

World
Watch
Research

Niger: Full Country Dossier

January 2022



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2022

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| World Watch List 2022 | 3 |
| Copyright note..... | 4 |
| Sources and definitions..... | 4 |
| Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic..... | 5 |
| External Links - Introduction | 5 |
| WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Niger | 5 |
| Brief country details | 5 |
| Dominant persecution engines and drivers | 6 |
| Brief description of the persecution situation | 6 |
| Summary of international obligations and rights violations | 6 |
| Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period | 7 |
| Specific examples of positive developments | 7 |
| External Links - Situation in brief | 7 |
| WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Niger | 8 |
| Links for general background information | 8 |
| Recent history | 8 |
| Political and legal landscape | 9 |
| Religious landscape | 10 |
| Economic landscape..... | 11 |
| Social and cultural landscape | 12 |
| Technological landscape | 13 |
| Security situation | 14 |
| Trends analysis | 15 |
| External Links - Keys to understanding | 16 |
| WWL 2022: Church information / Niger | 17 |
| Christian origins..... | 17 |
| Church spectrum today..... | 17 |
| External Links - Church information..... | 17 |
| WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Niger | 18 |
| Reporting period: 1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021 | 18 |
| Position on the World Watch List | 18 |
| Persecution engines | 18 |

Drivers of persecution 19

Areas where Christians face most difficulties 21

Christian communities and how they are affected 21

The Persecution pattern..... 22

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life 22

Violence..... 27

5 Year trends 28

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female 30

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male 31

Persecution of other religious minorities..... 32

Future outlook..... 32

External Links - Persecution Dynamics..... 32

Further useful reports.....33

External Links - Further useful reports..... 33



Woman in Niger (c) Alamy

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

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

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

Copyright note

This document is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2021 Open Doors International.

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 / Niger

Brief country details

| Niger: Population (UN estimate for 2021) | Christians | Chr% |
|--|------------|------|
| 25,006,000 | 64,700 | 0.3 |

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

Map of country



| Niger: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|-------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2022 | 68 | 33 |
| WWL 2021 | 62 | 54 |
| WWL 2020 | 60 | 50 |
| WWL 2019 | 52 | 58 |
| WWL 2018 | 45 | 58 |

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Challenges that Christians face in Niger are increasing every year. The families of converts from Islam try to make them renounce Christianity by threats or use of force. Christians have been hindered from celebrating Christian weddings in border regions under Islamist control. Communal worship and meetings of Christians have to be conducted with caution in such areas due to the threat of violence from militant groups. Christians are not treated equally in the public sector, are rarely able to secure employment within local government services and are frequently denied promotion. Christians have occasionally been hindered from gathering for meetings and the legal process for the registration of churches is very long and difficult.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians can be harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians often experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians can face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christian converts lose custody of their children and inheritance rights (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings and to receive licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- [May 2021](#): A Catholic church was vandalized during an attack by Islamic militants on Fantio village in the region of Tillabéri. The militants vandalized a statue and burned hymnbooks among other church property (ACN, 2 July 2021).
- In parts of Niger where there is a Christian population, gathering in churches is dangerous because most communities have been threatened by militants for doing so, resulting in killing or destruction of the village.

Specific examples of positive developments

The international community - especially US forces - are assisting Niger in combatting jihadist groups in the country and region.

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 against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: May 2021 - <https://acnuk.org/news/niger-jihadist-attack-on-christians-in-tillaberi/>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Niger

Links for general background information

| Name | Quote Reference | Link | Last accessed on |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Amnesty International country report (Niger is not included) | AI 2021 | https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/ | |
| BBC News country profile | BBC country profile | https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662 | 6 September 2021 |
| Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020 | BTI 2020 | https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-NER.html | 6 September 2021 |
| CIA World Factbook | CIA Factbook | https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/niger/ | 6 September 2021 |
| Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020 | EIU 2020 | https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf | 6 September 2021 |
| FFP's Fragile States Index 2021 | FSI 2021 | https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/ | 6 September 2021 |
| Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Niger is not included) | Freedom House/Democracy 2021 | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores | |
| Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index | Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021 | https://freedomhouse.org/country/niger/freedom-world/2021 | 6 September 2021 |
| Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Niger is not included) | Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020 | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores | |
| Garda World country report | Garda World | https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/niger | 6 September 2021 |
| Human Rights Watch World Report 2021 (Niger is not included) | HRW 2021 | https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021 | |
| Internet World Stats 2021 | IWS 2021 | https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ne | 6 September 2021 |
| RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index | World Press Freedom 2020 | https://rsf.org/en/niger | 6 September 2021 |
| Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index | CPI 2020 | https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/niger | 6 September 2021 |
| UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators | HDI 2020 | http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NER | 6 September 2021 |
| US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports | IRFR 2020 | https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/niger/ | 6 September 2021 |
| USCIRF 2021 country reports (Niger is not included) | USCIRF 2021 | https://www.uscifr.gov/countries | |
| World Bank country report | World Bank | https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger | 6 September 2021 |

Recent history

Niger declared independence from France in 1960. Since then, the country has seen at least four military coups. Despite the improvements since Mahamadou Issoufou came to power in 2011, there have been concerns about the 'securitization' of Niger's foreign policy and domestic politics. The country is battling against various Islamic militant groups: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) on its northern western border with Mali, and Boko Haram on its southern border with Nigeria.

Islamists are by their very ideology opposed to the secular nature of the government. Many imams give *khoutbas* (sermons) opposing Boko Haram and other militant groups, especially the Shiite imams who are in the minority. These imams do not want to see what has been happening in Nigeria taking place in Niger, and they support the US-led operations against Islamic militancy. However, in recent years there has been an increasing adherence to stricter Islamic practice in Niger's cities, especially in places like Zinder, Maradi and Diffa, which have long been connected to the Islamic communities in northern Nigeria. There is therefore concern about the spread of more violent Islamic groups like Boko Haram. Because of the close proximity of the cities (just mentioned) to Boko Haram's chief area of operations in northern Nigeria, some religious leaders in Niger have taken a public stance against the group, while other religious leaders fear the potential backlash from doing so. While no radical Islamic movement within Niger has yet emerged to challenge the government, the possibility of this happening in the near future cannot be discounted, especially given the external pressure on imams and vulnerable local leaders exerted by Boko Haram and other groups like MUJWA.

There were major domestic political incidents in 2018 that pitted the government against human rights defenders and activists, largely involving the government's use of repressive measures. Arbitrarily detaining a group of human rights defenders for nearly four months after their arrest in March 2018, Nigerien authorities opened the [prosecution](#) proceedings against them in an attempt to silence dissenting voices and ban peaceful demonstrations (Business and Human Rights Resource Center, 24 July 2018). A similar case occurred again when activists were [arrested](#) while protesting in March 2020 (Amnesty International - AI, 30 September 2020).

Since 2018, there has been a rise in the levels of violence (see below: *Security situation*). In 2019 and 2020, the country faced numerous jihadists attacks. Since the beginning of 2021, Niger witnessed an uptick in jihadist violence especially in the 'tri-border' region between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, with an estimated 300 people being killed in attacks in the first three months. The militant groups are constantly expanding their operations and the government seems to have no effective way of bringing the situation under control.

Political and legal landscape

Politics in Niger takes place within the framework of a semi-presidential representative democratic republic, with the President of Niger as head of state and the Prime Minister as head of government, which is established as a multi-party system. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the National Assembly.

Politics, tribe and militancy have always been intertwined in Niger's political landscape. In recent years there has been an improvement in civil liberties and political rights in Niger. The turning point occurred in 2009-2010 when the president in office, Tandja, announced his intention to alter the Constitution of Niger's Fifth Republic via a referendum, which included extending his presidential term by three years. However, the major opposition groups opposed and boycotted the referendum. In February 2010, amid pressure from the international community, the army overthrew the government in a coup. In the autumn of 2010, a new Constitution was passed through a national referendum and on 31 January 2011 Mahamadou Issoufou of the Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) won the presidential election against former Prime Minister Seyni Oumarou (National Movement for a Developing Society- MNSD - Nassara). President Issoufou's new government assumed power in April 2011.

Since then, political and civil groups have been able to assemble peacefully, the situation for journalists and the freedom of the press has improved, and Niger is on the way to forming a multi-party democracy. This development is also of major importance to Christians in the country, especially since the region is otherwise very much influenced by Boko Haram and AQIM activity. However, the 2016 elections did not advance the consolidation of democratic rule and corruption remains endemic. Despite these setbacks, the electoral outcome was accepted by all political parties. General elections were held again in Niger on 27 December 2020 to elect the President and National Assembly. As no presidential candidate received a majority of the vote, a second round was held on 21 February 2021. [Mohamed Bazoum was declared the winner](#) in the second round with 55.67% of the vote. He was the former Interior Minister and the preferred successor and right-hand man of outgoing President Mahamadou Issoufou. He assumed office on 2 April 2021, marking the the country's first peaceful transition of power be-

tween two democratically elected heads of state. However, protests were staged by opposition groups following the election and more than 400 people were arrested (Al-Jazeera, 22 March 2021).

The legal landscape in Niger remains discriminatory towards women and girls, particularly in respect to marriage ([CEDAW, 2015](#)). Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 76% of girls married before 18 ([Girls Not Brides, 2021](#)). Whilst the legal age for marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys, underage marriage can occur with parental consent. The government has introduced campaigns to end child marriage, although progress remains slow ([OECD, 2019](#); [Girls Not Brides, 2021](#)). Legislation is further insufficient in regards to domestic violence and marital rape; many victims choose not to report crimes for fear of stigma and retaliation. Making it challenging for women to escape abusive marriages, divorce and custody laws also favor men ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Religious landscape

| Niger: Religious context | Number of adherents | % |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians | 64,700 | 0.3 |
| Muslim | 24,144,000 | 96.6 |
| Hindu | 0 | 0.0 |
| Buddhist | 0 | 0.0 |
| Ethno-religionist | 771,000 | 3.1 |
| Jewish | 0 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 8,200 | 0.0 |
| Atheist | 210 | 0.0 |
| Agnostic | 13,400 | 0.1 |
| Other | 4,900 | 0.0 |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> | | |

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

Niger is a Muslim majority nation. As can be seen from the above table, an estimated 96.5% of the country's population follows Islam. Most Muslims in Niger are members of either the Tijaniya or Qadiriya Sufi orders, although Islamists seek to disassociate the population from Sufism and encourage Salafism. Additionally, there are smaller Islamic groups in Niger, including the Kalikato, who have a belief system like Boko Haram in rejecting all influences from the West. Indeed, the influence of Boko Haram seems to be spreading from northern Nigeria into Niger.

Despite the government's attempts to control what is taught in the many madrassas in the country, there is concern that these could be playing a role in the radicalization of the youth. Any such radicalization is likely to make life more difficult for Christians in the country, especially as the whole Sahel region is already under serious jihadist threat.

Economic landscape

According to World Bank's [2021 Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa](#):

- **Economic growth:** Growth fell strongly from 6.3% in 2019 to 0.8% in 2020. Impacts of COVID-19 such as restrictions on movement and business hours, the closure of the border with Nigeria's, the halting of some investment projects, and violent terrorist attacks undermined economic activity.
- **Inflation:** Inflation was pushed from negative (-2.5%) in 2019 to 3.4% in 2020, due to the adverse effects of the global COVID-19 crisis.
- **Poverty:** Between 2019 and 2020, the share of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day in the 2011 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is estimated to have increased by 1.3 percentage point from 41.6% to 42.9%, owing to the impact of COVID-19 and related economic and social distancing measures.

Niger is one of the poorest countries in Africa. As a landlocked and mostly desert country that is plagued by drought and famine, Niger consistently ranks near the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index. The country's only major exports are crude oil and unrefined uranium. With the exception of an oil refinery in Zinder that opened in November 2011, Niger is otherwise an entirely resource-dependent country. Power lines for electricity and the Internet come from Niger's southern neighbors, Nigeria (electricity), and Benin (Internet cable), along with the majority of oil, agricultural produce, and other commercial products. The agricultural sector contributes about 40% of GDP and provides the livelihood for approximately 80% of the population. There are plans in the international development community to move Niger towards solar power and other innovative energy sources that rely on indigenous solutions.

60% of Niger's economy comes from international aid and for the foreseeable future, this is likely to continue, especially because the international community fears that if Niger's economy fails, it will allow Islamic militants to exploit the situation and become more powerful.

According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI 2020), the influx of refugees from Mali and Nigeria - as well as a growing number of IDPs - are another challenge to the socio-economic growth and has a negative impact on the whole population.

According to World Bank (country overview):

- The COVID-19 pandemic is having a negative impact on Nigerien households, owing primarily to loss of income from layoffs, a drop in remittances, and a decline in human capital endowment. Schools closures are expected to lead to higher dropout rates, especially among girls and the most vulnerable.
- The economy is expected to recover in 2021 due to the reopening of the border with Nigeria, the resumption of projects and the normalization of supply chains. An economic turnaround and growth of 4.7% is anticipated.

- Due to the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak, recent gains in combating poverty are in danger of being wiped out, following a 3% drop in per capita income in 2020. With poverty rising by 1.3%, 685,000 additional people have joined the ranks of the extreme poor. It is estimated that the number of people living in extreme poverty will increase by 300,000 in 2021, owing mainly to population growth. Based on projections, the country will not be able to reduce its poverty rate to pre-COVID-19 levels before end of 2023.
- Niger also remains vulnerable to climate shocks and fluctuations in global non-oil commodity prices.
- Lower oil prices could adversely affect the real sector, public finances, and the balance of payments.

According to Heritage Foundation's [2021 Index of Economic Freedom](#), Niger has a score of 57.3 points, making it 117th in the world and 17th among Sub-Saharan countries.

Women and girls are among the most economically disadvantaged, in part due to reduced access to education and employment (UN Human Development Indicators, HDI 2020). Niger is one of just three countries worldwide where married women require permission from their husband to open a bank account (Georgetown Women Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p. 34). Making it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence, women cannot inherit land under customary law, and under Islamic law women inherit less than men ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to UNDP's HDI 2020 and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hausa 53.1%, Zarma/Songhai 21.2 %, Tuareg 11%, Fulani (Peuhl) 6.5%, Kanuri 5.9%, Gurma 0.8%, Arab 0.4%, Tubu 0.4%, Other/unavailable 0.9% (2006 est.)
- **Main languages:** French (official), Hausa, Djerma
- **Median age:** 15.2 years
- **Urban population:** 16.5%
- **Expected years of schooling:** 6.5 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 30.6%
- **Employment to population ration (15 years and older):** 71.7%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 0.5%
- **Unemployment, youth (15-24 years of age):** 0.6%

According to [UNHCR](#) (accessed 20 June 2021):

Refugees/IDPs: As of May 2021, there were some 586,874 people of concern in Niger, comprising: 300,320 IDPs, 240,527 refugees and 3,048 asylum-seekers, 7,032 people of concern from Burkina Faso, and some 35,659 returnees from Nigeria. UNHCR has also received a total of 6,351 resettlement pledges for the Libya-Niger/Rwanda situation out of which 1,131 confirmed pledges are for the emergency transit mechanism (ETM) Niger evacuees and 450 for refugees registered in Niger. As of 1 January 2021, a total of 2,752 evacuated refugees departed from Niger to resettlement countries.

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

- **Human Development Index:** Niger is ranked 189th out of 189 countries with a value of 0.394
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 62.4 years
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.724
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** 0.642 (this indicates a high level of gender inequality. The GI is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market).

Although the country's official language is French, each tribe and ethnic group has its own language and culture. Eight of the nine presidents since independence in 1960 have been of Hausa or Zarma descent. These two tribes dominate the country and therefore it should not be surprising that Tuaregs have engaged in two major rebellions since the 1990s and early 2000s and that the Songhai tribes were the main targets for recruiting by the radical Islamic group MUJWA. MUJWA, for example, used Songhai traditional symbolism in its recruiting videos. Niger's most fertile areas are also in the Zarma region south of Niamey, and therefore the Zarmas are the wealthiest tribe in the country. The Hausas are descended from the Hausa states that formerly occupied the region in the jihads of the 19th century, so they have a tradition of being in power. The Tuaregs of northern Niger live in the most arid region of the country and are the poorest of the major tribes. While education is not guaranteed in any part of the country, the levels are particularly low in the Tuareg region, especially for women.

These low education levels reflect social norms and gender stereotypes that place women in the roles of wives and mothers ([OECD, 2019](#); [CEDAW, 2015](#)). The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated gender-based vulnerabilities, hampering campaigns against child marriage ([UNICEF, April 2021](#)) and providing the context for domestic violence levels to soar ([USDG, May 2021](#)). Child marriage remains a widespread issue, with parents viewing it as a protective mechanism for daughters against potential predators in a context of poverty, conflict and widespread sexual violence against girls ([Girls Not Brides, 2021](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 13.4% of the population – survey date 31 December 2020
- **Facebook usage:** 2.3 % of the population – survey date 31 December 2020

According to World Bank (country profile):

- **Mobile phone (subscriptions per 100 people):** 40.6
Whilst recent statistics are lacking, a 2015 report by the GSMA indicated a 45% gender gap in mobile phone ownership ([GSMA, 2015, p.14](#)). 2020 statistics on social media usage indicate that this gender gap has not closed, with significantly more male users across Facebook and Instagram than female ones ([Napoleon Cat, December 2020](#)).

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (updated 27 July 2020):

- "A lack of fixed telecoms infrastructure has led to growth in mobile services. Niger's mobile penetration is modest compared to other countries in the region, while fixed broadband penetration is negligible. However, recent investments aimed at extending the reach of fiber-optic infrastructure in Niger will lead to improved internet networks and access. In late 2016 the country was awarded €43.9 million from the African Development Bank (AfDB) to build-out the Trans-Saharan Dorsal optical fiber (SDR) network. Following years of financial difficulties, the state-owned fixed-line operator, Sonitel, was merged with its wholly-owned mobile unit, SahelCom, in late 2016 to form a new entity, Niger Telecom. The merged company secured a global telecom license in November 2017 and is aiming to develop greater efficiency through sharing resources and infrastructure. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 is having a significant impact on the production and supply chains globally and has slowed down the maintenance and upgrade of existing infrastructure in the country. On the other hand, consumer spending on telecoms services and devices is under pressure from the financial effect of large-scale job losses and the consequent restrictions on disposable incomes."

Niger is one of the poorest nations in the world. Its technological infrastructure is poor. Road, schools, and hospitals lack facilities. Christians are concentrated in the main cities and as a result, they are better served with technology compared to those living in rural areas.

Security situation

Security conditions have deteriorated in recent years, particularly in the areas bordering Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali, where armed groups have established bases and carry out repeated attacks against the security forces and civilians. Since 2017, the government has declared a [state of emergency](#) in the Diffa, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions (UNHCR Factsheet, June-July 2021).

The attacks by Boko Haram, Islamic State group (IS) affiliates and other radical Islamic groups continue to cause fear among the Christian community. There is a likelihood that the violence of militant Islamic groups from northern Nigeria (as well as from Mali) could in the long run seriously affect Niger. A major challenge remains the fight against Islamic militancy in the Diffa region. Military confrontation between government troops and Boko Haram has caused a large number of IDPs and a humanitarian disaster. Many Christians who have escaped the conflict are living in IDP camps in Bosso, Yebbi, Maiduguri and Yola. There is also ongoing community violence. Since 2018, there has been an overall rise in the level of violence.

The following list shows a selection of incidents in the first half of 2021:

- In [March 2021](#), suspected jihadists on motorbikes attacked the villages of Intazayene, Bakorat and Wistane, located in the Tahoua region near the border with Mali, killing at least 137 people. Previously, on 15 March 2021, unidentified gunmen had attacked and killed at least 58 civilians returning from a weekly market in the Banibangou department, Tillabéri region, near the Malian border (Andalou Agency, 23 March 2021).
- In [April 2021](#), 19 civilians were killed when armed men raided Gaigorou village in west Niger close to the border with Mali (France24, 18 April 2021).

- In [May 2021](#), a military patrol was ambushed in the Tahoua Region, resulting in the killing of 16 soldiers and the wounding of six more (Al-Jazeera, 3 May 2021).
- In [May 2021](#), the village of Fantio, in the Téra department of the Tillabéri region of Niger, was attacked by unknown gunmen on motorcycles on 12 May. The attack, which left five people dead, also involved deliberate [damage](#) to a church in the village (Africanews, 13 May 2021).
- In [May 2021](#), four civilians and four soldiers were killed during a raid carried out by Boko Haram militants in the town of Diffa, in the Diffa Region. The jihadists used 15 vehicles to attack the town in the late afternoon but were pushed back by security forces after a long gunfight, in which six attackers were killed (Reuters, 30 May 2021).

The lack of human security in the country has affected the Christian community significantly. As the jihadists are targeting Christians as well as the state authorities, Christians have to be careful to keep a low profile. Male and female Christians face different risks against this backdrop of instability and violence. Women and girls are vulnerable to abduction and sexual violence from extremist groups, whereas boys are more prone to being recruited into the ranks of militant groups.

Trends analysis

1) The presence of Boko Haram and other jihadist groups remains a constant threat

In the past five years, the Sahel region has seen a huge increase in violent Islamist attacks and the government of Niger has lost a lot of territory to the jihadists. Taking this territory back might take a significant length of time considering the fact that the country has to deal with the COVID-19 threat as well. Simply put, the presence of Boko Haram and AQIM remains a constant threat both to the state authorities and to Christians in the country and region. As in Burkina Faso and Mali, it is very likely that jihadist group keep expanding and eventually destabilize the government as occurred in Mali which has recently seen two coups in less than one year (2020-2021).

2) Niger has international military support to secure its borders

A considerable part of the southern third of the country is prone to persistent Islamist hostilities. The proximity of radical Islamic groups in the upper north of Nigeria and northern Mali is far from reassuring. The country is not a well-developed democracy with institutions that can deal with crises. Because the region is seeing a proliferation of radical Islamic groups, the UN and Western countries have been supporting the government with military assistance. There are [forces](#) from the USA, France, Germany, Mali, and from other countries in the region actively assisting (CNN, 5 October 2017). However, this is unlikely to be enough if it is not coupled with profound changes in the country in both political and economic ways. With the impact of COVID-19, those changes are unlikely to be possible in the short-term. This presence of international forces might face extreme challenges if the problems in the neighboring countries continue to grow. Jihadist groups are expanding in West Africa in general.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: prosecution - <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/niger-release-of-activists-must-signal-end-to-repression-of-dissenting-voices/>
- Recent history: arrested - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/niger-charges-must-be-dropped-following-release-of-three-activists/>
- Political and legal landscape: Mohamed Bazoum was declared the winner - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/22/nigers-top-court-confirms-mohamed-bazoums-election-win>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2015 - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&Lang=en
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2021 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/niger/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2021 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/niger/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Economic landscape: 2021 Macro Poverty Outlook for sub-Saharan Africa - <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/720441492455091991/mpo-ssa.pdf>
- Economic landscape: 2021 Index of Economic Freedom - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/niger>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/niger>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: CEDAW, 2015 - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&Lang=en
- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF, April 2021 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/covid-19-threat-progress-against-child-marriage-niger>
- Social and cultural landscape: USDG, May 2021 - <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/violence-and-control-lockdown-more-support-needed-women-and-girls-niger>
- Social and cultural landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2021 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/niger>
- Technological landscape: GSMA, 2015, p.14 - <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat, December 2020 - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-niger/2020/12>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Niger-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: state of emergency - file:///C:/Users/davidat/Downloads/UNHCR%20Niger%20-%20Factsheet%20Sahel%20%20June_%20July%202021.pdf
- Security situation: March 2021 - <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/niger-at-least-137-killed-in-attack-near-malian-border/2184831>
- Security situation: April 2021 - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210418-several-civilians-killed-in-armed-raid-on-funeral-village-in-west-niger>
- Security situation: May 2021 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/3/16-soldiers-killed-in-western-niger-ambush>
- Security situation: May 2021 - <https://www.africanews.com/2021/05/13/niger-5-people-killed-during-ramadan-celebrations-in-tillaberi-region/>
- Security situation: damage - <https://barnabasfund.org/news/church-vandalised-during-terrorist-attack-in-niger/>
- Security situation: May 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/boko-haram-militants-kill-8-southeastern-niger-says-defence-ministry-2021-05-30/>
- Trends analysis: forces - <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/04/politics/us-forces-hostile-fire-niger/>

WWL 2022: Church information / Niger

Christian origins

Although there were [missionary expeditions](#) along the Niger River in the 19th century, Christianity did not become established in the country until the 20th century. The Sudan Interior Mission started working in Niger in 1923 and the Evangelical Baptist Mission in 1929. The Roman Catholic Church came to Niger in 1931 from its main mission base in Dahomey (now Benin) and has since set up two dioceses. (Source: Dike K O: *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891*, Anglican History, 1962)

Church spectrum today

| Niger: Church networks | Christians | % |
|--|---------------|--------------|
| Orthodox | 0 | 0.0 |
| Catholic | 21,200 | 32.8 |
| Protestant | 22,400 | 34.6 |
| Independent | 20,800 | 32.1 |
| Unaffiliated | 300 | 0.5 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total (Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals) | 64,700 | 100.0 |
| Evangelical movement | 20,200 | 31.2 |
| Renewalist movement | 22,200 | 34.3 |

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.

Many of the older Protestant and Catholic churches were established by American mission groups. They can be found in all seven departments of Niger: Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri, Zinder and Niamey (the capital). Several independent, non-denominational churches originating from Nigeria exist - especially in the capital Niamey and in the departments of Maradi and Zinder. Outside of the bigger cities and in areas closer to the southern border of the country, Christians with a Muslim background are treated as outcasts by the local communities and at times face violent attacks.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: missionary expeditions - http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike_origins1957.html

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Niger

Reporting period: 1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

| Niger: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|-------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2022 | 68 | 33 |
| WWL 2021 | 62 | 54 |
| WWL 2020 | 60 | 50 |
| WWL 2019 | 52 | 58 |
| WWL 2018 | 45 | 58 |

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

Niger re-entered the WWL top 50 countries with an increase of six points in WWL 2022. The rise was mainly due to the ongoing pressure and violence orchestrated by violent Islamic militants in the Sahel region. Violence by itself rose by over 4 points. Just like in Mali and Burkina Faso, jihadist groups have expanded their areas of influence in the country. In the past, Niger was more or less spared from attacks by radical Islamic groups and the Church was previously not a main target. However, since the WWL 2020 reporting period, the country has been experiencing a series of attacks by Islamic militants. There are also conflicts that have both religious and ethnic dimensions. The unpredictable situation of the country makes Christians vulnerable.

Persecution engines

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

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

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

In Niger, the Muslim population is 96.6% according to WCD 2021 statistics. For most of the population, Islam is regarded as being part of their ethnicity: If you are a Nigerien, you are a Muslim. Anything to the contrary is regarded as betrayal, which causes converts to Christianity in particular to face hostility from their Muslim family and local community if their faith is discovered. The secular nature of the state, which has always meant that state and religion are kept separate, is increasingly under pressure. Muslim religious leaders of the Izala group, a radical Islamic group originating in northern Nigeria, are active in Niger and threatening the freedom of Christians. Other Islamic pressure groups like the Tariqa (“the way” in Arabic – the Sufi way of approaching Allah) are active in certain parts of the country (e.g. in Maradi and Niamey). Izala and Tariqa create pressure on minority religions and on Muslims they consider to be deviating from Islam. Niger has a history of good relations between the majority of Muslim believers and the much smaller minority faiths. Nonetheless, Niger’s battle against Boko Haram has stoked local intercommunal tensions and undermined the security and freedom of Christians in the country.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Ex-President Issoufou made it one of his main priorities to combat corruption within the government. Anti-corruption measures have now become law targeting government officials, their family members, and all political parties. In the same way, there are now laws to counter [conflict of interest](#) issues in awarding contracts; the bribery of public officials by private companies is officially illegal. However, corruption is a problem in the judiciary and impunity is a serious challenge facing the country; office-holders who break the law and engage in corrupt practices attract adverse publicity but are not adequately prosecuted. This situation affects society negatively, including the Christian population.

Drivers of persecution

| Niger: Drivers of persecution | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|----|-----|-----------|-----------|------|----|-----|--------|
| | IO | RN | ERH | CO | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC |
| | VERY STRONG | | | MEDIUM | VERY WEAK | | | | STRONG |
| Government officials | Very weak | | | Very weak | | | | | Medium |
| Ethnic group leaders | Medium | | | Medium | | | | | |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Strong | | | | | | | | |
| Religious leaders of other churches | | | | | Very weak | | | | |
| Violent religious groups | Very strong | | | | | | | | Strong |

| Niger: Drivers of persecution | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|----|-----|--------|-----------|------|----|-----|--------|
| | IO | RN | ERH | CO | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC |
| | VERY STRONG | | | MEDIUM | VERY WEAK | | | | STRONG |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | Strong | | | | | | | | |
| One's own (extended) family | Strong | | | | | | | | |
| Organized crime cartels or networks | Strong | | | | | | | | Strong |

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** This is probably the strongest driver in the country. Radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram and other al-Qaeda affiliated militants attack Westerners, Western-aligned institutions and tourists, soldiers and peacekeepers. Broader society and citizen-mobs have been a major source of persecution for Christians too. They kill Christians and attack churches and Christian schools. The Wahhabis, a radical branch of Islam originating from Saudi Arabia, are regularly preaching opposition to Christianity in public and via mass media (radio and television).
- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** There is a strong link between organized crime and corruption and violent religious groups in the Sahel region. This driver plays a vital role in financing the operations of the jihadists and in making the environment easy for them to operate in.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Non-Christian religious leaders such as Islamists and violent militant leaders of Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa have all combined to threaten, intimidate and persecute Christians in Niger. Also, leaders among such groups as the Fulani are trying to enhance the ancient Islamic pedigree of their ethnic group by cleansing their communities of Christians. At Tunga, in Dosso State, no Christian presence is tolerated by the religious and tribal leaders who have enormous influence in these areas.
- **Extended family (Strong) and ordinary citizens (Strong):** Extended family members in the community oppose and often reject converts to Christianity.
- **Government officials (Very weak):** Many of Niger's government officials are Muslim and some would like to pursue policies and agendas that are discriminatory against Christians and would exclude them from public life. President Issoufou promised to counter the expansion of radical Islamic teaching promoting violence in his February 2016 re-election campaign but no concrete measures were delivered. Furthermore, in some places, some government officials are also subscribers to jihadist ideology.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** Various criminal organizations are operating in the country. Lawlessness and criminal activities are common in the vast uninhabited areas of the country. Some criminal organizations are operating in cooperation with militant groups and persecute Christians.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Radical Islamic groups in the country earn money through drug trafficking and kidnapping to purchase weapons. Thus, violent religious groups in Niger are also drivers of organized crime and corruption.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Corruption continues to be a problem in the judiciary and impunity is a serious challenge facing the country.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The areas outside the main cities, especially outside the capital city, are the main areas where Christians experience persecution. Taking advantage of the COVID-19 crisis, Islamic militants have been able to expand their areas of influence, which has put more Christians under pressure as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

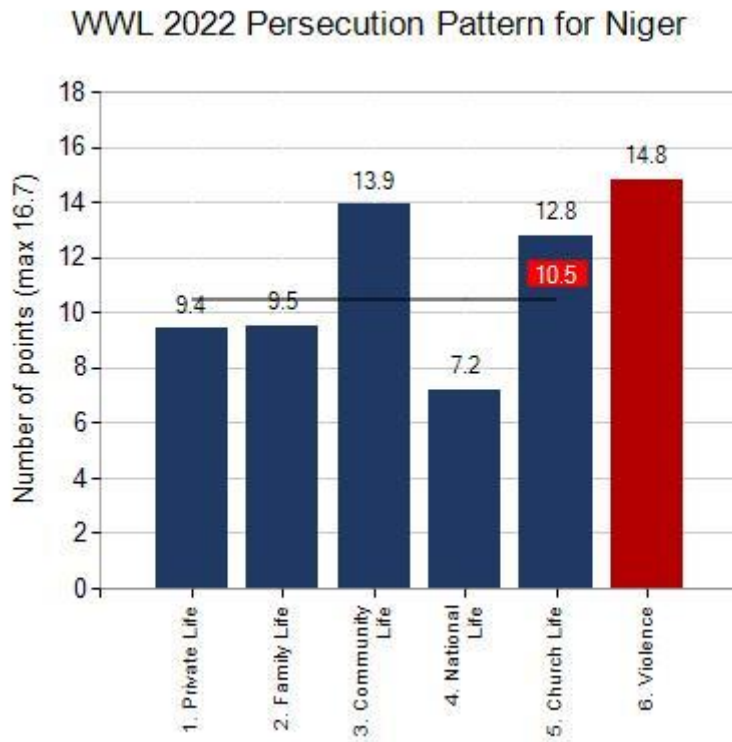
Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Niger are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included for scoring in the WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: Both older Protestant and Catholic churches belong to this category. They suffer from the growing Islamic militancy in Niger and, in the past few years, there have been attacks by armed groups such as Boko Haram in the departments of Diffa, near the border to Nigeria. Pastors and church leaders from such villages have been forced to flee to larger cities fearing for their safety. Such incidents have also been observed in the department of Tillabéri. Many historical Christian communities in areas close to Nigeria live under fear of violent attack.

Converts to Christianity: In some cases, the pressure on converts from Islam is particularly pronounced, especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life* (see below). Parents and relatives may oppose a family member's conversion to Christianity more than the government. Radical Islamic imams and teachers influence ordinary Muslim people to attack and chase converts away - and any Christians found ministering to converts.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are present in Niger and face pressure. This category faces more or less the same kind of pressure as historical Christian communities and - in comparison to converts from Islam to Christianity - are less vulnerable to societal pressure.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Niger shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Niger is high at 10.5 points, up from 10.2 in WWL 2021.
- The *Community sphere* score is highest 13.9, up from 13.3 points in WWL 2021, followed by the *Church sphere* score with 12.8 points (rising from 11.6 points in WWL 2021). This reflects how Christians facing serious difficulties in the Islamic communities to live according to their faith and values. The high score in the *Church sphere of life* is also an indication that church activities in the country are restricted due to the presence of Islamic militants.
- The score for violence is 14.8, a major increase from 10.6 points in WWL 2021. The increase is due to the high level of violent Islamist activity in the country and surrounding Sahel region. The presence of jihadists in the country is growing rapidly.

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 2022 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://openodoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.50 points)

Christians in Niger are increasingly under threat. Being at the heart of the Sahel, Niger has seen a massive rise in the radicalization and activities of militant groups. Anywhere in the country, performing acts of worship is risky for converts to Christianity. Converts face hostility from family members and the community at this private level since conversion is demonized. Other Christians do not face this form of persecution and are generally allowed to practice their faith in private. Converts usually go underground, refuse to be identified and live their new faith in secret. Some converts also decide to leave the country. Outside the major towns and cities, all types of Christianity must make sure that they are not seen by others when they conduct acts of worship.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.50 points)

The overall situation in the country is worrying. Jihadists are highly influential and for any Christian groups and individuals in remote areas it is dangerous to own and keep Christian materials. For converts, the danger is even worse. It is particularly risky in communities in the border areas. Most Christians have decided to move from areas where jihadists are very active.

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.). (2.50 points)

It is an established fact that jihadists (and militants with strong ties to jihadist groups) are controlling large areas of the country. In such areas, Christians must be very careful how they express their Christian faith. This is especially true for converts from Islam. Besides the dangers of expressing themselves in public, it is also becoming dangerous for Christians to be found with non-Muslim religious materials.

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

This is currently the case for all Christian groups all over the country, and is particularly risky in regions such as Tahoua, Agadez and Zinder; however, in the capital city it only affects converts. Due to an increase in the activities of violent Islamic groups it has been dangerous for Christians to display Christian images and symbols, particularly around the border areas of Lake Chad. In these areas, security is limited and Christians are left exposed.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.50 points)

The discrimination of children of Christian parents is something that has become more or less expected. In schools or in the streets while playing with their friends, Christian children are seen as second class citizens and are hence often discriminated against, causing them to be less inclined to follow their parents in standing firm in Christian faith.

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. (2.50 points)

In general this is not the case unless one of the parents or the children is abducted in which separation is apparent. In the case of converts, the extended family considers the children of converts to be Muslims and, in case of divorce or death, claim the children as Muslims. This is done to put pressure on possible converts.

Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.50 points)

There are many methods available to persecutors in countries like Niger. Block 2.12 is a particular issue that affects converts. Family and community members will do everything possible to deny a convert the right to inherit or keep custody of children when they push for divorce.

Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (2.25 points)

The extended family, relatives and immediate family of converts from Islam try to pressure them into renouncing Christianity by threats or use of force. One method is to get their spouses to divorce them. This plays a big role in family disintegration. To achieve this end, severe pressure like house-arrest, denied access to children or homes can be applied.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Hostility towards Christians comes mainly from the surrounding Islamic society - i.e. from (extended) family and local chiefs - and includes harassment, threats and obstruction. For instance, Christians face pressure to dress like Muslims; this issue can become violent (and possibly even fatal) especially in areas influenced by radical Islamic groups.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.50 points)

Abduction is very common in the Sahel region and a lucrative business. In some areas, communal worship and meetings of Christians have to be conducted with caution to avoid drawing the attention of militant groups in the locality. This threat is increasing with the growing influence and capabilities of jihadist groups.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)

Society is being radicalized by Wahabist preachers. Radical Muslims in the country and Sahel region are basically giving Christians the choice of converting, dying or fleeing. This issue has been affecting all Christians, but converts in particular.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.25 points)

As has been reported widely, jihadists are radicalizing society and promoting an 'us-versus-them' dichotomy, a principle that has been used in many other places. In the region of Alambare, Makalondy Christians are denied potable water and education. In north Maradi at Tashar Ibrahim, Christian Fulanis lack potable drinking water because of their faith.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

The Sahel region, including Niger, has become a safe haven for jihadists. Safety is a concern in many parts of the country and Christians must take serious precautions when they travel to avoid abduction etc.. Even military personnel are not safe: IS affiliates are known to ambush and kill Nigerien and international soldiers.

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

Virtually all local officials have become afraid of jihadists and their informers in society. As a result, they regularly support preferential treatment to Muslims - for instance, for gaining professional positions of employment. Christians are not treated equally in their dealings with the public sector, are rarely able to secure employment within local government services and are frequently denied promotion. In some places it is the jihadists themselves who function as local administrators and provide social services.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (2.50 points)

Niger's Constitution and laws respect freedom of religion in theory, but in practice Christian NGOs have experienced difficulties. Pluralism and civil society are virtually unknown concepts in Niger and some groups equate these organizations with missionaries. There are also no Christian political parties in the country. In many parts of the country where jihadists are operating, it is very risky for Christian civil society organizations to operate in safety.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (2.50 points)

Christians are often subjected to hate-speech and ridicule from Islamist groups. This is particularly the case with followers of Boko Haram, whose area of influence spans the Lake Chad border region. Christianity in Niger is seen as a foreign religion of 'infidels' and radical Islamic religious leaders freely promote hatred and intolerance.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Niger has seen expansion of jihadist from neighboring countries including Boko Haram from Nigeria. Boko Haram is able to go in and out of the country with ease and has been recruiting members. Christians are watched and must face the dangers of being attacked in churches and targeted for kidnap and assault. Local youth and religious leaders participate in monitoring church activities.

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

Outside events are very risky in many parts of the country due to the presence of radical Islamic groups. Large gatherings of Christians can be seen as an act of defiance to the local jihadist groups and this can put pressure on the government as well. Thus, it is not surprising to see the government restricting such church activities.

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.75 points)

Generally speaking, for safety reasons, Christians are advised not to engage in the distribution of Christian materials as such actions are likely to prompt attacks by radical Islamic groups. As mentioned above in the commentary to Block 5.1, even just being a Christian can attract attacks, let alone distributing Christian materials. The capital city is safer for selling and distributing, but those who do this can be easily targeted in the capital city as well.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.50 points)

There is no law that prohibits registration. However, the legal process for the registration of churches is very long and difficult. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain permits for new churches and to buy land for building new churches and Christian schools. Churches are always advised to keep to the outskirts of cities and towns. Some of those that work in government offices are radical Muslims who deliberately make it difficult for churches to obtain permits for new buildings. The government also monitors all religious expression it views as potentially threatening to public order or national unity.

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.

| Niger: Violence Block question | | WWL 2022 | WWL 2021 |
|--------------------------------|---|----------|----------|
| 6.1 | How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)? | 10 * | 2 |
| 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? | 20 | 10* |
| 6.3 | How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons? | 3 | 0 |
| 6.4 | How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.5 | How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)? | 2 | 10* |
| 6.6 | How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons? | 1 | 10* |
| 6.7 | How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians? | 1 | 10* |
| 6.8 | How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)? | 43 | 100* |
| 6.9 | How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 8 | 10* |
| 6.10 | How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 12 | 10* |
| 6.11 | How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons? | 1000* | 100 |
| 6.12 | How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons? | 35 | 0 |

5 Year trends

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

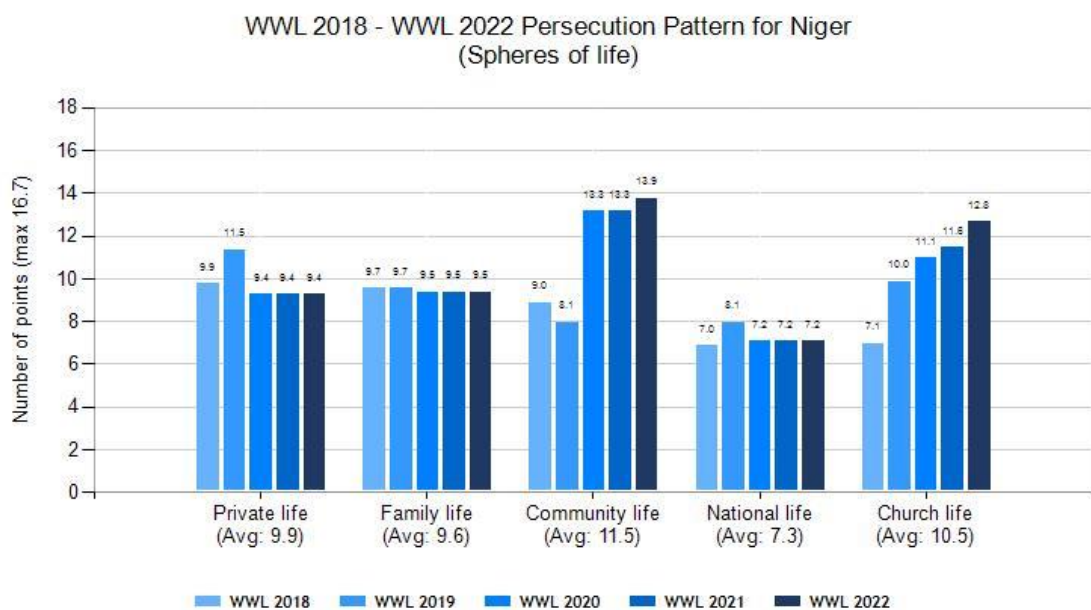
5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows that the average pressure on Christians has been increasing every year since WWL 2018. This is an indication that the situation for Christians in Niger is getting worse, which is very similar to what is happening in the neighboring countries in the Sahel region.

| Niger: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|---|---|
| 2022 | 10.5 |
| 2021 | 10.2 |
| 2020 | 10.1 |
| 2019 | 9.5 |
| 2018 | 8.5 |

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

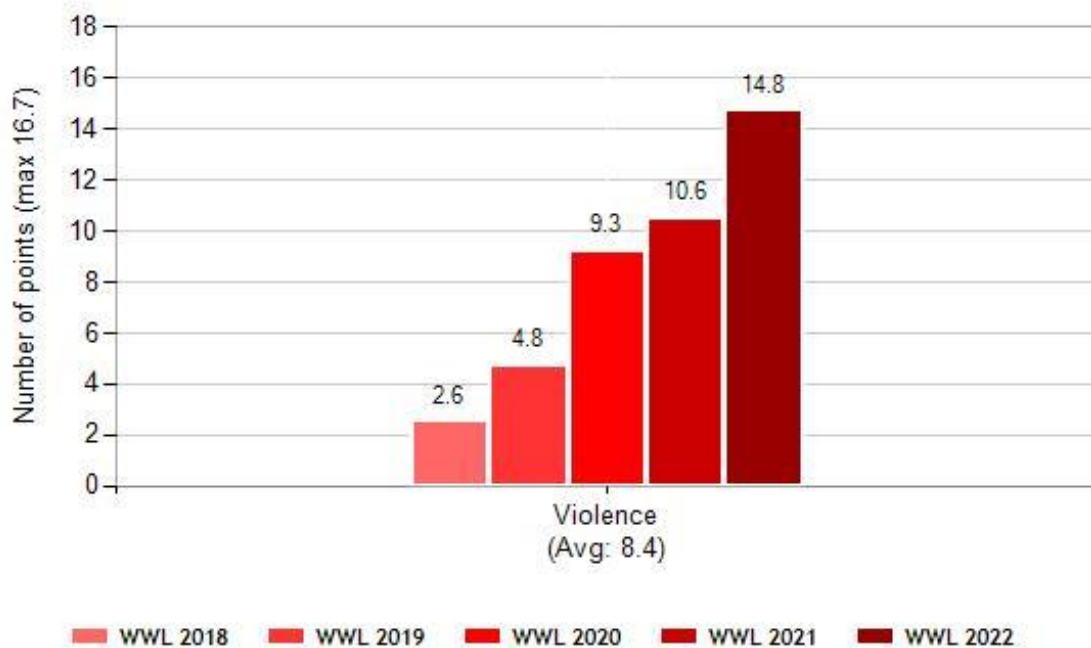
In the chart below, pressure has stabilized since WWL 2020 in the *Private*, *Family* and *National* spheres of life. In contrast, in the same period, there have been very high increases in pressure in *Community* and *Church life*.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

As can be seen in the chart below: The five year trend shows a dramatic and continuous increase of violence in the country targeting Christians. In the last five reporting periods the score for violence increased a total of 12.2 points, from 2.6 points in WWL 2018 to the extreme level of 14.8 points in WWL 2022.

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Niger (Violence)



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Group | Female Pressure Points |
|---------------------|---|
| Economic | Denied inheritance or possessions |
| Political and Legal | Denied custody of children; Forced marriage |
| Security | Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual |
| Social and Cultural | Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal |
| Technological | - |

Niger's society is heavily patriarchal. It has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with [76% of girls](#) being married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides). This is in part due to [wide-scale poverty and escalating violence](#) (Humanium, 1 December 2020).

Like many other countries in the Sahel, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to abduction, rape and sexual abuse by extremist groups. A country expert comments: "Forced marriages are commonplace in Niger with very little being done to end it. Abducting and marrying girls to militants is part of an organized program by Islamist militants to breed its next generation of fighters." Beyond jihadist groups, female Christians face the possibility of rape and targeted seduction for the purposes of forced conversion. Families do not report instances of rape as it will impact the marriage prospects of the victim and is viewed as a source of shame. More

broadly, many Christian girls also face sexual harassment and discriminatory remarks for failing to wear the hijab.

Additionally, Christian women in Niger are affected by living under Sharia. For example, according to Sharia, a Christian woman has no right to claim custody of her children in divorce cases, even though Niger is officially a secular country. Converts to Christianity can face extreme hostility from their families and local communities. They can be denied custody of their children, forced out of the home, forced into marriage with a Muslim man and raped. “Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical cleric as a corrective measure”, a country expert states. Christian parents can by law apply for custody of the children, but in practice, Christian parents fail to succeed. Many have also been denied their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity. Christians are often unaware of their [legal options](#) to defend their rights (OECD, 2019, “[Social Institutions and Gender Index: Niger](#)”) but when the case is taken to court, the problem is often settled satisfactorily.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Group | Male Pressure Points |
|---------------------|--|
| Economic | Economic harassment via business/job/work access |
| Political and Legal | Imprisonment by government |
| Security | Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death |
| Social and Cultural | - |
| Technological | - |

Known converts to Christianity face the most severe forms of persecution, as conversion from Islam to any religion is considered a betrayal by some families. They may be rejected by their families, chased out of their family home, or put under house arrest.

There is another phenomenon in Niger - although not specifically a form of targeted religious persecution - which affects all communities and has a strong negative impact on Christian families: Boys in Niger are subject to recruitment as child soldiers. There is high potential for boys to be abducted and forced to join the ranks of militant groups, or physically harmed during raids. They can also be abducted for forced labor, and/or trafficked between militant groups. Christian men and boys have also been targeted for killings by extremist groups. In 2021, [attacks by armed Islamist groups](#) have increased (Human Rights Watch, 11 August 2021). Since African communities are community-centered, this situation can harm all families in a community.

Christian men in Niger can also face dismissal from their jobs because of their faith, or have their business boycotted by the Muslim community. As men and boys are usually the financial providers, this leaves his family vulnerable and exposed.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020), there are no hindrances for specific faiths from the side of the government:

- "The government prohibits open air, public proselytization events by all religious groups due to expressed safety concerns. There is no legal restriction on private, peaceful proselytization or conversion of an individual from one religious faith to another as long as the group sponsoring the conversion is registered with the government."

However, Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahai, who are mostly present in major urban centers, do face the threat of violence from radical Islamic groups and have to tread carefully so as not to attract too much attention or provoke persecution.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

Many Nigerien see their religion very much connected with their ethnicity. In this context, to be a Nigerien and a Christian is not seen as being compatible. Although this attitude could change in the future through dialogue and cooperation, this is not likely in the short-term since *Islamic oppression* is likely to increase. The numbers of jihadists are growing fast and the government has shown little determination to fight back. Many churches are concentrated in the political capital and have limited outreach programs; as such, they seem ill-prepared for higher levels of pressure from radical Islam.

Furthermore, as reported by the US State Department ([IRFR 2109](#)), there is huge external funding for the growth of jihadist groups in the country:

- "Government officials expressed concern about funding from Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and other countries for the construction of mosques and training of imams, but according to observers, the government had only limited resources to track the extent of the funding and fully understand its consequences."

What is exacerbating the issue in 2021 and beyond is that due to COVID-19, the government has shifted its focus from fighting Islamic militants to fighting the fall-out from the virus. This gave the jihadists an enormous opportunity to expand and they took it without hesitation. This will have a long term impact for years to come.

Organized corruption and crime

The existence of organized crime and corruption is tied to the weakness of the government and the presence of the jihadist groups in the country. There is no sign that this will change in the near future.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: conflict of interest - <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Niger-Corruption>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 76% of girls - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/niger>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: wide-scale poverty and escalating violence - <https://www.humanium.org/en/child-marriage-in-the-sub-saharan-africa-the-case-of-niger/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: legal options - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Social Institutions and Gender Index: Niger - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/NE.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: attacks by armed Islamist groups - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/11/niger-surgin-atrocities-armed-islamist-groups>
- Future outlook: IRFR 2109) - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/niger/>

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=Niger>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Niger>
- [The Sahel – Rising-islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-christians-in-the-region – 2016](#)

External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: The Sahel – Rising-islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-christians-in-the-region – 2016 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf>