

World
Watch
Research

Burkina Faso: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

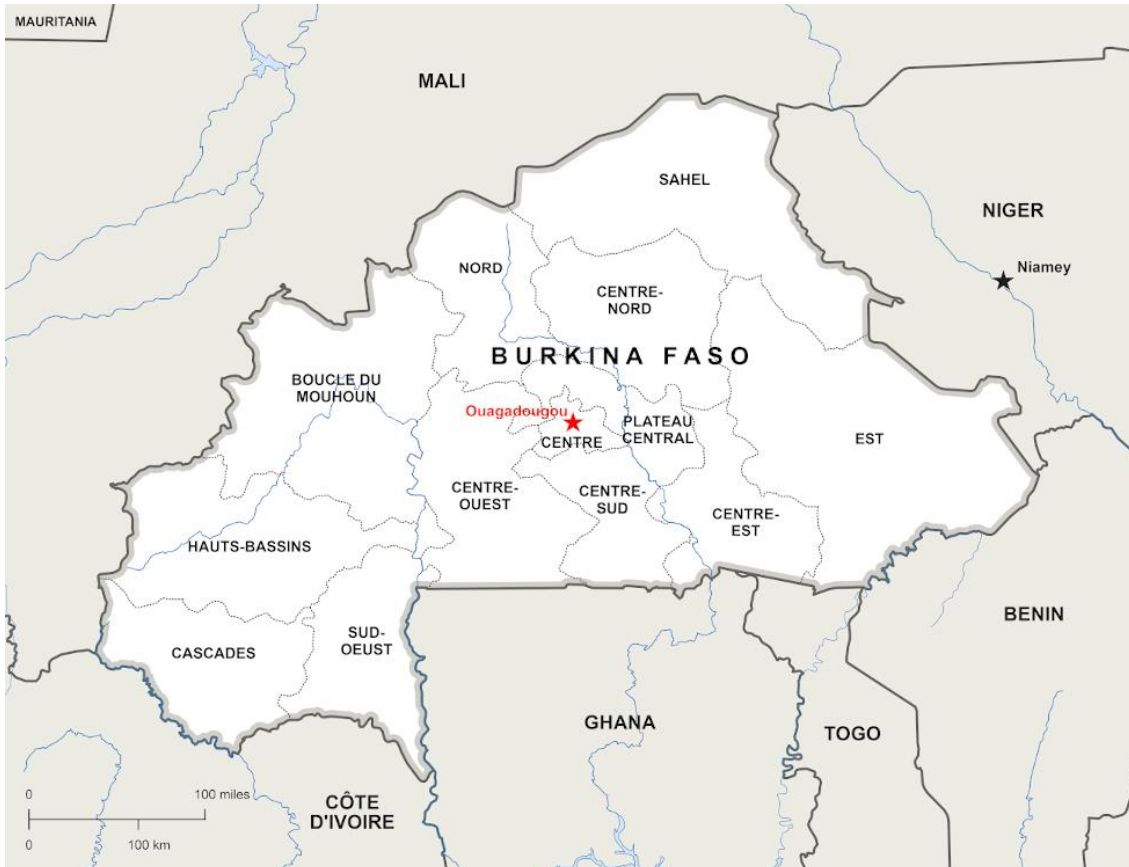
WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Burkina Faso

Brief country details

Burkina Faso: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
22,721,000	5,315,000	23.4

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Burkina Faso: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	75	20
WWL 2023	71	23
WWL 2022	68	32
WWL 2021	67	32
WWL 2020	66	28

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

In recent years, the impact of violent Islamic militants in the country has been expanding, making their influence felt even in cities that had previously been beyond their reach. This has particularly been the case for the "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims" (JNIM). Christians have been targeted and killed and churches have been destroyed. Christians of Muslim background are the most persecuted Christian group in the country. Similar attacks in Niger, Mali and the greater Sahel region are making the situation in Burkina Faso very serious. Christians have been targeted in villages, churches and workplaces. Hundreds of churches have been closed due to jihadist activities. Family and community members reject converts and try to force them to renounce their Christian faith, making them afraid to express their faith in public because of such threats. The scope for religious freedom for Christians, is contracting as jihadist ideologies gain traction and expand within the broader community.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian converts from a Muslim background are ostracized, faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with loss of inheritance (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by militant groups (ICCPR Art. 17)

- Christian female converts run the risk of being forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16)
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- At least 31 Christians were killed.
- Over 100 churches were destroyed.
- Thousands of Christians are forced to flee their homes, and they leave as IDPs.
- **12 October 2022:** "Presumed Islamic militants ordered the closure of three churches in Samou, near Bogande in the Est Region. Militants also ordered citizens to wear short trousers, grow beards, and sell their pigs." (Source: US State Department IRFR 2022 Burkina Faso)

Specific examples of positive developments

May 2023: 88 year old Australian surgeon and Christian, Dr. Kenneth Elliott, was [released after 7 years of captivity](#) (SBS News, 23 May 2023). Dr Elliott and his wife had been kidnapped by al-Qaeda-linked militants in January 2016 near the border with Mali and Niger, where they were running a medical clinic.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: released after 7 years of captivity - <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/a-kidnapped-australian-doctor-has-been-released-after-seven-years-heres-what-happened/ujnwn0ih>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Burkina Faso

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Burkina Faso report	AI Burkina Faso 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/burkina-faso/report-burkina-faso/	29 June 2023
BBC News Burkina Faso profile - updated 16 January 2023	BBC Burkina Faso profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13072774	29 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Burkina Faso Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BFA	29 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Burkina Faso - updated 22 June 2023	World Factbook Burkina Faso	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/	29 June 2023
Crisis24 Burkina Faso report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Burkina Faso report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/burkina-faso	29 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Burkina Faso profile 2023	EIU Democracy Index Burkina Faso profile 2023	http://country.eiu.com/burkina-faso	29 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Burkina Faso	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	29 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Burkina Faso not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Burkina Faso	https://freedomhouse.org/country/burkina-faso/freedom-world/2023	29 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Burkina Faso not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Burkina Faso profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/burkina-faso/	29 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Burkina Faso report	Girls Not Brides Burkina Faso	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/burkina-faso/	29 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Burkina Faso country chapter	HRW 2023 Burkina Faso country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/burkina-faso	29 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Burkina Faso	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#bf	29 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Burkina Faso	https://rsf.org/en/burkina-faso	29 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Burkina Faso	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/bfa	29 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Burkina Faso	UNDP HDR Burkina Faso	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/BFA	29 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Burkina Faso	IRFR 2022 Burkina Faso	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burkina-faso/	29 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Burkina Faso not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank Burkina Faso data 2021	World Bank Burkina Faso data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar-ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=BFA	29 June 2023
World Bank Burkina Faso overview – updated 30 March 2023	World Bank Burkina Faso overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/overview	29 June 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Burkina Faso - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Burkina Faso	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f5c5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-bfa.pdf	29 June 2023

Recent history

Burkina Faso is in the Sahel region of West Africa. The country was formerly a French colony known as Upper Volta and gained independence in 1960. Throughout its post-independence history, Burkina Faso has gone through several episodes of political unrest and instability.

Like most African countries, the territorial borders are a product of the 19th-century European colonial demarcation process called the “scramble for Africa”. The independence movement to become free from French control was led by the Voltaic Democratic Union (UDV) party. The leader of the UDV, Maurice Yaméogo, became the country's first president. After coming to power, President Yaméogo banned all other political parties and declared the country to be a single-party state. The regime favored the policies of the French and other Western powers.

The UDV regime became unpopular, which led to an outbreak of political unrest in 1966 and Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana orchestrated a successful military coup. Lamizana took control and ruled the country for the next fourteen years first with a full military government and then with a military government including some civilians holding limited power. Political protests led by the country's trade unions forced the regime to introduce a democratic constitution in 1977. The country held an open election in 1978 which Lamizana won. This election, like most earlier elections, was not free and fair.

The country then experienced a second military coup when the Lamizana regime was overthrown by Colonel Saye Zerbo in 1980. The Zerbo regime was unpopular, faced considerable opposition and lasted only two years. A military council called the Council of Popular Salvation (CSP), led by Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, [overthrew](#) the Zerbo regime in 1982 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed 30 January 2023). Following political unrest and infighting, on 4 August 1983 the Ouedraogo regime was overthrown by the CSP faction led by Thomas Sankara and Blaise Compaoré. Sankara was installed as the president of the republic.

In 1984 President Sankara changed the name of the country to Burkina Faso ("land of honest men"). Sankara was one of the most popular leaders in Africa. He introduced numerous political and social reforms that included more rights for women and workers. However, it seems that his Socialist economic policies were unpopular among Western powers and he was killed in a coup led by Blaise Compaoré in October 1987.

Blaise Compaoré's military government was dictatorial and unpopular among the people. Opposition to the regime was met with violent reprisals and many opposition leaders were arrested, tortured, killed or forced to leave the country. Opposition came to a height in the 2014 uprising which forced Compaoré to leave the country in October 2014 after 27 years of rule. After a brief transitional period, there was another military coup in September 2015. However, the coup leaders agreed to transfer power to a civilian government through elections. A democratic election was held in November 2015 and Roch Kaboré became the first democratically elected president of Burkina Faso.

General elections were held in Burkina Faso on 22 November 2020 to elect the president and National Assembly. The elections were held in the shadow of jihadist violence, which [claimed more than 2,000 lives in 2020 alone](#) (France24, 26 November 2020). In the presidential elections, incumbent President Kaboré of the People's Movement for Progress was re-elected in the first round with 57.7% of the vote.

Two military coups in 2022

On 24 January 2022 a [military coup](#) overthrew Burkina Faso's President Kaboré amid a deepening security crisis in the country. Both civilians and security forces had long been voicing their discontent (ISS, 3 February 2022). The coup was orchestrated by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had just been promoted to head the country's third military region. A Transition Government was set up under Damiba as president, but a further coup took place in October 2022: Damiba was ousted by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who set up his own military government.

French forces leave

Taking advantage of the political chaos, jihadist groups have been growing stronger and expanding beyond the peripheries they used to control. Jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso have resulted in devastating consequences, including loss of life, destruction, and significant social and economic challenges. As of 9 November 2022, the French government formally concluded Operation Barkhane, a significant anti-insurgent operation launched on 1 August 2014, aimed at combating violent Islamic militants in the Sahel region of Africa.

The conclusion of Operation Barkhane poses new challenges and concerns for the region's security. With the departure of French soldiers, there is a potential void in the efforts to counter the ongoing threat posed by militant groups. The absence of this crucial international support may leave Burkina Faso vulnerable to further attacks and hinder efforts to stabilize the volatile Sahel region.

Christians in the country have made significant contributions, for instance, in leading the country to independence and in all other efforts to stabilize the country. At the same time, especially in recent years, Christians have been targeted by jihadists (particularly JNIM) who are growing in influence in the Sahel (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*).

Political and legal landscape

According to the [Constitution of 2012](#), Burkina Faso is a secular state and guarantees the right of individuals to choose, practice and change their religion at will. The laws allow all organizations, religious or otherwise to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Internal Security. The current Constitution was first approved in 1991 and has been amended multiple times since then. The last amendment in 2012 established a semi-presidential system. The president is elected every fifth year and selects the prime minister with the approval of the parliament. The country's legislature is a bicameral body with the National Assembly as the lower house and the Senate as the upper house. The national assembly consists of 111 elected members.

The country made significant progress towards democracy after the transfer of power in 2015. Political freedom and the situation of human rights also greatly improved. A general election was held in Burkina Faso in November 2015, the first national elections since the uprising and [departure](#) of President Blaise Compaoré who had ruled Burkina Faso for 27 years (The Guardian, 1 November 2014). Fourteen different political parties held National Assembly seats in the 2015 election. The country's constitutional court approved a law preventing anyone associated with the previous regime to run for office. President Kaboré won the [presidential election in November 2020](#) with an outright majority (Vanguard, 26 November 2020). Despite increased Islamic militant activity, nationwide elections proved possible.

Large parts of the country remain contested between jihadist groups, ethnic militias and security forces. [In July 2021](#), due to Islamic militants creating enormous challenges to the country, the president reshuffled his cabinet and assumed the role of defense minister in addition to the presidency (Reuters, 1 July 2021). On 23 February 2022, Reuters reported that the ruling junta that came to power in a coup on 24 January 2022 was considering a 30-month transitional period until new elections could take place. However, the October 2022 coup brought a new military leader, Captain Ibrahim Traore, to the fore and it is unclear whether this 30-month transitional period will be respected.

According to [Human Rights Watch](#), [Amnesty International](#), and the [International Crisis Group](#), Burkina Faso's human rights situation has severely deteriorated since 2022 and continued to worsen in 2023. The armed groups, reportedly controlling about 40 percent of the country, intensified their attacks on civilians and military targets, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. As a result, internal displacement reached a staggering figure of around two

million people, approximately 10 percent of the population, forced to flee their homes since 2016 due to the escalating violence (see below: *Social and cultural landscape*). In response to the escalating situation, international organizations, including the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union, France, the United Nations and USA expressed condemnation of both the two recent coups and the abuses perpetrated by the jihadist groups. However, there was a noted reluctance to denounce or push for investigations into allegations of abuse by the armed forces and pro-government militias.

With a background of political instability and mounting evidence of human rights violations, the prospects for justice has remained bleak as rule-of-law institutions in Burkina Faso continued to face challenges. While the government took some measures to address social media posts inciting violence against minority groups and reduce the number of suspects in pre-trial detention, there was little progress in holding accountable those responsible for past abuses.

Gender perspective

In relation to gender, by law both men and women have equal rights to enter marriage and must freely consent to the union (Constitution, Article 23). The legal framework does not cover customary or religious marriages however. This contributes to Burkina Faso having one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 52% of girls marrying before 18 (Girls Not Brides Burkina Faso). By law, the minimum age for marriage is 17 for girls, although they can marry at 15 if authorized by civil courts. This legislative loophole and widespread societal acceptance of child marriage can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution, particularly against female converts. [Legislation](#) introduced in 2015 was viewed as a positive step towards securing support and access to justice for victims of gender-based violence (Refworld, 6 September 2015), but effective implementation has been slow and few care centers have been established.

Religious landscape

Burkina Faso: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	5,315,000	23.4
Muslim	12,761,000	56.2
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	4,511,000	19.9
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	4,400	0.0

Atheist	790	0.0
Agnostic	128,000	0.6
Other	880	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Burkina Faso is a Muslim majority country in the Sahel region of Africa. Muslims are dominant in the northern and eastern parts of the country, whereas the Christian communities are concentrated in the central and southern parts of the country. Followers of indigenous traditional African religions dominate the southern part of the country. Historically, the country has experienced a harmonious coexistence among the different religious groups.

The 2012 Constitution [guarantees](#) freedom of religion and the principle of separation of church and state. The pre-coup government required all religious groups to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to operate in the country. There has been no state-funding of religious schools, which thus operate independently. However, in past years, there have been anti-Christian campaigns and sentiment propagated by Islamic militants.

According to WCD 2023 estimates, 23.4% of the population follow traditional African religions. Many Christians and Muslims in the country also mix their faiths with various forms of traditional beliefs and practices. For instance, some Christians continue to embrace polygamy.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank Burkina Faso overview:

- **GDP growth:** "GDP growth slowed to 2.5 percent in 2022 (-0.1 percent per capita). Growth could strengthen to 4.3 percent in 2023 with improved security; however, the medium-term outlook is subject to substantial downside risks with security spending and expensive borrowing delaying fiscal consolidation."
- **Inflation:** The "closure of several gold mines and high food prices drove inflation to a region-high 14.1 percent."
- **Fiscal deficit:** "The fiscal deficit remained high. The fiscal deficit increased to 10.6 percent of GDP in 2022—the largest deficit in the region."

The World Bank Burkina Faso overview makes the following projections for 2023:

- "Growth will increase to 4.3 percent in 2023 (1.7 percent in per capita terms), driven by the agriculture and service sectors, and a recovery in gold mining sector."
- "Average annual inflation is projected to decline to 4.9 percent in 2023, reflecting a decline in global oil and food prices and assuming no further deterioration in insecurity."
- The fiscal deficit is projected to remain high, at 6.9 percent of GDP, exceeding the target (4.7 percent) of the adopted budget, due to higher security spending and the inclusion of securitized debt linked to fuel subsidies in spending figures."

Overall, Burkina Faso is one of the least developed countries in the world. Nearly 80% of the people practice subsistence farming for their survival. Cotton remains the leading export followed by gold. Rises in gold prices have increased the country's export income. Despite the progress made in the past two decades, the country still faces many development challenges, particularly in terms of health and education. It ranks 144th among 157 countries in World Bank's Human Capital Index and about 40.1% of the population still lives below the national poverty line. Burkina Faso remains vulnerable to climatic shocks related to changes in rainfall patterns and to fluctuations in the prices of its export commodities on world markets. Its economic and social development will depend on political stability in the country and the sub-region, its openness to international trade and export diversification.

Gender perspective

Within this fragile context, women are particularly economically vulnerable due to low education rates and limited employment opportunities. The female labor force participation rate stands at 58.3%, compared to 74.8% for men (UNDP HDR Burkina Faso). Making it additionally challenging for women to attain financial independence, customary and religious practices deny women their due inheritance, despite equal rights being enshrined in law.

Social and cultural landscape

According to UNDP HDR Burkina Faso and World Factbook Burkina Faso:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mossi 52%, Fulani 8.4%, Gurma 7%, Bobo 4.9%, Gurunsi 4.6 %, Senufo 4.5 %, Bissa 3.7%, Lobi 2.4 %, Dagara 2.4%, Tuareg/Bella 1.9%, other 7.2% (2010 est.)
- **Main languages:** French is the official language and other native African languages belonging to Sudanic family spoken by 90% of the population
- **Urbanization:** About 31.2% of the total population make up the Urban population. (2021 est) The rate of urbanization is 4.75% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 2.58% (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 17.6 years
- **Life expectancy:** 61.6 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 41.2%
- **Expected years of schooling:** 9.3 years. (9.4 for female; 9.1 for male)
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 62.3%
- **Employment in agriculture:** 25.2% of total employment
- **Employment in services sector:** 41.1% of total employment
- **Unemployment:** 6.3% of labor force
- **Youth unemployment (15-24 years):** 8.3%

According to the [UNHCR Factsheet](#) (published 18 May 2023):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** "The humanitarian situation is concerning. As of 31 March 2023, according to the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR), 2,062,534 persons are internally displaced, over 3% increase in one month only. Additionally, as of the same date, the country is hosting 36,265 refugees and asylum seekers, according to UNHCR."

According to UNDP HDR Burkina Faso:

- **Human Development Index:** Burkina Faso is ranked 182 out of 189 countries with the value of 0.452. Overall, Burkina Faso has shown improvements in HDI compared to previous years.
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.867
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** 0.594. This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Burkina Faso ranks 147th out of 177 countries.

In general, Burkina Faso is facing a multifaceted crisis driven by a complex interplay of factors such as jihadist insurgency, widespread poverty, ineffective governance, and a lack of rule of law. The presence of jihadist groups in the country has led to escalating violence and insecurity, resulting in numerous civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure. This has disrupted social cohesion, causing fear and trauma among communities and hindering economic activities. The violence and instability have also severely impacted education and healthcare systems, limiting access to basic services and further exacerbating poverty and social inequalities.

The high levels of poverty in Burkina Faso have left a significant portion of the population vulnerable to extremist ideologies and recruitment by jihadist groups, as they may offer alternative means of survival and a sense of belonging. This cycle of poverty and radicalization perpetuates the violence and instability in the country, creating a vicious circle that hinders social progress and economic development.

Ineffective governance and corruption have also contributed to the crisis, as they weaken state institutions and erode public trust in the government's ability to address the root causes of the conflict and implement effective policies. The lack of rule of law allows jihadist groups to operate with impunity, further undermining security and hindering economic growth and foreign investment.

The combined impact of these factors has led to a dire humanitarian situation, with millions of people facing food insecurity, displacement, and limited access to essential services. The ongoing conflict and instability have disrupted agriculture, trade, and investment, stifling economic growth and development prospects for the population. As reported by the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) in March 2023:

- "Burkina Faso home to almost half of closed schools in Central and West Africa. ... Over a million children in Burkina Faso are currently affected by school closures with 6,134 academic institutions shut as of February 2023, an increase of over 40 per cent since the end of the last school year. Nearly one out of four schools country-wide are now out of service due to rampant insecurity and violence, which has forced close to two million people into displacement."

Christian minorities in Burkina Faso bear a disproportionate brunt of the ongoing crisis, as they are often targeted by militant groups due to their religious identity. Jihadist insurgents have launched violent attacks on Christian communities, leading to the loss of lives, destruction of

churches, and displacement of Christians. These attacks not only instill fear and insecurity among the Christian population but also disrupt their ability to freely practice their faith and participate in religious activities. The violence has forced many Christians to flee their homes, leaving them vulnerable and marginalized in unfamiliar surroundings. Moreover, the destruction of churches and religious sites further undermines their sense of identity and belonging, impacting their social and cultural fabric. The targeting of Christian minorities exacerbates existing social divisions and poses significant challenges to their safety, wellbeing, and religious freedom.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Burkina Faso):

- "According to the Ministry of Education, 5,709 schools were closed as of November [2022] due to terrorist attacks, depriving nearly one million students of access to education. The NGO Save the Children said the closures represented 22 percent of the educational structures in the country. In addition, an estimated 79 municipalities were declared completely out of the education system."

Gender perspective

Domestic violence, child marriage and the practice of Female Genital Mutation remains prevalent. Several government policies have been introduced to combat child marriage, but the widespread societal acceptance of this practice makes it challenging to combat. According to a survey in 2020, around half of women aged 15–24 thought that it was normal for a man to beat his wife in certain circumstances ([Equipop, July 2020, p.5](#)). Domestic violence reportedly rose due to the additional pressures and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic ([Equipop, July 2020, p.8](#)). Urban settings are recognized as more favorable environments for women's empowerment compared to rural settings, although political and economic opportunities have remained limited countrywide ([OECD Maps and Facts, January 2018](#)).

Technological landscape

According to the Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Burkina Faso)

- **Internet usage:** 21.0% of the population - survey date: December 2021 (most recent survey available)
- **Facebook usage:** 10.3% penetration rate - survey date: January 2022

Burkina Faso has a marked gender gap in Internet usage, particularly in relation to social media usage. According to [Napoleon Cat](#) (December 2022), 69.8% of the country's Facebook users were male and 30.2% female.

According to [Data Reportal 2023](#) report, in early 2023:

- There were 4.96 million internet users in Burkina Faso at the start of 2023, when internet penetration stood at 21.6 percent.
- Burkina Faso was home to 2.05 million social media users in January 2023, equating to 8.9 percent of the total population.
- A total of 25.68 million cellular mobile connections were active in Burkina Faso in early

2023, with this figure equivalent to 111.9 percent of the total population.

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (publication date: January 2023):

- "Burkina Faso's telecom sector in recent years has made some gains in providing the necessary infrastructure and bandwidth to support telecom services. An IXP completed in September 2020 increased international bandwidth capacity by a third, while in mid-2021 the government was able to start the second phase of a national fibre backbone project. This will link the capital city to an addition 145 municipalities, and provide additional connectivity to terrestrial cables in neighboring countries."
- "The activities of the militants in side areas of the country jeopardize overall security, and render it difficult for the telcos to safeguard their networks and equipment."
- Burkina Faso has begun developing its first satellite.

Christians are among the most educated in the country and tend to have better access to the latest advances in technology in government use.

Security situation

In the context of the ongoing war against Islamic insurgents, Christians in the country find themselves a primary target for attack. Although there had been significant progress in democracy and human rights after Kaboré came to office, his presidency was overshadowed by the numerous attacks carried out by Islamic militants operating in the region. Militant Islamic groups operating in the country include: *Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitoun, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram. These groups have been responsible for waves of attacks and are gaining ground, especially following the political instability in neighboring Mali. Frustration over the continuing insecurity was one of the main factors behind the military coups of January and October 2022. In January 2023, France agreed to [end its deployment](#) of around 400 troops, which is likely to considerably weaken counter-terrorism operations (DW, 25 January 2023).

According to [International Crisis Group](#) (24 February 2020), in 2019 Burkina Faso suffered more jihadist attacks than any other Sahelian country. In April 2019, Protestant worshippers and a pastor were killed as Islamic militants launched what is regarded as the country's [first attack on a church](#) since the sectarian violence erupted (Al-Jazeera, 29 April 2019). This was followed by deadly attacks on two consecutive days in May 2019 targeting Catholic Christians in two different parts of the country. These attacks forced more than half a million people to flee their homes. Since then, there have been numerous attacks on churches and Christians - see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*.

As OCHA reported in its [Burkina Faso Humanitarian Snapshot](#) (as of 31 October 2023), the ongoing violence in the country has caused:

- 2.1 million IDPs
- 2.3 million food insecure people
- 5,700 closed schools
- 398 health centers closed, affecting 3.6 million people.

According to [Refugees international](#) reporting on 11 February 2020:

- "Unfortunately, in its efforts to stop armed incursions, the army has increasingly begun to violate human rights, often with impunity. There are numerous accounts of Burkinabé forces indiscriminately killing civilians. In some cases, the government has initiated investigations of these abuses. However, aid workers report that violations continue and that there have been no consequences for the perpetrators."
- Further, the government also changed the national penal code to prohibit criticism of the military and block any contact with armed groups: "The new law, whose provisions on contact are too broad, has prevented human rights organizations from verifying the numerous claims of abuses committed by Burkinabé forces and forbids humanitarian organizations from negotiating with armed groups to secure access to populations in need."

In an attempt to bolster the army, the The National Assembly in Burkina Faso adopted a bill on 21 January 2020 establishing Volunteers for Homeland Defence (VDP) with the aim of dealing with the multiple acts of terrorism that have been blighting the country since 2016. Volunteer groups receive 14 days of training and are then sent out on patrols and surveillance missions, equipped with light arms. These volunteers have proved to be a particular target for jihadist attack, with more than 100 being [killed in combat](#) within the year 2020 alone (The Defense Post, 26 November 2020). Allegations of human rights abuses by volunteers have also been "rampant - from stealing cattle to attacking those accused of collaborating with the jihadist militants". This law was supposed to bring security and stability; however, the volunteers are [both perpetrators and victims](#) of violence, and civilians are trapped between attacks from all sides (The New Humanitarian, 12 October 2020).

The situation remained challenging in 2022 and 2023. The jihadist activities in the country have forced the government to launch [numerous operations](#) and increase the efforts of the security forces against groups such as JNIM (Critical Threats, 7 June 2023). Burkinabe forces significantly stepped up their operations near the southern border of Burkina Faso in May 2023 to disrupt the support zones of JNIM. After the government declared a "[General Mobilization](#)" in April 2023 (France24, 14 April 2023), 12 operations were conducted by Burkinabe security forces in the Centre-Est region during May 2023 alone, surpassing the monthly average observed in the preceding months. The escalation in the frequency of security operations follows a positive trend that began in the last quarter of 2022 when the security forces began to intensify their efforts.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Burkina Faso):

- "Domestic and transnational terrorist groups continued to operate throughout the year and, according to media and NGO reports, increased their killing of individuals based on their religious identity. Deaths attributed to terrorism rose to 1,135 in 2022 from 759 in 2021, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace Global Terrorism Index. The attacks forced more people to flee their villages, bringing more communes under the groups' control, and preventing villagers from farming. The attacks spread to the south and west, the Cascades, Boucle du Mouhoun Regions, the Centre-Sud, Centre-Ouest, Hauts Bassins, and Centre East regions. Terrorist groups included the U.S.-designated terrorist groups Ansaroul Islam, ISIS-GS, JNIM, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar Dine, and al-

Mourabitoun. Although perpetrators of many attacks in the country were not identified, observers attributed most attacks to three terrorist groups: Ansaroul Islam, JNIM, and ISIS-GS. Media outlets reported that terrorist groups regularly targeted Muslim and Christian clergy, religious congregations, houses of worship, teachers, local government employees, schools, and Muslims they criticized for not practicing a sufficiently conservative form of Islam. According to residents, terrorist groups were also responsible for killing imams whom the terrorist groups accused of collaborating with government security forces."

According to ICG's [Crisis Watch - March alerts and February trends 2023](#):

Sahel region's Oudalan province:

- Alleged Islamic State in the Sahel (IS-Sahel) ambushed military convoy between Oursi and Déou localities on 17 February 2023. The attack resulted in at least 51 and possibly up to 80 soldiers dead.
- IS-Sahel attacked a military detachment camp in Tin Akoff town on 20 February 2023 in the same province, taking control of the town. Dozens of soldiers, volunteers fighting alongside security forces (VDPs), and civilians were killed during the attack.

Sahel region's Seno province:

- IS-Sahel attacked Bani town on 4 February 2023, resulting in the deaths of 22 civilians and three police officers.

Centre-North region's Namentenga province:

- Alleged al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) fighters killed seven gendarmes and one VDP in Boala village on 7 February 2023.

East region's Tapoa province:

- Unidentified jihadists killed an as yet unknown number of individuals in Partiaga town on 26 February 2023.

Gender perspective

Christians in the country suffer from the lack of security. Many have been targeted and killed in 2021 - 2023 period. Christian women and girls risk being abducted, raped and forcibly married. Instances of sexual assault have reportedly increased as extremist groups exploited the insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to expand control. Christian boys on the other hand are often recruited into militant forces, which also serves to weaken the Christian church. In light of such pressure, many Christians are forced to flee their homes altogether.

Trends analysis

1) Islamic militancy is gaining ground but the arms seems to respond

Islamic militancy is gaining ground in Burkina Faso, presenting a serious challenge to the nation's stability and religious tolerance. The radicalization of the Islamic population has become evident, and extremist groups such as JNIM, AQIM, and Boko Haram are rapidly expanding their influence. These groups were quick to exploit the government's preoccupation with the COVID-19 crisis to further their agenda. The departure of French forces has created a security vacuum, leaving the country more vulnerable to jihadist activities. The absence of these international forces has placed additional pressure on Burkina Faso's security forces, but in response to the escalating situation in 2023, the government has taken significant steps; numerous operations have been conducted against the insurgent groups, signaling a commitment to tackling the security challenges head-on.

Meanwhile, illegal trafficking and trade, along with weak governance, have provided fertile ground for jihadists to thrive. The lack of effective governance in certain areas has allowed these groups to establish control and exploit local populations for their benefit. Moreover, illegal trade have served as a significant source of funding for their operations, allowing them to sustain and expand their activities.

2) Instability continues

Instability continues to plague Burkina Faso, creating a volatile and challenging environment. The nation faced tumultuous times in 2022 with two coups within a span of just eight months. Those who orchestrated the coups have consistently pointed fingers at the previous government, accusing it of inadequately combatting the jihadist threat. However, upon seizing power, they have demonstrated no greater success in dealing with the militants. Unfortunately, this pattern is not unique to Burkina Faso but has become a concerning trend across West Africa.

In October 2022, the military regime elected its president and made promises to hold elections in 2024. However, doubts linger about whether these commitments will be fulfilled amidst the ongoing turmoil. The prevailing political uncertainty and insecurity have cast shadows of doubt on the junta's ability to uphold its promises.

The country's turbulent situation makes it challenging for external actors to effectively address the jihadist threat and contribute to stabilizing the whole Sahel region.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: overthrew - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Burkina-Faso>
- Recent history: claimed more than 2,000 lives in 2020 alone - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20201126-burkina-s-kabor%C3%A9-wins-re-election-according-to-full-preliminary-results>
- Recent history: military coup - <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-caused-the-coup-in-burkina-faso>
- Political and legal landscape: Constitution of 2012, - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2012?lang=en
- Political and legal landscape: departure - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/31/burkina-faso-president-blaise-compaore-ousted-says-army>

- Political and legal landscape: presidential election in November 2020 - <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/11/burkina-faso-incumbent-kabore-wins-presidential-election/>
- Political and legal landscape: In July 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/burkina-faso-president-takes-defence-role-amid-security-crisis-2021-06-30/>
- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights Watch, - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/burkina-faso>
- Political and legal landscape: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/burkina-faso/report-burkina-faso/>
- Political and legal landscape: International Crisis Group, - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/watch-list-2023-spring-update>
- Political and legal landscape: Legislation - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5d42bdfd4.html>
- Religious landscape description: guarantees - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2012.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Factsheet - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100772>
- Social and cultural landscape: Norwegian Refugee Council - <https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/march/burkina-faso-home-to-almost-half-of-closed-schools-in-central-and-west-africa/#>
- Social and cultural landscape: Equipop, July 2020, p.5 - <https://equipop.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rapport-Enquete-Covid19-ANGLAIS.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: Equipop, July 2020, p.8 - <https://equipop.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rapport-Enquete-Covid19-ANGLAIS.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD Maps and Facts, January 2018 - <https://www.oecd.org/swac/maps/63-Burkina%20Faso-gender-inequality.pdf>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat - https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-burkina_faso/2022/12/
- Technological landscape: Data Reportal 2023 - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-burkina-faso>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Burkina-Faso-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses?r=51>
- Security situation: end its deployment - <https://www.dw.com/en/france-agrees-to-pull-troops-from-burkina-faso/a-64513392>
- Security situation: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>
- Security situation: first attack on a church - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/killed-burkina-faso-church-attack-190429103434033.html>
- Security situation: Burkina Faso Humanitarian Snapshot - <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-snapshot-31-october-2023>
- Security situation: Refugees international - https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/2/11/burkina-faso-and-the-sahels-new-frontline?gclid=CjwKCAjwp-X0BRAFEiwAheRui6jatVvqnweKRqXtNwM_SCW-tUJM-dAoTtB0FfYfiK3R8hUjL7aYtRoCp7sQAvD_BwE
- Security situation: killed in combat - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/11/26/volunteer-militia-killed-burkina-faso/>
- Security situation: both perpetrators and victims - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2020/10/12/victims-or-villains-volunteer-fighters-burkina-faso-s-front-line>
- Security situation: numerous operations - <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/salafi-jihadi-movement-weekly-update-june-7-2023>
- Security situation: General Mobilization - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230413-general-mobilisation-declared-in-burkina-faso-after-series-of-jihadist-attacks>
- Security situation: Crisis Watch - March alerts and February trends 2023 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/march-alerts-and-february-trends-2023>

WWL 2024: Church information / Burkina Faso

Christian origins

Throughout recent centuries, the Sahel region has been dominated by Islamic states like the empire of Mali and the Mossi kingdom. Although Muslim rulers controlled these kingdoms, most of the population kept their traditional beliefs. For example, as recently as the 19th century, most people in the Mossi kingdom were not Muslim. Christianity was introduced during the French colonial period, and most Christians today are the ancestors of followers of traditional African religion (ATR).

Christianity came to the country in 1896 with the French. The Roman Catholic White Fathers entered the country in 1900 and opened their first mission at Ouagadougou in 1901. In 1922, an indigenous Catholic order called the Black Sisters of the Immaculate Conception was formed. The Catholic Church decided to make Ouagadougou an archdiocese in 1955.

(For further details, see: Rupley L and Bangali L, Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso, 2013, third edition p. 36ff.)

Protestants first came to the country in the early 1920s. Missionaries from the Assemblies of God became active in Ouagadougou in 1921 and opened a Bible school in 1933. In 1923 the Christian and Missionary Alliance started working in Dioulasso.

(For further details, see: Melton J G and Baumann M, Religions of The World - 2nd edition: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia Of Beliefs And Practices, 2010, pp. 444-445.)

From the middle of the 20th century onwards, many indigenous churches and new denominations emerged. Temple Apostolic was the first independent indigenous church congregation in the capital city. The Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions, the country's primary Christian cooperative association, was created in 1961 by conservative Evangelicals.

Church spectrum today

Burkina Faso: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	3,574,000	67.2
Protestant	1,812,000	34.1
Independent	104,000	2.0
Unaffiliated	7,800	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-182,000	-3.4
Total <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>	5,315,800	100.0

Evangelical movement	2,036,000	38.3
Renewalist movement	2,252,000	42.4

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The northern and eastern parts of the country are the main areas where Christians experience most pressure and violence, particularly outside the major cities. In the western part of the country, ethno-religious groups also put pressure on Christians.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated and are therefore not treated as a separate WWL category.

Historical Christian communities: The Roman Catholic Church is the most dominant Christian denomination in the country. Most of the country's political leaders, including heads of state, have been Catholics. Catholics face less persecution compared to other Christian groups due to their large numbers.

Converts: This category includes Christians of Muslim or traditional African religious background. Converts from a Muslim background experience the most serious persecution from their families and communities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are concentrated mostly in the major cities. They are targeted more often than historical Christian groups by Islamic militants because non-traditional churches show more engagement in proselytizing.

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Burkina Faso

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Burkina Faso: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	75	20
WWL 2023	71	23
WWL 2022	68	32
WWL 2021	67	32
WWL 2020	66	28

In the last five years, Burkina Faso's score has progressively increased. On the World Watch List of 2024, Burkina Faso went up another four points, reaching a score of 75 points and now reaching rank 20. This significant rise is tied to the growth of jihadist movements and the socio-economic crisis, particularly impacting Christians within the nation. The surge in violence and pressure experienced across the country, primarily targeting Christians, has been a pivotal driver behind this escalation. The expanding activity of jihadist groups has resulted in the forceful closure of numerous churches and Christian educational institutions, intensifying pressure within the Christian community. The deliberate targeting and fatalities among Christians have instilled an atmosphere of fear, deterring many from attending religious services or allowing their children to pursue education in such settings. Adding to this, jihadist factions have assumed control in various regions, supplanting governmental functions and assuming responsibility for providing essential social services. This complex situation has been further aggravated by the country's political uncertainties, marked by military coups in January and October 2022 amid deepening security crises.

Moreover, the instability in neighboring nations like Niger and Mali has contributed significantly to the insecurity experienced within Burkina Faso. What was once a notably tolerant society has undergone a distressing transformation, displaying heightened intolerance towards non-Muslim communities. Ethnic conflicts intertwined with religious dimensions have intensified, amplifying pressure on converts and various Christian groups. In short, Burkina Faso is looking exceedingly fragile.

Persecution engines

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

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

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

Burkina Faso has experienced several attacks by Islamic militant groups in recent years, especially in the northern region and occasionally in the capital. These can be seen as violent attempts at "Islamizing" the country. *Ansar ul Islam* was formed in 2016 and has tried to impose its laws in the northern part of the country through violent and non-violent means. There is also *Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslim* ("Group supporting Islam and Muslims") operating in the country and has ties with local militant groups. Its preachers influence the youth into blaming their misfortune on the French and on the corruption of morals through the West. There have been attacks on churches and Christians and some churches fear further attacks may be planned.

A country researcher writes: "Generally speaking, the ethnic groups are tolerant but with the increasing influence of Islamic expansion, Muslim leaders from various tribes have become sources of persecution." Converts from a Muslim background experience the most serious persecution from their families and communities.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

In many countries in the Sahel region, organized corruption is enabling the jihadists to recruit, buy weapons, and operate with impunity. A country researcher reported: "There is a high level of corruption in governance. Crimes such as robbery and kidnapping are being committed in various regions of the country. The government is doing little or nothing to contain such crime, even in the capital city, Ouagadougou."

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

In Burkina Faso, the government discourages church leaders from criticizing the government and from raising questions about justice, which hinders the Christian community's ability to engage in public discourse on national and religious issues.

Drivers of persecution

Burkina Faso: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK			STRONG	STRONG
Government officials	Weak							Strong	
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Very weak				
Violent religious groups	Very strong								Strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Strong								
Organized crime cartels or networks									Strong

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** There are several radical Islamic groups operating in the country (e.g. those affiliated with IS, al-Qaeda or Boko Haram). These groups have been responsible for numerous attacks.
- **Citizens (Strong):** Ordinary citizens in local communities and mob violence have been responsible for putting converts from Islam under pressure. As a result, converts do not express their Christian faith in public.
- **Extended family (Strong):** Christians of Muslim background experience severe pressure from their families to return to Islam.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** In remote areas, preachers have been actively inciting violence against Christians and spreading hatred towards Christians.

- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** Criminal networks are creating an environment whereby jihadists flourish, since these need to be able to act with impunity. Thus, the role of organized corruption is increasing in the country and, as a result, the rule of law is being weakened.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Many ethnic group leaders living in Muslim-dominated areas also harass Christians who have encouraged Muslims to convert to the Christian faith.

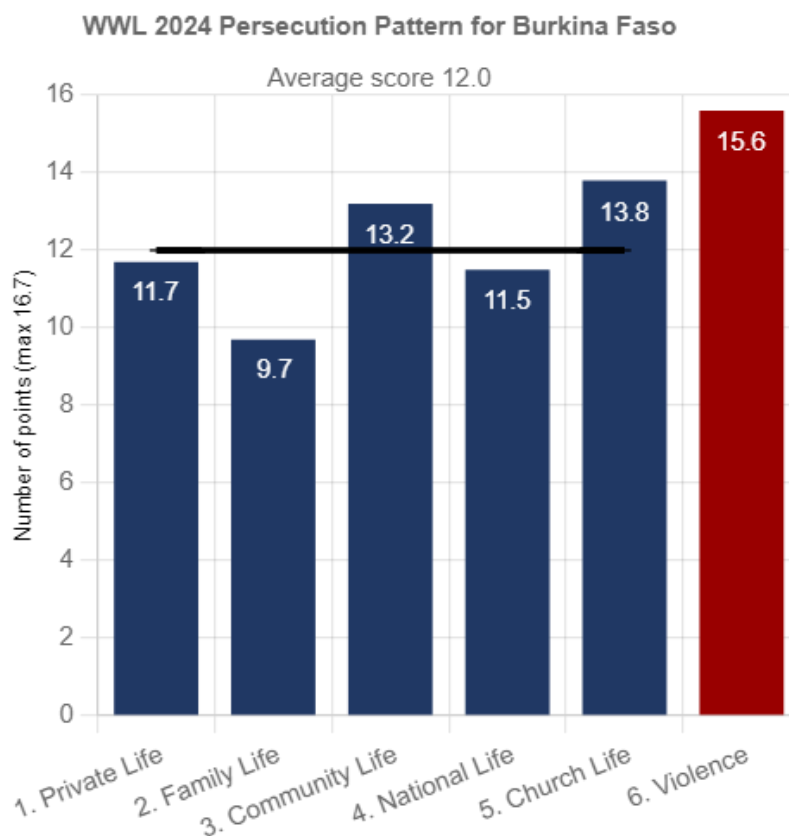
Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Militant groups have committed atrocities against foreign Christians in the past and are likely to continue to do so when the opportunities arise. Attacks by these groups have caused a high number of killings and displacement.
- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** It seems that a parallel state structure has been established outside the normal state machinery. The types of crimes committed range from kidnapping and theft and are conducted by a variety of groups in various parts of the country. This is increasingly becoming a cause of concern, especially since foreign aid workers are a favorite target. The abductors, often Islamic militants, think that abducting NGO workers will mean higher sums can be demanded for ransom. It also happens to be the case that there are many Christians working for foreign NGOs.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials exert pressure on Christians to remain silent on various critical issues. This includes discouraging them from speaking out against the government, discussing the recent coup, commenting on civilian matters, and raising questions about justice. This kind of suppression serves to limit the scope of religious freedom and hampers the community's ability to engage in public discourse on matters that are both nationally and religiously significant.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Burkina Faso shows:

- The average pressure in WWL 2024 is 12.0 points, rising from 11.0 points in WWL 2023.
- Pressure is highest in the *Church sphere* (13.8 points), followed by the *Community sphere* (13.2 points), rising from 12.5 points WWL 2023. This is a reflection of what has happened to churches and the pressure Christians have faced in their communities due to the activities of Islamic militants.
- The score for violence is at an extreme level, 15.6 points, similar to WWL 2023.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (3.25 points)

Church activities are subjected to intense surveillance and disruption, reflecting a hostile environment for Christians. The systematic targeting by local authorities and extremist groups

severely restricts their ability to freely practice their faith and gather for worship.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.25 points)

The enforcement of Sharia law by jihadist groups has made the possession of Christian materials extremely dangerous.. This threat has forced many to either hide their faith or seek refuge in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, as Christian possessions and institutions increasingly become targets of extremist attacks.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.25 points)

The rise of jihadist groups enforcing Sharia law has drastically limited Christians' freedom to speak about their faith on online platforms. This is particularly the case for Christians with a Muslim background.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.25 points)

The ongoing jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso have severely impeded Christians' access to essential media like Christian radio, TV, and online content. This relentless targeting has instilled a pervasive fear within the Christian community, driving many, particularly converts, to either hide their faith or seek refuge in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Christians face significant challenges in conducting Christian weddings, as the rise of jihadist groups and clan-based discrimination increasingly jeopardize these ceremonies.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

Christian parents face numerous obstacles in raising their children according to their faith, due to the closure or destruction of Christian educational institutions. This challenging environment, shaped by the presence of militant Islamic groups, clan-based discrimination and organized crime, severely hampers the ability of parents to impart Christian values and maintain faith-centered family practices.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.00 points)

Christian children in Burkina Faso are often pressured to attend schools with anti-Christian or majority religion teachings, especially since the closure of Christian educational institutions has limited faith-based education options. Oppression from radical Islamic groups, clan-based discrimination and organized crime has made the practice and preservation of Christian faith within families increasingly difficult.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

Children from Christian families endure harassment and discrimination linked to their parents' faith, worsened by the rise of jihadist groups. The closure of Christian schools forces them into environments that often disregard their religious beliefs, impacting their education, well-being, and identity.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.50 points)

Christians in Burkina Faso face harassment, threats and obstruction in their daily activities due to their faith, including discrimination in public services, exclusion from resources, and attacks by jihadist groups. This hostile environment has forced many to flee to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps and has led to the closure of Christian educational institutions.

Block 3.2: 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.). (3.50 points)

Christians in certain areas Burkina Faso are subjected to intensive monitoring by local communities and private groups, including being reported to authorities, shadowed, and having communications intercepted, especially in the northern, eastern, and western regions. This surveillance, exacerbated by the influence of jihadist groups, creates a climate of fear and sense of exclusion.

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

Christians, particularly female converts, face the threat of abduction and forced marriage, especially in regions where radical Islamic groups operate.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 points)

In Burkina Faso, particularly in the northern, eastern, and western parts of the country, Christians face significant hindrances in sharing community resources. The intimidating environment makes Christians hesitant to even request the sharing of essential resources such as water, grazing land, and farming land, posing considerable challenges for their community participation.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.75 points)

The increasing intolerance and hostility towards the Christian community has made it risky for churches in some areas to openly display religious symbols.

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christians face restrictions on travel for faith-related purposes, a consequence of the country's political and social instability and the authorities' focus on appeasing radical Islamic factions. This situation, worsened by the involvement of groups like the Wagner mercenaries, adds to the hardships of the Christian community, limiting their freedom to practice their faith.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christians experience discrimination in interactions with local government and military authorities, partly due to the latter's focus on countering Western influence.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.25 points)

The expression of Christian views and opinions is severely restricted due to the military regime's focus on countering Western influence and due to the continual influence of jihadist groups. This situation is compounded by controversial alliances with the likes of the Wagner mercenary group.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

The Christian community faces a severe crisis due to the jihadist intent on eradicating their presence, leading to widespread monitoring, disruption and destruction of churches, educational institutions and healthcare institutions. This persecution severely limits their religious practices, with congregations lacking worship spaces, church leaders facing mobility challenges, and a high risk associated with the distribution of religious materials.

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

Many churches do not even consider organizing activities outside their buildings due to the influence of jihadist groups on society. Such activities would be a provocation.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

In most areas of the country, it would be far too dangerous for visible churches to openly integrate Christians with a Muslim background due to the influence of jihadist groups.

Block 5.19: Churches have been hindered in their interaction with the global church (both foreigners visiting and nationals being able to visit Christians in other countries to attend conferences etc.). (3.75 points)

Heightened safety concerns, coupled with travel limitations, create significant barriers for Christians to interact globally. The influence of jihadist groups has hindered churches in Burkina Faso from engaging with the global church community, restricting cross-border exchanges and international participation in conferences.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced

Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

3. The use of symbolic number

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain.*

A symbolic number of 100 could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain..*

Burkina Faso: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	31	10 *
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	10 *
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	7000	5000
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *

5 Year trends

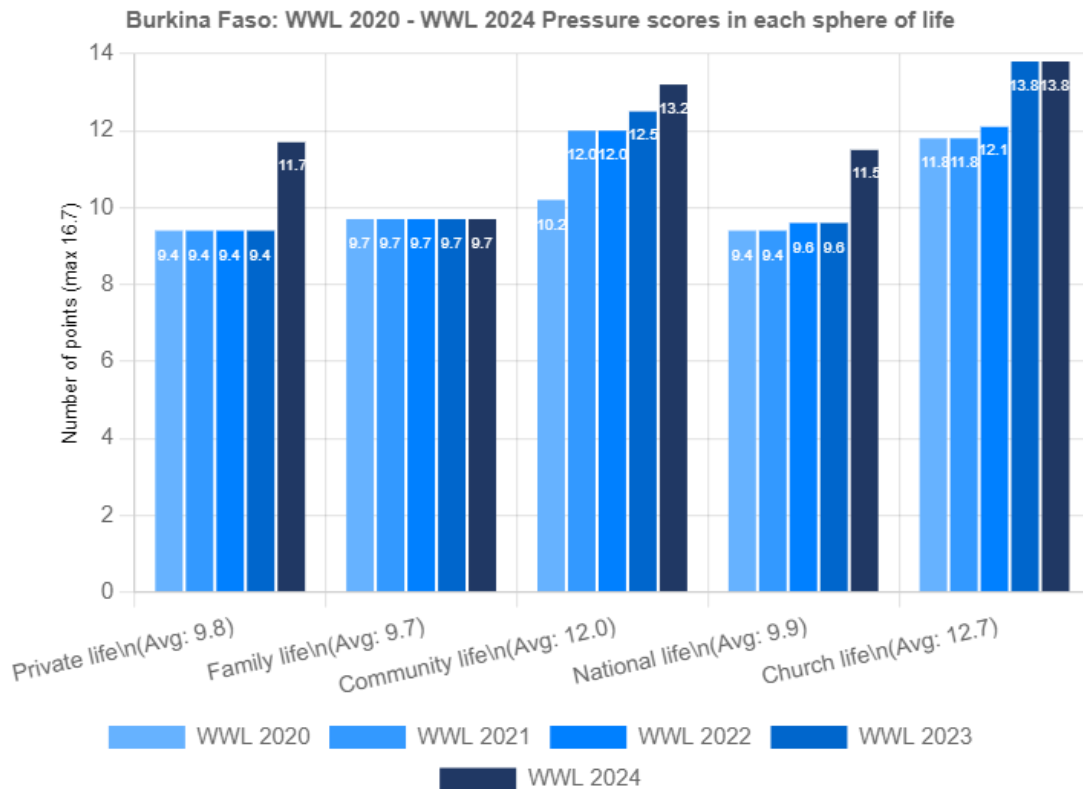
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Burkina Faso: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	12.0
2023	11.0
2022	10.6
2021	10.5
2020	10.1

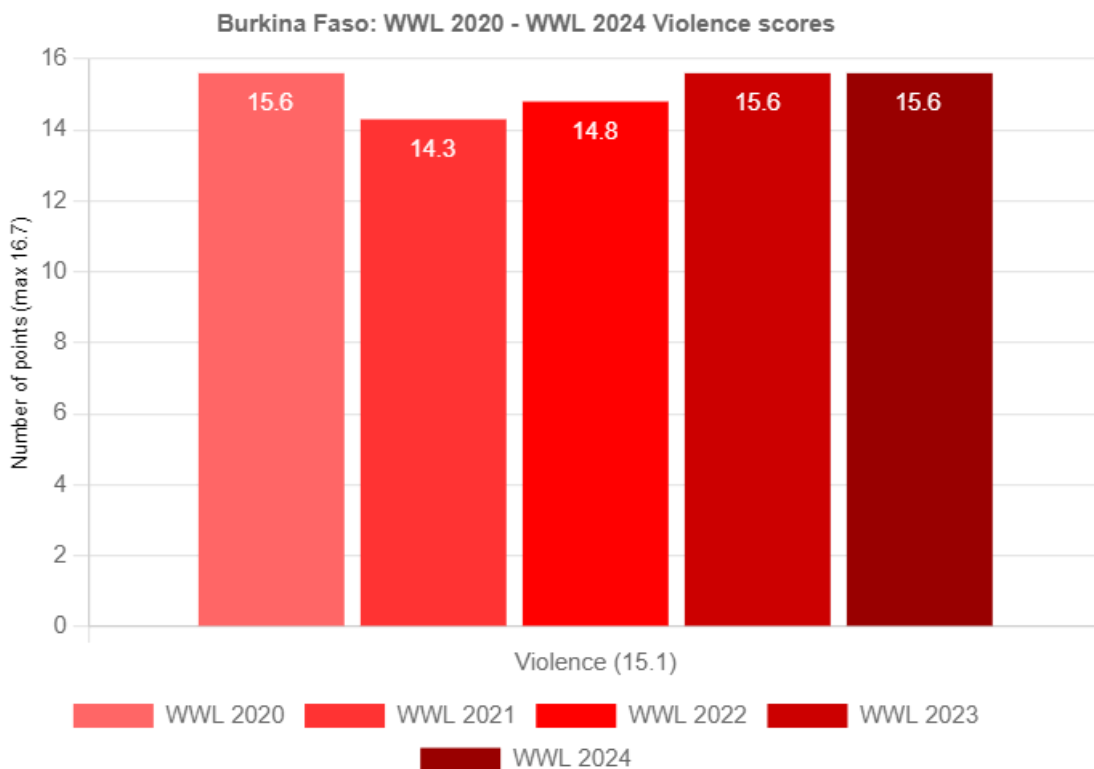
The average pressure on Christians has risen every year, from 10.1 points in the WWL 2020 reporting period to 12.0 points in WWL 2024. The extremely high violence scores (see Violence chart below) has had a huge impact on the pressure Christians face in the *the Church* and *Community spheres of life*, in particular. The instability in the government is also making it easier for jihadists to increase their influence.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Except for the *Family sphere* (which has stabilized at 9.7 points) and the *Church sphere* (which has scored 13.8 points in both WWL 2023 and 2024), the chart above shows how pressure has increased in each sphere of life. Increases In WWL 2024, the increases in pressure in *Private life* and *National life* were particularly large. Christians currently face very high pressure in the *Church sphere* (12.7 points on average) and *Community sphere* (12.0 points on average), due mainly to the presence, influence and activities of Islamic militants. On average, all other spheres scored 9.7-9.9 points over the 5-year period.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The violence score has been at an extreme level throughout the 5-year period. Each WWL reporting period has witnessed a distressing pattern of targeted attacks resulting in killings and injuries among Christians. Places of worship, specifically churches, have been singled out for attacks, while Christian-owned businesses have faced deliberate demolition, looting and permanent closures.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Women and girls face distinctive forms of persecution, including rape, forced marriage, banishment, and abduction. They are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and forced marriages and face pervasive threats of death and abuse, with girls facing early and forced marriages. Christian women also encounter pressures such as family rejection and discrimination, all of which contribute to a complex environment of fear and insecurity. The challenges faced by women and girls underscore the need for attention to gender-specific dimensions of persecution, emphasizing the unique vulnerabilities they experience in the face of violence and coercion.

Burkina Faso is located in a region where radical Islamic groups have a huge influence, and the rule of law is very weak, particularly in the Sahel and the eastern regions of the country where Islamic law is applied. Jihadists exploited this weakness during the COVID-19 crisis to gain increased control of the country's infrastructure, especially in [the north](#) (Royal United Services Institute, 9 November 2022). Within this context, there is a high potential for women and girls to be abducted by militants during raids. Some security experts have said that the kidnapping of women and children by jihadis in parts of West Africa signify desperation to create regional chaos.

In response to the kidnapping of dozens of women and children in the northern region of the country, an expert said: "I am alarmed that dozens of women out to search for food for their families were abducted in broad daylight". Female converts, according to many reports, are especially vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. The militants may force them to marry one of their members or subjugate them to sexual slavery. A country expert states: "The jihadists' attacks on many villages have isolated many Christians from other members of the family. In some villages, many women were abducted and kept in the bush for a long time by the jihadists ... they have been victims of rape and forced marriages ... and that has isolated them from their husbands and children".

Raping Christian women and girls is a common method of attacking Christian communities. In many areas, there is very little understanding of women's rights, so many people consider it "normal" to sexually assault a woman. Women and girls who are victims to such abuse are

taught to believe that they have brought shame, dishonor and stigma to the family, and the feeling of worthlessness can also weaken the family spiritually if not addressed. In particular the daughters of Christian leaders are often targeted through sexual violence “to aggravate the Christian community.” One of the most pervasive forms of persecution that Christian women face is rape, which is often underreported. This lack of reporting can be attributed to various factors, including social stigma and fear of reprisal. The issue becomes even more complex when considering that underreporting perpetuates a cycle of silence, making it difficult to grasp the extent of the problem.

An African Union security expert stated that women and children are becoming easy targets for Islamic militants because they are vulnerable and unable to defend themselves: “Civilians are easy targets because civilians are not armed. Young girls, and women are very vulnerable, they can be easily abducted, kidnapped, and all that because they know this will get international condemnation and uproar, they use those means” ([DW](#), 20 January 2023).

Converts from an Islamic or traditional religious background face additional pressure and violence. Families beat them, give them in forced marriage, withdraw them from school and in some instances, chase them out of the family. Some young women are also threatened with death. Although Burkina Faso is a CEDAW signatory and has committed to ending child, early and forced marriage by 2030, 52% of girls are married before their 18th birthday (Girls Not Brides/Burkina Faso). A country expert states that forced marriages are very common, going on to describe a situation where a girl died by suicide in order to escape a forced marriage.

Another common form of pressuring converts is to keep them under house arrest. As conversion to another religion is considered a betrayal by some families, they may also be repudiated and denied their inheritance. Christian girls will also be put under intense pressure to convert to Islam. The threat of forced marriage, sexual abuse, rejection and even death causes complex psychological trauma to Christian women and girls.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The displacement of 2 million people in Burkina Faso has been named the world’s most neglected crisis. The country has endured five years of conflict, with violence increasing since the two coups in 2022, with militias – who have attacked water sources and forced school clo-

tures – now controlling up to 40% of the country’s territory ([The Guardian](#), 2023). Indeed, the number of schools closed in the country rose by almost a third over the past year to 6,149, affecting close to 1 million students. Children out of school are more likely to be forced to work, to be recruited into armed groups, or be victims of gender-based violence and exploitation ([The Guardian](#), 1 June 2023). Islamic militant groups operating in the Sahel region often recruit their members from countries like Niger and Burkina Faso. Christian men and boys are targeted for recruitment, physical attacks and for ransom. The abduction and killing of Christian men causes fear and trauma in Christian communities, as well as economic fragility as the men are normally the family providers.

Further fracturing the stability of the Church, many men and boys flee the country due to the pressures they face. An expert comments: “Christian men and boys are targeted and recruited by militant groups. In conflict areas, they are often victims of physical attacks by violent Islamic militants. When Christian men and boys are forcibly displaced from their homes and towns because of their faith, the families are seriously affected by the persecution as well.” In November 2023, at least 40 civilians were killed by al-Qaeda-linked rebels trying to take control of a besieged town in Burkina Faso’s hard-hit northern region. The United Nation’s rights office called the attack a war crime, with an additional 42 people wounded and three camps for IDP’s set on fire ([The Independent](#), 29 November 2023).

Church leaders, the majority of whom are males, have also been targeted by militant groups. According to reports, an unknown number of pastors and their families have been abducted and remain in captivity. Others have been “executed in front of their families.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Burkina Faso):

- "Media outlets reported that terrorist groups regularly targeted Muslim and Christian clergy, religious congregations, houses of worship, teachers, local government employees, schools, and Muslims they criticized for not practicing a sufficiently conservative form of Islam. According to residents, terrorist groups were also responsible for killing imams whom the terrorist groups accused of collaborating with government security forces."
- "Extremists also urged Muslim and non-Muslim persons to adapt their living styles. Some attacks took place at both Christian and Islamic houses of worship. According to many observers, attacks also targeted Muslims whom the attackers believed were insufficiently rigorous in their practice of Islam."

Burkina Faso is a country where Islamic radicalization is growing. The peripheries of the country are under the influence of Islamic militants and the mosques and madrassas teach radical versions of Sunni Islam, thus causing even Sufi Muslims to be under threat. In these areas, there is no place for religious minorities. It was even reported that teachers in schools were threatened to hold Quran classes or face repercussions. This is also making life difficult for more moderate Muslims. Furthermore, anti-Islamic sentiment appears evident among some vigilante armed groups. In November 2020, an unknown assailant threw a Molotov cocktail into a mosque in Ouagadougou, [wounding six people](#). A note left on the ground nearby said: “Close the mosque or we’ll launch grenades at you” (AP News, 8 November 2020).

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

The country is losing the religious tolerance it has otherwise practiced throughout its earlier history. The constant rhetoric and influence by radical Islamic groups have created a situation where Muslim families react with increasing hostility towards family members who convert to Christianity and where certain ethnic groups have started to specifically target Christians. As a result, Christians are afraid of being abducted or attacked in some parts of the country, and their fear can be seen in the increased security measures at churches. The United Nations has also expressed its concern [reporting](#) that "terrorist groups" are "making large swaths of territory unstable and stoking ethnic violence, especially in Burkina Faso and Mali" (AP News, 14 November 2019). The global pandemic also created a fertile environment for the insurgents due to the government shifting its focus from fighting the spread of Islamic militancy to fighting the spread of COVID-19. The fact that the government has been in disarray means that - up until April 2023 (see above: *Security situation*) - there was little coordinated effort from the government to contain the expansion of these jihadist groups. Since 2015, the fight against jihadists has resulted in thousands of deaths and about 2 million displaced people. Christians have been forced to flee their homes, and many churches and schools have closed down after facing attacks. During the WWL 2024 reporting period, jihadist activities intensified, exacerbating the already challenging circumstances for Christians and other civilians. This trend is anticipated to persist in the coming years.

Organized corruption and crime

In the absence of law and order, organized crime is growing. This is also the main means for Islamic militants to transfer weapons (and traffic people and drugs) across borders and remain active in the country. The fact that the government is weak, organized cartels and jihadists are coordinating their actions so that they can maximize profit from human trafficking, the trafficking of minerals, and wildlife as well. If the general situation is not addressed, this Persecution engine will grow in influence, not only in Burkina Faso but also in the entire region.

Instability in the government

The government in Burkina Faso has seen instability in the last few years after the ousting of Blaise Compaoré, who led the country from 1987 to 2014. In 2022 alone, two coups were conducted. This instability is making the country a safe haven for jihadists. While the latest military regime is trying to consolidate power (despite pressure from the international community), it appears unlikely that there will be a return to stability. That means that a significant security vacuum will remain for the jihadists to exploit and fill. Now that there has been another coup in Niger (in July 2023), the instability could even get worse.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: the north - <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/fragile-future-sahel-wake-covid-19-and-ukraine-war>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: DW - <https://www.dw.com/en/why-kidnappers-in-west-africa-now-target-women/a-64461678>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jun/01/burkina-faso-is-the-worlds-most-neglected-crisis-as-focus-remains-on-ukraine>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/14/quarter-of-schools-closed-in-burkina-faso-as-fighting-escalates-after-coup>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: (The Independent - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/united-nations-ap-burkina-faso-nigeria-abuja-b2455415.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: wounding six people - <https://apnews.com/article/africa-burkina-faso-ouagadougou-3ae5e4ca4317352cc797f73152ff8899#>
- Future outlook: reporting - <https://apnews.com/79b56cd182864be29cf3326f8bbd634f>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Burkina+Faso>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.