



Somalia: Country Dossier

January 2019



OpenDoors

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Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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World Watch List 2019

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016	Total Score WWL 2015
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.9	94	94	92	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	93	89	88	81
3	Somalia	16.3	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.4	8.9	91	91	91	87	90
4	Libya	15.3	15.0	15.1	16.0	16.3	9.6	87	86	78	79	76
5	Pakistan	14.3	14.1	13.9	15.0	13.2	16.7	87	86	88	87	79
6	Sudan	14.7	15.0	14.6	15.6	16.1	10.6	87	87	87	84	80
7	Eritrea	14.7	14.9	15.8	16.0	15.2	9.4	86	86	82	89	79
8	Yemen	16.6	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.7	3.1	86	85	85	78	73
9	Iran	14.0	14.3	14.3	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	83	80
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	14.8	13.2	15.2	83	81	73	68	62
11	Syria	13.6	14.0	13.1	13.8	14.2	13.0	82	76	86	87	83
12	Nigeria	12.3	11.8	13.4	12.9	12.9	16.7	80	77	78	78	78
13	Iraq	13.9	14.4	14.1	14.6	13.6	8.1	79	86	86	90	86
14	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.9	16.7	1.1	78	78	76	76	78
15	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.6	14.0	15.3	16.5	2.4	77	79	76	76	77
16	Egypt	11.7	13.2	10.7	13.2	11.0	15.9	76	70	65	64	61
17	Uzbekistan	15.4	12.9	13.9	12.3	15.9	3.1	74	73	71	70	69
18	Myanmar	11.4	11.8	13.3	12.1	11.8	11.1	71	65	62	62	60
19	Laos	13.0	9.1	14.2	14.7	14.9	4.6	71	67	64	58	58
20	Vietnam	12.7	8.2	12.7	13.5	14.2	9.1	70	69	71	66	68
21	Central Africa Republic	10.2	9.7	11.9	10.6	11.1	16.1	70	61	58	59	67
22	Algeria	13.1	14.2	10.1	11.8	12.7	7.6	70	58	58	56	55
23	Turkmenistan	14.6	10.8	13.8	13.3	15.1	1.3	69	68	67	66	63
24	Mali	11.4	10.1	11.5	9.2	9.9	15.4	68	59	59	55	52
25	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	12.2	13.0	13.3	0.6	67	57	55	-	50
26	Turkey	12.4	11.1	10.7	13.2	10.9	7.2	66	62	57	55	52
27	China	10.4	8.0	10.3	11.8	14.5	10.0	65	57	57	57	57
28	Ethiopia	10.0	10.0	10.3	10.8	10.4	13.5	65	62	64	67	61
29	Tajikistan	13.8	11.9	11.6	12.1	12.9	2.4	65	65	58	58	50
30	Indonesia	10.6	11.1	11.3	10.2	9.3	12.0	65	59	55	55	50
31	Jordan	13.0	13.1	11.8	11.5	12.2	3.0	65	66	63	59	56
32	Nepal	12.4	11.4	10.6	10.9	11.9	7.0	64	64	-	-	-
33	Bhutan	12.9	11.1	12.3	12.4	14.0	0.9	64	62	61	56	56
34	Kazakhstan	13.2	10.8	10.3	12.2	13.5	3.1	63	63	56	55	51
35	Morocco	12.2	13.3	9.6	12.0	14.4	1.5	63	51	49	47	47
36	Brunei	13.4	14.3	10.5	10.3	13.4	0.7	63	64	64	61	58
37	Tunisia	12.1	13.2	10.7	11.2	12.0	3.3	63	62	61	58	55
38	Qatar	13.0	12.6	10.3	11.0	14.1	1.1	62	63	66	65	64
39	Mexico	8.3	7.5	12.2	10.2	9.7	13.5	61	59	57	56	55
40	Kenya	11.7	10.6	10.1	8.3	11.5	8.3	61	62	68	68	63
41	Russian Federation	12.5	8.4	10.7	10.4	12.0	5.7	60	51	46	48	45
42	Malaysia	11.8	14.2	12.1	11.7	8.6	1.5	60	65	60	58	55
43	Kuwait	13.2	12.2	10.1	10.5	12.2	1.5	60	61	57	56	49
44	Oman	12.9	12.5	9.8	9.6	12.8	1.7	59	57	53	53	55
45	United Arab Emirates	12.8	12.0	9.1	10.5	12.2	1.9	58	58	55	55	49
46	Sri Lanka	11.0	8.3	10.5	11.5	10.0	7.0	58	57	55	-	51
47	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.8	9.4	8.5	12.6	58	56	53	55	55
48	Bangladesh	11.0	9.1	11.6	10.5	7.8	7.8	58	58	63	57	51
49	Palestinian Territories	11.4	12.3	9.0	10.6	11.8	2.4	57	60	64	62	58
50	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	-	57	50
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.4	56	-	56	56	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	12.7	9.9	10.9	9.2	11.9	1.9	56	-	-	-	-
53	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	57	58	60
54	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	9.3	7.4	10.3	16.1	55	-	-	-	-
55	Bahrain	11.9	12.2	8.6	10.2	10.2	1.5	55	57	54	54	-
56	Cameroon	9.9	7.3	10.0	7.8	7.5	11.3	54	-	-	-	-
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.8	4.8	52	-	59	57	56
58	Niger	11.5	9.7	8.1	8.1	10.0	4.8	52	-	-	53	-
59	Cuba	8.8	4.4	9.1	10.5	11.8	3.9	49	-	-	-	-
60	Chad	11.5	8.2	9.0	8.0	8.7	3.0	48	-	-	-	-
61	Burkina Faso	9.0	8.0	8.8	6.6	7.9	7.2	48	-	-	-	-
62	Uganda	11.4	8.0	7.7	6.9	9.6	3.7	47	-	-	-	-
63	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.0	46	-	-	-	-
64	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.5	5.8	8.0	15.0	44	-	-	-	-
65	Mozambique	6.7	4.3	6.0	6.9	6.0	13.3	43	-	-	-	-
66	Gambia	7.7	8.2	8.2	8.3	8.8	1.9	43	-	-	-	-
67	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.7	8.2	5.5	6.4	4.3	43	-	-	-	-
68	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	3.3	43	-	-	-	-
69	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.1	8.7	10.4	6.1	42	-	-	-	-
70	Togo	8.8	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	2.0	42	-	-	-	-
71	Venezuela	3.3	3.8	10.5	9.0	8.8	5.9	41	-	-	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	6.7	41	-	-	-	-
73	Nicaragua	2.3	3.6	6.4	8.9	7.9	11.9	41	-	-	-	-

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD) . Further news and analysis is supplied by World Watch Monitor and WWR staff.

World Watch List Somalia	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	91	3
WWL 2018	91	3
WWL 2017	91	2
WWL 2016	87	7
WWL 2015	90	2

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Somalia

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094503>

Recent country history

Somalia declared its independence in 1960 when the British protectorate and Italian colony merged. In 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's socialist military government came to power; it introduced 'Scientific Socialism.' In the course of this process, property owned by Christian missions and churches, including schools and clinics, were seized and Christians were expelled from the country. In 1974 a new law was introduced giving women the same inheritance rights as men. Islamic leaders preaching against this new law were imprisoned or executed. The secular and reformist nature of the government undermined the Islamic identity of the Somali people. This resulted in a revival of radical Islamic influence and the growth of Muslim clan-based militant organizations. They aimed to turn Somalia into an Islamic state. Siad Barre's regime and Islamic militants shared an enemy – Christians. During Barre's rule, radical Muslims used their influence to encourage the government to ban the printing, importing, distributing or selling of Christian literature in the country. Moreover, its National Security Services (NSS) threatened, arrested, tortured, and murdered Somali Christians. Other Christians lost their jobs and businesses.

Relations between Somalia and its neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya have been soured due to the claim by the Somalian government that all territories where Somalis live belong to Somalia. As a result of this agenda to form a 'Greater Somalia', the country waged a major war with Ethiopia in 1977.

After decades of ruling the country with a mixture of terror and guile, Siad Barre's regime finally collapsed in 1991. The country was left without an effective government. The war between the clans and also the drought threatened the lives of millions. The United Nations (UN) and the Organizations of African Unity (OAU) sought to end the crisis. In 1992, The United Nations Security Council Adopted Resolution 751 by which a United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) was established. UNOSOM sent in an American-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF). As the situation spun out of control, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to establish a United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II) by Resolution 755. Following the unsuccessful attempts to help Somalis create a central government, the United States withdrew its forces in 1994. The UN then decided to withdraw all its forces from Somalia (Security Council Resolution 954). For the following two decades Somalia became a lawless state where radical Muslims, local militias, and warlords continued fighting. The country became a hub for militant Islam and terrorists.

In the meantime, even though not recognized by the international community, Somaliland declared a unilateral independence from Somalia by citing the colonial boundaries between British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Puntland also declared its autonomy without severing its ties from 'Somalia proper'.

After several attempts at mediation by the international community, the current federal government was eventually formed in 2012. The government only controls cities and towns; many parts of rural Somalia still remain in the hands of al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has been consistently propagating anti-Christian ideology by labeling all foreign forces in Somalia 'Christian forces that have come to Somalia

to spoil Islam'. In 2016, parliamentary elections were held and in February 2017, a presidential election was held and Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed was elected president. That was [greeted enthusiastically](#) by many Somalis and the international community. It has been seen as a big step forward for Somalia. In 2017 and in 2018, al-Shabaab still remains potent enough to conduct deadly attacks in the country. The AMISOM soldiers have been targeted on numerous occasions. For example, in [April 2018](#), up to 46 Ugandan peacekeepers were killed in a double suicide car bomb attack by Islamic militants.

The religious landscape

The population of Somalia is overwhelmingly Muslim. According to World Christian Database (WCD) statistics, 99% are Sunni Muslims. The Christian community is small and under constant attack. Open Doors estimates the number of Christians in the country to be “hundreds”. However, in the past the country was home to one of the biggest Catholic cathedrals in the region and the Christian community was much larger.

The years of chaos following the overthrow of President Siad Barre’s military regime in 1991 has culminated in the rise of Sharia courts and of radical Islamic groups like al-Shabaab. The activities of al-Shabaab, a group linked to al-Qaeda, are regularly mentioned in the media and can distort the understanding of the persecution of Christians. It is important to realize that al-Shabaab, although drawing fighters from outside, is in its core a clan-based Islamic militant group. Equally important to recognize is that Somalia is a patchwork of competing clans, containing clan-based militias and religious groups. They all pursue a strong Islamic identity against a background of a strong tribal identity. Changing religion – i.e. to Christianity – does not only mean a betrayal of Islam and the Muslim community but also a break with the norms and values of the clan as well. In tribal societies, this is a very serious offence. According to some Somalis, a 'Somali is born Muslim and dies Muslim'. Therefore, even if al-Shabaab is currently in decline, it does not mean that the threat to Christians diminishes. An example is Somaliland which declared independence in 1991 (still unrecognized): It would seem to be a region free of Islamic militant activity, but Christians are just as much persecuted there because the root cause of persecution goes back to religion and culture as well.

The political landscape

The Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia was adopted on 1 August 2012 and affirms the absolute predominance of a strict interpretation of Sharia. According to Article 2 of the Constitution, “Islam is the religion of the State; no religion other than Islam can be propagated in the country; and no law which is not compliant with the general principles and objectives of Sharia can be enacted.” Furthermore, the Constitution categorically declares that Sharia law is supreme. Considering the provision of the Transitional Charter, the Constitution took a step back from securing freedom of religion by prohibiting apostasy. Therefore, it can be expected that a better functioning federal government will not lead to a cessation of the persecution of Christians. Likewise, as stated in the Constitution, the province of Puntland has declared that only Islam may be propagated: “Islam shall be the only religion of the Regional Puntland State of Somalia. With the exception of Islam, no other religion can be spread in the Puntland State; the laws and culture of the people shall be based on the Islamic religion.” The constitution of Somaliland also states: “Islam is the religion of the Somaliland state, and the promotion of any religion in the territory of Somaliland, other than Islam, is prohibited.”

The political situation in the country has created a hostile environment for Christians, especially those coming from a Muslim background. As a result, the persecution of Christians in Somalia nearly always means a very high level of violence.

The socio-economic landscape

Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Continuous drought and war have caused the death of millions over the years. The fall of Said Barre's regime in 1991 created a religious vacuum in which radical Islamic militancy could flourish – to the detriment of Christians and the Church. In 1991, when the Somali government system fell apart, radical Islamic groups formed a committee of sheikhs to search for and identify all Somali Christians, whether they were inside or outside Somalia. This committee appointed an armed group to execute all Somali Christians, leading to many killings among Somali Christians in Somalia and neighboring countries. Somali Christians were forced to live underground or to become refugees. Subsequently, the visible Church in Somalia has disappeared; what is left are some old ruins of mostly Catholic Church buildings. As it stands, there is no immediate hope to build new churches in the country.

In every sphere of life – private, family, community, and national – being exposed as a convert to Christianity means life-threatening danger, often leading to on-the-spot execution. 'Church life' simply is not possible. This persecution pattern is exceptional and puts Somalia high up in the category of extreme persecution.

Concluding remarks

Somalia is known for being hostile to Christians. The persecution is particularly severe for believers with a Muslim background who usually face beheading if discovered. An Open Doors field researcher testifies to the perseverance of Somali believers: "Amid the hardest times of persecution and executions of Christians, they have remained steadfast, holding on to their Christian faith secretly."

Despite some deadly attacks orchestrated by al-Shabaab, it seems that the Somali Federal Government is heading towards becoming a functioning government. However, if peace cannot be achieved within a foreseeable period, the international community might give up on Somalia again as was the case in 1995. The election of the new president in February 2017, despite the dubious election procedure, is giving hope for many Somalis and the international community. It was hoped that the election of the new president would change a lot, but al-Shabaab still remains a formidable force that can carry out attacks in the heart of Mogadishu.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Somalia

1. Recent country history: greeted enthusiastically
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/world/africa/somalia-farmajo-mohamed-abdullahi-mohamed.html?_r=0
2. Recent country history: April 2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/al-shabaab-attack-kills-ugandan-soldiers-in-somalia>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
15,182,000	a few hundred	0.0

Source: *Open Doors estimate for number of Christians 2018.*

How did Christians get there?

[Arab sources](#) from 10th-12th century describe the port of Seylac (Zeila), near the border with Djibouti, as a majority Christian city. However by the end of the 15th century the Christian presence had died out. Jesuits visiting the island Soqotra in 1542 were also amazed to find the inhabitants there were clearly Christian, although illiterate. It had to wait until 1881 before Christianity was introduced again into Somalia. Christian faith spread in the following years, especially after the Italians took control of the southern coast, including Mogadishu. However, the colonial powers in both British and Italian territories were at times against the work of missionaries among Somalis for fear of instability. For further information see: Melton J & Baumann M (Editors), *Religions of the World* (2nd Edition), ABC-CLIO 2010, p.2664f.

In 1886 a French Roman Catholic mission agency and the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Mission set up bases in the port town of Berbera in the then British protectorate of Somaliland, Mogadishu and Kismayo towns. The church was soon growing rapidly. Lutheran missionaries from the Church of Sweden came to Somalia in 1898 and opened educational and medical facilities. They also engaged in evangelistic outreach and had their greatest success among a group of Bantu-speaking former slaves. The mission was disrupted when Italian authorities expelled the missionaries in 1935. The work was revived after World War II and during the 1950s further Christian missions took up work. The Swedish Lutheran Mission, Mennonite mission and Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in particular left their mark but in 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's socialist military government came to power. All property owned by Christian missions and churches (including schools and clinics) was confiscated. In 1972 the government nationalized all of the Roman Catholic Church's property. However, in spite of the changes in the Catholic Church's status and the resultant departure of much of its personnel, a [Diocese of Mogadishu](#) was created in 1975. By 1976 all foreign missionaries had left the country. Two groups of Somali nationals, one formerly associated with the Mennonites and one with SIM, continued to meet after the missionaries left. In the 1980s, a few Mennonites were able to return.

What church networks exist today?

In the interest of security, no breakdown of church networks can be published.

Religious context

WCD estimates the Muslim population at 99.9%. All tribal groups in the country identify themselves as Muslim. The community leaders and religious leaders see Christians as a foreign element that is in their country to damage their culture and religion. There has been a revival of Islamic militancy, leading to a growth of clan-based militant Muslim organizations, one of which is al-Shabaab. Somalia has been seen as classic example of a modern failed state.

Notes on the current situation

In Somalia, there are no safe places for Christians - especially converts - to practice their faith. It is a violent country where Christians face horrific challenges; community and family members persecute anyone who would leave Islam. Christians in Somalia have come to faith knowing all these challenges. Thus, they sometimes pay the ultimate price - death.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

1. How did Christians get there?: Arab sources
https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/22-2_003.pdf
2. How did Christians get there?: Diocese of Mogadishu
<https://sites.google.com/site/hiyawkal/%C2%A0briefhistory:%C2%A0somalia>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 91, Somalia ranks 3rd on WWL 2019, just as in WWL 2018.

What type of persecution dominates?

Islamic oppression: Somalia is a majority Muslim nation and society expects all Somalis to be Muslim. Imams in mosques and madrassas (as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab) state publicly that there is no room for Christians.

Ethnic antagonism: Al-Shabaab relies on the clan-based structure to gather intelligence and recruit members. If Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them.

Organized corruption and crime: UN reports clearly indicate that al-Shabaab is thriving on illegal trade and illegal taxes to fund its operations.

Who is driving persecution?

The two main drivers of persecution in Somalia are the radical Islamic group al-Shabaab and the tribal system in the country. Society's Islamic clan system has a profound impact on how the federal government is structured. Al-Shabaab is also relying on the same clan-based structure to gather intelligence, recruit members and advance its ideology. This group is using this structure to force sheiks and imams to teach *jihad* or face expulsion or death. This is compounded by the fact that there are networks of organized crime used to fund radical groups like al-Shabaab. Society expects all Somalis to be a Muslim. Imams in mosques and madrasas as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab state publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians, and churches in Somalia. The country's Constitution states that Islam is the state religion and the government prohibits any celebration of Christmas. The family (both extended and nuclear) is also a driver of persecution.

What it results in

The only Christian community in the country that is considered for WWL analysis are the Christians with a Muslim background. They are regarded as a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives and have often been killed on the spot when discovered. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, which subscribes to the doctrine of Wahhabism, advocates Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia. This group continuously expressed its desire to eradicate Christians from the country. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country, but Islamic oppression is not limited to militants only. Christians also face serious persecution from family, extended family members and the community at large. Any conversion to Christianity is regarded as a betrayal of the Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them. Over the last years, the situation appears to have worsened. Islamic militants intensified their hunt for people who are Christian and in a position of leadership. An attempt to reopen a church in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in [August 2017](#) also failed as the government was forced to shut it down due to pressure from the local Islamic population.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Somalia	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	50	72	0	0	43
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	23	104	1	4	10

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

In the WWL 2019 reporting period, Christians remain very vulnerable to attacks by Islamic militants. In the interests of security, no examples can currently be published.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

1. What it results in: August 2017
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/somaliland-closes-catholic-church-due-public-pressure-re-opened-week-ago-30-years/>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 91, Somalia ranks 3rd in WWL 2019, just as in WWL 2018. Mired in ceaseless civil war, social fragmentation, tribalism and Islamic radicalism, Somalia is once again high in the WWL Top Ten. The pressure on Christians has remained at an extreme level and violence has been very high. Al-Shabaab showed its potency by conducting a number of attacks in the capital city of the country.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Somalia	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Very strong
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Not at all
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very weak
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very 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 (long version).

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Somalia is a majority Muslim nation and society expects all Somalis to be Muslim. Imams in mosques and madrassas (as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab) state publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians, and churches in Somalia. The country's Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The government prohibits Christians from celebrating Christmas and those who want to celebrate must do it in a very discreet way. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab (a militant Islamic group that subscribes to the doctrine of Wahhabism and advocates Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia), targets and kills Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country. However, Islamic oppression is not limited to militants only. Christians also face serious persecution from family, extended family members and the community at large. To be Christian, especially a convert from Islam, is a huge challenge and can lead to brutal death at the hands of radical groups.

Ethnic antagonism (Very strong):

The clan is a major factor in Somali society and orders the way daily life is run and how one community is related to another. This clan structure has also a profound impact on how the federal government is structured and how elections are conducted, as was evident in the 2017 Somali election: The president was elected by a parliament that was itself elected by 14,025 clan elder-appointed delegates. Al-Shabaab is also relying on the same clan-based structure to gather intelligence, recruit members and advance its ideologies. It uses this structure to force sheiks and imams to teach jihad or face expulsion or death. According to many Somalis and clan leaders, Somalis are Muslims and therefore conversion

to Christianity is a betrayal of the Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):

In its fragile and lawless situation, crime and corruption is rampant in Somalia. The federal government controls only some cities and towns and leaves the majority of rural Somalia to be controlled by al-Shabaab. Militants collect taxes and fund their operations through illegal trade. This situation has made life for Christians very delicate as they have no protection whatsoever. In a [Transparency International's Corruption Index](#) released in February 2018, Somalia is listed as the worst country in the world (180/180).

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Somalia	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	VERY STRONG	-	-	-	VERY WEAK	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	Medium	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	Medium	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	Medium	Strong
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	Very strong
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	Medium	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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 (long version).

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

The main drivers of this engine are jihadist militants/violent groups operating in the country. As stated above, Muslim religious leaders state publicly that there is no room for Christianity and al-Shabaab kill Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. Family and community are also drivers of

persecution for converts. Society in general and family members are against any thought of conversion to Christianity.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

In Somalia drivers for ethnic antagonism and Islamic oppression overlap. Even political parties are ethnically based and at the same time subscribed to the idea that Somalia is for Somalis – and being Somali means being Muslim. Clan leaders do not want to see any conversions to Christianity. They do not want to see Christian symbols in the country. Family and community in the country are also drivers of this engine.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

Criminal cartels profit from the lawlessness in Somalia and al-Shabaab also engages in illegal trade and taxation as a means of income. Operations against Christians in the country and neighboring countries need to be financed.

Context

Radical Islam is not a new phenomenon in Somalia. In 1899 Muhammad Abdullah Hassan created Darvish State (a Sunni Islamic state). He decided to set up a caliphate having seen Somali orphans identifying themselves as Catholics which he saw as a betrayal of Somali culture and Islamic faith.

Historically, Islam was firmly established before the arrival of Christianity in Somalia. Ever since colonial interventions by Italy and Britain took place, severe resistance to Christianity emerged. Fearing that there could be an uprising, Italian and British colonialists even discouraged Christian missionary work in the country. In addition, Somali society is clan-based. Somalia's tribal system - an informal way of governing Somalia - is very resistant to modern government models and more robust than the formal state structure. In the process of extending security and governance and trying to maintain relations with the Somali clans, the formal government has not prioritized civil liberties and rule of law. According to Freedom House reporting in 2018, freedom of association, religion, and belief are [highly restricted](#) in the country. The government also allows anti-Christian sentiments to flourish within the tribal system. This is clearly reflected in the Constitution of Somalia, which states that Islam is the state religion and any propagation of other religions except Islam is prohibited.

Violent radical groups emerged following the collapse of central government in 1991. Since the downfall of Siyad Barre in 1991, Somalia has become a safe haven for Islamic jihadists, causing society to become more aggressive and intolerant towards Christians not only in the country but also in the surrounding region. In the majority of cases, Christians in Somalia (in areas under the control of al-Shabaab) would not last a day in a trial or ever get the chance to be sentenced to a labor camp. The mere suspicion of someone being a Christian leads to a rushed public execution. This should be seen in connection with the attacks that al-Shabaab has orchestrated against Christians in Kenya. There is also another militant group that has been trying to establish itself in Somalia, namely Islamic State (IS). IS has been courting al-Shabaab to make it ditch al-Qaeda and join the IS caliphate. In April 2016, IS [claimed responsibility](#) for an attack on African Union (AU) troops. However, an attempt by some factions among al-Shabaab to join the IS has so far failed to materialize as planned. In July 2018, the UN Security Council [renewed](#) the mandate of AU troops in the country until the end of May 2019.

The Federal Government of Somalia was set up in August 2012 after the interim mandate of the Transitional Federal Government ended and has been boosted by the military gains of the African

Union forces against al-Shabaab. However, in terms of freedom for Christians, there has been no progress. The provisional Constitution limits freedom of religion and only goes to show how regressive the situation in Somalia is. For instance, apostasy was not listed as a crime under the previous transitional charter, whereas now the provisional Constitution explicitly prohibits apostasy. Also, in order to appease and boost its support among the clan leaders, the government has at times issued clear directives such as banning the celebration of Christmas in December 2015 by stating that the Christian festival has "[nothing to do with Islam](#)". In February 2017 the country elected a new president and even though there is fresh optimism surrounding this election, there is no guarantee that the president will stand up for minorities in the country. However, frequent deadly attacks by al-Shabaab is taking that optimism away. In 2018, the new president is making little progress in driving out al-Shabaab and the latter continues to attack civilians.

Somaliland and the autonomous province of Puntland are fairly stable, but there too, there is no room for Christians. The closure of a church after it was [officially reopened](#) for one week in 2017 in the capital of Somaliland, Hargeisa, is an example. This church remained closed in 2018 as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

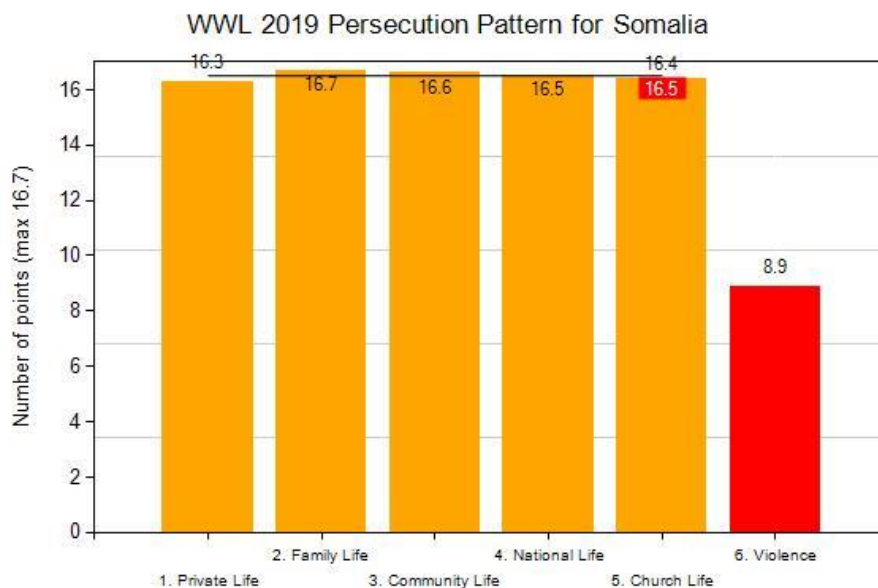
Communities of expatriate Christians: Since this group is restricted to chaplaincies for soldiers (e.g. among officers of the African Union Mission – AMISOM) and foreign workers in Mogadishu, and some refugees in Hargeisa (Somaliland) it is not regarded as a separate category for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: These do not exist in the country. One of the biggest Roman Catholic cathedrals in Africa was built in 1928 in Mogadishu. However, this building has been a ruin since 2008 onwards.

Non-traditional Christian communities: These do not exist in the country.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background face the worst form of persecution and are considered a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives. In the country's very recent history, converts - or those accused of being converts - have often been killed on the spot when discovered.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Somalia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Somalia is 16.5 compared to 16.2 in WWL 2018. This shows that the overall pressure on Christians in the country remains at an extremely high level.
- Pressure is at an extreme level in all *spheres of life*, with the highest scores in the *family sphere* (16.7) and *community sphere* (16.6), reflecting the immense pressure exerted on converts by family and neighborhood.
- The score for violence is very high at 8.9, but decreased from its WWL 2018 level of 10.4.

Private sphere:

Individual Christians in Somalia face severe difficulties in trying to live according to their faith. They have to pray in secret and do not own or carry Christian materials or symbols as these would be seen as evidence against them, should they be caught. They have to hide their conversion to Christianity not only from their extended family and clan members but also from their own closest family members. The family will not only be unsympathetic towards Christianity, they will also fear being suspected of being converts too. According to one country researcher, Christians hardly dare to express their faith in any form: "There is a worldwide Somali Christian social media network, and just 'liking' a post on that social media network invites serious danger." This is a country where a mere suspicion is enough to land you in danger.

Family sphere:

Celebrating weddings according to Christian faith or celebrating Christian holidays in a family is virtually impossible. Somali children have to participate in mandatory Islamic classes, and Christian parents often find it too dangerous to teach their children about their Christian faith. Converts or suspected Christians face all sorts of discrimination when it comes to custody of children, inheritance rights, and divorce. In order to escape these challenges, Christian families usually keep their faith as secret as possible.

Community sphere:

Christians from a Muslim background are under pressure from members of their community in various ways. One country researcher reports: "Suspected converts get intimidating messages via phone calls from 'concerned' community members or even from al-Shabaab personnel who would tell them they have heard rumors of their conversion or have observed some 'contrary' behavior [contrary behavior according to the Quran] and first warn them to change or risk death." To survive such threats and other similar problems, Somali Christians have to hide their religion in order to get access to basic social services or education. Christian women have to dress like Muslims in order to hide their faith.

National sphere:

This sphere of life is critical for analyzing persecution in a given country since policies or laws that emanate from the national or regional level set the tone for how things are implemented at the local level. In Somalia, the Constitution has set it out loud and clear that Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the source of all laws. There are no provisions exempting non-Muslims from the application of Sharia law. Officials at the federal and local level enforce laws that limit a Christian's freedom severely, which has left Christians with no option but to live out their faith in secret. It is also important to note that Somali governments believe that there are no Somali Christians.

Church sphere:

There are no recognizable church buildings in the country. Many churches were destroyed in the past decades, including the Roman Catholic cathedral in Mogadishu which was regarded as one of the finest and biggest cathedrals in Africa. In the past, attempts to reopen the cathedral failed. There was one church reopened for a week in Hargeisa (Somaliland) in 2017 but it was closed due to pressure from the Islamic community. In short, church life is very restricted and has to remain underground.

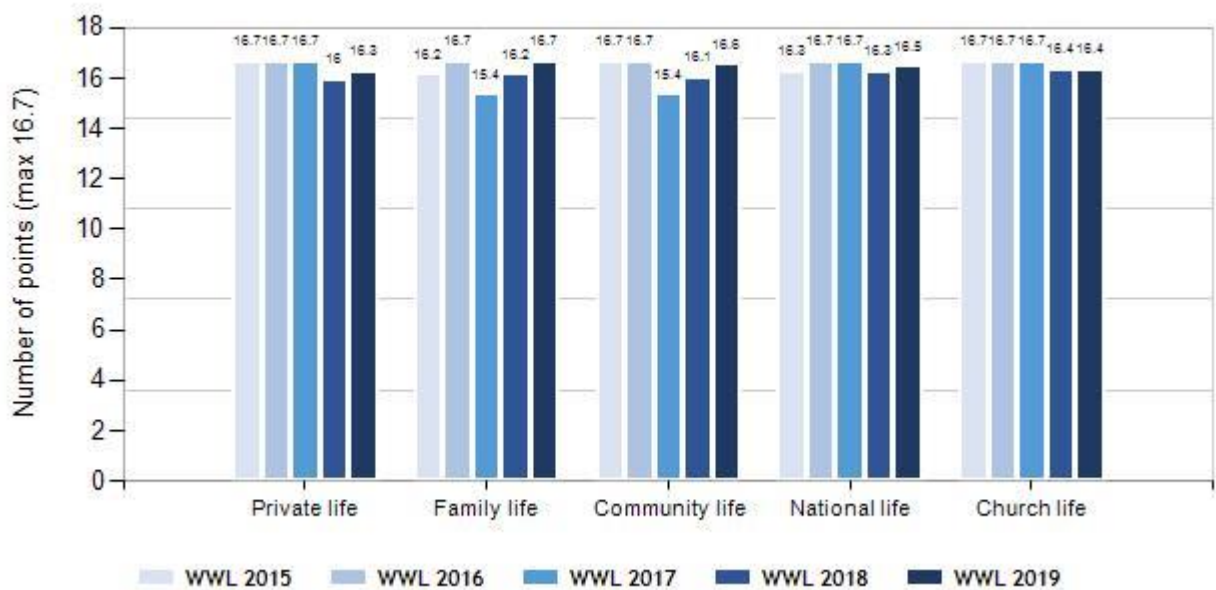
Violence:

Somali Christians face faith-related violence from family, clan, authorities, and militias. On numerous occasions al-Shabaab has expressed in word and actions that it targets Christians both in Somalia and neighboring countries. For a summary of the statistics on violence, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

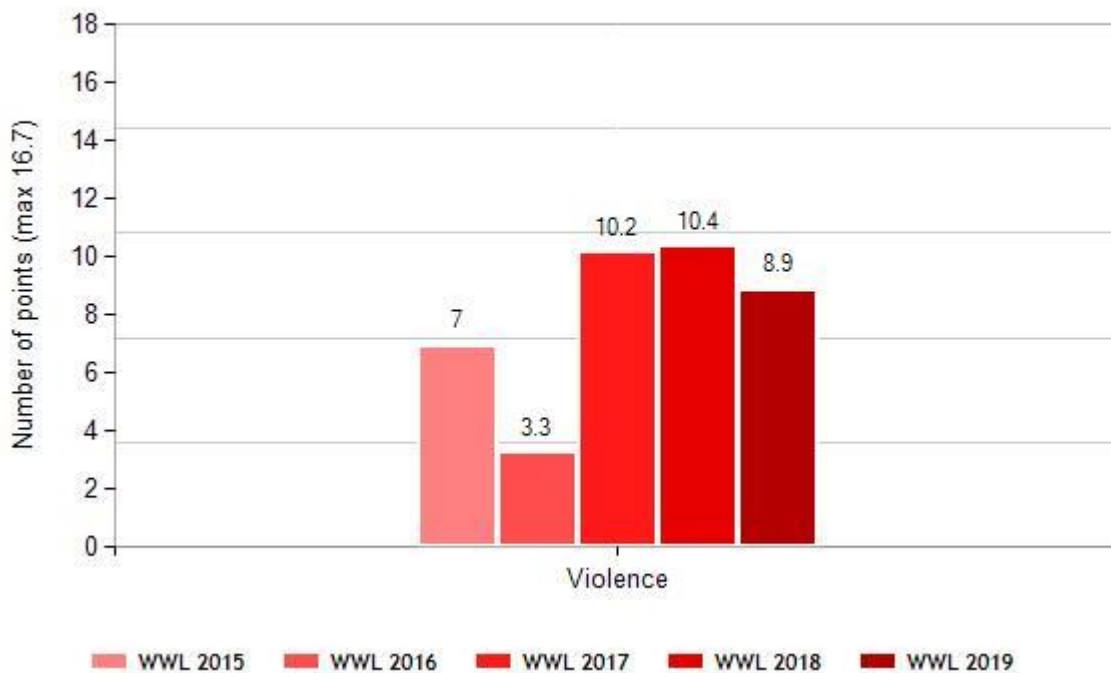
The five year profile for pressure (chart 1) clearly shows that the extreme levels of pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* are more or less stable. Apart from a minor reduction in WWL 2017 in *family and community life*, all *spheres of life* have consistently scored 16.0 or above. This reflects the fact that persecution in Somalia is everywhere and a national phenomenon; Christians lack meaningful space and protection both in the community and from the government. This is also shown by the extreme levels recorded for the average pressure (chart 2), where 16.2 has been the minimum in the last five reporting periods. Compared to the diagrams for pressure, the scores for violence (chart 3) are lower. However, except for WWL 2016 (when the score went down to 3.3 - probably mostly due to the inaccessibility of the country, not because there was low violence), the scores have remained in the very high bracket.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Somalia (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Somalia	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	16.5
2018	16.2
2017	16.2
2016	16.7
2015	16.5

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Somalia (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

One researcher reports: "Women and girls were pressured into attending Duksi classes, dressing in al-Shabaab compliant burkas, forcefully married off, suffered domestic violence, beaten up by family and spouses, verbally abused, put under 'house arrest', denied food and rights, lost their businesses, were threatened and forced to go into hiding with some seeking refuge outside the country, denied access to their children, were widowed and some even killed on suspicions of their faith."

Male:

According to one researcher, men and boys suspected of conversion to Christianity faced extreme levels of persecution: "Men and boys were verbally abused, physically assaulted, businesses taken over, threatened with death, tortured, burnt alive and others shot to death." And this was when there was only a suspicion of conversion.

Persecution of other religious minorities

No religious groups other than Sunni Islam have any meaningful rights. In areas controlled by al-Shabaab, the situation has become so extreme that even Shia Muslims keep a very low profile. Moderate Sunnis are also targeted. As stated above, laws in Somalia prohibit the propagation of any religion other than Islam and prohibit Muslims from converting. The Constitution also states that all

laws must comply with the general principles of Sharia. In this context, any other religion except (Sunni) Islam will experience severe challenges. Al-Shabaab has also repeatedly shown its interest in attacking Jewish owned properties in previous reporting periods. A February 2015 report illustrates this: <https://unitedwithisrael.org/somali-based-muslim-terrorists-threaten-jewish-owned-malls-in-west/>.

Future outlook

The political outlook: Somalia is a failed state. The international community and the African Union (AU) have tried to establish different governments on more than two occasions. The current federal government is supported by AU forces and is backed by the UN Security Council. Despite this, al-Shabaab remains potent enough to conduct deadly attacks even in Mogadishu - the seat of the federal government. The USA has been constantly conducting airstrikes against al-Shabaab - as recently as [October 2018](#). However, the air strikes have [failed to produce](#) the desired effects, as reports have indicated.

The socio-economic outlook: The insecure situation in the country has also been compounded by millions being affected by [drought and famine](#). The conflict and famine in the country has led to hundreds of thousands fleeing the country.

The outlook for Christians: For more than 25 years, the country has been a safe haven for Islamic militants who constantly target Christians both in Somalia and in neighboring countries. There is no reason to believe that the levels of *Islamic oppression*, *Ethnic antagonism* and *Organized corruption and crime* will decrease in the next months and years.

Conclusion: To sum up, Somalia has been on the World Watch List since 1993 and will no doubt continue to be listed high up. The government of Somalia has managed to survive 2018 with the help of troops from the African Union backed by the UN. However it is weak and will continue to struggle. If the UN would decide not to renew the [mandate of AMISOM](#) in 2019, al-Shabaab would be emboldened again and might pose an even greater threat to Christians in the country and beyond. As things stand, it can be expected: i) that al-Shabaab will continue targeting converts to Christianity and ii) that none of the severely damaged church buildings will be reopened any time soon.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

1. Persecution engines: Transparency International's Corruption Index
https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017
2. Context: highly restricted
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/somalia>
3. Context: claimed responsibility
<http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-somalia-islamic-state-claims-first-ever-attack-mogadishu-while-courting-al-2359373>
4. Context: renewed
<https://www.newtimes.co.rw/africa/un-au-mission-somalia>
5. Context: nothing to do with Islam
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-christmas-season-somalia-idUSKBN0U61NT20151223>

6. Context: officially reopened
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/somaliland-closes-catholic-church-due-public-pressure-re-opened-week-ago-30-years/>
7. Future outlook: October 2018.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/16/somalia-us-military-airstrike-al-shabaab>
8. Future outlook: failed to produce
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/11/us-airstrikes-fail-to-weaken-al-shabaab-grip-on-somalia>
9. Future outlook: drought and famine
<https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2015-000134-som>
10. Future outlook: mandate of AMISOM
<http://amisom-au.org/amisom-mandate/>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

At the time of publication there were no items specifically for Somalia.

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

At the time of publication there were no items specifically for Somalia.

World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/somalia>

Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Somalia> (password: freedom).