

World  
Watch  
Research

## Iran: Full Country Dossier

January 2022



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Man in Iran (c) Open Doors International

# 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

## Copyright note

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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 / Iran

### Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Iran: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
84,308,000	800,000	OD estimate

### Map of country



Iran: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	85	9
WWL 2021	86	8
WWL 2020	85	9
WWL 2019	85	9
WWL 2018	85	10

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

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

Converts from Islam to Christianity bear the brunt of religious freedom violations, carried out by the government in particular and to a lesser extent by society and the converts' families. The government sees these Iranian Christians as an attempt by Western countries to undermine Islam and the Islamic regime of Iran. Both leaders and common members of Christian convert groups have been arrested, prosecuted and have received long prison sentences for 'crimes against national security'. The historical communities of Armenian and Assyrian Christians are recognized and protected by the state but are treated as second-class citizens and are not allowed contact with Christians of a Muslim background (speaking Persian) or have them attend church services.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)



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

- Christians are arbitrarily arrested, charged for national security crimes and sentenced without a fair trial (ICCPR Art. 9)
- Christian peaceful religious activities are monitored and regularly disrupted by the state under national security grounds (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 21)
- Converts to Christianity are persecuted by the state because of their decision to leave Islam (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians from all denominations are monitored by the state, in violation of their right to privacy (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian children are forced to receive Islamic religious education (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians cannot inherit from Muslims and have restricted access to higher education and public employment (ICCPR Art. 26)

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

- **Exorbitant sums for bail demanded:** The Iranian regime continued its practice of requiring exorbitant sums for releasing detained Christians on bail. In December 2020, it was reported that judge Moghiseh increased the sum demanded for the bail of four converts to Christianity, amounting to \$220,000 each ([Article 18, 17 December 2020](#)). During 2021, several other Christians also had to pay high amounts for bail ([Article 18, 8 November 2021](#), [Article 18, 4 October 2021](#)). It is believed that the Iranian regime requires such high sums of money for bail in order to financially bankrupt Christians and to enrich high officials ([The Guardian, 28 November 2016](#)). Instead of imprisoning them, the Iranian regime severely threatens Christians after their release, forcing them to flee the country, thus forfeiting their bail. Many Iranian Christians have had to sell their (business) properties or hand over their title deeds to be able to pay; those who do not have the financial means often remain imprisoned.
- **September 2020:** An Iranian appeal court ruled that the very young adopted daughter of Sam Khosravi and Maryam Falahi could not stay with her parents as they are Christians. Despite the acknowledgement in the first ruling that there was “zero chance” another adoptive family would be found for Lydia given her health problems, the couple was judged “not to be fit” to take care of her, given their conversion ([Article Eighteen, 4 September 2020](#)). Even fatwas issued by two grand ayatollahs, the most senior Shia Islamic clergy, did not help, nor did an appeal letter from 120 Iranian activists and lawyers ([Article Eighteen, 13 October 2020](#)). It is believed that the hands of the judges were tied and that the actual verdict came from the Ministry of Intelligence, showing that the Iranian judiciary is not independent at all. They have taken their case to the Iranian Supreme Court ([Article 18, 22 April 2021](#)).
- **February 2021:** Iranian (former) President Rouhani signed two controversial amendment to the Penal Code into law. The amendments concern Articles 499 and 500, which are both often used against Christians. It now states that “members of sects” can be imprisoned up to five years for membership of “anti-security groups” and “propaganda against the state”. The amendments widen the scope for prosecuting Christians, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, as the regime defines them as members of “sects” and “cults” ([Article Eighteen, 19 February 2021](#)).



- **June 2021:** Three converts from Islam to Christianity received the maximum sentence of five years imprisonment under the newly amended Article 500. The verdict resembled the Article's new wording - they were convicted for "engaging in propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam" ([Article 18, 28 June 2021](#)). Their sentences were reduced to three years in appeal, with the three men being summoned to start their prison sentences in November 2021 ([Article 18, 8 November 2021](#)).

## Specific examples of positive developments

Although outside the WWL 2022 reporting period, in November 2021 Iran's Supreme Court ruled that "involvement in house-churches and even the propagation of what is referred to as the "Evangelical Zionist sect" should not be deemed an act against national security. The ruling has the potential to influence current and future cases involving converts from Islam to Christianity ([Article 18, 25 November 2021](#)). However, the decision can still be reversed by the General Assembly of the Supreme Court.

Other than the example mentioned above, no positive developments have been reported in recent months. The regime brutally suppressed the November-December 2019 demonstrations, killing around 1,500 Iranians. The parliamentary elections of February 2020, which were boycotted by the opposition, saw the conservatives win a landslide victory. The June 2020 adjustment of the Iranian Penal Code, which was signed into law by president Rouhani in February 2021, makes it easier to sentence religious prisoners of conscience, including Christians. The amendment can be viewed as a negative result of the election. The June 2021 presidential elections saw the engineered election of hardliner Ebrahim Raisi - another step in a negative direction.

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article 18, 17 December 2020 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7653/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article 18, 8 November 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9548/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article 18, 4 October 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9337/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: The Guardian, 28 November 2016 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2016/nov/28/iranian-judicial-authorities-attempt-arrest-of-mp-mahmoud-sadeghi>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article Eighteen, 4 September 2020 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/6878/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article Eighteen, 13 October 2020 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7038/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article 18, 22 April 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/8438/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article Eighteen, 19 February 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7872/>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article 18, 28 June 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/6652/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Article 18, 8 November 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9548/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Article 18, 25 November 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/news/9836/>

## WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Iran

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/</a>	21 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14541327">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14541327</a>	21 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-IRN.html">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-IRN.html</a>	21 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iran/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iran/</a>	21 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-R1Q-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-R1Q-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf</a>	21 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	21 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Iran is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-world/2021</a>	21 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-net/2020">https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-net/2020</a>	21 July 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/iran">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/iran</a>	21 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/iran">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/iran</a>	21 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ir">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ir</a>	21 July 2021
Middle East Concern	MEC Iran country profile	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/iran/">https://meconcern.org/countries/iran/</a>	22 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/iran">https://rsf.org/en/iran</a>	21 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/iran">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/iran</a>	21 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI 2020	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IRN">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IRN</a>	21 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran/</a>	21 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Iran%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf">https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Iran%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf</a>	21 July 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran</a>	21 July 2021

### Recent history

In the Revolution of 1979, the Shah was removed from power and Iran was changed into an Islamic Republic. During his reign (1941-1979), the Shah had introduced a program of modernization and allowed Western influences to develop in the country. At the same time, all dissidents were heavily oppressed by his US trained and supported secret service, which had been in place since the USA and United Kingdom initialized a coup which toppled Iran's democratically elected government in 1953. As a result, the Shah lost the support of powerful religious, political and popular forces, paving the way for another coup. Shia Islamic clerics took political control, banning from the country all Western influence (or Christian influence, which is regarded as being virtually the same thing). Today, the most senior and influential cleric is the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In July 2015 an agreement between Iran and six world powers aiming to restrict the Iranian nuclear program was made in exchange for the lifting of sanctions. President Rouhani, who is known as a moderate, struck this deal in his first term and was re-elected in May 2017. In February 2016, moderates won in the parliamentary elections and this seemed to confirm the rise of moderate politics in Iran. However, the February 2020 parliamentary elections saw the hardliners win a landslide victory after the very conservative Guardian Council rejected the candidacy of thousands of mostly moderate and reformist candidates - including 90 sitting members of parliament ([AP News, 14 January 2020](#)). Similarly, the presidential elections in June

2021 were won by the former head of the judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, a confidant of the Supreme Leader rumored to become his successor, in a seemingly engineered election process in which only 7 of the almost 600 candidates were approved by the Guardian Council ([BBC News, 19 June 2021](#)) This all shows that in the end – in spite of what seems to be a democratic process – it is the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who pulls the political strings in Iran.

The July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – which is popularly known as "The Iran Deal" – led to a more prosperous and confident Iran, whose influence in the region grew. However, in May 2018 the USA announced its withdrawal from the nuclear deal and reinstated its sanctions against Iran. As a result, the Iranian economy has been struggling ever since. The moderates, including President Rouhani, tried to uphold the deal with the other signatories (mainly the EU, Germany, France and the UK). However, increasing tensions between Iran and the USA led to Iran breaching the terms of the agreement ([The Independent, 6 November 2019](#)). Tensions escalated further after the US embassy in Baghdad was partially set on fire by an Iraqi militia backed by Iran in December 2019. In January 2020, in an unexpected and major response which shocked the Iranian government, the USA assassinated Major General Qasem Soleimani, Iran's most influential military commander, a 'living martyr' of the Iran-Iraq war and public hero ([Al-Monitor, January 2020](#)). In the following upheaval, Iranian forces accidentally downed a Ukrainian civil aircraft, killing all 176 passengers on board ([BBC News, 11 January 2020](#)).

While Iran continued to expand its nuclear facilities, newly elected US President Joe Biden indicated that he would like to revive the deal. However, both parties have been in stalemate ever since, as Iran first wants the sanctions to be lifted, while the USA first wants Iran to scale down its nuclear activities ([BBC News, 6 April 2021](#)). Negotiations restarted in November 2021 - with the USA not officially taking part -, but experts are not optimistic about any positive results ([BBC News, 29 November 2021](#)). With Iran getting closer to developing a nuclear bomb, it is feared that the talks might end in armed conflict ([BBC News, 23 November 2021](#)).

The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 caused Iran to become the most badly affected country in the Middle East. Although official figures were far lower, BBC Persian service claimed that by July 2020 around 42,000 people had died from COVID-related symptoms ([BBC News, 3 August 2020](#)). The number of official deaths increased to 84,000 in July 2021 ([The Guardian, 3 July 2021](#)). Meanwhile, the Iranian government has been accused of further worsening the situation by prohibiting the import of UK and USA made vaccines ([HRW, 19 August 2021](#)).

Meanwhile, ten years after the Green Movement protests ([BBC News, 28 December 2009](#)), the deteriorating economic situation and oppression of dissidents (including female activists) ([BBC News, 11 March 2019](#)), led to weeks of bloody protests in November and December 2019. It is believed that around 1500 demonstrators were killed during these protests ([Reuters, 23 December 2019](#)).

Both Christians from the historical Christian communities as well as converts from Islam to Christianity remain oppressed - see *Religious landscape*.

## Political and legal landscape

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocracy combined with a presidential system. The president is elected, but ultimately power rests in the hands of the clergy, with hardliner Ayatollah Ali Khamenei being the Supreme Leader and having the highest authority.

Within the current Iranian political spectrum, there is a division between the Islamic left (Reformists), the Pragmatists and the Islamic right (referred to as "Principlists" or "hardliners"). Before the February 2020 elections, the Islamic Consultative Assembly (i.e. the parliament) was dominated by the Reformists, reflecting to a certain extent the voice of the Iranian people (although only political parties and factions loyal to the establishment and to the state ideology are permitted to operate). However, the hardliners took over after the elections in February 2020 were boycotted by the opposition. In June 2021, the presidential elections saw hardliner Ebrahim Raisi win the elections, after the opposition boycotted the elections again after most candidates (almost 99%) were rejected by the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council, which has the power to veto all legislation from the parliament and has to approve all major political candidates, is also dominated by the Principlists. The appointments of the Guardian Council are controlled by the Supreme Leader. Hence, ultimate power rests in his hands, as do the unelected institutions under his control. These institutions, including the security forces and the judiciary, play a major role in the suppression of dissent and other restrictions on civil liberties. Even Reformist parties have come under increased state repression, especially since 2009. This makes it unlikely that Iran will see any significant political change in the short term. As long as the right wing sees Iran as an Islamic country for Shiite Muslims threatened by Western (Christian) countries and culture, Christians, especially converts, will be persecuted.

Under the Constitution, Christianity is one of the three legally recognized ethnic religious minorities in Iran. Through this recognition, ethnic minority Christians maintain the right, at least in principle, to exercise their faith. Article 13 of the Constitution states: "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education." As interpreted by the Iranian government, these rights pertain only to ethnic minority Christians (not to Iranian converts to Christianity) who act within the limits of the law, including non-codified principles of Islamic law.

However, even ethnic minority Christians suffer from a large amount of legalized and social discrimination. They are not allowed to hold services in Persian (Farsi) or print religious materials in Persian. In addition, they face employment restrictions (being Muslim is a requirement for many jobs, in particular in government positions and the authorities have been known to force Muslim employers to dismiss Christian employees); marriage restrictions (for instance, the Civil Code prohibits a non-Muslim man from marrying a Muslim woman); unequal treatment by the courts; not being allowed to adopt children; the Islamic hijab is compulsory for all women in Iran, including Christians; and the inability to inherit property from a Muslim (which encourages people to convert to Islam for financial reasons). Moreover, Article 881 of the Iranian Civil Code provides that when an 'infidel' dies, if there is any Muslim among the beneficiaries, this legatee inherits all the property even if only a distant relative. Even the recognized religious minorities are referred to as 'infidels' in this article. Christians are also not allowed to hold public offices

such as being a judge, qualify for the presidency or be elected to local councils (except for three out of five designated seats for religious minorities in the *Majlis*, the Iranian parliament).

The government forces recognized churches to reject any Muslim trying to be baptized into the Christian faith and requires a church to register its members. The government closes any church that does not comply. For this reason, converts are forced to meet in informal house churches or to practice their faith in isolation.

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive, in particular making marriage a place of enacting violent repression of female converts. Iran is one of just six UN states not to have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and it has one of the world's lowest female participation [rates](#) in Parliament (Index Mundi, accessed 21 July 2021). The 1979 Islamic Revolution crippled the rights of women in relation to marriage, divorce and child custody by terminating the Family Protection Law. The legal age for marriage currently stands at 13 for girls and 15 for boys, although marriages can be carried out earlier with the consent of a male guardian and court judge (Civil Code, Article 1041). [17% of girls](#) are reportedly married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides).

Divorce laws prevent women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. A man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq*, whereas women must file through the courts for divorce. In addition to the challenges of providing considerable evidence to support her case, many women fear the stigma attached to divorce. Upon divorce a woman will likely lose [custody](#) of their children, particularly if she is a convert to Christianity (UNDP, 2019, "Gender Justice and the Law" p.21).

Other sources report:

- Middle East Concern writes (MEC Iran country profile): " Although apostasy is not proscribed by the Penal Code ..., the Code makes provision for judges to rely on authoritative Islamic sources in matters not covered by the Code – effectively providing scope for Islamic law sanctions to be applied for apostasy (though there are no known examples of judicial death sentences having been applied for apostasy since 1990)."
- Iran is classified by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2020) as 'authoritarian'.
- Human Right Watch reports (HRW 2021): "Iranian authorities continued to repress their own people. The country's security and intelligence apparatus, in partnership with Iran's judiciary, harshly cracked down on dissent, including through excessive and lethal force against protesters and reported abuse and torture in detention. President Rouhani [*succeeded by President Raisi in August 2021*] and his administration have shown little inclination to curb or confront these serious rights violations perpetrated by Iran's security agencies, while authorities at the highest level continue to greenlight these rampant abuses. Broad United States sanctions also impacted the country's economy and Iranians' access to essential medicines and harmed their right to health."
- The FFP Fragile States Index (FSI 2021) reports that factionalized elites and group grievances are increasing, leading to a growth in potential conflict between those in power and ordinary Iranian citizens.

## Religious landscape

Iran: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	800,000	0.9
Muslim	82,915,250	98.3
Hindu	37,521	0.0
Buddhist	479	0.0
Ethno-religionist	4,790	0.0
Jewish	7,784	0.0
Bahai	215,546	0.3
Atheist	10,378	0.0
Agnostic	232,510	0.3
Other	84,222	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

Iran is home to a rich variety of religious and ethnic groups who have a long history in the region. Most Iranians follow Twelver Ja'afari Shia Islam, which is the official state religion. However, a significant minority of [10% follows Sunni Islam](#) (World Population Review, accessed 20 July 2021).

Although the Armenian and Assyrian Christians enjoy some religious freedom, they remain tightly monitored and restricted (see above: *Political and Legal landscape*). There is almost no contact between historical church Christians and Christians from a Muslim background. The latter do not enjoy any religious freedom and have to keep their faith hidden. If a convert's new faith becomes known, they are very likely to lose their employment. Government officials in particular will put them under pressure to renounce their faith, as will wider society (but to a lesser extent).

Interest in Christianity (and other non-Islamic religions) has continued unabated among a population predominantly disillusioned with Islam. Christians in Iran report an increase of agnosticism and nominal adherence to Islam, especially in urban areas. Being a non-Muslim brings a host of limitations and unfair discrimination to one's private and public life in Iran. Religious and political leaders in Iran continue to speak out against Christianity and hardliners maintain their almost absolute power in domestic affairs, which affects human rights. It is therefore unsurprising that the Christian community experiences repression in various forms. The Iranian intelligence service (MOIS) closely monitors Christian activities and other religious minorities, together with the Revolutionary Guard (IRCG). They are responsible for raids on

Christian gatherings in private homes, arresting those in attendance and confiscating personal property. Those arrested are subjected to intensive and often aggressive interrogation.

As already stated above, Christianity is considered a condemnable Western and Zionist influence and a constant threat to the Islamic identity of the Republic. This is especially the case since Christian numbers have grown considerably over recent years - above all, the number of Christians with a Muslim background - and allegedly even children of political and spiritual leaders are leaving Islam for Christianity. Since virtually all Persian-language church services are prohibited and only some ageing communities remain, most converts gather in informal house-church meetings or receive information on the Christian faith via satellite TV and websites.

Converts with a Muslim background constitute the largest group of Christians in the country and there are also many Iranians abroad who convert to Christianity. The second largest group are the Armenian and Assyrian Christian communities, the only Christians who are officially recognized by the Iranian government and protected by law but treated as second-class citizens.

Apart from Christians, the rights of other religious minorities like Jews, Bahai, Zoroastrians, Dervish and Sunni Muslims are violated as well. Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism are recognized in the Constitution, while religions that are not recognized in the Constitution, like Bahai, are particularly affected. According to recent reports, converts from Islam to Christianity are treated worse than non-recognized minorities.

Islamic law dictates that women must adopt Islamic dress in public spaces – a cloth head-covering (*hijab*) and a long jacket (*manteau*), or a large full-length covering (*chador*, as is mandatory at government functions). Should they fail to do so, they may be [arrested](#) and sentenced to flogging and/or a fine (Iran Human Rights Review, 2016, p.3).

Other sources report:

- Concerning the state of religious freedom, a report by [Freedom of Thought](#) (accessed 26 August 2020) notes: "The constitution declares that Islam (Ja'afari Shiism) is the state religion. Articles 12 and 13 divide citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran into four religious categories: Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians. Nonbelievers are effectively left out and precluded from certain legal rights or protections: Iranians must declare their faith in one of the four officially recognized religions in order to be able to claim a number of legal rights, such as the capacity to apply for the general examination to enter any university in Iran. The authorities classify Yarsanis as Shia Muslims practicing Sufism, although Yarsanis identify Yarsan as a distinct faith. Similarly, Sabean-Mandaeans do not consider themselves as Christians, but the government classifies them among the Christian groups."
- Interestingly, a 2020 survey entitled "Iranians attitudes towards religion" found that only 32.2% of the Iranians consider themselves Shiite Muslim, with 22.2% not identifying with any religion or belief. According to the survey, 1.5% respondents indicated they were Christian ([GAMAAN, last accessed 24 November 2020](#) / [Christianity Today, 3 September 2020](#)).



## Economic landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and World Bank:

- **Gross National Income per capita:** 13.150 USD (2020, PPP)
- **Poverty:** 18.7% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line, with some sources suggesting that even as high as 60% of the population struggle to survive ([Financial Times, 25 January 2021](#)).
- **Unemployment rate:** Approximately 11.0% (2020), with youth unemployment being more than twice as high at 25.5% (2019)

According to World Bank:

- **Economy:** "Years of sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic have mounted pressures on the Iranian economy. Fiscal space remains constrained due to a decline in oil revenues and the cost of COVID-19 mitigation measures, which caused a surge in government debt. Restricted access to foreign reserves due to U.S. sanctions led to a sharp exchange rate depreciation, which in turn heightened inflation. Job losses through the pandemic and high inflation deteriorated welfare, particularly that of already vulnerable households."
- **GDP:** "Despite an initial COVID-19 induced shock to GDP, a strong rebound in mid-2020 led to a modest economic expansion in 2020/21. Iran's GDP is now estimated to expand by 1.7% in 2020/21."
- **Economic outlook:** "Iran's economic outlook hinges on the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pace of global economic recovery. The GDP recovery is projected to be slow and gradual due to a slow vaccination rollout and weak demand from regional trading partners. Inflation is forecast to decrease but remain above 20% on average in the medium term. With limited fiscal space and high inflation, economic pressures on poor households will continue."

Iran's economy profited from the lifting of (economic) sanctions following the nuclear deal in 2015. Although increased oil revenues was a great boost, Iran's economy kept struggling, especially because of a lack of institutional reform. This situation has worsened since the withdrawal of the USA from the deal and its re-imposition of sanctions. The result of the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic is that the recovery process in the wake of the re-imposition of US sanctions will be further prolonged.

One major issue in the country is that Article 44 of the Iranian Constitution prescribes "that all major industries should be government owned" ([Radio Farda, 25 July 2017](#)). In May 2005, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei provided an important new interpretation of this Article, allowing more privatization and a decrease of the state sector. Instead of private companies, the very conservative Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), the powerful military and security organization commissioned to protect the regime, used this opportunity to build its own semi-state economic empire. As the IRGC is very well connected to the judiciary and other state branches, it has become almost impossible to carry out major reforms. This explains why economist Dr Bijan Khajepour writes on Iran: "Although privatization picked up pace ..., it happened for all the wrong reasons, especially as a process for expanding the economic interests

of the semi-state sector which put additional pressures on the genuine private sector" ([Anatomy of the Iranian Economy](#), Swedish Institute of International Affairs, June 2020, p.16).

Symbolic for Iran's semi-state-driven economy is its blacklisting by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global anti-money laundering watchdog. This will make it harder for Tehran to obtain foreign currency and makes it more difficult for foreign companies to invest in Iran ([Iran News Wire, 24 February 2020](#)). Even more telling is the regime's response to this blacklisting, when it claimed that complying with such anti-terrorism norms would endanger its survival.

Women are, in general, the most economically vulnerable in Iran due to both low female employment rates (see UNDP's HDI 2020) and patrilineal inheritance practices. Sharia rules of inheritance are applied, whereby daughters typically receive half the share that sons receive ([OECD, 2019](#)). According to a report by Al-Monitor ([14 September 2020](#)), women have suffered the most economically through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Iranian Christians, both from a historical church and Muslim background, face great difficulties in the midst of this economic uncertainty. On top of the general economic problems, they face high levels of legal and social discrimination. Iran's unemployment rate has been above 10% for the last decade. As mentioned above, while the average unemployment rate was around 11% in 2021, the unemployment rate among young Iranians reached 27%. The situation for university graduates is particularly difficult since they make up 40% of the unemployed ([Iran News Wire, 6 January 2019](#)). Iran's economy, which is reliant on government initiatives, has little growth potential as it is hardly capable of creating new jobs. One of the characteristics of the Iranian government is the discrimination it imposes on the job market. Individuals who at least pretend to be loyal to the Islamic Republic are in a better position for finding work with government employers.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 343 onwards) and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the population is from Persian descent, with other ethnicities being Azeri, Kurd, Lur, Baloch, Arab, Turkmen and Turkic tribes
- **Main languages:** The official language is Persian (Farsi), with minority groups speaking Azeri and other Turkic dialects, Kurdish, Gilaki and Mazandarani, Luri, Balochi and Arabic
- **Urban population:** 76.3% of total population lives in urban areas (2021), with an annual urbanization rate of 1.32%
- **Literacy rate:** 85.5% of the population over 15 years of age can read and write, with a significant difference between men (90.4%) and women (80.8%) (2016)
- **Median age:** 31.7 years. The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up almost 38% of the population.
- **Education:** In general, Iranians enjoy 15 years of education.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Around 2.5 - 3 million mainly Afghani refugees reside in the country, alongside 20.000 Iraqi's (2020).

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI 2020):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Iran ranks #70 out 189 countries, falling from #65 in 2019. Despite the ongoing difficulties, the combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a high HDI score of 0.783. Iranians view education of both men and women as highly important. As a result, Iran is "witnessing the emergence of a young, dynamic and educated society" ([Anatomy of the Iranian Economy](#), Swedish Institute of International Affairs, June 2020, p.9). Nonetheless, "minorities generally lack equal access to public sector jobs and university education and are excluded from many other social and economic sectors" ([Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index - BTI, Iran Country Report 2020](#)).
- **Life expectancy:** 76.7 years on average; women (77.9 years), men (75.6 years).
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.866, women are still clearly disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Iranian society and culture is conservative on the surface, but there is a significant underground culture dominated by the younger generation and dissenting artists. Persian culture can be traced to origins long before the arrival of Islam and Iranians are proud of these pre-Islamic cultural roots. This also finds its expression in the Persian names given to children. Urbanization is rapidly increasing with vast numbers of people leaving rural areas to seek more opportunities and a better life in the cities, which also leads to a further secularization of society.

Iranian Christians report that many of Iran's youth have no interest in Islam and work to get around its restrictions. Women's rights movements and educated women will likely grow in influence, with the government taking harsh measures against them (AI 2021). The "brain drain" from Iran will likely continue, as few believe change is possible and choose instead to leave the country. Therefore, the Iranian diaspora is growing rapidly and is presently estimated at about 6 million. Faced with limited opportunities at home, thousands of Iranians leave the country each year to work or study abroad; often not intending to return ([Migration Policy Institute, 22 April 2021](#)).

Iranians invest in education. Although no less than 2,640 universities exist in the country, levels of education are poor on the whole. Education is often driven for ideological reasons rather than for increasing rational-decision making (BTI 2020). This is probably part of the reason why Iran ranked 128th out 141 countries on "critical thinking in education" and 92nd in "overall skills" in the World Economic Forum's [Global Competitiveness Report 2019](#).

Despite an evolving socio-cultural landscape, patriarchal and Islamic norms continue to dominate. Women and girls are viewed as second-class citizens who should fulfil traditional roles as a wife and mother. Women require permission from a male guardian to obtain a passport or to travel freely, restricting their physical freedom ([Al-Monitor, 8 March 2021](#)). Iran has a strong honor-shame culture and so-called 'honor killings' remain prevalent. Incidences of violence against women have reportedly increased in the context of COVID-19 (HRW 2021). Activists have continued to campaign for Iran to adopt the draft law "Protection, Dignity and Security of Women against Violence" (which has been under discussion in parliament since September 2019), although it contains several gaps, such as a failure to address marital rape ([HRW, 4 Dec 2020](#)).

Violations of the rights of Christians in Iran is mainly state-driven and societal views on Christianity, especially in urban areas, is more positive than in neighboring countries. Nonetheless, family pressure, stemming from a mixture of Islamic conviction and concepts around preserving the honor of the family, remains a significant problem for Iranian converts from Islam to Christianity. In addition, there is a growing trend among the younger generation to view all religion, including Christianity, with skepticism.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 91.8% penetration - survey date: June 2021  
Internet usage saw an increase of 11% in one year, with the previous survey showing 80.5% penetration in December 2019.
- **Facebook usage:** 47.0% penetration - survey date: June 2021

According to World Bank:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 142.4 per 100 people  
According to [Georgetown](#), 93.6% of women use a mobile phone. Whilst small compared to other countries, there remains a gender gap in relation to mobile phone usage (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, "Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20", p.21).

Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020 rates Iran as "Not Free", with a very low score of 15/100 points. According to the report, websites, social media and other communications platforms face widespread censorship and pro-government commentators actively manipulate online discussions. According to [Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2019](#), the Iranian Cyber Police unit has no less than 42,000 volunteers who monitor online speech. Those who are found opposing the regime, are likely to be arrested and imprisoned; even reporting critically on the spread of COVID-19 in the country saw several journalists end up in jail. The report also states that the Iranian government actively tries to hack accounts belonging to government critics and human rights organizations.

Although the majority of the Iranian population has Internet access, usage differs greatly between rural and urban communities. The government is known to limit access or even slow down the Internet in order to contain discontent and protests, while censoring all Internet content. Mobile phones are widely used but with constant monitoring of all calls and SMS texts.

According to World Press Freedom 2020:

- "Iran is still one of the world's most repressive countries for journalists, subjecting news and information to relentless control. At least 860 journalists and citizen-journalists have been prosecuted, arrested, imprisoned and in some cases executed since the 1979 revolution. The Islamic Republic shows no signs of relaxing its harassment of independent journalists and media outlets, or loosening its tight grip on the media landscape as a whole. Iran's journalists are still constantly subjected to intimidation, arbitrary arrest and long jail sentences imposed by revolutionary courts at the end of unfair trials. The authorities also

wage their fight against the freedom to inform beyond the country's borders, putting a great deal of pressure on Iranian journalists working for international media outlets. And they continue to harass the relatives of imprisoned journalists by threatening them and even arresting them and sentencing them to long prison sentences."

In an effort to stop Western influence, the government has prohibited the possession of satellite dishes (although many do possess them). The authorities hinder the access to satellite broadcast channels and Internet sites they disapprove of, including Christian media. Part of their goal is to slow down the growth of the Church and especially Christian sites focusing on evangelization are blocked. However, Iranian Christians report that contact with the wider world is nonetheless growing rapidly through such media as satellite TV and Internet, despite all restrictions and monitoring by the government.

Iran has bought state-of-the-art monitoring systems from China and is able to monitor its citizens, including their movements, purchases, tele-communications and online activity. There is also evidence to suggest that Iran monitors individuals from religious minorities, who are considered to be a threat, even when they are outside the country. Thus, those inside the country active in Internet ministry among Muslims (and also Muslims interested in Christianity) run the risk of being questioned and/or arrested if discovered. But even a Christian's public and private online presence (including email correspondence) while located outside of Iran could lead to the Iranian government's identification of their faith (Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [Iran's Internal Targets](#), 4 January 2018).

## Security situation

In November 2019, Iran saw some of the bloodiest protests in decades. Probably around 1,500 demonstrators were killed, in what started as a protest against rising petrol prices ([Reuters, 23 December 2019](#)). The Iranian security forces, especially those directly under control of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei are well-trained, well-equipped and well-known for using violence against demonstrators. They are supported by a variety of intelligence services and Iran's secret service is also known for its operations abroad (also in the West), executing Iranians who oppose the government ([AIVD, 8 January 2019](#)).

In the past few years, Iran has increased its efforts in forging alliances with Middle Eastern countries in the fight against "The West" and against the threat of the (Sunni) Islamic State group (IS) and its affiliates. Alliances with Hezbollah (Syria, Lebanon) and Hamas (Gaza) are well-known, but smaller Shiite groups also enjoy Iran's support. These alliances are mainly supported by members or units of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). This elite force has experience in fighting opposition in Iran internally and has also been deployed in several other countries (such as Syria and Iraq). Apart from the Revolutionary Guard Corps, there is also the Basij Militia. This militia consists of volunteers and is part of the Revolutionary Guard. Both will defend Iran at all costs, if the country is attacked. However, it is unlikely that any war will happen in Iran itself, as Tehran will try to fight all wars abroad.

Another example of the IRGC's involvement abroad is its support for the Houthi rebel movement in Yemen ([Middle East Institute, 6 December 2018](#)). Although the Houthi rebels are not an Iranian proxy force like Lebanon's Hezbollah, it is unlikely that the Houthis would have been able

to conduct a wide scale attack on Saudi Arabia's biggest oil processing facility in September 2019 without help from Iran.

Iran faces tensions with Saudi Arabia and in particular with the USA ([International Crisis Group, accessed 20 July 2021](#)), although the Sunni kingdom has recently started to seek rapprochement ([Foreign Policy, 29 April 2021](#)). These tensions are partly due to allegations against Iran made by the USA and partly due to violent activities in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran is being held responsible for so-called terrorist activities in Saudi Arabia and for seizing foreign (oil)tankers. The assassination of Iran's most senior military commander Major General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020 could easily have acted as a tipping point bringing direct war between the USA and Iran, but the Iranian regime probably had to limit its response due to declining internal support and the fear of further domestic unrest. However, the naval shadow war with Israel increased with the Israelis damaging an alleged Iranian 'spy ship', while Iranians largest navy vessel mysteriously caught fire and sank ([BBC News, 7 April 2021](#), [The Guardian, 2 June 2021](#)). In July 2021, a drone strike killed two sailors on board of an Israeli-owned oil tanker ([Times of Israel, 31 July 2021](#)). In the meantime, the threat of an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities is growing ([BBC News, 23 November 2021](#)).

According to [World Politics Review, 30 April 2019](#): There is a threat of attack by violent Sunni militants in Iran - particularly in the Sistan and Baluchestan provinces. This is a mainly a consequence of Iran's oppression of Iranian Sunni Muslims ([Reuters, 2 March 2021](#)).

Internally, Iran's religious police regulate adherence to Sharia-based law and it is common that this police force carries out arrests and issues fines for non-adherence ([BBC News, 22 April 2016](#)). For Christians, especially those from a Muslim background, the biggest threat is from the Iranian security services and especially the MOIS, Iran's Ministry of Intelligence. It is clear that their (online) activities are extensively monitored and information gathered is used against them in interrogations and trials as evidence of action against 'national security' or 'espionage for Zionist regimes'. It is believed that thousands of Iranian Christians from a Muslim background flee the country out of fear of arrest, psychological torture (including solitary confinement) and long-term prison sentences. Others are warned and forced to sign papers in which they agree to never get in (online) contact again with other Iranian or foreign Christians or to search for online Christian material. Due to the high levels of pressure, it is likely that many Iranian converts comply and are forced to become isolated believers.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Nuclear deal needed to ease crippling sanctions

The nuclear deal (JCPOA) concluded with six major world powers in mid-2015, is still very relevant for Iran, even though the USA have withdrawn from it at the moment. The Principlists are mainly opposed to the deal, as they fear that it could lead to social and political reforms and an undermining of the values of the Revolution. However, the economic necessity of easing the sanctions is forcing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei to send his envoys back to the negotiation table. If he wants Raisi to succeed him as Supreme Leader, Khamenei needs to make his presidency a success and improve the economy, "which has always been a major factor in the success or failure of any Iranian president" ([Atlantic Council, 10 June 2021](#)). The USA's with-



drawal from the JCPOA had previously put the moderates between a rock and a hard place, with the hardliners blaming them for concluding the deal with the arch-enemy in the first place. Now all political offices are occupied by hardliners, they will have to prove that they can ease the sanctions and revive the economy.

## **2) Sanctions and new US president**

Although President Joe Biden is willing to return to the negotiation table, the sanctions imposed by his predecessor are still in place. It is likely that the Biden government will also keep trying to confine Iran's influence in the region and will only make concessions if Iran significantly scales down its nuclear activities. Until now, it seems unlikely that the parties are willing to compromise. Even if the deal is revived in the end, the relationship between the USA and Iran will likely remain more or less hostile. Nonetheless, the USA's traditional Gulf allies seem willing to ease tensions with Iran ([ABC News, 6 December 2021](#), [The Irish Times, 15 October 2021](#)).

## **3) Oppression of any dissent - Christians viewed as a threat**

Another way of getting the message across that the nuclear deal does not mean an end to the values of the Revolution, is the crackdown on media, human rights and political activists. Already, the suppression of Iranians holding dual nationality and dissidents (including religious minorities) has increased. These groups are considered a threat to the Islamic character of the republic: Those holding dual nationality are a threat because of their connections to foreign circles and businesses. Dissidents and religious minorities are seen as a threat because of their political or religious convictions. This suppression can be seen in the increased number of arrests but also in the smear campaigns targeting religious minorities, especially Christian converts and adherents of Bahai. As more interaction with the wider world becomes possible for the general public through technological progress, religious minorities like Bahai and Christians are likely to be more closely watched - with the authorities especially looking for any contact with Western co-religionists. Christian Persian-language media are already reported to be under close observation.

## **External Links - Keys to understanding**

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- Recent history: BBC News, 29 November 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-59386825>
- Recent history: BBC News, 23 November 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-59322152>
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## WWL 2022: Church information / Iran

### Christian origins

Iranians (Parthians, Medes and Elamites) were among the first believers in Jesus Christ according to the Bible (Book of Acts, chapter 2). 60 Christian tombs dating back to the 3rd century AD have been found on Kharg Island, close to Iran's mainland, indicating a strong early Christian presence.

The Iranian church had some importance as indicated by the fact that Bishop "John of Persia of the churches of the whole of Persia and in the great India" was in attendance at the Council of Nicea in 325. In 344, a wave of persecution started as the Christians were accused of conspiring with the Roman empire. In the next 40 years, at least 35,000 Christians were killed. However, the church survived and at the Synod of Mar Isaac (410) it became the independent Church of the East, adopting the Nicene Creed.

Separation from the Western churches occurred when the Church of the East supported the 'heretical' archbishop Nestorius, adopting their own creed in 486 which rejected both Monophysitism and the Council of Chalcedon. Despite further persecution and heavy resistance from the Zoroastrians, the Church had enough influence for the Shah to declare in 590 AD: "My throne stands on four feet ... on Jews and Christians, as well as Magians and Zoroastrians". The Nestorian church was very active in spreading Christianity to Central Asia, India, Mongolia and

even China.

Arabs invaded Persia in 642 AD. As Islam took root, the Christian population was forced into 'dhimmitude'. Public worship became severely restricted, Christians had to pay twice as much tax and had no right to public office. Evangelizing became difficult and many non-Muslims converted to Islam. Nonetheless, the real blow was dealt by the Moguls who between the 12th and 14th centuries killed thousands of Assyrian Christians and almost completely destroyed the Church of the East. In 1830, some remnants of the Nestorian Church entered into agreement with Rome and became "Chaldean Catholics".

It was the Armenian Christians coming in from the north from the 16th century onwards that established a permanent Christian community in Iran, despite times of persecution. The Armenian Christians were well connected with Armenians residing in foreign countries and often fulfilled a bridge function between Iran and the outside world. Although less well-treated since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, they still have an official presence in Iran.

Protestant missions were established from the 19th century onwards, they were responsible for translating the New Testament into Persian for the first time in 1812. However, most Protestant church members came from a Nestorian background since mission-work among the Muslims remained difficult. The Anglican Church, which had the most Muslim converts, counted only 350 of them in 1936. Nevertheless, Christian influence in the 19th and 20th century was significant through church-run schools, hospitals and village clinics. Major restrictions followed the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Proselytizing became illegal, conversion punishable by death and the building of new churches became impossible.

(Source: Bradley, M: "Iran and Christianity Historical Identity and Present Relevance", New York, 2008, pp. 137-158.)

## Church spectrum today

Iran: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox		30.6
Catholic		1.0
Protestant		5.2
Independent		60.1
Unaffiliated		3.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians		0.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>99.9</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		

Evangelical movement		13.9
Renewalist movement		49.4

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.

Although there are no exact numbers regarding the historical Armenian and Assyrian communities, all sources agree that their numbers have decreased significantly since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The once significant historical Armenian community has declined by more than 80 percent. Although there is unclarity and Iranian official figures even suggest a renewed increase over the last two decades, the Armenian community probably declined from 250,000 at its peak before the Revolution to around 30 - 35,000 today.

[Source: James Barry. *Armenian Christians in Iran: Ethnicity, Religion, and Identity in the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. if, 245-73.]

Similarly, the Assyrian community dwindled from 200,000 before 1979 to 50,000 today, with other sources claiming that only 20,000 Assyrians remain ([Assyrian Policy](#), accessed 11 December 2021, [Refworld](#), accessed 11 December 2021).

A distinction must be made between ethnicity and denomination here - although the majority of the Armenians and Assyrians belong to the Armenian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East respectively, others belong to the Armenian Catholic Church and the (Assyrian) Chaldean Catholic Church (both belonging to the wider Roman Catholic Church). An even smaller number have become Protestant, belonging to a number of denominations including the Assemblies of God, the Assyrian Pentecostal Church, the Assyrian Evangelical Church, the Armenian Evangelical Church and the Anglican Church, among others.

Although the Protestant churches in particular were joined by a (small) number of converts from Islam to Christianity in the past, nowadays it is impossible to integrate converts in any of the Armenian or Assyrian churches. Hence, the thousands of Iranians converting to Christianity these days mainly gather in small house groups, forming a non-community of thousands of unconnected house churches; with others practicing their faith in isolation, often only connected to other Christians online. Ethnic Armenians and Assyrians, often belonging to the Protestant denominations involved with and supporting house-churches, have been prosecuted and sentenced to long prison terms in the recent past.

## External Links - Church information

- Church spectrum today - additional information: Assyrian Policy - <https://www.assyrianpolicy.org/iran>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: Refworld - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4cb826c3c.html>

# WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Iran

## Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

## Position on the World Watch List

Iran: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	85	9
WWL 2021	86	8
WWL 2020	85	9
WWL 2019	85	9
WWL 2018	85	10

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

Average pressure remains at an extremely high level in Iran. The 1 point drop in score was in reality a 0.3 point drop, so for all intents and purposes the score and situation has remained much the same as in WWL 2021. The outlook for Iranian Christians, in particular converts from Islam to Christianity, is by no means improving. The election of hardliner Ebrahim Raisi as president and the amendment and tightening of the penal code is all part of a wider development towards Iran becoming a totalitarian state. State surveillance is on the rise and the authorities are increasingly exerting a firmer grip on daily life and activities. The scores in all *spheres of life* are at an extreme level.

## Persecution engines

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

*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)**

Shia Islam is the official state religion and all laws must be consistent with the official interpretation of Sharia law. The Constitution bans parliament from passing laws contrary to Islam and states that there may be no amendment to its provisions related to the “Islamic character” of the political or legal system or to the specification of Shia Jafari Islam as the official religion. To safeguard Islamic ordinances and to ensure the compatibility with Islam of legislation passed by the parliament, a Guardian Council consisting of Shia scholars and clerics must review and approve all legislation. The Guardian Council also reviews all candidates for the highest public appointments, like the presidency and the parliament. This explains why even the reformists within the government are conservative and why Christians and other religious minorities are barred from high office and other influential positions within the system.

In the view of the government, and to a lesser in the view of society in general, ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim, and therefore ethnic Persian Christians are considered apostates. This makes almost all Christian activity illegal, especially when it occurs in the Persian language - be it evangelism, Bible training, publishing Christian books or preaching in Persian. However, Iranian society is much less fanatic than its leadership. This is partly the result of the widespread influence of a more moderate and mystical Sufi Islam, as well as the pride of the Iranian people in pre-Islamic Persian culture.

**Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)**

The zeal to maintain power is blended with *Islamic oppression*. The Islamic regime aims above all to protect the values of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Christianity is considered a condemnable Western influence, with evangelical Christians being particularly considered a Zionist influence as well and a constant threat to the Islamic identity of the Republic. Only the historical communities of Armenians and Assyrians are accepted as Christian by the regime, although they are treated as second class citizens as well. Any other form of Christianity is treated as a dangerous Western influence, which explains why many Christians, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, are convicted for crimes against national security.

**Organized corruption and crime (Medium)**

Imprisoned Christians – especially converts – are sometimes offered release on bail. This often involves large amounts of money - reportedly varying between 2,000 and 200,000 USD - forcing the Christians or their families to hand over title deeds of homes and sometimes businesses. Persons released on bail do not always know how long their property will be retained. This uncertainty can silence them due to fear of losing their family's property. The Iranian regime puts pressure (sometimes with threats) on active Christians who were arrested for their house-church or evangelistic activities to leave the country and hence forfeit their bail (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period*).

**Clan oppression (Medium)** Iran has an honor and shame culture, especially present in the rural areas. In addition, Iran has a multicultural population with some ethnic groups having strong group identities. The Iranian regime puts pressure on all non-Shia and even some (Shia) Sufi groups. This can lead to additional pressure on converts to Christianity within these groups.

### Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)

The Iranian authorities like to highlight the presence of representatives of the Armenian and Assyrian churches in the media and in international settings to portray a positive impression of the country's religious tolerance. These church representatives make public statements about "the freedom all Christians enjoy", while in fact just a small section of the Christian community enjoys a very limited level of freedom. These statements are often used to delegitimize other Christian denominations (mostly Protestant converts from a Muslim background) who do not conform to the government's restrictions and who want to exercise their religious freedom to a greater degree.

### Drivers of persecution

Iran:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	MEDIUM			VERY STRONG	MEDIUM
Government officials	Very strong							Very strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders				Medium	Medium				
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Medium				
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak								
One's own (extended) family	Medium			Medium					
Political parties	Strong								
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	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

- **Government officials (Very strong):** These are responsible for the many arrests and sentencing of Christians, especially converts from Islam. State security services monitor all Christian groups closely, even the officially recognized historical communities of Armenian and Assyrian Christians. Through this close monitoring and arrest of those involved in evangelization, the government applies pressure to ensure that no Christian is involved in proselytizing Muslims.



- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Iran is headed by Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who rules in accordance with the *velayat-e faqih* ("the guardianship of the Islamic jurist"), the system of governance that underpins the Shia regime. High ranking Shia clerics fulfill key roles within the Iranian government, while local Muslim clerics sometimes incite violence against minority groups.
- **Political parties (Strong):** The Islamic right-wing politicians (Principlists) dominate the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the Guardian Council, which has the power to veto all legislation from the parliament. As long as the right-wing regards Iran as an Islamic country for Shiite Muslims threatened by Western (Christian) countries and culture, Christians, especially converts, will be persecuted.
- **Paramilitary groups (Strong):** The Principlists strengthen their support base through the Revolutionary Guard's volunteer militia, the Basij. This fanatical right-wing paramilitary group is well-known for its loyalty to the Supreme Leader. The militia has offices and bases all over the country, securing support for the Principlists and acting violently against all enemies of the state (including Christians) if called upon.
- **Citizens (Weak) / (Extended) Family (Medium):** Although Iranian society is much more moderate than its leadership, religious families will often put pressure on family members converting from Islam to Christianity.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Dictatorial paranoia and Islamic oppression are blended in Iran. Ousting other ideologies and religions helps the leading Iranian clerics maintain power and serves their aim of having a country ruled according to Shia Islam. In addition, according to the BTI 2020 Country Report, high-ranking "clerics and their family members (the so-called *Aghazadeh-ha*) ... hold monopolies in lucrative areas of the economy and are widely involved in illegal practices, such as corruption, smuggling and tax evasion". The same document reports that "the state sector (state-owned and semi-state-owned companies) accounts for about 80% of Iran's economic activity, while the private and cooperative sectors account for only 20%.", indicating the major role played by the state authorities and the enormous (economic) interests of those in power ([BTI 2020 Country Report Iran](#), p. 19).

#### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Medium):** The government uses the bail-system in such a way that it is purposely impoverishing prosecuted Christians and encouraging them to leave the country. It has been reported that some government officials use the system to enrich themselves ([The Guardian, 28 November 2016](#)).

#### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Depending on the specific ethnic group, ethnic group leaders can play a significant role in encouraging hostility towards converts to Christianity from those groups.

- ***One's own (extended) family (Medium):*** Family members sometimes feel they have to protect the honor of their family, clan or tribe if another family member converts to Christianity. This can especially be the case for female converts.

#### **Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism**

- ***Religious leaders of other churches / Ethnic group leaders (Medium):*** The Armenian and Assyrian ethnic Christian minorities have altogether three representatives in the Iranian parliament. They tend to depict Iran as a free country where minorities have equal rights with all other citizens. They even go so far as praising the Iranian government and security services for protecting other ethnic Christians abroad, while Christians in their own country are sentenced to lengthy prison sentences. However, due to government pressure, this is probably the only way to survive as an ethnic Christian minority under the current regime.

### **Areas where Christians face most difficulties**

Government control is highest in urban areas, while rural areas are less monitored. However, the anonymity of urban areas gives Christians more freedom to organize meetings and activities than in rural areas, in which social control is higher.

### **Christian communities and how they are affected**

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** This group consists of Christian expatriates from the Far East (e.g. Philippines, South Korea) and the West, of whom most have a Catholic, Lutheran or Presbyterian background. Of the small number of churches, some expatriate churches have been forced to shut down after local converts with an Islamic background started attending. Joint annual prayer meetings between church leaders of different denominations were also cancelled in the past due to pressure from Iran's security apparatus. The numbers of expatriate Christians nowadays are reportedly very low (less than 1,000).

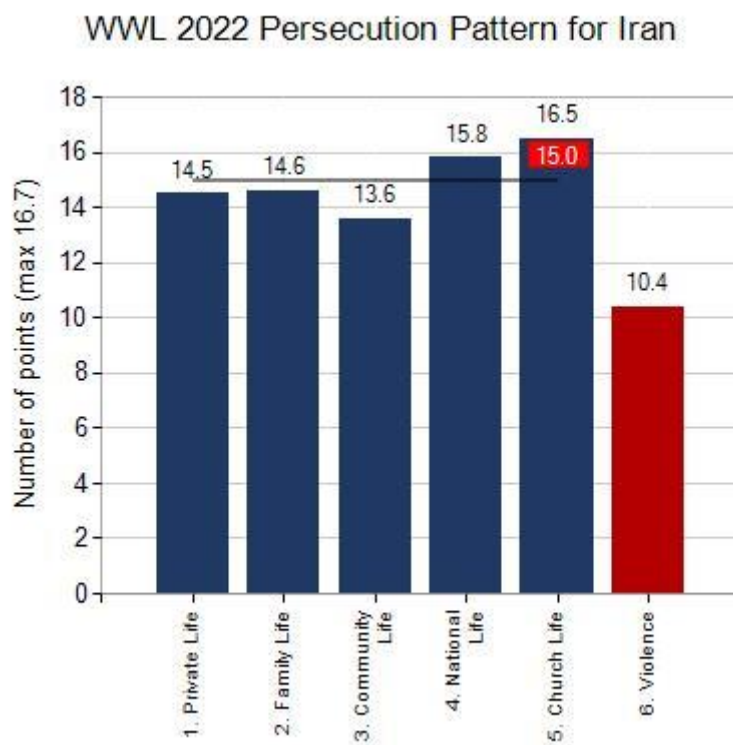
**Historical Christian communities:** Historical ethnic Christian minorities such as the Armenian and Assyrian Christians are relatively free to practice their beliefs. They are allowed to preach to fellow countrymen in their own language, but it is forbidden to minister to people with a Muslim background (speaking Persian) or have them attend church services. Although formally recognized and protected by law, they face legalized discrimination and are treated as second-class citizens. Besides this, they will face imprisonment, physical abuse, harassment and discrimination if they do reach out to Muslims.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts from Islam to Christianity constitute the largest category in the country. They bear the brunt of persecution carried out by the government and to a lesser extent by their (extended) families and society. In contrast to the historical churches, the government sees them as an attempt by Western countries to [undermine](#) Islam and the Islamic regime of Iran (World Watch Monitor, 12 December 2016). Baptism is seen as a public declaration of one's denunciation of Islam and is therefore forbidden. Also, the majority of children born to converts are automatically registered as Muslims. In the past, especially the leaders of Christian convert groups were prosecuted; but since 2014 an increasing number of

non-leaders have received similar charges and long prison terms for crimes against national security. Due to such high pressure, converts have to be very careful and many of them practice their faith isolated from other Christians. There is also a growing community of Iranian Christian converts worldwide, as over the years many converts have fled the country and other Iranians have become Christians abroad.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Although it is difficult to make a sharp distinction between this category and the communities of converts, there are Christians belonging to Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal communities. They often have an Armenian, Assyrian, Jewish or a Zoroastrian background. Others include the children and grandchildren of converts from Islam. They face the same severe persecution from the government and are discriminated against by society, especially if they engage in any evangelistic or house-church activities.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Iran shows:

- The average pressure on Christians stayed at an extremely high level (15.0 points), comparable to WWL 2021. The Iranian government is exerting pressure on Christians on a large scale.
- Although all spheres of life (except Community life, where pressure is borderline very high/extreme) show extreme levels of pressure, with pressure by far strongest in Church and National life. This reflects the fact that the pressure is mainly coming from the government. All church life is very much restricted, even for the officially recognized ethnic Christians, who are not allowed to evangelize or even to speak in Persian during their church services.
- The score for violence slightly decreased from 10.6 to 10.4 points in WWL 2022.

## 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 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (4.00 points)**

Security services in Iran monitor social media for Christian-related texts and record such posts as evidence prior to an arrest. Christians have been confronted with private messages and posts during interrogation. Although this mostly concerns converts, there is also a risk for other types of Christians, as sharing Christian messages can be interpreted as acts of proselytization, especially when written in Persian.

In addition, revealing one's faith publicly can lead to extra pressure from society and family, especially within conservative areas and families.

**Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.75 points)**

For all types of Christianity, it can be dangerous to possess Christian materials in Farsi (Persian) – especially in significant quantities – as this would suggest they are for distribution to Muslim background Iranians. Christians from Historical Christian communities are allowed to possess Christian materials in their own language (Armenian or Assyrian).

**Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.75 points)**

Due to the high surveillance of all media, accessing Christian materials comes at a risk. The authorities monitor Christian broadcasts and Internet presence and use them to discover and track converts.

**Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.75 points)**

Particularly Christians from a convert background meeting with other convert Christians or other Christians risk being discovered. It is also risky for foreign Christians to meet with local Christians, especially converts, as security services monitor all movements of foreigners in Iran. Christians having contacts with foreign Christians are seen as a security threat.

#### **Block 1 - further information**

*Even within the Private sphere of life, most pressure stems from persecution by the Iranian government. Because the regime presents itself as the true representation of Islam, many Iranian families have actually distanced themselves from the Islamic faith. Nonetheless, within conservative religious families, especially in rural areas and among ethnic minorities, family pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity can be severe.*

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (4.00 points)**

Adopting a Muslim child is impossible for any category of Christian. Armenians and Assyrians have their own orphanages where they can go and adopt children from their own background. However, if they go to a state orphanage their application to adopt a child will be rejected. A clear example is the case of Lydia - see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period, September 2020*).

### **Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)**

The children of converts are automatically registered as Muslim and have to go through the Islamic-based educational system, which has been further Islamized since the 1979 Revolution. Some converts have tried to oppose this, but this has led to court cases against them and threats against the children involved. Many choose not to engage in this legal dispute for the fear of more persecution. Furthermore, children of Armenian and Assyrian Christians are forced to take Quranic and Islamic classes at elementary school. Courses like “History of Islam”, “Quranic Teachings” and Arabic are mandatory for all post-secondary students regardless of their religion. University application forms require the applicants to indicate their religion. If a Muslim-born individual mentions his/her religion as Christianity, he/she will not be accepted for study at university. Thus, post-secondary education is practically not available to converts with an Islamic background (unless they keep their new faith hidden when they apply).

### **Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (3.50 points)**

Many church leaders and ordinary church members have been imprisoned for long periods and this frequently has a negative impact on their families. Some children are severely traumatized by the absence of their father or mother. Sometimes imprisonment has led to divorce as (non-Christian) spouses were unable to stand the pressure. Such cases cause associated emotional pain for the family.

### **Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (3.50 points)**

Inheritance laws are part of legalized discrimination in the Civil Code of Iran. For example, according to Article 881 of the Civil Code, a non-Muslim cannot inherit property from a Muslim. Even if only one of the heirs of a non-Muslim is Muslim, the latter (regardless of that person’s relationship with or the distance to the deceased) will receive the entire inheritance to the detriment of all other non-Muslim heirs. In practice, this law not only discriminates against religious minorities but also encourages conversion to Islam for material gain.

## Block 2 - further information

*Extreme pressure in the Family sphere of life makes it very difficult for a family to live according to Christian faith and values. From baptism to marriage and funeral, all key family moments are severely hindered and very difficult to celebrate or arrange in a Christian way for converts from Islam to Christianity. In addition, providing a Christian education is hindered or impossible for all Christian communities. It is one of the reasons why many Christians decide to flee Iran.*

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)**

All categories of Christian are monitored in Iran. Iran uses sophisticated technology to monitor its citizens and if people are suspected of running house-churches or engaging in evangelism, they will be shadowed and often harassed in a variety of ways. This monitoring extends beyond the borders of Iran and there are reliable reports of informers in Western countries reporting back to Iranian intelligence on Christian activity.

**Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)**

Converts and other Christians, especially those suspected of evangelism, are frequently summoned for interrogation or are interrogated upon arrest. Some of them have been summoned dozens of times. The aim of the interrogation in these cases is to intimidate the Christians without the bother of having to prosecute and imprison them. However, some of them are imprisoned and prosecuted after these interrogations, depending on the severity of the allegations and the available 'evidence'.

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

All women in Iran have to cover their heads and wearing the hijab is mandatory. Christians have to be sensitive to survive without problems in their communities. Pressure is more intensely felt during certain times of the year, like Islamic religious festivals (Ramadan) or when Christmas and other Christian celebrations coincide with days of mourning for Shia Muslims. Especially converts, if known, can face daily harassment from neighbors, employers, colleagues and others.

**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). (3.75 points)**

The state controls more than 80% of the economy directly and doing business in Iran is very much affected by clientelism and cronyism. Those belong to Historical Christian communities, such as Armenians and Assyrians, will face discrimination when doing business, while other types of Christian do not stand a chance of conducting business in Iran at all.

### **Block 3 - further information**

*It is difficult for Christians in Iran to participate in daily community life, particularly for converts from Islam to Christianity. Christians experience discrimination in both the public and private sector, especially because most of the economy is controlled by the state. Even officially recognized Christians have to participate in state approved religious ceremonies. Women and girls belonging to the historical Christian communities have to veil themselves, even in their own schools.*

## **Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere**

### **Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)**

There is no freedom of speech in Iran and criticizing the government can have severe consequences. Armenian and Assyrian Christians have to be careful not to criticize the government or to state anything that might be interpreted as an act of evangelism. Convert and other Christians already have to operate very carefully in private, let alone when it comes to expressing views in public.

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

National media in Iran is carefully controlled and does not allow alternative opinions or beliefs to be promoted. At various times state officials will speak up against Christians (typically referring to "Zionism" and house-churches) and this will initiate a wave of hate-speech against Christians. Hate-speech against Iranian Christians, especially Protestants, remained at a high level during the WWL 2022 reporting period in the form of multimedia material published by the government and anti-Christian rhetoric expressed by imams.

### **Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial. (4.00 points)**

It is difficult to monitor judicial prosecutions of Christians in Iran and it is likely that a significant number of faith-related cases against Christians will remain unknown because the victims are forced into silence. Even the UN Special Rapporteur and his two most recent predecessors have not been allowed to visit the country.

### **Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)**

Minorities in Iran are severely discriminated against and higher positions in both government and society are only given to Shia Muslims. All Christians are banned from public offices, except for three seats reserved for Armenian/Assyrian Christians in parliament.



**Block 4 - further information**

*Although officially recognized in the Constitution, even the historical Armenian and Assyrian Christian communities are severely hindered in participating in the National sphere of life. There is almost no room for Christians in any official position, as being a (Shia) Muslim is often a key requirement. While it is impossible for converts to Christianity to establish any sort of NGO or civil society organization, the historical Christian communities are forced to organize their own cultural groups behind closed doors and out of the public eye and are forbidden from letting any Iranian Muslim enter their premises. Other subjects of legalized discrimination include employment, military service and inheritance laws, among others ([Article 18, 26 April 2021](#)).*

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)**

Many (if not all) public church services are monitored by the secret police. Armenians and Assyrians, while under surveillance, have not been hindered from gathering, as long as they conduct their services in their own languages and do not welcome Muslim-background Christians to their meetings and activities. Only four Protestant Persian-speaking congregations remain in the country. These congregations are prohibited from accepting converts from Islam to Christianity, are not allowed to accept visitors nor can they take on any new members. All other Persian-speaking churches - both Catholic and Protestant – have been forcibly closed down in recent years. Severe surveillance of house-churches leads to high levels of fear among those attending.

### **Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)**

All churches are forbidden to welcome Persians on a permanent basis. This began as a security strategy in 2008-2010. Churches were visited by security officials or church leaders were summoned to government offices. They were told to supply lists of attendees and refuse entry to ethnic Persians. The Persian language was forbidden for use in church services. Those leaders who refused to comply were put under great pressure and have been forced to leave the country. This policy has not changed and all remaining churches comply with it, knowing that integrating converts will not be accepted.

### **Block 5.10: Christians have been hindered in training their own religious leaders. (4.00 points)**

The Armenian and Assyrian (and Catholic and Anglican) churches are able to appoint clergy trained outside of the country. Non-traditional groups and house-churches, however, have to rely on more informal training. The targeting of church leaders, either by imprisonment or forced emigration, has resulted in a lack of experienced teachers remaining in the country. Christian media and Internet outreach tries to address this deficiency, but the growth and discipleship of the church in Iran has undoubtedly been hindered through state oppression and interference.

**Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (4.00 points)**

Expatriate churches which had established schools, hospitals and other social and humanitarian institutions were forced to hand over their possessions to the Islamic government after the 1979 Revolution. Since then, they have not been allowed to carry out such activities. Protestant and non-traditional churches followed the same fate in 1990s. The only remaining church institutions and associations (which even receive financial subsidies from the state) belong to the historical Armenian Orthodox and Assyrian Chaldean churches. However, usually the heads of Armenian and Assyrian schools are Muslim. Furthermore, following the Revolution, the number of Armenian and Assyrian teachers in these schools has significantly reduced.

**Block 5 - further information**

*Church life remains the most limited sphere of life with only churches with Armenian, Assyrian or expatriate Christian members being able to function officially at all. Since the Revolution of 1979, no new churches have been built in Iran. Churches are not allowed to use Persian in their services or publish Christian material in Persian, making it de facto impossible for Iranians to join in worship, even if they dared to visit a church. In fact, the only visible churches in Iran are the ones that are useful in paying lip service to the regime in upholding its international image of religious tolerance.*

## 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.

Iran: Violence Block question		WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
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?	19	17
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	49	110
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?	16	44
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	3	21
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	30	10
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	114	240
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?	14	75
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?	15	28

6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	90	60
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000*

In the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** The physical elimination of Christians is not something that the pragmatic government of Iran is willing to do or can politically afford. Gradual and silent elimination is their preferred choice.
- **Churches attacked:** House-churches have been raided by the security forces and Christian cemeteries have been deliberately damaged on grounds of faith.
- **Christians arrested:** The number of arrested Christians decreased compared to WWL 2021. There was no wave of widespread arrests, although smaller crackdowns took place during the reporting period. The fall in the number of arrests is probably because the COVID-19 pandemic measures significantly decreased the number of Christian activities, hence creating less opportunities to arrest Christians. The COVID-19 crisis probably also occupied the government in other ways, while the Iranian security services had their hands full with silencing and dealing with the protests and strikes that started in July 2021.
- **Christians attacked:** Many arrested Christians have been beaten, (sexually) harassed or been put under severe pressure during interrogations. Methods include solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, prolonged interrogation, threats to bring harm to family members (including rape) and death threats to the individuals involved or their family members.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Christians have been forced to hand over their title deeds to pay the high sums of bail after arrest. Often Christians forfeit their title deeds when fleeing the country out of fear of otherwise receiving lengthy prison sentences.
- **Christians forced to flee:** it is estimated that at least 90 Iranian Christians had to relocate within the country for faith-related (safety) reasons. In addition, although it is impossible to know exactly how many Iranians flee the country each year, it is estimated that at least 1000 Christians have fled the country. Reliable sources claim that the number of refugees continued to increase during the WWL 2022 reporting period.

## 5 Year trends

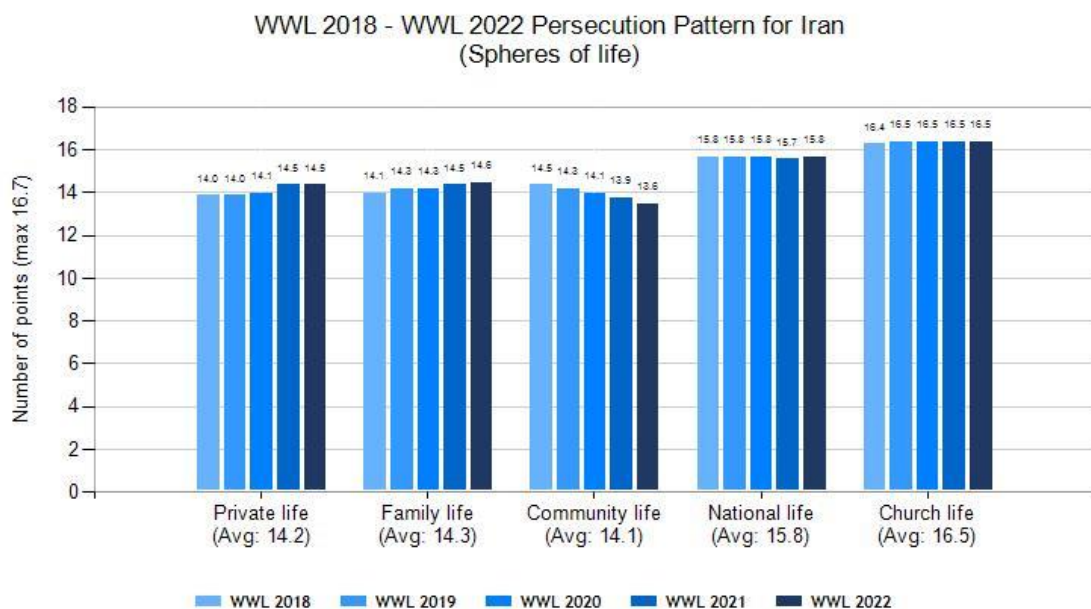
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has been constant at an extreme level of 14.9/15.0 points over the last five reporting periods.

Iran: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	15.0
2021	15.0
2020	14.9
2019	15.0
2018	15.0

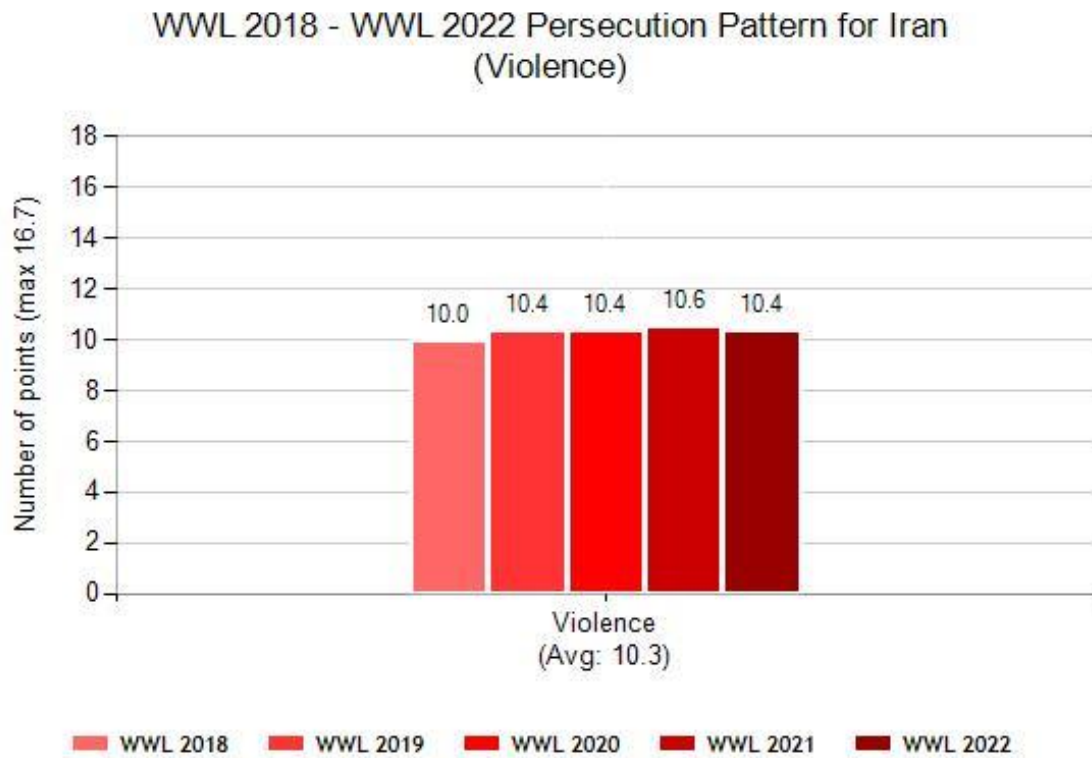
## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that all *spheres of life* have experienced extreme levels of pressure in the last five WWL reporting periods. Levels of pressure remained more or less stable in most spheres of life, with *National* and *Church life* scoring highest. Pressure in *Community life* has shown a slight decrease over the past five years, partly reflecting a growing apathy among the Iranian population towards Islam and the regime.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The chart below shows that the score for violent incidents recorded in Iran has not changed dramatically over the reporting periods. For the last four reporting periods, it has been stable at the very high level of 10.4 - 10.6 points. The scores are mainly coming from incidents where Christians have been detained or sentenced, and where Christians' houses and house-churches have been raided. In addition, many Christians, both from Armenian/Assyrian and convert background, fled the country because of persecution.



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Iranian women have little individual legal protection, making the situation particularly precarious for Christian women detained for their faith. According to some estimates, the majority of house-church members in Iran are women, as the domestic setting provides more opportunities for them to participate in ministry and leadership. While this has allowed many women to fulfil their spiritual calling, it has also made them more vulnerable. They risk being arrested and sexually harassed by the authorities during interrogation and imprisonment. Shaming women in this way is an effective way to stain their reputation and harm their social status, and can damage their chances of finding work.

With many churches forced to shut down and Christians increasingly isolated, some Christian women, particularly Muslim background converts, are forced to marry Muslims. This pressure from family and local community affects both women and girls; it is possible for girls as young as nine to [legally be married](#) (US State Department Human Rights Report for 2020, October 2021). If a female convert is an already-married mother, it is highly likely that the custody of the children will be taken from her in order to ensure the children are raised in an Islamic way. A country expert shares: “Forced separation of children from Christian mothers is one of the most terrifying acts for believer women.” Converts may also be placed under house-arrest and denied access to Christian community.

Within marriages, Christian women are unprotected against sexual abuse and domestic violence; authorities consider such issues a private matter and legislative justice is lacking. There is an explicit restriction on a woman becoming the head of a household or the head of a family. While rape is illegal, a rape victim must present multiple eyewitnesses, accounting for a women’s testimony being worth half of a man’s.

This lack of legal protection against violence creates impunity for perpetrators of the violent religious persecution of Christian women in both private and public spheres. Since Iranian women are not free to travel on their own, fleeing a dangerous situation and finding sheltered accommodation becomes problematic.

At a most basic level, Iranian law provides that [a woman who appears in public](#) without appropriate Islamic attire may be sentenced to flogging and being fined (Amnesty International, 28 May 2019). [Female activists](#) against the compulsory hijab have been imprisoned, fined, and flogged (International Christian Concern, 22 March 2021).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Despite the majority of house-church members now being women, more men are arrested, prosecuted, sentenced by the government, and often imprisoned for many years experiencing physical and mental abuse while detained. Men are more often arrested in urban areas, whereas in rural regions they are forced to flee the area and can be forced out of their homes. Lengthy imprisonments can cost families dearly; sometimes the strain and emotional pain caused by separation leads to divorce and child trauma.



Men are usually the primary providers for their families, especially if they have young children. When converting to Christianity, men risk losing their jobs, particularly if they have been arrested. If they apply for a business registration or trade permit and the officer discovers their Christian faith, the application is likely to be turned down. This puts extra financial and psychological pressure on the families. Younger converts may be banned from continuing with their education upon discovery of their faith.

When single Christian men are under acute stress through monitoring, threats (including the threat of apostasy) and harassment, they are likely to flee the country, which naturally impacts the family emotionally and financially. In contrast to women, men are not seen as 'misguided', but as willfully making wrong choices. Thus, their punishment is harsher, and they are more likely to suffer physical abuse, torture and longer prison sentences. When Christian men are forced to flee, it weakens the Church, depriving it of potentially experienced and mature male leaders.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Bahai, Sunni, Sufi (Dervish) Muslims and other religious minorities (for example, the Yarsanis) are also persecuted in Iran. Although no Christian has been killed by the regime for many years, most probably out of fear of the ensuing international consequences, many dissidents from other groups have been executed - mainly on charges of terrorism (instead of "apostasy"). Ethnic minorities such as the Kurds, Baloch and Iranian Arabs face government suspicion and discrimination as well.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020):

- "Iran Human Rights and other human rights activists continued to report a disproportionately large number of executions of Sunni prisoners, particularly Kurds, Baluchis, and Arabs." (page 14).
- "The government bars Baha'is from all government employment and forbids Baha'i participation in the governmental social pension system. Baha'is may not receive compensation for injury or crimes committed against them and may not inherit property. A religious fatwa from the supreme leader encourages citizens to avoid all dealings with Baha'is." (page 10).
- "Activists and NGOs reported Yarsani activists and community leaders continued to be subject to detention or disappearance for engaging in awareness-raising regarding government practices or discrimination against the Yarsani community." (page 20).

Other examples are:

- In the first nine months of 2021, the Iranian regime executed at least 267 people ([Iran HRM, 7 October 2021](#)).
- In August 2021, it was reported that at least 52 executions took place in July 2021 alone. The number of executions seems to have increased following the election of the new president ([Iran HRM, 10 August 2021](#))

- In February 2021, Iranian security forces dealt violently with protests in Saravan, a city in the Baluchestan province. At least 40 Baluchi citizens were killed ([Iran HRM, 9 December 2021](#))
- In November 2020, 50 Bahai homes were raided by officers of the Intelligence Ministry in four provinces. Although belongings were confiscated, no reasons for the raids were given. ([Iran HRM, 22 November 2020](#))

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians - as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

As long as the current Islamic regime keeps control of all government institutions and keeps a firm grip on the Iranian economy, it is unlikely things will really change in Iran. However, an increasing number of Iranians do not trust the regime anymore and are openly calling for change. A move away from state religion towards a form of secularism might be an option - seeing as the influence of secularism is clearly growing - however, this influence is still too weak to expect any real change in the near future.

### Dictatorial paranoia

As more interaction with the wider world becomes possible (via the Internet and also through contact with the thousands of Iranians abroad), the security services are likely to intensify their monitoring. As a result, religious minorities such as Christians (and adherents of Bahai) are likely to be more closely watched - especially those with contacts to Western co-religionists. Christian media and websites in Persian are reported to be particularly closely watched.

### Clan oppression

Although more and more Iranians are dissatisfied with the regime and subsequently Islam, it is likely that hostile social attitudes to Christians and especially converts from Islam to Christianity will remain common, especially in rural areas. Nonetheless, in contrast to other Middle Eastern countries, systematic state persecution and discrimination will remain the major challenge to be faced by Christians and other religious minorities.

### Organized corruption and crime

The Iranian government will probably continue with its practice of financially ruining arrested Christians by setting disproportionately high levels of bail. It is likely that the Iranian authorities are also using these violations of the rights of Christians to enrich themselves.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: BTI 2020 Country Report Iran - <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/IRN>
- Drivers of persecution description: The Guardian, 28 November 2016 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2016/nov/28/iranian-judicial-authorities-attempt-arrest-of-mp-mahmoud-sadeghi>

- Christian communities and how they are affected: undermine - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/12/iran-church-retreat-centre-confiscated-for-being-funded-by-cia/>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: Article 18, 26 April 2021 - <https://articleeighteen.com/analysis/8506/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: legally be married - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IRAN-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: a woman who appears in public - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/05/iran-abusive-forced-veiling-laws-police-womens-lives/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Female activists - <https://www.persecution.org/2021/03/22/life-christian-iranian-women/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Iran HRM, 7 October 2021 - <https://iran-hrm.com/2021/10/07/high-number-of-iran-executions-in-2021/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Iran HRM, 10 August 2021 - <https://iran-hrm.com/2021/08/10/irans-executions-surging-with-ebrahim-raisis-taking-office/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Iran HRM, 9 December 2021 - <https://iran-hrm.com/2021/12/09/human-rights-situation-in-iran-in-2021/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Iran HRM, 22 November 2020 - <https://iran-hrm.com/2020/11/22/iranian-security-agents-raid-50-bahai-homes-in-four-provinces/>

## 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=Iran>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Iran>
- [Iran – The reality for Christians – revised May 2021](#)

## External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: Iran – The reality for Christians – revised May 2021 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Iran-The-reality-for-Christians-Revised-May-2021-Final.pdf>