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World Watch Research

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# Libya:

# Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



**Open***Doors*

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

Libya: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
6,964,000	35,500	0.5

*Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024*

Libya: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	35,500	0.5
Muslim	6,896,000	99.0
Hindu	6,400	0.1
Buddhist	17,400	0.2
Ethnic religionist	550	0.0
Jewish	130	0.0
Bahai	710	0.0
Atheist	230	0.0
Agnostic	3,100	0.0
Other	4,600	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

### Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Libyan Christians with a Muslim background often face violent and intense pressure from their family and the wider community to renounce their faith. Foreigners from other parts of the African continent are also targeted by various Islamic militant groups and organized criminal groups. These groups kidnap Christians and there have also been instances in which Christians have been killed in brutal fashion. Even when they do not face such a fate, Christians from Sub-Saharan Africa are harassed and subjected to threats from radical Muslims. Christians who publicly express their faith and try to share the Christian faith with others also face the risk of arrest and violent opposition. The absence of a single central government to impose law and order in the country has made the situation for Christians precarious. The level of violence against Christians in Libya is categorized as 'very high'.

### Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians are targeted and killed by extremist groups on the basis of their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christians are harassed and targeted for wearing religious symbols (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian converts are tortured and pressured to recant their conversion from Islam (ICCPR Arts. 7 and 18)
- Christians are arrested and detained on blasphemy charges for sharing Christian material online (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)



## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- A Christian from a Muslim background remains imprisoned while his case is pending with the Supreme Court. He was sentenced to death for apostasy in September 2022 ([MEC, 12 September 2022](#)).
- Several church buildings and other places of Christian worship, mostly belonging to Sub-Saharan African Christians, were attacked and demolished or damaged.
- Several Sub-Saharan African Christians were kidnapped for ransom.
- Several Christian migrants (mostly from Sub-Saharan African countries) held in detention centers in Libya have reportedly been raped and beaten.
- Slavery and human trafficking still take place despite an international outcry in 2017 when [CNN showed video evidence](#) of an auction of Sub-Saharan Africans (CNN, 14 November 2017). Many of the Sub-Saharan African migrants are Christian.
- The effects of an incident which took place in the WWL 2024 reporting period are still reverberating: In March 2023, at least six Libyan Christians from a Muslim background were arrested, with the authorities trying to force them (under torture) to recant their faith ([The Guardian, 3 May 2023](#)). At the same time, at least one foreign Christian was arrested and forcibly expelled from the country following accusations of proselytizing ([The Guardian, 3 May 2023](#)).

## Specific examples of positive developments

Having just one central government controlling the whole of Libya would seem be the only way to end the lawlessness in the country (and curb the violence targeting foreign Christians in Libya). Parliamentary and presidential elections were originally planned for December 2021, but were postponed indefinitely after major disagreements between all political factions. Representatives of both the Eastern-based House of Representatives and Western-based High Council of State are now working on a new election framework, but it is unlikely that any major faction will agree to ceding power following elections. Whatever the outcome, the situation for converts from Islam to Christianity will remain very sensitive and insecure.

Almost all expatriate Christians working in the country have left; the main Christian groups in Libya currently consist of Sub-Saharan migrants and some Egyptian Copts.

- The Egyptian Coptic Orthodox church had three church buildings, one in Tripoli, Benghazi and Misrata, but these are not functioning anymore at the present time.
- A few Sub-Saharan African groups are currently able to meet for worship, but they have to operate very carefully.
- The Roman Catholic church has two church buildings left in Libya - one in Tripoli in the West and one in Benghazi in the East, but only the Roman Catholic church in Tripoli is currently still functioning. According to the Apostolic Vicar of Tripoli, [Bishop George Bugeja](#), the church serves around 3,000 remaining Catholics in Libya, although their number is dwindling. All of the parishioners are foreigners - mostly Filipinos, Indians and Pakistanis. There are also Catholics from Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone (ACN Malta, January 2020).

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### **Communities of expatriate Christians**

Most expatriate Christians have left the country; the main Christian groups remaining consist of Sub-Saharan migrants and Egyptian Copts. Christian migrant workers are allowed to meet in their own places of worship (although all Coptic Orthodox churches in the country have been destroyed or abandoned), but Libyans are not allowed to attend. Although they enjoy more freedom than converts from Islam, non-Libyan Christians are constantly facing threats of kidnapping and other forms of abuse. Sub-Saharan African Christians are doubly vulnerable to persecution and discrimination based on race and religion.

Christian migrants travelling through Libya describe their journey as a living hell. Both Christian and Muslim migrants are subject to forms of severe abuse. Because of the internal divisions, migrants are handed over from one group of human traffickers to another on their journey to reach the coast. Each group of human traffickers tries to extort as much money as possible from the migrants and - for ransom purposes - are known to even send a migrant's family in the home country videos of torture being carried out. Most female migrants face sexual abuse by traffickers; they cannot refuse, as the traffickers otherwise threaten to leave them behind. While waiting to be transported and to be handed over to another group of traffickers, migrants are often held in (temporary) camps. According to reports, the general conditions in such camps are very poor and many migrants do not survive their journey. One Christian migrant recounts the complete lack of safety: "You can never sleep with your eyes closed". When they finally reach the coastal area, they often have to find ways to raise additional money to pay for crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. Traffickers put as many migrants as possible onto often unseaworthy boats, putting the lives of the migrants very much at risk.

### **Historical Christian communities**

This category does not exist in Libya as defined by WWL methodology.

### **Converts to Christianity**

The very small group of Libyan nationals who are Christians keep their faith secret. Libyans are forbidden to attend worship in official churches. The number of Libyan Christians from a Muslim background is very low, but with the appearance of Christian programs on satellite TV and Christian websites in Arabic, the interest in the Christian faith has been increasing. As in most Muslim countries, converting from Islam brings massive social pressure and converts are always at risk from their families. Most Libyan Christians are afraid to meet with other Christians, since any kind of non-Islamic religious gathering is forbidden for Libyans.

### **Non-traditional Christian communities**

This category does not exist in Libya as defined by WWL methodology.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians are at risk all over the country, but are especially vulnerable in areas where radical Islamic groups are active. Particularly the region around Sirte is notorious for the presence of radical Islamic groups (including elements of IS). Expatriate Christians avoid travelling in general and especially in

areas where Islamic militants are likely to have set up checkpoints. Groups such as those previously connected to the now defunct Islamic Dawn coalition are in control of areas around Tripoli and some parts of Tripoli itself. In the East, radical Islamic groups are at least present in Benghazi.

Migrant Christians who have been arrested and detained while trying to reach Europe, often end up in one of the overcrowded detention centers around Tripoli. Others do not even make it that far, but are directly delivered into the hands of criminal officials or groups by their human traffickers. Subsequently, they are forced into heavy labor in the agricultural sector or pushed into prostitution.

## Position on the World Watch List

Libya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	91	4
WWL 2024	91	3
WWL 2023	88	5
WWL 2022	91	4
WWL 2021	92	4

The score for WWL 2025 remained the same as in WWL 2024. The shockwaves of a major incident in March 2023, which led to the arrest of both Libyan and expatriate Christians, has forced the tiny community to remain extremely careful. The scores in all spheres of life remain at extreme levels. Although the country further stabilized to a certain extent and saw less direct conflict between the various factions during the WWL 2025 reporting period, the overall vulnerability of Christians in the country, including the expatriate community, remains extremely high.

## Persecution engines

Libya: 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	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all

*(table continues below)*

Libya: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
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)**

This engine manifests itself in different ways. Libya has a deeply Islamic culture causing converts from Islam to Christianity to face immense pressure from their family members and community. In addition, following Gaddafi’s downfall, various radical Islamic groups have gained more influence and control over society. They form an active threat to all foreign Christians residing in the country, including Christian Sub-Saharan African migrants and Egyptian Copts. Amplified by issues of ethnicity and racism, Christian migrants from Sub-Saharan countries face particularly fierce discrimination.

**Clan oppression (Strong)**

Libya's society is conservative and tribal. Converting from Islam to Christianity is not only seen as betrayal of Islam, but also of the family and tribe. In practice, conversion to Christianity is only possible for Libyans if they keep it a secret and are willing to accept severe consequences if their faith is revealed, including being killed.

**Organized corruption and crime (Strong)**

The fact that corruption is so rife also contributes to perpetuating impunity and the lack of rule of law in the country. This engine is blended with *Islamic oppression* since some of the Islamic militant groups work with or act as organized criminal groups by engaging in human trafficking and other criminal activities. Especially Christian Sub-Saharan African migrants are at a clear risk of being kidnapped for ransom. In addition, many of those incarcerated in migrant (detention) camps are reportedly being extorted and face high levels of violence and torture.

## Drivers of persecution

Libya: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			STRONG					STRONG
Government officials	Strong								
Ethnic group leaders	Strong			Strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								
Violent religious groups	Very strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Very strong			Strong					
Political parties	Strong								
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	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

- **Extended family (Very strong) / Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Although clearly mixed with issues of family honor (see below: *Clan oppression*), strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for (extended) families to target members holding other beliefs.
- **Violent religious groups / Paramilitary groups (Very strong / Strong):** The most prominent examples were the beheadings of 21 Coptic Christians in February 2015 by IS, followed by the execution of a group of Ethiopian Christians in April that same year. Meanwhile, IS has lost Sirte as its stronghold, but elements of the group are still present in the country. Other radical Islamic groups are mostly connected to the internationally recognized government in the West, although there are also radical elements among the Eastern parties. Such groups are responsible for the most violent forms of persecution and act with absolute impunity due to the absence of a single government to impose any semblance of law and order in the country. In recent years, some of these groups have become increasingly institutionalized, with their leaders now holding official positions within the governments in both the East and the West ([SWP, 31 July 2023](#)).

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** At the community level, local imams or sheikhs are known to incite hatred against Christians, especially against those who are migrants or converts. At the national level, radical (Wahhabi) Islamic scholars exert influence via both satellite television and Internet. In April 2019, [ICG especially warned](#) against the growing influence of the Madkhalis, an ultra-conservative Salafi group rooted in Saudi-Arabian Wahhabism with adherents in both Eastern and Western Libya. Although Madkhalis oppose both political activities (e.g. as carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood) and jihadi operations (e.g. as carried out by IS), they still adhere to strict interpretations of Sharia law. Their influence is reported to be growing, causing strict Islamic rules to be enforced in more and more areas of the country.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Libya does not have one central government and the treatment of Christians differs from region to region. However, Sharia law is upheld throughout the country. Converts and Christians involved in proselytization can be arrested by local ruling groups. Detained migrant Christians from a Sub-Saharan background can face worse treatment than other migrants because of their faith.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Ordinary people who subscribe to intolerant and radical interpretations of Islam contribute to the persecution and discrimination of Christians especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life*. This category overlaps with extended family since families and tribes are close-knit and often live together - which is also true in urban areas, although to a lesser extent.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Most political factions are supporters of the application of Sharia law and aim to keep Libya a Muslim country.

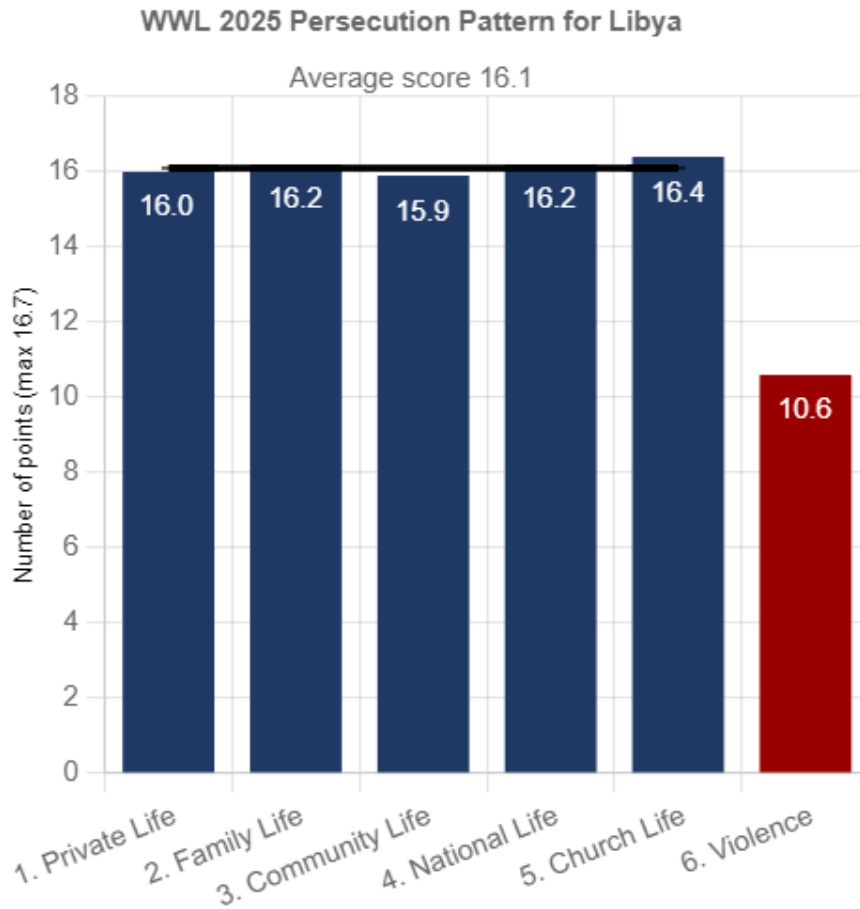
#### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** For converts, one's own family is often the biggest threat. In order to nullify the shame brought upon the family by conversion to Christianity, the family will try to force the convert into recanting his or her new faith. This often comes in the form of social pressure (exclusion, forced divorce, losing custody over children), but converts can also face severe violence.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Libya's population is divided into more than thirty different tribes. Each tribe consists of different clans and families, which have a hierarchical structure in which the father is the head of the nuclear family. Tribal leaders, often the eldest sons of their families, have a duty to protect the (extended) family and look after the well-being and family honor of the whole group. They put pressure on converts to recant their new faith or encourage families to take action against apostate family members.

#### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** Although intertwined with the activities of corrupt government officials, criminal groups are involved in the persecution and discrimination of Christians. In particular those engaged in human trafficking and kidnapping for ransom are known to single out Christians and treat them harsher than victims from other backgrounds. These groups engage in all sorts of predatory behavior against immigrants who are trying to make their way through Libya to Europe. In addition to being held hostage for ransom, many are sold into slavery and many women are subjected to sexual assault and rape.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Libya shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at an extremely high level (16.1 points), the same as in WWL 2024. This extremely high level is not least caused by the anarchy that continues to exist due to the lack of a central government. Radical Islamic groups and governing authorities can harm Christians (both Sub-Saharan migrants and converts) with impunity.
- Although all spheres of life show extreme levels of pressure, pressure is highest in *National life* (followed by *Church* and *Private life*). This reflects the lack of a central government. Where anarchy and Islamic radicalism rule together, there is no freedom of speech, no equal treatment of Christians, no permits for churches to be built etc.
- The level of violence remained very high, increasing slightly from 10.2 points in WWL 2024 to 10.6 in WWL 2025. The reason for this rise was a higher number of verified incidents, including an increase in attacks on church buildings.

## 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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

#### ***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.). (4.00 points)***

Because of the oppression caused by the intolerance of relatives, society and radical Islamic groups, Christians in Libya hardly dare to inform others about their faith, let alone express their faith in written form clearly visible for others. It could i) draw unwanted attention from criminal groups looking to extort or kidnap people; ii) alert Islamic radical groups opposing Christian presence; or iii) lead to accusations of blasphemy if, for example, Jesus Christ is described as “Son of God”. This is in particular risky for converts, as a public expression of their new faith brings shame on their (extended) family.

#### ***Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (4.00 points)***

Being visibly recognizable as a Christian brings risks. Wearing a cross or - like Egypt’s Copts - having a tattoo of a cross on the wrist or arm, can be dangerous. Militias and local ruling groups maintain checkpoints monitoring all those entering their territory. In normal daily life, being recognized as a Christian could lead to discrimination or harassment. Especially Sub-Saharan migrant Christians have to hide their Christian identity to avoid the increased likelihood of being selected for discrimination and (sexual) abuse by human traffickers and government officials.

#### ***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (4.00 points)***

Libyan society is conservative and radical Islamic thinking has a high level of influence in the country. Discussing Christian faith with a Muslim could be interpreted as an act of evangelism. Proselytization is not explicitly prohibited, but “instigating division” and “insulting Islam” is.

#### ***Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (4.00 points)***

Libya’s indigenous convert Christians, in particular, cannot publicly or openly meet with other Christians. Discovery might lead to unwanted attention, especially from direct family members. Expatriate Christians also have to be careful in many parts of the country, as they are at risk of being kidnapped or worse. Meetings cannot take place without precautionary security measures, as even travelling within certain cities is dangerous because of checkpoints manned by different groups.

### ***Block 1 - Additional information***

Pressure in the *Private sphere of life* has been extremely high for years, as both Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity and expatriate Christians are severely limited in their personal expression of faith. Conversion to Christianity is strongly opposed, making it almost impossible to speak about faith with family members. While owning a Bible carries high risks for convert and expatriate Christians alike, the



Internet has brought some helpful solutions here. Nevertheless, recent examples have shown that even using online Christian material is not without risk.

## **Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere**

### ***Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)***

Libyan converts to Christianity are viewed as Muslims by government authorities and cannot have an official Christian wedding. They are outlawed and have to live in secrecy. Foreign Christians are allowed to marry other Christians in their own churches in some parts of the country. Celebrating a wedding might put them all at risk and draw unwanted attention from radical groups, or, in the case of converts, from family members.

### ***Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (4.00 points)***

Converts will most probably be buried with Islamic rites. Reportedly, funerals for Sub-Saharan migrant Christians who died in migration centers have been hindered as well. Many migrant Christians are buried in unmarked graves along the road.

### ***Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)***

Libya is an Islamic country and Islamic teaching influences all school curricula. Even international schools have to follow the Islamic curriculum. Almost all expatriate Christian workers have left the country and the main Christian groups remaining are Sub-Saharan migrants and some Egyptian Copts. Their children, if they go to school, have to attend Islamic instruction and are vulnerable to harassment.

### ***Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (4.00 points)***

Some converts even keep their new faith hidden from their children as they might accidentally reveal it to others. If their parent's new faith would be known, children of converts are highly likely to be bullied by their peers. Children of Sub-Saharan migrant Christians are vulnerable to abuse both for their faith and race.

## **Block 2 - Additional information**

It is virtually impossible for Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity to establish Christian family life. They can only be baptized in utmost secrecy and cannot give their children Christian names. Marriage and burial can only be carried out according to Islamic rites. In addition, converts are likely to face divorce, lose the custody over their children and be disinherited if their new faith becomes known.

### 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.). (4.00 points)***

Christians regularly face harassment and discrimination and are generally viewed with suspicion. Protestant Christians in particular are seen as being linked to Western countries and intelligence agencies, like the CIA. Women have to dress modestly and most Libyan women cover their hair, according to Islamic tradition. Converts, in particular women, have to dress according to Islamic standards in order not to draw attention to their conversion. During Ramadan, all Christians experience social pressure to abstain from eating and drinking during the day; converts have to do this in order not to be discovered.

***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.). (4.00 points)***

Intensified by the civil war, high levels of suspicion exist. Christians have to live every day carefully; converts and expatriate Christians alike avoid many parts of the country and tend to live in urbanized areas where secrecy and anonymity are more possible.

***Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (4.00 points)***

Not only converts to Christianity will experience pressure to recant their faith. Reportedly, at times Sub-Saharan migrant Christians are forced to convert to Islam or do so to protect themselves. Those who do not give up their faith are likely to be singled out for persecution, while some have even been killed.

***Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)***

Converts will most probably lose their job if their new faith becomes known, and they are likely to be actively discriminated against when trying to find another job. Christians are generally not employed by the government, certainly not in higher positions. Christian migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa are doubly discriminated against, due to their skin color as well as their faith. Many of them are vulnerable to abuse and have to work under harsh conditions, some even being sold as slaves.

#### ***Block 3 - Additional information***

Libyan society is conservative and staunchly Islamic. While Libyan converts have to keep their faith hidden when participating in society, migrant Christians residing in the country do not fare much better. Especially during religious feasts like Ramadan, Christians have to adhere to Islamic religious norms. Due to the presence of radical Islamic and criminal groups, abduction and kidnapping are concrete risks for migrant Christians in Libya. Both local militias and groups aligned with the internationally recognized government arrest and interrogate Christians suspected of evangelization. Possession of a single Bible is enough evidence for accusations of proselytizing.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

***Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)***

Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity cannot reveal their faith in any way to any authority. They would risk imprisonment, torture or worse, if discovered. Christian migrants also often hide their faith or even use a Muslim name to avoid discrimination by those in authority.

***Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)***

The fall of the Gaddafi regime gave Libyan citizens more space to express their views in public. However, criticizing government officials or ruling groups is dangerous, as the disappearance of outspoken journalists and bloggers in recent years has shown. Since most Christians are foreigners, they have to be careful not to appear provocative; converts cannot get involved in public debates as they are regarded as outlaws.

***Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (4.00 points)***

Even the few registered church buildings cannot display religious symbols on the outside walls, since the public display of Christian symbols is considered to be an indirect form of proselytization and can attract serious punishment from the authorities - or even lead to public lynching.

***Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (4.00 points)***

Converts can be harmed or killed with impunity; especially when carried out by family members, it will be considered to be a matter of family honor. Other Christians can also be killed with impunity by both radical groups as well as government officials; Sub-Saharan Christians are especially vulnerable in this regard.

### ***Block 4 - Additional information***

Both the 2011 interim Constitutional Declaration as well as the 2016 Constitutional Draft declare Islam to be the religion of the state and Sharia the primary source of legislation. Whereas the 2011 Constitutional Declaration allows "non-Muslims the freedom to practice their religious rituals" (a very limited interpretation of the Freedom of Religion or Belief; note that conversion is not recognized and Libyan Christians are considered to be Muslim), the 2016 Draft lacks any reference to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Christian NGOs are not allowed to operate in the country, while media reporting regarding Christians and Christianity is reportedly biased and hate speech not uncommon. Blasphemy accusations are a real threat and can have severe consequences for both Libyan and migrant Christians. Due to the lack of a central government and widespread anarchy, international monitoring is severely hindered or simply impossible.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### ***Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)***

Converts cannot come together in any church setting without high risks; foreign churches also have to operate with great caution. Most churches try to maintain good relationships with Muslim neighbors, but a general hostile attitude towards Christians makes it hard to have a positive influence in society.

### ***Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)***

Converts from Islam to Christianity do not dare to be known as Christians, let alone request the government for any official recognition of their church activities. Expatriate churches with a long historical presence, like the Coptic Orthodox Church from Egypt and the Roman Catholic Church are officially recognized, but building a new church or renovating an existing one is difficult, if not impossible. New non-traditional Protestant groups have not been given legal recognition and have had to operate in private homes.

### ***Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)***

Regardless of which government authorities or local Salafi militia are in charge, no church anywhere in the country can accept converts in their midst. Evangelizing is not officially prohibited, but the criminal code puts the death penalty on those who insult Islam or Mohammed. This means, therefore, that the few remaining churches have to operate very carefully and cannot invite or accept visits from Muslims to church services.

### ***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.). (4.00 points)***

It is very dangerous for foreigners to visit Christians inside Libya. Converts have to be very careful when travelling abroad in order not to raise any suspicions. Some parts of Tripoli can be visited by foreigners, but serious security risks remain. This makes it very difficult to encourage and support Christians inside the country.

### ***Block 5 - Additional information***

Church life is hardly possible for any Christians. Depending on the region, migrants can gather in churches, but they face serious security risks. Importing Christian literature and Bibles in Arabic remains strictly forbidden and the proselytizing of Muslims and missionary activity is officially prohibited in the country. This is another factor that suppresses the growth of the indigenous Church.

## 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 numbers:**

- *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 WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Libya: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
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?	13	9
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	5	31
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?	15	10 *
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	6
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	25	17
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	3	2
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?	6	16
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?	11	18
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	16	23
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	21	17

The level of violence against Christians in Libya remains in the category 'very high'. Due to the political instability and absence of law and order in the country, many Christians are subjected to violent, inhumane and degrading treatment. Given the security issues surrounding a Muslim's conversion to the Christian faith, most reports about converts in Libya cannot be published (see *Specific examples of violations of rights* above for some public examples).

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Christians attacked:** Christian migrants in particular have been the victim of abduction, rape and other forms of violence. Migrant women, many of whom are Christian, are reported to have been forced into prostitution.
- **Christians arrested:** Both convert and migrant Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons. Tribal groups as well as government officials (who are often connected to radical Islamic groups or militias) are responsible for such detentions.
- **Churches attacked:** There are few church buildings in the country. Churches and buildings used as a church remain a very vulnerable target for attack, especially by radical Islamic groups.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Homes where Christians live and small shops they run are vulnerable to being targeted by criminal groups, radical Islamic groups or even government officials.

Although published well before the WWL 2025 reporting period, a 2016 [report](#) by Amnesty International gives a clear indication of what Christians have been going through: A 26-year-old from Eritrea who was held in a detention center in al-Zawiya, is quoted as saying: “They hate Christians. If you’re a Christian, all I can say is God help you if they find out...If they see a cross or a [religious] tattoo they beat you a lot more.” Another former detainee (from Nigeria) said that guards in the detention center in Misrata would separate the men according to religion and flog those who were Christians. A 22-year-old man from Eritrea who was beaten in detention after his boat was intercepted, stated: “They beat me, took my money and threw away my Bible and the cross I had on my neck... First they check whether one has money in the pockets, then they take an electrical cable and whip you.”

A report by Amnesty International published in July 2021 shows that the situation had not improved a few years later. Many migrants are sent back to Libya after being intercepted at sea while trying to reach Europe; many of these are subsequently detained and abused, while others find they are not able to return to their home countries due to lack of funds ([Amnesty International, 15 July 2021](#)).

## 5 Year trends

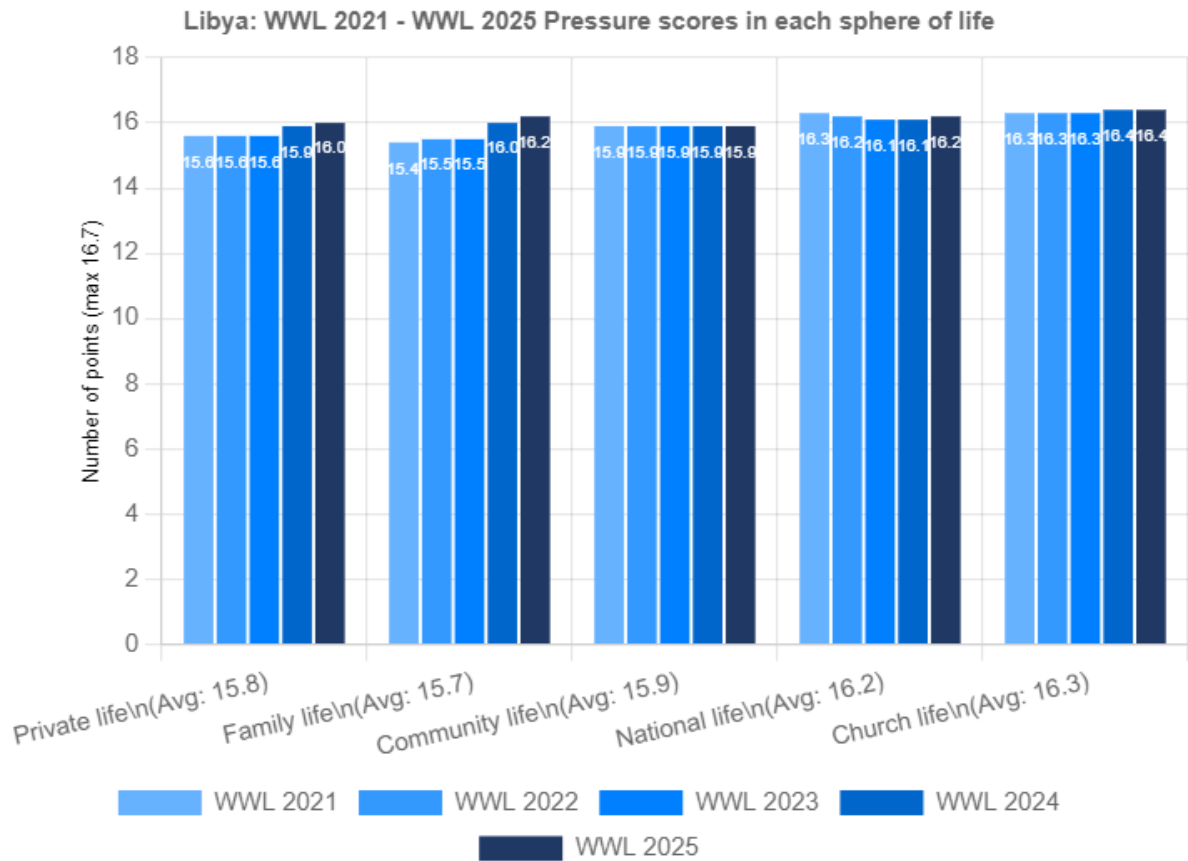
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Libya: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	16.1
2024	16.1
2023	15.9
2022	15.9
2021	15.9

In the table above it can be seen that, over the last five WWL reporting periods, the average pressure on Christians has remained stable at an extreme level (between 15.9 and 16.1 points). Ongoing lawlessness and the presence of radical Islamic groups in a conservatively Islamic and tribal country have created a situation in which it is barely possible to live as a Christian.

**5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life**

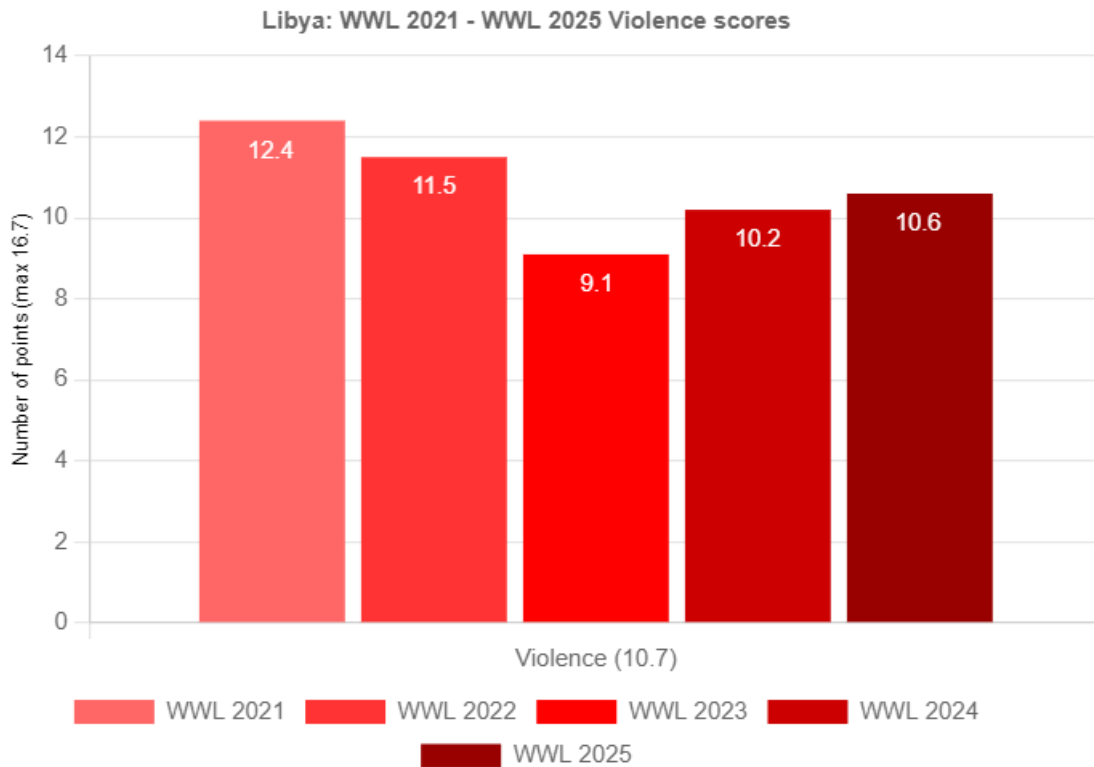


The levels of pressure in all spheres of life have been extremely high over the last five reporting periods due to the ongoing lawlessness in most parts of the country. The situation of Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity remains extremely oppressive and dangerous, while Christian Sub-Saharan migrants, Egyptian Copts and other expatriate Christians continue to be extremely vulnerable, too.

**5 Year trends: Violence against Christians**

As can be seen in the chart below, the scores for violence in the period WWL 2021 - WWL 2022 were at an extremely high level. The scores for WWL 2023 - WWL 2025 went down to the category 'very high'. Due to the insecurity in the country, reporting is restricted and it is very probable that a lot of incidents go unreported. This has kept the score for violence against Christians lower than it probably is in reality.





## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points (WWL 2025)
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

Female and male Christians can often face the same means of persecution pressure, but their form or severity can have a gendered component. As Libyan women tend to live under strict familial control and secluded from other people, the severity of domestic persecution experienced by converts can be greater than for men. In general, women have a lower position within Libyan family life than men; this is caused by tribal norms corresponding to Sharia law. If suspected of being interested in Christianity, women can face house arrest, domestic violence, sexual assault, forced marriage or even the threat of so-called ‘honor killing’. A country expert confirms that “there have been instances where Christians, particularly women and girls, have been targeted for abduction and forced into marriages against their will.” It is difficult for female converts to escape such dangerous situations. There is almost no scope

for them to live autonomously, due to explicit restrictions on a woman becoming head of the household or family.

In light of Libya’s honor-shame culture, all women and girls are expected to uphold high norms regarding their sexuality and dress modestly. It is widely understood that failing to do so brings shame upon the wider family.

Christian women who experience sexual violence because of their faith, sometimes as a form of punishment, encounter social and cultural barriers to the prosecution of any offence. This includes police and judicial reluctance to act and family reluctance to publicize an assault, contributing to a lack of effective law enforcement. This vulnerability is further compounded by the lack of adequate legislation on sexual harassment and domestic violence, including a penal code which allows a reduced sentence for a man who kills his wife or female relative because she is suspected of having an affair ([HRW 2024 Libya country chapter](#)).

Christian Sub-Saharan migrant women and men attempting to cross Libya to reach Europe continue to be a significant group of vulnerable Christians in Libya. Christian women are highly vulnerable to trafficking, abduction and sexual enslavement, especially when they are separated from their male companions - such as in migrant detention centers. One expert comments: “The position of women is low, migrant women is even lower mainly because they are seen as house-keepers, or sometimes even prostitutes.”

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points (WWL 2025)
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In general, men face higher risks of physical violence in Libya, and, according to a country expert, “increasing torture when Christian faith is known.” This takes place against a backdrop of considerable volatility ([HRW 2023 Libya country chapter](#)). Christian men come under immense psychological pressure to convert to Islam, including a phenomenon of “forced Hajj”. A country expert explains that this “can be compared to a loyalty test” and is a way of influencing someone through enforced participation in the traditional pilgrimage. It is expected on both a spiritual and practical level that someone’s faith will change to Islam after doing this. In addition, Christian men can face physical and mental abuse and eviction from their family home. As the providers for their family, Christian men who lose their ability to provide as a result of persecution often feel that they have lost their role in the

family, causing psychological distress. The risks for Libyan Christian men are so high that the formation of fellowship groups is nearly impossible unless whole families convert.

Forced labor and slavery are widespread for Sub-Saharan men who have migrated to Libya, including Christian men. They are often young and travel without their family, which makes them vulnerable to being abducted for enforced heavy agricultural labor, especially when they run out of money. Others are abducted or arrested and are only freed if a ransom is paid. If the men have a family in their home country, those families will be financially at risk as they depend on their husbands and fathers to protect them and take financial care of them.

Libyan men and boys have been forced to fight in militias, causing more and more to flee their home towns to evade such a fate. Migrant Christians in detention camps, too, are forced to fight. As a country expert explains, “both local converts and migrant men risk conscription, either the militia of their own tribe/family/town (in the case of converts) or in one of the militias (in the case of migrants).” Refusal to fight can be met with death.

A country expert summarizes: “The persecution of Christian men and boys in Libya has a devastating impact on families and communities, leading to economic hardship, psychological trauma, forced displacement, and the weakening of social structures. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the protection of vulnerable populations.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Libya](#)):

- The influence of radical Madkhali Salafist elements continued to be present in both parts of the country. Ibadis and Sufi Muslims in Libya who do not belong to the Sunni Islamic traditions, as well as those accused of atheism face persecution in the form of violent attacks by militant Sunni groups, as well as general discrimination from society. In May 2023, the General Authority for Endowments and Islamic Affairs (GAEIA), linked to the Western government, established a morality police called the “Guardians of Virtue”. “According to analysis by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, “Sufis in particular have been targets of the Guardians of Virtue, and many Sufi leaders and followers have been imprisoned and prevented from giving sermons at mosques. The Guardians of Virtue have also been able to hunt down intellectuals and writers,” accusing them of “apostasy, Christian proselytizing, atheism, and freemasonry.”

Atheists and anyone publicly questioning Sunni Islamic doctrine are also very much at risk of being targeted.

## Trends Summary

### 1) Libya is divided into an Eastern and Western bloc

During the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, President Gaddafi was ousted without a clear idea of how the future should be shaped. Since then, Libya has ended up in a nightmarish scenario in which a patchwork of militant groups control different parts of the country and vie for supremacy. Currently, the country is more or less divided into an Eastern and Western bloc. On the geopolitical and ideological level, the country has become an international battlefield in which different military superpowers try to gain influence (i.e. Turkey-Qatar Islamist axis versus Emirati-Saudi-Egyptian dictatorship axis, with Russia playing a major role in favor of the latter). The internationally recognized GNU is now being rivalled by the eastern GNS. Many actors, both national and international, are primarily concerned about protecting their own interests, making the country vulnerable for renewed armed conflict.

### 2) Power dynamics are pushing democracy aside

It is likely that formal elections will continue to be postponed further into the future, as elections would mean that the parties that now control parts of Libya would have to hand over control to a central government. Many of those groups are profiting from the current situation and have no real interest in democratic elections. Moreover, the most powerful groups are being institutionalized and becoming part of the government apparatus, making it even more unlikely that a democratically elected government will succeed in taking over power ([SWP, 31 July 2023](#)). If the postponed elections are going to be held in the near future, it is likely that a number of parties would not accept the outcome unless their (economic) interests were secured.

### 3) Christians cannot expect any guarantees of freedom of religion

Any hope for an improvement in the situation for Christians in Libya is contingent upon an improvement in the political and security situation within the country. If a central government would be able to assert more authority and restore law and order in the country, Christians would probably receive protection from the most egregious forms of persecution, even though there would not necessarily be any guarantee of freedom of religion or belief. However, in the long run, the nature of the permanent political and constitutional order that would emerge from the current peace and transition process will be the most decisive factor for the freedom of religion of Christians in Libya. Given Libya's conservative Islamic culture, it is unlikely that Christians, and especially Libyan Christians from a Muslim background, will enjoy full freedom of religion or belief in the long term.

## Further useful reports

Further background information per country and 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/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- 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: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.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 violations of rights in the reporting period: MEC, 12 September 2022 - <https://meconcern.org/2022/09/12/libya-convert-sentenced-to-death-for-apostasy/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: CNN showed video evidence - <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/14/africa/libya-migrant-auctions/index.html>
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