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## Niger: Country Dossier

December 2019



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# 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 / Niger

## Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Niger		
23,177,000	62,200	0.3

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

World Watch List Niger	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	60	50
WWL 2019	52	58
WWL 2018	45	58
WWL 2017	47	--
WWL 2016	53	49

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

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

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

## Brief description of persecution situation

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

## Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- In June 2019, a Protestant church was [set on fire](#) by protesters who were protesting the arrest of an Imam.
- In October 2019, a [mission school](#) was vandalized by jihadists who operate in the region.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary

- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: set on fire - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2019-06/church-niger-protests-fire-muslim-imam-arrest.html>
- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: mission school - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2019-10/niger-mission-schools-jihadist-attack.html>



# WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Niger

## Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662>.

## Recent history

Niger declared its independence from France in 1960. Since then the country has seen numerous ups and downs, including at least four military coups. Despite the improvements since Mahamadou Issoufou came to power in 2011, there have been concerns about the “securitization” of Niger’s foreign policy and domestic politics. The country is battling against various Islamic militant groups: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) on its northern western border with Mali, and Boko Haram on its southern border with Nigeria. In May 2013, AQIM and MUJWA claimed responsibility for suicide operations in Arlit and Agadez, northern Niger, where the country has a historically militant Tuareg population. Within days of those attacks, militants attacked a prison in Niamey and freed a long-time AQIM member and attempted to free several other Boko Haram members. This led to speculation that Boko Haram and MUJWA orchestrated the prison attack.

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

In the last two years there has been a rise in the levels of violence. March 2018 saw repeated attacks carried out by [Boko Haram militants](#) against vulnerable internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees in the Diffa region of southeastern Niger, killing 88 people and displacing nearly 18,500 people from their homes. In April 2018, it was reported that the US air-force was building a large base for [armed drones](#) a few miles outside Agadez and at the request of the Nigerien government, with the drones expected to target al-Qaeda and IS-affiliated militants throughout the Sahel region including the area around Lake Chad that has been affected by Boko Haram insurgency.

There were also major domestic political incidents in 2018 that pitted the government against human rights defenders and activists, largely involving the government's use of repressive measures. Arbitrarily detaining them for nearly four months after their arrest in March 2018, Nigerien authorities opened the [prosecution](#) proceedings against a group of human rights defenders in an attempt to silence dissenting voices and ban peaceful demonstrations.

## Political and legal landscape

Politics, tribe and militancy are intertwined in Niger's political landscape.

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

This development is of major importance to Christians in the country, especially since the region is otherwise very much influenced by Boko Haram and AQIM activity. However, the 2016 elections did not advance the consolidation of democratic rule and corruption remains endemic. Despite these setbacks, the electoral outcome was accepted by all political parties. A major challenge remains the fight against Islamic militancy in the Diffa region.

## Religious landscape

Niger is a Muslim majority nation with over 96% of the population being Muslims, of whom about 5% are Shiites.

Religious Context: Niger	Numbers	%
Christians	62,200	0.3
Muslim	22,314,000	96.3
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	775,000	3.3

Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	7,700	0.0
Atheist	200	0.0
Agnostic	12,800	0.1
Other	4,800	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

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

60% of Niger's economy comes from international aid and for the foreseeable future this is likely to continue, especially because the international community fears that if Niger's economy fails, it will allow Islamic militants to exploit the situation and become more powerful. Niger has always been considered one of the poorest countries in the world. In the last five years, GDP growth has consistently reached between 4% and 7%. Droughts and flooding in the summer months remain a pressing challenge. The influx of refugees from Mali and Nigeria - as well as a growing number of IDPs - are another challenge to [the socio economic growth](#) and has a negative impact on the whole population.

## Social and cultural landscape

Although the country's official language is French, each tribe and ethnic group has its own language and culture. Eight of the nine presidents since independence in 1960 have been of Hausa or Zarma descent. These two tribes dominate the country and therefore it should not be surprising that Tuaregs have engaged in two major rebellions since the 1990s and early 2000s and that the Songhai tribes were the main targets for recruiting by the radical Islamic group MUJWA. MUJWA, for example, used Songhai traditional symbolism in its recruiting videos. Niger's most fertile areas are also in the Zarma region south of Niamey, and therefore the Zarmas are the wealthiest tribe in the country.

The Hausas are descended from the Hausa states that formerly occupied the region in the jihads of the 19th century, so they have a tradition of being in power. The Tuaregs of northern Niger live in the most arid region of the country and are the poorest of the major tribes. While education is not guaranteed in any part of the country, the levels are particularly low in the Tuareg region, especially for women.

Most Muslims in Niger are members of either the Tijaniya or Qadiriya Sufi orders, although Islamists seek to disassociate the population from Sufism and encourage Salafism. Additionally, there are smaller Islamic groups in Niger, including the Kalikato, who have a belief system like Boko Haram in rejecting everything from the West. Indeed, the influence of Boko Haram seems to be spreading from northern Nigeria into Niger.

## Technological landscape

Niger is one of the poorest nations in the world. Its technological infrastructure is poor. Road, schools, and hospitals lack a lot of facilities. The country's Internet penetration rate is among the lowest with only a 10% penetration rate. Its level of [Facebook](#) users is also one of the lowest: 440,000 Facebook users in Dec/2017, which is a 1.9% penetration rate.

## Security situation

Military confrontation between government troops and Boko Haram has caused a large number IDPs and a humanitarian disaster. Many Christians who have escaped the conflict are living in IDP camps in Bosso, Yebbi, Maiduguri and Yola.

The attacks by Boko Haram and other radical Islamic groups continue to cause fear among the Christian community. There is a likelihood that the violence of militant Islamic groups from northern Nigeria (as well as from Mali) could in the long run seriously affect Niger. The economic and political instability of the country could also offer radical groups like Boko Haram an opportunity to expand their influence and presence. [In mid-May 2019](#), Nigerian security forces foiled a terror attack on Niger's highest-security prison outside of the capital Niamey that held the country's most dangerous prisoners, including former Boko Haram fighters and drug traffickers. Two days later, 28 government troops pursuing the militants who attacked the prison [were killed](#) in an ambush by armed insurgents in what became the deadliest attack recorded in western Niger.

## Trends analysis

### 1. The presence of Boko Haram and AQIM remain a constant threat

In 2017, the human rights situation in the country deteriorated due to security concerns over Boko Haram activity. The government declared a state of emergency in some parts of the country and even arrested several journalists in connection with the Boko Haram threat. As it stands, it seems that the country is moving away from the internal political divisions that led to the 2010 coup, but the presence of Boko Haram and AQIM remain a constant threat both to the state authorities and to Christians in the country and region. Niger requires military support to secure its borders.

## 2. Niger has international military support to secure its borders

A considerable part of the southern third of the country seems prone to persistent Islamic hostilities. The proximity of hardline Islamic groups in the upper north of Nigeria and northern Mali is far from reassuring. The country is not a well-developed democracy with institutions that can deal with crises. The fact that the region is seeing a proliferation of radical Islamic groups, the UN and Western countries have been supporting the government with military assistance. Currently there are [forces](#) from the USA, France, Germany, Mali and from other countries in the region actively assisting. However, this is unlikely to be enough if it is not coupled with profound changes in the country in both political and economic ways.

### External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Niger

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662>
- Recent history: Boko Haram militants - <http://https://www.voanews.com/africa/boko-haram-militants-target-civilians-nigers-diffa-region>
- Recent history: armed drones - <http://https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-builds-drone-base-niger-crossroads-extremism-fight>
- Recent history: prosecution - <http://https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/niger-release-of-activists-must-signal-end-to-repression-of-dissenting-voices/>
- Economic landscape: the socio economic growth - <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/NER/>
- Technological landscape: Facebook - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ng>
- Security situation: In mid-May 2019 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cvenzmgygmt/niger%20>
- Security situation: were killed - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48286975>
- Trends analysis: forces - <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/04/politics/us-forces-hostile-fire-niger/>

## WWL 2020: Church information / Niger

### Christian origins

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

### Church spectrum today

Church networks: Niger	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	20,200	32.5
Protestant	22,000	35.4
Independent	19,800	31.8
Unaffiliated	320	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,320</b>	<b>100.2</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	23,000	37.0
Renewalist movement	25,900	41.6

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: missionary expeditions - [http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike\\_origins1957.html](http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike_origins1957.html)

# WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Niger

## Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 60 points, Niger entered the Top 50 at Rank 50 in WWL 2020.

Niger scored 53 points and ranked 58th in WWL 2019. The rise in 7 points is mainly due to the pressure and violence orchestrated by violent Islamic militants in the Sahel region. In the past, Niger was more or less spared from attacks by radical Islamic groups and the Church was not the main target as well. However, in the WWL 2020 reporting period, the country has experienced a series of attacks by Islamic militants and protesters also at times take their revenge by burning churches. There are also conflicts that have both religious and ethnic dimensions. The activities of the Islamic militants have forced the Nigerien president to seek international military support. The unpredictable situation of the country makes Christians vulnerable.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Niger	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very 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	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

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

### Islamic oppression (Very strong):

In Niger, the Muslim population is over 96% according to WCD 2019 statistics. Despite this, religion is understood to be a private matter and is not politicized by the State; indeed, the State tries to maintain the separation of State and religion, but this separation is increasingly under pressure. Muslim religious leaders of the Izala group, a radical Islamic group originating in northern Nigeria, are active in Niger and threatening the freedom of Christians. Other Islamic pressure groups like the Tariqa ("the way" in Arabic – the Sufi way of approaching Allah) are active in certain parts of the country (e.g. in Maradi and Niamey). Izala and Tariqa create pressure on minority religions and on Muslims they consider to be deviating from Islam. Niger has a history of good relations between the majority of Muslim believers and the much smaller minority faiths. Nonetheless, Niger's battle against Boko Haram has stoked local intercommunal tensions and undermined the security and freedom of Christians in the country.



**Organized corruption and crime (Medium):**

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

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

For most Nigerien, Islam is regarded as being part of their ethnicity: If you are a Nigerien, you are a Muslim. Anything to the contrary is regarded as betrayal, which causes converts to Christianity and other indigenous Christians to face persecution.

**Drivers of persecution**

Drivers of Persecution: Niger	IO	RN	CEA	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	-	-	-	MEDIUM
Government officials	Medium	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	Weak
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

#### Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** This is probably the strongest driver in the country. Radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram and other al-Qaeda affiliated militants attack Westerners, Western-aligned institutions and tourists, soldiers and peacekeepers. Broader society and citizen-mobs have been a major source of persecution for Christian too. They kill Christians and attack churches and Christian schools. The Wahhabis, a radical branch of Islam originating from Saudi Arabia, are regularly preaching opposition to Christianity in public and via mass media (radio and television).
- **Organized crime networks (strong):** There is a strong link between organized crime and corruption and violent religious groups in the Sahel region. This driver plays a vital role in financing the operations of the jihadists and in making the environment easy for them to operate in.

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Non-Christian religious leaders such as Islamists and violent militant leaders of Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa have all combined to threaten, intimidate and persecute Christians in Niger.
- **Extended family (Medium) and ordinary citizens (Medium):** Extended family members in the community oppose and often reject converts to Christianity.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Many of Niger's government officials are Muslim and some would like to pursue policies and agendas that are discriminatory against Christians and would exclude them from public life. President Issoufou promised to counter the expansion of radical Islamic teaching promoting violence in his February 2016 re-election campaign. However, his administration has yet to take concrete measures concerning this. Furthermore, in some places, some government officials are also subscribers to jihadist ideology.

#### **Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:**

- **Organized crime networks (Medium):** Various criminal organizations are operating in the country. Lawlessness and criminal activities are common in the vast uninhabited areas of the country. Some criminal organizations are operating in cooperation with militant groups and persecute Christians.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** Radical Islamic groups in the country earn money through drug trafficking and kidnapping to purchase weapons. Thus, violent religious groups in Niger are also drivers of organized crime and corruption.

#### **Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism (Medium):**

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Ethnic leaders among such groups as the Fulani are trying to enhance the ancient Islamic pedigree of their ethnic group by cleansing their communities of Christians. At Tunga, in Dosso State, no Christian presence is tolerated by the religious and tribal leaders who have enormous influence in these areas.

## **Geographical hotspots of persecution**

The areas outside the main cities, especially outside the capital city, are the main areas where Christians experience persecution.

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

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

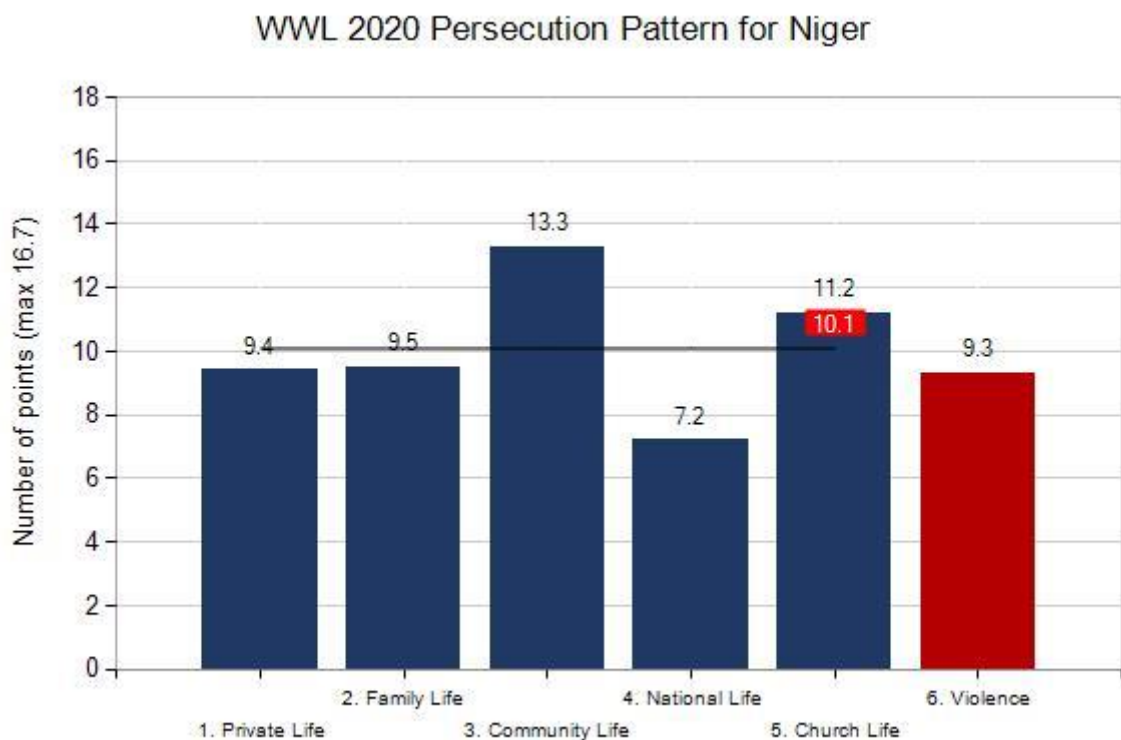
**Historical Christian communities:** Both Protestant and Catholic churches belong to this category and were mainly established by American mission groups. They can be found in all seven departments of Niger: Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillaberi, Zinder and Niamey (the capital). These churches suffer from the rise in Islamic militancy in Niger and, in the past few years, there have been attacks by armed groups such as Boko Haram in the departments of Diffa, near the border to Nigeria.

Pastors and church leaders from such villages have been forced to flee to larger cities fearing for their safety. Such incidents have also been observed in the department of Tillabéri. Many historical Christian communities in areas close to Nigeria live under fear of violent attack.

**Converts to Christianity:** In some cases, the pressure on converts from Islam is particularly pronounced, especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life* (see below). Parents and relatives may oppose a family member's conversion to Christianity more than the government. Radical Islamic imams and teachers influence ordinary Muslim people to attack and chase converts away - and any Christians found ministering to converts. Therefore, outside of the bigger cities and in areas closer to the southern border of the country, Christians with a Muslim background are treated as outcasts by the local communities and at times face violent attacks.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are present in Niger and face pressure. Several independent, non-denominational churches originating from Nigeria can also be found - especially in the capital Niamey and in the departments of Maradi and Zinder. This category faces more or less the same kind of pressure as historical Christian communities and are less vulnerable to societal pressure compared to Christian converts.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Niger shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Niger is high at 10.1 points, an increase of 0.6 points from WWL 2019.

- The *Community sphere* score is highest (13.3), followed by the *Church sphere* score with 11.2 points. This is an indication that Christians face pressure in the Islamic communities to live according to their values. The high score in the *Church sphere of life* is also an indication that church activities in the country are restricted due to the presence of Islamic militants.
- The score for violence is 9.3 points, rising from 4.8 points in WWL 2019. The increase is due to the high level of violent Islamist activity in the country and surrounding Sahel region. The presence of jihadists in the country is increasing.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

### Private sphere:

- ***It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.) (Block 1:2 / 2.50 points):*** Performing acts of worship is risky for converts to Christianity. Family members and the community persecute converts at this private level since conversion is demonized. Other Christians do not face this form of persecution and are generally allowed to practice their faith in private. Converts usually go underground, refuse to be identified and live their new faith in secret. Some converts also decide to leave the country.
- ***It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials (Block 1.3 / 2.50 points):*** It is dangerous to own and keep Christian materials for Christians with a Muslim background. This is particularly dangerous in communities in the border areas.
- ***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 / 2.50 points):*** In places where radical Islam is growing faster, Christians must be very careful how they express their Christian faith. This is especially true for converts from Islam.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols (Block 1.5 / 2.50 points):*** This is currently the case for all Christian groups all over the country, and is particularly risky in regions such as Tahoua, Agadez and Zinder; however, in the capital city it only affects converts. Due to an increase in the activities of violent Islamic groups it has been dangerous for Christians to display Christian images and symbols, particularly around the border areas of the Lake Chad. In these areas, security is limited and Christians are left exposed.

### Family sphere:

- ***Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce (Block 2:11 / 2.50 points):*** The extended family, relatives and immediate family of converts from Islam try to pressure them into renouncing Christianity by threats or use of force.
- ***Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases (Block 2.11 / 2.50 points):*** The extended family considers the children of converts to be Muslims and, in case of divorce or death, claim the children as Muslims.

- ***Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or to another church denomination (if the person was already a Christian) (Block 2: 12 / 2.50 points):*** This is a particular issue that affects converts. Family and community members will do everything possible to deny a convert the right to inherit. However, in government institutions this is less likely to be the case.
- ***Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith (Block 2:9 / 2.50 points):*** In schools or in the streets while playing with their friends, Christian children are seen as a second class citizens and are often discriminated against, causing them to be less inclined to follow their parents and stand firm in Christian faith.

#### 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 / 3.75 points):*** Hostility towards Christians comes more from society - i.e. from (extended) family and local chiefs - than from the government. Also, the whole Christian community in Niger is monitored by individuals and radical groups.
- ***Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage (Block 3.3 / 3.5 points):*** Abduction is very common in the Sahel region and a lucrative business. Communal worship and meetings of Christians have to be conducted with caution in such areas to avoid drawing the attention of militant groups in the locality.
- ***Christians have been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water) (Block 3.4 / 3.25 points):*** In many places, Christians often face rejection in their community. In the region of Alambare, Makalondy Christians are denied potable water and education. In north Maradi at Tashar Ibrahim, Christian Fulanis lack potable drinking water because of their faith.
- ***Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith (Block 3.7/3.25 points):*** This issue has been affecting all Christians, but converts in particular. Radical Muslims in the country and Sahel region are basically giving Christians the choice of converting, dying or fleeing.

#### National sphere:

- ***Christians have been hindered in traveling for faith-related reasons (Block 4.4 / 3.00 points):*** Safety is a concern and Christians must take serious precautions when they travel. Even military personnel are not safe. IS affiliates are known to ambush and kill Nigerien and international soldiers.
- ***Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons (Block 4.5 / 2.75 points):*** Preferential treatment is accorded to Muslims for professional positions of employment. Christians are not treated equally in their dealings with the public sector, are rarely able to secure employment within local government services and are frequently denied promotion.

- ***Christian civil society organizations or political parties been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions (Block 4.9 / 2.50 points):*** Niger's Constitution and laws respect freedom of religion in theory, but in practice, Christian NGOs have experienced difficulties. Pluralism and civil society are virtually unknown concepts in Niger and there are no Christian civil society groups. There are also no Christian political parties in the country.
- ***Christians have been subject to smear campaigns or hate speech (Block 4:11 / 2.50 points):*** Christians have been subject to smear campaigns, hate speech, and ridicule from Islamist groups. This is particularly the case with followers of Boko Haram whose area of influence spans the Lake Chad border region. Christianity in Niger is seen as a foreign religion of "infidels" and radical Islamic religious leaders freely promote hatred and intolerance.

#### Church sphere:

- ***Activities of churches have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed (Block 5.1 / 3.50 points):*** The Sahel region has become a hotbed for violent radical Islamic groups, especially those using Mali as a springboard for attacks into Niger. But Boko Haram can easily go in and out of the country too and has been recruiting members. Christians are watched and face being attacked in churches and being targeted for kidnap and assault.
- ***Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings (5.5 / 3.50 points):*** Outside events are very risky in many parts of the country due to the presence of radical Islamic groups.
- ***Openly selling or distributing Bibles and other Christian materials has been hindered (Block 5.14 / 3.50 points):*** In the capital city, it is possible to distribute Christian materials, but in many places, such actions are likely to prompt attacks by radical Islamic groups.
- ***It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government (Block 5.2 / 3.50 points):*** The legal process for the registration of churches is very long and difficult. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain permits for new churches and to buy land to build new churches and Christian schools. Churches are always advised to keep to the outskirts of cities and towns. Some of those that work in government offices are radical Muslims who deliberately make it difficult for churches to obtain permits for new buildings. The government also monitors all religious expression it views as potentially threatening to public order or national unity.

## Violence

*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.*

Niger	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	130	1	10	11
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	22	0	5	0
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	23	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.*

The main sources of violent persecution in Niger are the militant Islamic groups and individuals and segments of society influenced by the teaching of radical imams. Militants have attacked churches, pastors and Christians with a Muslim background in the WWL 2020 reporting period.

- **Christians killed:** Many Christians were killed in the WWL 2020 reporting period, but the context was not clear, thus the record indicates zero.
- **Christians attacked:** At least 130 Christians were attacked or kidnapped, with the attacks coinciding at times with a church service.
- **Christians arrested:** In the reporting period, one Christian was arrested for a month and a half because of his faith. He was eventually released.
- **Churches attacked:** Over ten churches were attacked. For example, there was an attack on [Dolbel parish](#) in May 2019. According to sources, a priest was also wounded in the process.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** In the context of the ongoing jihadist attacks, at least 11 Christian shops and homes were targeted. For example, in October 2019, a mission school was attacked by a group of armed men. The attacks on missionary schools affect many Nigerien children, not only Christians. A priest of the [Society of the African Mission](#) told media that such attacks affect “the poorest in the country today and only confirm the instability of the border region with Burkina Faso. In this country, the number of children denied their right to education is now in the thousands.”



## 5 Year trends

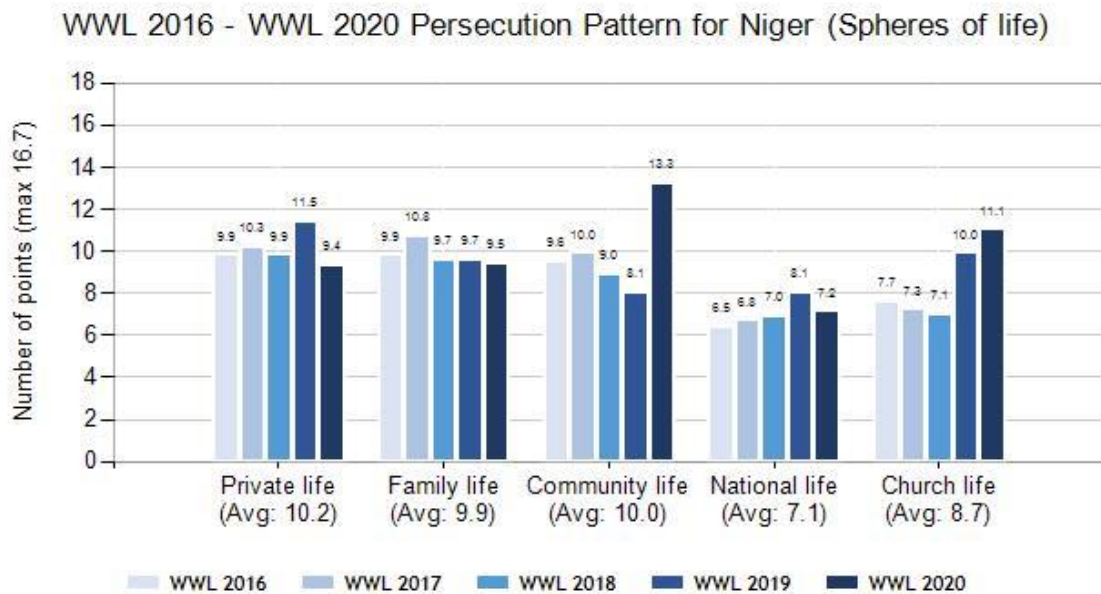
**Chart 1:**

Except for WWL 2018, the pressure on Christians has been gradually climbing, reaching double-digits in WWL 2020. Even though the increase in pressure is not surprising considering the fact that violent Islamic militants in the region have been putting immense pressure on the government and Christians, the way the Nigerien government is abandoning the rule of law in a large part of the country is very concerning. If this trend continues, it is likely that more attacks and more pressure will occur, leading to a higher score in the WWL 2021 reporting period.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Niger	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	10.1
2019	9.5
2018	8.5
2017	9.1
2016	8.7

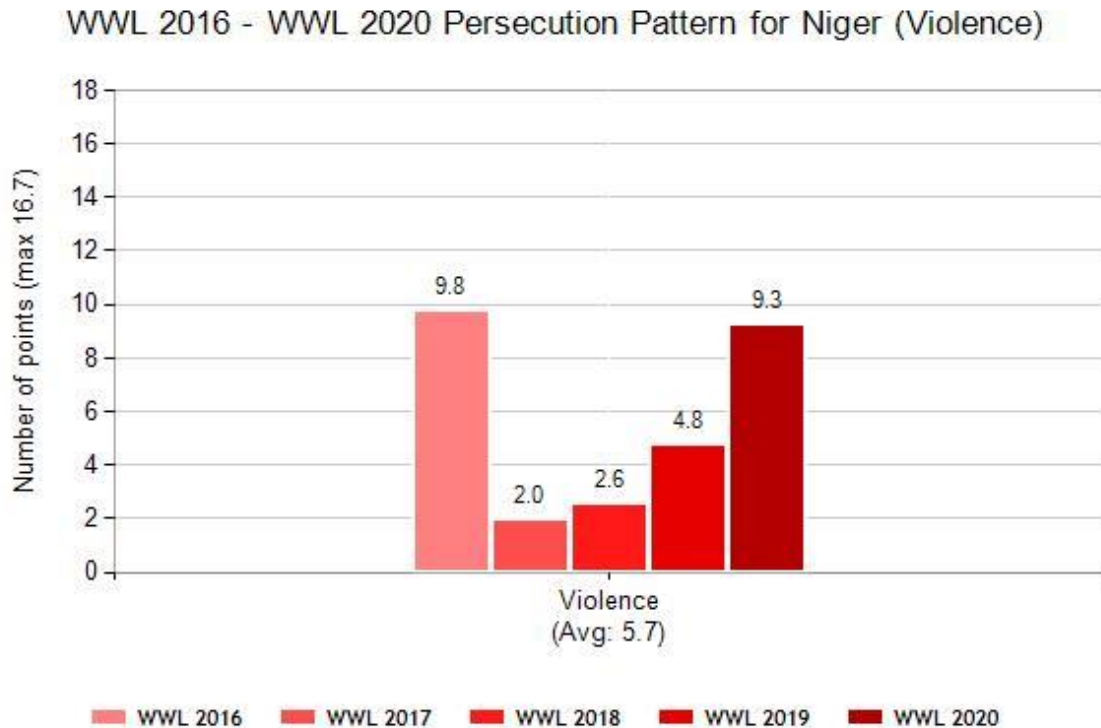
**Chart 2:**

The chart below shows that pressure in the most recent reporting period in the Church and community spheres of life have increased significantly. What can also be discerned from the pattern is that the highest averages over the five years are to be found in the Community and Private spheres (reaching 10.0 points or above). The lowest average (7.1) in the National sphere of life is an indication that the government is not the main persecutor of Christians in the country.



**Chart 3:**

Even though the average score for violence is "only" 5.7 points, the trend shows that for the last four years violence against Christians has been increasing significantly, almost reaching the very high WWL 2016 level again.



## Gender profile of persecution

### Female Pressure Points:

- ***Denied custody of children***
- ***Denied inheritance or possessions***
- ***Forced marriage***
- ***Forced Divorce***
- ***Forced out of home/expulsion***
- ***Violence – psychological***
- ***Violence – sexual***

Just like other African countries with similar socio-economic and demographic circumstances, female Christians face the possibility of rape. Niger is also seeing a rise in violence and it was reported that a Christian girl was raped in the western town of Niger. Additionally, Christian women in Niger are affected by living under Sharia. For example, according to Sharia, a Christian woman has no right to claim custody of her children in divorce cases, even though Niger is a secular country. Christian parents can by law apply for custody of the children, but in practice, Christian parents fail to succeed. Many have also been denied their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity. Many Christians are unaware of legal options to defend their rights, but when the case is taken to court, the problem is often settled satisfactorily.

### Male Pressure Points:

- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Forced out of home/expulsion***
- ***Incarceration by family***
- ***Incarceration by government***

Christian men in Niger can face dismissal from their jobs because of their faith. This and other forms of harassment because of religion are confusing for a Christian population of men and boys unaccustomed to living their faith in a hostile environment. Converts to Christianity can face some of the most severe persecution and some have been imprisoned in attempts to force them back to Islam; when they refuse, they are chased away from their home.

There is another phenomenon in Niger - although not specifically a form of targeted religious persecution - which affects all communities and has a strong negative impact on Christian families: Boys in Niger are subject to recruitment as child soldiers according to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act List published yearly by the United States and relied on by agencies such as Human Rights Watch. Niger ranks number 6 on this list. Since African communities are community-centered, this situation can affect all families in a community.

### Persecution of other religious minorities

Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahai are also present in Niger - mostly in major urban centers. These religious groups exist under the threat of violence from radical Islamic groups and have to tread carefully so as not to attract too much attention or provoke persecution.

### Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- ***Islamic oppression:*** Based on what has happened in the past and what is currently occurring, to state that persecution of Christians due to Islamic oppression will only grow is not an overstatement. Jihadists are growing very fast and the government has shown no strength to fight them back. Many churches do not seem prepared for higher pressure from radical Islam. They are concentrated in the political capital and have limited outreach programs.
- ***Organized corruption and crime:*** The existence of organized crime and corruption is tied to the weakness of the government and the presence of the jihadist groups in the country. There is no sign that this will change in the near future.
- ***Clan and ethnic antagonism:*** The issue of ethnic antagonism in the country has some relation to Islam. Many Nigerien see their religion very much connected to their ethnicity. In this context to be a Nigerien and a Christian are not compatible. Although this attitude could be changed in the future through dialogue and cooperation, this is not likely in the short-term.

### External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

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

- Persecution engines: officeholders who break the law - <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/NER/>
- Violence: Dolbel parish - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-05/niger-parish-catholic-priest-attack-niamey.html>
- Violence: Society of the African Mission - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2019-10/niger-mission-schools-jihadist-attack.html>

## 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 may be found at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/?s=Niger>.

### Recent country developments

Up-to-date reports may be found at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Niger>  
(password: freedom).