

World
Watch
Research

Burkina Faso: Full Country Dossier

January 2022



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Woman in Burkina Faso (c) Alamy

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Burkina Faso

Brief country details

Burkina Faso: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
21,497,000	5,093,000	23.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Map of country



Burkina Faso: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	68	32
WWL 2021	67	32
WWL 2020	66	28
WWL 2019	48	61
WWL 2018	-	-

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Burkina Faso: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Organized crime cartels or networks, Non-Christian religious leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, the impact of jihadists in the country has been expanding, making their influence felt even in cities that had previously been beyond their reach. Christians have been targeted and killed and churches have been destroyed. Christians of Muslim background are the most persecuted Christian group in the country. Similar attacks in Niger, Mali and the greater Sahel region is making the situation in Burkina Faso very serious. Christians have been targeted in villages, churches and workplaces. Hundreds of churches have been closed due to jihadist activities. Family and community members reject converts and try to force them to renounce their Christian faith, making them afraid to express their faith in public because of such threats.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian converts from a Muslim background are ostracized, faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with loss of inheritance (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by militant groups (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16)
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **April 2021:** Two Spanish journalists and an Irish citizen (believed to Christians) were killed in an ambush ([Reuters, 27 April 2021](#)).
- **January 2021:** A Roman Catholic priest was found dead just days after being abducted by Islamic militants ([CNA, 21 January 2021](#)).
- **May 2021:** Suspected jihadists attacked a baptism ceremony in the village of Adjarara, Oudalan Province killing 15 people on 18 May 2021. Many others were forced to flee the village ([Christian Daily, 26 May 2021](#)).

Specific examples of positive developments

Compared to Mali, Burkina Faso does at least have a functioning government.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Reuters, 27 April 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/three-foreigners-among-missing-after-burkina-faso-ambush-say-security-sources-2021-04-26/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: CNA, 21 January 2021 - <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/246203/missing-priest-in-burkina-faso-found-dead>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Christian Daily, 26 May 2021 - <https://mychristiandaily.com/15-killed-at-baptism-in-burkina-faso-by-armed-men/>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Burkina Faso

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/burkina-faso/	21 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13072774	21 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-BFA.html	21 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/	21 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	21 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	21 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Burkina Faso is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/burkina-faso/freedom-world/2021	21 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Burkina Faso is not included)	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/burkina-faso	21 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/burkina-faso	21 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#bf	21 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	https://rsf.org/en/burkina-faso	21 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/bfa	21 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI 2020	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BFA	21 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burkina-faso/	21 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Burkina Faso is not included)	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso	21 July 2021

Recent history

Burkina Faso is in the Sahel region of West Africa. The country was formerly a French colony known as Upper Volta and gained independence in 1960. Throughout its post-independence history, Burkina Faso has gone through several episodes of political unrest and instability.

Like most African countries, the territorial borders are a product of the 19th-century European colonial demarcation process called the “[scramble for Africa](#)” (Lonely Planet, accessed 20 August 2020). The independence movement to become free from French control was led by the Voltaic Democratic Union (UDV) party. The leader of the UDV, Maurice Yaméogo, became the country's first president. After coming to power, President Yaméogo banned all other political parties and declared the country to be a single-party state. The regime favored the policies of the French and other Western powers.

The UDV regime became unpopular, which led to an outbreak of political unrest in 1966 and Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana orchestrated a successful military coup. Lamizana took control and ruled the country for the next fourteen years first with a full military government and then with a military government including some civilians holding limited power. Political protests led by the country's trade unions forced the regime to introduce a democratic constitution in 1977. The country held an open election in 1978 which Lamizana won. This election, like most earlier elections, was not free and fair.

The country then experienced a second military coup when the Lamizana regime was overthrown by Colonel Saye Zerbo in 1980. The Zerbo regime was unpopular, faced considerable opposition and lasted only two years. A military council called the Council of Popular Salvation (CSP), led by Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, [overthrew](#) the Zerbo regime in 1982 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed 20 August 2020). Following political unrest and infighting, on 4 August 1983 the Ouedraogo regime was overthrown by the CSP faction led by Thomas Sankara and Blaise Com-

paoré. Sankara was installed as the president of the republic.

In 1984 President Sankara changed the name of the country to Burkina Faso ("land of honest men"). Sankara was one of the most popular leaders in Africa. He introduced numerous political and social reforms that included more rights for women and workers. However, it seems that his Socialist economic policies were unpopular among Western powers and he was killed in a coup led by Blaise Compaoré in October 1987.

Blaise Compaoré's military government was dictatorial and unpopular among the people. Opposition to the regime was met with violent reprisals and many opposition leaders were arrested, tortured, killed or forced to leave the country. Opposition came to a height in the 2014 uprising which forced Compaoré to leave the country in October 2014 after 27 years of rule. After a brief transitional period, there was another military coup in September 2015. However, the coup leaders agreed to transfer power to a civilian government through elections. A democratic election was held in November 2015 and Roch Kaboré became the first democratically elected president of Burkina Faso.

General elections were held in Burkina Faso on 22 November 2020 to elect the president and National Assembly. The elections were held in the shadow of jihadist violence, which [claimed more than 2,000 lives in 2020 alone](#) (France24, 26 November 2020). In the presidential elections, incumbent President Kaboré of the People's Movement for Progress was re-elected in the first round with 57.7% of the vote.

Christians in the country have made enormous contributions, for instance, in leading the country to independence and in all other efforts to stabilize the country. At the same time, especially in recent years, Christians have been targeted by jihadists who are growing in influence in the Sahel.

Political and legal landscape

The country is in a period of transition, moving towards democracy after years of political turmoil and military dictatorship. According to the [Constitution of 2012](#), Burkina Faso is a secular state and guarantees the right of individuals to choose, practice and change their religion at will. The laws allow all organizations, religious or otherwise to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Internal Security.

The current Constitution was first approved in 1991 and has been amended multiple times since then. The last amendment in 2012 established a semi-presidential system. The president is elected every fifth year and selects the prime minister with the approval of the parliament. The country's legislature is a bicameral body with the National Assembly as the lower house and the Senate as the upper house. The national assembly consists of 111 elected members.

The country made significant progress towards democracy after the transfer of power in 2015. Political freedom and the situation of human rights also greatly improved. A general election was held in Burkina Faso in November 2015, the first national elections since the uprising and [departure](#) of President Blaise Compaoré who had ruled Burkina Faso for 27 years (The Guardian, 1 November 2014). Fourteen different political parties held National Assembly seats in the 2015 election. The country's constitutional court approved a law preventing anyone associated with

the previous regime to run for office. President Kaboré won the [presidential election in November 2020](#) with an outright majority (Vanguard, 26 November 2020). Despite increased Islamic militant activity, nationwide elections proved possible.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2020), even though large parts of the country remain contested between jihadist groups, ethnic militias and security forces, Burkina Faso is forecast to experience significant political instability during 2020-21. [In July 2021](#), due to Islamic militants creating enormous challenges to the country, the president reshuffled his cabinet and assumed the role of defense minister in addition to the presidency (Reuters, 1 July 2021).

In relation to gender, by law both men and women have equal rights to enter marriage and must freely consent to the union (Constitution, Article 23). The legal framework does not cover customary or religious marriages however. This contributes to Burkina Faso having one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 52% of girls marrying before 18 ([Girls Not Brides, 2020](#)). By law, the minimum age for marriage is 17 for girls, although they can marry at 15 if authorized by civil courts. This legislative loophole and widespread societal acceptance for child marriage can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution, particularly against female converts. [New legislation](#) introduced in 2015 was viewed as a positive step towards securing support and access to justice for victims of gender-based violence (Refworld, 6 September 2015), but effective implementation has been slow and few care centers have been established ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Religious landscape

Burkina Faso: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	5,093,000	23.7
Muslim	12,037,000	56.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	4,242,000	19.7
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	4,300	0.0
Atheist	750	0.0
Agnostic	120,000	0.6
Other	850	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Burkina Faso is a Muslim majority country in the Sahel region of Africa. Muslims are dominant in the northern and eastern parts of the country, whereas the Christian communities are concentrated in the central and southern parts of the country. Followers of indigenous traditional African religions dominate the southern part of the country. Historically, the country has experienced a harmonious coexistence among the different religious groups.

The 2012 Constitution [guarantees](#) freedom of religion and the principle of separation of church and state. The government requires all religious groups to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to operate in the country. Moreover, the government does not fund religious schools, which thus operate independently. However, in past years, there have been anti-Christian campaigns and sentiment propagated by Islamic militants.

According to WCD 2021 estimates, 19.7% of the population follow traditional African religions. Many Christians and Muslims in the country also mix their faiths with various forms of traditional beliefs and practices. For instance, some Christians continue to embrace polygamy. However, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of adherents of traditional religions in recent years.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank:

- **GDP growth:** 6% in 2019 compared to 6.8% in 2018. Despite the security and humanitarian crisis, the macroeconomic framework remained broadly stable due to the services sector, which offset the decline in the agriculture, mining, and construction sectors.
- **Inflation:** -3.2 % in 2019, falling from 2% in 2018.
- **Fiscal deficit:** This improved in 2019 (-2.6%) which is below the 3% threshold set by the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

The World Bank makes the following projections:

- Growth is likely to fall slightly to 5.8% in 2020 owing to the security and humanitarian crisis. These projections may further be impacted by the spread of coronavirus, climate events, global recession and possible decline of cotton prices.
- Inflation is projected to increase over 2% but remain below the 3% threshold set by the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).
- Account deficit is projected to increase but remain well controlled and stable at roughly 4.5% of the GDP during the 2020-2022 period.
- The increase in gold exports, decline in oil imports, and the consolidation of the government budget are likely to lead to a trade surplus of approximately 1.5 % of the GDP on average during 2020-2022 period.

Overall, Burkina Faso is one of the least developed countries in the world. Nearly 80% of the people practice subsistence farming for their survival. Cotton remains the leading export followed by gold. Rises in gold prices have increased the country's export income. Despite the progress made in the past two decades, the country still faces many development challenges, particularly in terms of health and education. It ranks 144th among 157 countries in World Bank's Human Capital Index and about 40.1% of the population still lives below the national pov-

erty line. Burkina Faso remains vulnerable to climatic shocks related to changes in rainfall patterns and to fluctuations in the prices of its export commodities on world markets. Its economic and social development will depend on political stability in the country and the sub-region, its openness to international trade and export diversification.

Within this fragile context, women are particularly economically vulnerable due to low education rates and limited employment opportunities (AI 2020). The female labor force participation rate stands at 58.3%, compared to 74.8% for men (UNDP's HDI 2020). Making it additionally challenging for women to attain financial independence, customary and religious practices deny women their due inheritance, despite equal rights being enshrined in law ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to UNDP's HDI 2020 and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mossi 52%, Fulani 8.4%, Gurma 7%, Bobo 4.9%, Gurunsi 4.6 %, Senufo 4.5 %, Bissa 3.7%, Lobi 2.4 %, Dagara 2.4%, Tuareg/Bella 1.9%, other 7.2% (2010 est.).
- **Main languages:** French is the official language and other native African languages belonging to Sudanic family spoken by 90% of the population.
- **Urbanization:** About 31.2% of the total population make up the Urban population.(2021 est) The rate of urbanization is 4.75% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 2.58% (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 17.6 years
- **Life expectancy:** 61.6 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 41.2%
- **Expected years of schooling:** 9.3 years. (9.4 for female; 9.1 for male)
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 62.3%
- **Employment in agriculture:** 25.2% of total employment
- **Employment in services sector:** 41.1% of total employment
- **Unemployment:** 6.3% of labor force
- **Youth unemployment (15-24 years):** 8.3%

According to the [UNHCR](#) (accessed 21 July 2021):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** "In 2020, an already complex humanitarian situation evolved dramatically with a convergence of crises, including armed conflict with attacks and violence against civilians, extreme poverty, food insecurity, hazards from climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, over 1 million people were internally displaced by the end of the year, making Burkina Faso one of the fastest growing displacement and protection crisis in the world. Internal displacement occurred increasingly towards urban centres leading to overcrowding, competition over scarce resources, and social tensions. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the rainy season increased the risks and hazards to IDPs, most of whom lived in the open, in public buildings, or in overcrowded host families."

According to UNDP's HDI 2020:

- **Human Development Index:** Burkina Faso is ranked 182 out of 189 countries with the value of 0.452. Overall, Burkina Faso has shown improvements in HDI compared to previous years.
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.867
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** 0.594. This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Burkina Faso ranks 147th out of 177 countries.

Similar to other countries in the region, the COVID-19 crisis has been the key change that the country has faced in 2020. In fact, Burkina Faso was one of the first African countries to report numerous cases of infection. What exacerbated the problem in the country is that while the government has been focusing on fighting the spread of the virus, Islamic militants have taken advantage of the situation to launch attacks.

Domestic violence, child marriage and the practice of Female Genital Mutation remains prevalent. Several government policies have been introduced to combat child marriage, but the widespread societal acceptance of this practice makes it challenging to combat. According to a recent survey, around half of women aged 15–24 thought that it was normal for a man to beat his wife in certain circumstances ([Equipop, July 2020, p.5](#)). Domestic violence has reportedly risen due to the additional pressures and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic ([Equipop, July 2020, p.8](#)). Urban settings are recognized as more favorable environments for women's empowerment compared to rural settings, although political and economic opportunities remain limited countrywide ([OECD, 2018](#)).

Technological landscape

According to the Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 21.4% of the population – survey date: December 2020
- **Facebook usage:** 9.8% penetration rate – survey date: March 2021

According to World Bank's country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 100.2 per 100 people

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (updated 2 June 2020):

- Mobile telephony has experienced strong growth since competition was introduced in 2000. There has been some fluidity in ownership, with Zain having been acquired by Bharti Airtel before being sold on to Orange Group in 2016. Although market penetration remains below the African average, it continues to grow steadily.

According to [Datareportal's Digital 2021 report](#) (accessed 21 July 2021):

- The number of mobile connections in Burkina Faso increased by 1.2 million (+5.7%) between January 2020 and January 2021.

Christians are among the most educated in the country and tend to have better access to the latest advances in technology in government use.

As highlighted by [Afrobarometer \(March 2020\)](#), Burkina Faso has a marked gender gap in relation to Internet use; 8% of women use the Internet compared to 16% of men. The gender gap widens further in relation to social media usage, with 72.3% of the country's Facebook users being male ([NapoleonCat, 2019](#)). However, [Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index \(2019/20\)](#) highlighted Burkina Faso as one of the top ten countries that reported recent gains in women's cellphone use (p.35).

Security situation

In the context of the ongoing war against jihadists, Christians in the country find themselves a primary target for attack. Although there has been significant progress in democracy and human rights since Kaboré came to office, his presidency has been overshadowed by the numerous attacks carried out by Islamic militants operating in the region. Militant Islamic groups operating in the country include: *Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM), Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitoun, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram. These groups have been responsible for waves of attacks and are gaining ground, especially following the political instability in neighboring Mali.

In 2018, there were reports of recurrent attacks that claimed several lives and terrorized communities. Among these, the attacks which occurred in March and September 2018 were particularly significant in the way targets were identified and how the attacks were carried out. In March 2018, there were coordinated [attacks](#) against the French embassy and army headquarters in the capital, Ouagadougou, which claimed the lives of at least 16 people, including militants (Al-Jazeera, 3 March 2018). As a response to further attacks in 2018, the president declared a [state of emergency](#) in December 2018 (Reuters, 31 December 2018). With the security situation not showing signs of improvement, the state of emergency (SoE) and associated curfews have remained in place in several regions of Burkina Faso,

The attacks continued into 2019 and 2020. According to [International Crisis Group](#) (24 February 2020), in 2019 Burkina Faso suffered more jihadist attacks than any other Sahelian country. In April 2019, Protestant Christian worshippers and a pastor were killed as Islamic militants launched what is regarded as the country's [first attack on a church](#) since the sectarian violence erupted (Al-Jazeera, 29 April 2019). This was followed by deadly attacks on two consecutive days in May 2019 targeting Catholic Christians in two different parts of the country. These attacks forced more than half a million people to flee their homes. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) warned that [900,000](#) people could be internally displaced by April 2020 (NRC, 28 January 2020).

The conflict and violence have [led to the displacement](#) of more than one million people in just two years and has left 3.5 million people in need of assistance – a 60 per cent increase from January 2020 to January 2021 (Reliefweb, OCHA, 1 February 2021).

According to [Refugees international](#) reporting on 11 March 2020:

- “The military continues to struggle to stop the spread of these attacks. As a result, communities have formed 'self-defense' groups. These local militias now regularly clash with insurgents and criminal elements, fueling cycles of retaliatory violence.”
- Further, the government also changed the national penal code to prohibit criticism of the military and block any contact with armed groups: "The new law, whose provisions on contact are too broad, has prevented human rights organizations from verifying the numerous claims of abuses committed by Burkinabé forces and forbids humanitarian organizations from negotiating with armed groups to secure access to populations in need.”

In an attempt to bolster the army, the The National Assembly in Burkina Faso adopted a bill on 21 January 2020 establishing Volunteers for Homeland Defence (VDP) with the aim of dealing with the multiple acts of terrorism that have been blighting the country since 2016. Volunteer groups receive 14 days of training and are then sent out on patrols and surveillance missions, equipped with light arms. These volunteers have proved to be a particular target for jihadist attack, with more than 100 being [killed in combat](#) since January 2020 (The Defense Post, 26 November 2020). Allegations of human rights abuses by volunteers have also been “rampant - from stealing cattle to attacking those accused of collaborating with the jihadist militants". This law was supposed to bring security and stability; however, [the volunteers are both perpetrators and victims of violence](#), and civilians are trapped between attacks from all sides (The New Humanitarian, 12 October 2020).

Christians in the country suffer from the lack of security. Many have been targeted and killed in 2020 and 2021 (see above: *Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period*). Christian women and girls risk being abducted, raped and forcibly married. Instances of sexual assault have reportedly increased as extremist groups exploited the insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to expand control ([AP News, 14 February 2021](#)). Christian boys on the other hand are often recruited into militant forces, which also serves to weaken the Christian church. In light of such pressure, many Christians are forced to flee their homes altogether.

Trends analysis

1) There is progress in democracy

Burkina Faso has shown dramatic progress towards democracy since the overthrow of Compoare's dictatorship. The electoral process had become more open and credible and the government has also taken numerous measures to improve human rights. Despite extreme poverty, Islamic militancy and corruption, the country is trying to make progress in furthering democracy and rule of law. This can be possibly upended by the impact of COVID-19 and the opportunities it has created for the jihadists. Furthermore, the latest coup in Mali (May 2021) may also prove to be a destabilizing factor for Burkina Faso and the surrounding region.

2) Islamic militancy is gaining ground

Burkina Faso is losing the religious tolerance it had previously practiced in its earlier history. A radicalization of the Islamic population is now taking place. The recent expansion of Islamic militancy in the Sahel region threatens the developing democracy. Radical Islamic groups like

AQIM and Boko Haram are clearly gaining ground. Although the government is taking various precautionary measures to prevent the expansion of such groups, it will also need to look for grassroots solutions to combat the growing Islamist influence which is often aimed against Christians. There have also been inter-communal clashes that have at times resulted in civilian deaths and displacement. The jihadists have been quick to take advantage of the government's current preoccupation with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Burkina Faso government needs to increase the country's security (by combating Islamic militants in the region) and actively encourage a more tolerant environment where different religious traditions can live side by side without major tension. It is hoped that, with the re-election of President Kabore in the November 2020 elections, progress in furthering democracy and political stability will be strengthened.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: scramble for Africa - <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/burkina-faso/history>
- Recent history: overthrew - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Burkina-Faso>
- Recent history: claimed more than 2,000 lives in 2020 alone - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20201126-burkina-s-kabor%C3%A9-wins-re-election-according-to-full-preliminary-results>
- Political and legal landscape: Constitution of 2012, - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2012?lang=en
- Political and legal landscape: departure - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/31/burkina-faso-president-blaise-compaore-ousted-says-army>
- Political and legal landscape: presidential election in November 2020 - <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/11/burkina-faso-incumbent-kabore-wins-presidential-election/>
- Political and legal landscape: In July 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/burkina-faso-president-takes-defence-role-amid-security-crisis-2021-06-30/>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2020 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/burkina-faso>
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- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/BF.pdf>
- Religious landscape description: guarantees - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2012.pdf%20
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/BF.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/burkinafaso>
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- Social and cultural landscape: Equipop, July 2020, p.8 - <https://equipop.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rapport-Enquete-Covid19-ANGLAIS.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD, 2018 - <https://www.oecd.org/swac/maps/63-Burkina%20Faso-gender-inequality.pdf>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Burkina-Faso-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses?r=51>
- Technological landscape: Datareportal's Digital 2021 report - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-burkina-faso>
- Technological landscape: Afrobarometer (March 2020), - <https://afrobarometer.org/blogs/african-women-have-less-access-internet-african-men-do-thats-problem>
- Technological landscape: NapoleonCat, 2019 - https://napoleonicat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-burkina_faso/2019/06%22%20/

- Technological landscape: Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index (2019/20) - https://teams.microsoft.com/_#/docx/viewer/teams/https%3A~2F~2Fcorphost.sharepoint.com~2Fsites~2FODIWomen-GlobalProjects~2FGedeelde%20documenten~2FGSRP%20and%20Advocacy~2FPREST%20research~2FNot%20Integrated.%20Prepped%20Spring%202021~2FMay%20target~2FBurkina%20Faso%20TO%20DO%20.docx?threadid=19:8fd92054c7334ebe86f44da86a649b38@thread.skype&baseUrl=https%3A~2F~2Fcorphost.sharepoint.com~2Fsites~2FODIWomen-GlobalProjects&fileid=b606e939-d204-4a04-ae4b-4b12a0d6f72a&ctx=files&rootContext=items_view&viewerAction=view
- Security situation: attacks - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/blast-rocks-burkina-faso-ouagadougou-reports-180302110142186.html%20>
- Security situation: state of emergency - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burkina-security-idUSKCN10U0OV>
- Security situation: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>
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- Security situation: 900,000 - <https://www.nrc.no/news/2020/january/burkina-faso-shattered-by-worlds-fastest-growing-displacement-crisis/>
- Security situation: led to the displacement - <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-situation-report-1-feb-2021#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20ICRC%20classified%20the,non-international%20armed%20conflict%E2%80%9D.&text=In%202020%2C%20Burkina%20Faso%20saw,%E2%80%9Ccatastrophic%2Ffamine%E2%80%9D%20conditions.>
- Security situation: Refugees international - https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/2/11/burkina-faso-and-the-sahels-new-frontline?gclid=CjwKCAjwp-X0BRAFEiwAheRui6jatVvqnweKRqXtNwM_SCW-tUJM-dAoTtB0FfyfiK3R8hUUL7aYtRoCp7sQAvD_BwE
- Security situation: killed in combat - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/11/26/volunteer-militia-killed-burkina-faso/>
- Security situation: the volunteers are both perpetrators and victims of violence - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2020/10/12/victims-or-villains-volunteer-fighters-burkina-faso-s-front-line>
- Security situation: AP News, 14 February 2021 - <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-violence-sexual-assault-only-on-ap-burkina-faso-308f0d4856bac8d426a889bfcd3e4a6>

WWL 2022: Church information / Burkina Faso

Christian origins

Throughout recent centuries, the Sahel region has been dominated by Islamic states like the empire of Mali and the Mossi kingdom. Although Muslim rulers controlled these kingdoms, most of the population kept their traditional beliefs. For example, as recently as the 19th century, most people in the Mossi kingdom were not Muslim. Christianity was introduced during the French colonial period, and most Christians today are the ancestors of followers of traditional African religion (ATR).

Christianity came to the country in 1896 with the French. The Roman Catholic White Fathers entered the country in 1900 and opened their first mission at Ouagadougou in 1901. In 1922, an indigenous Catholic order called the Black Sisters of the Immaculate Conception was formed. The Catholic Church decided to make Ouagadougou an archdiocese in 1955.

(For further details, see: Rupley L and Bangali L, Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso, 2013, third edition p. 36ff.)

Protestants first came to the country in the early 1920s. Missionaries from the Assemblies of God became active in Ouagadougou in 1921 and opened a Bible school in 1933. In 1923 the Christian and Missionary Alliance started working in Dioulasso.

(For further details, see: Melton J G and Baumann M, *Religions of The World - 2nd edition: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia Of Beliefs And Practices*, 2010, pp. 444-445.)

From the middle of the 20th century onwards, many indigenous churches and new denominations emerged. Temple Apostolic was the first independent indigenous church congregation in the capital city. The Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions, the country's primary Christian cooperative association, was created in 1961 by conservative Evangelicals.

Church spectrum today

Burkina Faso: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	3,333,000	65.4
Protestant	1,771,000	34.8
Independent	101,000	2.0
Unaffiliated	7,600	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-119,000	-2.3
Total	5,093,600	100.0
(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)		
Evangelical movement	1,930,000	37.9
Renewalist movement	2,115,000	41.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Burkina Faso

Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

Burkina Faso: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	68	32
WWL 2021	67	32
WWL 2020	66	28
WWL 2019	48	61
WWL 2018	-	-

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The increase by one point in WWL 2022 is due to the fact that pressure in the whole country is increasing on Christians. Jihadist activity is expanding and many churches and Christian schools are being forced to close. The *Church* and *Community spheres of life* are under particularly high pressure. The targeting and killing of Christians has created an environment of fear, with many Christians being too scared to attend church services or send their children to school. Jihadist groups are also replacing the government in areas that they are controlling, and they are providing social services. The situation in the neighboring countries like Niger and Mali is also contributing to the insecurity in Burkina Faso. A society that was very tolerant in the past has become very intolerant towards non-Muslims. This is also aided by the fact that there are ethnic conflicts with religious dimensions. As a result, converts and other Christian groups are facing high levels of pressure and, if the current situation is not addressed as soon as possible, it is very likely that Burkina Faso will become a more dangerous and extremely fragile state.

Persecution engines

Burkina Faso: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all

Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong), blended with Clan oppression (Medium)

Burkina Faso has experienced several Islamist attacks in recent years, especially in the northern region and occasionally in the capital. These can be seen as violent attempts at "Islamizing" the country. *Ansar ul Islam* was formed in 2016 and has tried to impose its laws in the northern part of the country through violent and non-violent means. There is also *Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslim* ("Group supporting Islam and Muslims") operating in the country and has ties with local militant groups. Currently, they seem to be more focused on combatting the French presence and countries allied to France. Its preachers influence the youth into blaming their misfortune on the French and on the corruption of morals through the West. There have been attacks on churches and Christians by Islamic militants and some churches have stepped up security, fearing further attacks may be planned.

A country researcher writes: "Generally speaking, the ethnic groups are tolerant but with the increasing influence of Islamic expansion, Muslim leaders from various tribes have become sources of persecution." Converts from a Muslim background experience the most serious persecution from their families and communities.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

In many countries in the Sahel region, organized corruption is enabling the jihadists to recruit, buy weapons, and operate with impunity. A country researcher indicated: "There is a high level of corruption in governance. Crimes such as robbery and kidnapping are being committed in various regions of the country. The government is doing little or nothing to contain such crime, even in the capital city, Ouagadougou."

Drivers of persecution

Burkina Faso: Drivers of Persecution									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK				STRONG
Government officials	Weak	-	-						
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								

Burkina Faso: Drivers of Persecution									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK				STRONG
Religious leaders of other churches					Very weak				
Violent religious groups	Very strong								Strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Strong								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong								Strong

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** There are several radical Islamic groups operating in the country (e.g. those affiliated with IS, al-Qaeda or Boko Haram). These groups have been responsible for various attacks.
- **Citizens (Strong):** Ordinary citizens in local communities and mob violence have been responsible for putting converts from Islam under pressure. As a result, converts do not express their Christian faith in public.
- **Extended family (Strong):** Christians of Muslim background experience severe pressure from their families to return to Islam.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** In remote areas, preachers have been actively inciting violence against Christians and spreading hatred towards Christians.
- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** Criminal networks are creating an environment whereby jihadists flourish, since these need to be able to act with impunity. Thus, the role of organized corruption is increasing in the country and, as a result, the rule of law is being weakened.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Many ethnic group leaders living in Muslim-dominated areas also harass Christians who have encouraged Muslims to convert to the Christian faith.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Militant groups have committed atrocities against foreign Christians in the past and are likely to continue to do so when the opportunities arise. Attacks by these groups have caused a high number of killings and displacement.
- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** It seems that a parallel state structure has been established outside the normal state machinery. The types of crimes committed range from kidnapping and theft and are conducted by a variety of groups in various parts of the coun-

try. This is increasingly becoming a cause of concern, especially since foreign aid workers are a favorite target. The abductors, often Islamic militants, think that abducting NGO workers will mean higher sums can be demanded for ransom. It also happens to be the case that there are many Christians working for foreign NGOs.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The northern and eastern parts of the country are the main areas where Christians experience most pressure and violence, particularly outside the main cities. In the western part of the country, ethno-religious groups also put pressure on Christians.

Christian communities and how they are affected

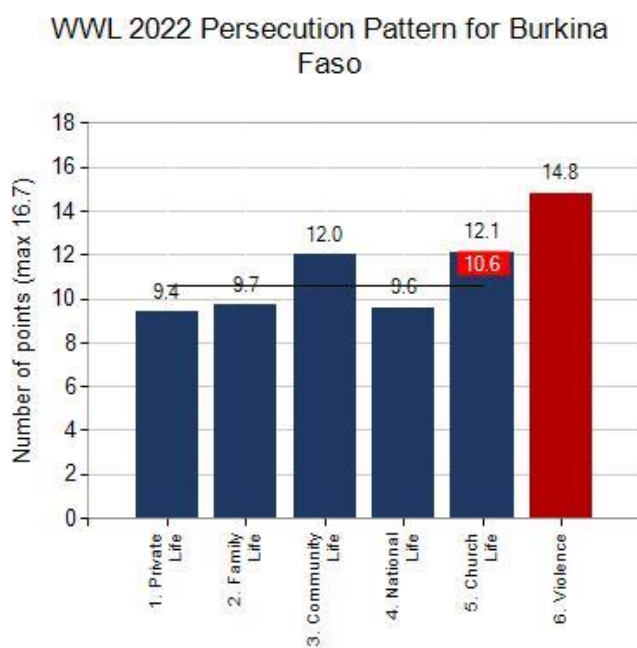
Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated and are therefore not treated as a separate WWL category.

Historical Christian communities: The Roman Catholic Church is the most dominant Christian denomination in the country. Most of the country's political leaders, including heads of state, have been Catholics. Catholics face less persecution compared to other Christian groups due to their large numbers.

Converts: This category includes Christians of Muslim or traditional African religious background. Converts from a Muslim background experience the most serious persecution from their families and communities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are concentrated mostly in the major cities. They are targeted more often than historical Christian groups by Islamic militants.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Burkina Faso shows:

- The average pressure in WWL 2022 is 10.6 points. Even though this is only a rise of 0.1 point, it still reflects that the situation in the country is getting worse.
- Pressure is highest in the *Church sphere* (12.1 points) closely followed by the *Community sphere* (12.0 points) - a reflection of what has happened to churches and the pressure Christians have faced in their communities due to the activities of Islamic militants.
- The score for violence is at an extreme level, increasing by 0.5 point.

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 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

One's religion has become a defining factor in human interactions in the country. Radical Muslims have inculcated the concept of 'us' versus 'them' in society. Christians, particularly converts from Islam, face hostile reactions if they discuss their faith with others. For example, in some remote areas, Christians have to make sure that they do not possess Christian materials at home because militants can easily show up at their door and search. Conversion is not forbidden by law, however, most Muslims oppose conversion and it has been risky for converts to speak about their faith with family members for fear of stigmatization and of being treated as an outcast.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.75 points)

The majority of the rural areas of the country (especially in the northeast) are effectively under jihadist control. In these areas, for fear of being attacked, mocked or rejected, some Christians from Muslim and ATR backgrounds avoid displaying Christian images or symbols. Since there is also (ethnic-based) communal violence, showing Christians images might invite attack from other ethnic groups.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.50 points)

In Muslim families, both male and female young adults tend to hide the fact that they might want to convert to Christianity for fear of disappointing their parents and of maybe being disowned by them. If one decides to convert, he or she avoids discussing this with any family members.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.50 points)

The main fear is that any meeting between Christians can easily be tracked and targeted by jihadists. This is particularly the case for converts. Converts from ATR or Islam are very often in

danger if meeting with other Christians because their families may react violently to see them engaging with people of another religion.

Block 1 - further information

In the context of Islamic oppression (the main Persecution engine in the country), converts face high levels of pressure and as a result:

- *they cannot possess Christian materials without risk to their family and themselves;*
- *they find it difficult to worship;*
- *they risk more pressure if they post about their faith on social media.*

It is also not uncommon for non-convert Christians to be impacted in areas outside the capital city. At times, Islamic militants go house to house to check who is there.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

In the past years there has been a major increase in the number of jihadists and in their influence in Burkina Faso and the surrounding region. This has created an environment where others are not welcome except those who subscribe to the most extreme Islamic teachings. All Christian groups have to make sure that they do not celebrate Christian weddings or Christian holidays in areas that are prone to attacks by jihadists. Christians have to be very careful not to attract any attention from local leaders or Islamic militants in the area and thus make sure that they hide Christian wedding celebrations, for instance. Muslim parents with children who have converted to Christianity oppose any plans they might have to marry another Christian, since that would bring shame upon the family.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

Beyond the major cities, living a Christian life and raising children according to Christian values has become increasingly difficult. This issue is particularly serious for converts. Parents who are converts are hindered from raising their children according to their Christian faith. Converts lose their inheritance rights. Christians have to be very careful not to attract any attention from local leaders or jihadists who are operating in many areas of the country (or even outside the country). One way of being careful is to try to tell their children about the Christian faith in a way that does not expose them.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.00 points)

In some schools where leaders (and sometimes the school founders) are predominantly Muslim, students of all kinds - including Christians - face pressure to receive Islamic teaching. Christian families belonging to non-traditional church groups also find it difficult to raise their children according to their religious convictions. It has been reported that Islamic militants have killed

teachers who did not teach Islam and that they have threatened to kill more unless the Islamic religion is taught to all students, including Christian students.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

The general trend is that the Muslim population in the country is becoming increasingly radicalized. In the northern, eastern and western border regions of the country, Christians often face discrimination in many aspects of their lives. This includes children being targeted.

Block 2 - further information

This is a country where Islamist groups are fighting to establish a Sharia state. In addition, the influence of radical forms of Islam is sweeping across the country. As a result, society has become intolerant towards people of other faiths. Converts face most persecution and cannot risk celebrating Christian holidays or a Christian wedding. Other Christian groups also have to be careful how loud Christian music is played during Christian holidays or Christians wedding.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

Burkina Faso is struggling with both rising communal violence and violence caused by Islamic militants. The country has been relying on foreign assistance (from France in particular) to combat the jihadist threat, but despite this, violent Islamic militants keep expanding their influence. As a result, in many parts of the country (except in the capital city where Christians are significant in number), Christians are being targeted, especially in the northern region which shares a border with Mali. In this region, especially in Soum Province which seems to be the epicenter of Islamic militant activity, militant groups have kidnapped Christians and carried out attacks against security forces, causing levels of fear to rise. Malam Ibrahim Dicko's Ansar al-Islam movement operates from its bases along the border in the Foularé Forest and has launched attacks and intimidated school teachers into replacing French with Arabic as the language of instruction in schools. Schools not offering classes on Islam have been burned down. Many Christians have fled their homes.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.25 points)

Abduction has been the main source of income for jihadists in the Sahel region. This has created a climate of fear and intimidation with Christian missionaries, NGO employees, social workers and school teachers under extreme threat of abduction, particularly in the northern region. Due to high poverty rates, girls are often victims of child marriage and forced marriage too. Forced marriages have also been used as a weapon to force female converts to return to Islam.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.00 points)

The prevailing 'us-versus-them' thinking is making communal life for Christians difficult. The worsening security situation, assaults on social services and social service providers, attacks on civic institutions and religious leaders have created widespread instability in Burkina Faso, which is hindering the delivery of social and educational services. Where Christians are a minority, they are often hindered from accessing community resources.

Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.00 points)

In areas where jihadists have influence (and where Muslim religious leaders propagate radical Islamic teaching), Christians find themselves sidelined. Their businesses are frequently boycotted, attacked and forced to close down.

Block 3 - further information

The Community sphere is often highly impacted in countries where Islamic oppression is a main persecution engine. In some areas, Christians are hindered from sharing community resources and are obstructed from participating in communal institutions etc..

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.50 points)

Christians are sometimes in danger if they publicly display Christian symbols in remote areas dominated by a Muslim population.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Churches experience difficulties in obtaining permits from the administrative authorities for purchasing land or concerning other matters.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.00 points)

The space for freedom of expression is becoming narrower and narrower not as a result of very restrictive measures by the state, but because of the highly hostile environment created by non-state actors. Christians face pressure not to publicly speak about their faith.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (2.75 points)

Jihadists often demonize Christians as a tool for recruiting new members. The government has been fighting against this for years. The spreading of anti-Christian sentiment has helped create the jihadist mindset which regards Christians as enemies. This is especially true in northern, eastern and western parts of the country, where Islam is strongly represented.

Block 4 - further information

Burkina Faso is a secular state on paper but less so in practice. Officials at both local and national level are intimidated by those who follow radical forms of Islam. There is also concern that radical Islamic influence is making inroads among civil servants. This plays out when it comes to the treatment of Christians.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Despite the fact that the country is officially secular and Christians make up over 20% of the population, churches in Burkina Faso have come to suffer from fear due to the threat of unpredictable attacks and due to social constraints in many parts of the country. They are closely monitored by militant groups and community leaders in the northern, eastern and western parts of the country.

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

Some evangelistic campaigns in public places have been prohibited. Local authorities hostile to the Christian faith do their best to stop such church programs in public. Christian leaders are targets of harassment, particularly where non-traditional Christian groups operate without authorization from the Protestant federation and have opposed the federation's stance on religious tolerance.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

The Shel region is becoming one of the most hostile regions for Christians to exist. Let alone integrating converts, traditional Christians have found their own existence at risk in this very hostile environment.

Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.50 points)

One of the rallying cries for jihadists is: "They - the westerners/Christians - are corrupting our youth. They are teaching them a lifestyle that is not compatible with our Islamic values." Based on this premise, organizations often find it difficult to help the country's youth, even where it is simply a case of offering basic vocational training.

Block 5 - further information

The Church sphere is the sphere of life most affected by pressure. Church life has become virtually impossible in many part of the country. Jihadists have specifically targeted their places of worship and killed Christians. This has led to the closure of many churches and social services provided by Christian organizations.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Burkina Faso: Violence Block question		WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	100 *	38
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10*
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	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)?	8	7
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100*	10*
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	0
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100*
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100*	10*
6.10	How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10*
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	1000*
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

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.

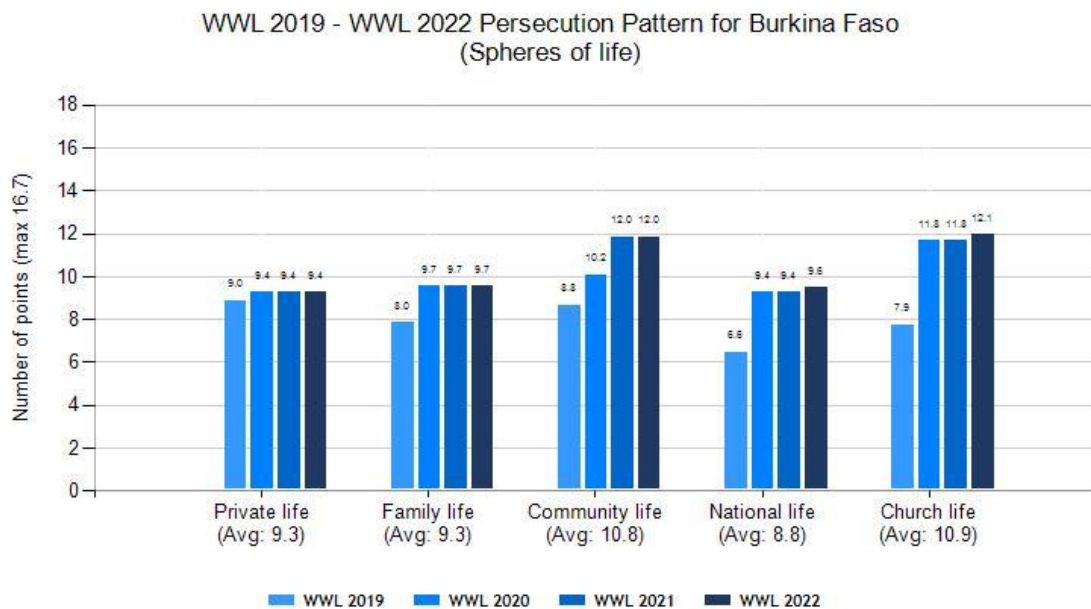
5 Year trends: Average pressure

For years, Burkina Faso was more or less spared from attacks by violent Islamic militants in the Sahel region. However, in the past three WWL reporting periods, this has changed and the activities of Islamic militancy have been increasing. As can be seen in the table below, the average pressure on Christians has risen from 8.1 points in the WWL 2019 reporting period to 10.5 points in WWL 2021. The fact that the violence score has been so high has also had a huge

impact on the pressure Christians face in *spheres of life* such as *Church* and *Community life*.

Burkina Faso: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	10.6
2021	10.5
2020	10.1
2019	8.1
2018	0.0

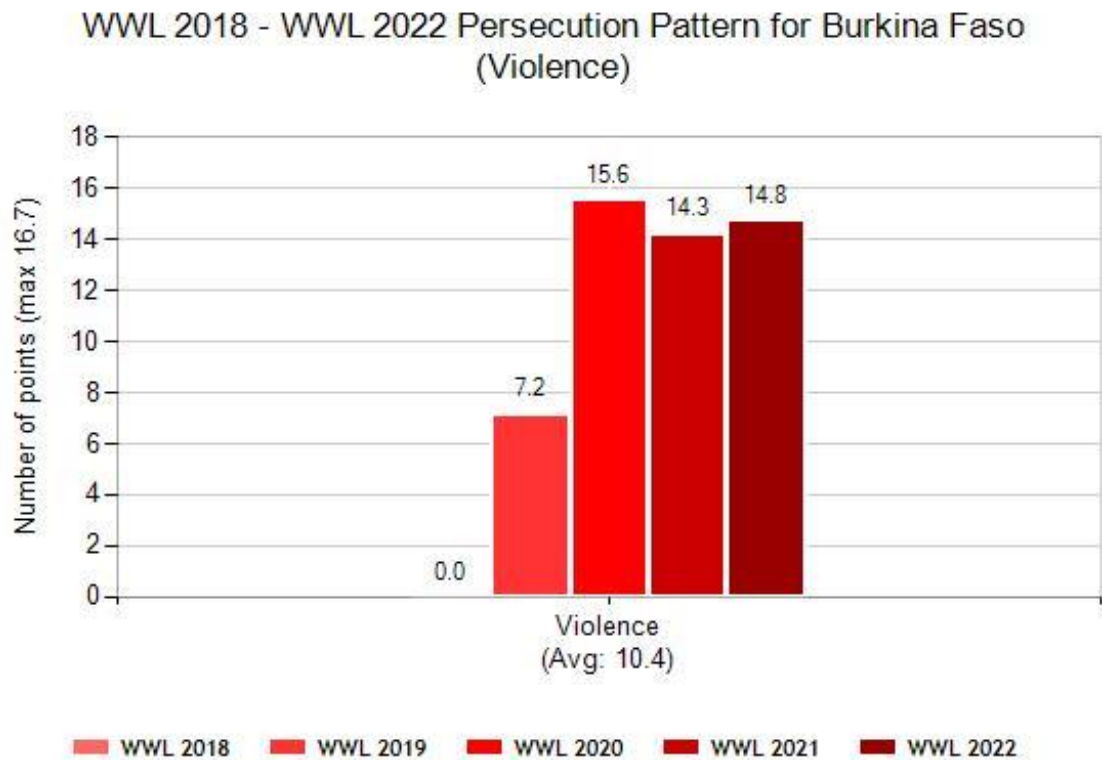
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows how pressure has increased in each sphere of life. Christians currently face very high pressure in the *Community* and *Church spheres*, due mainly to the presence, influence and activities of Islamic militants.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

As can be seen in the chart below, the score for violence has been extreme since WWL 2020. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, Christians have been specifically attacked, killed and wounded. Churches were targeted and Christian businesses were demolished, looted and closed for good.



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Burkina Faso is located in a region where Islamist groups have a huge influence, and the central government is very weak, particular in the eastern regions of the country where Islamic law is applied. Jihadists have exploited this weakness during the COVID-19 crisis to gain increased control of the country's infrastructure. Within this context, there is a high potential for women and girls to be abducted by militants during raids. The militants may force them to marry one of their members or use them as labor. Christian girls will also be put under intense pressure to convert to Islam.

Rape of Christian women and girls is a common method of attacking Christian communities. In many areas, there is very little understanding of women's rights, so many people consider it 'normal' to sexually assault a woman. However, girls and women who are abused, very often have a feeling of worthlessness and think they have brought shame and stigma to the family. In particular, the daughters of Christian leaders are often targeted through sexual violence.

Converts from an Islamic or ATR background face additional pressures. Families beat them, give them in forced marriage, withdraw them from school and in some instances, chase them out of the family. Some young women are also threatened with death. Although Burkina Faso is a CEDAW signatory and has committed to ending [child, early and forced marriage](#) by 2030, 52% of girls are married before their 18th birthday (Girls Not Brides). A country expert summarizes: "Female converts are especially vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. Forced marriages have been used as a weapon to force female converts to return to Islam." Another common form of pressuring converts is to keep them under house arrest.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Islamic militant groups operating in the Sahel region often recruit their members from countries like Niger and Burkina Faso. Christian men and boys are targeted for recruitment, physical attacks and for ransom. The abduction and killing of Christian men causes fear and trauma in Christian communities, as well as economic fragility as the men are normally the family providers. Further fracturing the stability of the Church, many men and boys flee the country due to the pressure they face. A country expert comments: "Christian men and boys are targeted and recruited by militant groups. In conflict areas, they are often victims of physical attacks by violent Islamic militants. When Christian men and boys are forcibly displaced from their homes and towns because of their faith, the families are seriously affected by the persecution as well."

Converts from a Muslim background face further challenges. As conversion to another religion is considered a betrayal by some families, they may be rejected and denied their inheritance.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Burkina Faso is a country where Islamic radicalization is growing. The peripheries of the country are under the influence of Islamic militants and the mosques and madrassas teach radical versions of Sunni Islam, thus causing even Sufi Muslims to be under threat. In these areas, there is no place for religious minorities. It was even reported that teachers in schools were threatened to hold Quran classes or face repercussions. This is also making life difficult for more moderate Muslims. Furthermore, anti-Islamic sentiment appears to be rising in Burkina Faso among other vigilante armed groups. In November 2020, an unknown assailant threw a Molotov cocktail into a mosque in Ouagadougou, [wounding six people](#). A note left on the ground nearby said: "Close the mosque or we'll launch grenades at you" (AP News, 8 November 2020).

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

The country is losing the religious tolerance it has otherwise practiced throughout its earlier history. The constant rhetoric and influence by radical Islamic groups have created a situation where Muslim families react with increasing hostility towards family members who convert to Christianity and where certain ethnic groups have started to specifically target Christians. As a result, Christians are afraid of abductions and attacks in some parts of the country and their fear can be seen in the increased security measures at churches. The United Nations has also expressed its concern [reporting](#) that "terrorist groups" are "making large swaths of territory unstable and stoking ethnic violence, especially in Burkina Faso and Mali" (AP News, 14 November 2019). The global pandemic has also created a fertile environment for the jihadists due to the government shifting its focus from fighting the spread of Islamic militancy to fighting the spread of COVID-19. For the first time, in February 2021, Burkina Faso's government floated the idea of entering into [negotiations](#) with jihadist groups, an idea rejected until now by President Kabore (The Defense Post, 5 February 2021). Such negotiations are increasingly being touted as a possible route towards finding a political resolution to the Sahel crisis. Perhaps, if the negotiations occur, they may yield positive results.

Organized corruption and crime

In the absence of law and order, organized crime is growing. This is also the main means for Islamic militants to transfer weapons (and traffic people and drugs) across borders and remain active in the country. If the general situation is not addressed, this Persecution engine will be here to stay, not only in Burkina Faso but also in the entire region.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted the government response to radical Islamic activity. If post-COVID-19 recovery is very slow, it will be increasingly difficult for the government to push back against the jihadist threat, since they have managed to take control of a large amount of territory.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: child, early and forced marriage - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/burkina-faso/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: wounding six people - [https://apnews.com/article/africa-burkina-faso-ouagadougou-3ae5e4ca4317352cc797f73152ff8899#:~:text=OUAGADOUGOU%2C%20Burkina%20Faso%20\(AP\),the%20government%20spokesman%20said%20Sunday.&text=Burkina%20Faso%20has%20been%20reeling,State%20group%20for%20five%20years.](https://apnews.com/article/africa-burkina-faso-ouagadougou-3ae5e4ca4317352cc797f73152ff8899#:~:text=OUAGADOUGOU%2C%20Burkina%20Faso%20(AP),the%20government%20spokesman%20said%20Sunday.&text=Burkina%20Faso%20has%20been%20reeling,State%20group%20for%20five%20years.)
- Future outlook: reporting - <https://apnews.com/79b56cd182864be29cf3326f8bbd634f>
- Future outlook: negotiations - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/02/05/burkina-faso-premier-talks-jihadists/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- [https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Burkina Faso](https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Burkina+Faso)
- [https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Burkina Faso](https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Burkina+Faso)