
World Watch Research

Philippines: Persecution Dynamics

February 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/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

Philippines: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
119,106,000	107,061,000	89.9

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

Philippines: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	107,061,000	89.9
Muslim	7,497,000	6.3
Hindu	38,700	0.0
Buddhist	141,000	0.1
Ethnic religionist	2,687,000	2.3
Jewish	110	0.0
Bahai	369,000	0.3
Atheist	247,000	0.2
Agnostic	945,000	0.8
Other	119,700	0.1
<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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Philippines:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Political parties, Violent religious groups, Non-Christian religious leaders
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Non-Christian religious leaders

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

As the only Christian majority country in Southeast Asia many Christians, particularly Catholics in Luzon and the Visayas face high levels of religious freedom. This starkly contrasts with the situation of Christians living in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and of those supporting the most marginalized communities and protecting the environment based on Christian faith-based views. Converts from tribal religions or Islam also face challenges and are often under intense pressure to return to their original faith. BARMM is in the transitional phase of incorporating a tri-justice system that incorporates the Philippines Constitution, Sharia and traditional or tribal laws, with efforts underway to expand and strengthen Sharia legal systems as part of BARMM's justice reform agenda.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#)
- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#)
- [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CAT\)](#)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)
- [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families \(ICMW\)](#)

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

- Christian leaders face harassment and vilification for speaking out against human rights violations (ICCPR Art.18 and 19).
- Christians face “Red-Tagging” and Accusations of being communist-terrorists under Anti-Terrorism Laws (ICCPR Art. 18 and 22).
- Christians in the BARMM region regularly experience violence and insecurity (ICCPR, Art. 9).
- Christians are regularly discriminated against in education and employment in the BARMM region (ICCPR, Art. 25 and ICESCR Art.2).
- Christian children regularly experience harassment and coercion into Islamic teachings within the BARMM (CRC, Art. 2).

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **3 December 2023:** Four people were killed in an explosion that took place during a Catholic church service at the MSU Campus in Marawi City. Estimates of those injured ranged from 42-50 people ([BBC News, 3 December 2023](#)).
- **5 April 2024:** A Catholic church in Negros Occidental was damaged when a Muslim man drove a tricycle into the church damaging the podium and other furnishings and forcing the church to temporarily close ([Manila Bulletin, 5 April 2024](#)).
- **19 May 2024 (Pentecost Sunday):** Two men on a motorbike threw a grenade into the service being held at Santo Nino chapel, Cotabato, injuring two people ([Asia News, 22 May 2024](#)).
- **2023 and 2024:** Various church services were disturbed in the BARMM region. For example, two churches were attacked by stone-throwers in the Cotabato region.
- **2023-2024:** Whilst full details cannot be given for security reasons, at least fourteen Christians were physically abused for faith-related reasons including multiple death threats, threats to business, shooting of Christian's homes and shootings of individuals leading to hospitalization.

Specific examples of positive developments

- **January 2023:** The Philippine Congress deliberated on a Religious Freedom bill aimed at underlining the right to freedom of religion and liberty of conscience. While the bill received mixed reactions from various religious groups, the discussions reflect an active engagement with issues of religious liberty ([PhilStar, 23 January 2023](#)).
- **September 2024:** The Philippines hosted the 2024 International Forum on Law and Religion in Taguig City, themed "Building Peace Through the Protection of Religious Freedom" ([CurrentPH, 22 August 2024](#)).

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored separately in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: The Roman Catholic Church is by far the largest historical Christian community in the Philippines, however the country also boasts numerous Orthodox and Protestant churches. Where these churches are located in Muslim majority areas they face high levels of persecution such as the bombing at a Roman Catholic church in the WWL 2025 reporting period. In recent years, these churches have been the recipients of "red-tagging" (i.e., accusations of being communist sympathizers) and trumped up charges as can be seen from the arrest and imprisonment of Bishop Carol, who remains on bail after being released in 2018 ([Anglican News Service, 17 April 2018](#)). Christians belonging to Historical churches have also been targeted for their missionary work, as was the case with the attack of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) compound in 2020 ([Bulatlat, 25 January 2020](#)).

Converts to Christianity: Converts come mainly from a Muslim and - to a lesser degree - from an Indigenous background. They face the most severe persecution, especially in the hot-spot areas such as the BARMM. There, they risk violence and pressure to give up their faith if their conversion is discovered. One country expert shared how "many of these communities are hidden and assign themselves as Almasihin's, which is an acceptable designation in their specific communities to avoid conflicts with the majority of the people in their culture." Similarly, Indigenous converts may face pressure from their family or tribal leaders to give up their faith that can even extend to being forcibly removed from their ancestral lands.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are many non-traditional communities throughout the Philippines including Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals. These communities face challenges in three areas: 1. In predominantly Roman Catholic areas where they may experience mild social pressure, especially if they actively proselytize. 2. In Muslim majority areas where they may encounter threats or violence, especially if they are active in missionary work. 3. In Indigenous territories where active mission work may lead to pushback, threats of violence and even expulsion from a community.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The primary site of persecution in the Philippines is the BARMM region, which includes the four provinces of Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Tawi-Tawi. A Tri-justice system operates in the area which female Islamic Member of Parliament Sha Elijah Dumama-Alba describes in the following way: "... the provisions of the Bangsamoro Justice System give a premium to the unique cultural and

historical heritage of the Bangsamoro. It emphasizes that the dispensation of justice in the region shall be in consonance with the Constitution, Shari’ah, traditional or tribal laws, and other relevant laws” ([Bangsamoro, 26 July 2023](#)). Several churches in the region faced violence during the WWL 2025 reporting period (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*). Converts from Islam run the risk of severe opposition, including violence. The regions first elections are scheduled to be held on 12 May 2025 and it remains to be seen what this will mean for the country's Christian minority.

There are other areas where growing Islamization poses a challenge to Christianity such as limitations to Bible distribution in Sulu and a beach in Boracay where only Muslims are allowed ([Esquire, 4 September 2024](#)).

Christian activists across the country risk persecution for their role in the protection of human and environmental rights.

Position on the World Watch List

Philippines: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	43	78
WWL 2024	40	-
WWL 2023	32	-
WWL 2022	34	-
WWL 2021	26	-

The Philippines rose 3 points in WWL 2025. Although average pressure remained unchanged at 6.8 points, there was a stark rise in violence score from 6.1 points in WWL 2024 to 8.5 points. While there were fewer killings, incidents of attacks on churches and Christians increased, along with the number of arrests and forced departures from the country. This included the bombing of a chapel in Cotabato, in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Persecution engines

Philippines: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium

(table continues below)

Philippines: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Very weak
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very weak

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

Islamic oppression (Strong)

The Philippines is a predominantly Christian nation, but in the BARMM region, Christians are a minority. This region operates under a unique legal framework known as the Tri-Justice System, which integrates Sharia law alongside local customary laws and civil law. This framework, while designed to ensure Muslim autonomy, has led to the marginalization of the Christian minority, especially in terms of religious freedom. The region's history of Islamic extremism is a significant factor in this oppression. Militant Islamic groups, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), continue to exist and exert influence, often in violent forms. The presence of these groups contributes to an atmosphere of fear and oppression, particularly towards any Christian converts. The existence of these extremist groups and the underlying attitudes toward Islamization, including the Muslim-first ideology in BARMM, create serious levels of persecution for Christian minorities. Converts to Christianity are particularly vulnerable, facing threats ranging from social ostracism to violent attacks.

Clan oppression (Medium)

In addition to the challenges posed by *Islamic oppression*, some indigenous groups in the Philippines also present a source of persecution for Christians. The country is home to numerous indigenous peoples, some of whom practice Christianity and others who practise traditional animist beliefs or Islam. When members of these groups convert to Christianity, they often face extreme pressure from their communities to renounce their new faith. Indigenous Christian converts may be viewed as traitors to their cultural identity, and their decisions can lead to ostracism, physical threats, and sometimes violent retribution. These indigenous groups often have strong clan-based structures, and converting to Christianity can disrupt longstanding traditions and values, leading to communal punishment. While the intensity of this persecution varies, it remains a significant concern in rural and remote areas.

Other (Weak)

While religious persecution in the Philippines is deeply connected to the aforementioned engines, there are additional factors that contribute to the marginalization of Christians, though these are often seen as being less pervasive. One significant issue is the persecution that arises from environmental and land rights activism. In regions like Mindanao, Christian communities, particularly those aligned

with indigenous struggles, face persecution for standing against destructive mining and deforestation practices.

Development aggression, driven by business interests, often leads to clashes between indigenous rights activists, environmental advocates and state-backed corporations. Christians (particularly leaders) are targeted where they are involved in these movements.

One specific form of this type of persecution is "red-tagging," where Christian leaders and activists are falsely accused of being communist sympathizers or insurgents due to their advocacy for environmental or human rights causes. This has led to surveillance, harassment, and, in some cases, targeted killings. However, there are indications that this form of persecution has somewhat improved under President Marcos' administration, though the situation remains volatile, particularly in areas with active paramilitary groups.

Drivers of persecution

Philippines: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	VERY WEAK			VERY WEAK
Government officials	Strong								
Ethnic group leaders									
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium			Medium					
Violent religious groups	Medium								
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Strong	Very weak				
Political parties	Medium								
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups				Medium		Very weak			Very weak

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

Islamic oppression

- **Government officials (Strong) / Political parties (Medium):** In the BARMM, policies favoring Islamic practices are being implemented, including mandatory hijabs for women in schools and government offices, and the addition of Islamic prayers and subjects in school curricula.

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Many Christians who come from Muslim families face intense pressure from within their own families. In one report, a Muslim husband threatened his wife with hellfire for attending gatherings of an *Almasihin* group in their community. The wife reported to partners that she experiences constant verbal threats from her husband due to her faith in Isa, highlighting the severe strain converts face within their own households.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Some imams and *ustadh* (title of honor for Muslim musician) in certain communities have been teaching that joining groups such as *Almasihin* (which many new Christians turn to), will condemn individuals to the fires of hell. These teachings put pressure on new converts to renounce their newfound faith.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** Although there are no reports from the 2025 reporting period, groups such as Abu Sayyaf and Maute have a long history of targeting Christians in Mindanao. Their actions include kidnapping, killing and displacing Christian communities. These extremist groups seek to establish Islamic rule and view Christians as enemies of their cause.

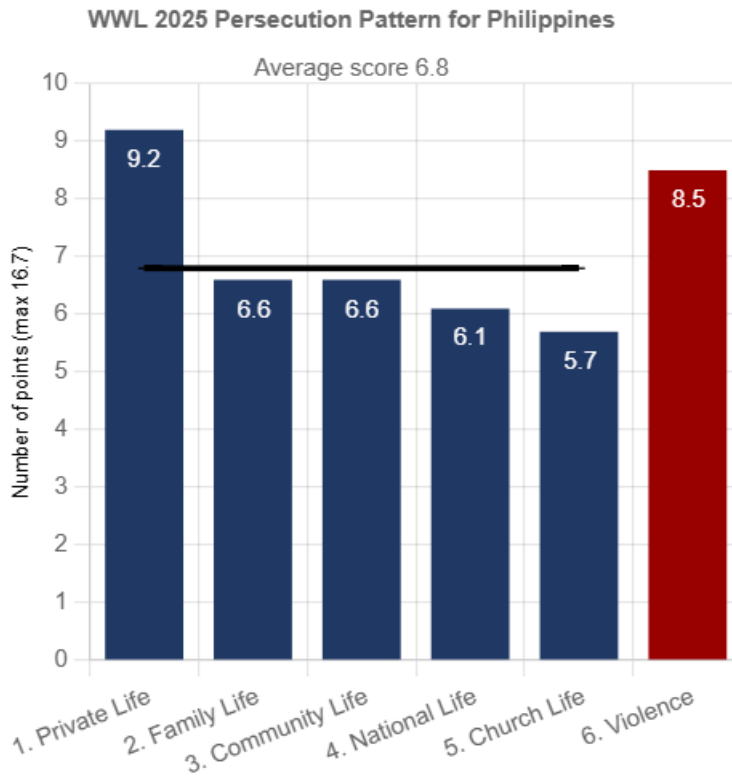
Clan oppression

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Converts frequently face opposition from their extended families, including coercion to return to their previous faith. Families may also resort to evicting Christian converts from ancestral homes, leaving them ostracized and displaced.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Religious leaders in clan-based communities often put pressure on converts to return to their original faith, arguing that abandoning their ancestral religion angers the spirits. In extreme cases, converts have been evicted from their ancestral lands, further marginalizing them.
- **Revolutionaries or Paramilitary groups (Medium):** Entire Christian communities, particularly in rural areas, have faced violent threats and raids by revolutionary or paramilitary groups. These attacks aim to displace Christian communities from their land, especially when their conversion is viewed as undermining local customs or alliances.

Other

- **Revolutionaries or Paramilitary groups (Medium):** Paramilitaries often work on behalf of the corporate interests in mining, logging and agricultural operations and frequently act aggressively towards any Christians defending human and environmental rights.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for the Philippines shows:

- Average pressure is at the same fairly high level as in WWL 2024: 6.8 points. In the BARMM region, pressure is particularly evident under the continued implementation of a Tri-Justice system that includes Sharia law.
- Pressure is strongest in *Private Life*, reflecting the difficulties faced by converts.
- The very high violence score largely reflects the four Christians killed in bombings in the BARMM and the destruction of church property.

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

In the Philippines, conversion from one religion to another, or even from one denomination to another, is generally not legally forbidden or punishable by law. The country’s Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and most conversions happen without legal consequence. However, in certain cultural and

religious contexts, conversion can face strong social opposition. Christian converts often come from a tribal or Muslim background. The experience of those from a tribal background differs greatly and whilst some individuals find relative freedom to convert others face opposition from family members or tribal leaders rooted in tribal laws, beliefs and communal norms. Punishments vary but can reach the extreme of being expelled from one's home and even from one's ancestral lands.

For Christians with a Muslim background, opposition to conversion is a permanent occurrence, especially in the Muslim dominated communities or municipalities. Whilst there is no law that strictly forbids conversion, Muslim families frequently remind their members that it is not acceptable for them. Punishment for conversion ranges from verbal abuse to estrangement from family and friends and outright physical violence.

While legally permissible and widely accepted in most of the country, individuals 'converting' from one Christian denomination to another (e.g., Roman Catholicism to Protestantism or vice versa) may face mild social pressure, especially in close-knit or conservative religious families and communities.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.00 points)

Whilst the country's predominantly Christian population ensures that conversations about religion are widely accepted and are a normal part of social interaction, this is not the case for many converts. Discussing one's faith outside of the immediate family is extremely risky for those who have converted to Christianity, especially within Moro groups such as the Maranaos, Magiundanao's and the Iranuns. For Tausug Christians, the risk is evident but not as high as for those previously mentioned. For the Sama tribe in Sulu and Tawi-tawi, there are certain communities that are very antagonistic towards those that openly share their faith. Some Christians on the Island avoid using the title "Pastor" because for them it is risky. For the Kalagan tribe in the Davao area, particularly in Samal Islands, Muslim leaders' are very antagonistic to those that openly profess their conversion, with a number of reports that some who have recently converted were questioned about their faith and were openly called out regarding their belief.

At top universities and other institutions of higher education, discussions of faith and Christian values are expected to be delivered via intellectual arguments to make Christianity credible and authentic to the critical audience. This is expected and not risky per se. However, it may demand more intellectual energy for Christians (especially students), and religiously affiliated individuals, to justify their positions in the classroom compared to others. This can be particularly difficult in areas where Christians are the minority, including some campuses of Mindanao State University.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.75 points)

Those who have converted from Islam to Christianity frequently noted speaking with immediate family members about their faith to be one of the hardest parts of their conversion. Christian converts are wary in expressing their faith especially to their Muslim family and many attempt to keep their new faith hidden from their family, at least to begin with. This leads to caution at school as survey respondents noted the need to be careful not to let their classmates find out as they might report their

conversion to their family. Even those whose families know of their conversion report being careful about what they speak and how they act, so as not to "aggravate the situation".

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.50 points)

In the majority of the country, religious symbols are not only commonly displayed in homes and churches but are also visible in public spaces, vehicles and even workplaces. This cultural norm reflects the deeply ingrained presence of Christianity in Philippine society, where such symbols are seen as part of everyday life. Even in Muslim-majority areas of Mindanao, while Christians may be more discreet in certain contexts, it is generally not dangerous to display Christian symbols in personal spaces or places of worship. The situation is very different for converts from Islam. One local expert summarized these differences as follows: "Even if you would want to wear the cross as a statement of belief in Christ, it is inviting questions, ridicule and persecution. Necklaces, earrings and other form of jewelry, even t-shirt printings are very risky to use for Muslim Background Believers. Not so much for those that live openly as Christians in Muslim-dominated areas since they are already viewed by the Muslims as a different faith from them."

Block 1 - Additional information

It is difficult for many converts to Christianity to meet with other Christians, although many take great risks to do so. One example during the WWL 2025 reporting period was that of a group of Maranao converts from Islam in Marawi who met discreetly for fellowship despite opposition. As a result they were accused of belonging to the Islamic State group or other armed rebel groups.

For some converts owning a Bible can be dangerous. To avoid such dangers it was reported that "those from a Muslim background use the various kitabs (Injil, Tawrat, Jabur) in their personal spiritual growth and some also use portions of the Quran." Furthermore, there have been reports from Sulu that there are some Islands where Bible distribution is no longer allowed and its possession frowned upon.

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. (3.25 points)

Through Order No. 49, s. 2009 the Department of Education set the general guidelines for religious instruction in public schools to ensure that no student must be forced to attend religious classes of another religion. However, in the BARMM region, Christian children have been forced to memorize Islamic prayer and undergo prescribed Islamic curricula. Even students in Christian schools in the BARMM region face challenges. For example, one Christian Evangelical School was forced to employ Muslim teachers to comply with local government standards with teachers not only imposing Islamic education but also unable to provide any Christian education. There were also a limited number of reports of students being pressured into participating in Roman Catholic catechism classes in public schools. Whilst these classes are allowed during regular school hours, in some schools students from different denominations have reported feeling pressured to join in.

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (2.25 points)

Converts to Christianity, particularly those from the Sama and Tausug tribes of Sulu, continue to report that if the parents have a Muslim name, the registrar does not bother to ask the child's religion and simply registers them as Muslim, despite Philippine laws requiring the registrar to accurately record the religious affiliation of the child as declared by the parents during registration. This is particularly challenging for parents with lower literacy levels since birth registration typically involves filling out a Certificate of Live Birth (COLB). If parents have limited literacy levels this is often completed by medical staff. In this situation, assumptions are often made and a child whose parents have a 'Muslim sounding name' are automatically registered as Muslim.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (2.25 points)

Christian baptisms are challenging for converts from Islam and for some tribal background believers, depending on the particular tribe. Generally speaking, converts' baptisms are held secretly if they are done in their communities. However, a common option is to travel to another area where the baptism can be safely performed. For example, in the WWL 2025 reporting period it was reported that Maranaos from Marawi travelled to a beach in Iligan for baptisms and Maguindanaos to a lake. This was noted in stark contrast to Tawi-tawi, where some converts were baptized within the community in front of many people.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (2.25 points)

Parents in Muslim majority areas have been hindered from raising their children according to their Christian faith. This is due to a multitude of factors including the aforementioned challenges in using Christian symbols, the limitations on the use and distribution of Bibles in certain regions and the insistence that children in public schools learn Islamic values including memorizing Islamic prayers, and undergo Koranic teaching and other Islamic religious practices. Alongside the social pressure that Christian children within Muslim majority regions face to convert, this cocktail of challenges places great pressure on parents trying to raise their children according to their Christian beliefs.

Block 2 - Additional information

Children and youth in Muslim majority areas shared stories of being ridiculed for their parents' faith. After one focus group meeting with youth, the group leader summarized that "they experience being ridiculed because their parents are Christians, they are being labeled as 'haram' (unclean), and according to them, this hurt them because they know that their parents are good people, and this form of discrimination is widespread in Muslim communities."

Two examples during the WWL 2025 reporting period show that spouses are sometimes divorced because of their conversion. In the first example, a women's husband divorced her after she became Christian. In another example, a man converted to Islam and left his wife, in part motivated by the Imam's assurance that if he converted Allah would provide a new and better wife for him to replace his Christian wife who 'was not submissive to him'.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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)

Christian students in the BARMM region face disadvantages, particularly in access to higher education. Some scholarships provided by both national and local government are tailored specifically for Muslim students, particularly in fields such as Sharia law. Whilst the BARMM government defend their scholarship policy by stating that they are trying to reduce the educational inequalities faced by Muslim students when looking at the country as a whole, the situation of Christian students in the BARMM region is particularly difficult.

Whilst the BARMM government does offer some scholarships based purely on merit, the ability of Christian students to obtain them is limited given that they are seemingly often awarded lower grades for the same level of work as their Muslim counterparts.

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.). (2.75 points)

Christians in the BARMM area are regularly monitored by unknown persons. Whilst this often takes places during or immediately after a gathering such as a training session, Christian leaders who have converted from Islam reported more regular following by people they did not know. Furthermore, Christians from outside are careful when visiting converts as neighbors are often watching their activities and will accuse them of bringing outsiders. There are certain areas where Christian groups try not to visit to avoid arousing suspicion from local residents.

Across the country, and particularly in the areas of Mindanao that fall outside the BARMM, theological institutes and leaders of some churches are monitored. This is particularly true when there is church involvement in human and environmental rights issues such as the case of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. Members of this church often report photos being taken outside churches or in theological institutes by unknown people on motorbikes.

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

Christians in the BARMM region have expressed concerns regarding pressure such as public roads being restricted during Muslim prayer times, with all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, expected to comply with these restrictions. Additionally, non-Muslim participation in Muslim public prayers within government institutions and community gatherings has been reported, raising concerns about freedom of religion and conscience. A particularly concerning incident involved a group of Christian missionaries visiting a mosque in the region; the missionaries were required to recite the *shahadah*, the Islamic declaration of faith, and were pressured into compliance despite their Christian beliefs.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)

Employment of Muslims in the Muslim-led Bangsamoro Transitional Authority is highly favored, thus Christians trying to get employed in the new system are at an extreme disadvantage. Employment disadvantages extend to schools where Arabic speaking Muslim teachers are highly favored even for non-Islamic subjects and such teachers are also seen as being more qualified according to the standards of the Ministry of Education in the BARMM government ([Bangsamoro Education Code, 2021](#)). It can be observed that the Christians schools now in some BARMM areas have more Muslim teachers than Christian.

Block 3 - Additional information

Known converts to Christianity from Islam face regular pressure to renounce their faith, particularly where the "Balik Islam movement" is strong. Converts are encouraged to return to Islam, which is framed as the true religion of the Philippines, for which they will be rewarded by monetary gains and other benefits, particularly if the person can also bring others to the Islamic faith.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)

Christians in the BARMM region report feeling discriminated against when engaging with their local authorities and in particular the police. They claim that the authorities are not responsive to the pleas of local Christians regarding violence in their communities. This is particularly important given the presence of land-grabbing in the area, where armed conflicts are frequent, forcing Christians to evacuate their land. Once the conflict is over, armed rebels claim the land and the Christian land owners receive no support from the police or military authorities to reclaim their land.

Discrimination is also seen in the labelling of 'activist' clergy as communist-terrorists for their faith-based defense of human and land rights. This labelling (often termed "red-tagging") then leads to unjust treatment such as unwarranted arrest or detention.

Block 4.7: Christians have been hindered in running their own businesses without interference for faith-related reasons (e.g. personnel policy, client admission policy). (2.75 points)

The implementation of elements of Sharia law in the BARMM region has led to the closure of various businesses - for example, those involved in hog raising or selling pork products. This has been very challenging for Christians who then struggle to find employment given the general preference of Muslims in the area to employ other Muslims.

As already mentioned, at least one Christian school in the BARMM region has been forced to employ Muslim teachers and, due to the local government standards, all teachers in the school are Muslim.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (2.75 points)

Amongst converts to Christianity from all communities there was a belief that 'if you want to keep your head, you have to shut your mouth.' Such an environment left those who have recently found Christ

feeling unable to speak out against the injustices around them. One country expert shared that there is "an unspoken rule that it is not wise to voice opinions that are in opposition to the ruling authorities". Whilst this is particularly challenging for converts, Christians in other parts of the country have also been hindered in expressing their views, particularly those related to the actions of large mining and logging companies, or in relation to government actions such as the War on Drugs. Those who speak out too loudly against such injustices often find themselves labelled as communist-terrorists, arrested or worse.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (2.75 points)

Whilst Christianity is part of daily life, politics, policies and political debates in the Philippines as a whole, those in the BARMM region face a different reality. The Teduray Christians have formed a group composed of mostly pastors who seek to make opinions heard about the injustice of land-grabbing in their communities; however, they tend to be ignored by the local Muslim government. Whilst the situation of Christian civil society organizations in the BARMM region is particularly difficult, other civil society organizations have also been limited in their operations due to their Christian background. Whilst the high profile cases such as the arrest and detention of Bishop Carlo Morales or the freezing of the bank accounts of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines no longer take place, the practice of "red-tagging," which labels activists and clergy as communists or terrorists, remains a significant concern, placing people at risk of harassment and arrest. International bodies, including the World Council of Churches, have raised alarms over ongoing persecution, while recent memorial events have called for an end to repression against faith leaders engaged in social justice work.

Block 4 - Additional information

There are serious concerns about communications blackouts in certain areas of the BARMM region where rampant violence has been occurring, but no reports seem to reach the local or national news. On the ground, the indications are that, whilst the implementation of the BARMM government appears to be relatively smooth, in reality, it is tumultuous, and Christians find themselves in the middle of the chaos.

According to one Roman Catholic priest serving in churches located in Marawi, Cotabato, Tawi-tawi and now Jolo and Sulu (all Muslim majority areas), there are regular smear campaigns against Christians. He shares that "Christians in Muslim areas are like news fodder, and the media is quick to pounce on issues of Christians and Muslims, especially in areas where the military are Christians, and the local population are Muslims."

One recurrent issue amongst converts is the difficulty of changing one's religion on national ID cards. Converts from Islam report that the challenging processes and lengthy questioning by registrars make this process almost impossible.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Many converts to Christianity in Muslim majority areas report being actively discouraged from integrating into mainstream churches and instead being encouraged to run house churches so as not to provoke negative reactions from local Muslim populations who are unwelcoming to the idea of converts. Whilst things are already challenging, those living in the BARMM region have indicated that stricter rules against conversion are forthcoming. Although this has not been officially announced, in-country sources have shared how Muslim leaders are pushing for this within the Sharia section of the Tripartite law. This will make it even more challenging for Christian converts who would prefer to be integrated into mainstream fellowships.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (2.75 points)

A church in the Cotabato area has reported being disturbed during worship on more than one occasion by stones being thrown against their roof. Another church in Marawi reported being regularly observed by strangers. These two incidents point to wider practices of monitoring churches in Muslim areas, particularly those that appear to be growing. Churches are also monitored throughout the country where Christians are involved in faith-based work supporting human and environmental justice. A bishop of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) shared: "The IFI, especially in regions like Mindanao, has faced government surveillance and persecution due to its advocacy for marginalized communities, and its stand against environmental destruction caused by mining. The activities of the church and its clergy have been monitored and sometimes obstructed, particularly when they speak out against human rights violations. However, this is not the case in all areas of the Philippines, and most of the persecution is concentrated in regions where the church is most actively engaged in social justice work."

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)

Christian leaders and pastors in the BARMM area experience regular harassment that ranges from them and their family being called "haram" (unclean) to threats of physical violence so serious that one Roman Catholic priest and one pastor have been assigned a military escort. As already mentioned, in areas where insurgency is present, there are contentious social issues and church leaders engaged in working for justice have been targeted. The threat is so severe that some churches have opted to install CCTV cameras.

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (2.75 points)

The distribution of Bibles is another issue that differs greatly according to the region in question. Whilst evangelistic tracts are distributed in some coffee boxes, Bibles can be distributed freely and some organizations even reach public schools and conduct Bible distribution for children (9-12 years old) in some parts of the country, in others the situation is much more complex. According to the Gideons' president in Sulu, there are areas that no longer allow Bible distribution and permits are needed for distribution to others. A Gideons volunteer in Zamboanga also shared that there are areas that need

specific permits to openly distribute Bibles. Interestingly, neither Sulu nor Zamboanga are part of the BARMM.

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.*

Philippines: 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)?	4	6
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?	6	1
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	3	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	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	1
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	14	1
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?	1	40
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	7	0

Please see the section *Specific examples of violations of rights* for examples of incidents listed in the table above.

Given the difficulty of gathering information in certain areas, many incidents are likely to go unreported. Despite this, the increase in the number of Christians physically or mentally abused was largely a result of increased reporting capacity with many of those who have been "red-tagged" (i.e., falsely accused of having communist sympathies) included in this category. The jump in the number of churches or Christian properties attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed

or confiscated is concerning and cannot be explained through changes in reporting capacity. It remains to be seen whether this will become a continuing trend.

In the WWL 2024 reporting period, a specific issue amongst Teduray Christians led to high numbers of houses of Christians being destroyed. Thankfully, no such incident took place in the WWL 2025 reporting period, although Teduray Christians continued to face challenges.

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.

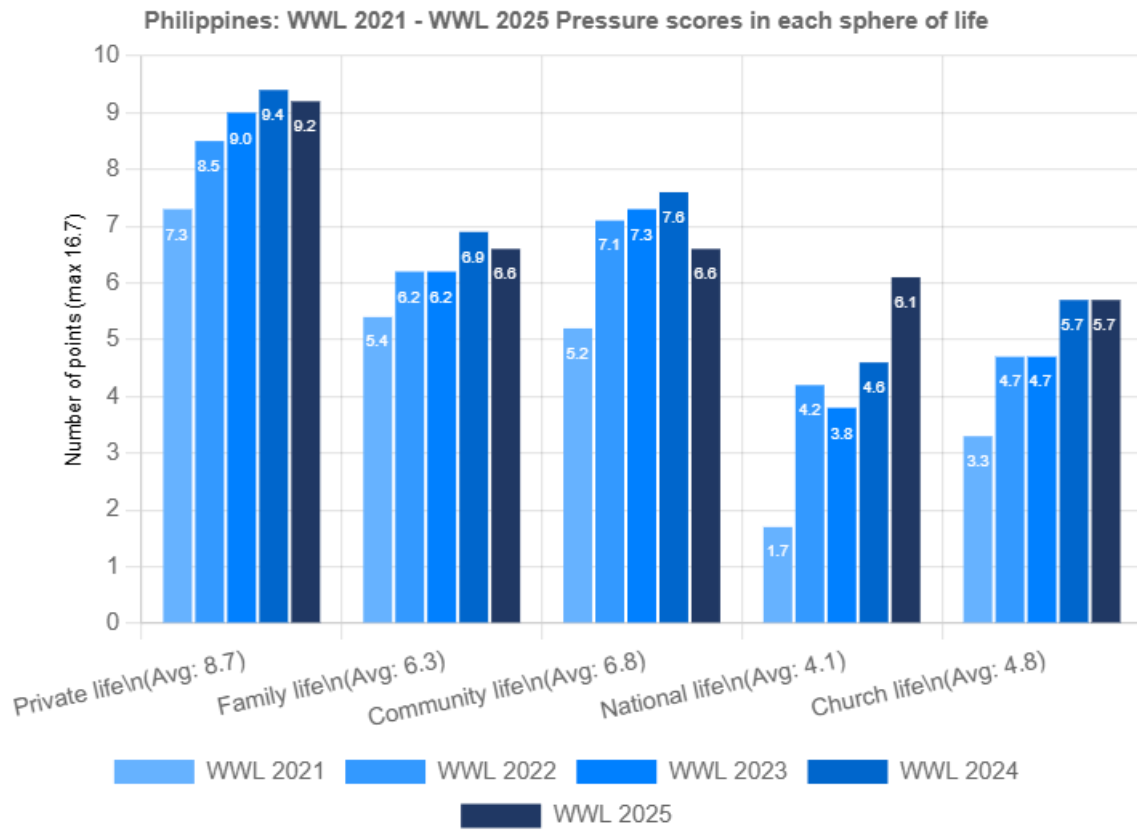
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Philippines: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	6.8
2024	6.8
2023	6.2
2022	6.1
2021	4.6

The score for average pressure has increased annually since 2021, stabilizing at 6.8 for the past two years. The primary reason for this increase is the introduction of the BARMM region, the gradual introduction of its policies and a Tri-Justice legal system that includes Sharia law.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the blue chart below, in the WWL 2025 reporting period there was a significant drop in pressure in the *Community sphere* when compared to the WWL 2022-2024 periods and a significant increase in pressure in the *National sphere*. There are two main reasons for the decrease in the *Community sphere*: Firstly, a reduction in the number of Christians thought to be under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage and secondly a reduction in the number of businesses in the BARMM region that were closed due to faith-related reasons (although it should be noted that a reduction in the number of businesses closed simply reflects the fact that most of these types of businesses were already closed in previous periods, not that the situation is actually improving.) The increase in the *National sphere* is in large part due to the effect of national policies being felt in the BARMM region, for example, the aforementioned requirements set by the government for all school teachers.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The increase in violence score largely reflects increased reporting capacity and the events mentioned above in *Specific examples of violations of rights*. As already mentioned, it is likely that much violence against Christians in the BARMM region continues unreported.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Whilst there is no legislation mandating wearing of the hijab in the BARMM region or any other area of the Philippines, social pressure mandates such dress throughout much of the BARMM and other areas with large Muslim populations such as Sulu. One country expert shared this in relation to Jolo in Sulu (an area not in the BARMM region): "Christian women in the BARMM region when working in their offices are required to dress as Muslims, Christian youth and children (females) are forced to wear the hijab as a part of their uniform (one child when we were visiting their home was really uncomfortable wearing the hijab because she was not used to it and the weather was really hot, she even did not want to join our picture because she was ashamed that she was wearing the hijab). This has now been normalized."

In 2018, then President Duterte ordered soldiers to shoot female rebels in the vagina, a statement that drew international condemnation and highlighted deep-rooted misogyny ([The Independent, 12 February 2018](#)). Although Duterte is no longer in office, many officials who served under his administration remain in positions of power, continuing to shape policies and attitudes toward gender and human rights.

Whilst no cases of forced marriage were recorded during the WWL 2025 reporting period, mothers reported being concerned about their daughters and the need to stay 'vigilant'.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Christian men in the BARMM region often face threats of violence, making them a primary target of persecution. As business owners, they are disproportionately affected when establishments are shut down for failing to comply with *halal* standards. Additionally, Christian men frequently encounter workplace discrimination, such as being denied promotion due to their faith. While women also face these challenges, the patriarchal structure of society places a heavier economic burden on men, who are still largely expected to be the primary breadwinners. These combined forms of pressure create significant financial and emotional strain on Filipino Christian men.

Persecution of other religious minorities

The Magna Carta of Religious Freedom Act, which passed in the House of Representatives on 1 December 2024 aims at protecting religious freedom. However, there are concerns about its implementation, particularly regarding how it might favor Christians over other religious groups. This concern is amplified by the fact that Muslims and other minorities feel that the bill does not offer equal protection for non-believers or those of other faiths ([US State Department IRFR 2023 Philippines](#)).

Many Indigenous communities face systemic discrimination and marginalization with limited access to education and healthcare, and socio-economic disadvantages. They are frequently forced from their ancestral lands and places of worship. Anglican mission agency the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG) calls the level of persecution against indigenous communities, and the Lumad in particular, a "cultural genocide" ([Church Times, 26 July 2022](#)).

Muslim communities also continue to experience discrimination and human rights abuses. Public figures, including Muslim Senator Padilla, have highlighted ongoing issues faced by Muslims in the country, advocating for increased education and understanding of what it means to be a Muslim ([Politiko, 22 September 2022](#)). One outcome was the passing of a bill that marks the first day of February as National Hijab Day in the Philippines.

Trends Summary

1) Worsening situation in BARMM region: Election and Tripartite Law concerns

The situation in the BARMM region continues to evolve with growing challenges. The implementation of the Tri-justice system and the upcoming elections in May 2025 are crucial developments. While there is some optimism about the peace process, concerns are rising regarding the return of armed conflict, particularly with the growing presence of militant groups exploiting the political vacuum. As elections approach, the risk of destabilization increases, especially given the region's complex mix of political, religious and security dynamics. The 'normalization process', including disarmament and integration of former rebels, remains a key challenge in fostering long-term peace and development. Monitoring these developments closely is vital to understand the potential impact on Christian communities and religious freedom in the region.

2) Growing Islamization across the islands

Over recent years, the spread of Islamic influence has been more pronounced across the Philippines. While the southern region has historically been Muslim-majority, recent trends show an increasing visibility of Islam across other parts of the archipelago. This growth is partly driven by economic factors, foreign investment and migration patterns, but also by efforts to assert Islam as a cultural and political force. The rise of Islamic organizations, both political and religious, has raised concerns about the marginalization of religious minorities. These trends should be closely monitored for their potential impact on the broader religious freedom landscape in the country.

3) Improvements amidst persistent concerns under President Marcos

Under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., there have been visible signs of improvements in certain aspects of governance and religious freedom. The administration has shown a commitment to ensuring better security, economic stability and infrastructure development. However, concerns persist about the continuation of human rights abuses, particularly in marginalized communities. While Marcos has taken steps to improve the country's image, there remains significant skepticism about his government's ability to ensure full religious freedom. The continuing challenges in the BARMM region and the rise of Islamization across the country highlight the importance of closely watching how the adherents of all religions are affected by the evolving political and religious landscape.

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/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>
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