossibility.”

Christians also have much difficulty finding employment in the public sector, while they also face discrimination in the private sector. As men are the main financial providers, the violation of rights of male Christians can hit his wider family and community hard. It can cause anger, fear and anxiety. The psychological toll of being unable to provide for their families can be considerable.

Persecution of other religious minorities

In Turkey, young nationalistic Turks can be quickly won over by hate-speech propaganda and carry out violent acts, thinking they have the state's and public approval. In addition, the Gülen movement has been heavily persecuted since the 2016 coup-attempt. Yazidis in Turkey's southeast face similar issues as the Syriac Christians. Nusayri refugees (Alawites) from Syria feel enormous pressure to leave the country. Alevites are also discriminated against (officially they do not exist as a specific group and cannot run any houses of worship) as well as Kurds in general.

According to the US Department of State ([IRFR 2023 Turkey](#)):

- "The government continued to limit the rights of non-Muslim minorities, especially those not recognized under the government's interpretation of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which includes only Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. ... While Alevites continued to state they are a religious faith that deserves government recognition as such, the government continued to categorize Alevi worship as cultural rather than religious and to not recognize Alevi houses of worship (*cemevis*), despite a 2018 ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeals requiring such recognition. In 2018, the head of the Diyanet said mosques were the appropriate places of worship for both Alevites and Sunnis." (p.2, 16)
- Non-Sunni religious minorities are also disadvantaged in the educational system: "Non-Sunni Muslims and nonpracticing Muslims said they continued to face difficulty obtaining exemptions from compulsory religious instruction in primary and secondary schools and often had to choose from electives dealing with different aspects of Sunni Islam, particularly if their new identification cards listed their religion as Muslim. Reportedly, because only Christian and Jewish children could opt out of the religion course, teachers assumed all other students were Muslim and thus required to take the course. The government said the compulsory instruction covered a range of world religions, but some religious groups, including Alevites and Christian denominations, stated the courses largely reflected Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine and contained negative and incorrect information regarding other religious groups," (p.21).
- "In Konya, Jehovah's Witnesses opened a place of worship on March 27 [2023], which authorities shuttered on July 20 after neighbors filed complaints against the use of the premises for religious purposes. The group appealed on September 13, and the case continued through year's end."

Both government officials and society verbally attack religious minority groups such as Alevites and Jews and ethnic minority groups such as the Kurds. This trend is likely to continue. Although toning down its public support of Muslim Brotherhood entities following rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, Turkey still remains a supporter. In line with this support, public attitudes are often anti-Israel and antisemitic in nature. Anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and negative stereotypes are not uncommon in the public sphere, especially on social media. This kind of hate speech soared after the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, with several Jewish (cultural) sites being vandalized. This has naturally made the small Jewish community in Turkey anxious and some hundreds have emigrated to Israel, leaving those behind even more vulnerable. However, Jewish citizens reported that the government continued to coordinate with them on security issues. Earlier, in 2022, it was reported that the neglected Jewish cemetery in central Bodrum was renovated by the municipality. Similarly, renovations took place on the Jewish Cultural Heritage Project in Izmir ([IRFR 2022 Turkey](#), p.15).

In November 2018, [the Appeals Court ruled](#) that the government should pay the electricity expenses of *cemevis* (Alevi houses of worship), just as the government also does for mosques ([Al-Monitor, 10 December 2018](#)). However, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) gave a similar ruling in 2016, and both rulings seem to have been ignored by the government. If the government were to heed this ruling, that could open up possibilities for churches to request equal treatment too.

Trends Summary

1) The security services keep a strong grip on all opposition

The state of emergency which was declared after the attempted 2016 coup officially ended in 2018, but the security services have kept a strong grip on all forms of opposition. With new laws in place, human rights organizations are claiming that the state of emergency has now actually been made permanent. Even seven years later, there were still arrests being made of alleged followers of Fethullah Gülen, which Turkey consistently accuses of being members of the "Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation" (FETÖ). For example, in June 2023 the alleged "FETÖ Turkmenistan director" was arrested, while a nephew of Gülen was detained in July 2023 ([AA, 17 June 2023](#), [YeniSafak, 14 July 2023](#)). Fears of being accused of FETÖ membership are still so strong, that most Turks do not dare to speak about it publicly ([FDD, 5 March 2024](#)). Anti-terrorism laws are also frequently used to target government critics and the last remaining independent journalists in Turkey ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 13 February 2024](#)).

2) Turkey's economy and geopolitical activities point to an uncertain future

Although Turkey has seen huge economic growth since 2000, there is now great uncertainty about the future. The value of the Turkish Lira has been in a downward spiral for almost four years and youth [unemployment](#) remains generally high (Trading Economics, accessed 19 September 2024). The unstable political situation on the geopolitical level is another major challenge, with Turkey fighting against the PKK inside Turkey and the Kurdish-led SDF in Syria, and supporting the GNA in Libya, having supported Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Especially, the fall of Syria's Assad regime in December 2024, following a very rapid assault of Syrian rebels (partly) supported by Turkey, offered Erdogan the opportunity to increase the attacks against the SDF in the border areas with the help of pro-Turkish Syrian and Arab fighters. However, the situation in Syria remains volatile. Hence, President Erdogan is playing an uncertain (geopolitical) game on multiple fronts which might seriously affect Turkey in the coming years.

3) All non-Sunni citizens have faced growing pressure

As a result of government policies and growing nationalism, the level of intolerance has risen and all those not siding with President Erdogan face oppression. Sunni citizens opposing Erdogan and non-Sunni citizens, including the tiny Christian minority, are facing growing pressure, which at times translates into violent incidents. Although Turkish Christians do not yet seem to be direct targets for government persecution, the continuing targeting of foreign Christians with entry bans is worrying and seems to be an effort to isolate the Turkish Protestant church. The situation for Historical Christian communities in the southeast of Turkey is particularly worrying. Much of their property has been taken away by the Turkish government in recent years and their ancient culture is gradually disappearing. Overall, Christians need to act carefully, especially in the public sphere.

Another category of Christians facing severe pressure are the Christian refugees in the country, especially converts from a Muslim background. It is likely that they will continue to face hardship in the country, both from parts of Turkish society, from individual government officials as well as from their own ethnic communities (such as Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis) and governments (e.g., Iran).

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: immigration restriction code - <https://realeast.biz/en/kody-deporta-v-turczii/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Duvar English, 9 November 2023 - <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkish-prosecutor-releases-all-suspects-in-assyrian-mans-murder-case-news-63292>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Duvar English, 28 January 2024 - <https://www.duvarenglish.com/one-died-in-gun-attack-to-istanbuls-church-during-sunday-mass-news-63733>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: YouTube, 22 December 2023 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2LMfcO6TyM>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Vatican News, 11 October 2023 - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2023-10/turkey-first-church-syriac-orthodox-mor-st-ephrem-istanbul.html>
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- Church spectrum today - additional information: The Conversation, 21 November 2019 - <https://theconversation.com/christians-have-lived-in-turkey-for-two-millennia-but-their-future-is-uncertain-127296>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: World Watch Monitor, 1 June 2018 - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/06/turkey-returns-confiscated-syriac-church-property-deeds/>
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- Persecution engines description: declared - <https://ahvalnews.com/press-freedom/media-and-democracy-not-compatible-says-erdogan>
- Drivers of persecution description: referendum - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/10/turkish-referendum-all-you-need-to-know>
- 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. (3.75 points): Vatican

News, 11 October 2023 - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2023-10/turkey-first-church-syriac-orthodox-mor-st-ephrem-istanbul.html>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UN Women, accessed 13 January 2025 - <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/turkey/ending-violence-against-women>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Turkey - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkey/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2022 Turkey - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkey/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: the Appeals Court ruled - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/turkey-court-recognizes-alevi-houses-of-worship.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Al-Monitor, 10 December 2018 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/12/turkey-court-recognizes-alevi-houses-of-worship.html>
- Trends Summary: AA, 17 June 2023 - <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/feto-s-so-called-turkmenistan-director-arrested-in-istanbul/2924977>
- Trends Summary: YeniSafak, 14 July 2023 - <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/news/feto-leaders-nephew-fugitive-selman-gulen-arrested-in-istanbul-3666646>
- Trends Summary: FDD, 5 March 2024 - <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/03/05/turkeys-erdogan-silences-critics-with-feto-terrorist-label/>
- Trends Summary: Committee to Protect Journalists, 13 February 2024 - <https://cpj.org/2024/02/drop-in-jailed-turkish-journalists-belies-a-long-simmering-press-freedom-crisis/>
- Trends Summary: unemployment - <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/youth-unemployment-rate>