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OPEN DOORS
WORLD
WATCH
LIST
2024

Niger

LANDSINFORMATION

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Niger: Full Country Dossier

January 2024

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Contents

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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

Copyright note

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 / Niger

Brief country details

Niger: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
27,066,000	66,600	0.2

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

Map of country
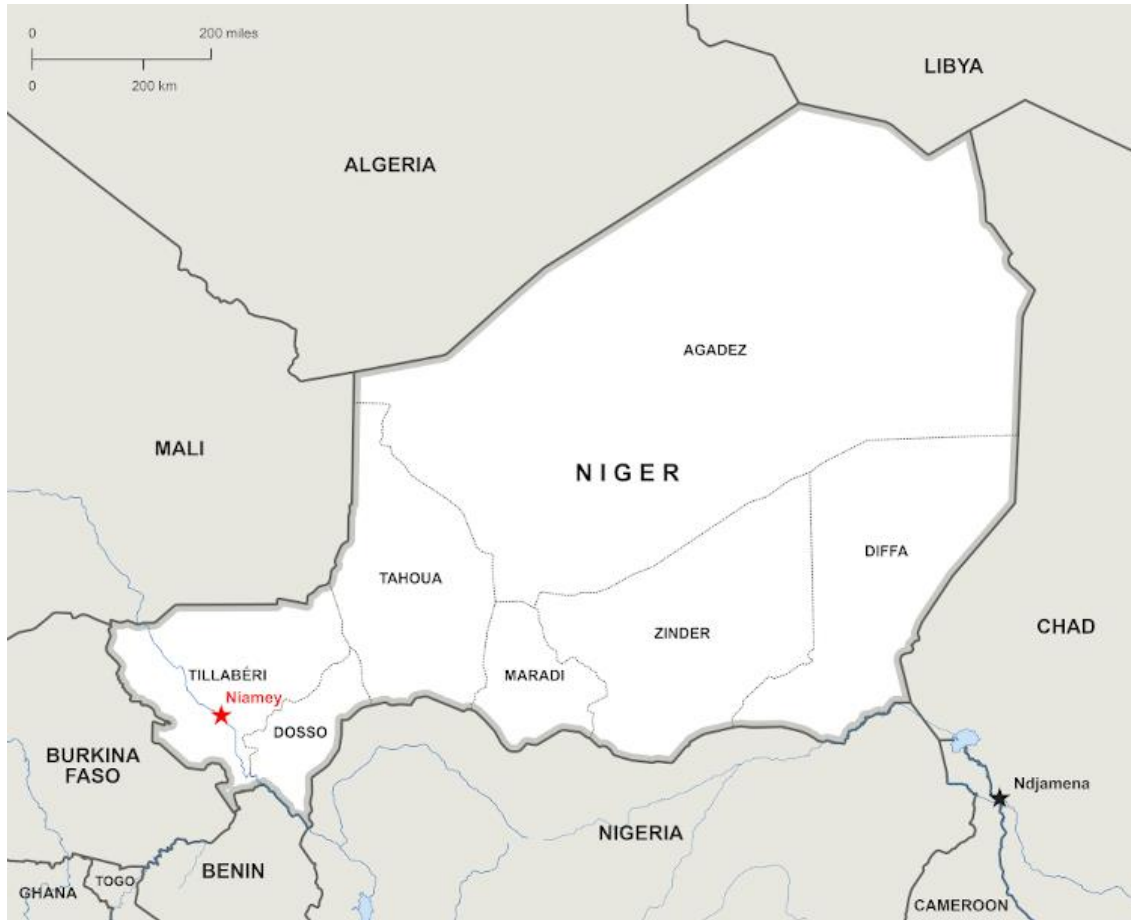
Niger: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	70	27
WWL 2023	70	28
WWL 2022	68	33
WWL 2021	62	54
WWL 2020	60	50

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Christian communities in Niger are confronting intensifying difficulties year by year. Most notably, individuals who convert from Islam to Christianity face hostility from their families, which frequently manifests as threats or forceful measures aimed at making them abandon their newfound beliefs. Moreover, gatherings for Christian weddings, for instance are severely limited in areas dominated by radical Islamic factions. In such volatile regions, any form of communal Christian worship or gathering takes place under an ever-present shadow of potential violence, which often materializes into actual physical attacks. The looming risk of kidnapping further constrains the freedom of movement for Christians across the country.

Registering a church in Niger is a complex and lengthy procedure, further complicating the efforts to legally establish Christian congregations. There have been instances where legal roadblocks have disrupted Christian communities from assembling. In the realm of employment, Christians face palpable discrimination, especially in public sector jobs. Opportunities within local governmental services are few and far between for Christians, and even those who secure such positions often face obstructions to career advancement.

In a disturbing trend, there has been a surge in targeted attacks against public Christian properties. Institutions such as schools, healthcare facilities, and other church-affiliated properties are increasingly becoming focal points for anti-Christian hostilities. Compounding these issues is the broader insecurity plaguing the Sahel area, marked by the rising influence of jihadist groups and criminal organizations.

The situation for Christians in Niger has taken a particularly concerning turn since the July 2023 coup. The sudden political upheaval has deepened fears within the Christian community. It is widely suspected that the Wagner Group, known for its brutal tactics, may establish a presence in Niger following the military regime's call for Western troops to exit the country. This new development has the potential to exacerbate the already perilous situation for Christians.

The coup not only intensified the existing challenges for Christians but also introduced new uncertainties about the future of religious freedom in Niger.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians can be harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians often experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians can face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christian converts lose custody of their children and inheritance rights (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings and to receive licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- *Restricted freedom of movement:* Christians' ability to move freely is severely hindered. This limitation impacts their capacity to engage in routine activities, such as going to work, attending church services, or visiting family and friends.
- *Targeted violence and abductions:* Christians are often the specific targets of violence, which can range from verbal and physical assaults to kidnappings. The intention behind these abductions is usually to spread fear within the Christian community or to extract ransom payments.
- *Destruction of Christian property and buildings:* There is a worrying trend of Christian properties, including homes and businesses, being deliberately targeted for destruction. Moreover, churches and other buildings used by Christians are not spared, with many being vandalized or completely demolished. This not only results in a loss of safe spaces for worship and community but also serves as a stark reminder of the intolerance Christians face.

Specific examples of positive developments

The international community, particularly the USA, has been deeply involved in aiding Niger in efforts to counteract jihadist groups within the country and in the wider region. US Special Forces have been operating in Niger since 2013, bolstering the fight against extremism. On 26 July 2023, NBC reported that the role of the US Special Forces in Niger extends beyond direct combat against Islamic militant groups. In addition to their active engagement in the battlefield, they are also committed to training Nigerien special forces, thereby strengthening the local military capacity to combat insurgent groups.

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 Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx
- Specific examples of positive developments: NBC reported - https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/u-s-troops-training-soldiers-in-niger-to-take-on-islamic-extremist-groups-189263941855

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Niger

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/22 Niger report	AI Niger 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/niger/report-niger/	29 June 2023
BBC News Niger profile - updated 25 April 2023	BBC Niger profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662	29 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Niger Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/NER	29 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Niger - updated 20 June 2023	World Factbook Niger	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/niger/	29 June 2023
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/niger	29 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Niger profile 2023	EIU Niger profile 2023	https://country.eiu.com/niger	29 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Niger	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	29 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Niger not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Niger	https://freedomhouse.org/country/niger/freedom-world/2023	29 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Niger 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 Niger profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/niger/	29 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Niger report	Girls Not Brides Niger	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/niger/	29 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Niger not included	HRW 2023	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023	
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Niger	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ne	29 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Niger	https://rsf.org/en/niger	29 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Niger	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/niger	29 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Niger	UNDP HDR Niger	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/NER	29 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Niger	IRFR 2022 Niger	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/niger/	29 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Niger not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country Niger overview – updated 23 March 2023	World Bank Niger overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger/overview	29 June 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Niger - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Niger	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ner.pdf	29 June 2023
World Bank Niger data 2021	World Bank Niger data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=NER	29 June 2023

Recent history

Niger declared independence from France in 1960. Since then, the country has seen at least four military coups. Despite the improvements since Mahamadou Issoufou came to power in 2011, there have been concerns about the 'securitization' of Niger's foreign policy and domestic politics. The country is battling against various Islamic militant groups: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) on its northern western border with Mali, and ISWAP and Boko Haram on its southern border with Nigeria.

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

There were major domestic political incidents in 2018 that pitted the government against human rights defenders and activists, largely involving the government's use of repressive measures. Arbitrarily detaining a group of human rights defenders for nearly four months after their arrest in March 2018, Nigerien authorities opened the prosecution proceedings against them in an attempt to silence dissenting voices and ban peaceful demonstrations (Business and Human Rights Resource Center, 24 July 2018). A similar case occurred again when activists were arrested while protesting in March 2020 (Amnesty International - AI, 30 September 2020).

Since 2018, there has been a rise in the levels of violence (see below: *Security situation*). Since the beginning of 2021, Niger witnessed an uptick in jihadist violence especially in the 'tri-border' region between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, with an estimated 300 people being killed in attacks in the first three months of 2021. Attacks continued throughout 2022, although there also appears to be great rivalry between ISWAP and Boko Haram (Naija News, 12 January 2023). The government seems to have no effective way of bringing the situation under control.

In February 2021, Niger's political landscape experienced a pivotal moment when the former interior minister, Mohamed Bazoum, secured a victory in the presidential election. Heralded as a crucial democratic transition for a West African nation known for its history of coups, this change ushered in a new era of governance.

Niger's democratic institutions, compared to its neighbors Burkina Faso and Mali, have shown some level of resilience and efficiency. However, given the unstable regional context, this status quo might not be immune to rapid changes. The ongoing fight against terrorism in the country,

along with potential unrest within the armed forces - reminiscent of the situations in Mali and Burkina Faso - have threatened the nation's relative stability.

Despite receiving specialized training from the US Special Forces to enhance its counter-terrorism tactics, Niger still grapples with the overwhelming impact of rampant Islamic militancy within the region. This struggle was starkly highlighted in February 2023, when one of the deadliest attacks in Niger's history occurred. Gunmen with suspected affiliations to extremist groups launched a brutal ambush on a military convoy in the Tillabéri region's Banibangou community. The onslaught claimed the lives of seventeen soldiers and injured thirteen others, bringing an end to months of relative calm in the area.

Amidst these security challenges, the country marked a significant economic milestone in June 2023. The World Bank approved a financial package of approximately 230 million dollars to help the country improve its education system overall.

However, the nation's political fabric faced a significant stress test on 26 July 2023. In an apparent coup, presidential guards detained the president, sparking international outrage. The United Nations, the USA, the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States unequivocally condemned this action (Al-Jazeera, 27 July 2023). Underscoring the importance of political stability in Niger, the EIU Niger profile 2023 states:

- "The presidential guard announced on July 27th that Niger's president, Mohamed Bazoum, had been deposed. The army swiftly lent its backing to the coup. EIU expects a military regime to rule Niger throughout the 2023-24 forecast period. Relations with France will deteriorate, and French troops could be asked to leave the country. This would leave Niger, along with Mali and Burkina Faso, relying on the Russian mercenary outfit, the Wagner group, to battle against jihadi insurgents. However, France's role is is pivotal given that French security forces guard the Orano-owned uranium mines in the north. Great uncertainty reigns at the moment".

Political and legal landscape

Prior to the July 2023 coup, politics in Niger took place within the framework of a semi-presidential representative democratic republic, with the President of Niger as head of state and the Prime Minister as head of government, which was established as a multi-party system. Legislative power was vested in both the government and the National Assembly.

Politics, tribe and militancy have always been intertwined in Niger's political landscape. From 2011 to 2023 there had been an improvement in civil liberties and political rights. The turning-point occurred in 2009-2010 when the president in office, Tandja, announced his intention to alter the Constitution of Niger's Fifth Republic via a referendum, which included extending his presidential term by three years. The main opposition groups opposed and boycotted the referendum. Then, in February 2010, amid pressure from the international community, the army overthrew the government in a coup. In the autumn of 2010, a new Constitution was passed through a national referendum and on 31 January 2011 Mahamadou Issoufou of the Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) won the presidential election against former Prime Minister Seyni Oumarou (National Movement for a Developing Society - MNSD - Nassara). President

Issoufou's new government assumed power in April 2011. Since then (up until July 2023), political and civil groups were able to assemble peacefully, the situation for journalists and the freedom of the press improved, and Niger was on the way to forming a multi-party democracy.

This political development was also of major importance to Christians in the country, especially since the region was otherwise very much influenced by Boko Haram and AQIM activity. However, the 2016 elections did not advance the consolidation of democratic rule and corruption remains endemic. Despite these setbacks, the electoral outcome was accepted by all political parties. General elections were held again in Niger on 27 December 2020 to elect the President and National Assembly. As no presidential candidate received a majority of the vote, a second round was held on 21 February 2021. Mohamed Bazoum was declared the winner in the second round with 55.67% of the vote. He was the former Interior Minister and the preferred successor and right-hand man of outgoing President Mahamadou Issoufou (Al-Jazeera, 22 March 2021). He assumed office on 2 April 2021, marking the the country's first peaceful transition of power between two democratically elected heads of state. However, protests were staged by opposition groups following the election and more than 400 people were arrested.

As mentioned above (in: *Recent history*), on 26 July 2023, Niger's political stability was put to the test when presidential guards detained the nation's president. This action prompted a broad spectrum of condemnation from the international community, with key organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) speaking out against the action disrupting the country's governance. Such military interventions have become an increasingly familiar phenomenon in West Africa (WWR, September 2023), and Niger's history is no stranger to the occurrence of coups over the decades (Al-Jazeera, 27 July 2023).

Gender perspective

The legal landscape in Niger remains discriminatory towards women and girls, particularly in respect to marriage (CEDAW, 2015). Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 76% of girls married before 18 (Girls Not Brides Niger). Whilst the legal age for marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys, underage marriage can occur with parental consent. The government has introduced campaigns to end child marriage, although progress remains slow (Girls Not Brides Niger). Legislation is further insufficient in regards to protecting against domestic violence and marital rape; many victims choose not to report crimes for fear of stigma and retaliation. Making it challenging for women to escape abusive marriages, divorce and custody laws also favor men.

Religious landscape

Niger: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	66,600	0.2
Muslim	26,096,000	96.4
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	873,000	3.2
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	9,400	0.0
Atheist	190	0.0
Agnostic	14,500	0.1
Other	5,600	0.0
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

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

Niger is a Muslim majority nation. As can be seen from the WCD 2023 figures in the table above, an estimated 96.1% of the country's population follows Islam. Most Muslims in Niger are members of either the Tijaniya or Qadiriya Sufi orders, although radical Islamic elements seek to disassociate the population from Sufism and encourage Salafism. Additionally, there are smaller Islamic groups in Niger, including the Kalikato, who have a belief system like Boko Haram in rejecting all influences from the West. Indeed, the influence of Boko Haram seems to be spreading from northern Nigeria into Niger.

The propagation of more radical Islamic ideologies in Niger is advancing in tandem with the rise of aggressive jihadism, signifying a deeply concerning trend. Not only are these ideologies driving violent actions, but they are also being spread through non-violent means. Such methods include the use of religious institutions like madrassas and other platforms for indoctrination, thereby amplifying their reach and impact across various levels of society.

Despite the government's attempts to control what is taught in the many madrassas in the country, there is concern that these could be playing a role in the radicalization of the youth. Any such radicalization is likely to make life more difficult for Christians in the country, especially as the whole Sahel region is already under serious jihadist threat.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Niger):

- "There are several hundred Baha'i, who reside primarily in Niamey and in communities west of the Niger River."

- "A small percentage of the population adheres primarily to Indigenous religious beliefs. Some Muslims intermingle animist practices with their practice of Islam, although observers note this has become less common over the past decade due to the influence of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Kuwait."
- "The government prohibits open air, public proselytization events by all religious groups due to national security concerns. There is no legal restriction on private, peaceful proselytization or conversion of an individual from one religious faith to another as long as the group sponsoring the conversion is registered with the government."

Economic landscape

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

60% of Niger's economy comes from international aid and for the foreseeable future, this is likely to continue, especially because the international community fears that if Niger's economy fails, it will allow Islamic militants to exploit the situation and become more powerful. The influx of refugees from Mali and Nigeria - as well as a growing number of IDPs - are another challenge to the nation.

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Niger:

- *Economic growth:* In 2023, real GDP growth in Niger is projected to align with its potential, registering at 6.9 percent, or 3 percent per capita. This growth is expected to surge even more significantly in 2024, reaching 12.5 percent. This economic acceleration will be largely driven by the commencement of large-scale oil production and exports, sustained support from donors, and an economic reform program aimed at enhancing overall productivity and fortifying economic governance. Key elements of this reform include strategically investing the proceeds from the petroleum sector and harnessing a consistent flow of international aid to improve access to basic services, infrastructure, and financial inclusion. These initiatives are expected to elevate Niger's GDP per capita to a level 15 percent higher than what was recorded in 2021.
- *Inflation:* In an effort to combat inflation throughout the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) countries, the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) has implemented a series of measures. These include an increase in policy interest rates by a cumulative 75 basis points in 2022, which brought the rates to 2.75 percent for liquidity calls and 4.75 percent for the marginal lending facility. Inflation is expected to reduce to 3.2 percent in 2023, further dipping to 2.8 percent in 2024 as food inflation moderates. However, inflation rates are predicted to rise slightly in 2025, driven by the additional de-

mand triggered by increased oil revenues. However, as foreign exchange reserves have dipped and inflation continues to exceed the target range of 1-3 percent, the BCEAO will likely need to maintain a course of monetary tightening into 2023. This strategy aligns with the actions of other major central banks worldwide, as they navigate similar economic challenges.

- *Poverty:* The extreme poverty rate in Niger, defined as living on less than $2.15 per capita per day (in Purchasing Power Parity terms), is anticipated to have decreased from 53.3 percent in 2021 to 46.9 percent in 2022. This expected decline is attributed to the recovery of growth, notably in the agricultural sector. However, the number of people living in extreme poverty is still projected to be substantial, at around 12.3 million in 2022, with considerable regional disparities. The country's struggle with high food inflation, compounded by insecurity, has disrupted livelihoods and market dynamics in certain regions, including Tillabéry, Diffa, Tahoua, and Maradi. This disruption has had a negative impact on household food security. The precarious situation was further worsened by climatic challenges such as flooding and dry spells, as well as limited access to agricultural inputs. These issues are expected to have affected around 15 percent of farming villages, resulting in declines in their agricultural production.

According to the World Bank Niger overview:

- Niger's economy is characteristically undiversified, with agriculture contributing to 40% of the nation's GDP. As of 2021, over 10 million individuals, representing 41.8% of the population, were living in conditions of extreme poverty.
- The country is also wrestling with the humanitarian challenge of refugees fleeing conflicts in neighboring Nigeria and Mali. By August 31, 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had registered 294,467 refugees and nearly 350,000 internally displaced persons in Niger.
- Security concerns continue to plague Niger, particularly in the regions bordering Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali. These regions are frequent targets of armed groups, launching repeated assaults against both security forces and civilians. As a response to the escalating violence, a state of emergency has been declared in the Diffa, Tahoua, and Tillaberi regions.
- Despite the significant challenges, Niger's economy has shown some resilience. After registering a modest 1.4% GDP growth in 2021, estimates for 2022 show an impressive rebound to 11.5%. This surge has been largely driven by a 27% increase in agricultural production, attributed to an above-average rainy season and an expansion of irrigated farming. These agricultural gains have effectively offset declines in mining and manufacturing. Additionally, the services sector has enjoyed growth due to an expansionary fiscal policy and the construction of an oil pipeline, which has invigorated market services and transportation.

According to Heritage Foundation's 2023 Index of Economic Freedom:

- With an Economic Freedom score of 53.7, Niger occupies the 126th spot in terms of the freest economies as per the 2023 Index, a 1.2 point drop from the previous year. In the context of the Sub-Saharan Africa region, Niger is placed 23rd out of 47 countries. Its overall score trails the global average, yet it surpasses the regional average.

- The journey towards increased economic freedom in Niger has been uneven and slow-paced. Persistent institutional deficiencies continue to thwart macroeconomic stability and efforts aimed at poverty reduction. Particularly, the rule of law, a cornerstone of economic freedom, remains compromised due to prevalent corruption and a flawed judicial system that is vulnerable to political meddling.

Gender perspective

Women and girls are among the most economically disadvantaged, in part due to reduced access to education and employment (UNDP Human Development Report Niger). Niger is one of just three countries worldwide where married women require permission from their husband to open a bank account (Georgetown Women Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p.34). Making it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence, women cannot inherit land under customary law, and under Islamic law women inherit less than men.

Social and cultural landscape

According to UNDP HDR Niger and World Factbook Niger:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hausa 53.1%, Zarma/Songhai 21.2 %, Tuareg 11%, Fulani (Peuhl) 6.5%, Kanuri 5.9%, Gurma 0.8%, Arab 0.4%, Tubu 0.4%, Other/unavailable 0.9% (2006 est.)
- **Main languages:** French (official), Hausa, Djerma
- **Median age:** 15.2 years
- **Urban population:** 16.5%
- **Expected years of schooling:** 6.5 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 30.6%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 71.7%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 0.5%
- **Unemployment, youth (15-24 years of age):** 0.6%

According to UNHCR Niger Operational Update July 2023:

- **Refugees/IDPs:** Since the inception of the resettlement program in November 2017, Niger has facilitated the relocation of 5,487 refugees to third countries. This includes individuals evacuated from Libya through the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) and refugees registered under Niger's national asylum system. Niger, despite the ongoing conflicts in the Sahel region, remains a safe haven for approximately 302,137 refugees and asylum-seekers from various countries and over 358,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). World Refugee Day was celebrated nationwide on 20 June 2023, with numerous activities promoting the theme 'Hope away from home'. Inclusive of the Niger authorities, UNHCR partners, refugees, and host communities, the celebration marked a gesture of solidarity. Niger also participated in the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2023.

According to the UNDP HDR Niger:

- **Human Development Index:** Niger is ranked 189th out of 191 countries with a value of 0.4, only above South Sudan and Chad from Africa.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 63.62 years

- *Gender Development Index (GDI):* 0.724
- *Gender Inequality Index (GII):* 0.642 (this indicates a high level of gender inequality. The GII is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market).

Although the country's official language is French, each tribe and ethnic group has its own language and culture. Eight of the nine presidents since independence in 1960 have been of Hausa or Zarma descent. These two tribes dominate the country and therefore it should not be surprising that Tuaregs have engaged in two major rebellions since the 1990s and early 2000s and that the Songhai tribes were the main targets for recruiting by the radical Islamic group MUJWA. MUJWA, for example, used Songhai traditional symbolism in its recruiting videos. Niger's most fertile areas are also in the Zarma region south of Niamey, and therefore the Zarmas are the wealthiest tribe in the country. The Hausas are descended from the Hausa states that formerly occupied the region in the jihads of the 19th century, so they have a tradition of being in power. The Tuaregs of northern Niger live in the most arid region of the country and are the poorest of the major tribes.

Gender perspective

While education is not guaranteed in any part of the country, the levels are particularly low in the Tuareg region, especially for women. These low education levels reflect social norms and gender stereotypes that restrict women to the roles of wives and mothers (CEDAW, 2015). The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated gender-based vulnerabilities, hampering campaigns against child marriage (UNICEF, 30 April 2021) and providing the context for domestic violence levels to soar (USDG, 27 May 2021). Child marriage remains a widespread issue, with parents viewing it as a protective mechanism for daughters against potential predators in a context of poverty, conflict and widespread sexual violence against girls (Girls Not Brides Niger).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Niger):

- *Internet usage:* 13.1% of the population – survey date: December 2021
- *Facebook usage:* 33.9% penetration rate – survey date: January 2022

According to Data Reportal 2023 report (early 2023):

- There were 5.98 million internet users in Niger at the start of 2023, when internet penetration stood at 22.4 percent.
- Niger was home to 467.9 thousand social media users in January 2023, equating to 1.8 percent of the total population.
- A total of 14.59 million cellular mobile connections were active in Niger in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 54.7 percent of the total population.

According to World Bank Niger data:

- *Mobile phone (subscriptions per 100 people):* 40.6

A 2015 report by the GSMA indicated a 45% gender gap in mobile phone ownership ([GSMA, 2015, p.14](#)). More recent statistics on social media usage indicate that this gender gap has not closed: 80.2% of Facebook users were men and only 19.8% women, according to [Napoleon Cat, July 2023](#).

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (publication date: July 2023):

- "Niger, a vast yet impoverished country in West Africa, is slowly enhancing its connectivity to previously underserved regions. Due to the nation's limited fixed telecoms infrastructure, mobile services have seen a surge, though the country's mobile penetration remains relatively low compared to its neighbors. Fixed broadband penetration is almost non-existent."
- "The completion of the Trans-Saharan Dorsal optical fiber (SDR) network, backed by international investment, has bolstered Niger's fiber infrastructure reach and improved its international capacity. The new cables linking Niger with Chad and Burkina Faso have further boosted the nation's connection to international cable infrastructure."
- "Additionally, the World Bank has provided $100 million to support Niger's digital progress, and the country has adopted free mobile roaming with other G5 Sahel nations."

Niger is one of the poorest nations in the world. Its technological infrastructure is poor. Road, schools, and hospitals lack facilities. Christians are concentrated in the main cities and as a result, they are better served with technology compared to those living in rural areas.

Security situation

Security conditions have deteriorated in recent years, particularly in the areas bordering Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali, where armed groups have established bases and carry out repeated attacks against the security forces and civilians. In 2017, the government declared a [state of emergency](#) in the Diffa, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions (UNHCR Factsheet, June-July 2021).

The attacks by Boko Haram, ISWAP and other radical Islamic groups continue to cause fear among the Christian community. There is a likelihood that the violence of militant Islamic groups from northern Nigeria (as well as from Mali) could in the long run seriously affect society throughout Niger. A major challenge remains the fight against Islamic militancy in the Diffa region. Military confrontation between government troops and Boko Haram has caused a large number of IDPs and a humanitarian disaster. Many Christians who have escaped the conflict are living in IDP camps in Bosso, Yebbi, Maiduguri and Yola. There is also ongoing community violence. Since 2018, there has been an overall rise in the level of violence.

Between January and 30 June 2023, the country witnessed a staggering 77 'terrorist attacks', contributing to an atmosphere of heightened tension and insecurity, as a report published by [ECOWAS](#) in July 2023 indicates (Al-Jazeera, 26 July 2023). One such incident of escalating tension occurred in February 2023 when a government convoy was ambushed by jihadists, leading to the death of numerous soldiers.

According to [Vision of Humanity, Global Terrorism Index 2023](#), p.66:

- " ... deaths have rapidly intensified in the tri-border regions of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (also known as Liptako-Gourma), driven by the growth of IS affiliates and JNIM. Between 2012 and 2022 Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger became the epicenter of Sahelian terrorism."

According to [Vision of Humanity, Global Terrorism Index 2022](#) (accessed 31 January 2023):

- "Niger had the largest increase in deaths from terrorism, with deaths more than doubling over the past year [2021]. This is the highest terrorism death toll in the country since 2007. Although the majority of deaths were attributed either to unknown groups or to unspecified Muslim extremists, it is suspected that these attacks could be the work of either Islamic State in West Africa [ISWAP] or Boko Haram who were active in the country in 2021".
- "The rise in terrorist activity in Niger is part of a larger increase across the Sahel region, with similar surges seen in Mali and Burkina Faso over the past few years. One possible reason for the rise in violence in Niger is that Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad (JAS) and ISWAP appear to operate in those areas, whereas Ansaru seem to operate in Kaduna State, Nigeria."

Gender perspective

The lack of security in the country has affected the Christian community significantly. Since Islamic militants target Christians as well as the state authorities, Christians have to be careful to keep a low profile. Male and female Christians face different risks against this backdrop of instability and violence. Women and girls are vulnerable to abduction and sexual violence from radical Islamic groups, whereas boys are more prone to being recruited into the ranks of militant groups.

Trends analysis

1) The presence of violent Islamic militants remains a constant threat

Over the past years, the Sahel region has seen a huge increase in attacks by radical Islamic groups and the government of Niger has lost a lot of territory to them. Taking this territory back is likely to take a significant length of time. Simply put, the presence of Boko Haram, ISWAP and AQIM has become a constant threat both to the state authorities and to Christians in the country and region. As in Burkina Faso and Mali, it is very likely that jihadist groups will keep expanding and destabilizing the country. The July 2023 coup can be seen in this context, as can the two coups in Mali in less than one year (2020-2021). Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Libya, and Mali are all under serious threat from the ever expanding jihadist influence. From January to 30 June 2023, Niger experienced a significant surge in violence with at least 77 'terrorist attacks' taking place, as reported by ECOWAS. These attacks led to numerous fatalities, widespread destruction, and displacement of civilians. The threat extends beyond national borders, stressing the need for a regional resolution.

2) Niger joins the list of countries with a coup trend

Niger has recently become part of the list of countries experiencing a trend of coups. Once known for receiving strong international military aid to secure its borders, the landscape shifted after the July 2023 coup, thrusting Niger into a new dimension of geopolitical struggle. In the aftermath of the coup, divergent stances emerged from global powers and neighboring countries. While the USA and several African nations issued ultimatums for the release of the president, held under house arrest, Russia and neighboring countries, including Burkina Faso, Mali, and others with close ties to Russia and the Wagner group, supported the coup.

3) Society has become radicalized

Analysis of the WWL 2024 reporting period indicates a concerning trend towards the potential amplification of *Islamic oppression*, primarily fueled by the radicalization efforts of jihadists and the support they receive from certain imams espousing their extremist ideology. Due in large part to the influence that jihadist factions and their affiliated imams wield, this radicalization has resulted in an increasingly ultra-conservative social landscape. This shift often translates into stringent adherence to interpretations of sharia, leading to the imposition of repressive norms that curtail individual freedoms and rights, particularly for minority groups, dissenters, and those not aligned with radical Islamic beliefs.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: prosecution - https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/niger-release-of-activists-must-signal-end-to-repression-of-dissenting-voices/
- Recent history: arrested - https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/niger-charges-must-be-dropped-following-release-of-three-activists/
- Recent history: rivalry between ISWAP and Boko Haram - https://www.naijanews.com/2023/01/12/10-iswap-fighters-surrender-after-boko-haram-attacks-in-niger-republic/
- Recent history: In February 2021 - https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56175439
- Recent history: February 2023, - https://issafrica.org/iss-today/is-nigers-counter-terrorism-approach-an-exception-in-the-sahel
- Recent history: The World Bank - https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/06/23/the-world-bank-approves-funding-to-help-niger-improve-its-education-system
- Recent history: condemned - https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230726-african-union-ecowas-condemn-attempted-coup-in-niger
- Political and legal landscape: Mohamed Bazoum was declared the winner - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/22/nigers-top-court-confirms-mohamed-bazoums-election-win
- Political and legal landscape: an increasingly familiar phenomenon - https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/reports/africa-recent-upsurge-in-military-coups
- Political and legal landscape: coups over the decades - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/27/timeline-a-history-of-coups-in-niger
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2015 - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&amp;Lang=en
- Economic landscape: 2023 Index of Economic Freedom: - https://www.heritage.org/index/country/niger#:~:text=Niger's%20economic%20freedom%20score%20is,but%20above%20the%20regional%20average.
- Economic landscape: Women Peace and Security Index 2019/20 - https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Niger Operational Update July 2023 - https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/2690

- Social and cultural landscape: CEDAW, 2015 - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&amp;Lang=en
- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF, 30 April 2021 - https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/covid-19-threat-progress-against-child-marriage-niger
- Social and cultural landscape: USDG, 27 May 2021 - https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/violence-and-control-lockdown-more-support-needed-women-and-girls-niger
- Technological landscape: Data Reportal   - https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-niger#:~:text=Data%20shows%20that%20Niger's%252https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-niger#:~:text=Data%20shows%20that%20Niger's%20population,percent%20lived%20in%20rural%20areas.0population,percent%20lived%20in%20rural%20areas.
- Technological landscape: GSMA, 2015, p.14 - https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat, July 2023 - https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-niger/2023/07/
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research   - https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Niger-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses
- Security situation: state of emergency - file:///C:/Users/davidat/Downloads/UNHCR%20Niger%20-%20Factsheet%20Sahel%20%20June_%20July%202021.pdf
- Security situation: ECOWAS - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/26/over-1800-terrorist-attacks-in-west-africa-in-2023-ecowas
- Security situation: Vision of Humanity, Global Terrorism Index 2023 - https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-170423.pdf
- Security situation: Vision of Humanity, Global Terrorism Index 2022 - https://www.visionofhumanity.org/sahel-emerges-as-the-new-epicentre-of-terrorism/

WWL 2024: Church information / Niger

Christian origins

Although there were [missionary expeditions](#) along the Niger River in the 19th century, Christianity did not become established in the country until the 20th century. The Sudan Interior Mission started working in Niger in 1923 and the Evangelical Baptist Mission in 1929. The Roman Catholic Church came to Niger in 1931 from its main mission base in Dahomey (now Benin) and has since set up two dioceses. (Source: *Dike K O: Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891, Anglican History, 1962*)

Church spectrum today

Niger: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	21,600	32.4
Protestant	23,000	34.5
Independent	21,700	32.6
Unaffiliated	300	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	**66,600**	**100.0**
(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)		
Evangelical movement	20,600	30.9
Renewalist movement	22,600	33.9

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

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

Many of the older Protestant and Catholic churches were established by American mission groups. They can be found in all seven departments of Niger: Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillaberi, Zinder and Niamey (the capital). Several independent, non-denominational churches originating from Nigeria exist - especially in the capital Niamey and in the departments of Maradi and Zinder. Outside of the bigger cities and in areas closer to the southern border of the country, Christians with a Muslim background are treated as outcasts by the local communities and at times face violent attacks.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The areas outside the main cities, especially outside the capital city, are the main areas where Christians experience persecution. Taking advantage of the COVID-19 crisis, Islamic militants were able to expand their areas of influence, which has put more Christians under pressure, particularly in the western areas of the country.

Christian communities and how they are affected

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

Historical Christian communities: Both older Protestant and Catholic churches belong to this category. They suffer from the growing Islamic militancy in Niger and, in the past few years, there have been attacks by armed groups such as Boko Haram in the departments of Diffa, near the border to Nigeria. Pastors and church leaders from such villages have been forced to flee to larger cities fearing for their safety. Such incidents have also been observed in the department of Tillabéri. Many historical Christian communities in areas close to Nigeria live under fear of violent attack.

Converts to Christianity: In some cases, the pressure on converts from Islam is particularly pronounced, especially in the *Private*, *Family* and *Community spheres of life* (see below). Parents and relatives may oppose a family member's conversion to Christianity more than the government. Radical Islamic imams and teachers influence ordinary Muslim people to attack and chase converts away - and any Christians found ministering to converts.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are present in Niger and face pressure. This category faces more or less the same kind of pressure as historical Christian communities and - in comparison to converts from Islam to Christianity - are less vulnerable to societal pressure.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: missionary expeditions - http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike_origins1957.html

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Niger

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Niger: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	70	27
WWL 2023	70	28
WWL 2022	68	33
WWL 2021	62	54
WWL 2020	60	50

Niger's rounded overall score remained unchanged, although there was a small rise of 0.6 points. Pressure rose very slightly in the *Family sphere of life;* the violence score, already extremely high, also rose from 15.4 points in WWL 2023 to 15.9 points. In a disturbing trend, there has been a surge in targeted attacks against Christian institutions such as schools, healthcare facilities and other properties. Compounding these issues is the broader insecurity plaguing the Sahel area, marked by the rising influence of jihadist groups and criminal organizations, with at least 100 churches being attacked. The volatile nature of the Sahel region has significantly affected Niger. Moreover, the coup conducted in July 2023 sent shockwaves across the area, positioning Niger at the epicenter of the geopolitical struggle unfolding in the region.

Persecution engines

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

Niger: Persecution engines (contd.)	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

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

In Niger, the vast majority of the population, 96.1% according to 2023 WCD statistics, identifies as Muslim. This religious affiliation is deeply intertwined with their national identity - to be a Nigerien is seen as synonymous with being a Muslim. As such, conversion to other faiths, notably Christianity, is often met with hostility from family and local communities, being seen as a form of betrayal.

The country's traditional secular governance, which keeps state affairs separate from religious matters, is facing increasing pressure. Islamic groups like the Izala, a radical faction originating from Northern Nigeria, and the Tariqa, a Sufi path towards Allah, are becoming increasingly active in parts of Niger, including Maradi and Niamey. Both groups exert significant pressure on religious minorities and Muslims who they perceive as deviating from Islam.

Niger has historically fostered harmonious relationships between its dominant Muslim population and smaller faith minorities. However, the country's ongoing conflict with Boko Haram and other militant groups has aggravated local intercommunal tensions and posed a significant threat to the security and freedom of Christians in Niger.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Niger's ex-President, Issoufou, prioritized combating corruption within his government, leading to the implementation of anti-corruption laws targeting government officials, their families, and political parties alike. Similarly, legal measures have been introduced to counteract conflict of interest issues in contract awarding, and bribery of public officials by private entities is now officially prohibited.

However, corruption continues to be a significant problem within the judiciary, with a lack of prosecutions contributing to a culture of impunity among office-holders who engage in illicit activities. The public exposure of these practices has yet to lead to substantial legal action. This situation negatively impacts society, including the Christian population.

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the successful operation of jihadist groups in the region is facilitated by the presence of organized crime networks. In this turbulent environment, the Church faces additional vulnerability: The influence of jihadist groups and organized crime networks can lead to targeted attacks against Christian communities, places of worship and individuals, infringing upon their rights to religious freedom.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

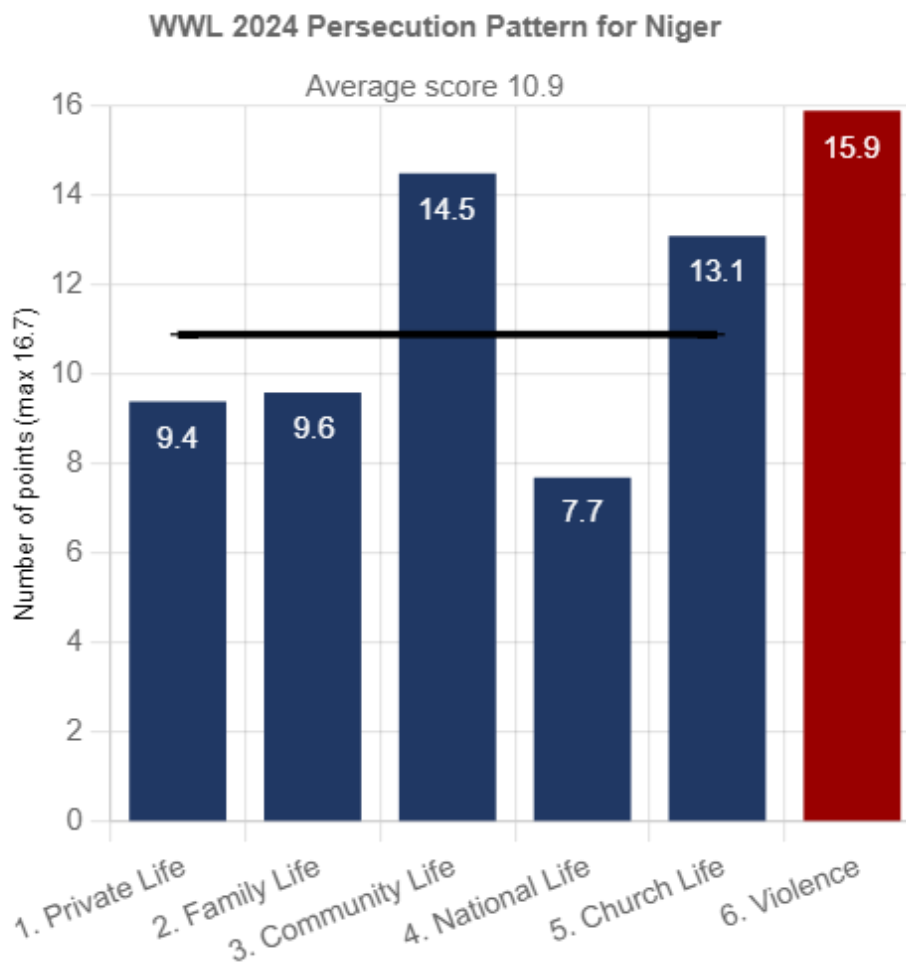**Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression**

- *Violent religious groups (Very strong):* This is probably the strongest driver in the country. Radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP and al-Qaeda-affiliated militants have attacked Western-aligned institutions and tourists, soldiers and peacekeepers. They kill Christians and attack churches and Christian schools.
- *Organized crime networks (Strong):* There is a strong link between criminal and violent religious groups in the Sahel region. This driver plays a vital role in financing the operations of the jihadists and in making the environment easy for them to operate in.
- *Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong) and ethnic group leaders (Strong):* Non-Christian religious leaders such as Islamists and violent militant leaders of Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa have all combined to threaten, intimidate and persecute Christians in Niger. The Wahhabis, a radical branch of Islam originating from Saudi Arabia, are regularly preaching opposition to Christianity in public and via mass media (radio and television). Also, leaders among such groups as the Fulani are trying to enhance the ancient Islamic pedigree of their ethnic group by cleansing their communities of Christians. At Tunga, in Dosso State, no Christian presence is tolerated by the religious and tribal leaders who have enormous influence in these areas.
- *Extended family (Strong) and ordinary citizens (Strong):* Extended family members in the community oppose converts to Christianity, often violently.

- *Government officials (Medium):* Many of Niger's government officials are Muslim and some would like to pursue policies and agendas that are discriminatory against Christians and would exclude them from public life. President Issoufou promised to counter the expansion of radical Islamic teaching promoting violence in his February 2016 re-election campaign but no concrete measures were ever delivered. In some places, government officials are also subscribers to jihadist ideology.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- *Organized crime networks (Strong):* Various criminal organizations are operating in the country. Lawlessness and criminal activities are common in the vast uninhabited areas of the country. Some criminal organizations are operating in cooperation with militant groups and persecute Christians.
- *Violent religious groups (Strong):* Radical Islamic groups in the country earn money through drug trafficking and kidnapping to purchase weapons. Thus, violent religious groups in Niger are also drivers of organized crime and corruption.
- *Government officials (Medium):* Corruption continues to be a problem in the judiciary and impunity is a serious challenge facing the country.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Niger

Average score 10.9

Number of points (max 16.7)

9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9

1. Private Life 2. Family Life 3. Community Life 4. National Life 5. Church Life 6. Violence

The WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Niger shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Niger is high at 10.9, increasing from 10.8 points in WWL 2023.
- The *Community sphere* score is highest at 14.5 points, followed by the *Church sphere* score 13.1 points (both similar to WWL 2023 scores). This reflects how Christians in Islamic communities are facing serious difficulties living according to their faith and values, and how church activities in the country are restricted due to the presence of Islamic militants.
- The score for violence is 15.9 points, increasing from 15.4 points in WWL 2023. The presence of jihadists in the country would seem to be growing rapidly.

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. (2.50 points)

Conversion from Islam is often opposed and punished, particularly due to the increasing influence of jihadist groups advocating a strict interpretation of Sharia law. This climate of fear and intimidation has got worse since the military coup in July 2023. The tumultuous political environment has further empowered extremist groups, increasing the pressure and threats against anyone contemplating conversion.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.50 points)

Private acts of Christian worship, such as prayer and Bible reading, have become increasingly risky for converts due to the influence of jihadist groups advocating a strict interpretation of Sharia law.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.50 points)

The possession of Christian materials has become increasingly dangerous for converts, particularly in areas where society has become radicalized through the influence of jihadist groups.

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.). (2.50 points)

Revealing one's Christian faith on social media platforms like Facebook has become increasingly risky for converts due to the growing radicalization in society.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (2.75 points)

While there are no specific laws requiring the automatic registration of babies and children of Christians under the state or majority religion, there have been instances where this practice occurs, creating difficulties in the issuance of vital documents. The lack of clear legal provisions contribute to challenges faced by Christians in ensuring accurate registration for their children, impacting their ability to obtain essential documents.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (2.50 points)

Celebrating Christian weddings has become a high-risk activity, particularly outside the capital city, and can provoke a hostile reaction. The inability to celebrate Christian weddings freely is part of a larger challenge, including the risk associated with displaying Christian imagery, worshiping in public, and even using Christian names.

Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.50 points)

Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of children in divorce cases. Legal and cultural systems are biased against Christians, particularly in matters of family law, where religious affiliations can be pivotal.

Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (2.50 points)

It is not uncommon for Christians to lose inheritance rights due to their conversion from Islam to Christianity. Such loss would be a natural extension of the broader socio-political challenges they face, including clan-based discrimination and the influence of jihadist groups, which extend their influence into personal and familial legal matters.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)

Christians have been harassed, threatened, and obstructed in their daily lives for non-compliance with Islamic culture. This pattern of harassment is part of a broader issue that includes being excluded from public services and community resources, thereby affecting their social and economic well-being.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.75 points)

There is a high potential for boys - including Christians - to be abducted and forced to join the ranks of militant groups. Women and girls in Niger - including Christians - are also vulnerable to abduction, rape and sexual abuse by extremist groups. Country experts also shared:

- "Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical cleric as a corrective measure".
- "There were numerous reports of abduction or kidnap of priests and other religious leaders, especially in the Tillaberi and Diffa regions".

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)

Christians have been subjected to various forms of monitoring in their local communities. This surveillance includes reporting to the police, being shadowed, and having their communications, such as telephone lines and emails, monitored or censored. It is part of a larger scheme of intimidation and social control, heightened by the increasing influence of jihadist groups and organized crime.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)

Converts to Christianity have been put under pressure to renounce their faith by family members and local communities, since leaving Islam is regarded as an act of betrayal.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Jihadist operations severely limit Christian mobility. These limitations on travel are part and parcel of a broader context in which the small Christian community faces particular vulnerability.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)

In areas under radical Islamic influence in particular, the Christian community often finds itself marginalized. Interaction with authorities often involves discriminatory practices that affect their ability to secure equal treatment under the law and to access essential public services.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (2.50 points)

As of July 2023, the complex geopolitical and internal dynamics have contributed to an environment in which Christians find themselves increasingly marginalized. The current military regime and the rise in jihadist activities have created a hostile atmosphere where Christians are

vulnerable and often discouraged from public expression of their faith and opinions.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (2.50 points)

Christian communities have not only been marginalized but have also become targets of derogatory narratives, particularly where society has become radicalized.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

The activities of Christian churches and related organizations have been significantly monitored, hindered, and obstructed, particularly in the context of rising jihadist influence and ongoing political instability. The operations of many churches have been curtailed, with church buildings being either destroyed or forcibly closed, severely limiting the movement and function of church leaders and placing congregants at high risk during religious gatherings. This multi-faceted persecution extends to Christian-affiliated schools and healthcare centers, many of which have been closed, looted, or destroyed as part of a deliberate strategy by extremist factions.

Block 5.4: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities inside their place of worship. (3.75 points)

Amid a politically volatile environment and the rise of jihadist activity, churches have targets of extremist violence. At times, this has left Christian communities without a communal space for worship, and even when spaces are available, assembling for worship or other Christian activities is a high-risk endeavor due to the constant threat of violence.

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

The growing influence of jihadist groups and an unstable political climate have made any form of public Christian activity very risky. Church leaders face significant restrictions on their movement and ability to provide spiritual guidance, making it nearly impossible to conduct services or distribute religious materials safely outside church premises. The hindrance to organizing activities outside of church buildings is part and parcel of a situation in which Christian-run schools and health centers are also being targeted. Many of these institutions have been forcibly closed, looted, or destroyed, causing teachers and healthcare providers to abandon their roles and thereby leaving Christian communities increasingly vulnerable.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)

Christian preaching, teaching, and published materials encounter close monitoring in the face of the complex challenges Christians navigate in the country. This form of surveillance is part of a broader strategy by extremist groups to restrict and even eradicate the Christian presence.

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

2. ***Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons***

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

3. ***The use of symbolic numbers***

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

| Niger: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10 *	10 *
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	30 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	2	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	5
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	11	20 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10 *

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

| Niger: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.9
2023	10.8
2022	10.5
2021	10.2
2020	10.1

The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has been slowly increasing every WWL reporting period, from 10.1 points in WWL 2020 to 10.9 points in WWL: 2024. This rise signifies a notable deterioration in the situation for Christians in the country.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life
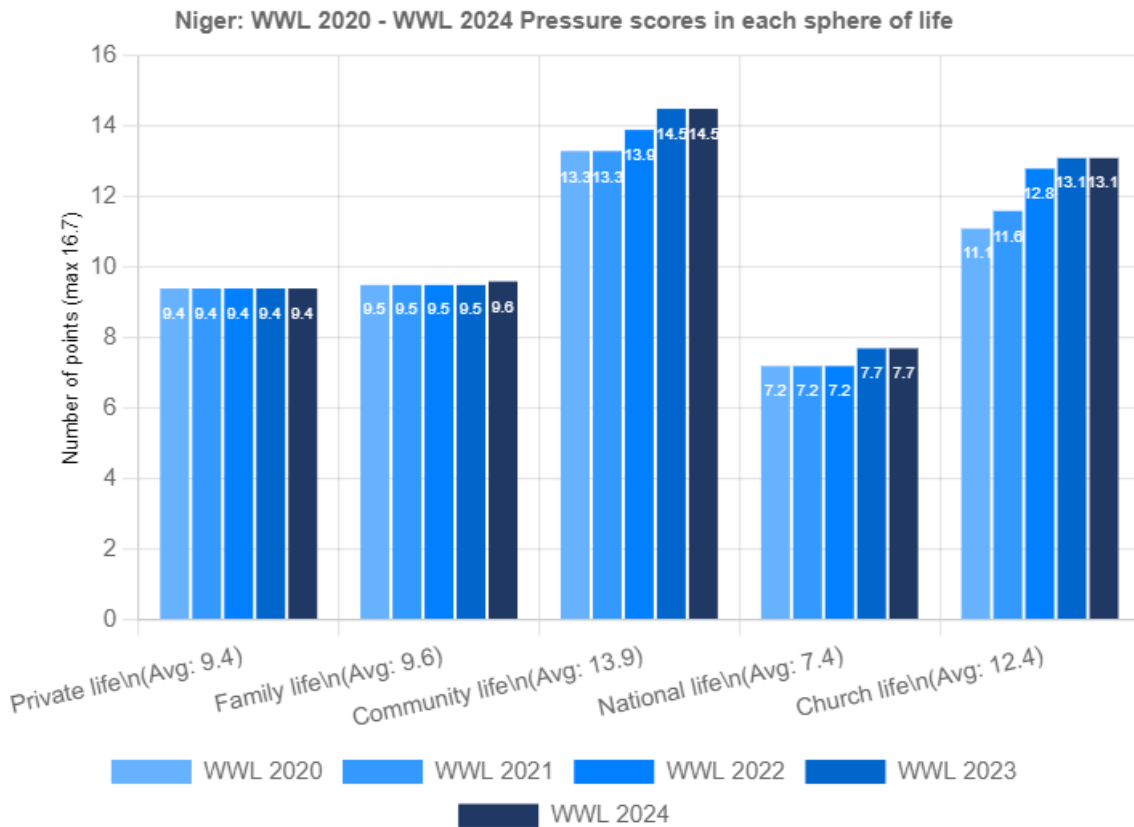
Over the five-year average, *Community life* stands out as the most profoundly affected sphere, recording an average extreme score of 13.9 points. This is closely followed by *Church life*, registering an average score of 12.4 points. These figures underscore the pervasive influence of jihadist activities which impede the daily lives of Christians. The *National life sphere* exhibits the lowest impact, scoring an average of 7.4 points. With the exception of *Family life*, pressure now seems to be levelling off in all *spheres of life*.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Niger: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024 Violence scores
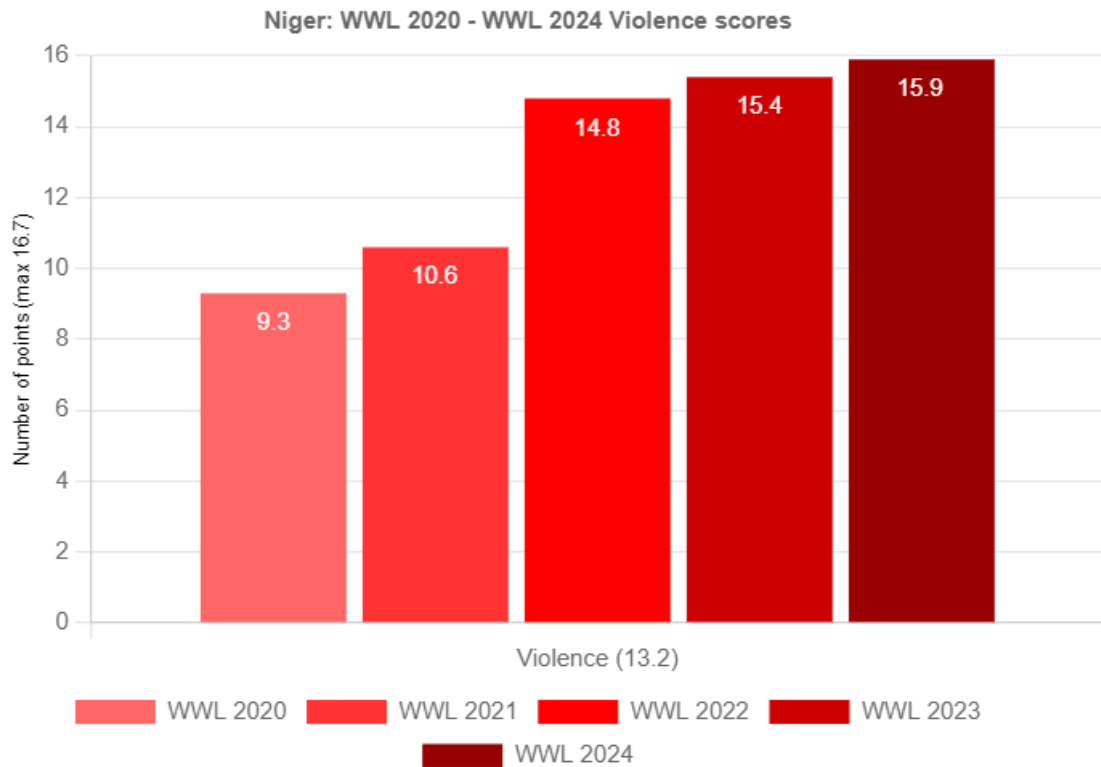
The five-year trend illustrates an alarming escalation in violence specifically targeted at Christians within the country. Starting at a score of 9.3 points in WWL 2020, violence has climbed to the extremely high of 15.9 points in WWL 2024. This consistent year-on-year increase starkly emphasizes the intensifying threat and danger faced by Christians in the country.

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; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Although the law mandates equal treatment of women and men, Niger's society is heavily male-dominant and harmful traditional practices like forced marriage and widow inheritance cause women to be more vulnerable to persecution. It has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 76% of girls being married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides Niger). Certain Islamic interpretations are being used to justify child marriage in Niger and resist legislative and policy changes. Customary and Sharia laws have a very strong influence in Niger, including in the process of marriage. Child marriage is perceived as a means to protect a girl's dignity and preserve her virginity. The fear of dishonor from pregnancy outside of marriage is aggravated by the high levels of sexual violence against women and girls in the country. It is reported than in certain areas people believe that girls should be married before their first period, as bloodstained clothing may be perceived as loss of virginity which brings shame to families (Girls Not Brides Niger). This is in part due to widespead poverty, food insecurity crisis, and continuing instability within Niger and in neighboring countries (Concern USA, 10 January 2022).

Like many other countries in the Sahel, women and girls in Niger are also particularly vulnerable to abduction, rape and sexual abuse by extremist groups. An expert comments: "Abducting and marrying girls to militants is part of an organized program by Islamist militants to breed its next generation of fighters." There have been numerous instances of abduction and kidnap of Christians by militia groups, as well as forced marriages as a way of recruitment. Indeed, beyond the threat from extreme jihadist groups, female Christians face the possibility of rape and sexual grooming for the purposes of forced conversion. Due to the high poverty rate, some Muslims allegedly use money, clothes, and phones to entice Christian girls, according to reports. A country expert states that rich Muslim men and Imans may sponsor young Muslim men to seduce and marry Christian girls. Families also do not report instances of rape as it will impact the marriage prospects of the victim and is viewed as a source of shame. More broadly, many Christian girls also face sexual harassment and discriminatory remarks for failing to wear the hijab. Female genital mutilation remains a live risk for Christian girls living among ethnic communities, for instance, the Gurma tribe in the Tillaberi region.

Additionally, Christian women in Niger are affected by living under Sharia. For example, according to Sharia, a Christian woman has no right to claim custody of her children in divorce cases, even though Niger is officially a secular country and in principle, women have more right to custody of children than men under Sharia law. Converts to Christianity can face extreme hostility from their families and local communities. They can be denied custody of their children, forced out of the home, forced into marriage with a Muslim man and raped. "Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical cleric as a corrective measure", as a country expert shared. Many have also been denied their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity. Reports also suggest that women are often unaware of their legal options to defend their rights (OECD, SIGI 2023, Annex A).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – death
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Converts to Christianity can face the most severe forms of persecution, as conversion from Islam to any religion is considered a betrayal by some families. They may be rejected by their families, chased out of their family home, or put under house arrest.

There is another phenomenon in Niger – although not specifically a form of targeted religious persecution – which affects all communities and has a strong negative impact on Christian families: Boys in Niger are subject to recruitment as child soldiers. There is a high potential for boys to be abducted and forced to join the ranks of militant groups, or physically harmed during raids. They can also be abducted for forced labor, and/or trafficked between militant groups in exchange for money, weapons, or other resources. Christian men and boys have also been targeted for killings by extremist groups. A surge in attacks by violent Islamic militants in recent months has forced many men, especially pastors and church leaders to flee to safer cities like Niamey, or across the border to Burkina Faso. Since Nigerien tribes are close-knit, this situation can harm all families in a community. "There were numerous reports of abduction or kidnap of priests and other religious leaders, especially in the Tillaberi and Diffa regions", a country expert shared. Older men who cannot flee are at a higher risk of being killed (Human Rights Watch, 23 February 2022).

Christian men in Niger can also face dismissal from their jobs because of their faith or have their business boycotted by the Muslim community. Christian men often face persecution in the workplace and pressure to renounce their faith by Muslim colleagues who tend to hold higher positions of power and authority over their Christian co-workers. As men and boys are usually the financial providers, this leaves his family vulnerable and exposed.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Niger):

- "In February 2022, authorities arrested Muslim cleric Alfa Ali Boubacar and charged him with 'production and dissemination of information prejudicial to public order and incitement of violence'. He was arrested and charged because he uttered a fatwa against the regime and criticized the government for its "poor management of security in the Tillabéri Region [and] the presence of French troops in the country.""

Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahai, who are mostly present in major urban centers, face the threat of violence from radical Islamic groups and have to tread carefully so as not to attract too much attention or provoke persecution.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

Many Nigerien see their religion very much connected with their ethnicity. In this context, to be a Nigerien and a Christian is not seen as being compatible. Although this attitude could change in the future through dialogue and cooperation, this is not likely in the short-term since *Islamic oppression* is likely to increase, with the numbers of jihadists growing fast and the government showing inadequate determination to fight back. Many churches are concentrated in the political capital, have limited outreach programs and seem ill-prepared for higher levels of pressure from radical Islam.

Furthermore, although not repeated in IRFR 2022 Niger, the US State Department stated in IRFR 2021 that there is extensive external funding for the growth of jihadist groups in the country:

- "Government officials continued to express concern regarding funding from foreign government sources for the construction of mosques and the training of imams, but according to observers, the government had insufficient resources to track the extent of the funding and fully understand its consequences."

The military coup (July 2023), which ousted the democratically elected president, has not only strained relations between the country and the West African Economic Bloc but has also provoked friction with Western allies. This has led the country to explore alternative alliances, notably turning towards Russia and the Wagner Group as potential alternatives. However, amidst the government's efforts to solidify its authority following the coup, there is a palpable risk: The jihadists could capitalize on this political upheaval to extend their influence and presence within the country. They have already radicalized society which as a consequence is moving towards what could be termed 'ultra conservativism.' This can only make the lives of Christians more challenging than they already are.

Organized corruption and crime

The interplay between *Islamic oppression* in general, the pervasive presence of jihadist groups in particular, and the recent military coup significantly amplifies the landscape of *Organized corruption and crime*, creating a breeding ground for criminal activities and corrupt practices to thrive unchecked. There are indications that certain jihadist elements have already ventured into activities like human trafficking and the illegal trade of minerals. This alliance between extremist groups and criminal enterprises not only bolsters their financial resources but also perpetuates a climate of lawlessness. Moreover, the recent military coup, while unsettling political stability, inadvertently creates a power vacuum and weakens the governance structures. In such chaotic circumstances, the control over various regions becomes tenuous, allowing criminal syndicates and jihadist groups to exploit the ensuing chaos for their illicit agendas. This volatile situation not only undermines the rule of law but also hampers any immediate prospects for curbing organized crime and corruption. If left unchecked, this alliance between extremist factions and criminal networks could further entrench their influence, posing a grave threat to the country's stability and governance.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Concern USA, 10 January 2022) - https://concernusa.org/news/poverty-in-niger/
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: legal options - https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4607b7c7-en/1/4/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4607b7c7-en&_csp_=a6be4df33c99961512705b97977ea566&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Human Rights Watch, 23 February 2022 - https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/23/no-one-spared/abuses-against-older-people-armed-conflict
- Future outlook: IRFR 2021 - https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NIGER-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf

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/
- https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/reports/africa-recent-upsurge-in-military-coups

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

- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Niger
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf.