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**WORLD
WATCH
LIST**
2024

Somalia

LANDSINFORMATION

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World
Watch
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Somalia: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



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Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

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

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

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

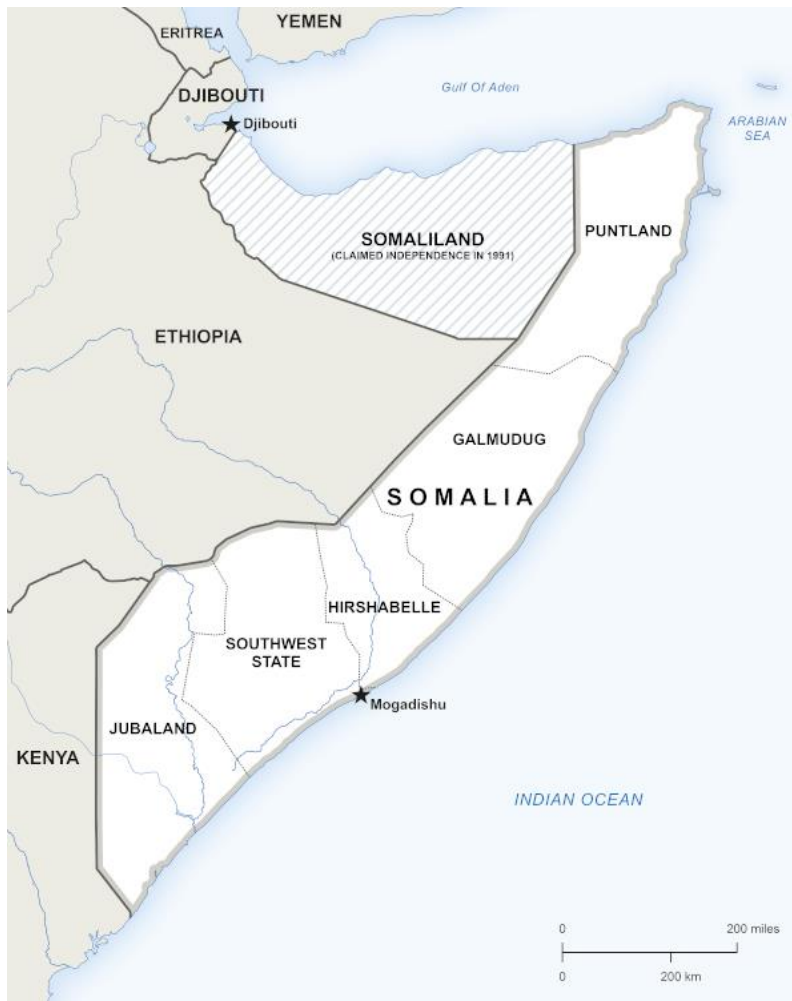
WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Somalia

Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Somalia: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
17,339,000	hundreds	OD estimate

Map of country



Somalia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	93	2
WWL 2023	92	2
WWL 2022	91	3
WWL 2021	92	3
WWL 2020	92	3

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

Christians in Somalia find themselves in an exceedingly precarious situation, marked by multiple layers of threats. Despite suffering military setbacks and facing rebellion from some clans, al-Shabaab remains a potent force, controlling large swathes of the country. It has infiltrated federal and local authorities and even extends its reach to neighboring countries like Kenya. The group vigorously advocates a strict form of Sharia law and is committed to eradicating Christianity from Somalia. In this grim landscape, Christians discovered practicing their faith have often been killed immediately.

Particularly vulnerable are Christians with a Muslim background, who are viewed as high-value targets by al-Shabaab operatives. They have often been killed on the spot when discovered. Foreign jihadists are also present in Somalia, further increasing the risks faced by Christians. However, the threats are not solely from radical Islamic groups; Islamic family members, extended family, and the community at large also pose significant challenges to Christians. Conversion to Christianity is considered the ultimate betrayal of one's Somali family and clan, leading to harassment, intimidation, and even execution by family members and clan leaders.

Over the years, the dangers have escalated. Islamic militants have increasingly focused on identifying and eliminating Christian leaders. Attempts to establish or re-open churches have been met with fierce resistance. For instance, an attempt to reopen a church in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in August 2017 failed after the government was pressured by the local Islamic population to shut it down. As a result, 'church life' is simply not possible in Somalia. This pattern of persecution is so extreme that it places Somalia high in the category of countries where extreme persecution occurs.

The societal atmosphere in Somalia adds another layer of peril. The community is overwhelmingly conservative, and even the suspicion of conversion from Islam to Christianity can lead to life-threatening danger. In every sphere of life—private, family, community, and na-

tional—being identified as a convert to Christianity will often lead to immediate execution. The situation is further exacerbated by the overall instability in the region, fueled by al-Shabaab's activities and influence, making Somalia one of the most dangerous places in the world for Christians.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Somalia 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 Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

**Somalia has a reservation on CRC Art.14 protecting children's freedom of religion or belief.*

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

- Christian converts are killed on the spot if their conversion is discovered or merely suspected (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian parents cannot raise their children according to their religious values (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- All Somali are assumed to be Muslim and forbidden to leave Islam (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Women converts are forcibly married and pressured to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

No details about specific incidents of violations of rights can be published since doing so could potentially endanger the life of converts from Islam to Christianity in the country.

Specific examples of positive developments

In some instances, government forces successfully pushed back al-Shabaab, regaining territorial control in some areas.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: 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 Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Somalia

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 country report - 156 countries	AI Somalia 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/somalia/report-somalia/	23 June 2023
BBC News country profile - updated 26 April 2023	BBC country profile Somalia	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094503	23 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 - 137 countries	BTI Somalia Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SOM	23 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Somalia - updated 20 June 2023	World Factbook Somalia	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/somalia/	23 June 2023
Crisis24 Somalia country report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Somalia country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/somalia	23 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Somalia profile 2023	EIU Somalia profile 2023	https://country.eiu.com/somalia	23 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 - 179 countries	FSI 2023 Somalia	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	23 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index - 29 countries, Somalia is not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index - 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Somalia	https://freedomhouse.org/country/somalia/freedom-world/2023	23 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report - 70 countries, Somalia not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 country profile Somalia	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/somalia/	23 June 2023
Girls not Brides Somalia report	Girls not Brides Somalia	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/somalia/	23 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 (Somalia country chapter) - 100+ countries	HRW 2023 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/somalia	23 June 2023
Internet World Stats Somalia - data available in 2023	IWS 2023 Somalia	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#so	23 June 2023
Middle East Concern country profile	MEC Somalia profile	https://meconcern.org/countries/somalia/	2 January 2024
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index - 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Somalia	https://rsf.org/en/somalia	23 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index - 180 countries	CPI 2022 Somalia	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/somalia	23 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report – covering 191 countries, Somalia not included	UNDP HDR 2022	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights/#/ranks	23 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Somalia	IRFR 2022 Somalia	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/somalia/	23 June 2023
USCIRF 2021 country reports 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Somalia not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	23 June 2023
World Bank overview Somalia - 30 March 2023 (178 countries covered)	World Bank overview Somalia	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/somalia	23 June 2023
World Bank Somalia 2021 data (222 countries covered)	World Bank data Somalia	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=SOM	23 June 2023
World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook April 2023 - 147 countries	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Somalia	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f5c5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-som.pdf	23 June 2023

Recent history

Somalia declared independence in 1960 when the British protectorate and Italian colony merged. In 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's military government came to power and introduced 'Scientific Socialism' into the country. During this process, property owned by Christian missionary organizations and churches, including schools and clinics, were seized and Christians were expelled from the country. In 1974 a new law was introduced giving women the same inheritance rights as men. Islamic leaders preaching against this new law were imprisoned or executed. It was claimed that the secular and reformist nature of the government undermined the Islamic identity of the Somali people. This resulted in a revival of radical Islamic influence and the growth of Muslim clan-based militant organizations. They aimed to turn Somalia into an Islamic state. Siad Barre's regime and Islamic militants shared an enemy – Christians, whose presence had become increasingly visible in the years before the early 1990s. During Barre's rule, radical Muslims used their influence to encourage the government to ban the printing, importing, distributing or selling of Christian literature in the country. Moreover, the National Security Services (NSS) threatened, arrested, tortured and murdered many Somali Christians. Other Christians lost their jobs and businesses.

Relations between Somalia and its neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, had been soured by the Somalian government's claim that all territories where Somalis live belong to Somalia. As a result of this agenda to form a 'Greater Somalia', the country waged a major war with Ethiopia in 1977.

After decades of ruling the country with a mixture of terror and guile, Siad Barre's regime finally collapsed in 1991. The country was left without an effective government. War between the clans and drought threatened the lives of millions. The United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) sought to end the crisis. In 1992, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 751 by which a UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) was established. UNOSOM I sent in a US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF). As the situation spun out of control, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 755 to establish a second UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II). Following the unsuccessful attempts to help Somalis create a central government, the USA withdrew its forces in 1994. The UN then decided to withdraw all its forces from Somalia (Security Council Resolution 954). For the following two decades Somalia became a lawless state where Islamists, local militias and warlords continued to fight each other. The country became a hub for militant Islamic activity.

In the meantime, even though not recognized by the international community, Somaliland declared unilateral independence from Somalia by citing the colonial boundaries between British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Puntland also declared its autonomy without severing its ties from the rest of Somalia.

After several attempts at mediation by the international community, a federal government was eventually formed in 2012. The government only controls cities and towns; many parts of rural Somalia still remain in the hands of al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has been consistently propagating anti-Christian ideology and regarding all foreign forces in Somalia as Christians intent on conquering Islam. In 2016, parliamentary elections were held and in February 2017, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed was elected president. This was [greeted enthusiastically](#) by many Somalis and the international community (New York Times, 8 February 2017). It has been seen as a big step forward for Somalia.

In 2017 and in 2018, al-Shabaab remained potent enough to conduct deadly attacks in the country. AMISOM soldiers (deployed in Somalia by the African Union since 2007) were targeted on numerous occasions. For example, in [April 2018](#), up to 46 Ugandan peacekeepers were killed in a double suicide car bomb attack by Islamic militants (The Guardian, 1 April 2018). In May 2019, the Security Council extended the mandate of AMISOM and authorized a troop reduction, unanimously adopting Resolution 2472 (2019) at its 8537th meeting. In 2018 and 2019, the government continued to fight al-Shabaab with the help of African Union Forces. Al-Shabaab conducted a bombing in the capital city in July 2019 and wounded the Mayor of Mogadishu, who later [died](#) of his injuries (New York Times, 1 August 2019).

In 2020, there were border clashes between Kenyan and Somalian government soldiers and there were rumors that Kenya might seek to annex some Somalian territory. Deutsche Welle reported on 13 March 2020 that the Somali government [requested](#) Kenya to "halt its ongoing violations of Somalia's sovereignty and encroachment in the border areas. In a long-drawn legal battle involving maritime boundary dispute against Kenya, the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

ruled [largely in favor of Somalia in setting a new maritime border](#) in an area of the Indian Ocean believed to be rich in oil and gas (Al-Jazeera, 12 October 2021). However, [Kenya rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction](#) days before the Court announced its decision (Al-Jazeera, 8 October 2021). The situation in the area remains precarious as Jubbaland forces are regrouping for possible fresh clashes, despite efforts to ease the hostility.

Some of the defining moments in 2022 (continuing into 2023) have been (see also below: *Political and legal landscape*):

- The election of former President Hassan Sheikh Mahamud as president in May 2022.
- Widespread famine
- Government offensive and clan uprisings against al-Shabaab since mid-2022.

Political and legal landscape

The [Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia](#) was adopted on 1 August 2012 and affirms the absolute predominance of a strict interpretation of Sharia law. According to Article 2 of the Constitution, “Islam is the religion of the State; no religion other than Islam can be propagated in the country; and no law which is not compliant with the general principles and objectives of Sharia can be enacted.” Furthermore, the Constitution categorically declares that Sharia law is supreme. Since the Constitution took a step back from securing freedom of religion by prohibiting apostasy, it can be expected that a better functioning federal government will not lead to a cessation of the regular violation of rights of Christians. Likewise, as stated in the Constitution, the province of Puntland has declared that only Islam may be propagated: “Islam shall be the only religion of the Regional Puntland State of Somalia. With the exception of Islam, no other religion can be spread in the Puntland state; the laws and culture of the people shall be based on the Islamic religion.” The Constitution of Somaliland also states: “Islam is the religion of the Somaliland state, and the promotion of any religion in the territory of Somaliland, other than Islam, is prohibited.”

The political situation in the country has created a hostile environment for Christians, especially for those coming from a Muslim background. As a result, the religious freedom violations against Christians in Somalia nearly always involves a very high level of violence. The new Ethiopian prime minister, who took up office in April 2018, has brought fresh hope to the region: Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia are committed to solving current regional issues.

In 2020, the president of Somalia [signed a landmark federal law](#), paving the way for the country to hold its first popular election in half a century (The Guardian, 24 February 2020). The president and the leaders of Somalia's five semi-autonomous federal states had reached an agreement in September 2020 to prepare for indirect parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2020 and early 2021. As part of the agreement, the election planning was set to commence on 1 November 2020. But the deal fell apart in the face of squabbles over how to conduct the vote, while talks in February 2021 between Farmaajo and the leaders of the country's federal states [failed to break the deadlock](#) (Al-Jazeera, 10 February 2021). In April 2021, parliament voted to extend the president's term for another two years to let the country prepare for direct elections. This move came amid growing pressure to end the political stalemate and was heavily criticized by the international community. Following clashes in the

capital, Mogadishu, between factions of the security forces (which were divided over the issue), Somali lawmakers [voted unanimously to cancel](#) the two-year presidential term extension (France 24, 2 May 2021).

The cancelling of the extension gave Somalia's political leaders the impetus to agree on [new dates](#) for holding the postponed elections: The indirect presidential election was to be held on 10 October 2021, following the election of members to the Upper House in July and members of the Lower House in the period 10 August - 10 September 2021 (Al-Jazeera, 29 June 2021). However, in September 2021, Somalia's top two most powerful leaders – the President and Prime Minister – became [locked in a deepening political confrontation](#) after they named different men to head the country's intelligence service, causing fears of instability and further throwing the ongoing electoral process into doubt (Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2021). This was followed by the president [suspending](#) the prime minister's power to appoint and dismiss officials (Al-Jazeera, 16 September 2021), leading [regional leaders](#) and [international community](#) to de-escalate the standoff and commit to the elections (Al-Jazeera, 17 and 18 September 2021). The feud between the president and prime minister halted the complicated, indirect election process. Although it seemed they had come to an agreement in October 2021, in December the president [suspended](#) the powers of the prime minister amid the ongoing power-struggle between the two leaders, raising concerns of political violence possibly erupting (CNN, 27 December 2021). Heavily armed factions took up position in parts of the capital, Mogadishu.

In January 2022, Somali officials announced that they had [struck a deal](#) to carry out the delayed parliamentary elections by 25 February 2022 (Africanews, 10 January 2022). When the February date was also postponed with no new date in view, the USA imposed [sanctions on Somali officials](#) for undermining the democratic process in Somalia (Al-Jazeera, 26 February 2022), with the IMF also giving a [warning](#) that funding programs were a stake if elections were not held within the next few months (Africanews, 23 February 2022). After months of repeated postponements, Somalia finally [inaugurated 290 new lawmakers](#) in mid-April 2022 bringing the country a step closer to completing a prolonged electoral process, and [elected a new Speaker](#) at the end of April 2022, paving the way for the presidential vote (Africanews, 28 April 2022). After a record number of candidates ran in Somalia's presidential election, including the incumbent President Farmaajo, who announced candidacy for a second term. Former President [Hassan Sheikh Mahmud](#) was elected president for the second time (CNN, 16 May 2022). [Analysts warn](#) that despite the fact that under the new president fighting against al-Shabaab is very robust and effective, with clans also rising up to combat al-Shabaab, "many of the deep political fissures that defined Farmaajo's rule persist and will resurface" (Brookings, 27 January 2023)." The USA has also kept up pressure on al-Shabaab by conducting airstrikes. For example, on 9 July 2023, [CNN reported](#) that US airstrikes had killed at least ten al-Shabaab fighters.

Gender perspective

The legal landscape facing women and girls is additionally restrictive, in particular making marriage a place of enacting violent repression of female converts. Somalia is one of just six UN states not to have [ratified](#) the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Within marriages, women are vulnerable from a lack of legislation addressing [domestic violence or marital rape](#) (UN Women/UNDP, Somalia - Gender, Justice and

the Law, 2018). Divorce laws also prevent women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. A man has the right to divorce his wife simply by *talaq*, whereas women must apply through the courts.

In this religiously conservative society that suppresses women, finding a [female Somali police general](#) fighting al-Shabaab and the patriarchy is a rare yet pioneering sight (Al-Jazeera features, 25 February 2022). Zakia is one of many women fighting for [gender equality](#) in the security sector and the inclusion of women at all levels on matters regarding national peace and security (Medium, 22 October 2020). Women also occupy 54 of the 247 [parliamentary seats](#) (IDEA Somalia country data, 1 August 2022 update) but cite discrimination by leaders of federal states based on “deeply ingrained traditional prejudices” for their inability to meet the established [30% gender quota](#) (Deutsche Welle, 4 May 2022).

In August 2020, outrage was sparked as the long-awaited Sexual Offences Bill (aimed at protecting women and girls from sexual abuse, rape and child marriage, and heralded as a progressive step) was [overturned](#) by parliament (Reuters, 11 August 2020). Instead of outlawing them, the replacement bill permits child and early marriage to continue. According to [UN Women](#), 45% of women are married before 18 years of age (UN Global Database on Violence Against Women: Somalia). Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical Muslim as a corrective measure.

Religious landscape

The population of Somalia is overwhelmingly Muslim, 99% being Sunni Muslims. The small Christian community is under constant threat of attack, since Christians are seen as a foreign element that is in the country to damage both the culture and Islam. Open Doors estimates the number of Christians in the country to be “hundreds”. However, in the past, the Christian community was much larger and the country was home to one of the largest Catholic cathedrals in the region.

The years of chaos following the overthrow of President Siad Barre’s military regime in 1991 culminated in the rise of Sharia courts and of radical Islamic groups like al-Shabaab. They all pursue a clear Islamic identity against the background of a strong tribal identity. Changing religion – i.e., to Christianity – not only means a betrayal of Islam and the Muslim community but also a break with the norms and values of the clan as well. In tribal societies, this is a very serious offense. According to many Somalis, a “Somali is born Muslim and dies Muslim”. Therefore, even if al-Shabaab’s influence were to decline, it does not mean that the threat to Christians would diminish. An example is Somaliland which declared independence in 1991 (but which is still unrecognized): It would seem to be a region free of Islamic militant activity, but Christians are just as much persecuted there because anti-Christian sentiment is rooted in the country’s religion and culture.

Gender perspective

Within this context, Christian male converts face extremely [hostile treatment](#) as they are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; for instance, they are responsible for determining the faith of the family and therefore more is expected from them (World Watch Monitor, 7 February 2019). They can be blamed if a sister or wife converts, or killed. Suspected

female converts, too, face extreme pressure from their families and local communities; they are commonly raped, publicly humiliated, or forcibly married to a radical sheikh.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Somalia:

Economic growth and outlook:

- "Somalia is experiencing a prolonged severe drought, with a fifth consecutive season of failed rains, against a backdrop of higher commodity prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These paused 2021's modest economic recovery from the pandemic with a slowdown in real GDP growth to an estimated 1.7 percent in 2022. Furthermore, 7.1 million people— nearly half of the population—were food insecure at the end of 2022 due to the drought and 1.3 million people were displaced."
- "Growth has been low and volatile averaging only 2.8 percent in 2014–22 with no growth in real GDP per capita."
- "Somalia continues to contend with increasingly frequent shocks in the context of widespread fragility, conflict, and violence. Repeated climate-related shocks such as cycles of droughts, floods, and locusts' infestation, lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher international commodity prices, as well as security incidences have interrupted Somalia's growth trajectory and slowed the transition from fragility."
- "The economy is expected to make a modest recovery in the medium-term, despite the persistent severe drought. Real GDP growth is projected to recover to 2.8 percent in 2023 and increase to 3.7 percent in 2024 and 3.9 percent in 2025."

Debt:

- "Somalia is progressing towards attaining debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, which would reduce its debt to sustainable levels. Upon reaching the HIPC Completion Point, Somalia will enjoy access to new sources of financing, but terms of financing will shift from grants to loans. Therefore, it is critical for the country to raise domestic revenues and improve institutions for debt management."

Poverty rate:

- "The poverty rate is projected to remain at around 73 percent between 2022 and 2024."
- "The economy does not generate the jobs needed to reduce poverty. Only about 30 percent of the workforce participates in the labor market, and this is markedly lower for women compared to men at 15 percent and 38 percent, respectively. Households suffer from food insecurity and loss of productive assets in a context of poor human capital and widespread insecurity. Repeated shocks contribute to internal displacement and rapid urbanization (estimated at 4 percent per annum), as well as conflict due to competition for limited resources."

Food insecurity:

- "As the country continues to cope with on going severe drought, the overall humanitarian situation remains dire, and the number of food insecure could grow to 8.3 million people by mid-2023."

Inflation:

- Overall merchandise exports declined by 3.8 percent. Similarly, inflationary pressures intensified in 2022 with food inflation rate at its peak of 17.5 percent in July—almost four times higher than in mid-2021. Overall inflation averaged 6.8 percent in 2022."

Gender perspective

Women are, in general, the most economically vulnerable within Somalia. This is in part due to low education rates for girls; only 35% of girls of school age were [enrolled](#) in school in 2020 (UN OCHA, 2020). The widespread practice of FGM results in thousands of girls [withdrawing](#) from school due to debilitating scarring and infections (Somali Magazine, January 2022). Early marriages also result in girls ending their education earlier than their male counterparts. Women and girls regularly lose their inheritance rights, too. Whilst under the 1975 Family Code (Article 158) women have equal rights to men, Sharia rules of inheritance are applied, and daughters receive half the share that sons receive.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Somalia:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (Including 30,000 Arabs)
- **Main languages:** Somali (official, according to The provisional federal constitution (PFC)), Arabic (official, according to the 2012 Federal Transitional Charter), Italian, English
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 55.72 years (2022 est.)
- **Median age:** 18.5 years (2020 est.)
- **Urban population:** 47.3% (2022 est.)

As stated in the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) (Section: Somalia / People, last accessed 19 July 2023):

- "In culture, language, and way of life, the people of Somalia, north-eastern Kenya, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, and the southern part of Djibouti are largely one homogeneous group." _Further: "The Somali people make up the overwhelming majority of Somalia's population. They are divided into numerous clans, which are groups that trace their common ancestry back to a single father. These clans, which in turn are subdivided into numerous sub-clans, combine at a higher level to form clan families. The clan families inhabiting the interfluvial area of southern Somalia are the Rahanwayn and the Digil, which together are known as the Sab. Mainly farmers and agro-pastoralists, the Sab include both original inhabitants and numerous Somali groups that have immigrated into this climatically favorable area. Other clan families are the Daarood of north-eastern Somalia, the Ogaden, and the border region between Somalia and Kenya; the Hawiye, chiefly inhabiting the area on both sides of the middle Shabelle and south-central Somalia; and the Isaaq, who live in

the central and western parts of northern Somalia. In addition, there are the Dir, living in the northwestern corner of the country but also dispersed throughout southern Somalia, and the Tunni, occupying the stretch of coast between Marca and Kismaayo. Toward the Kenyan border, the narrow coastal strip and offshore islands are inhabited by the Bagiunis, a Swahili fishing people."

Refugees/IDPs

In the past three decades, conflict and famine in the country have led to hundreds of thousands fleeing the country. The insecure situation has also been compounded by millions continuing to be seriously affected by [drought and famine](#) (Reliefweb, last accessed 19 July 2023).

According to the UNHCR in September 2022, there were [33,847 refugees and asylum seekers](#) in the country. In the timeframe January-September 2022 there were [1,405,000 newly displaced IDPs](#), of which 467,000 were due to conflict/insecurity. In comparison, in the timeframe January-December 2021 there were 874,000 IDPs of which 544,000 were due to conflict/insecurity.

According to the [UNHCR](#) report "Somalia Refugee Crisis Explained" (19 October 2022):

- "At the end of 2021, there were 836,300 Somali refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, most of them – almost 80 percent – are living in neighboring countries like Kenya (279,200), Ethiopia (250,719), Yemen (69,940) and Uganda (61,853)."
- "The drought in the Horn of Africa is impacting more than 20 million people—including those in Somalia. ... The drought is severely affecting millions of refugees, IDPs and their host communities, primarily in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya."
- "Refugees from Somalia have been living in refugee camps for nearly 30 years. Many have lived most or all of their lives in these camps. This is called a protracted refugee situation."

Gender perspective

Gender inequality in Somalia is reinforced by its patriarchal norms, Islamic religious landscape and long history of gender discrimination. Women are widely viewed as subservient, and many continue to remain restricted to the domestic sphere. There are signs that these dynamics are slowly changing, with increasing numbers of women going to [university](#) to become working professionals (East Africa Monitor, 2 September 2020). According to the [Association of Somali Universities](#), the enrolment rate of female students in tertiary institutions increased by 17% in the last five years (University World News, 2022). Inequality remains deeply entrenched however, and women and children have reportedly experienced higher rates of [gender-based violence](#) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, June 2020). Campaigners are pushing for the overturned [Sexual Offences Bill](#) to be reintroduced; this had sought to provide greater protection to victims of gender-based violence (Reuters, 11 August 2020).

Technological landscape

Despite the fact that there is no strong central government, the country has made progress in telecommunication technology.

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Somalia):

- **Internet usage:** 14.5% of the population – survey date: December 2021 (most recent survey date at time of writing)
Facebook usage: 14.5 % of the population – survey date: January 2022
According to [Napoleon Cat](#) (June 2023), there were 2,716,200 Facebook users in the country: 55.9% were male, compared to 44.1% female.

The state of digital adoption and use in Somalia in 2023 in early 2023 as per [Data Reportal](#) (14 February 2023):

- There were 1.76 million internet users in Somalia at the start of 2023, when internet penetration stood at 9.8 percent.
- Somalia was home to 1.95 million social media users in January 2023, equating to 10.9 percent of the total population.
- A total of 7.99 million cellular mobile connections were active in Somalia in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 44.7 percent of the total population.

According to World Bank Somalia data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 52 per 100 people .

According to a 2018 OECD report, women in Africa are on average [34%](#) less likely to own a smartphone than their male counterparts (OECD 2018, p.13). This restricts their access to both information and community networks. The 2022 [GSMA Mobile Gender Gap](#) report also indicates that only 37% of the female population in Sub-Saharan African countries use mobile internet (GSMA, 2022, p. 39).

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

- "Somalia's economic difficulties in recent years have made it difficult for telcos and the government to sustain investment in infrastructure. The government has also had to contend with militant groups which continue on occasion to force the closure of internet services in many areas of the country."
- "Given the poor condition of fixed-line infrastructure, operators have concentrated on mobile connectivity. Their investment plans have involved the development of LTE services to provide mobile data and broadband services."
- "Despite the many inherent difficulties faced in the country, the telecom market has flourished. Tariffs are among the lowest in Africa, and new cable systems coming on stream in the next few years (providing additional connectivity to Asia and Europe), as well as planned investments from local operators to bolster the country's national fibre backbone, will lead to downward pressure on retail pricing."

- "On the consumer side, spending on telecoms services and devices is under pressure from the financial effect of large-scale job losses and the consequent restriction on disposable incomes as the remnants of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic remain and as global events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, continue to play out. However, the market is continuing a positive growth trajectory, supported by a slow economic rebound in the country."

As the number of Internet users increases, it is likely that citizens (converts from Islam in particular) will have more access to online Christian resources.

Security situation

Somalia is viewed as being a classic example of a modern failed state. For more than 25 years, the country has been a safe haven for Islamic militants who constantly target Christians both in Somalia and in neighboring countries. The country has now become a patchwork of competing clans, clan-based militias and Islamic groups. Thus, it has been difficult to have a central government or any sort of government in the country.

Al-Shabaab has conducted numerous attacks in the WWL 2024 reporting period. The list below is not exhaustive:

- [In January 2023](#), seven soldiers were killed in al-Shabab attack on Somali military base.
- In [June 2023](#), at least six people were killed in a hotel siege in Mogadishu.
- According to the Ugandan president, reported by [Al-Jazeera](#) in June 2023, al-Shabab killed 54 Ugandan soldiers in Somalia."

The United Nations Security Council has regularly extended the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UNSOM](#)). In October 2023, it was extended until 31 October 2024 (UN Press Release, 31 October 2023). The Council had authorized similar extensions for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). But on 1 April 2022, the [UN Security Council voted unanimously](#) to authorize the creation of a new African Union-led peacekeeping force in Somalia, called the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), in place of the AMISOM mission of nearly 20,000 military, police and civilians that will be gradually reduced to zero by the end of 2024. The purpose of the new mission is to support Somali government forces in the fight against al-Shabaab militant activity (Al-Jazeera, 1 April 2022).

On 17 May 2022, the USA decided to re-establish of an [American troop presence](#) in Somalia to help local authorities combat the Al-Shabaab militant group, reversing the policy of the previous US administration (Africanews, 17 May 2022).

In addition to al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate, there is an IS affiliate in Somalia operating in Puntland. In a recent [recruitment campaign](#) by IS's Somalia province, Christians were blamed for the alleged historical suffering and persecution of Muslims (Terrorism Info, 4 August 2022).

In February 2023, regional countries Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti met to discuss a [joint military offensive](#) against al-Shabaab (Al-Jazeera, 1 February 2023).

Gender perspective

In the context of this fragile state, the proliferation of jihadists and impunity, Christians are regarded as 'a high-value-target' by al-Shabaab and other radical groups. Against this backdrop of [extreme hostility](#) towards Christians, daily life is a challenge for both men and women (The Critic, 23 June 2022). If identified, Christian men are likely to be threatened, tortured or brutally killed. Women and girls also face the threat of death, in addition to sexual violence and/or forced marriages.

Trends analysis

1) Somalia is known for being hostile to Christians

The country has been on the World Watch List since 1993 and will no doubt continue to be listed high up. Violations of religious freedom are particularly severe for Christians with a Muslim background who commonly face beheading if discovered. The persistent hostility towards Christians in Somalia is rooted in multifaceted factors, outlining a trend that indicates this hostility will endure for the foreseeable future. Primarily, the deeply entrenched clan system, with its strong influence on societal structures and norms, perpetuates an environment inherently hostile towards religious diversity. This system often opposes any deviation from the predominant faith, promoting an exclusionary stance against Christianity. Moreover, the historical and cultural fabric of Somalia intertwines religion with identity, further entrenching the resistance towards embracing religious pluralism. Additionally, the prevalence of radical Islamic ideologies, coupled with a lack of effective governance and security measures, amplifies the vulnerability of Christians, fostering an environment where persecution persists with limited recourse for protection or legal support. As these societal, cultural and security dynamics persist without substantial change or intervention, Somalia is poised to remain hostile to Christians for the foreseeable future.

2) Somalia is a failed state

Somalia is a failed state: The international community and the African Union (AU) tried to establish different governments on more than two occasions. The current federal government is supported by AU forces and is backed by the UN Security Council. Despite this, al-Shabaab remains powerful enough to conduct deadly attacks even in Mogadishu - the seat of the federal government. The USA has been conducting [airstrikes against al-Shabaab](#) but these have failed to produce the desired effects, as reports have indicated (e.g., The Guardian, 11 November 2018). Nevertheless, it seems that the Somali Federal Government is heading towards becoming a functioning government. Yet al-Shabaab is still conducting some serious attacks registering over 200 incidents per month at the beginning of 2022, according to the May 2022 [UN Security Council](#) report. After some serious delays, a new president was elected. But the election exposed the deep divide in the Somali political culture. The COVID-19 crisis served only to exacerbate this situation. Added to that is the war in Ukraine, which is impacting many African countries especially countries like Somalia that depend on foreign aid for food.

3) The government of Somalia remains weak

Despite the dubious election procedure, the presidential election in February 2017 had been a sign of hope for many Somalis and the international community. However, the government was weak and only managed to survive the years 2018-2021 with the help of troops from the African Union, backed by the UN. The UN has extended the mandate of UNSOM until October 2024. In 2020-2021, the president was trying to extend his term office by two years. However, due to pressure from the clans, parties and pressure from the international community, the president was forced to back down and a new president was elected and assumed office in May 2022. There are many other incidents that happened in the context of socio-political developments that indicate the lack of a state with coercive power. These incidents and what surrounded the election show that the government of Somalia and its institutional capacity remains weak.

4) Al-Shabaab continues to pose a significant threat

It is a well-known fact that Somalia is home for one of the most radical and deadly jihadist groups in the world. Jihadism in the Horn of Africa/East Africa is not new. There were even groups that were formed in the early 20th century to establish an Islamic state in the modern-day Somalia. In 1984 *Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya* (AIAI) was formed from the merger of two Salafi organizations - *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* and *Wahdat al-Shabaab al-Islam*. This group was believed to be supported by the then Sudanese government. The Ethiopian military conducted numerous military campaigns against the AIAI and finally defeated them. In 1996, it was rumored that the militant group had transitioned into a political group. It was the leadership of the AIAI who also played a bigger role in establishing the Islamic Courts Union in 2000 (dissolved in 2007). After the defeat of the Islamic Courts Union by the Ethiopian army in 2007, al-Shabaab was formed. In order to weaken and eventually defeat this newly formed group, the international community backed the Somalia Transitional government (now Federal Government) by sending peacekeepers. Yet, al-Shabaab remains very potent and conducts serious, organized attacks in the country including the capital city where hundreds of people were killed and injured in the WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 reporting periods. In 2022, the US government [added additional bounty](#) for receiving information leading to the whereabouts of al-Shabaab leaders such as Ahmed Diriye, Mahad Karate and Jihad Mostafa (US Embassy in Kenya, 14 November 2022). On the other hand, some are suggesting that engaging with al-Shabaab might be the best way of solving a crisis which has no end in sight.

5) Clans are showing discontent with al-Shabaab

Although it is early to know how this will progress, the protests against al-Shabaab in [Mogadishu](#) (Al-Jazeera, 13 January 2023) and the clan [revolt gathering pace](#) suggest that the government is getting significant support in its fight against the group (The Economist, 3 November 2022). If this is maintained, it is possible that the threat of al-Shabaab could be reduced - however, it would be unrealistic to consider any possibility of the group being eradicated in the short term.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: greeted enthusiastically - https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/world/africa/somalia-farmajo-mohamed-abdullahi-mohamed.html?_r=0
- Recent history: April 2018 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/al-shabaab-attack-kills-ugandan-soldiers-in-somalia>
- Recent history: died - <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/world/africa/mogadishu-mayor-dead.html>
- Recent history: requested - <https://www.dw.com/en/could-kenya-annex-chunks-of-somalia/a-52725856>
- Recent history: largely in favor of Somalia in setting a new maritime border - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/12/un-court-icj-somalia-kenya-maritime-border-dispute-ruling>
- Recent history: Kenya rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/8/kenya-rejects-un-jurisdiction-ahead-of-somalia-border-ruling>
- Political and legal landscape: Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia - <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: signed a landmark federal law - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/24/somalia-edges-closer-to-first-democratic-election-in-half-a-century>
- Political and legal landscape: failed to break the deadlock - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/10/what-is-delaying-somalias-election>
- Political and legal landscape: voted unanimously to cancel - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210502-somalia-s-parliament-unanimously-votes-to-cancel-presidential-extension>
- Political and legal landscape: new dates - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/29/somalia-to-hold-presidential-election-october-10>
- Political and legal landscape: locked in a deepening political confrontation - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/8/somalia-on-edge-as-president-pm-clash-over-intelligence-chief>
- Political and legal landscape: suspending - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/16/somalia-crisis-deepens-as-president-withdraws-pms-powers>
- Political and legal landscape: regional leaders - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/17/somalias-regional-leaders-urge-end-to-power-struggle>
- Political and legal landscape: international community - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/18/un-council-urges-somalias-feuding-leaders-to-settle-dispute>
- Political and legal landscape: suspended - <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/27/africa/somalia-politics-election-us-intl/index.html>
- Political and legal landscape: struck a deal - <https://www.africanews.com/2022/01/10/somalia-leaders-agree-to-hold-delayed-elections/>
- Political and legal landscape: sanctions on Somali officials - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/26/us-announces-sanctions-for-somali-officials-after-election-delays>
- Political and legal landscape: warning - <https://www.africanews.com/2022/02/23/imf-warns-somalia-funding-at-stake-over-delayed-elections/>
- Political and legal landscape: inaugurated 290 new lawmakers - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/15/somalia-swears-in-lawmakers-as-un-warns-of-famine>
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- Political and legal landscape: Analysts warn - <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/somalias-challenges-in-2023/#:~:text=Two%20key%20interlinked%20dynamics%20will,-al-Shabaab%20clan%20uprisings.>
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- Political and legal landscape: ratified - https://tbineternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=161&Lang=EN
- Political and legal landscape: domestic violence or marital rape - <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Somalia%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English.pdf>

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WWL 2024: Church information / Somalia

Christian origins

[Arab sources](#) from 10th-12th century describe the port of Seylac (Zeila), near the border with Djibouti, as a majority Christian city (Aram, B I, Somalia's Judaeo-Christian heritage, in: Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology 22.2, 2003). However by the end of the 15th century the Christian presence had died out. Jesuits visiting the island Soqotra in 1542 were amazed to find that the inhabitants were clearly Christian, although illiterate. It had to wait until 1881 before Christianity was introduced again into Somalia. Christian faith spread in the following years, especially after the Italians took control of the southern coast, including Mogadishu. However, the colonial powers in both British and Italian territories at times opposed the work of missionaries among Somalis for fear of instability. *For further information see: Melton J & Baumann M (Editors), Religions of the World (2nd Edition), 2010, p.2664f.*

In 1886 a French Roman Catholic mission agency and the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Mission set up bases in the port town of Berbera (in the then British protectorate of Somaliland), in Mogadishu and Kismayo. The church grew rapidly. Lutheran missionaries from the Church of Sweden came to Somalia in 1898 and opened educational and medical facilities. They also engaged in evangelistic outreach and had their greatest success among a group of Bantu-speaking former slaves. The mission was disrupted when the Italian authorities expelled the missionaries in 1935. The work was revived after World War II and during the 1950s further Christian missions participated. The Swedish Lutheran Mission, Mennonite mission and Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in particular left their mark but in 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's Socialist government came to power and all property owned by Christian missions and churches (including schools and clinics) was confiscated.

In 1972 the government nationalized all of the Roman Catholic Church's property. However, in spite of the changes in the Catholic Church's status and the resultant departure of much of its personnel, a [Diocese of Mogadishu](#) was created in 1975 (Living Word, accessed 2 January 2024). By 1976 all foreign missionaries had left the country. Two groups of Somali nationals, one formerly associated with the Mennonites and one with SIM, continued to meet after the missionaries left. In the 1980s, a few Mennonites were able to return.

Before the early 1990s, the presence of Christians in Somalia was visible. According to an article in Aleteia published on 15 July 2019, when the [Catholic cathedral](#) in Mogadishu "opened in 1928, it was the largest cathedral in Africa. Built in three years and designed in a Norman Gothic style by architect Antonio Vandone di Cortemilia, the church was heavily influenced by the Cefalù Cathedral in Sicily." In July 1989, Bishop Colombo was gunned down in the middle of a church service. The cathedral was looted and damaged and, after that, Islamic militants in the country and from other parts of the world began to target Christians and Christian symbols.

Church spectrum today

For security reasons no information on church networks can be published.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

No area is safe for Christians in the country. However, the harshest places are the areas under the control of al-Shabaab. These are particularly in the southern and south-western region and include areas around Kismayo, Jamaamee, Marka, El Hur and many other places. Christians are not safe even in relatively peaceful and stable places like Puntland and Somaliland.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Since this group is restricted to chaplaincies for foreign soldiers (e.g. among officers of the now disbanded African Union Mission – AMISOM), foreign workers in Mogadishu and some refugees in Hargeisa (Somaliland), it is not treated as a separate category for WWL analysis and scoring.

Historical Christian communities: These do not exist in the country. One of the biggest Roman Catholic cathedrals in Africa was built in 1928 in Mogadishu. However, this building has been a ruin since 2008.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background face the most severe violations of their fundamental rights and are considered a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives. In the country's very recent history, converts - or those accused of being converts - have often been killed on the spot when discovered.

Non-traditional Christian communities: These do not exist in the country.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Arab sources - https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/22-2_003.pdf
- Christian origins: Diocese of Mogadishu - <https://sites.google.com/site/hiyawkal/%C2%A0briefhistory%3A%C2%A0somalia>
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WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Somalia

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Somalia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	93	2
WWL 2023	92	2
WWL 2022	91	3
WWL 2021	92	3
WWL 2020	92	3

The rise in score was due mainly to the significant increase in the violence score from 8.7 points in WWL 2023 to 10.6 points in WWL 2024. Overall pressure remained stable at an extreme level. Clan leaders, elders and family members monitor the movements of any suspected Christian convert. The situation is further exacerbated by the overall instability in the region, fueled by al-Shabaab's activities, making Somalia one of the most dangerous places in the world for Christians. In Somalia, the identity of being a Christian in itself is often perceived as a societal affront. Documenting acts of violence against Christians within the country poses substantial challenges. If violence scored the highest like in countries where persecution is extreme, Somalia would have ranked number one.

Persecution engines

Somalia: 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	Very strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very 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)

Somalia is a majority Muslim nation and society expects all Somalis to be Muslim. Imams in mosques and madrassas (as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab) state publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians and churches in Somalia. The country's Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, targets and kills Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country. However, *Islamic oppression* is not limited to militants only. Christian converts also face serious violations of religious freedom from family, extended family members and the community at large. To be Christian, especially a convert from Islam, is a huge challenge and can lead to brutal death at the hands of radical groups.

Clan oppression (Very strong)

The clan is a major factor in Somali society and orders the way daily life is run and how one community is related to another. This clan structure also has a profound impact on how the federal government is structured and how elections are conducted, as was evident in the 2017 Somali election: The president was elected by a parliament that was itself elected by 14,025 clan elder-appointed delegates. A similar process took place in May 2022, when Former President [Hassan Sheikh Mahmud](#) was elected president for the second time (CNN, 16 May 2022). Al-Shabaab is also relying on the same clan-based structure to gather intelligence, recruit members and advance its ideology. It uses this structure to force sheiks and imams to teach jihad or face expulsion or death. According to many Somalis and clan leaders, Somalis are Muslims and therefore conversion to Christianity is a betrayal of the Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong)

In the current fragile and lawless situation, crime and corruption is rampant in Somalia. The federal government controls only some cities and towns and leaves the majority of rural Somalia to be controlled by al-Shabaab. Militants collect taxes and fund their operations through illegal trade. This situation has made life for Christians very delicate as they have no protection whatsoever. The organized nature of this engine means that, at times, militants have networks in government positions as well. The country ranked last in Transparency International corruption index 2022 by scoring 12/100 points (CPI 2022).

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

Christians in the country also face pressure from the government. It is the government that sets the laws that limit Christians' rights in the country. The government in all Somalia (Puntland, Somaliland and Somalia) are denying Christians their rights. Over past years, both in Somaliland and Somalia, government agencies have remained active in silencing Christians either through denying basic rights via legal means and/or creating a hostile environment. (An example from a previous reporting period occurred on 5 October 2020, when the authorities in Somaliland arrested a married couple for Christian proselytizing. The arrest prompted calls from some Somali religious leaders for the two, who were converts from Islam to Christianity, to be charged

with apostasy under Sharia. On 5 November 2020, the couple was 'deported' to Mogadishu upon the order of a Somaliland court.)

Drivers of persecution

Somalia: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			VERY STRONG				MEDIUM	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Medium							Medium	
Ethnic group leaders				Very strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								Very strong
Violent religious groups	Very strong			Strong					Very strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong			Strong					
One's own (extended) family	Very strong			Strong					
Political parties	Medium								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very strong			Very strong					Very 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. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Islamic militants operate freely in many regions. Al-Shabaab militants kill Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. This driver is so potent and dangerous that it even drives violence and violations of religious freedom outside Somalia, particularly in Kenya where the group has been responsible for the death of hundreds of Christians in the last years. Al-Shabaab is considered a threat to the peace and security of the whole region and is a designated terrorist organization globally.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Muslim religious leaders state publicly that there is no room for Christianity.
- **Family and ordinary citizens (Very strong):** Society in general and family members are against any thought of conversion to Christianity and will treat converts harshly.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Very strong):** This driver is closely linked to violent religious groups as well. It is this driver that is helping the jihadists finance their oppression.
- **Government officials (Medium) and Political parties (Medium):** Government officials have shown their anti-Christian attitude on many occasions. For example, any form of Christmas celebration has been prohibited by the government. Political parties are ethnically based

and at the same time subscribe to the idea that Somalia is for Somalis – and being Somali means being Muslim.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Clan leaders (Very strong):** Clan leaders do not want to see any conversions to Christianity. They do not want to see Christian symbols in the country.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Very strong):** Somalia's socio-political landscape and persecution dynamics are highly complex. It is often challenging to unravel the connections between various persecution engines, identifying which driver operates where and how. What is clear, however, is that they collectively operate in a way that is detrimental to Christian life and existence. In this context, clan operations are intertwined with organized crime networks, sharing information and ideas on many fronts. In fact, there is no institution in Somalia that is free from the influence of clans.
- **Family (Strong) and Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Family and ordinary citizens serve as drivers where a family/community member is suspected of being a convert to the Christian faith.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** For jihadists, any person who leaves Islam is seen as a threat. Groups like al-Shabaab also use the clan system to recruit.

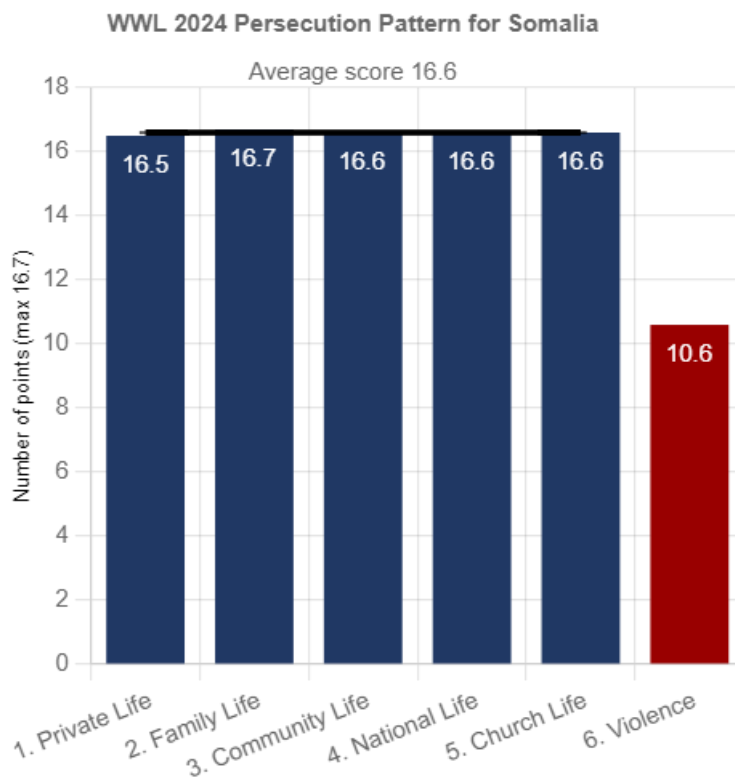
Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized criminal cartels (Very strong):** Criminal networks profit from the lawlessness in Somalia. They work with a network of illegal trade routes. These cartels have a strong connection to al-Shabaab or they are being operated by al-Shabaab itself. The money that these cartels generate buy weapons that are used to kill Christians and other civilians.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Al-Shabaab engages in illegal trade and taxation as a means of income for financing operations against Christians in Somalia and in neighboring countries.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** What is also astonishing in the context of Somalia is the link between non-Christian religious leaders and organized crime networks. These religious leaders are often part of the clan system, and some are also clan leaders. There exists a nexus between organized crime, corruption, and non-Christian religious leaders. They also share a common goal: making Somalia free from 'infidels.'

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** Some government officials are those who enforce restrictive laws in the country. In addition, some of the members of the government also harbor anti-Christians sentiment. They believe that Somalia should only be a home for Muslims.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Somalia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Somalia is 16.6 points, similar to WWL 2023. The overall pressure on Christians in the country remains at an extremely high (and almost maximum) level.
- The pressure is at an extreme level in all spheres of life, with the highest scores in the *Family sphere* (with maximum 16.7 points) and *Community, Church and National spheres* (16.6 points), reflecting the immense pressure exerted on converts by family and neighborhood and the nationwide situation for Christians.
- The score for violence is very high with 10.6 points, up from 8.7 points in WWL 2023.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (4.00 points)

Conversion poses an extreme danger in Somalia. Any suspicion of conversion holds potentially fatal consequences.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (4.00 points)

The act of private worship for Christians is fraught with peril, making even the simplest expressions of faith a risky endeavor. Suspected converts find themselves subject to intense scrutiny.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (4.00 points)

Christians hardly dare to privately possess or keep materials related to their faith as it is so dangerous, if these are found.

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)

Christians experience significant risks in expressing their faith through written mediums like blogs and social media, where sharing beliefs can lead to severe consequences. This reality forces many to either remain anonymous or face the looming threat of harsh repercussions for their public expression of faith.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (4.00 points)

In Somalia, where everyone is presumed Muslim, registering children as Christians is virtually unthinkable.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (4.00 points)

Christians are cautious of exposing their Christian faith and encounter immense obstacles in registering life events like births, weddings, and deaths. Amid oppression, organized crime, and persecution, achieving these fundamental events becomes nearly impossible, compelling many to navigate in secrecy or face severe consequences.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (4.00 points)

Christians undertaking baptisms encounter significant risks due to Islamic oppression, organized crime, and clan-driven persecution, necessitating secrecy for these ceremonies to avoid severe consequences.

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

Christian families are practically compelled to send their children to madrassas, as failure to do so exposes them to severe persecution.

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)

Suspected Christians are constantly subjected to harassment, threats, and obstruction for deviating from the majority religion's norms, with even minor non-conformities like dress codes leading to intense scrutiny. This oppressive environment forces them to live in a state of fear and isolation, cautiously navigating their daily lives to avoid further persecution.

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 intense monitoring for deviations from Islamic principles, leading to harassment and threats for even minor non-conformities. This environment of constant surveillance instills a deep sense of fear and isolation, forcing them to go underground.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (4.00 points)

The Christian community lives under the ever-present, real threat of abduction and forced marriage, especially for confirmed converts or those suspected of Christian sympathies. Armed groups enforcing adherence to the predominant Muslim faith frequently take advantage of this vulnerability, with female converts being particularly vulnerable to forced marriages intended to compel conformity to Islamic principles.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (4.00 points)

Individuals suspected of being Christian are compelled to partake in non-Christian religious activities; refusal to participate often heightens suspicion and is perceived as confirmation of their Christian faith, significantly increasing the danger they face.

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

It is common for suspected Christians to face intense societal pressure to renounce their faith, leading to exclusion and rejection within their communities or death. This coercive environment, demanding adherence to a singular ideology, exemplifies the widespread discrimination and psychological manipulation Christians endure.

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)

The legal and cultural landscape significantly contravenes Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of religion. This systemic bias, deeply embedded in national laws and societal norms, severely restricts Christians' ability to practice their faith freely and without fear of persecution.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (4.00 points)

Conversions to Christianity are neither acknowledged nor recognized, reflecting a systemic discrimination deeply rooted in the country's culture and legal system. This entrenched stance means that Christian converts are consistently marginalized and denied their fundamental right to openly express their beliefs.

Block 4.7: Christians have been hindered in running their own businesses without interference for faith-related reasons (e.g. personnel policy, client admission policy). (4.00 points)

Christians, or those suspected of being Christians, commonly face hindrances in their business endeavors due to religiously motivated discrimination embedded in cultural, legal, and societal norms. This systemic bias affects all aspects of their business operations, from recruitment to client relationships, significantly impeding their economic prospects.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)

Due to deeply ingrained cultural, legal and societal biases, Christian NGOs in Somalia endure severe persecution. These entities struggle to operate effectively and have an historical precedent of exclusion and marginalization, limiting their ability to advocate and engage in public discourse. There are no Christian political parties.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

The process of obtaining registration or legal status for churches is virtually impossible due to cultural, religious, and legal barriers, with authorities often hindering or denying such efforts. This systemic suppression prevents churches from operating legally, severely restricting their ability to assemble, worship and practice their faith openly.

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

Integrating converts into Christian communities is extremely difficult due to the hostile environment against Christians. This situation severely limits their ability to join and be nurtured within church congregations, impacting their spiritual growth and community support.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

Any distribution and sharing of Christian teaching and literature is risky due to heavy monitoring, with those found in possession of such materials facing severe persecution, potentially even death. This intense scrutiny severely restricts the Christians' ability to grow in faith.

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

Any church activity faces intense surveillance and disruption, reflecting the hostile environment for Christians. This heightened scrutiny, often involving local authorities and extremist groups, targets suspected house-churches and severely limits Christians' freedom to practice their faith and gather for worship.

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).

For security reasons, no details about violent incidents in Somalia can be published.

5 Year trends

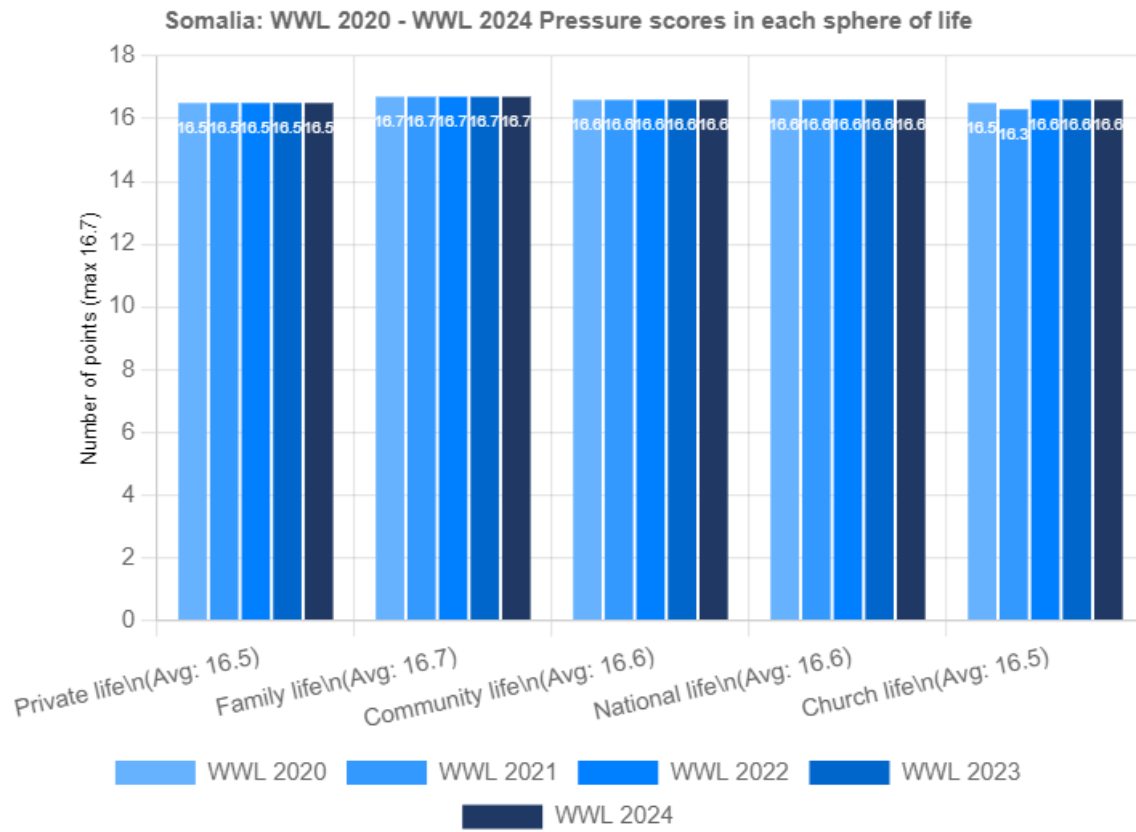
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Somalia: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	16.6
2023	16.6
2022	16.6
2021	16.5
2020	16.6

Over the last five WWL reporting periods extreme levels have been recorded for the average pressure, where 16.5 points has been the minimum. This shows how extremely difficult it is to live in the country as a Christian. A mere suspicion can lead to killing. Any 'abnormal' behavior can be construed as abandoning Islam and can lead to serious problems. Christian life is lived under a constant shadow: If discovered by al-Shabaab, one's conversion is a death sentence. In places like Somaliland, the locals will be arrested and charged with anti-conversion laws.

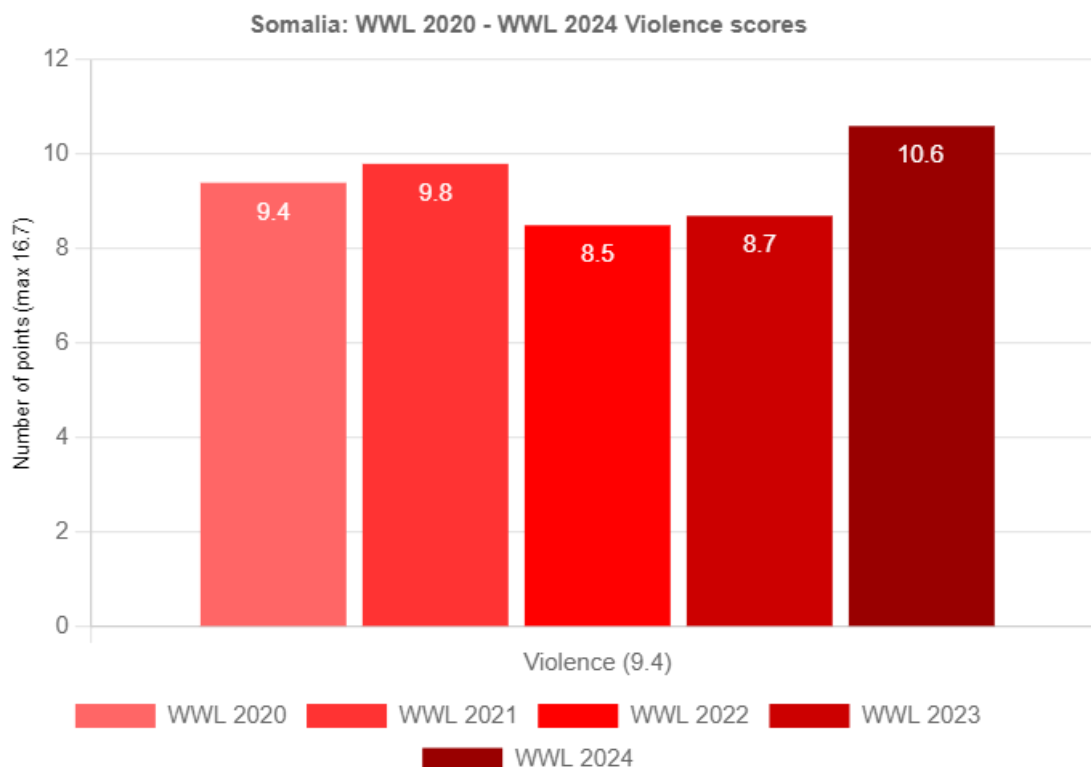
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the extreme levels of pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* are more or less stable, all averaging 16.5 points or above. The highest average score (16.7 points) is found in the *Family sphere*, closely followed by the *Community* and *National spheres* (16.6 points). This reflects the fact that persecution in Somalia is everywhere and is hence a nationwide phenomenon; Christians lack meaningful space in society and protection by the government. Christians find themselves in an environment where meaningful participation in society is limited, and any safeguarding mechanisms offered by the government are notably lacking.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

As can be seen in the chart below, the average score for violence over the past five years is 9.4 points. Compared to the charts for pressure, the scores for violence are lower. This is probably due in part to the inaccessibility of the country and difficulties in reporting. The scores have nevertheless consistently reached the category of "very high". Had Somalia scored higher in violence, it would be a challenger for the No.1 position on the WWL.



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Women and girls in Somalia are the group most affected by nearly three decades of conflict, insecurity, political fragility, recurrent climate shocks and mounting economic pressure. Somalia ranks fourth lowest in the gender equality index. Maternal and infant mortality rates are one of the highest worldwide. At least 98% of Somali girls between the age of 9 and 15 years old have undergone female genital mutations, and gender-based violence is highly prevalent. Moreover, 35% of girls go through child marriage, and there is no legal framework to stop it in courts ([Relief Web, 8 March 2023](#)). Natural hazards combined with widespread security threats have caused one of the world’s largest displacement crises, with 3.8 million IDPs recorded at the end of 2022

([UN Migration, 2023](#)). A spike in gender-based attacks has further compounded the plight of displaced women and girls with physical violence, intimate partner violence and rape being the most common types of violence that women and girls are subjected to in IDP communities. A lack of food and sanitation leaves individuals susceptible to blackmail and rape ([VOA News, 9 May 2023](#)). In Somalia, social life is primarily clan-based, and almost exclusively Islamic-oriented. As a result, women in Somalia mostly lead prescribed lives with little leeway for personal belief or expression. A woman does not have a voice in her community and is dependent on men. Young female converts to Christianity remain one of the most vulnerable populations. Commonly, a woman suspected of Christianity will be humiliated in public, kept under strict house arrest, raped, abducted, forcibly married to a radical sheikh or killed. For example, when a female convert to Christianity was this year discovered by her family, “arrested in her room and tied on her bed with a chain for six months” until another believer was able to come to the rescue. If already married, she will likely be divorced and have her children taken away to ensure that they are raised in an Islamic way.

According to a [BBC report](#) published on 23 March 2023, women are increasingly falling prey to the underground world of sex work, particularly in Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu. The women interviewed left home at a young age, a rare occurrence on Somali society where young women generally do not leave home before they are married. However, abuse or irreconcilable differences with other family members can push some away; this appears to be a growing phenomenon. The women describe how they have become addicted to opioids and have turned to sex work to maintain their addiction. As sex work is illegal in Somalia, many of these young women find themselves in precarious situations with no recourse to the authorities.

Forced and early marriages are commonplace (and legally permissible) in Somalia. As such, forced marriage – often to much older men – is easily accessible as a means of coercion to restore converts back to Islam. Some are pressured by families, whilst others are abducted by radical Muslims for the purpose of forced conversion, marriage and sexual slavery. The constant threat of abduction and forced marriage leads many to flee their homes and to go into hiding. Although all civilians are at threat, there is an added level of violence against Christians because there will be no consequence of perpetrators. Sharia law encourages members to marry off underage girls and to forcibly impose Islam on non-believers. In the context of Jihad, abduction of non-believers is one of the ways of protecting Islam from ‘infidels’.

Insecurity in the country due to al-Shabaab and clan militias has seen a concerning [80% rise in sexual violence](#), primarily against girls (Forbes, 9 October 2021). As one country expert explained: “A Christian school girl was raped inside her own school after her class mate exposed that her mother is a Christian”. Indeed, rape is identified as the most violent form of persecution that female Christians face, and it is particularly alarming that it occurs at the hand of close relatives. [Education](#) is often brief for girls, with only 5% making it to high school enrolment (No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project, accessed 3 November 2022). In education, Christian girls can be pressured into attending Islamic Duksi classes and dressing in al-Shabaab compliant burkas. In combination with discriminatory inheritance practices, this can exacerbate women’s economic vulnerability, which is often exploited. Christian women also suffer when their husbands are imprisoned or killed; widows tend to be forced to marry Muslim men, property is confiscated, and the widow is left at the mercy of the man's family. Many are taken advantage

of by male relatives and young daughters married off. The family often ends up impoverished.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

“A Somali first identifies himself as a Muslim then a Somali.”: this common understanding of male identity means that within the tight social controls of the patriarchal clan society, men and boys merely suspected of conversion to Christianity face extreme violations of their fundamental rights. They are at risk of being physically assaulted, imprisoned, heavily threatened, tortured, abducted, or killed in abhorrent ways. These are no idle threats and fear is a constant companion for Somali Christian men and boys. The constant threats facing male converts in Somalia leads them to distrust even their own family members.

Men face more hostile treatment because they are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; expected to lead their family in religious matters, they can consequently be blamed if a family member converts. Leadership positions are removed and they lose their wives and children. For those suspected of conversion themselves, pressure is applied on them to conform by their local community. For instance, they may be deliberately selected to lead the Mosque prayers and be expected to grow a beard, marry more than one wife or perform Islamic rituals in public. These are means of testing suspected converts.

Additionally, boys are expected to own and operate weapons, and many are abducted and indoctrinated by al-Shabaab. Families forcefully send their young men, including converts, to Islamic rehabilitation centers to be trained as al-Shabaab militia, and consequently, “forced into radicalism” as one expert shared. If exposed within this context as Christians, they face further dangers; as one country expert notes, “the family unit is usually the first point of attack or persecution of Christians especially converts.” Other forms of persecution include murder, loss of inheritance rights, and coercion to renounce their faith.. Overall, men and boys in Somalia encounter various threats and pressures that compromise their safety and religious freedom.

If discovered, Christian men are also denied their inheritance and boys are denied education. In Christian families, the whole family and community is affected if the husband is killed or compromised, for men tend to be the financial providers. When the men are killed, their family is often left unprotected, labeled *kafir* and seen as a stain on the community. The underground church also suffers greatly when the men are persecuted or killed because most of the other

men opt to go deeper underground, leading to leadership crises.

Persecution of other religious minorities

No religious groups other than Sunni Islam have any meaningful rights in Somalia. In areas controlled by al-Shabaab, the situation has become so extreme that even Shia Muslims keep a very low profile. Moderate Sunnis are also targeted. As stated above, laws in Somalia prohibit the propagation of any religion other than Islam and prohibit Muslims from converting. The Constitution also states that all laws must comply with the general principles of Sharia. In this context, any other religion except (Sunni) Islam will experience severe challenges.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Islamic oppression is embedded in society and government and looks set to remain the main challenge for religious minorities in Somalia and neighboring countries. The COVID-19 crisis also served to strengthen the militant groups and weaken the government. In summary:

- Al-Shabaab will most likely continue targeting converts to Christianity.
- It is unlikely that any of the severely damaged church buildings can ever be re-opened;
- If AU troops were to leave the country or are reduced in strength following the expiration of the current term, al-Shabaab would be emboldened again and might pose an even greater threat to Christians in the country and beyond.
- Although the new president was elected in May 2022, the election-process showed that the institutions and culture in Somalia are not ready for periodic elections where democracy can flourish. It is more likely that background issues will lead to major division among those who are part of the government.

Clan oppression

If there is anything certain about Somalia's near future, it is the persistence of the intense opposition from the clan system towards Christianity. Somali society is structured in clans. A government cannot make decisions without clan support. As outlined by Reuters back in December 2007, this is because: "[The clans control districts and businesses](#) and are the arbiters of most aspects of Somali life. Decisions are made collectively within the clans and their complex sub-divisions." What is also important to underline in the case of Somalia is that the clan structure has become a serious threat to democracy and stability in the country. It is difficult to see this situation change in the near future. It must be emphasized that if there is any Persecution engine that is here to stay in Somalia, it is this engine. It survived colonialism, socialism, dictatorship and absolute chaos and lack of government for over 20 years. In fact, it is so deep-rooted that it controls both private and public political space. Even those who are believed to be powerful can only become powerful and remain so with the support of clan leaders. What makes it even more complicated and so dangerous is that this engine is intertwined with Islamic faith. Those who are clan leaders are also religious leaders. The extent of their power can be seen in the role they play in the country's election. To put it simply, any

violations of religious freedom that emanate from this engine are likely to remain.

Organized corruption and crime

According to Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perception Index (CPI 2022 Somalia), Somalia ranks as the world's most corrupt country of all, ranking 180th out of 180 countries. Transparency International states that Somalia "continually ranks as one of the least peaceful countries in the world. For three decades, violence and instability have decimated the country, leaving many Somalis in dire humanitarian conditions. Corruption is rampant, yet public officials continue to ignore the problem, as newly elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud dissolved two key anti-corruption bodies in October." It seems that there is no appetite to fight this problem, and al-Shabaab is using such rampant corruption to infiltrate the government. It also uses corruption to finance its operations. This issue will likely continue, and as long as al-Shabaab and its supporters flourish in the country, the chance for the Church to grow is very slim.

Dictatorial paranoia

The government in power in Somalia is not democratic. Human rights and other fundamental rights are not respected. For Christians, it is even more challenging. At this moment, the government is not in its strongest position, as it has been battling with al-Shabaab. Once it consolidates its power, however, it is likely to take act with increased hostility towards Christians. In fact, the government shows anti-Christian sentiment in order to bolster its image in the very conservative Muslim society that it governs.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: Hassan Sheik Mahmud - <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/16/africa/somalia-elects-new-president-intl/index.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Relief Web, 8 March 2023 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/policy-position-paper-forgotten-rights-somali-women-girls-bearing-brunt-crisis#>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UN Migration, 2023 - <https://dtm.iom.int/somalia>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: VOA News, 9 May 2023 - <https://www.voanews.com/a/in-somalia-spike-in-gender-based-attacks-compounds- plight-of-displaced-women-girls/7085771.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: BBC report - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-65026793>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 80% rise in sexual violence - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2021/10/09/sexual-violence-in-somalia-on-the-rise/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Education - <http://www.noceilings.org/child-marriage/>
- Future outlook: The clans control districts and businesses - <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL05364051>

Further useful reports

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

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

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

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Somalia>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.