
World Watch Research

Vietnam: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



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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

Vietnam: Population (UN estimate for 2024)

99,498,000

Vietnam: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	9,778,000	9.8
Muslim	217,000	0.2
Hindu	90,900	0.1
Buddhist	47,743,000	48.0
Ethnic religionist	11,525,000	11.6
Jewish	380	0.0
Bahai	458,000	0.5
Atheist	6,073,000	6.1
Agnostic	11,773,000	11.8
Other	11,839,390	11.9
<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

Vietnam: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Political parties, Government officials
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Following the introduction of Decrees No. 95 and [Directive 24](#) in 2024 (Project 88, 1 March 2024), there is growing concern about the government's tightening control over religious groups. These regulations, along with the creation of the "neighborhood grassroots security force" in late 2023, could signal increased surveillance of religious activities, especially among non-traditional Protestants and ethnic minority Christian communities. These groups, often targeted by local authorities, may face greater restrictions on their religious expression, both in private and public spaces.

While the situation in remote areas remains dire for converts, there have been reports that newly converted Christians in urban areas, particularly those with no family ties to the faith, have begun to face discrimination or marginalization. This has manifested in social exclusion, especially on social media, where expressing Christian faith can lead to negative reactions from both family members and the wider community.

The targeting of non-traditional Protestants and ethnic minorities in areas such as the Central Highlands has intensified. In 2024, there have been reports of local authorities increasing pressure on Christian families to participate in ancestor worship and other traditional practices. Refusal to comply with these practices can lead to community isolation, violence, or the destruction of homes. Furthermore, religious leaders from these communities continue to face arrest, harassment, and sometimes torture for their faith.

Despite some relative freedom for historical Christian communities, the Catholic Church has continued to face significant challenges in 2024, particularly with land disputes. In areas where Catholic organizations hold large plots of land, such as schools or hospitals, there have been continued efforts by the state to confiscate such land for development purposes. The Catholic community's perceived involvement in activism—especially related to land grabs and environmental concerns—remains a particular point of vulnerability. Catholic activists involved in land disputes have faced imprisonment, while state interference in church services highlight the ongoing tensions.

The case of the [attacks in Dak Lak Province](#) in June 2023 (BBC News, 16 January 2024), while not directly religious in nature, shows how tensions with ethnic minorities, particularly the Hmong and Montagnard communities, can quickly escalate into violence. The government can use such incidents as a pretext to crack down on religious groups, further complicating the situation for Christians, particularly those in these ethnic communities.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Vietnam 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)

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

- Christians are harassed at the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians are arrested for speaking up for their rights (ICCPR Arts. 9 and 19)
- If arrested, Christians experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian children are ostracized at school and pressured to abandon their faith, their medical needs often neglected on the basis of their faith (ICCPR Art. 18; CRC Arts. 14 and 24)
- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men and pressured to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **28 March 2024:** The People's Court of Dak Lak province [sentenced](#) Y Krec Bya to 13 years in prison and five years probation for "sabotaging the unity policy" by organizing online meetings and publishing information that aimed to "cause division between the people and the government" and "between people following different religions" (The Vietnamese, 1 April 2024).
- **14 March 2024:** Plainclothed Vietnamese police, led by the Royal Thai police, [tried to persuade](#) a group of Montagnard Christians residing in Nonthaburi province in Thailand to return to Vietnam (The Vietnamese, 18 March 2024).
- **8 March 2024:** Relatives of Y Bum Bya, a member of the Evangelical Church of Christ of the Western Highlands (ECCWH), [found his battered body](#) hanging from a tree with a rope around his neck. He had been ordered to meet with the police, which was planning to return a cell phone they had confiscated from him earlier (Morning Star News, 22 April 2024).
- **1 March 2024:** Three Christians from the Ede minority attending an unregistered church in Dak Lak province were [detained](#) for one week by the authorities (RFA, 8 March 2024).
- **26 January 2024:** The People's Court of Phu Yen province [sentenced](#) Nay Y Blang to 4 and a half years in prison for illegal religious activities, accusing him of trying to form a separate state (RFA, 26 January 2024).
- **15 November 2023:** Authorities [stopped](#) a house church gathering in Buon Don district, Dak Lak province and ordered the assembly not to meet again. Many participants were later interrogated by the police (RFA, 22 November 2023). Several more such incidents have been reported, including from North Vietnam. For security reasons, no details can be provided.
- **31 October 2023:** Y Nuer Buon Dap, Y Think Nie, Y Cung Nie and his son Y Salemon Eban were released after a five day [detention](#), after they had invited then President Vo Van Thuong to attend one of their church services (RFA, 6 November 2023).

Specific examples of positive developments

The Roman Catholic Church makes up 77.8% of all Christians in Vietnam and while it is following the Vatican in its doctrine, there are subtle and less subtle attempts by the government at influencing it, possibly most visibly in the election of bishops. The Vatican and Vietnam are on their way to improve diplomatic relations and it is possible that the Vatican will have a [resident](#) papal representative in the country, after an agreement seems ready to be signed (Reuters, 16 July 2023). Some [commentators](#)

have been very critical of this agreement, even going so far as saying that the agreement resembles the one the Vatican has with China and highlighting that it does not even give the right to send a nuncio to Hanoi (UCA News, 25 July 2023).

Protestants are split into many denominations, two larger state-recognized ones are the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN-S) and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN-N), but there are also many Reformed, Baptist, Anglican, WEC, Seventh-Day Adventists and others. Mennonites and Baptists have been officially recognized by the state, but they have only a small number of followers from tribal and ethnic minority background. Vietnam Christian Mission (VCM) and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North and South) have an estimate two thirds membership with tribal and ethnic minority background. Even being state-recognized does not protect against state interference, as was shown when the authorities denied the ECVN-S permission to convene its traditional congress.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: As Christians from abroad cannot mix with local churches, especially in rural areas (which is most of Vietnam), they are judged to be involuntarily isolated. This category includes foreign business people and workers from Taiwan, Korea and the Philippines, who are being very strictly monitored.

Historical Christian communities: These are especially the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam. Whereas the former managed to open a Catholic university in 2016 and a training institute in Hanoi in March 2021, problems with land-grabbing by the authorities continue and the arrests of Catholic activists show that historical Christian communities continue to face severe problems.

Converts to Christianity: Converts come either from a Buddhist or Ethnic-animist background and face the strongest persecution, not only from the authorities, but also from their families, friends and neighbors. Since most of them belong to ethnic minorities like the Hmong, the Communist authorities are particularly suspicious of them.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category mainly consists of Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations. At the beginning of the Protestant missionary work in Vietnam (from 1911 onwards), all Protestant groups identified themselves as belonging to the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA). However, these developed into the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North and South) and are now included under Historical Christian Communities. Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian churches were established in the South in 1950s, 60s and early 70s. Pentecostal churches started in late 1980s and early 90s. Baptists, Mennonites, Churches of Christ and many others gather in house churches. They are closely monitored and face discrimination at various levels of government and society.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Pressure and violence targeting Christians among the ethnic minorities is especially strong in the central and north-western highlands in the following provinces: Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Binh Phuoc, Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Dien Bien, Gia Lai, Ha Giang, Ha Nam, Hoa Binh, Kon Tum, Lai Chau, Lam Dong, Lao Cai, Nghe An, Ninh Thuan, Phu Yen, Quang Binh, Quang Ngai, Son La, Thanh Hoa, Tra Vinh and Yen Bai.

This coincides with what the US State Department states ([IRFR 2023](#) Vietnam):

- "Catholic leaders reported that the most problematic regions were in the Central Highlands (Gia Lai, Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Kon Tum, and Lam Dong Provinces) and the Northwest Highlands, including Hoa Binh, Son La, Lao Cai, and Yen Bai Provinces."

Position on the World Watch List

Vietnam: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	67	44
WWL 2024	68	35
WWL 2023	70	25
WWL 2022	71	19
WWL 2021	72	19

The overall score fell by 1 point due to a decrease mainly in the score for violence. The violence score fell significantly from 7.2 points in WWL 2024 to 5.9, while average pressure only decreased very slightly to 12.1 points. This reduction in the violence score can largely be attributed to a decrease in the number of Christians detained and sentenced for faith-related reasons. This trend aligns with perceptions that direct government persecution is diminishing, although persecution from family and community members appears to be increasing. Notably, there is a distinction between rural and urban areas: Improvements have been observed in urban regions, which are not reflected in rural areas.

Persecution engines

Vietnam: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Very weak
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Very weak
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Very strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all

(table continues below)

Vietnam: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

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

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Very strong), blended with Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

Vietnam – or as the official name reads: the “Socialist Republic of Vietnam” – is one of the five remaining countries in the world which is still ruled by a Communist party. Vietnamese Communism is more than just cosmetic, as one country observer noted when stating that Marxist-Leninist-Ho Chi Minh-ideology is "quasi-religious". The government monitors Christian activity and exerts a very high level of pressure on all Christians. The Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian community in the country, but government authorities remain suspicious since Roman Catholics are tied to a foreign power, the Vatican, and are additionally often seen as a remnant from French colonial days. (In 1954, French forces were defeated at Dien Bien Phu, which led to peace negotiations and the division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel.) Stereotypes such as "Catholics are French and Protestants are American" still prevail, especially in rural areas. The expropriation of church-owned land and the fact that especially Catholics are active in highlighting social injustices underline the chequered relationship Communist leaders have with the Catholic Church. Some villages are named "communist village" or "Zero-Christian village." The people there would not allow Christians to live in their village.

The government is particularly suspicious of the ethnic minorities who live in the central and northern highlands (also known as "Montagnards"). Many of them are Protestant Christians, whose growth in numbers has reportedly continued. It should be noted that all non-Catholic Christians in Vietnam self-identify as Evangelicals, many of whom are Pentecostal or Charismatic. In 2022, the Communist Party estimated that 73% of all Protestants were members of ethnic minorities, including minority groups in the north-western highlands (Hmong, Dzao, Thai, and others) and in the central highlands (Ede, Jarai, Sedang, and Mnong, among others).

An updated law on religion came into force on 1 January 2018, and although it looked like an improvement on paper, in practice its implementation did not have any positive effect. Much stricter draft rules on religion were then published in June 2022. The White Book on Religions and Religious Policy, released on 9 March 2023, also shows that nothing will change for the better for Christians and other religions ([RFA, 9 March 2023](#)). On the contrary, Decree No. 95 (effective from 30 March 2024) replaces other decrees and aims at clarifying and simplifying measures to shut down religious organizations and educational institutions as well as curbing local and international fundraising ([Morning Star News, 28 February 2024](#)). The predominant goal of the Communist authorities is always to keep all groups and organizations in check in order to maintain their own level of power.

Clan oppression (Strong)

A country expert stated that Christians from ethnic minorities "are treated with scorn and antagonism in their clans when they convert to Christianity. The clan uses many pressure tactics in order to force the believers to renounce their faith." If new Christian believers of a tribal background are discovered by co-villagers or village leaders, where ethnic religions are still strong, they are forced by family and friends to keep following the age-old norms and values of their community. In order to maintain the tribe's culture, tribal leaders will often exclude Christians from the community, seeing them as traitors of their culture and identity. The community itself will often react violently against new Christian converts as well and expel them from their villages. Local authorities often cooperate with tribal leaders to the disadvantage of those converts.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

There have been incidents of land-grabbing particularly affecting Catholic Church property. These cases occur mainly in the cities. As one country expert put it: "Corrupt officials are always looking for land and other property to confiscate and sell to private developers, and church lands - typically Catholic - as well as communal lands of ethnic minority Christians, have been frequent targets for this corruption." Eviction has often been done with the help of criminal groups and "Red Flag Guards". However, no cases were reported for two years in a row, so such incidents may be declining.

Drivers of persecution

Vietnam: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG				VERY STRONG		MEDIUM		MEDIUM
Government officials	Weak				Strong		Medium		Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Medium				Weak				Very weak
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium				Weak				Weak
One's own (extended) family	Strong				Weak				
Political parties					Very strong		Medium		Weak

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 Communist and post-Communist oppression and Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong/Medium) and Political parties (Very strong/Medium):** The government violates the rights of the Christian minority at national, regional and local level. The Communist Party often does this by implementing ideology strictly and by promoting those who hold Communism in esteem. The government implements the control over religion by requiring all religious institutions to submit to the supervision of the government's Committee on Religious Affairs. Laws are passed and then implemented at the grassroots level, often undergoing misinterpretation and even stricter implementation, so one could say that persecution is becoming more "localized".
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium/-):** Occasionally, ethnic group leaders, citizens and even a convert's own family can become additional drivers of persecution, however, this is usually connected with *Clan oppression*, not *Communist oppression*. But Communist authorities can co-opt ethnic group leaders. Such actions are strictly limited to a distinct geographical location, most often a village.

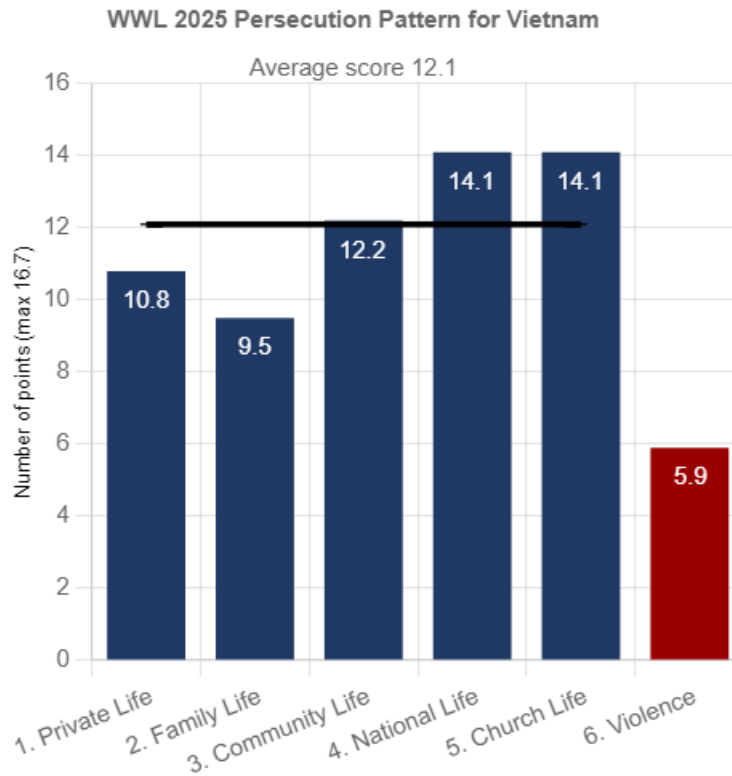
Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** As the tradition of ancestor worship is very strong in Vietnam and conversion to Christianity means stopping such acts of worship, this is viewed by most families (both nuclear and extended) in the rural areas as breaking the moral norm. Non-Christian relatives of Christians drive persecution by cutting family ties and denying inheritance; in some cases this means forcing a Christian spouse to divorce and withholding rights of child custody. All this is usually threatened first in an effort to bring the convert back to the family fold, but if this fails, he or she can be expelled from the family and the village.
- **Citizens (Medium):** Villagers persecute Christians – also by conniving with local authorities – beating Christians, expelling them from their village, or disrupting Christian fellowship by throwing stones at their place of worship.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** As they are protecting their tribe's culture, ethnic group leaders see converts to Christianity as traitors to their tribal identity and usually cut them off from accessing resources or expel them from their villages altogether, destroying their fields etc. in an effort to bring converts back to their ancient faith.

Drivers of Organized Corruption and Crime

- **Government officials (Medium):** Corruption is rampant in Vietnam and although the government is countering it with programs and crackdowns against corrupt officials, it is still ubiquitous and hard to uproot. One way this affects the Christian minority is through government officials who confiscate and sell for profit plots of land belonging to a church, or communal land from ethnic minority Christians.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Vietnam shows:

- Pressure on Christians in Vietnam has remained very high, although the average pressure decreased by 0.1 of a point to 12.1 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *National* and *Church spheres* (extreme level of pressure), followed by the *Community* and *Private spheres* (very high pressure). The pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private* and *Family spheres*, but all Christians face strong pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This pressure is fueled by increasing levels of Communist rhetoric, continued expropriation of Catholic church land, strict government regulations with cumbersome requirements for churches, and an ongoing suspicion towards all Christians (particularly converts) as well as to all ethnic and religious minorities.
- The violence score decreased from 7.2 points in WWL 2024 to 5.9 points in WWL 2025. There was one killing reported and several churches were attacked. However, it has always been very difficult to get information from all parts of the country, especially the regions where ethnic minorities live.

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 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)

While conversion is not explicitly prohibited by law, it is strongly opposed by families, communities, and, in some cases, local authorities. Christianity, in particular, is often seen as a cultural threat, especially in families that adhere to ancestral worship traditions or maintain strong Communist beliefs. Converts may face severe social repercussions, including ostracization, eviction, or verbal and physical abuse from relatives and neighbors. In some cases, family members have prevented converts from practicing their faith, pressured them to renounce it, or excluded them from family events and inheritance. In rural areas, such pressure is more pronounced, often supported or encouraged by local officials.

Additionally, converts from one denomination of Christianity to another may face resistance, particularly in strongly Catholic or Protestant families, where such actions are seen as a rejection of family or communal traditions. Converts to unregistered Christian groups or denominations not officially recognized by the government often face heightened scrutiny, harassment, or even loss of social benefits.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.00 points)

This is particularly risky when family members hold traditional religious beliefs, are members of the Communist Party, or work in government roles. In families where only some members convert, Christians are often reluctant to share their faith openly due to the risk of alienation or conflict. The refusal to participate in ancestral worship—central to Vietnamese culture—is seen as a rejection of family and filial piety. This perceived abandonment can lead to strong opposition, ostracization, and even violence against the convert. In some cases, family members may report Christians to local authorities, exacerbating the risk. Women and young people, in particular, face greater challenges as they are often in more vulnerable positions within the family hierarchy. Family members may perceive conversion as a threat to cultural unity, and those who work in government may fear that a relative's conversion could jeopardize their jobs or reputation.

Block 1.10: Christians have been isolated from other family members or other like-minded Christians (e.g. house arrest). (2.75 points)

Christians in Vietnam, particularly converts, often face significant isolation due to their beliefs. Converts frequently find themselves estranged from relatives who are uncomfortable with Christianity and they may no longer participate in traditional practices such as ancestor worship, which can lead to further alienation within their families. This change in behavior often results in social exclusion, as

neighbors and family members perceive them as abandoning cultural traditions. Converts may also face mockery and accusations of disrespecting their ancestors, especially during culturally significant events like death anniversaries. Additionally, some converts report being prohibited by their families from attending Christian worship services or events, further deepening their sense of isolation and disconnection from like-minded believers.

Block 1 - Additional information

Christians in Vietnam who express their faith on social media, such as Facebook, often encounter negative comments from non-believers, such as accusations of following an "American religion" or opposing the government. New converts, in particular, are hesitant to openly share their faith on social media for fear of persecution from family members, relatives and authorities. In more sensitive areas, social media activity related to Christianity is closely monitored, and any public expressions of faith may lead to increased scrutiny or even punishment.

Displaying Christian images or symbols outside of private homes or church buildings is generally discouraged or prohibited. Christians may display symbols like crosses within their homes, but doing so in public or on the exterior of buildings can attract criticism or intervention from authorities. In some areas, local authorities may even remove Christian symbols, such as crosses, if displayed outside the home. This is particularly sensitive in traditional families, where displaying Christian symbols can lead to persecution from family members.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)

Christian children in Vietnam face significant pressure to participate in teachings and rituals that contradict their faith. In schools, students are taught Communist ideology and evolution, which can conflict with Christian beliefs. On national holidays such as the Death Anniversary of Hung King or the Establishment of the Vietnam Communist Party, students are expected to engage in ceremonies that involve burning incense and bowing before altars. Christian students who refuse to participate in these rituals may face penalties, such as losing virtue ethics points, and may be subject to discrimination from teachers and peers. In some regions, Christian children are also pressured to participate in Buddhist practices or ancestral worship, as the community and authorities often expect them to conform to the majority religion's customs. Those who resist may face isolation or tension with local authorities and fellow students.

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

Christian parents in Vietnam often face challenges in raising their children according to their faith, particularly when only one spouse is Christian, leading to conflicts within the family. This is especially common in extended family settings, where non-believer relatives may attempt to influence the children's upbringing. For instance, grandparents may pressure Christian children to participate in ancestral worship, such as burning incense and bowing before altars during holidays or death anniversaries. Children who refuse to comply may face discrimination, curses, or tension with their

extended family members. These dynamics can create significant strain on Christian families as they navigate differing religious beliefs within their household.

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

Christian children often face harassment and discrimination at school due to their faith or that of their parents. In some cases, children from Christian families are prevented from attending school entirely, particularly when their families lack "household registration" documents, often withheld from those who refuse to renounce their faith. Even when attending school, Christian children are frequently targets of bullying by peers and face harsher treatment from teachers. Reports indicate that Christian students are often denied scholarships and other benefits, with schools prioritizing non-Christian students for government support and residency programs, even when the Christian children perform better academically.

In certain areas, such as the Central Highlands and the North West, Christian children face isolation from classmates, hate speech, and systemic exclusion. Teachers sometimes segregate Christian students, reinforcing their marginalization. Additionally, there have been instances where police report Christian children to schools for special monitoring, further subjecting them to discrimination. These challenges create an environment where Christian children struggle to make friends, feel alienated, and, in some cases, distance themselves from their faith community to fit in socially.

Block 2 - Additional information

A country expert explained the need for household registration as follows: "Household registration is the key document necessary to live a normal life in Vietnam. Without household registration the person cannot get legal documents such as marriage certificates or birth certificates. Employment and access to education are also severely restricted without household registration. Among those denied household registration have been thousands of Hmong and Montagnard Christians, most of whom are converts and/or belong to unregistered churches, and who refuse to renounce their faith. There have been numerous reports of birth certificates being denied to the children of these Christians, who have essentially been rendered stateless in their own country." Christians seldom manage to convince the authorities to issue the relevant documents. This can have dire consequences; for instance, they are needed for getting access to health services.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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)

Christians face pervasive monitoring by local communities and authorities. The government utilizes neighborhood watch systems, a hallmark of Communist-era surveillance, to keep tabs on Christian activities. Local authorities often encourage communities to view Christians as foreign and potentially subversive, motivating residents to report church activities or unusual behavior. Private groups, such as the "Red Flag Associations," are also mobilized to shadow believers and take action when deemed necessary. One individual shared that local security forces often arrive within minutes when something "strange or unusual" is noticed, underscoring the immediacy of the surveillance.

Physical and digital monitoring further limits Christians' freedom. Unregistered churches, which make up a significant portion of the religious landscape, are closely scrutinized by neighbors and government officials, with some individuals hired to infiltrate church meetings and report back. Church leaders and pastors face invasive measures such as having their phone calls monitored, emails read or censored, and online activities tracked. The presence of discreetly stationed officials around churches adds to the psychological pressure on Christians, fostering a sense of insecurity even during worship.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.25 points)

Christians often face discrimination in accessing community resources, with their faith used as grounds for exclusion or marginalization in receiving aid for housing repairs, food assistance, and community scholarships. For instance, Christians have been overlooked in subsidy programs, affecting their ability to improve living conditions and secure education opportunities for their children. The situation is particularly severe in tribal regions, where Christians may even be denied access to basic resources like clean water. Some tribal leaders justify this by asserting that "the Christian God should provide for them." Elsewhere, local authorities have been known to revoke *Poor Booklets*—documents granting access to social benefits such as healthcare, loans and housing support—when individuals convert to Christianity. In many of these cases, converts are told to depend on their church rather than the state for assistance. These practices not only hinder Christians' access to essential services but also perpetuate their social and economic marginalization.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)

Christians frequently experience intense pressure from their communities to renounce their faith. This often manifests as social isolation, verbal abuse, and efforts to ostracize Christians from community life. In some villages, Christians are accused of betraying ancestral traditions or adopting a foreign religion for material gain. Neighbors may label Christianity as an "American religion" and mock believers, undermining their standing in the community and creating a hostile environment. In extreme cases, Christians have been forcibly expelled from their villages or families.

Family members often play a key role in this coercion, especially when Christians are new converts living in extended family circles. Relatives may refuse to allow converts to attend church or Bible studies, subjecting them to harassment, threats and even violence. Additionally, community leaders and local authorities sometimes promote anti-Christian sentiment, framing the religion as incompatible with Vietnamese cultural traditions. Such attitudes, coupled with the lack of legal protection for religious minorities, leave Christians vulnerable to ongoing pressure to abandon their beliefs.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christians are frequently interrogated and compelled to report their activities to local authorities or vigilante groups. Pastors and church leaders are often summoned for "working sessions," where police demand information about church members and activities, sometimes using intimidation or threats, such as warning converts that "becoming a Christian means you want to get beaten."

In villages, Christians must report to elders, who relay information to authorities. In areas with zero-Christian policies, new believers are swiftly reported to local chiefs or police. Hosting visitors or organizing events requires prior approval, often delayed or denied, forcing churches to proceed without it. New converts are particularly targeted, subjected to monitoring and questioning. Christians traveling away from home may be required to report their movements or face interrogation.

Block 3 - Additional information

Christians in Vietnam face significant discrimination in the workplace, both in public and private sectors. They are often excluded from job opportunities and promotion, with their faith and refusal to work on Sundays cited as barriers. Public service roles are particularly restrictive, allowing Christians only rank-and-file positions without promotion prospects.

In schools, Christian students face discouragement from pursuing higher education and are pressured to show reverence to Ho Chi Minh. Converts may lose access to social benefits like loans, medical care and scholarships, and school principals have threatened them with expulsion.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)

Vietnam follows its Communist ideology strictly and reveres the state founder Ho Chi Minh, or 'Uncle Ho' as he is fondly referred to. All beliefs other than Communist ideology are opposed, and religion is curbed by a series of intermittently updated laws, decrees and regulations. As reported by the US State Department ([IRFR 2022 Vietnam, pp.16/17](#)):

- "Registered and unregistered religious groups continued to state that government agencies sometimes did not respond to registration applications or approval requests for religious activities within the stipulated time period, if at all, and often did not specify reasons for refusals as required by law. In other cases, religious groups were unaware they had been granted local approval of religious activities. Some local authorities reportedly requested documents or information beyond what was stipulated by law. Several religious leaders said authorities sometimes solicited bribes to facilitate approvals. ... Authorities attributed the delays and denials to the applicants' failure to complete forms correctly or provide complete information. Religious groups said the process of registering groups or notifying authorities of activities in new or remote locations was particularly difficult. Some religious groups reported that authorities urged them to register as affiliates of recognized religious groups instead of as new groups."

The Communist Party's understanding of freedom of religion has been well described in a report published in May 2021 ([The Vietnamese, 5 May 2021](#)). Decree 95/2023/ND-CP officially came into effect in Vietnam on 30 March 2024 and these regulations have raised concerns among religious groups and human rights advocates due to their potential to increase state control over religious freedom.

One observer has written in [Morning Star News, 28 February 2024](#):

- "The two most important additions to Decree 162 [which Decree 95 has replaced] are 1) measures on shutting down and rehabilitating activities of religious organizations and religious education institutions, and 2) requirements for local fundraising and financial management, and, for the first time, highly detailed procedures necessary for receiving foreign aid and forms for reporting on it, both finances and goods in-kind".

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (4.00 points)

Media reporting in Vietnam often portrays Christians in a negative light. With persistent bias, for example, state-controlled media continue to tacitly and also directly connect the Dak Lak attacks from June 2023 to a Protestant church. Furthermore, local media outlets frequently mix Christianity with fringe groups, such as the "Church of God World Mission Society" and "God the Mother," fueling misconceptions about Christian beliefs. These reports often smear Protestant groups, portraying them as dangerous or cult-like, which harms their public image. Additionally, the media tend to highlight any negative behavior associated with Christians, such as criminal acts, while rarely acknowledging the religious background of other offenders. These biases have had a significant impact on evangelism, creating distrust and fear of Christians in the community.

This pattern reflects the broader stance of the ruling Communist party and the state government, which control much of the media narrative. Despite official denials of religious discrimination, international observers and Christian groups report ongoing persecution, particularly against ethnic Christian groups like the Hmong and Montagnard. These groups face harassment, imprisonment, and forced denunciations of their faith, further illustrating the government's role in promoting negative portrayals of Christianity.

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

Cases of harm directed at Christians, particularly those involving physical violence or property damage, are often left unpunished, especially when the perpetrators are connected to local authorities or communities are hostile to Christians. When Christians report such incidents to local authorities, they are frequently dismissed, with authorities claiming that the issue is a "family matter" or simply choosing not to investigate. Incidences within the WWL 2025 reporting period include the destruction of Christian-owned livestock and the burning of fields, both of which went unaddressed by local officials. Additionally, in some cases, individuals have been wrongfully accused of crimes they did not commit. One example during the WWL 2025 reporting period involved a person who was falsely accused and calumniated, yet the individual responsible for the calumny remained unpunished. The lack of accountability for such actions is partly attributed to corruption within the local Communist leadership and government officials, who are rarely reprimanded or punished for their role in (or neglect of) such cases.

Block 4 - Additional information

Although national ID cards do not include a section on religious affiliation anymore, family cards and other documents still do. Reportedly, officials frequently simply give the entry "non-religious" (or deny documents altogether). There have been reports that the police explicitly state during interrogation

that the harassment would cease if (and only if) ethnic minority Christians would leave their house-churches and join officially registered churches. Movements made by Christian leaders are monitored and access to villages in the northern and central part of Vietnam is restricted.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)

Christian activities outside of registered church buildings in Vietnam are heavily restricted, requiring prior approval from local authorities which is frequently described as 'nearly impossible' to obtain. While larger events organized by prominent Christian groups, such as Franklin Graham crusades or "Love Hanoi" events, are occasionally allowed to present an image of religious freedom to the world, even these face government interference. Authorities often disrupt such events by cutting electricity, blocking Wi-Fi signals, or intimidating service providers. Smaller-scale activities, including local church evangelism, youth camps, or food distribution, are rarely permitted, with applications frequently denied. Churches that attempt to conduct such activities often face fines, monitoring, or direct interference. In border or remote areas, especially among ethnic minorities, the restrictions are even more severe. Churches must strictly confine their activities to registered premises or risk fines, surveillance, and other penalties. In some cases, even charitable acts like food distribution have been blocked by officials. These limitations severely hinder the ability of Vietnamese Christians to engage in community outreach or public expressions of faith.

Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (4.00 points)

The publication and distribution of Christian materials in Vietnam is possible but highly restricted. All published materials require government approval, and any unapproved material is confiscated by the police. Imports are similarly restricted, forcing churches to rely on (re-)printing materials within the country. Translated materials must undergo government review, with approval depending on how "sensitive" or "dangerous" authorities deem the content. There are no clear criteria for evaluating the "harmfulness" of materials; for instance, a Hmong-language Bible is likely to face far greater obstacles than a Vietnamese-language Bible. The cumbersome and nearly impossible approval process for importing Christian materials leaves churches reliant on hand-carrying small quantities, often secretly. Authorities frequently confiscate these materials and impose fines, while larger shipments are either prohibited outright or subjected to severe penalties, highlighting the significant challenges churches face in accessing essential resources.

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

Church activities are closely monitored, hindered, and disrupted by local authorities at varying levels with one respondent noting that 'Whatever you do, wherever you go, you will be known in advance by the police.' All churches, whether registered or not, are required to submit detailed plans for their activities to the local authorities for approval. Even after gaining permission, activities can still be obstructed, and surveillance often extends to neighbors and local businesses, who report unusual activity. Authorities routinely monitor events, sometimes with officials or informants present at gatherings, to prevent unauthorized activities or gatherings of any significant size. Additionally, the activity approval process can be prolonged, leading to interruptions if churches organize events before

receiving approval. One example reported in WWL 2025 involved a group of Christians, including foreigners, who visited new church land. It was reported that the authorities showed up within ten minutes, stopped the visit and took the local pastor and one church deacon to the police station where they asked them to sign papers accusing them of violating the law by "doing religious activities outside of the registered religious building".

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)

Obtaining legal registration for churches in Vietnam is a challenging and bureaucratic process. Church leaders must navigate complex administrative procedures, with no guarantee of approval. Even churches affiliated with registered denominations face difficulties, particularly when trying to establish new gathering points. Although the 2018 Law on Religion reduced the required years of existence for registration from 20 to 5, many churches still faced obstacles, with some lacking updates on the status of their applications. Additionally, authorities often create additional hurdles, such as requiring detailed reports on church members and their activities. In relation to this issue, one external expert noted in the previous reporting period (WWL 2024): "The government requires the church to submit a list of church members. After receiving the list, they go from house to house in uniform to 'clarify' if those on the list really belong to that church. This scares particularly young Christians from admitting their faith and membership in the church."

For smaller or unregistered denominations, the process of registration is even more difficult, with many churches continuing to operate without legal status.

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.*

Vietnam: 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)?	1	1
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?	6	7
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	1	20
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?	2	5
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	200	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?	5	10
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?	0	0

(table continues below)

Vietnam: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	20	22
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	1

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- Christians killed:** 1 - On 8 March 2024, the body of Y Bum Bya, a member of the Evangelical Church of Christ of the Western Highlands (ECCWH), was found hanging from a tree with a rope around his neck. He had been accused of "disrupting national unity" and had been ordered to meet with the police, who were supposedly to return a cell phone they had confiscated from him earlier ([Morning Star News, 22 April 2024](#)).
- Christians attacked:** During the WWL 2025 reporting period at least 200 Christians were attacked by their families, communities or authorities, sometimes in connection with police raids on churches and church compounds. Due to restrictions, not all regions could be reached for information, so the true number may be much higher.
- Christians detained:** 1 - In April 2024, Y Krec Bya of the Evangelical Church of Christ of the Central Highlands, received a 13 year sentence for "sabotaging the national unity". However, a United States government spokesperson described him as "a peaceful voice for freedom of religion or belief in Vietnam" ([Voice of America, 9 April 2024](#)).
- Churches attacked:** At least 6 church buildings were attacked and/or destroyed, mainly house-churches. For security reasons, no further details can be given.
- Christian homes attacked:** There were a small number of incidents reported, but for security reasons no further details can be given.

5 Year trends

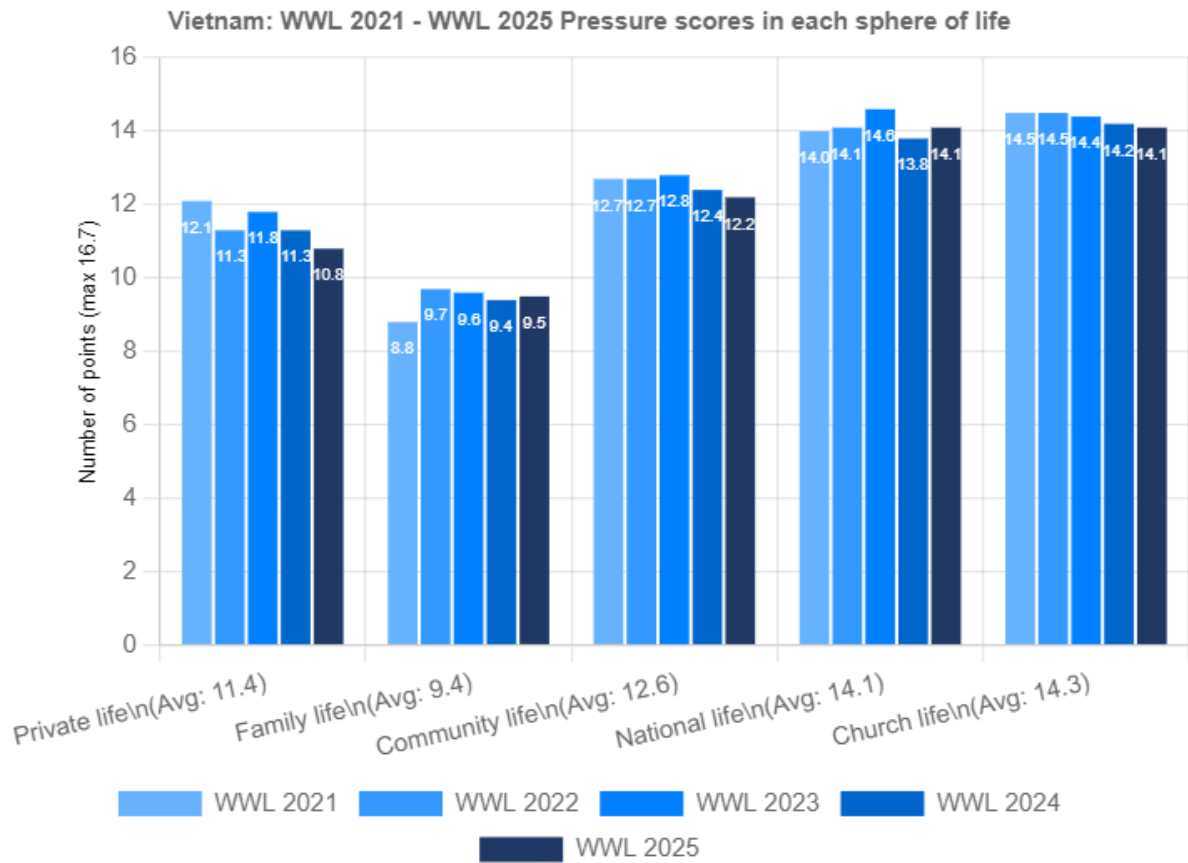
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows how the average level of pressure on Christians has been fairly stable at a very high level over the last five reporting periods. It had plateaued at 12.4 points in the period WWL 2020-2022 and is now stable at a slightly lower level (12.2/12.1 points).

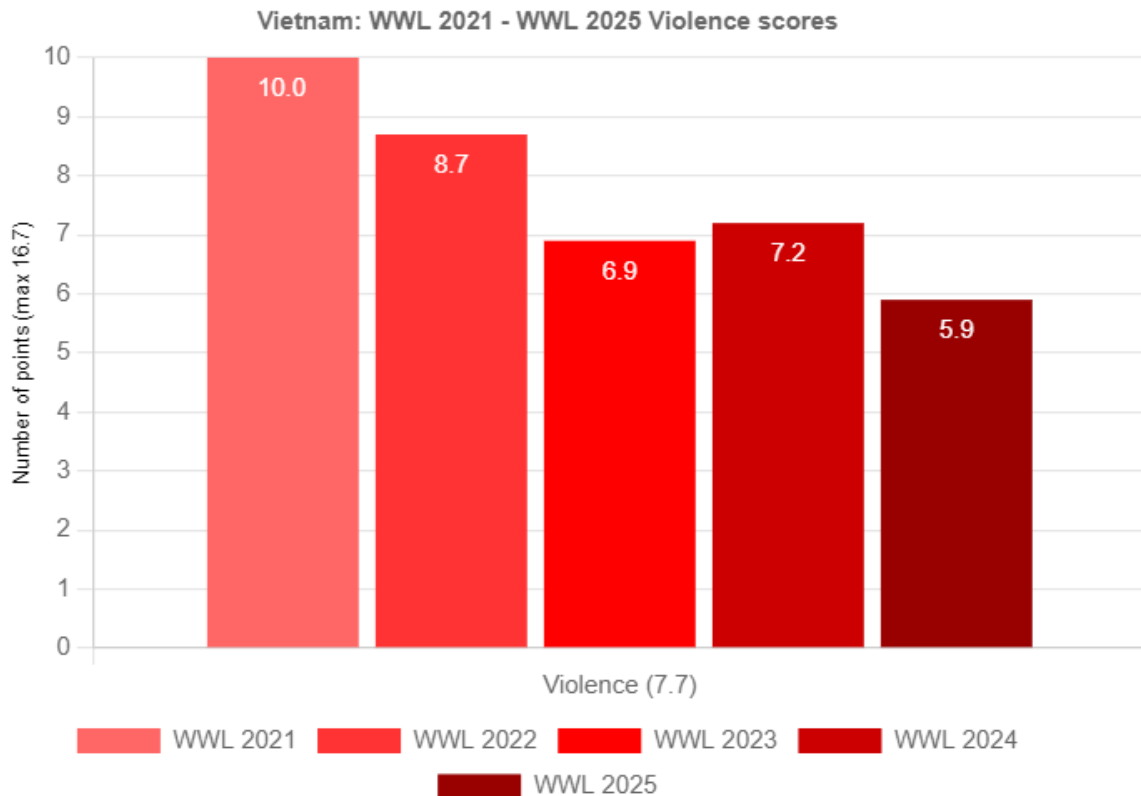
Vietnam: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	12.1
2024	12.2
2023	12.6
2022	12.4
2021	12.4

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* (except in *Family life*) has consistently been at a very high level or higher over the last five reporting periods. The pressure in the *National sphere of life* dropped in WWL 2024 after increasing each year since WWL 2020, but rose again to 14.1 points in WWL 2025. The pressure in *Church life* is at a consistently extreme level above 14 points. This reflects the severity of the state restrictions on Christians.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Persecution in Vietnam has always involved violence. The chart above shows very high scores over all 5 WWL reporting periods, but with a general decreasing trend. Killings do not happen on a large scale; the Communist government's preferred means are prison sentences or deportation. Limitations in reporting suggest an undercounting, so the scores are possibly indicating a lower level of violence against Christians than in reality.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Vietnam	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Forced divorce Violence – physical

Despite having one of the highest female workplace participation rates, women bear an unequal share of domestic work and are considered subservient. As in much of Communist Asia, women are traditionally expected to care for their parents, which requires a significant investment of time and energy. The country holds Socialist ideals of equality, but Confucian and patriarchal values remain which still influence aspects of society such as school textbooks ([Mai Trang Vu & Thi Thanh Thuy Pham, 2021](#)). On an everyday basis, gender equality is not the reality for many women in Vietnam ([The Vietnamese, 12 January 2023](#)). This is also reflected in Vietnam’s son-bias and the ongoing practice of sex-selective abortions, with the sex ratio at birth one of the most unequal globally ([The Diplomat, 13 July 2022](#)).

A country expert explains that “women are often the first converts to get the brunt of the pressure to recant,” potentially as they are perceived as easier to coerce. For example, within marriages, new Christians face oppression, violence and threats of divorce from their husbands, and are more likely to lose custody of their children when their faith becomes known. New women converts may also be exiled from their own homes. These impacts reinforce the feeling that they are unequal, creating fear and despondency.

For example, Hoa, a single mother and member of the Hmong tribe, became a Christian in August 2022 when a friend spoke with her about Christian faith. When her neighbors learned of her new faith she was threatened with a stark choice: recant Jesus or be kicked out of the village. She made a bold and courageous decision to continue to follow Jesus, and left the village with her 3-year old daughter, saying: “I will follow my Lord who forgave my sins...I don’t know about tomorrow, what trouble will come to me, but I will continue to trust in the Lord and pray that He will open the door for us, and He will take care of us.”

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Vietnam	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Economic harassment via business/job/work access Imprisonment by government Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence – physical Violence – psychological

Christian men, and in particular church leaders, are more likely to experience overt persecution, and will often be the government’s primary target for arrest and interrogation on faith-related grounds. A country expert explains that “men are typically monitored more closely” and are “readily caught and summoned to the police office”.

Interrogation can range from a conversation with the police as they look to extract information, to longer-term detainment and physical violence, and being sentenced to imprisonment. Christians are among the [prisoners of conscience](#) reportedly still in prison in 2024, the majority of whom are male (The Project 88 Database, accessed 27 December 2024). Generally, once in custody, Christian detainees suffer harsh treatment, physical beatings and are put under pressure to renounce their Christian faith.

Within communities, male Christians can also expect physical violence from villagers or the authorities, even risking death for their faith. A country expert summarized, that when a husband is persecuted, “the wife and children are also under pressure because he is whom they rely on emotionally [and] financially”.

Christians also experience pressure within the armed forces. Military service is compulsory for all men; evasion is punished by a prison sentence. Religious convictions are not grounds for non-participation. Within the armed forces, Christians are unable to read the Bible freely or partake in other Christian practices.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Being Communist, the government acts against all religions which are not under its umbrella, including Buddhists, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhists and Muslims. This starts with harassment and may end up in detention or expulsion from their homes, villages or country. Particularly members of the country's ethnic minorities are on the authorities' radar.

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

- “In April, local authorities ordered the UBCV monks of Thien Quang Pagoda in Xuyen Moc District of Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province to demolish and remove most of the structures at the temple complex, saying they were constructed without authorization on land zoned for growing trees. The authorities indicated that the leader of the pagoda would be charged nearly one billion dong (\$41,200) if the government resorted to demolishing the structures. At year's end, the monks reported that local authorities had not executed the removal order.”

As is typical for all Communist governments, the Vietnamese authorities seek to keep all religious groups under control. As long as they are organized under government-controlled councils and thus meet with the government's knowledge, the latter will leave them alone, except for controlling what is preached. Independent groups, however, come under serious pressure from the government, especially their leaders. In the words of Human Rights Watch ([HRW 2024 Vietnam country chapter](#)):

- “The police monitor, harass, and sometimes violently crack down on religious groups operating outside government-controlled institutions. Unrecognized religious groups—including independent Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Christian, and Buddhist groups—face constant surveillance, harassment, and intimidation. Followers of independent religious groups are subject to public criticism, forced renunciation of faith, pretrial detention, interrogation, torture, and imprisonment. As of September 2021, Vietnam acknowledged that it had not officially recognized about 140 religious groups with approximately 1 million followers.”

Trends Summary

1) Communist Party policy remains unchanged, but is under more pressure

Communist Party Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong has been mentioned as “embodying the virtue of [core leadership](#)” (The Diplomat, 13 February 2023), a term that has never been used before by Vietnamese Communists to describe an individual's role, not even Ho Chi Minh's. The fact that this claim came right after a major internal corruption scandal, shows that the Communist Party (CPV) saw it necessary to remind its members and the general public of the virtues of Communist rule. This necessity has only increased in the reporting period of WWL 2025: The National Assembly Chair is the fourth highest political post in the country and his departure will only add to the growing lack of trust many citizens have in the CPV. Although it is most likely that not much is about to change politically and the positions will be filled temporarily until the next Party Congress in 2026, such resignations add to the Communist Party's paranoia and need for tightening control in general. When General To Lam headed the Public Security Ministry, the Christian minority came under increased pressure through rising levels of scrutiny by security organs and through the implementation of new laws. He has also been instrumental in cases of land grabbing and personally ordered pressure to be exerted against the

Catholic church on several occasions. Now that he has been appointed president, Christians cannot expect any improvements in their situation in the foreseeable future, even more so where they belong to ethnic minorities.

Another sign for a continually perceived danger from religious groups was the promotion of the Head of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs to Deputy Minister of the Interior. Likewise, the White Book on Religion, published in March 2023 along with new regulations, do not provide any relief for Christians or adherents of other religions. Modernizers within the Communist Party, who would like to see the principles of *doi moi* (i.e., the introduction of an at least partly private economy to induce growth) translated to several parts of national life will need to wait, since Communist orthodoxy seems to be the safest way to go. A further opening up of the country does not seem to be likely for the foreseeable future. Christians will continue to be watched, singled out and used as scapegoats, where considered necessary.

Vietnam continues to be challenged in its territorial and economic claims in the South China Sea (in Vietnamese terms: the Eastern Sea) by an ever more assertive neighboring China, reinforced by the new Coast Guard Law of China, referred to above, and a process of re-naming and [registering](#) all features in the South China Sea by China (Benar News, 13 April 2021). When Vietnam held the rotating ASEAN chair in 2020, it managed to get a [strongly worded statement](#) on the South China Sea issued (Asia Times, 3 July 2020). ASEAN affirmed for the first time that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is the [framework](#) in which solutions have to be found (Geopolitical Monitor, 28 July 2020). How serious Vietnam is in its territorial claims was shown by its [ban of the "Barbie movie"](#), as in one scene, it showed a map carrying the Nine-dash-line, underlining Chinese claims to the Sea (BBC News, 4 July 2023).

2) Trade agreements continue to sideline human rights concerns

The economic *doi moi* policy has not spilled over into the social and political spheres of society and is not expected to do so in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, the authorities are increasingly relying on Communist rhetoric and ideology and act decisively against dissidents and all movements perceived as threatening their power. Dreams of an open civil society in Vietnam with public debates on political, economic, social and religious issues (which are common in democratic societies) are still far off.

The Free Trade Agreement with the EU entered into force on [1 August 2020](#). Human rights advocates have been promoting a [long list](#) of topics worth being discussed for improving the Agreement, including freedom of religion (Human Rights Watch, 22 March 2022). While the economic decline caused by the COVID-19 crisis could induce the government to be more open for improving its human rights record, it seems more likely that it will prioritize political stability. The human rights dialogue continued after a hiatus; in its last meeting in [June 2023](#), no mention of freedom of religion was made according to the joint press release (EEAS press team, 9 June 2023). However, Vietnam's human rights record still comes under scrutiny, as a [labor rights](#) related statement by an advisory group showed (EESC, 6 June 2024).

3) Ethnic minorities under increased scrutiny

The violent attack on 11 June 2023 against policemen and authorities, leaving eight people dead, took place in Ea Tieu and Ea Ktur villages in Dak Lak province, home of the Ede minority, but also of a smaller Hmong community. The government prosecuted 84 suspects and claimed an organization named FULRO was behind the attacks. The fact that the authorities classified the attacks as [terrorism](#) not only raises more questions than answers (The Vietnamese, 4 July 2023), but also does not bode well for the already difficult situation of the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. It will provide the Communist Party with even more opportunities to act with a heavy hand against them and increase pressure and restrictions. So far, there is no conclusive evidence that the attack was religiously motivated, but the fact that the Vietnamese police released a [video](#) in its aftermath showcasing church buildings of the "Montagnard Evangelical Church of Christ of the Central Highlands" does not bode well for Christians in the Central Highlands (The Vietnamese, 6 July 2023). A country expert commented:

- "The government still considers the Evangelical Church of Christ as a reactionary group. Media, news and state television stated that the people have to 'eliminate this church out of the community'. Pastors have been targeted, Christians threatened from the government. They are all under close monitoring by the government and their communities. The government puts a lot of effort in clearing the Evangelical Church of Christ from not only Central Highlands but also other provinces around, such as Phu Yen and Binh Dinh."

Although the government still held the view that opposition towards the government and sabotage were the main factors behind the violence, it has admitted that frustration had been building up due to poor land management by the authorities and the growing wealth gap. This admittance of the government's [own partial responsibility](#) (RFA, 7 September 2023) is an encouraging sign, but should not be understood as any opening up.

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/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: Directive 24 - <https://the88project.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/D24-report-final.pdf>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: attacks in Dak Lak Province - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-67995372>
- 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: sentenced - <https://www.thevietnamese.org/2024/04/internet-users-prosecuted-for-allegedly-distorting-ho-duy-hais-conviction-protestant-missionary-receives-13-year-sentence/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: tried to persuade - <https://www.thevietnamese.org/2024/03/vietnamese-police-track-down-montagnard-refugees-in-thailand-and-urge-them-to-return/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: found his battered body - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/vietnamese-churches-demand-investigation-of-christians-death>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: detained - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/house-church-03082024153024.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: sentenced - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/blang-01262024162452.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: stopped - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/church-of-christ-11222023000419.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: detention - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/protestants-released-11062023204427.html>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: resident - <https://www.reuters.com/world/vatican-vietnam-take-major-step-forward-relations-2023-07-16/>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: commentators - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/has-the-vatican-sacrificed-religious-freedom-for-ties-with-vietnam/102067>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: IRFR 2023 Vietnam - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/vietnam/>
- Persecution engines description: RFA, 9 March 2023 - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/religion-03092023165749.html>
- Persecution engines description: Morning Star News, 28 February 2024 - <https://morningstarnews.org/2024/02/ominous-new-decree-95-confirms-vietnams-intent-to-control-religion/>
- Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points): IRFR 2022 Vietnam, pp.16/17 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/vietnam/>
- Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points): The Vietnamese, 5 May 2021 - <https://www.thevietnamese.org/2021/05/the-collision-of-religion-and-the-vietnamese-state/>
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- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Mai Trang Vu & Thi Thanh Thuy Pham, 2021 - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14681366.2021.1924239>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Vietnamese, 12 January 2023 - <https://www.thevietnamese.org/2023/01/how-is-gender-equality-in-vietnam/?ref=the-vietnamese-magazine-newsletter>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Diplomat, 13 July 2022 - <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/what-the-roe-reversal-means-for-abortion-rights-in-vietnam/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: prisoners of conscience - <https://the88project.org/database/>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Vietnam - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/vietnam/>
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- Trends Summary: framework - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/07/how-asean-benefits-as-japan-shifts-production-away-from-china/>
- Trends Summary: ban of the "Barbie movie" - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66083761>
- Trends Summary: 1 August 2020 - <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-vietnam-free-trade-agreement>
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- Trends Summary: terrorism - <https://www.thevietnamese.org/2023/07/vietnams-classification-of-dak-lak-attack-as-terrorism-raises-more-questions-than-answers/>
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