# Tunisia: Country Dossier

## December 2019

World Watch Research

Open Doors
Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

# Contents

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2020

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2020 | Total Score WWL 2019 | Total Score WWL 2018 | Total Score WWL 2017 | Total Score WWL 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | North Korea | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 11.1 | 94 | 94 | 94 | 92 | 92 |
| 2 | Afghanistan | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 10.0 | 93 | 94 | 93 | 89 | 88 |
| 3 | Somalia | 16.5 | 16.7 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 16.5 | 9.4 | 92 | 91 | 91 | 91 | 87 |
| 4 | Libya | 15.3 | 15.5 | 15.8 | 16.0 | 16.4 | 11.3 | 90 | 87 | 86 | 78 | 79 |
| 5 | Pakistan | 14.0 | 13.9 | 15.0 | 14.9 | 13.7 | 16.7 | 88 | 87 | 86 | 88 | 87 |
| 6 | Eritrea | 14.5 | 14.9 | 15.9 | 15.9 | 15.4 | 10.9 | 87 | 86 | 86 | 82 | 89 |
| 7 | Sudan | 14.2 | 14.6 | 14.5 | 15.7 | 16.1 | 10.4 | 85 | 87 | 87 | 87 | 84 |
| 8 | Yemen | 16.6 | 16.4 | 16.4 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 2.6 | 85 | 86 | 85 | 85 | 78 |
| 9 | Iran | 14.1 | 14.3 | 14.1 | 15.8 | 16.5 | 10.4 | 85 | 85 | 85 | 85 | 83 |
| 10 | India | 12.9 | 13.0 | 13.5 | 15.0 | 13.5 | 14.8 | 83 | 83 | 81 | 73 | 68 |
| 11 | Syria | 13.5 | 14.2 | 13.0 | 13.9 | 14.4 | 12.6 | 82 | 82 | 76 | 86 | 87 |
| 12 | Nigeria | 12.2 | 11.9 | 13.5 | 12.8 | 13.0 | 16.7 | 80 | 80 | 77 | 78 | 78 |
| 13 | Saudi Arabia | 15.1 | 14.9 | 14.1 | 15.5 | 16.5 | 2.4 | 79 | 77 | 79 | 76 | 76 |
| 14 | Maldives | 15.4 | 15.6 | 14.0 | 15.9 | 16.6 | 0.7 | 78 | 78 | 78 | 76 | 76 |
| 15 | Iraq | 14.0 | 14.6 | 13.9 | 14.5 | 13.6 | 5.6 | 76 | 79 | 86 | 86 | 90 |
| 16 | Egypt | 12.1 | 13.1 | 10.7 | 13.2 | 10.5 | 16.1 | 76 | 76 | 70 | 65 | 64 |
| 17 | Algeria | 13.5 | 14.3 | 10.4 | 12.8 | 13.2 | 9.3 | 73 | 70 | 58 | 58 | 56 |
| 18 | Uzbekistan | 15.1 | 12.9 | 14.1 | 12.2 | 15.7 | 3.0 | 73 | 74 | 73 | 71 | 70 |
| 19 | Myanmar | 11.8 | 11.9 | 13.5 | 12.5 | 12.2 | 10.7 | 73 | 71 | 65 | 62 | 62 |
| 20 | Laos | 12.8 | 9.9 | 14.1 | 14.4 | 14.9 | 5.6 | 72 | 71 | 67 | 64 | 58 |
| 21 | Vietnam | 12.3 | 8.5 | 12.9 | 13.6 | 14.5 | 9.8 | 72 | 70 | 69 | 71 | 66 |
| 22 | Turkmenistan | 14.5 | 11.2 | 13.8 | 13.3 | 15.7 | 1.9 | 70 | 69 | 68 | 67 | 66 |
| 23 | China | 11.6 | 8.4 | 11.6 | 12.8 | 15.1 | 10.2 | 70 | 65 | 57 | 57 | 57 |
| 24 | Mauritania | 13.9 | 14.0 | 13.0 | 13.7 | 13.4 | 0.2 | 68 | 67 | 57 | 55 | 50 |
| 25 | Central African Republic | 10.1 | 9.1 | 13.1 | 9.8 | 10.2 | 15.6 | 68 | 70 | 61 | 58 | 59 |
| 26 | Morocco | 12.4 | 13.3 | 10.8 | 11.7 | 14.1 | 4.1 | 66 | 63 | 51 | 49 | 47 |
| 27 | Qatar | 13.6 | 13.4 | 10.8 | 12.2 | 14.1 | 2.2 | 66 | 62 | 63 | 66 | 65 |
| 28 | Burkina Faso | 9.4 | 9.7 | 10.2 | 9.4 | 11.8 | 15.6 | 66 | 48 | - | - | - |
| 29 | Mali | 9.2 | 8.2 | 12.8 | 10.0 | 11.7 | 13.7 | 66 | 68 | 59 | 59 | 55 |
| 30 | Sri Lanka | 11.5 | 9.0 | 11.0 | 10.9 | 9.6 | 13.1 | 65 | 58 | 57 | 55 | 53 |
| 31 | Tajikistan | 13.9 | 12.3 | 11.9 | 12.4 | 13.1 | 1.1 | 65 | 65 | 65 | 58 | 58 |
| 32 | Nepal | 12.4 | 10.8 | 9.9 | 12.1 | 12.2 | 7.0 | 64 | 64 | 64 | 53 | 53 |
| 33 | Jordan | 13.1 | 14.1 | 10.7 | 11.7 | 12.5 | 1.7 | 64 | 65 | 66 | 63 | 59 |
| 34 | Tunisia | 12.0 | 12.8 | 10.3 | 10.8 | 12.3 | 5.4 | 64 | 63 | 62 | 61 | 58 |
| 35 | Kazakhstan | 13.2 | 11.5 | 10.7 | 12.4 | 14.0 | 1.7 | 64 | 63 | 63 | 56 | 55 |
| 36 | Turkey | 12.6 | 11.8 | 10.7 | 13.3 | 11.3 | 3.7 | 63 | 66 | 62 | 57 | 55 |
| 37 | Brunei | 13.8 | 14.3 | 10.7 | 10.3 | 13.5 | 0.6 | 63 | 63 | 64 | 64 | 61 |
| 38 | Bangladesh | 11.1 | 9.9 | 12.7 | 11.1 | 8.9 | 9.3 | 63 | 58 | 58 | 63 | 57 |
| 39 | Ethiopia | 10.0 | 9.2 | 10.6 | 10.8 | 10.4 | 11.9 | 63 | 65 | 62 | 64 | 67 |
| 40 | Malaysia | 12.1 | 14.6 | 12.7 | 12.0 | 9.6 | 1.5 | 62 | 60 | 65 | 60 | 58 |
| 41 | Colombia | 8.9 | 7.8 | 11.9 | 9.8 | 8.9 | 15.0 | 62 | 58 | 56 | 53 | 55 |
| 42 | Oman | 12.7 | 13.1 | 10.0 | 11.5 | 12.7 | 2.0 | 62 | 59 | 57 | 53 | 53 |
| 43 | Kuwait | 13.2 | 13.1 | 9.9 | 11.5 | 13.4 | 0.7 | 62 | 60 | 61 | 57 | 56 |
| 44 | Kenya | 11.7 | 10.5 | 10.9 | 8.3 | 10.9 | 9.1 | 61 | 61 | 62 | 68 | 68 |
| 45 | Bhutan | 12.8 | 10.9 | 11.8 | 11.6 | 13.9 | 0.0 | 61 | 64 | 62 | 61 | 56 |
| 46 | Russian Federation | 12.2 | 8.3 | 10.7 | 10.4 | 12.1 | 6.9 | 60 | 60 | 51 | 46 | 48 |
| 47 | United Arab Emirates | 12.9 | 13.0 | 9.5 | 11.1 | 12.6 | 1.1 | 60 | 58 | 58 | 55 | 55 |
| 48 | Cameroon | 8.8 | 7.2 | 11.6 | 7.0 | 10.4 | 15.0 | 60 | 54 | 38 | - | 45 |
| 49 | Indonesia | 10.9 | 11.1 | 11.6 | 10.2 | 9.5 | 6.5 | 60 | 65 | 59 | 55 | 55 |
| 50 | Niger | 9.4 | 9.5 | 13.3 | 7.2 | 11.1 | 9.3 | 60 | 52 | 45 | 47 | 53 |
| 51 | Palestinian Territories | 12.2 | 13.0 | 9.2 | 10.2 | 11.9 | 3.1 | 60 | 57 | 60 | 64 | 62 |
| 52 | Mexico | 8.4 | 6.8 | 12.2 | 10.6 | 10.0 | 11.5 | 60 | 61 | 59 | 57 | 56 |
| 53 | Azerbaijan | 13.0 | 10.0 | 9.3 | 11.1 | 12.4 | 1.5 | 57 | 57 | 57 | 52 | 57 |
| 54 | Comoros | 11.7 | 11.5 | 9.1 | 9.9 | 13.9 | 0.9 | 57 | 56 | 56 | 56 | 56 |
| 55 | Kyrgyzstan | 12.9 | 10.3 | 11.1 | 9.4 | 11.9 | 1.1 | 57 | 56 | 54 | 48 | 46 |
| 56 | Djibouti | 12.3 | 12.3 | 10.3 | 10.0 | 11.2 | 0.2 | 56 | 56 | 56 | 57 | 58 |

| 57 | Democratic Republic of the Congo | 5.6 | 6.7 | 10.6 | 7.4 | 10.4 | 15.6 | 56 | 55 | 33 | - | 53 |
|----|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|----|----|----|----|
| 58 | Chad | 11.5 | 8.2 | 10.2 | 9.6 | 10.3 | 5.9 | 56 | 48 | 40 | - | 51 |
| 59 | Bahrain | 12.1 | 12.3 | 9.1 | 10.1 | 10.5 | 0.9 | 55 | 55 | 57 | 54 | 54 |
| 60 | Tanzania | 9.3 | 10.8 | 10.3 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 7.0 | 55 | 52 | 53 | 59 | 57 |
| 61 | Cuba | 9.6 | 5.6 | 9.5 | 11.8 | 12.0 | 3.5 | 52 | 49 | 49 | 47 | 42 |
| 62 | Uganda | 8.1 | 4.6 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 9.1 | 13.0 | 48 | 47 | 46 | 53 | 45 |
| 63 | Burundi | 5.1 | 5.8 | 9.7 | 9.2 | 9.6 | 8.7 | 48 | 43 | - | - | - |
| 64 | Guinea | 10.3 | 7.5 | 8.3 | 7.0 | 8.1 | 3.7 | 45 | 46 | - | - | - |
| 65 | South Sudan | 5.7 | 1.5 | 7.0 | 6.3 | 7.8 | 15.6 | 44 | 44 | - | - | - |
| 66 | Mozambique | 6.9 | 4.6 | 7.1 | 5.2 | 8.0 | 11.7 | 43 | 43 | - | - | - |
| 67 | Gambia | 8.3 | 8.2 | 8.7 | 8.3 | 8.8 | 1.1 | 43 | 43 | - | - | - |
| 68 | Angola | 6.4 | 3.6 | 7.0 | 8.7 | 10.4 | 6.7 | 43 | 42 | - | - | - |
| 69 | Venezuela | 3.8 | 4.4 | 10.6 | 9.3 | 9.5 | 4.8 | 42 | 41 | 34 | - | - |
| 70 | Ivory Coast | 9.8 | 8.6 | 8.2 | 5.5 | 6.6 | 3.5 | 42 | 43 | - | - | - |
| 71 | Rwanda | 5.3 | 4.4 | 6.7 | 7.8 | 10.1 | 7.2 | 42 | 41 | - | - | - |
| 72 | Nicaragua | 5.8 | 4.2 | 8.5 | 9.8 | 9.0 | 4.1 | 41 | 41 | - | - | - |
| 73 | Togo | 8.6 | 6.7 | 8.5 | 7.1 | 8.4 | 1.1 | 41 | 42 | - | - | - |

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# Brief note on 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). 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". The WWL 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

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).

# WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Tunisia

## Brief country details

| Pop 2019 | Christians | Chr% |
|---|---|---|
| Tunisia | | |
| 11,783,000 | 23,300 | 0.2 |

*Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).*

| World Watch List Tunisia | Points | WWL Rank |
|---|---|---|
| WWL 2020 | 64 | 34 |
| WWL 2019 | 63 | 37 |
| WWL 2018 | 62 | 30 |
| WWL 2017 | 61 | 29 |
| WWL 2016 | 58 | 32 |

*Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2016-2020 reporting periods.*

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

| Tunisia: Main Persecution engines | Main drivers |
|---|---|
| Islamic oppression | One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials , Ethnic group leaders, Violent religious groups |
| Clan and ethnic antagonism | One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders |

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

## Brief description of persecution situation

A journalist who has investigated the situation of Tunisians Christians in depth states: "Tunisian Christians face discrimination and targeting that is often obscure and hidden to the public eye. It affects their day-to-day lives. Because of their Christian identities, many experience job insecurity, abandonment from family, friends and even fiancés; they are victims of verbal, mental and physical abuse."

Due to the factors mentioned above, most Tunisian converts to Christianity choose to hide their faith and cannot openly worship and live their lives as Christians. The hostility and pressure they face from society at large makes it dangerous to share their faith with their family members, relatives, neighbors, friends or colleagues. They also find it difficult to gather for worship and fellowship due to the risks any possible exposure would entail, while being monitored by the Tunisian security services.

## Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- Church facilities and buildings are monitored, ostensibly for security reasons but also for the purpose of surveillance.
- During the WWL 2020 reporting period, some local Christians were detained and interrogated about their activities and for possessing Christian literature. They were accused of proselytization.
- During the WWL 2020 reporting period, several Christians, especially female converts, had to relocate inside the country due to pressure and threats from their families. It has also been reported that several convert Christians were physically and/or sexually abused.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary

- Brief description of persecution situation: who has investigated  - http://underground.priscillahwang.com/

# WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Tunisia

## Introduction

## Link for general background information

BBC country profile: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14107241.

## Recent history

For centuries, Tunisia has had a strategical position in the Mediterranean region. Its original capital, Carthage, was once the arch-enemy of ancient Rome, until it was completely destroyed at the end of the Punic Wars in 146 BC. The Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs and the Ottomans all used Tunisia as a province of their respective empires, until it became a French protectorate in 1883. Tunisia gained its independence from France in 1956. The first president, Habib Bourguiba, introduced secular influences such as the emancipation of women. In 1987, President Bourguiba was replaced by President Ben Ali, who ruled Tunisia until he was ousted from power through the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011.

An interim government took over and a new constitution was approved in January 2014 and followed by presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2014. A coalition of secularist and Islamist parties emerged from the elections, but the new government struggled to deal with both security and economic challenges. However, even more concerning was the infighting within the political parties, resulting in October 2019 with the election of a total outsider as president. While not giving clarity on many issues, newly elected President Kais Saied vowed to combat corruption and poverty. Saied is a law professor and known to be socially conservative, although he has promised to advance women's rights.

Parliamentary elections also took place in October 2019, with the Islamist Ennahda party winning most seats in parliament (52 out of the 217). However, this was 17 seats less than in the 2014 elections. The new secular 'Heart of Tunisia' party came in second with 38 seats. Hence, Tunisia looks set to have another Islamist-secular government on the basis of consensus and compromise.

## Political and legal landscape

Tunisia is considered by EIU to be a flawed democracy, although it still has a more democratic and legitimate government than any other country in the region. Nonetheless, FSI cohesion indicators score high and reflect how the ruling elite has not yet managed to build trust among the general population. The 27% difference in turnout between the 2014 parliamentary elections (69%) and the 2019 parliamentary elections (42%) would seem to prove this point. In this sense, Tunisia is still struggling with its revolution of 2011. Hence, political indicators show that state legitimacy remains low even though other indicators, most notably human rights, show signs of improvement.

The key challenges for the government are about finding ways to counter the activities of militant Islamic groups in the region and to revitalize the economy. If the government succeeds in keeping the former at bay, while improving the latter and decreasing unemployment structurally, Tunisia could be regarded as the most successful country to emerge from the 2011 Arab revolts.

Freedom of Thought Report summarizes the legal situation with regard to religion: "The government subsidizes mosques and pays the salaries of imams. Local religious committees and imams must be approved by the religious affairs directorate. The president appoints the grand mufti of the state. The government allows the Jewish community to worship freely and pays the salary of the grand rabbi. It also provides some security for all synagogues and partially subsidizes some restoration and maintenance costs. The government recognizes all Christian and Jewish religious organizations established before independence in 1956. The government permits Christian churches to operate freely, and formally recognizes the Roman Catholic Church through a 1964 concordat with the Holy See."

Christianity is regarded as a foreign religion by the government and there is no formal recognition of indigenous church communities.

## Religious landscape

99% of Tunisians identify themselves as Sunni Muslim. Despite the French legacy of *laicite* (French secularism) among the urban and educated elite, Islam is very influential and the Constitution recognizes Islam as state religion. Christianity and Judaism are the most significant minority religions, although the number of Agnostics/Atheists is greater than both. The number of Christians with a Muslim background are growing in number in Tunisia. This gradual growth of the Church has become noticeable since the 1990s.

MEC reports: "Both expatriate and local Christian communities enjoy relative freedom in Tunisia, provided that they avoid activities that could be construed as proselytism. A potential source of threat is from Salafist organisations, though recent attacks have principally been on cultural and economic targets rather than against non-Islamic religious groups. The most significant challenge for local Christians is the family and societal pressure that is often faced by those who choose to leave Islam, though this only takes violent forms in extreme cases."

Approximately 99.5% of the population are Muslim and virtually all are adherents of Sunni Islam, with most following the Maliki tradition. This is one of the largest groups within the Sunni tradition. A major center of Maliki teaching from the 9th to 11th centuries was in the Mosque of Uqba in Tunisia.

There are also a very small Bahai and Jewish minorities in Tunisia.

| Religious Context: Tunisia | Numbers | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Christians | 23,300 | 0.2 |
| Muslim | 11,724,000 | 99.5 |
| Hindu | 0 | 0.0 |

| Buddhist | 89 | 0.0 |
|---|---|---|
| Ethnoreligionist | 0 | 0.0 |
| Jewish | 1,900 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 2,400 | 0.0 |
| Atheist | 3,700 | 0.0 |
| Agnostic | 27,700 | 0.2 |
| Other | 190 | 0.0 |

*Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).*
*OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.*

## Economic landscape

Tunisia is classified by the World Bank as a lower middle income economy, with a Gross National Income (GNI) of $3500 per capita. This is notably poorer than the neighboring countries Algeria and Libya that are ranked as upper middle income economies. Tourism is a key sector of the economy.

The EIU forcasts that "the government will tread carefully in implementing fiscal reforms for fear of stoking public unrest but will move ahead with some of them to keep the IMF on its side. Economic growth will pick up in 2021-23, but unemployment will remain high."

HDI shows that only 39.3% of the population are in employment, but there is a youth unemployment rate of 35.8%. This indicates a lack of economic opportunities being available to the younger generation, especially since the country enjoys a relatively high literacy rate of 79.0% . As the World Bank concludes: "Tunisia is one of the few countries in the world where a higher level of education decreases employability, in particular for women."

## Social and cultural landscape

Tunisian society is mainly conservative and Muslim although there are differences between the (rural) south and (urban) north. Due to Tunisia being a hub of Arab secular government there is a strong liberal urban youth culture.

In September 2017, Tunisia overturned the law that prohibited Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men. An important step, especially for converts from Islam to Christianity. However, social opposition prevents implementation of the law in practice. In November 2018, the government proposed an amendment of the Personal Status Code, which would lead to gender equality regarding inheritance rights. However, the proposal has ignited a huge debate as conservative Muslims regards it contrary to the Quran and Islamic law. Newly elected President Kais Saied is an opponent of equal inheritance for women.

According to the BTI Tunisia 2018 report, there is educational gender balance in Tunisia with more than 90% of both sexes being literate and more women than men entering higher education. However, women remain significantly under-represented in the workforce with a 27% labor force participation. This is an indication of the societal conservative views on marriage and motherhood.

In April 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief [reported](#) on Tunisia. He concluded that "old laws and societal pressure pose the greatest challenges to religious freedom in Tunisia; a number of old laws, such as 'public morality concepts' and 'public order provisions', are used to enforce restrictions on, for example, food consumption during Ramadan."

[Freedom of Thought Report notes](#): Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools. The courses on Islam present roughly one hour per week and the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The state allows other religious groups to educate in private schools.

[HDI](#) lists life expectancy at 75.9 years with 15.1 years of expected education.

## Technological landscape

According to the [CIA World Factbook](#) estimates for 2016, 51% of the population uses the Internet. However, most North African countries are rapidly developing in this regard and, [according to the US International Trade Administration](#), the overall majority of the population has Internet access in 2019, although many (only) via their mobile phones.

Although the freedom of the press has signicantly increased after the Arab Spring revolution, legal guarantees are still lacking, leaving uncertainty for journalists, bloggers and others. [Freedom on the Net](#) indicates Tunisia as "partly free", while [Reportes without Borders](#) states that "Tunisian civil society organizations and international NGOs expressed concern about the foot-dragging and shortcomings in the drafting of new legislation for the media. On the other hand, Tunisia's commitment to the freedom to inform as one of the pillars of its democratic transition was demonstrated in 2018 by its support for the International Declaration on Information and Democracy."

## Security situation

Over the last decade, thousands of Tunisians have joined the Islamic State group (IS) and other Islamic militant groups. Many of them have returned or have joined IS cells or other groups closer to home. The lawlessness in neighboring Libya creates opportunities for them to maintain an active presence. The last major attack dates from 2015 when Islamic militants linked to IS [killed](#) at least 60 tourists and civilians in two attacks in and around Tunis. The security situation has improved since then, but the security services [remain targets for attacks](#). Violent Islamist militancy is undermining the state's ability to provide security and remains a [destabilizing factor](#) and risk for the future of Tunisia.

## Trends analysis

**1) Tunisian democracy remains fragile**

Tunisia is a country that is more advanced than most northern African countries in terms of socio-economic development, civil liberties and democratic governance. The country has the potential to act as a model for other Arab countries due to its peaceful and consensus-driven transition to democracy.

However, regional instability, the presence of violent Islamic militants as well as a high unemployment rate and difficulties in implementing economic reforms necessary for economic growth, means that Tunisian democracy is still in a fragile state.

**2) Islamist and liberal ideals continue to fight for influence in politics and society**

Although the political situation in Tunisia has stabilized to a degree, this does not mean that the pressure on Christians can be expected to decrease. There is a battle going on in both Tunisian society and at the political level between (hard-line) Islamists and moderate liberals. it was hoped that the parliamentary and presidential elections in October of 2019 would be instrumental in determining Tunisia's future direction, but neither the Islamists nor the liberals gained a clear majority in the parliament and President Kais Saied has no clear political profile.

It is unlikely that the situation for Tunisian Christians will improve in the coming years, as society remains mostly conservative and there are no indications that a majority of the population wants to improve Freedom of Religion and Belief.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14107241. - http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14107241
- Recent history: Punic Wars - https://www.britannica.com/event/Punic-Wars/Campaigns-in-Sicily-and-Spain
- Recent history: introduced secular influences - https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14107241
- Recent history: infighting - https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/infighting-in-nidaa-tounes-a-danger-to-tunisias-democracy
- Recent history: promised - https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/10/tunisia-swear-in-president-kais-saied.html
- Political and legal landscape: EIU - https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index
- Political and legal landscape: FSI - https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom of Thought Report - https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/tunisia/
- Religious landscape: MEC - https://www.meconcern.org/countries/tunisia/
- Religious landscape: Maliki tradition - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maliki
- Economic landscape: World Bank - https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519
- Economic landscape: EIU - https://country.eiu.com/tunisia
- Economic landscape: HDI - http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TUN
- Economic landscape: World Bank - https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/overview
- Social and cultural landscape: overturned - https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-41278610

- Social and cultural landscape: prevents - https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2018/8/8/tunisia-muslim-women-still-unable-to-marry-non-muslims
- Social and cultural landscape: has ignited a huge debate - https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/tunisia-bill-women-rights-equality-inheritance.html
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- Social and cultural landscape: reported - https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/tunisias-religious-freedom-curbed-by-societal-pressure/%20
- Social and cultural landscape: Freedom of Thought Report notes - https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/tunisia/
- Social and cultural landscape: HDI - http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TUN
- Technological landscape: CIA World Factbook - https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html
- Technological landscape: according to the US International Trade Administration - https://www.export.gov/article?id=Tunisia-Telecommunications-Equipment-Services
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net - https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/tunisia
- Technological landscape: Reportes without Borders - https://rsf.org/en/tunisia
- Security situation: killed - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33287978
- Security situation: remain targets for attacks - https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/27/suicide-bombers-kill-police-officer-in-attacks-in-tunis
- Security situation: destabilizing factor - https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36629059

# WWL 2020: Church information / Tunisia

## Christian origins

Tunisia has a very rich Christian history. The first reports on Christianity in Tunisia concerned the interrogation and martyrdom in 203 AD of two Christian women, Felicitas and Perpetua, in the city of Carthage. In that same city, three very influential Church Fathers lived, worked and died, namely Tertullian (160-230 AD), Cyprian (210-258 AD) and Augustine (354-430 AD).

The early church of Tunis was at times severely persecuted by Rome, especially under Emperor Diocletian, who ruled from 284–305 AD. It was one of the places where the Donatist controversy erupted in the 4th century concerning the appointment of leaders who had previously betrayed their Christian faith during persecution. It seems that the Amazigh ('Berber') Christians were, generally speaking, less forgiving than the urbanized Romans in Tunisia.

In 439 AD Carthage was conquered by Germanic Vandals. The Vandals tried to convert the urban Catholic Christians of Africa to their Arian version of Christianity. The Vandals sent the Catholic clergy into exile and expropriated their churches, and at times had Catholic leaders killed. In 534 AD the Byzantine Empire - representatives of Rome and of 'non-heretical' Christian faith - captured Tunisia again.

The Byzantines rebuilt fortifications and border defences and entered into treaties with the Imazigen ('Berbers). Nevertheless, for many decades security and prosperity were precarious and were never fully restored. Direct Byzantine rule did not extend far beyond the coastal cities. In 698 AD, Arab armies defeated the Byzantine forces at the Battle of Carthage and destroyed it. As in other countries in North Africa, the arrival of Islam significantly affected Church development, but Christianity managed to survive in Tunisia until the 11th century.

Christianity did not succeed in getting firmly established again until the 19th century when many French and other expatriate Christians came to the country under the political protection of France. The Roman Catholic witness grew considerably and an archbishop of Carthage was installed in 1884. Various other Christian organizations also began work: Anglicans in 1829, the North African Mission in 1881, the Seventh-day Adventist in 1905, Methodists in 1908, and in 1911 Pentecostals from the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). After Tunisia's independence in 1956, the public life of the Church became more restricted; expatriates could worship without much difficulty but Tunisians converting from Islam to the Christian faith faced great opposition.

## Church spectrum today

| Church networks: Tunisia | Christians | % |
|---|---|---|
| Orthodox | 220 | 0.9 |
| Catholic | 19,200 | 82.4 |
| Protestant | 1,100 | 4.7 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Independent | 2,500 | 10.7 |
| Unaffiliated | 300 | 1.3 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | 0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **23,320** | **100.1** |
| *(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)* | | |
| | | |
| Evangelical movement | 890 | 3.8 |
| Renewalist movement | 2,400 | 10.3 |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

*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: Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). Unaffiliated Christians: Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. Evangelical movement: Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.*

# WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Tunisia

## Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 64 points, Tunisia ranked 34 in WWL 2020.

In WWL 2019, the country ranked 37 with 63 points. The main reason for the rise in score is that the violence score rose from 3.3 points in WWL 2019 to 5.4 in WWL 2020 due mainly to a greater number of Christian buildings, houses and shops being attacked.

## Persecution engines

| Persecution engines: Tunisia | Abbreviation | Level of influence |
|---|---|---|
| Islamic oppression | IO | Strong |
| Religious nationalism | RN | Not at all |
| Clan and ethnic antagonism | CEA | Medium |
| Christian denominational protectionism | CDP | Very weak |
| Communist and  post - Communist oppression | CPCO | Not at all |
| Secular intolerance | SI | Very weak |
| Dictatorial paranoia | DPA | Not at all |
| Organized corruption and crime | OCC | Very weak |

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

**Islamic oppression (Strong)**:

This persecution engine operates at different levels: At the family level, converts from Islam to Christianity are often not supported by family members in their decision to convert. There are cases of converts being locked up in their houses by their own families. At the social level, Islamic militants spread fear throughout the country. At the political level, Islamist political parties are still influential. The links between some Islamist movements and organized crime should not be underestimated. They create a lot of unrest in Tunisian society and contribute to the increase of the already high levels of fear among Christians.

**Clan and ethnic antagonism (Medium):**

Tribal aspects of society, especially outside major cities, particularly affect converts from Islam to Christianity. Turning away from Islam is not only seen as religious betrayal, but also as a betrayal of the (extended) family. Nevertheless, tribalism is less strong than in neighboring countries due to a government campaign in the 1950s and 1960s directly aimed at combatting its influence.

## Drivers of persecution

| Drivers of Persecution: Tunisia | IO | RN | CEA | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | STRONG |  | MEDIUM |  |  |  |  |  |
| Government officials | Medium |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ethnic group leaders | Medium |  | Medium |  |  |  |  |  |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Strong |  | Medium |  |  |  |  |  |
| Violent religious groups | Medium |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | Strong |  | Medium |  |  |  |  |  |
| One's own (extended) family | 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:**

- *Extended family (Strong):* The main driver of persecution for Christian Tunisians who have converted from Islam is their own (extended) family. They will put pressure on the convert to recant his or her new faith, or even abuse the convert. Spouses will be pressured to divorce the convert and any children will be taken away.
- *Ordinary citizens (Strong):* The local neighborhood is also a source of persecution for converts. This is particularly the case outside the major urban centers. Neighbors will often, for instance, exclude converts from social gatherings and are likely to cause converts to lose their jobs.
- *Violent religious groups (Medium):* The threat of activities by militant Islamic groups affects all categories of Christian communities in the country. Radical groups (whose ranks are swelling with returnees from fighting in Syria and Iraq) remain a significant threat.
- *Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):* Despite the country's reputation as being the most celebrated success story of the Arab Spring uprisings, radical Islamic teaching and militancy is widespread.
- *Ethnic group leaders (Medium):* Family heads and other important members of the family put pressure on converts from Islam to Christianty to recant their faith.
- *Government officials (Medium):* The government and state apparatus could also be regarded as drivers of persecution since they deny registration and official recognition to congregations of Christians with a Muslim background.

**Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism:**

- *Extended family (Very strong):* Also in the case of Clan and ethnic antagonism, the (extended) family is the main driver. As the regional expert, Katia Boissevain, observed: "When a conversion is announced, or discovered, families feel they have been cheated and abandoned .... Stepping aside and choosing the Christian religion is not only a break with the social body, but also a break with the social rhythm (which is defined by Islamic traditions). Becoming Christian is interpreted by the others as a choice formulated against everything for which they have been raised" (in: Algeria and Tunisia, Christianity in North Africa and West Asia, Edinburgh Companion to Global Christianity, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p.47).
- *Ordinary citizens (Medium) / Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):* Especially in rural areas, society encourages the upholding of traditional values and customs that make it difficult for converts to turn away from Islam.
- *Ethnic group leaders (Medium):* Family heads and other important members of the family put pressure on converts to return to Islam, in order to restore the family honor.

## Geographical hotspots of persecution

Converts from Islam to Christianity have most to fear from their own family members and society. This is especially true in the south of the country, which is more conservative. Urban areas, and especially the capital Tunis itself, offer possibilities for converts to escape family pressure and live their faith in the anonimity of the big city.

Violent Islamic militants are active in the border areas to the south, in particular. They will target any Christian, whether foreign of national, if the opportunity arises.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians experience a relative amount of freedom, although public evangelism is not tolerated. Foreign Christians worshipping at the few international churches hardly encounter any problems.

**Historical Christian communities:** This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by the WWL Methodology.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts with a Muslim background face various forms of persecution, e.g. from their family members. However, they (and others) are more or less free to seek and receive information about the Christian faith, particularly content posted online.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by the WWL Methodology.

## The Persecution pattern



WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Tunisia
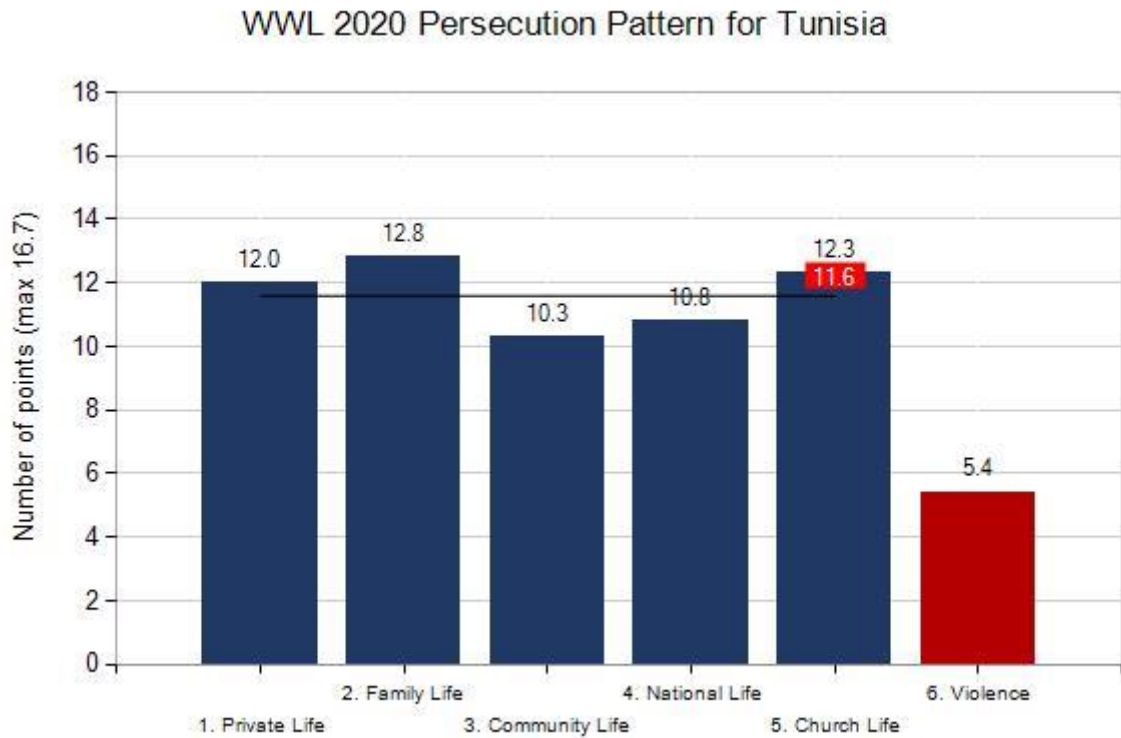
The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Tunisia shows:

• The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (11.6), decreasing from 11.8 in WWL 2019.

• Although all *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, it is highest in *Family* and *Church life.* This reflects the difficulties converts from Islam to Christianity face, both within their own families, as well as in the public sphere, e.g. if they want to be baptized or register churches.

• The score for violence went up from 3.3 in WWL 2019 to 5.4 in WWL 2020. The main reason for this rise was an increased number of Christian buildings, houses and shops being attacked.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details are shown from four of the highest scoring block questions, with those items scoring highest listed first. 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 0 – 4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/, password: freedom).

**Private sphere**:

- ***Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another? (Block 1.1 / Score: 3 points):*** Particularly converts from Islam experience pressure from their families when their conversion is known at the private level, although there are notable differences between rural areas and the country's capital, Tunis, where the situation is comparatively better.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.) (Block 1.4 / Score: 3 points):*** The fact that many Tunisian Christians feel it is safer to use a pseudonym when posting Christian messages on social media is an indication of the pressure they are facing.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members (Block 1.7 / Score: 3 points):*** Most converts (especially young people) face some sort of opposition, rejection and/or persecution because of changing their faith. Especially for young converts, it is risky to be seen reading the Bible and difficult to find a place for prayer by themselves, let alone speaking about their faith with family members.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians (Block 1.9 / Score: 3 points):*** This is especially problematic outside of the capital Tunis and other urban areas. Meeting other Christians might draw unwanted attention for converts and might lead to pressure from their families upon discovery.

**Family sphere:**

- ***Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith (Block 2.6 / Score: 4 points):*** Only Muslims can adopt a child in Tunisa.
- ***Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion (Block 2.1 / Score: 3. 5 points):*** There is no category for 'Christian Tunisian' in the birth registration process. The Tunisian constitution separates Tunisian citizenship from religious affiliation, but in reality it is assumed that all Tunisians are Muslims when registering civil rites of passage (birth, marriages, deaths etc.).
- ***Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / Score: 3. 5 points):*** Children of converts will have to follow Islamic education when they go to school and can face harassment if their parent's faith is known.
- ***Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases (Block 2.12 / Score: 3. 5 points):*** Due to their conversion, several converts have lost custody over their children.

*In the family sphere, the freedom of Christian families to conduct their family life in a Christian way is limited. Every Tunisian is automatically registered as a Muslim. Expatriates have no trouble if their children keep their foreign nationality. Converts have to accept that official documents will state that they are Muslim. If they seek to change this, it proves impossible and causes repercussions.*

**Community sphere:**

- ***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.) (Block 3.1 / Score: 3 points):*** Although most pressure stems from the family, harrassment and social isolation are known consequences of conversion from Islam to Christianity.

- ***Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.) (Block 3.2 / Score: 3 points):*** Monitoring happens frequently and Tunisian Christians are aware that their messages and calls are being intercepted. Police officers regularly question Tunisian Christians about their activities and even a simple request for a new passport can end up in an interrogation.

- ***Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith (Block 3.7 / Score: 3 points):*** Converts receive threats from their families or the society around them when their conversion is known. Especially in rural parts of the country young female converts are scared of being forced to marry a Muslim. There are also cases known of converts being expelled from their university, or who are not able to go to school because they have been turned out of their homes. Sometimes customers are told not to buy from shops run by a Christian. Hence, community pressure to recant their new faith is high for Tunisian Christians.

- ***Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons (Block 3.10 / Score: 3 points):*** Employment has been a major struggle for most Tunisian Christians. As converts, they either lose their jobs or cannot get hired because they lose all social connections. Tunisian Christians tend to seek employment with foreign institutions to avoid such discrimination.

**National sphere:**

- ***The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Block 4.1 / Score: 3.25 points):*** Sharia law is not the "principal source of legislation" as in many other Arab countries, but Islam is still the state religion and the state is the guardian of religion. Hence, this means that other faiths (and their adherents) do not have the same status as Islam and Muslims.

- ***Officials have at any level refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identity cards, etc. (Block 4.2 / Score 3.5 points):*** There is no official recognition of conversion. Tunisians are generally considered to be Muslim.

- ***Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols (Block 4.12 / Score: 3.5 points):*** Christians try to avoid drawing unwanted attention, especially from radical Islamic elements within society. Hence, only recognized (foreign) churches display Christian symbols.

- ***Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians (Block 4.10 / Score: 3 points):*** Media (newspapers and TV shows) have been spreading incorrect information about Christians and drawing a false picture of the Christian community. Christians are accused of converting for financial gain due to rich foreign Christians promising vulnerable Tunisians wealth and the possibility to migrate to a Western country. Christians are also accused of influencing under-age youth to become interested in the Christian faith.

*When dealing with the authorities, Christians are usually in a disadvantaged position. Underlining their vulnerable position is the fact that Christian converts are not likely to be treated equally in court, especially in cases involving family law. They are also vulnerable to abuse, as their families can in some cases act against them with impunity, especially in rural areas. Expatriate churches are the only ones allowed to display Christian symbols.*

**Church sphere:**

- ***It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government (Block 5.2 / Score: 4 points):*** Tunisian converts cannot register their churches and no new church has been granted official registration since Tunisia's independence in 1956. This stands in stark contrast to the law that regulates mosques. Registered churches are allowed to operate freely but face practical difficulties, particularly relating to their property-upkeep, hiring staff and obtaining permission to publish and distribute Christian texts in Arabic.
- ***It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution (Block 5.20 / Score: 3.5 points):*** Registered churches does not want their already vulnerable relationship with the government to deteriorate. Hence, they prefer to keep a low profile concerning infringements to their Freedom of Religion and Belief.
- ***Openly selling or distributing Bibles and other Christian materials has been hindered (Block 5.14 / Score: 3.25 points):*** Selling Christian materials is not forbidden and Bibles can be bought in secular bookstores. However, distributing Christian materials for free is seen as proselytizing and forbidden and there are no Christian bookstores in Tunisia.
- ***Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts (Block 5.7 / Score: 3.5 points):*** Due to social opposition, foreign churches (like Roman Catholic congregations) are very cautious about accepting Tunisian Christians in their midst.

*Although the Constitution of Tunisia currently respects freedom of religion and conversion from Islam is not prohibited, in practice representatives of the government often act very differently.*

## Violence

*The following table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure.*

| Tunisia | Reporting period | Christians killed | Christians attacked | Christians arrested | Churches attacked | Christian-owned houses and shops attacked |
|---------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| WWL 2020 | 01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019 | 0 | 21 | 6 | 2 | 15 |
| WWL 2019 | 01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018 | 0 | 25 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| WWL 2018 | 01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017 | 0 | 57 | 16 | 1 | 2 |

*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.*

- **Christians attacked:** Several Christians have been affected due to incidents involving (physical) abuse, forced marriage, rape and sexual harassment. In addition, several Christians had to relocate inside the country after facing pressure (from their families).
- **Christians arrested:** Some converts were detained and interrogated about their activities and for possessing Christian literature. They were accused of proselytization and having links with foreign organizations.
- **Churches attacked:** At least two church properties were vandalized.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Several converts have been attacked inside their houses, often by family members. In other cases, shop owners have been forced to end their business or had their shops damaged after the local community discovered they had converted to Christianity.

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the situation for Christians in Tunisia over the last five reporting periods.

**Chart 1:**

Since WWL 2017, the average pressure on Christians has more or less stabilized at the 11.6-11.8 point mark. This is a very high level of pressure and reflects the fact that in the years following the Tunisian Revolution of 2011 the situation for Christians has not improved.

| WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Tunisia | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|---|---|
| 2020 | 11.6 |
| 2019 | 11.8 |
| 2018 | 11.7 |
| 2017 | 11.7 |
| 2016 | 10.9 |

**Chart 2:**

The levels of pressure in all *spheres of life* have been more or less stable over the last four (and in some cases, five) reporting periods, although in WWL 2020 there were noticeable reductions in pressure in the *Family*, *Community* and *National spheres of life*.
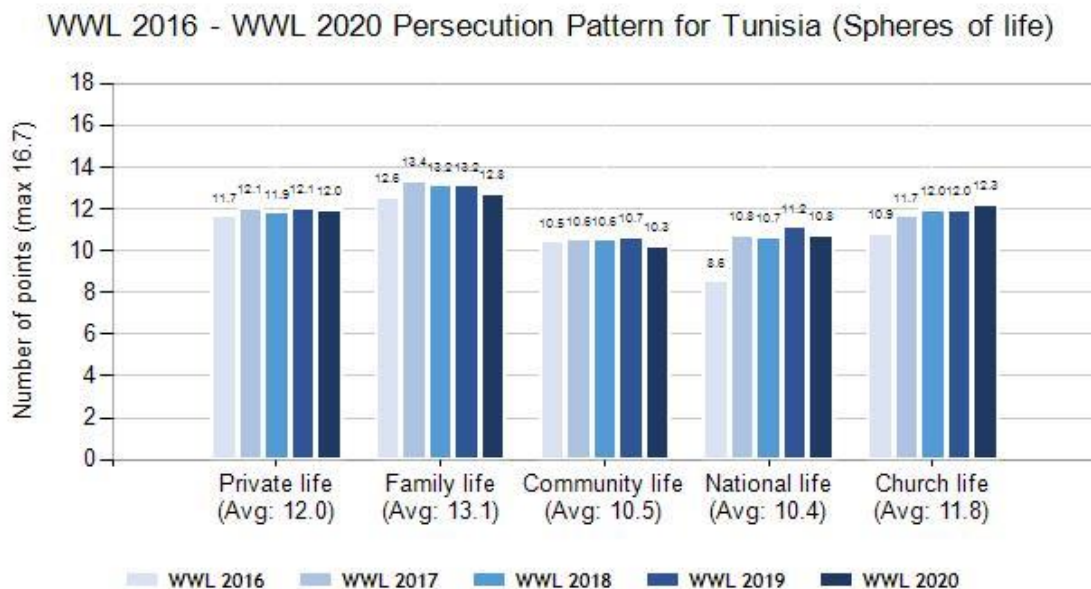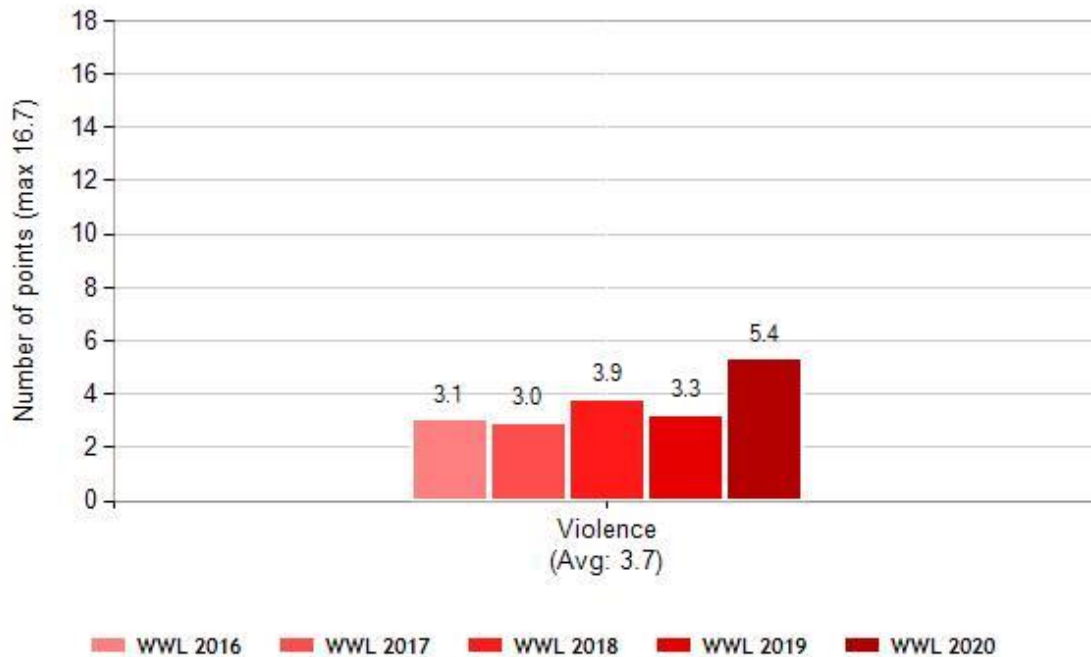


**Chart 3:**

Over the first four reporting periods, the scores for violent incidents remained more or less stable under 4.0 points (a fairly high level). However, more incidents were reported for WWL 2020, causing a rise in score to the high level of 5.4 points.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Tunisia (Violence)



## Gender profile of persecution

**Female Pressure Points:**

- *Abduction*
- *Denied access to social community/networks*
- *Denied access to Christian religious materials*
- *Denied custody of children*
- *Forced Divorce*
- *Forced Marriage*
- *Forced out of home/expulsion*
- *Incarceration by family*
- *Incarceration by government*
- *Violence – death*
- *Violence – physical*
- *Violence – psychological*
- *Violence – sexual*

Christian women and girls in Tunisia are particularly subject to sexual harassment, domestic violence, being expelled from family and forced into marriage as forms of religious persecution. According to BTI 2018 Tunisia (p. 24): "Tunisia has a track record on striving for gender equality, but discrimination against women persists. In the 2014 Gender Inequality Index, Tunisia ranks 48th out of 188 countries." However, this is an important improvement as "regional neighbors fared worse with Algeria ranking 83rd, Libya 94th and Morocco 126th."

Despite efforts toward gender equality, the culture is not generally respectful of women in practice, nor does it recognize women as leaders. While children, girls typically are given less freedom and are not as able to leave the house.

The main source of persecution for women in Tunisia comes from the dominating male in the family: For a single female that would mean the father, the brother or any other family member who follows in rank after that (uncle etc.); for a married woman that would be her husband or even fiancé. Conversion from Islam is forbidden and converts risk being ostracized by their families and communities, suffering physical violence, or even honor killings if their new faith is discovered. Women are more at risk in the traditional family context of honor killing, as men have more freedom to express their own opinion. This means that female converts must conceal their new religious beliefs from their family. Many Christian women who are the only believer in the family do not have a Bible at home and are known to be threatened if a Bible is found. Especially in rural parts of the country, young girls are afraid of being forced into married, and in some cases, abducted. The main source of pressure to marry a Muslim comes from the surrounding culture and the family.

Further, female converts can be imprisoned in their own homes and raped, even by family members. Married female converts can be divorced, losing custody over any children. This leaves them unprotected and vulnerable, as it is socially unacceptable for women to live on their own and be independent. In other cases when a mother comes to faith, there is the fear that the children might (accidentally) tell the extended family, who will subsequently put pressure on the husband to divorce her. Some Christian women have been separated from their children for prolonged periods due to disputes related to their new Christian faith.

**Male Pressure Points:**

- *Economic harassment via work/job/business*
- *Forced Divorce*
- *Forced out of home/expulsion*
- *Incarceration by government*
- *Violence – physical*
- *Violence – psychological*

New converts to Christianity - both male and female - are by far the most vulnerable of Christians in Tunisia. Christian men who convert face intimidation, beatings and death threats. They bring shame upon their families by leaving Islam and are therefore likely to be ostracized. Pressured by their families, Muslim wives will leave a Christian convert, and he may be denied inheritance or even access to his possessions. However, the severity of backlash following conversion depends on his social position and his political standing within his community. While Christian men may have been expelled from their home when the family first learnt about their conversion, many have found that their families will quietly accept the conversion at a later point in time.

Male converts also face loss of jobs and being denied access to social community/networks in addition to being detained by the police for faith-related reasons. When a man is persecuted, his family becomes vulnerable and lacks protection.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department's 2018 International Religious Freedom report (p.7), adherents of Bahai reported difficulties in practicing their belief as they are not officially recognized and cannot have their own place of worship. However, they have had some constructive dialogues with government officials in the recent past.

Regarding the Jewish community: "The government allows the Jewish community to worship freely and paid the salary of the grand rabbi. It also provided security for synagogues and partially subsidized some restoration and maintenance costs. Government employees maintained the Jewish cemetery in Tunis. The government permitted the Jewish community to operate private religious schools and allowed Jewish children to split their academic day between public schools and private religious schools."

No issues regarding the Sunni-Shia divide have been reported in the WWL 2020 reporting period, although Shia Muslims are generally discriminated against and public figures have spoken out against Shia Islam in the past.

## Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- *Islamic oppression:* Society and culture, particularly in rural areas, remains anti-Christian and this has not been influenced by the political changes since 2011 so far. Tunisia's Constitution may seem a positive step forward, but the wording is general enough to make restrictive interpretations possible. Interpretation will strongly depend on the kind of government that is in power and its attitude towards religious minorities. If the hard-liners gain more influence in the country this could make life more difficult for Christians. In addition, Tunisia faces a real threat of instability and conflict as a result of the rise in the activity of militant Islamic groups in the country. The situation is getting even more disconcerting now that many Tunisian Islamic fighters who have been fighting alongside the Islamic State group (IS) in Libya are returning home in the wake of IS's apparent defeat there. If groups like *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* gain more influence in Tunisia, the situation for Christians in the country will get much worse, most likely leading to more intense and violent persecution.
- *Clan and ethnic antagonism:* The positive developments regarding women's rights and a more positive approach towards religious minorities among the moderate liberals could create a backlash among more conservative elements within society, who want their traditional Islamic customs and practices upheld .

## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Gender profile of persecution: BTI 2018 Tunisia  -  https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/TUN/
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 2018 International Religious Freedom report  - https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TUNISIA-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf

- Persecution of other religious minorities: in the past  -  https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/shiites-in-tunis.html
- Future outlook for the church: Hizb-ut-Tahrir   -  http://almanac.afpc.org/hizb-ut-tahrir

# Additional reports and articles

## WWR in-depth reports

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

## World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles available at: https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/tunisia.

## Recent country developments

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