
World Watch Research

Bahrain: Persecution Dynamics

February 2025



OpenDoors

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February 2025

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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/February).

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

Bahrain: Population (UN estimate for 2024)
1,499,000

Bahrain: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	184,000	12.3
Muslim	1,162,000	77.5
Hindu	126,000	8.4
Buddhist	3,300	0.2
Ethnic religionist	370	0.0
Jewish	53	0.0
Bahai	11,900	0.8
Atheist	1,200	0.1
Agnostic	10,200	0.7
Other	370	0.0
<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

Bahrain: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders, Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

A considerable number of expatriate Christians (mainly from South Asia) work and live in Bahrain and can practice their faith in private places of worship as long as they do not publicly proselytize Muslims or insult Islam. There is also a small number of indigenous Bahraini Christians. Local converts face severe pressure from family and community to recant their Christian faith, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. Hence, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity experience similar pressure as in their home countries, as they are often living within their own national or ethnic communities.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Converts from Islam to Christianity faced pressure from their families, local Islamic clerics and sometimes government officials. Some were physically and mentally abused.
- Migrant workers (including Christians) are vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse. However, migrants face a lack of access to legal protection and are often not aware of methods to report abuse. As a result, many incidents where Christian migrant workers are targeted most probably go unreported. In addition, victims feel vulnerable to possible retribution.

Specific examples of positive developments

- **October 2024:** Following up on earlier interfaith discussions with the Roman Catholic Church (see below), a joint-conference on interfaith dialogue was organized by the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia in collaboration with the King Hamad Global Center for Peaceful Coexistence (KHGC) in October 2024 ([Bahrain News Agency, 21 October 2024](#)).
- **November 2022:** Roman Catholic Pope Francis visited Bahrain for the Bahrain Dialogue Forum where he met with the Muslim Council of Elders ([Vatican News, 4 November 2022](#)). The Council is headed by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, with whom Pope Francis co-signed the Document on Human Fraternity in the adjacent United Arab Emirates in 2019. During the follow-up meeting in Bahrain, the Pope welcomed the Kingdom of Bahrain Declaration as a significant step forward, but also spoke out against the death penalty (which Bahrain still applies) ([Vatican, 4 November 2022](#); [Reuters, 3 November 2022](#)). Following the Forum in November 2022, the Permanent Committee for Islamic-Christian Dialogue was established, which met for the first time in Bahrain in May 2023 and consists of members of the Vatican and the Muslim Council of Elders ([Bahrain News Agency, 24 May 2023](#)).
- **December 2021:** A new Roman Catholic cathedral was inaugurated in Awali, 20 kilometers south of the capital Manama. The 'Our Lady of Arabia' Cathedral is the largest in the Gulf and can seat 2,300 people. It will serve the 147,000 Catholics [WDC figure, May 2024] in the country ([The National, 10 December 2021](#)).
- **September 2020:** The government agreed to normalize relations with Israel in a deal (The Abraham Accords) brokered by the USA (despite protests by some Bahrainis). This move is generally viewed as being a step towards more openness and tolerance and away from Islamist influence.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, three types exist in Bahrain:

Communities of expatriate Christians: The majority of expatriate Christians are workers from Southeast Asia (e.g., from the Philippines), Africa and Western countries. They belong mainly to Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox congregations. Western Christian expatriates are most often free to practice their beliefs, as long as they refrain from proselytizing. Non-Western Christians like the Filipinos are more likely to face discrimination and abuse, especially female domestic workers. It is a matter of debate how much their non-Muslim faith adds to their vulnerability to abuse.

Historical Christian communities: Bahrain has a small group of indigenous Bahraini Christians, descendants of Arab Christian clans from an area which covers Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Converts to Christianity: In Bahrain, Christians with a Muslim background are under considerably more pressure than the expatriate communities are. Traditionally, society is intolerant towards conversion and converts have to be careful not to talk about their new faith openly. Pressure comes mostly from family and community, and to a lesser extent from the state.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are no non-traditional Christian communities in Bahrain except those involving expatriates.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Bahrain is a very small country with the capital city, Manama, being the center of activity. Bahraini converts primarily face the highest risks from family members as ties are strong and pressure to conform is great. However, the risks which converts from Islam to Christianity face from their community vary; opposition is stronger in Shia communities than in Sunni communities. Some communities are known to be strict, while others are known to be more moderate.

Converts from an expatriate background usually face similar pressure as in their home countries, as they are often living in compounds together with fellow compatriots.

Position on the World Watch List

Bahrain: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	54	67
WWL 2024	55	65
WWL 2023	55	66
WWL 2022	57	60
WWL 2021	56	60

The overall score for Bahrain decreased by one point in WWL 2025, due to a drop in the violence score from 1.1 to 0.6 of a point. Converts from Islam to Christianity face significant pressure from family and community to recant their Christian faith, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith.

Persecution engines

Bahrain: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Medium
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
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	Medium
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 (Medium)

Islamic oppression in Bahrain should be seen in line with what is happening in the whole region, where there are many sources of tension and conflict. This causes both government and society to be vigilant, suspicious of new influences and therefore conservative. The legal framework is also a manifestation of this conservative Islamic view. The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, the inviolability of places of worship, the freedom to perform religious rites, and the freedom to hold religious parades and religious gatherings as long as they are “in accordance with the customs observed in the country”. Given the fact that the Constitution also declares that the state religion is Islam and that Sharia (Islamic law) is the principal source for legislation, it actually means that freedom of religion is limited. The situation is therefore similar to that of other Gulf countries: Christians are free to practice their belief as long as they do it privately.

Islamic oppression is most keenly felt by converts as their families will put pressure on them to recant their faith and return to Islam. This pressure is not only exerted because of religious reasons, but is clearly mixed with tribal values (see below).

Clan oppression (Medium)

Tribalism still plays a major role in Bahraini society. Despite the incorporation of modern technology and architecture, age-old norms and values continue to be enforced. This tribalism is clearly mixed with Islam and especially affects converts. As in the rest of the Middle East, religion is connected to

family identity. Therefore, leaving Islam is interpreted as betraying one’s family. In general, families put social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The government endeavors to stay in power at all costs. A Sunni-family is ruling a Shiite majority with the help of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni majority countries in the region. Freedom of assembly, freedom of association, due process or law and other fundamental rights are constantly violated by the government.

Drivers of persecution

Bahrain: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	MEDIUM			MEDIUM			MEDIUM		
Government officials	Medium						Medium		
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium								
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Medium					

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

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Family hostility is often rooted in both *Islamic oppression* and *Clan oppression*, with conversion from Islam to Christianity being seen as both a betrayal of Islam and family. Family hostility and the fear of provoking violent reactions is the main form of pressure faced by Bahraini converts.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Although the Bahraini government regularly monitors preaching in mosques to check for any statements inciting violence, Muslim religious leaders keep society conservative and encourage family and society to take action against converts. This seems to be particularly true for Shia religious leaders.

- **Government officials (Medium):** The government can easily expel expatriate Christians, which forces them into self-restraint since opposing the government or infringing “fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine” is forbidden, as [Article 23](#) of the Constitution states. Churches have to be careful therefore when it comes to proselytizing activities and cannot criticize the government or Islam. In the case of converts from Islam to Christianity, the government also sometimes puts pressure on converts by detaining them for a short period to quell public unrest and to pressurize the convert into recanting their faith.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** In addition to protecting the honor of the family, tribal leaders will try to uphold Islam and Islamic norms, which are closely linked to the Bahraini family identity. They will put pressure on a convert to recant his or her new faith.
- **Citizens (Medium):** The conservative nature of Islamic society in Bahrain is causing most of the pressure experienced by Christians, especially converts. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable. Additionally - although mixed with racial bias - poor and low-skilled Christian workers from Southeast Asia and Africa can face discrimination and abuse from their employers and other citizens. Especially foreign workers who are known to have converted from Islam to Christianity face persecution from their employers and colleagues at work.

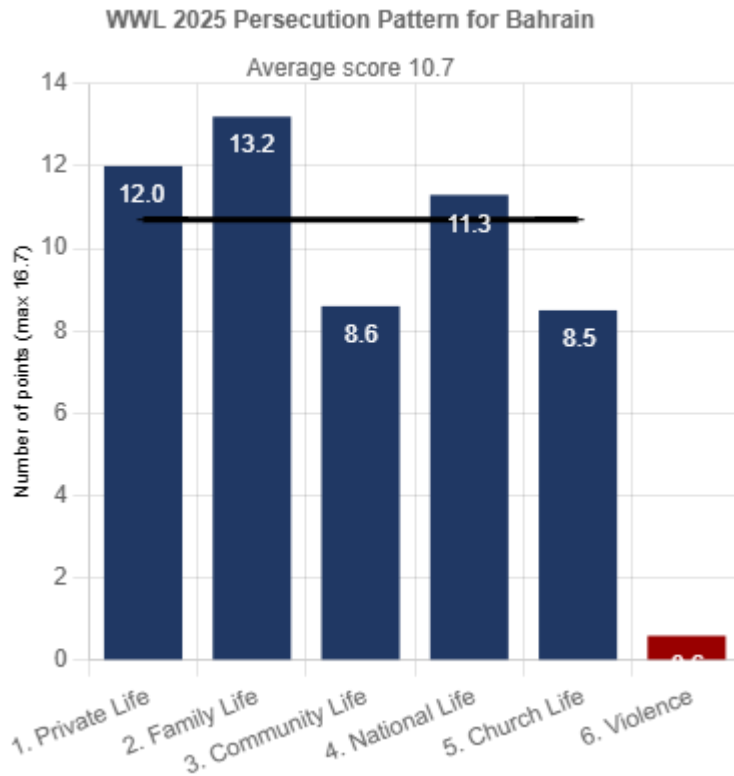
Drivers of Clan oppression

- **One's own (extended) family (Medium):** Bahraini families will try to protect the honor of the family. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for shaming their families.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Tribal leaders, often the eldest sons of their families, have a duty to protect the (extended) family and look after the well being, as well as the family honor of the whole group. They see it as their duty to put pressure on a convert to recant Christianity or to pressurize the family into taking action against an apostate family member. In the case of converts from expatriate communities, community leaders might apply pressure in line with the cultural norms of the home country.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Bahraini government is oppressive, especially against the Shia majority. As [Human Rights Watch](#) put it (in its Bahrain country summary, accessed February 2024): “Independent media has been banned since 2017. ... Authorities have arrested, prosecuted, and harassed rights defenders, journalists, and opposition leaders, including for their social media activity. Bahrain continues to deny access to independent rights monitors and the UN special rapporteur on torture.” It goes without saying that Christians have to be careful in such an environment, especially if making statements which could be understood as criticism of the ruling elite.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Bahrain shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (10.7 points), retaining the same score as in WWL 2024.
- Although all *spheres of life* show high or very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in the *Family* and *Private spheres*. This reflects the difficult situation experienced by converts in daily life as they face very high pressure from their (extended) family.
- The score for violence decreased slightly from 1.1 points in WWL 2024 to 0.6 in WWL 2025. Although less incidents were reported, it is likely that there were a number of unreported incidents occurring.

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.). (3.25 points)

Expatriate Christians can share their beliefs on social media, as long as their comments do not contradict Islamic principles. Criticizing Islam is not possible and could lead to deportation. Converts from Islam to Christianity have to be very careful, as it could reveal their new faith, leading to an increase in repercussions.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

Expatriate Christians have to be careful that any discussions about their faith with (Bahraini) Muslims are not viewed as an attempt to proselytize, which is socially unacceptable. Converts face the biggest risk, as they are often pressured into keeping a low profile. Hence, discussing their faith with others can lead to extra pressure, including arrest and detention (probably on charges related to public order or security). However, growing tolerance among some groups for different religious views mitigates risks to some extent.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)

The Constitution imposes no restriction on the right to choose, change or practice one's religion. In comparison to other Gulf countries, Bahrain is relatively tolerant when it comes to conversion cases. Nonetheless, conversion from Islam to Christianity is not well received by the community at large and this attitude is rooted in the apostasy provisions of Islamic law and as such represents a permanent source of pressure, especially within the Shia community. Although there are reports of growing numbers of Bahraini converts from Islam, numbers remain very small. This is therefore a significant source of pressure for a small number of Christians.

Block 1.10: Christians have been isolated from other family members or other like-minded Christians (e.g. house arrest). (3.00 points)

Social isolation by family members is a common reaction and punishment in the wider Gulf region for those choosing divergent paths, deviating from cultural and Islamic norms. Some are even put under house arrest, although this is less common. This is especially true for young converts from Islam to Christianity.

Block 1 - Additional information

Members of non-Muslim religious groups that practice their faith privately do so without government interference. However, particularly Christians with a Shia Muslim background can face great difficulties. For those of them who live with their families or parents, worshiping and displaying Christian symbols (such as crosses) is likely to attract serious persecution. Hence, privately possessing a Bible or other Christian materials mainly represents a risk for converts from Islam to Christianity. If caught in possession of a Bible by a disapproving member of the family or community, this could lead to negative repercussions. Many converts find ways to cope with such risks, especially since new technological developments such as Bible apps are available.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere***Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)***

Within Bahrain's small indigenous Christian community children are registered as Christian. In accordance with the principles of Islamic law, the children of Bahraini converts from Islam to Christianity would automatically be registered as Muslim.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.50 points)

The religion of the child is registered on the birth certificate application, although not displayed on the birth certificate itself or any identity documents. Converts from Islam to Christianity cannot register their child as Christian. A female Bahraini convert from a Muslim background is only permitted by law to marry a man also born a Muslim. While a man born Muslim would in principle have freedom to marry a non-Muslim - in both cases, Islamic marriage rites would be applied. Similarly, Islamic burial rites would be applied for anyone who was born Muslim, including converts to Christianity. For the small indigenous Christian Bahraini community, and for expatriate Christians, civil wedding ceremonies or church weddings (within some traditions) are possible, provided requirements set out by the Bahraini authorities and the relevant foreign government are met.

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.50 points)

For Christians from a Muslim background, Islamic burial rites apply. For indigenous and expatriate Christians there are two cemeteries, but both have very little remaining capacity. An application by churches for new land for burials was filed in 2014, with land being allocated in February 2022 ([IRFR 2022 Bahrain](#), p.20). This third cemetery is still under construction and has not been opened yet ([IRFR 2023 Bahrain](#), p.19). The original generation of Bahraini Christians is now growing old so the issue is seen as becoming increasingly urgent.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

For indigenous and expatriate Christian children, Islamic classes in school are optional; schools may apply to the Ministry of Education for permission to provide non-Islamic instruction for non-Muslim

students. However, Islamic instruction is compulsory for all children considered to be Muslim, including therefore for the children of Christians from a Muslim background. In addition, state school curricula include Islamic studies and there are no similar Christian classes for Christian students.

Block 2 - Additional information

In Bahrain, where Sharia law governs personal and property matters, Christian converts from Islam face many challenges. As mentioned above, Muslim women cannot marry a non-Muslim man. Any such marriage will not be recognized. Therefore, any child custody or inheritance issues arising from such marriages will not even be considered and have serious implications for those involved, especially women. It is most likely that pressure will be exerted on spouses of converts to divorce their husband or wife. There are no explicit laws restricting Christian parents from raising their children according to their Christian faith, but it can be difficult for Christian parents to raise their children in an Islamic environment, both for converts and expatriates.

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.). (3.00 points)

Known converts from Islam to Christianity are monitored by their local communities. This forces them not only to act carefully among their immediate family members, but also in public. Converts have to take precautions when meeting with other Christians.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.00 points)

Bahraini converts from Islam to Christianity can face limited access to higher education due to their new faith. Especially in the case of young converts, their families can decide to halt their education as part of a wider measure to isolate them.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (2.75 points)

Converts from Islam to Christianity will feel obliged to participate in Islamic practices and traditions (for example, observing fasting during Ramadan) in order not to draw negative attention to themselves and to avoid the discovery of their new faith.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (2.75 points)

Known converts from Islam to Christianity are likely to be put under pressure by the wider community to return to Islam, for example through social isolation.

Block 3 - Additional information

Although converts from Islam to Christianity experience higher levels of social hostility, expatriate Christians and indigenous Bahraini Christians belonging to the Historical Christian Community can usually live their lives without experiencing social hostility because of their faith. This is also due to the government's active promotion of tolerance. Nonetheless, Bahraini converts to Christianity often keep

a low profile to avoid any negative repercussions such as disadvantages in education, not being allowed to participate in communal activities and other forms of social exclusion.

If Bahraini converts are open about their new faith, it is not unlikely that they will end up being interrogated by the police. It is also likely that converts from Islam to Christianity will lose their job when their new faith becomes known. Nepotism is widespread in Bahraini society and getting a job often depends on relationships and social standing. The latter is lost when one turns from Islam to Christianity, making it difficult to keep or find employment.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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 Constitution of Bahrain enshrines Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as a principal source of legislation. However, the Constitution also affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. Although indigenous and expatriate Christians enjoy a certain amount of freedom, Bahraini nationals or other Muslims who are considered apostates could face imprisonment under the Penal Code's defamation provisions, and under sanctions such as forced divorce and removal of child custody under personal status laws overseen by Sharia courts. Hence, despite guaranteeing some elements of Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Constitution and other state laws are not aligned with the Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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

Most Christians exercise precautionary 'self-censorship' to avoid any form of provocation, particularly in relation to criticism of Islam or proselytizing.

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

Religious affiliation is not displayed on identity documents, nor on birth certificates, but the government does record a person's religion. Converts do not dare to request changes to this registration out of fear of reprisals (mostly from their family members).

Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.25 points)

All Christians exercise caution and a degree of self-censorship. Criticism of Islam can lead to prosecution, for example under Article 309 of the Penal Code which states that "any person who commits an offence by any method of expression against one of the recognized religions" faces a sentence of up to one year's imprisonment. In practice, expatriates who are found guilty will most likely be deported after completing their sentence. Converts from Islam to Christianity have to be even more careful, as accusations of blasphemy lead not only to prosecution but also to hostility from family and community members.

Block 4 - Additional information

National policies and laws often address issues aimed to help the Muslim population and ignore Christians and other minorities. The fact that the country is divided between Shia and Sunni groups puts Christians in an awkward position: They are often perceived as siding with the opposing group.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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)

Even though the government has at times allotted land for church compound construction, in the majority of cases it is difficult for a church community to build a new place of worship. The registered places of worship that exist in the country are too small to accommodate the large expatriate population.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.25 points)

Churches are being monitored, sometimes even in visible ways. Such monitoring can protect churches against threats, but can also be a way of identifying whether converts from Islam to Christianity are attending church activities.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.00 points)

Churches need to be careful with activities that could be considered proselytization. The inclusion of a Bahraini convert in an expatriate church community is a sensitive issue. Both the Bahraini government and the family members of the convert may try to hinder this.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.00 points)

The expatriate churches in Bahrain often have a good relationship with the government, but they have to apply self-censorship and cannot openly criticize government policies or social issues relating to Islamic culture and norms. This limits the churches in how far they can speak up about issues of social justice in the country.

Block 5 - Additional information

Churches are in general able to organize meetings for worship, although lack of church space is often an issue. Producing and distributing religious materials is permissible, provided it does not criticize Islam; however, publicly distributing Bibles or Christian materials could provoke a serious reaction from the local population.

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.

4. The symbol “x” in the table:

- This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Bahrain: 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)?	0	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?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	x	x
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	0
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	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	x	x

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

Christians attacked

- Several Bahraini converts from Islam to Christianity experienced domestic abuse from family members, including both physical and mental abuse.
- It is widely known that housemaids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable to incidents of abuse. However, statistics are scarce as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have

no interested in revealing the true situation: Bahrain needs the domestic staff to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the housemaids need the money coming in from the thousands of migrants working in the Gulf states and do not want to put their economic interests at stake. The employers of abused housemaids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The housemaids themselves feel often ashamed because of the abuse. In addition, many provide a very much needed source of income for their families in their home countries. The home families are proud of the work being done in Bahrain, and the housemaid does not want to disappoint her family. Therefore, statistics and evidence of abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any abuse is due to the housemaid being a non-Muslim. Despite this, given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, conservative estimates agree that at least 10 Christian house-maids were abused in the WWL 2025 reporting period, with their faith being one of the factors making them more vulnerable.

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.

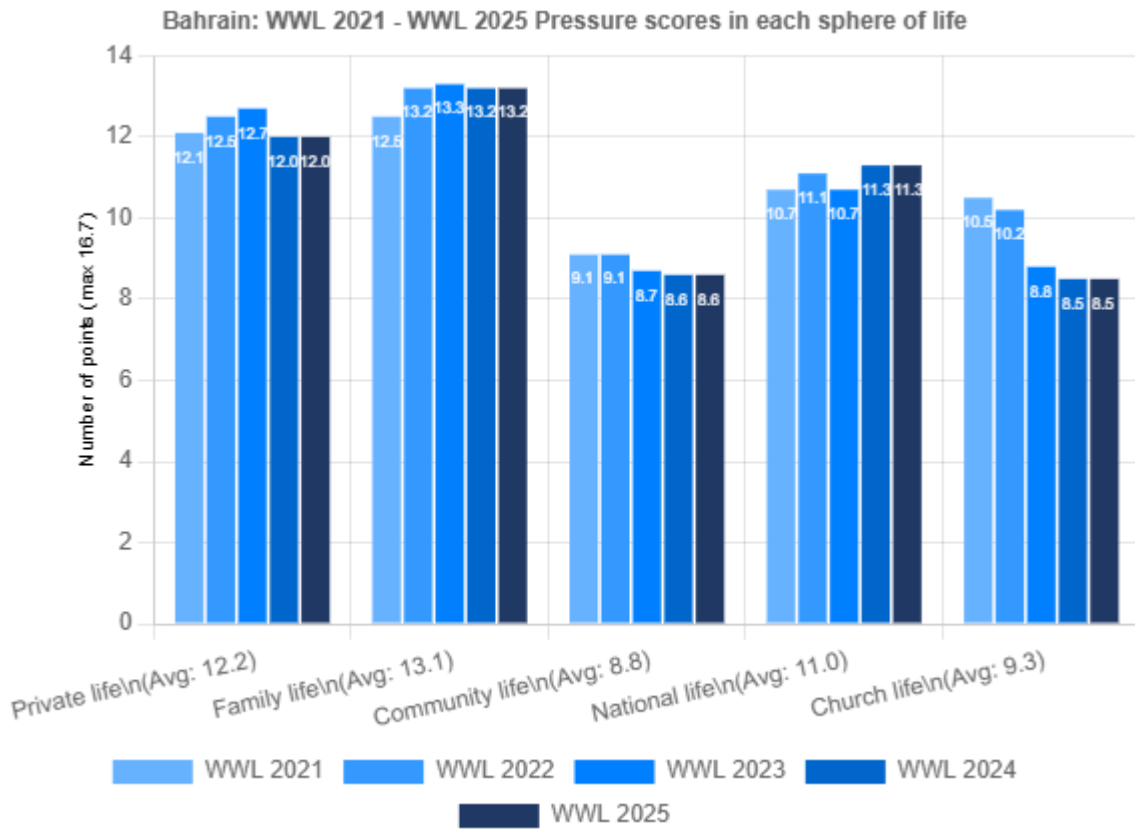
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Bahrain: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	10.7
2024	10.7
2023	10.8
2022	11.2
2021	11.0

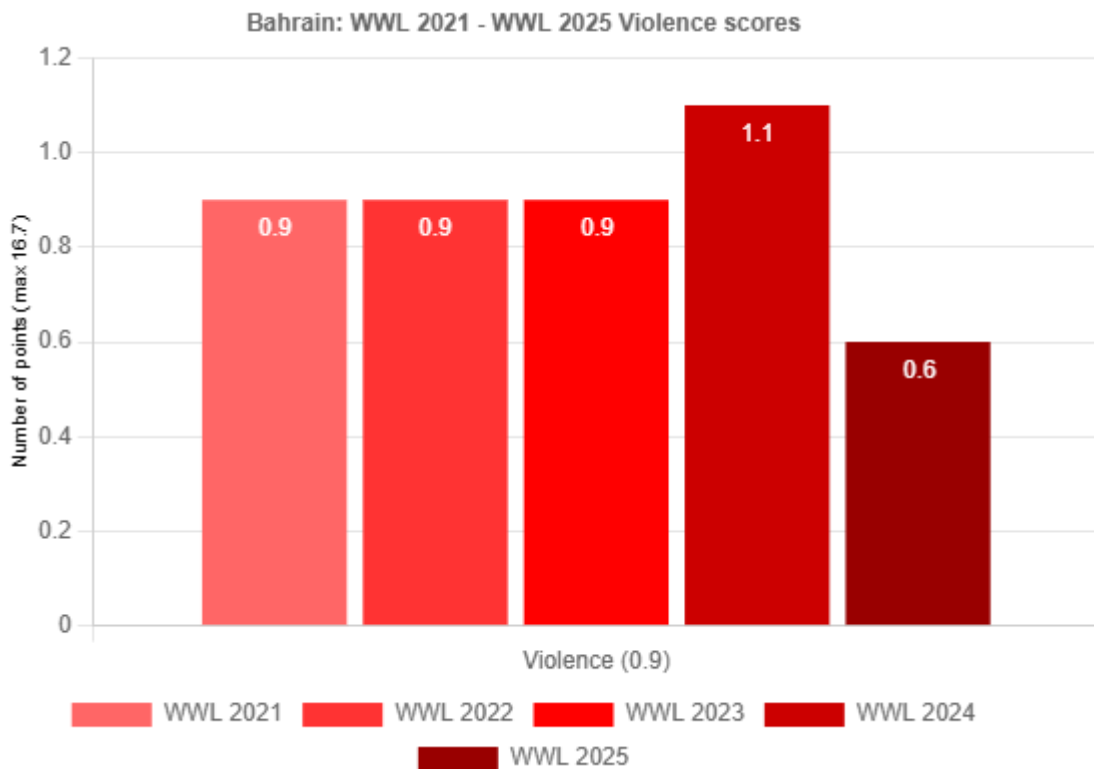
The average pressure on Christians has remained high/very high over the last five reporting periods and would seem now to have stabilized just under the 11 point mark. This reflects the difficulties experienced by converts in particular.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the blue chart below, the average pressure per sphere of life shows that pressure is consistently highest in the *Family* and *Private spheres*, reflecting the pressure that converts from Islam to Christianity have to deal with.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The number of recorded violent incidents against Christians have always been very low/low. This pattern of high pressure and low violence targeting Christians is typical for a Gulf country. The high levels of pressure ensure that many 'do not cross the line' and hence avoid provoking a violent reaction.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Despite some moves towards legal equality, women and girls continue to be viewed as inferior in Bahraini society (Wilson Center, 8 March 2020). Among the small number of converts to Christianity, pressure is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, then older men (reflecting levels of status and freedom within the culture). A key challenge that women from a Muslim background experience is the legal marriage restriction that prevents them from marrying a non-Muslim; only Muslim men are permitted to marry a non-Muslim. A marriage between a formerly (and still officially registered) Muslim woman who has converted to Christianity to a non-Muslim will not be recognized. If a Christian woman is married to a Muslim man, her custody and inheritance rights will also not be considered ([HRW 2025 Bahrain country chapter](#)). As a country expert describes, “divorce and custody laws favor the majority religion, and men. So female indigenous converts face a dual vulnerability”.

In addition to these challenges, female converts face oppression from their families. An expert shares that “Bahraini Muslim converts from a Shia background to Christianity face extreme pressure from their families, clans, and tribes to repent and return to Islam. ... Although this dynamic is placed upon all Bahraini Muslim converts to Christianity, Bahraini Muslim women who convert to Christianity are especially at great risk”. They are likely to be beaten by family members, placed under house arrest, and may be threatened with honor killing. They can also face other violent threats, such as that of forced marriage. Financial dependence on male family members, which can be common among female Bahrainis, provides another opportunity for persecution.

The ill-treatment of foreign workers, including sexual abuse, remains a major issue. Housemaids working in Bahrain often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience (sexual) abuse. More broadly, there is also pressure to adhere to Islamic style of dress in order to avoid harassment, and women in more conservative families may be monitored in their Internet use in order to prevent them accessing Christian materials and teachings.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Persecution of male Christian converts in Bahrain typically manifests itself in the workplace. As described by a country expert, male converts are “likely to face repercussions in work, direct/public action from family, [and] quick pressure to recant”. Men known to be Christians may lose out on promotion, or in some instances, lose their jobs altogether. This can lead to serious economic hardship which has major implications on the whole family, as the man is normally the financial provider of the family. Converts may also be ostracized from their families, threatened, beaten, intimidated and expelled from the family home. Their status and role in the family will come under threat. In light of such treatment, it is extremely challenging for Christians from a Muslim background to meet for fellowship.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and adherents of Bahai are relatively free to practice their faith and there are no reports of interference with their religious practices. There are however reports showing that the country's majority Shia Muslim group does face discrimination.

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

- "Minority religious groups continued to report a high degree of tolerance within society for them to freely express their beliefs and traditions, although not for conversion from Islam or for atheistic or secularist views."
- "Non-Muslim religious community leaders reported there was continuing societal pressure on individuals not to convert from Islam. Those who did so were unwilling to speak publicly or privately to family or associates about their conversions out of fear of harassment or discrimination."

According to [BTI Bahrain Report 2024](#): (p.7):

- "Meanwhile, discussions about national identities are varying, and sectarian identities do not solely reflect religious affiliations. The conflict between privileged Sunnis and marginalized Shi'a is mostly influenced by the politically motivated discrimination against Shi'ites. Consequently, the royal family's approach to maintaining its authority results in a contentious policy concerning citizenship and naturalization. The government encourages Sunni immigrants from abroad and awards Arab citizenship to others after 15 years of residency and to non-Arabs after 25 years of residency. Bahrain has continued to systematically discriminate against Shi'ites in a wide range of areas, including employment, access to services, political or judicial representation, freedom of speech and expression, promotion and representation in the security apparatus, and religious matters (e.g., mosque construction). Furthermore, the government uses citizenship revocations against Shi'ites as a tool of repression, undermining their ties to the state, deepening rifts within society, and violating international law. Since 2012, at least 990 Bahrainis have been stripped of their citizenship, the vast majority of whom are Shi'ites."

According to the [USCIRF 2021 annual report](#) (p.3):

- Although Bahrain is the only Gulf state to officially recognize the Shiite Ashura commemoration as a public holiday, the Shia community remains under surveillance by the authorities and several arbitrary interrogations of Shia clergy have taken place. In addition, numerous Shia citizens had their citizenship revoked. This oppression has a political element since Bahrain's Sunni government regularly accuses Shiites of cooperating with Iran. Hence, the Shia communities are treated far more unfavorably than Christians in Bahrain.

Trends Summary

1) Both Iran and Saudi Arabia seek to influence politics in the country

Bahrain is very prone to changes in regional politics and both Iran and Saudi Arabia seek to influence the politics of the country. Hosting a large US Navy presence forms a strong protection on the one hand, but it also puts Bahrain at risk if tensions between the USA and Iran were to boil over. Exemplifying the delicate balancing act, Bahrain welcomed Iranian government officials for talks to discuss the resumption of political relations, while knowing that *Saraya al Ashtar*, a Bahraini Shia terrorist group, is supported by Iran ([Al-Monitor, 26 June 2024](#), [Al-Monitor, 3 May 2024](#)).

2) The Shia majority is seen as a potential threat to the government

The key ongoing internal issue is the oppression of political opposition and other groups considered dissident. The oppressed Shia majority is seen as an internal threat which could be influenced by Iran, making Bahrain potentially vulnerable to intensified internal instability or to unpredictable regional currents. For now, the royal family from the minority Sunni group seems to have consolidated its power with the help of Saudi Arabia. However, a vicious circle has developed in which strong oppression leads to increasing radicalization and vice versa. Hence, the Sunni-Shia tensions could be a ticking time-bomb, endangering the stability of Bahrain, which would likely have an adverse effect on the Christian presence, if unrest were to break out. At the moment, however, the government is more interested in dealing with Shia dissidents than in restricting Christian church activities.

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/>
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution dynamics - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Bahrain News Agency, 21 October 2024 - <https://www.bna.bh/en/news?cms=q8FmFJgiscL2fwlzON1%2BDgels28kMe4uPcd%2BnfGgrFw%3D>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Vatican News, 4 November 2022 - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-11/pope-francis-apostolic-journey-bahrain-prayer-fraternity.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Vatican, 4 November 2022 - <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/november/documents/20221104-forum-bahrain.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Reuters, 3 November 2022 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/bahrain-popes-message-may-get-caught-shiite-sunni-muslim-divide-2022-11-03/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Bahrain News Agency, 24 May 2023 - <https://www.bna.bh/en/BahrainhostsfirstmeetingofPermanentCommitteeforIslamicChristianDialogue.aspx?cms=q8FmFJgiscL2fwlzON1%2BDjk5VDrntIUotsBOwoWPiOM%3D>
- Specific examples of positive developments: The National, 10 December 2021 - <https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/bahrain/2021/12/10/gulfs-largest-roman-catholic-cathedral-opens-in-bahrain/>

- Church spectrum today - additional information: American Mission Hospital - <https://www.amh.org.bh/>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: ELCNEC Bahrain, accessed 12 February 2024 - <https://elcnecbahrain.org/about-us.html>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: MEC country profile - <https://www.meconcern.org/countries/bahrain/>
- Drivers of persecution description: Article 23 - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bahrain_2012.pdf?lang=en
- Drivers of persecution description: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/bahrain>
- Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.50 points): IRFR 2022 Bahrain - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/bahrain>
- Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.50 points): IRFR 2023 Bahrain - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/bahrain/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2025 Bahrain country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/bahrain#d3d2f0>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Bahrain - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/bahrain/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: BTI Bahrain Report 2024 - https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2024_BHR.pdf
- Persecution of other religious minorities: USCIRF 2021 annual report - https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021%20Annual%20Report_0.pdf
- Trends Summary: Al-Monitor, 26 June 2024 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/06/us-cautious-irans-bahrain-frozen-funds-claims-warns-sanctions>
- Trends Summary: Al-Monitor, 3 May 2024 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/05/who-saraya-al-ashtar-bahraini-group-claimed-target-israel>