

World  
Watch  
Research

## Kuwait: Country Dossier

January 2020



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2020

[research@od.org](mailto:research@od.org)

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
World Watch List 2020 .....	3
Copyright notice .....	5
Brief note on sources and definitions .....	5
WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Kuwait .....	6
Brief country details .....	6
Dominant persecution engines and drivers .....	6
Brief description of persecution situation .....	6
Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period .....	7
External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary .....	7
WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Kuwait .....	8
Link for general background information .....	8
Recent history .....	8
Political and legal landscape .....	8
Religious landscape .....	9
Economic landscape .....	10
Social and cultural landscape .....	10
Technological landscape .....	11
Security situation .....	11
Trends analysis .....	12
External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding .....	12
WWL 2020: Church information / Kuwait .....	14
Christian origins .....	14
Church spectrum today .....	15
External Links - WWL 2020: Church information .....	15
WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Kuwait .....	16
Reporting period .....	16
Position on World Watch List (WWL) .....	16
Persecution engines .....	16
Drivers of persecution .....	18
Geographical hotspots of persecution .....	20
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	20
The Persecution pattern .....	21

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	22
Violence.....	25
5 Year trends .....	27
Gender profile of persecution.....	28
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	29
Future outlook for the church.....	30
External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics .....	30
Additional reports and articles.....	31
WWR in-depth reports.....	31
World Watch Monitor news articles.....	31
Recent country developments .....	31

# 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	-	-	-

## Copyright notice

**No copyright** - This report is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge WWR as the source.

## 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 / Kuwait

## Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Kuwait		
4,249,000	512,000	12.0

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

World Watch List Kuwait	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	62	43
WWL 2019	60	43
WWL 2018	61	34
WWL 2017	57	38
WWL 2016	56	41

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

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

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

## Brief description of persecution situation

Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship informally. However, the existing places registered for worship are very small for the number of people gathering and this can lead to tension between the different Christian groups. Obtaining property for gathering for worship is extremely difficult.

Local converts from Islam bear the brunt of persecution as they face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. They risk discrimination, harassment, monitoring of their activities by the police, and all sorts of intimidation by vigilante groups. Moreover, conversion from Islam to another faith is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity experience similar pressures as in their home countries, as they are often living within their own national or ethnic communities. Despite this, there are hardly ever reports of Christians being killed, imprisoned or harmed for their faith.

### Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- Some Christians had to relocate inside the country due to pressure from society.
- Abuse of foreign (domestic) workers is a widespread phenomenon, with the case of the Philippine worker [found dead in a freezer](#) in February 2018 exposing just the tip of an iceberg. Given the high numbers of Christians among the expatriate workers, it is reasonable to assume that some of them not only experience (sexual) abuse because of their different ethnic background, but also because of their faith. In other words, it is likely that their Christian faith adds to their vulnerability.
- The government requires Islamic religious instruction for all Muslim pupils in state and private schools. Teaching Christianity in state-run schools is prohibited, even to legally recognized Christian groups.
- The following statement from the [Amnesty International Report 2017/18](#) gives an indication of the restrictive environment Christians are having to live in: "The authorities continued to unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression, prosecuting and imprisoning government critics and online activists under penal code provisions that criminalized comments deemed offensive to the Emir or damaging to relations with neighboring states."

### External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary

- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: found dead in a freezer - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.9756f1fa9f37](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9756f1fa9f37)
- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: Amnesty International Report 2017/18 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/02/annual-report-201718/>



# WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Kuwait

## Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252>.

## Recent history

In 2011 the Arab Spring uprisings inspired some protests in Kuwait but to little effect. However, Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah and his cabinet resigned in December 2011 due to alleged corruption. In October 2012, parliament was dissolved once more due to on-going tensions between government forces and the opposition composed of Islamic and tribal factions. The political crisis continued into 2013 when the country held its third round of parliamentary elections within 16 months. According to The Bertelsmann Transformation Index ([BTI 2018](#)), "the new elections in November 2016 re-introduced an Islamist opposition into the formal political scene, which has opened a period of potential renewed antagonism between the legislative and executive branches, and could potentially lead to the empowerment of pro-reform forces."

In February 2018, a [diplomatic row erupted](#) between Kuwait and the Philippines, after a Philippine domestic worker was found dead in a freezer, revealing the tip of the iceberg of domestic worker abuse. In reaction, Philippine President Duterte imposed a travel ban for Philippine migrants to Kuwait. After both governments came to an agreement about worker rights in May 2018, the travel ban was [lifted](#). The solutions include the right for Philippine domestic workers to keep their passport during employment, even when they have a day off. Under the *kafala* system, domestic workers had to hand over their passport to their employers to prevent them from potentially running away. (Employers allegedly invest [thousands of dollars](#) to employ such workers.) The move was publicly [criticized](#) by a Kuwaiti blogger, who was subsequently accused of having a 'slavery mentality'. Abuse of domestic workers is a big problem in Kuwait but it is difficult to discern to what extent an employee's Christian faith adds to their vulnerability.

## Political and legal landscape

Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy whose head of state is the Emir of the al-Sabah family and was the first Arab country in the Gulf to have an [elected parliament](#). In May 2005 parliament gave women the right to vote and stand as candidates in elections for the 50-seat National Assembly.

[Human Right Watch reports](#): "Kuwait continued to restrict free speech, using provisions in the Constitution, the national security law, and other legislation to stifle political dissent. Despite recent reforms, migrant workers do not have adequate legal protections, and remain vulnerable to abuse, forced labor, and deportation for minor infractions. In 2017, Kuwait's Constitutional Court struck down an overbroad 2015 law that required all Kuwaiti citizens and residents to provide DNA samples to the authorities, ruling that it violated the right to privacy. The government has yet to ensure a transparent and fair process to address the citizenship concerns of an estimated 100,000 Bidun, who claimed to be stateless in Kuwait."

Compared to other countries in the Arabian Peninsula Kuwait generally ranks better in civil liberties and freedom of the press and Kuwaiti's are proud of their tradition of active political participation.

Kuwait tries to keep a neutral position on the international level and did not join Saudi Arabia and the UAE in its boycott of Qatar. It is actively trying to reconcile the Qatari crisis, with Emir Sheikh al-Sabah [stating](#) in October 2019 that "it is not acceptable to have a dispute among our brotherly GCC states".

## Religious landscape

Kuwaiti society is Islamically conservative and Sharia law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life.

[Freedom of thought 2018 Report](#) ranks Kuwait as having "grave violations" and notes a decline in freedom of expression since the Arab Spring: "The Constitution guarantees freedom of religious practice, nevertheless it specifies that such practice must not contravene public order or morals and must work in accordance with established customs (Article 35). The government does not recognize Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu or Sikh groups which are not included in the Islamic principle of Abrahamic faiths (ahl al-kitab: Muslims, Jews, Christians). It also denied the recognition of several Christian groups. The recognition by the state often take years for approval and is not transparent."

Although Kuwait has accepted some of the major United Nations conventions on human rights (e.g. the 1996 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 1996 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) non-Islamic religions face much opposition. In 2012, a member of Parliament [announced](#) a bill to put a halt on non-Islamic places of worship being built. The bill was not approved but churches still have to operate carefully. Proselytizing Muslims is both illegal and socially unacceptable and churches tend to apply self-censorship to avoid this. Criticizing Islam or the Prophet Muhammed will lead to public prosecution; even suggesting that the Kuwaiti Constitution should have priority over the Quran in state affairs [can lead to charges and public hatred](#). During recent years, human rights activists and others [have been convicted](#) for spreading atheism and secularism.

Religious Context: Kuwait	Numbers	%
Christians	512,000	12.0
Muslim	3,539,000	83.3
Hindu	138,000	3.2
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	0	0.0

Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	11,200	0.3
Atheist	700	0.0
Agnostic	32,600	0.8
Other	15,200	0.4

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

The World Bank classifies Kuwait as a high income economy with an economic model fully dependent on oil and gas exports. Kuwait has a high literacy rate of 96.1% ([BTI 2018](#)) and only 2.4% of the population is unemployed (2016, BTI). The GNI is ~73,000 ([USD PPP per capita](#)) and economic indicators as reported by [FSI](#) are mostly positive. However, according to BTI, "the state of Kuwait has an abundance of oil reserves and is thus – even with the currently declining oil prices – a very wealthy country. Among Kuwaiti nationals, absolute poverty does not exist. However, wealth is quite unevenly distributed." High oil prices led to significant growth until the global financial crisis started in 2008 and heavily affected the country's economic performance. Nevertheless, Kuwait remains a relatively wealthy country.

Kuwait's immigrant workforce is larger than its citizen population. The total population of Kuwait is [estimated at](#) 4.2 million. According to the US State Department's [2018 IRF report](#), "there are 1.4 million citizens and 3.3 million non-citizens".

## Social and cultural landscape

Society in Kuwait continues to be Islamic, conservative and tribal. According to the [Freedom of Thought 2018 report](#), women face discrimination in law and practice. There are no laws against domestic violence or marital rape. According to the law, a male citizen of any religion transmits citizenship to their children. A Kuwaiti woman requires the permission of her father to marry. A Muslim man is allowed to marry Muslim, Jewish or Christian women, a female Muslim can only marry a Muslim man in accordance with Islamic law. The children have to be brought up in their father's faith and Islamic law is applied in marital disputes.

According to the [Human Development Index](#) Kuwaitis have a life expectancy of 75.4 years and 13.8 years of expected schooling. It ranks Kuwait 57th out of the 189 countries.

According to country experts, being Christian is an extra vulnerability in Kuwait and can lead to higher levels of discrimination or abuse. However, skin colour and ethnic background often play an even greater role. Hence Western (white) Christian expatriates are far less likely to experience harassment than African or Asian Christian expatriates. In addition, high-skilled expatriates are likely to face less difficulties than low-skilled ones. Hence, a low-skilled Christian migrant from an African background will be most vulnerable to persecution in Kuwait.

## Technological landscape

According to the [Human Development Index](#), 99,6% of the population uses the Internet and mobile phone use is widespread. However, the advancement of communication technology and the increased use of social media has not led to an increased level of freedom of speech.

- The [Freedom of Thought 2018 Report](#) writes: "Since the events of the Arab Spring throughout the Arab world, Kuwait has been cracking down on online media freedoms. Freedom of assembly and association is guaranteed by law, but these rights are restricted in practice."
- [Human Rights Watch](#) reports: "Kuwaiti authorities have invoked several provisions in the constitution [*and*] penal code [...] to prosecute journalists, politicians and activists for criticizing the emir, the government, religion, and rulers of neighboring countries in blogs or on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media."
- Reporters without Borders ([RSF 2018](#)) describes the freedom of the press as highly restricted: "The vaguely-worded provisions of a cyber-crime law that took effect in January 2016 pose a threat to bloggers and online journalists who post any critical content. And an electronic media law adopted the same month forces them to apply to the government for a licence. The restrictions are reflected in online censorship and in arrests and convictions of bloggers ...".

## Security situation

The security situation in Kuwait is stable. In the aftermath of the Iraqi-Kuwait war in 1990-91, Kuwait's security forces developed well under training by Western countries. Its security forces are very capable of dealing with criminal, terrorist and foreign threats. Even amid the heightened tensions between the USA and Iran in 2019, Kuwait seems unaffected, despite the fact that around 30% of the population is Shiite.

As with neighboring countries, Kuwaiti citizens have been among fighters of the Islamic State group (IS) abroad, but this has not led to any attack in the country itself.

## Trends analysis

The future of Kuwait, like that of other countries in the Gulf, is intrinsically linked to the political situation in the region. The Middle East and the Gulf region remain unpredictable.

### **1) Although Kuwaiti society is Islamically conservative, there are liberal influences emerging**

The conservative nature of society has produced an environment which is basically hostile to Christians. The government is likely to allow this to continue (so long as it does not feel challenged in its administration of power) in order to appease the radical Islamic groups in society. However, there is also a growing influence of more liberal youth, especially coming from the large numbers of Kuwaiti's who have studied abroad. This is encouraging for the expatriate Christian communities who are hopeful that the degree of acceptance will continue and be reinforced - but there is still a long way to go before the right to change one's religion is granted or respected. Converts with a Muslim background will continue to face pressure.

### **2) Foreign Christian workers are likely to continue coming to the country regardless of the existing pressure**

As long as the country maintains its openness to the world economy, Christian workers are likely to continue coming to the country. Despite the regional turmoil (such as the Qatari crisis and the ongoing civil war in Yemen), Kuwait has been politically stable during the WWL 2020 reporting period and there has been no significant rise in levels of persecution. However, the fear among Christians (especially converts) will continue as the general environment is basically hostile. Society is likely to become more conservative and the government looks as if it will allow this as long as its authority is not openly challenged by radical Islamic groups. This will probably not deter Christian workers from abroad continuing to take up employment.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252>
- Recent history: BTI 2018 - <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/KWT/>
- Recent history: diplomatic row erupted - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?utm\\_term=.2f4ea1628ab7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?utm_term=.2f4ea1628ab7)
- Recent history: lifted - <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/07/23/not-one-worker-deployed-to-kuwait-despite-accord/>
- Recent history: thousands of dollars - <https://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwaiti-blogger-under-fire-over-comments-on-filipinos-1.2255665>
- Recent history: criticized - [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1260544617420376&id=407570359384477](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1260544617420376&id=407570359384477)
- Political and legal landscape: elected parliament - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14644252>

- Political and legal landscape: Human Right Watch reports - <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/kuwait>
- Political and legal landscape: stating - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/kuwait-emir-gulf-dispute-longer-acceptable-tolerable-191029095032440.html>
- Religious landscape: Freedom of thought 2018 Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Religious landscape: announced - <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/kuwaiti-mps-call-for-ban-on-construction-of-churches-445971.html>
- Religious landscape: can lead to charges and public hatred - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36046706>
- Religious landscape: have been convicted - <https://freethoughtreport.com/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Economic landscape: BTI 2018 - <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/KWT/>
- Economic landscape: USD PPP per capita - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.KD?locations=KW>
- Economic landscape: FSI - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Economic landscape: estimated at - <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kuwait-population/>
- Economic landscape: 2018 IRF report - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/KUWAIT-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: Freedom of Thought 2018 report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Social and cultural landscape: Human Development Index - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KWT>
- Technological landscape: Human Development Index - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/KWT>
- Technological landscape: Freedom of Thought 2018 Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Technological landscape: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/kuwait>
- Technological landscape: RSF - <https://rsf.org/en/kuwait>

## WWL 2020: Church information / Kuwait

### Christian origins

The earliest signs of Christian presence in Kuwait are the ruins of churches on the offshore islands Failaka and Akkaz. Archaeologists date these churches between the 5th and the 9th centuries. If this latter date is correct, Christianity survived the conquest by Islam (633 AD, according to Islamic tradition) longer than often assumed. The site in Failaka was a monastery with a church surrounded by a densely settled area and formed the focal part of a Nestorian community that lived on the island. The Kingdom of Hirah north of Kuwait had a large Nestorian population. By the 10th century these sites had been vacated; there is no more sign of a Christian presence in Kuwait for almost a millennium, although its position in the Arabic and Ottoman Empires makes it highly likely that at times, Christians from those Empires lived and worked in Kuwait.

Only after the Sheikhdом became a British protectorate in 1899, could mission work begin in Kuwait. Samuel Zwemer of the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church in America moved to Kuwait in 1903 and opened a Bible shop. The National Evangelical Church of Kuwait was organized that same year, though it did not have a building for worship until 1926. In 1910 the Mission also opened a clinic that developed into a hospital for men; a hospital for women followed.

After the discovery of oil in 1937, migrant workers from Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, India and Egypt came to Kuwait bringing with them a diversity of churches, including Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Church of South India and other denominations.

Due to the oil boom and the economic growth of Kuwait since 1973, the number of Arab and non-Arab Christians increased dramatically. Currently, about 12% of the Kuwaiti population is Christian with the Roman Catholic Church as the largest denomination. There is a cathedral in Kuwait City, which serves mainly people from India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan - as well as Arab Christians from Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories and Syria.

Kuwait is the only member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) besides Bahrain to have a local Christian population who hold citizenship. They number around 260 citizens in Kuwait while Bahrain has nearly 1,000, as reported by [Al Arabiya English](#). Most of the Christian families in Kuwait and Bahrain originate from south-eastern Turkey while others came from either Iraq or Palestine. According to some estimates, there are 12 families who identify as Christian-born Kuwaitis and are believed to have equal rights with their Muslim countrymen.

## Church spectrum today

Church networks: Kuwait	Christians	%
Orthodox	88,500	17.3
Catholic	396,000	77.3
Protestant	16,500	3.2
Independent	7,100	1.4
Unaffiliated	3,600	0.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>511,700</b>	<b>99.9</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	10,100	2.0
Renewalist movement	105,000	20.5

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.*

## External Links - WWL 2020: Church information

- Christian origins: Al Arabiya English. - <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2016/12/27/An-inside-look-at-a-Gulf-Christian-community.html>



# WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Kuwait

## Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019.

## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 62 points, Kuwait ranked 43 in WWL 2020.

Kuwait has risen 2 points compared to WWL 2019 but stayed at the same rank (Rank 43). The increase in score is mainly due to access to new sources and the fact that several country experts were consulted concerning the levels of pressure faced by Christians in Kuwait in comparison to neighboring Gulf countries. This has resulted in a slightly higher score for pressure in some *spheres of life*. Pressure remains at a very high level, with converts from Islam bearing the brunt of persecution as they face opposition from both family members and the local community.

## Persecution engines

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

*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):

As in many countries in the region, *Islamic oppression* is the main engine behind the persecution of Christians in Kuwait. It is operating strongly at both national and local community levels. The whole region is in a volatile situation, with society generally becoming very conservative – this is the context for the situation in Kuwait where the laws and Constitution also affirm the conservative nature of society.

According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion and Islamic law (Sharia) is an important source for legislation. The government requires Islamic religious instruction for all pupils in state and private schools. Teaching Christianity in state-run high schools is prohibited, even to legally recognized Christian groups. In the past, a significant number of Kuwaitis were tolerant towards non-Muslim residents; however, this has begun to change due to the growing influence of radical Islamic groups, who do not want to see Christians in the country. Even though the Islamic State group (IS) has been weakened militarily, its influence is still present and it enjoys a notable resonance among a significant number of Sunni radicals. Kuwaiti citizens are known to have fought for IS in Iraq and Syria.

Converts from Islam to Christianity, particularly those with a Kuwaiti background, face the highest levels of pressure. For converts from Pakistan or the Levant (e.g. Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Syria, among other countries), much depends on the response within their surrounding community in Kuwait. As long as they do not create unrest, they have less to fear from the Kuwaiti government, although their Kuwaiti employers may decide to end their work contract, which could result in deportation if they cannot find another job. Within those expatriate communities, the consequences for converts depend more on the cultural norms from the home country, than on the cultural practices of Kuwait. For expatriates, conversion to Christianity is sometimes easier than in their home country, because family and relatives are often far away and social pressure is less stringent.

**Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):**

The government of Kuwait is restrictive in many ways. For instance: Getting church registration is a very complicated and lengthy procedure. *Dictatorial paranoia* is behind most of the government restrictions, as the country's ruler does not want his hegemony threatened in any way. Freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of association are also restricted. Although the country has one of the strongest parliaments in the region, the ruling royal Sunni family still dictates everyday life. (In 2016, two former members of parliament, who were critical of the government and their allies, received prison sentences.)

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

Typical for this Persecution engine are situations in which age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context (such as family honor) are forced upon Christians. In the case of Kuwait, *Clan and ethnic antagonism* is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity, especially Kuwaiti converts, because of their strong family ties. Turning away from Islam is not only regarded as religious betrayal, but also as betrayal of the family and tribe. Converts are seen as disrespecting their own fathers and grandfathers, a disloyalty which is socially unacceptable. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion.

## Drivers of persecution

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

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 (Very strong):** Although clearly mixed with issues of family honor, strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for families to target family members who convert to Christianity. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially unacceptable in Kuwait. Families will most certainly expel converts from their home, as they see conversion not merely as being an attack on Islam, but also on the family honor.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Although there is no criminal penalty for conversion, it is socially unacceptable and a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized. Some Kuwaiti Christians (mostly converts from Islam to Christianity) have been interrogated by government officials, commanded to stop meeting, and have faced threats of losing their jobs and homes. Conversion is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status matters. For example, fathers who leave Islam are likely to lose custody of their children. Foreign Christians have to practice their faith carefully as the government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to speak about the Christian faith publicly; proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. Christian expatriate workers have been interrogated and instructed not to share their faith, or risk losing their visas. No Christians have been officially prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country without due process in recent years.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** The fear of hostile pronouncements or actions by Islamic leaders contributes to the high degree of caution converts feel compelled to exercise.

- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Strong):** Conservative Islamic society is the biggest driver of persecution against Christians in Kuwait. Employees are tied to their employers and thus vulnerable to their bosses' demands. The latter can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from South East Asia and North Africa. Expatriate Christians also face discrimination or mistreatment by their fellow Muslim expatriates in some cases.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Family and tribal heads will make sure that Islam is respected within their tribe or extended family. They will put pressure on family members to make sure that converts recant their faith.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Kuwait has one of the strongest parliaments of the Middle East. Some of the elected politicians are hardline Islamists and openly encourage the government to take action against Christians, especially converts.

*While the country tries to be open and modern, a strict interpretation of Islam continues to have its grip on society. Society and government enforce conservative Islamic customs in public, e.g. by enforcing public dress codes, prohibiting the drinking of alcohol, by limiting the freedom of expression (i.e. criticism of Islam) and by allowing other religions only to worship in private.*

#### **Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism:**

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Although it is clear that the Islamic punishment for apostasy - capital punishment - is a key element in the reasons to persecute a convert family member, this cannot be viewed separately from the concept of 'family honor'. Age old norms (such as protecting family honor) are still intact. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is the betrayal of everything a conservative Muslim family stands for and brings shame upon the family name. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for shaming their families.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Tribal and family heads will make sure that the honor of their group is not 'defiled' by a member that converts from Christianity to Islam, which is felt as a great disgrace.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The government adds to the influence of *Clan and ethnic antagonism* in that they work to maintain the status quo in society and its cultural practices. The government will not protect a convert against its own family, but regard any punishment as a 'family matter'.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Local imams will encourage the upholding of cultural norms, which are intertwined with Islamic principles.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** Tribalism still has a widespread influence within Kuwaiti society and the social standing of tribe and family is very important to Kuwaitis. Thus, there is social pressure to keep up societal norms in order not to shame the good name of the tribe and family.

#### **Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:**

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Kuwaiti government does not allow any criticism of state affairs, including how it manages religious affairs. The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring activities in the country closely.

Expatriates speaking out against the government will most probably be deported. [Freedom House 2019](#) reported that journalists and social media users whose articles insult the emir (or Saudi Arabia) often face prosecution, and that the government continues to stifle criticism of policies.

Despite its restrictive policies, the main pressure on Christians is not coming from the government in the first instance. Christians have most to fear from members of Kuwait's conservative society. There is a clear dichotomy in the country between Kuwaitis (by definition Muslim) and the many immigrant workers, even more so if the latter are Christian. As a result, due to the already existing societal abuse and discrimination, Christians frequently exercise self-restraint for safety reasons.

## Geographical hotspots of persecution

Kuwait is a very small country with the capital city (Kuwait) being the centre of all activities. The risks that Christians face - especially converts from Islam to Christianity - depend on the sort of community Christians are part of, rather than the geographical area where they live. Kuwaiti converts face the highest risks as Kuwaitis are conservative and family ties are strong. Western Christian expatriates are most often free to practice their beliefs, as long as they refrain from proselytizing. Non-Western Christians with lower levels of skills are more likely to face discrimination and abuse, especially female domestic workers. Many of these are from the Philippines. It is a matter of debate to what extent their non-Muslim faith adds to their vulnerability in the case of abuse.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two are present in Kuwait:

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Of the total number of Christians in Kuwait, the majority of them are foreign workers. They are relatively free to worship. However, the existing places for meeting are very small for the number of people gathering. It is extremely difficult to obtain property for worship purposes.

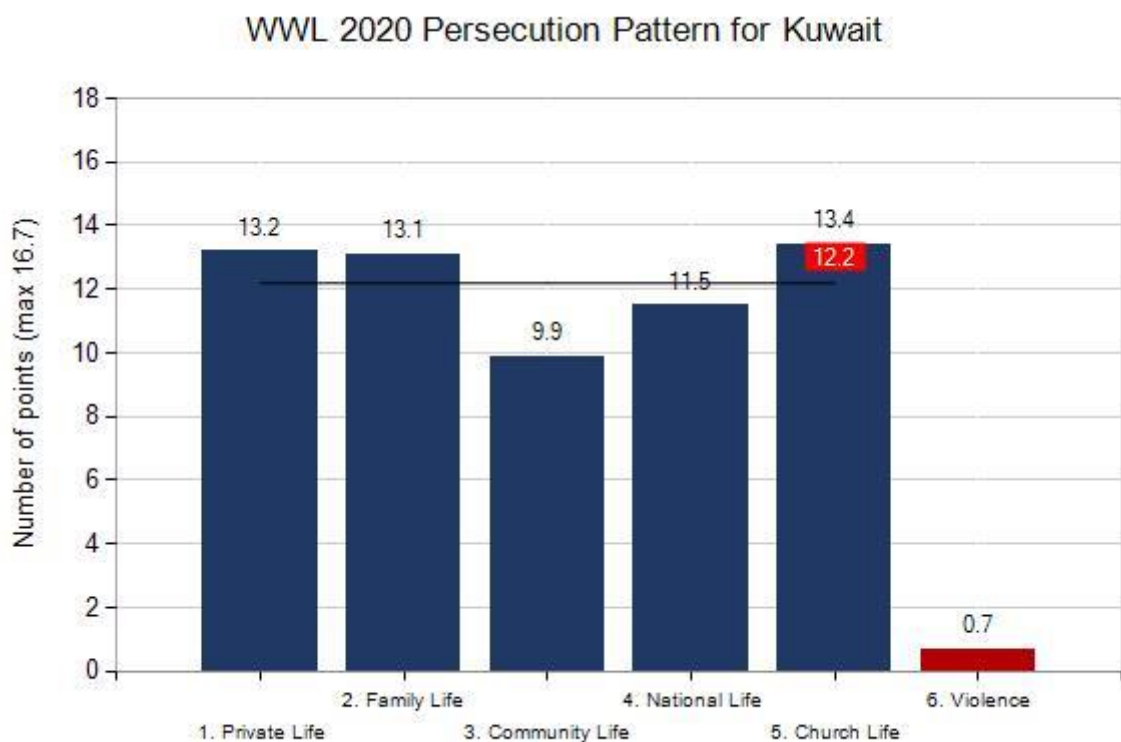
According to page 4 of the US State Department's [International Religious Freedom report](#) for 2018, there are seven officially recognized Christian churches: The National Evangelical Church (Protestant), the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church. Some religious groups can conduct worship services without government interference provided they do not disturb neighbors or violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing. The government allows such groups to operate in rented villas, private homes, or the facilities of licensed churches.

**Historical Christian communities:** There is a small number of native Kuwaiti Christians residing in the country. [Reportedly](#), there are 12 Christian families and a total number of 250 Christians. These do not exist as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis; they are included in the category for expatriates above.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts from Islam to Christianity face daunting challenges in many forms. The main drivers of persecution are family, community members, radical Muslims and, to a lesser extent, the authorities. They risk discrimination, harassment, monitoring by police and all sorts of intimidation. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These do not exist as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis; they are included in the category for expatriates above.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Kuwait shows:

- The average pressure on Christians has remained on a very high level (12.2 points), increasing from 11.7 in WWL 2019. (This increase in points is mainly due to new reports and a reassessment of the situation in the country in comparison to neighboring Gulf countries.)
- Although all *spheres of life* show high or very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in the *Private, Family and Church spheres of life*. This reflects on the one hand the difficult situation for convert Christians who face very high pressure from their (extended) family and cannot have an official Christian marriage or a Christian funeral. On the other hand, church life is difficult for both converts and expatriate Christians, as proselytizing and integrating converts from a Muslim background are socially unacceptable.
- The score for violence went down from 1.5 in WWL 2019 to 0.7 in WWL 2020. The decrease in score is mainly do to fewer reports of violence being recorded.

## 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:

- ***It has been risky for Christians to discuss their faith with those other than immediate family members (extended family, others) (Block 1.8 / Score: 3.5 points):*** Risks are highest for Kuwaiti converts, while it depends on the specific norms of their own community for non-Kuwaiti converts. Expatriate Christians can be accused of proselytism when speaking about their faith with Muslims, which will lead to deportation.
- ***Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another (Block 1.1 / Score: 3.25 points):*** In a very conservative and tribal society that regards leaving Islam as a betrayal of family values, conversion to Christianity always brings difficulties. As a result, even though the law does not formally prohibit conversion, both society and government put hurdles in the way for people who convert. For instance, they will not get an official document with their new faith recorded on it.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols (Block 1.5 / Score: 3.25 points):*** Converts cannot wear any Christian symbol as it can lead to discovery of their faith. Expatriate Christians are sometimes careful, as publicly displaying a cross can lead to negative remarks or other types of harassment, especially when working in a Kuwaiti home (as a domestic worker, for example).
- ***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: 3.25 points):*** Converts from Islam to Christianity face the highest risk as posting faith-related items could lead to discovery of their conversion. However, expatriate Christians can also not openly proselytize or criticize Islam.

*In addition, all (religious) literature deemed offensive towards Islam is forbidden. Converts living with their family (both nuclear and extended) have difficulty worshiping or owning Christian materials as they have to be careful that such materials are not discovered.*

### Family sphere:

- ***Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion (Block 2.1 / Score: 3.5 points):*** All children born to Kuwaitis are considered to be Muslim. This principle also applies to the children of Kuwaiti converts.



- **Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons (Block 2.3 / Score: 3.5 points):** A female Kuwaiti Christian from a Muslim background is only permitted by law to marry a man also born Muslim; while a man would have freedom to marry a non-Muslim - but in both cases Islamic procedures apply. Hence, celebrating the marriage between a Christian and a Kuwaiti convert in a church would be impossible.
- **Christian children have been pressured to attend anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / Score: 3.5 points):** Converts often do not receive any inheritance from their deceased parents, as their leaving Islam has dishonored the family.
- **Christian baptisms have been hindered (Block 2.4 / Score: 3.25 points):** Baptisms of converts must be conducted discreetly as open baptism might attract severe abuse and harassment from family as well as from the community at large.

*Especially converts from Islam face serious challenges living as a Christian family. The prevailing circumstances in the country also put significant restrictions on expatriate Christian families. Both have to behave carefully in public. Speaking about their beliefs is difficult and even dangerous, because proselytizing in any way is strictly forbidden. Besides this, converts bear the brunt of persecution in the family sphere. Deceased converts are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, and there are very limited facilities for expatriate Christians. The law also puts restrictions on marriage - a Muslim female may not marry a non-Muslim man unless he converts to Islam. These laws have a significant implication on questions of custody and inheritance as well.*

#### **Community sphere:**

- **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: 3.5 points):** Christians are in general monitored not only by the government but also by society, who will inform the security services if they are aware of 'suspicious circumstances'. Especially expatriates suspected of evangelism will be followed by the security services.
- **Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events (Block 3.5 / Score: 3.25 points):** During the month of Ramadan, Christians struggle to cope with the de facto requirement to fast imposed by the government and the community. In addition, converts from Islam to Christianity will have to take part in all Islamic religious ceremonies in order to keep their new faith a secret.
- **Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith (Block 3.7 / Score: 3.25 points):** There is always pressure on converts to renounce Christianity, also at the community level. Known converts will be ostracized, probably lose their job and will not be seen as being part of the community anymore.
- **Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons (Block 3.10 / Score: 3.25 points):** Known Kuwaiti converts would definitely be discriminated against and have great difficulty in finding employment. It is an accepted fact that Christian expatriate workers can experience discrimination on the work-floor. Their Christians faith is an extra vulnerability in this regard, although racism often also plays a very negative role.



*In Kuwaiti communities, Christians are seen as foreigners (and infidels) and are sometimes directly or indirectly prevented from participating in community activities. Education is another area where Christians face challenges. The government requires Islamic religious instruction in state schools for all students and also in private schools that have one or more Muslim students. But the law [prohibits](#) organized religious education for faiths other than Islam in state-run schools.*

**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: 4 points):*** The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The freedom of religion enshrined in [the Constitution](#) does not meet international standards fully as it focuses purely on the observance of religious rites, which may not conflict with Kuwaiti (i.e. Islamic) morals - see Article 35. Hence, the Constitution does not guarantee the freedom to convert from Islam to Christianity.
- ***Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions (Block 4.9 / Score: 3.75 points):*** Only Christian organizations with a clear benefit for Kuwaiti society, such as a hospital, will be welcomed. It is impossible to establish a Christian organization with the intention of proselytizing and organizations with a clear Christian profile will be under constant suspicion and opposed.
- ***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):*** No convert from a Muslim background would apply to have their conversion officially recognized because they know that this cannot be granted (based on apostasy provisions of Islamic law) and because to make such an application would expose them to the authorities and so be extremely dangerous.
- ***Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public (Block 4.8 / Score: 3.5 points):*** All Christians will try to keep a low profile in order to avoid pressure. Criticizing both the Kuwaiti government or Islam is impossible and will probably lead to deportation for expatriate migrants. Thus, for example, speaking about social justice from a Christian perspective can only be done with great sensitivity.

*There are laws against proselytizing, and the government enforces them. The government also endorses a policy of funding and supporting Sunni Islam by financing Sunni mosques, imams and Sunni Islamic teaching and education. Although Kuwait does hold democratic elections, running for a public office as a non-Muslim is unthinkable. Several radical Islamic groups (as well as conservative hardline members of parliament) wish to get rid of all non-Muslim influences, such as the expatriate celebration of Christmas.*

**Church sphere:**

- **Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings (Block 5.5 / Score: 3.75 points):** As organizing public Christian activities will often be interpreted as proselytism, churches will not be allowed to organize them. Most churches apply self-censorship in this regard in order to avoid any problems with the government or society. Many congregations have to gather in homes as there is a lack of church space, but those churches make sure they keep a low profile.
- **Work among youth has in particular been restricted (Block 5.6 / Score: 3.75 points):** It is possible to organize activities for Christian youth, but it is impossible to organize activities directed at Muslim youth as these will be interpreted as acts of proselytism.
- **Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts (Block 5.7 / Score: 3.75 points):** The government has prohibited non-Muslim missionaries from working in the country and from proselytizing Muslims. Openly integrating converts within church communities would be seen as a clear sign that proselytizing is taking place.
- **Openly selling or distributing Bibles and other Christian materials has been hindered (Block 5.14 / Score: 3.75 points):** The selling of Christian materials is only permitted at outlets within the church compound. The free distribution of Christian materials is not permitted outside church compounds as this would be considered to be an act of proselytization. In practice most Christians would exercise extreme caution in distributing Christian materials, effectively exercising self-censorship. In previous years, the distribution of Christian material has led to deportation of the expatriate offender.

*Church life in Kuwait is restricted. For example, to purchase a plot of land to build a church, the buyer must be a citizen of Kuwait. For converts to go and buy land for church construction would be very dangerous as this would expose their conversion to the general public. It is not uncommon that churches applying for licenses to build new places of worship have had to wait years for approval. A country researcher noted: "Most of the recognized Christian churches considered their existing facilities inadequate to serve their communities and faced significant problems in obtaining proper approvals from municipal councils to construct new facilities. Municipal authorities obstructed religious gatherings in private spaces and pressured landlords who had leased property to unlicensed churches." Besides the difficulties in obtaining church facilities, publishing religious material is also limited to one's own church congregation. The government allows churches to import religious materials, but under the condition its content does not insult Islam. Signs and symbols on the outside of church buildings are forbidden.*

**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.*

Kuwait	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	1100	0	0	0
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	20	0	0	0
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	2	0	0	0

*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.*

Kuwait is a typical Gulf country in that it experiences a low level of violence targeting Christians. The government does not have to act against Christians since pressure from society is very high and Christians are self-censoring. It is difficult to get verified reports on specific violent incidents out of the country.

- **Christians attacked:** It is widely known that house-maids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable to incidents of (sexual) abuse. However, statistics are scarce as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have no interest in revealing the true situation: Kuwait needs the domestic staff to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the house-maids need the money coming in from the thousands of migrants working in the Gulf states and do not want to put their economic interests at stake (although Philippine President Duterte imposed a temporary travel ban to Kuwait, after the body of a Philippine maid was found in a freezer).

The employers of abused house-maids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The house-maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as "dirty", whether in Kuwait itself or by their family at home. In addition, many provide a very much needed source of income for their families in their home countries. The home families are proud of the work being done in Kuwait, and the house-maid does not want to disappoint her family. As indicated above, statistics and evidence of sexual abuse are very difficult to provide and it is also difficult to prove that any sexual abuse is due to the house-maid being a non-Muslim. The figure provided is a conservative estimate.

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence on Christians over the last five reporting periods.

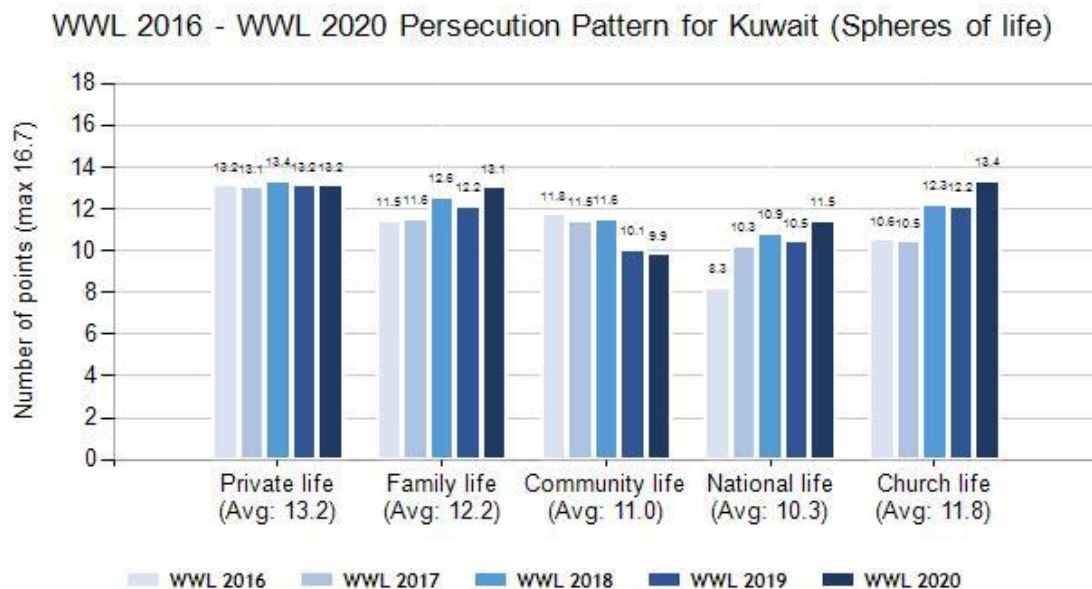
### Chart 1:

The average pressure on Christians has increased since WWL 2016. It appears to be currently levelling off at the 11.7 - 12.2 point mark.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Kuwait	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	12.2
2019	11.7
2018	12.2
2017	11.4
2016	11.1

### Chart 2:

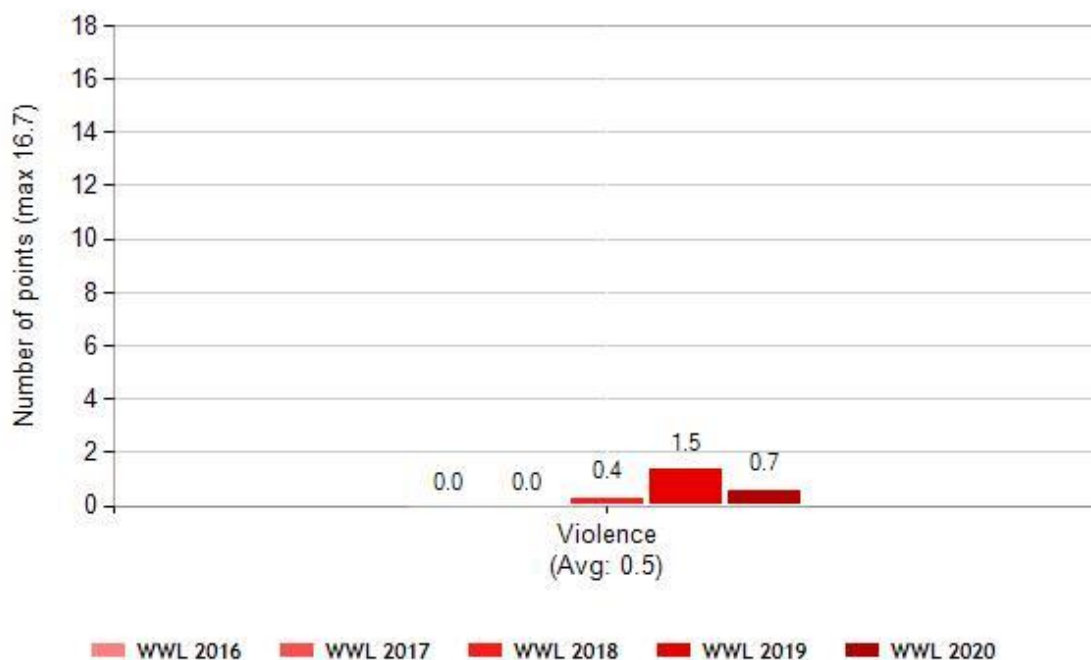
While the very high level of pressure in the *Private sphere of life* has been more or less stable over the last five reporting periods, there have been noticeable increases in the pressure in the *Family, National and Church spheres of life*. Only in *Community life* does there appear to be a trend of pressure reducing (in WWL 2019 and WWL 2020).



### Chart 3:

The number of violent incidents recorded in Kuwait has not changed dramatically over the years and so the violence score has remained more or less stable at a very low level (except in WWL 2019). The rise in WWL 2019 was mainly due to an increase in points scored for the abuse of expatriate domestic workers. Less cases were reported during the WWL 2020 period, resulting in a slightly lower score.

### WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Kuwait (Violence)



## Gender profile of persecution

### Female Pressure Points:

- **Forced divorce**
- **Forced to flee town/country**
- **Violence – sexual**

Christian women remain especially vulnerable, as women in general in Kuwait are treated as being inferior to men. Although there are relatively few Kuwaiti Christians, many of the foreign domestic maids in Kuwait are Christian. This is significant in a country where the foreign population outnumbers the indigenous population. According to Kuwaiti delegates attending a [CEDAW review](#) in 2017, the ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, is a major issue. Statistics on the issue are scarce, as employers of abused maids or the perpetrators of the abuse have no interest in reporting the issues, and the maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as "dirty" within their society in Kuwait or by their family at home.

Although there is no proof, some country experts claim that non-Muslim domestic workers, almost all of whom are female, are more vulnerable to such abuse than Muslims. It is known that within Islamic culture, many look down upon non-Muslims (and even other Islamic sects). Islamic doctrine concerning "those whom one's right hand possesses" strengthens attitudes that Christian maids are free to use however one likes. Furthermore, according to the Tahirih Justice center, domestic abuse, especially against women, is thought to be widespread in Kuwait. Domestic violence is considered to be a family affair; there are [no specific laws on domestic violence](#) and the authorities most probably will not act against it. Besides that, the role of women in society is very limited and they often do not have a choice in marriage.

Native Kuwaiti Christian women of Muslim background will encounter severe family pressure to reject their new faith, leading some to seek emigration. Perhaps the most difficult law for Christian converts hoping to establish their own Christian household is that women from a Muslim background are restricted by law from marrying a non-Muslim.

#### **Male Pressure Points:**

- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Forced divorce***
- ***Forced out of home/expulsion***

In Kuwait, men who convert to Christianity fear the rejection of their immediate and extended families and the repercussions that has on their livelihood. In this Islamic society, male converts are likely to be ostracized by their families, simultaneously losing their respect and their financial support. Often, this means that Christian men or boys are forced to leave the family home. Without family support, it is difficult for men to find or keep their job and marrying becomes almost impossible. Christian men are especially subject to discrimination and hostilities on the work-floor. Married Muslims who convert have been be divorced by their spouses. The isolation of conversion is further amplified by the difficulty that converts from a Muslim background have in forming sustainable church groups.

### **Persecution of other religious minorities**

Not only Christians have to face the oppressive hand of the government, other minorities (such as the Shia community) also experience discrimination and have to operate carefully. Although the sizeable Shia community has traditionally enjoyed greater levels of acceptance in Kuwait than in some other countries in the region, restrictions on religious freedom have increased; this is primarily due to political changes concerning Kuwait's relationship to Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Religious groups such as Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs are relatively free to practice their faith in private, although they lack facilities to worship. Conservative groups within parliament view all non-Muslim religious activities with suspicion and regularly oppose them.

According to the US State Department's 2018 [International Religious Freedom report](#) (p. 10): "Members of non-Abrahamic faiths and nonregistered churches continued to state they remained free to practice their religion in private but faced harassment and potential prosecution if they disturbed their neighbors or violated laws regarding assembly and proselytizing. They ... avoid conflict with authorities by not proselytizing or disparaging the government or other faiths. ... they did not publicly advertise religious events or gatherings to avoid bringing unwanted attention to their organizations both from the public and from government authorities. ... Almost uniformly across these communities, members said they lacked sufficient religious facilities and religious leaders or clerics to lead prayers, bless births and marriages, and conduct appropriate death rituals."

## Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- **Islamic oppression:** If the authorities feel compelled (for reasons of political expediency) to become more hostile towards Iran and closer to Saudi Arabia, this could potentially lead to Sunni conservatives exerting greater political influence which could result in the political climate becoming more hostile to Christians (including expatriate churches). In addition, although IS has suffered serious defeat from a military point of view, its influence still remains. The rise in Sunni radicalism has been an issue not only for Christians in the region, but also for individual country leaders and the international community. Sunni majority countries, including Kuwait, are on the alert to make sure that militant groups do not establish their networks in their country.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The Kuwaiti government will continue to do everything necessary to eradicate any dissent and avoid public unrest.
- **Clan and ethnic antagonism:** Although urbanization, modernization and the rise of the Internet are also a major influence on the younger generation, it is likely that the influence of tribalism will remain high. Globalization could even strengthen tribalism, as Kuwaitis may feel threatened and seek to protect their own identity. In such a climate, conversion from Islam to Christianity will remain a very sensitive issue.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution: Freedom House 2019 - <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/kuwait>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: International Religious Freedom report - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/KUWAIT-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: Reportedly - <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2016/12/27/An-inside-look-at-a-Gulf-Christian-community.html>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life : prohibits - <http://freethoughtreport.com/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life : the Constitution - [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait\\_1992.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.pdf?lang=en)
- Gender profile of persecution: CEDAW review - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22341&LangID=E>
- Gender profile of persecution: no specific laws on domestic violence - <http://preventforcedmarriage.org/forced-marriage-overseas-kuwait/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: International Religious Freedom report - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/KUWAIT-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>



## 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 Kuwait.

### World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/kuwait>.

### Recent country developments

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