



Morocco: Country Dossier

January 2019

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit



OpenDoors

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World Watch List 2019

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016	Total Score WWL 2015
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.9	94	94	92	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	93	89	88	81
3	Somalia	16.3	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.4	8.9	91	91	91	87	90
4	Libya	15.3	15.0	15.1	16.0	16.3	9.6	87	86	78	79	76
5	Pakistan	14.3	14.1	13.9	15.0	13.2	16.7	87	86	88	87	79
6	Sudan	14.7	15.0	14.6	15.6	16.1	10.6	87	87	87	84	80
7	Eritrea	14.7	14.9	15.8	16.0	15.2	9.4	86	86	82	89	79
8	Yemen	16.6	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.7	3.1	86	85	85	78	73
9	Iran	14.0	14.3	14.3	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	83	80
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	14.8	13.2	15.2	83	81	73	68	62
11	Syria	13.6	14.0	13.1	13.8	14.2	13.0	82	76	86	87	83
12	Nigeria	12.3	11.8	13.4	12.9	12.9	16.7	80	77	78	78	78
13	Iraq	13.9	14.4	14.1	14.6	13.6	8.1	79	86	86	90	86
14	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.9	16.7	1.1	78	78	76	76	78
15	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.6	14.0	15.3	16.5	2.4	77	79	76	76	77
16	Egypt	11.7	13.2	10.7	13.2	11.0	15.9	76	70	65	64	61
17	Uzbekistan	15.4	12.9	13.9	12.3	15.9	3.1	74	73	71	70	69
18	Myanmar	11.4	11.8	13.3	12.1	11.8	11.1	71	65	62	62	60
19	Laos	13.0	9.1	14.2	14.7	14.9	4.6	71	67	64	58	58
20	Vietnam	12.7	8.2	12.7	13.5	14.2	9.1	70	69	71	66	68
21	Central Africa Republic	10.2	9.7	11.9	10.6	11.1	16.1	70	61	58	59	67
22	Algeria	13.1	14.2	10.1	11.8	12.7	7.6	70	58	58	56	55
23	Turkmenistan	14.6	10.8	13.8	13.3	15.1	1.3	69	68	67	66	63
24	Mali	11.4	10.1	11.5	9.2	9.9	15.4	68	59	59	55	52
25	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	12.2	13.0	13.3	0.6	67	57	55	-	50
26	Turkey	12.4	11.1	10.7	13.2	10.9	7.2	66	62	57	55	52
27	China	10.4	8.0	10.3	11.8	14.5	10.0	65	57	57	57	57
28	Ethiopia	10.0	10.0	10.3	10.8	10.4	13.5	65	62	64	67	61
29	Tajikistan	13.8	11.9	11.6	12.1	12.9	2.4	65	65	58	58	50
30	Indonesia	10.6	11.1	11.3	10.2	9.3	12.0	65	59	55	55	50
31	Jordan	13.0	13.1	11.8	11.5	12.2	3.0	65	66	63	59	56
32	Nepal	12.4	11.4	10.6	10.9	11.9	7.0	64	64	-	-	-
33	Bhutan	12.9	11.1	12.3	12.4	14.0	0.9	64	62	61	56	56
34	Kazakhstan	13.2	10.8	10.3	12.2	13.5	3.1	63	63	56	55	51
35	Morocco	12.2	13.3	9.6	12.0	14.4	1.5	63	51	49	47	47
36	Brunei	13.4	14.3	10.5	10.3	13.4	0.7	63	64	64	61	58
37	Tunisia	12.1	13.2	10.7	11.2	12.0	3.3	63	62	61	58	55
38	Qatar	13.0	12.6	10.3	11.0	14.1	1.1	62	63	66	65	64
39	Mexico	8.3	7.5	12.2	10.2	9.7	13.5	61	59	57	56	55
40	Kenya	11.7	10.6	10.1	8.3	11.5	8.3	61	62	68	68	63
41	Russian Federation	12.5	8.4	10.7	10.4	12.0	5.7	60	51	46	48	45
42	Malaysia	11.8	14.2	12.1	11.7	8.6	1.5	60	65	60	58	55
43	Kuwait	13.2	12.2	10.1	10.5	12.2	1.5	60	61	57	56	49
44	Oman	12.9	12.5	9.8	9.6	12.8	1.7	59	57	53	53	55
45	United Arab Emirates	12.8	12.0	9.1	10.5	12.2	1.9	58	58	55	55	49
46	Sri Lanka	11.0	8.3	10.5	11.5	10.0	7.0	58	57	55	-	51
47	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.8	9.4	8.5	12.6	58	56	53	55	55
48	Bangladesh	11.0	9.1	11.6	10.5	7.8	7.8	58	58	63	57	51
49	Palestinian Territories	11.4	12.3	9.0	10.6	11.8	2.4	57	60	64	62	58
50	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	-	57	50
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.4	56	-	56	56	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	12.7	9.9	10.9	9.2	11.9	1.9	56	-	-	-	-
53	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	57	58	60
54	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	9.3	7.4	10.3	16.1	55	-	-	-	-
55	Bahrain	11.9	12.2	8.6	10.2	10.2	1.5	55	57	54	54	-
56	Cameroon	9.9	7.3	10.0	7.8	7.5	11.3	54	-	-	-	-
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.8	4.8	52	-	59	57	56
58	Niger	11.5	9.7	8.1	8.1	10.0	4.8	52	-	-	53	-
59	Cuba	8.8	4.4	9.1	10.5	11.8	3.9	49	-	-	-	-
60	Chad	11.5	8.2	9.0	8.0	8.7	3.0	48	-	-	-	-
61	Burkina Faso	9.0	8.0	8.8	6.6	7.9	7.2	48	-	-	-	-
62	Uganda	11.4	8.0	7.7	6.9	9.6	3.7	47	-	-	-	-
63	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.0	46	-	-	-	-
64	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.5	5.8	8.0	15.0	44	-	-	-	-
65	Mozambique	6.7	4.3	6.0	6.9	6.0	13.3	43	-	-	-	-
66	Gambia	7.7	8.2	8.2	8.3	8.8	1.9	43	-	-	-	-
67	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.7	8.2	5.5	6.4	4.3	43	-	-	-	-
68	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	3.3	43	-	-	-	-
69	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.1	8.7	10.4	6.1	42	-	-	-	-
70	Togo	8.8	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	2.0	42	-	-	-	-
71	Venezuela	3.3	3.8	10.5	9.0	8.8	5.9	41	-	-	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	6.7	41	-	-	-	-
73	Nicaragua	2.3	3.6	6.4	8.9	7.9	11.9	41	-	-	-	-

Morocco – Country Dossier

January 2019

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Further news and analysis is supplied by World Watch Monitor and WWR staff.

World Watch List Morocco	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	63	35
WWL 2018	-	-
WWL 2017	-	-
WWL 2016	-	-
WWL 2015	-	-

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Morocco

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14121438>

Recent country history

Morocco was a French protectorate from 1912 to 1956, when it gained independence. Upon independence, Morocco was able to take control of some of the territory under Spanish protectorate, the so called "Western Sahara". However, Morocco's claim of sovereignty over other former Spanish controlled territories is resisted by the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro"(POLISARIO) which proclaimed an independent state called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and managed to secure the recognition of some states.

The religious landscape

Over 99% of the population is Muslim (majority Sunni), with the remaining being mostly agnostic or Christian. Islam is the official state religion. Non-Muslim foreign communities can openly practice their faiths. The majority of Christians in Morocco are Roman Catholic and in relative terms (i.e. in comparison to other countries in the Arab world) Morocco could be characterized as a religiously tolerant state. Nevertheless, proselytization with the intent to convert Muslims from Islam to another religion is still considered illegal.

The political landscape

Morocco is a parliamentary monarchy in which the king is granted extensive executive powers and is both political and religious leader, being officially designated "Commander of the Faithful". He presides over the Council of Ministers and appoints the prime minister following legislative elections from the winning party. On recommendations from the prime minister, he appoints the members of government. After the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Morocco was also touched by the wind of liberty and desire for economic change. Large numbers of young people who found themselves unemployed even after getting university degrees expressed their frustration by taking to the streets. Responding to the demonstrations and calls for change, the government organized a referendum on constitutional reforms which was held on 1 July 2011. In the elections held since these constitutional reforms were put in place, the Islamist Justice and Development Party has won the largest number of seats in parliament enabling it to form coalition governments. Therefore, Morocco was able to avoid the political upheaval that engulfed North Africa.

However, there are still grievances and discontent is especially strong in the Rif region which is found in the northern part of the country where the mainly ethnic Berber population feel marginalized and neglected by the government. During the WWL 2019 reporting period, there were occasional demonstrations in this region. In June 2018, some of the protest's leaders [were convicted](#) to lengthy prison sentences. In August 2018, during the Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Slaughter, King Mohammed VI [pardoned](#) nearly 200 imprisoned protesters. In the same month, the King [reinstated](#) military service for men and women aged between 19 and 25 years old.

The socio-economic landscape

Compared with most other countries in the region, Morocco's economy is a relatively dynamic and robust. Mining, agriculture, manufacturing and tourism are important sectors of the economy.

However, Morocco is ranked 123 on the [UNDP Human Development Index](#) despite steady progress over the past two decades. The average life expectancy in Morocco is [75.8 \(2016\)](#), the overall [adult literacy rate is 68%](#) (94% among 7 to 12 year-olds in 2014) and the Gross national income (GNI) per capita is [7,710 USD](#). Moroccan companies are also becoming increasingly active and investing in other African countries, especially in West Africa and this is helping foster economic growth in the country.

Concluding remarks

Morocco has been an oasis of stability and economic progress in a region that has been fraught with political instability and economic crises. Its incremental and evolutionary approach to political reform has proved to be quite successful so far. Morocco's international image is that of a progressive, tolerant and economically dynamic country. However, there is the risk of complacency setting in and this image does not fully reflect the country's record when it comes to the rights of religious minorities. Also, unless the unrest in the Rif region is quickly addressed, the situation could allow Islamic militants to destabilize the country.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Morocco

1. The political landscape: were convicted - https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/moroccan-protest-leader-3-others-get-20-year-sentences/2018/06/27/a7e4c594-79e7-11e8-ac4e-421ef7165923_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b22c1b7366f3
2. The political landscape: pardoned - <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/8/22/morocco-king-pardons-jailed-hirak-protesters-for-eid-al-adha>
3. The political landscape: reinstated - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-morocco-army/morocco-reinstates-compulsory-military-service-for-under-25s-idUSKCN1L52DA>
4. The socio-economic landscape: UNDP Human Development Index - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MAR>
5. The socio-economic landscape: 75.8 (2016) - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=MA>
6. The socio-economic landscape: adult literacy rate is 68% - <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/MAR/>
7. The socio-economic landscape: 7,710 USD - <https://tradingeconomics.com/morocco/gni-per-capita-ppp-us-dollar-wb-data.html>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
36,192,000	31,400	0.1

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

Christianity arrived in Morocco during the Roman Empire and became very prominent in areas like Tangiers, Rabat and Fez. It was also one of the countries where Donatism and Arianism became a major theological issue in the 4th century AD. By the 7th century, Islam reached Morocco and many Christians were forced to convert. In 1220, priests of the Franciscan Order made a brave attempt to re-introduce Christianity and a diocese was set up at Marrakesh in 1234 which was able to function until 1566. In the 19th century the country became a French colony and the Roman Catholic Church returned.

Missionaries from North Africa brought the Protestant faith to Morocco in 1884. After Morocco was declared a French protectorate (1912-1956), the Reformed Church of France formed the Evangelical Church of Morocco. The Gospel Missionary Union and Emmanuel Mission Sahara came to the country in 1894 and 1926 respectively. Other churches and movements followed, such as Anglicans, the Assemblies of God, the Christian Brethren and the Seventh-day Adventists.

According to Jack Wald in "Christianity in North Africa and West Asia" (Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 41-44), the indigenous Moroccan church began to emerge in the late 1960s, meeting in house churches held in the homes of missionaries. In 1984 the community suffered a major setback when King Hassan II forced many Moroccan Christians to recant their faith, after suspecting them of a coup. With the arrival of incumbent king Mohammed VI in 1999, a decade of relative freedom started which allowed house churches, this time mostly led by Moroccans, to grow. However, in March 2010, around 150 foreign Christians from all over the country were suddenly deported. [Reportedly](#), the country wanted to take a tough line against proselytism. Moroccan Christians were interrogated too and it became apparent that the police had inside informers; many house churches disbanded as a result. With the rise of the internet and social media, new movements have been started and many can now find fellowship, even if they are alone and isolated.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Morocco	Christians	%
Orthodox	590	1.9
Catholic	18,700	59.6
Protestant	5,300	16.9
Independent	5,300	16.9
Unaffiliated	1,500	4.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	31,390	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	4,200	13.4
Renewalist movement	4,800	15.3

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: Believers 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.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

There are a number of churches in Morocco but these are mainly for expatriates who live mostly in the urban areas of Casablanca, Tangier and Rabat. Church denominations include the French Evangelical Church of Morocco, the Moroccan Association of Protestant Churches, the Anglican Church in Casablanca and Tangier, the Russian Orthodox Church in Rabat and the Greek Orthodox Church in Casablanca. According to the World Christian Database, the Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian denomination in Morocco.

Religious context

Religious Context: Morocco	Numbers	%
Christians	31,400	0.1
Muslim	36,075,000	99.7
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	0	0.0
Jewish	2,400	0.0
Bahai	35,800	0.1
Atheist	400	0.0
Agnostic	47,100	0.1
Other	0	0.0

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

With the exception of the minorities listed above, virtually all Moroccans are adherents of Sunni Islam. Islam is the official state religion and the country's king is officially designated "Commander of the Faithful".

Notes on the current situation

- Christians, especially converts from Islam, face societal discrimination, and the government prohibits the proselytizing of Moroccan Muslims. This is a restriction of the freedom of Christians to manifest their religion and belief in teaching and practice.
- The growth of Islamic militant movements in North Africa is a cause of concern for Christians.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

1. How did Christians get there?: Reportedly - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8563111.stm>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 63 points, Morocco has reached rank 35 in WWL 2019. The score in WWL 2018 was 51 points and the country was outside the Top 50 countries.

What type of persecution dominates?

- **Islamic oppression:** Christians face several restrictions including the confiscation of Christian literature in Arabic, bans on cooperating with Christians from abroad and serious challenges in securing recognition and places of worship for believers with a Muslim background. Converts face persecution where talking about their faith is deemed as an attempt at proselytization.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The Moroccan government looks at the church, especially the convert church, with suspicion. Moroccans are expected to be loyal to Islam, king and country; Christianity could threaten this hegemony. In addition, the government also strictly monitors Christians in order to appease radical Muslim groups who accuse the government of being reluctant to enforce Islamic rule.

Who is driving persecution?

Although Muslim-majority Morocco is considered to be a relatively tolerant country, nevertheless Christians suffer persecution from both the state and society at large. Although the intensity and frequency of the persecution is less in comparison to many other countries in the region, there are still restrictions imposed by the state and radical Muslims within the general populace also put pressure on Christians. In rural areas, the pressure coming from the extended family and the community at large can also be considerable.

What it results in

A recurrent problem for Christians who are open about their faith relates to Article 220 of the Penal Code which criminalizes shaking the faith of a Muslim. This puts many Christians who talk to others about their faith at risk of criminal prosecution and arrest. Advocates for the rights of Christians have also been targeted for violent attack by Islamic militants. While the law only punishes proselytization, converts to Christianity can be punished in other ways, for instance by losing inheritance rights and custody of children.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Morocco	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	16	2	0	0
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	0	0	0	0

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- During the WWL 2019 reporting period, converts from Islam to Christianity have been detained and questioned by the security services about their possession of Bibles as well as their contacts with foreign Christians.
- Converts from a Muslim background are often the victim of physical or even sexual abuse at the hands of members of their (extended) family.
- At least one female convert has been forced to marry a Muslim man.
- In April 2018, a British Pentecostal pastor was [refused entry](#) into the country. Colin Dye is known as a teacher on the Arabic TV channel "Kingdom Sat".

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

1. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: refused entry - <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/kensington-temple-pastor-barred-from-morocco-calls-for-religious-freedom/128313.htm>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 63 points, Morocco has reached rank 35 in WWL 2019. The score in WWL 2018 was 51 points and the country was outside the Top 50 countries. The rise in points was due to a broader understanding of the situation through the availability of new information which led to higher scores for both pressure and violence.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Morocco	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Weak
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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 (long version).

Islamic oppression (Strong):

Morocco displays a more moderate version of *Islamic oppression* compared to other countries in the region. Restrictions imposed by the Islamic authorities include the confiscation of Christian literature in Arabic (including Bibles) if discovered, bans on cooperating with Christians from abroad - especially if evangelization is planned - and serious challenges in securing recognized places of worship for Christians with a Muslim background. Converts from Islam face pressure as a result of their new faith from family and friends and from the local community if their proclamation of faith is felt to be an attempt at proselytization.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

The Moroccan government looks at the church, especially the convert church, with suspicion. Moroccans are expected to be loyal to Islam, king and country; Christianity could threaten this hegemony. In past years, the Moroccan authorities have accused Christians of being disloyal to the king and have deported many foreign Christians without due process. One of the reasons for this sort of action could be the fear of radical Muslim groups: By appeasing to them, the government tries to prevent any unrest. This means in practice that converts are regularly detained and questioned about their motives and contacts.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Morocco	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	WEAK	VERY WEAK	-	-	MEDIUM	-
Government officials	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-
Ethnic group leaders	Weak	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Medium	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Among the main drivers of *Islamic oppression* in Morocco are government officials and leaders of political parties. The Justice and Development Party (PJD) is arguably the most important political player in the country alongside the monarchy. Although it does not advocate banning Christianity, its leaders have exhibited intolerance towards Christianity and do not fully recognize the right to freedom of belief and worship for Christians. State officials are also unwilling to register and allow Christian converts with a Muslim background to congregate freely, gain recognition and evangelize. Abdelaziz Aftati, a controversial former member of the ruling party, reportedly mocked the idea that Christians in Morocco should have rights. The extended family of converts from Islam as well as society at large - especially in rural areas - also act as drivers of *Islamic oppression* because of the pressure they exert on converts to renounce their faith in Christ.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

The Moroccan authorities and security services are monitoring all church life. Converts to Christianity are actively watched and sometimes interrogated. There is still fear that the security services are infiltrating the convert movement.

Context

Morocco is a former French protectorate with an overwhelming Muslim majority estimated to be about 99.7% of the total population by the World Christian Database. Politically, Morocco is a parliamentary monarchy in which the king is granted extensive executive powers and is both a political and religious leader. During the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, demonstrations took place and the

government organized a referendum on constitutional reforms which was held on 1 July 2011. Morocco was thus able to avoid the political upheaval that engulfed much of the Arab world.

Non-Muslim foreign communities can openly practice their faith but the proselytization of Muslims is considered illegal. Morocco's international image is that of a progressive, tolerant and economically dynamic country. However, this image does not fully reflect the country's record when it comes to the rights of religious minorities. The position of converts from Islam to Christianity is precarious, for example.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians, many of whom are engaged in a variety of professional activities, are often under surveillance and risk deportation if they are perceived to engage in acts of evangelization. However, compared to other groups - especially to Moroccan converts to Christianity - expatriate Christians from the West enjoy relative freedom of religion. Recognized churches for expatriates exist only in major cities. Those denominations that pre-exist independence in 1956 include the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church and the French Protestant Church. Most of these churches own church buildings but the government owns the land. As long as the building is being regularly used for church services, the church keeps control of the building. If it falls into disuse, the government takes over the building and uses it for other purposes. Given the difficulty for these churches to get new members and the fact that it is impossible for Moroccan Christians with a Muslim background to join these churches, historical Christian communities find it challenging to remain active and present in the country.

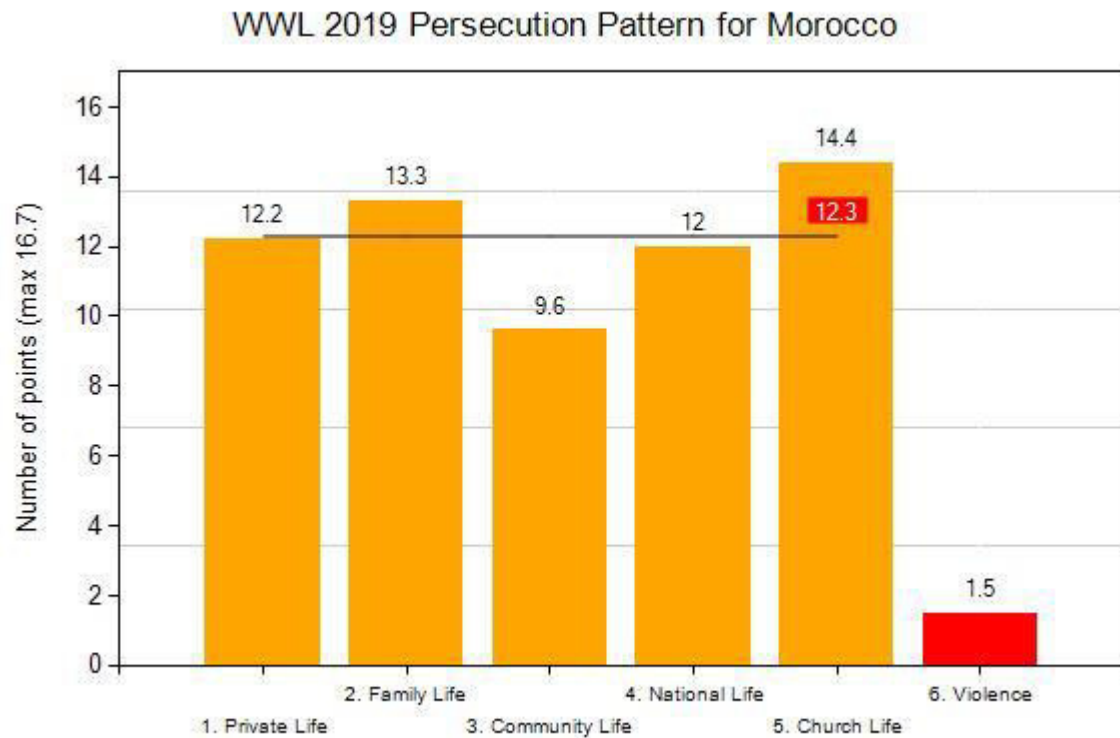
Expatriate Christians from Sub-Saharan African countries, who are often Pentecostal Christians, are usually marginalized and discriminated against.

Historical Christian communities: These communities are not considered as a separate category in WWL analysis since they consist mainly of expatriate Christians and have been included in the category above.

Communities of converts to Christianity: Moroccan Christians meet in house-churches because they cannot get permission and official recognition to congregate in public. They change location regularly and do not have the history or level of organization to develop into a "denomination" (i.e. non-traditional Christian community). While the level of tolerance from the society in urban centers as well as from the public authorities towards Christian converts is better than in most other countries in the region, converts to Christianity still face pressure to renounce their faith from society at large and their family. They also tend to be under surveillance and risk persecution, especially if they engage in evangelism.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category does not exist in Morocco.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Morocco shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.3), rising from 10.1 in WWL 2018. The reason for this increase is that more detailed information has become available which has affected the scoring.
- The pressure is extreme in *Church life* (14.4 points). This reflects the limitations expatriate churches face if they try to share their faith with others and how the government has effectively strangled fellowship among convert communities. The next highest score is to be found in *Family life* (13.3 points), which reflects the pressure converts have to face when they want to practice their new religion in public: Getting baptized, married or even buried in a Christian way is difficult and they will face pressure from family, society and even the government, especially in rural areas.
- The score for violence went up from 0.6 in WWL 2018 to 1.5 in WWL 2019. The reason for this increase is the rise in reported incidents due to new sources of information being available.

Private sphere:

Although conversion from Islam to Christianity is punishable according to Moroccan law (and although Moroccan Islamic religious leaders have often disputed whether conversion is punishable by death), enforcement of this law is very weak and almost non-existent. Generally speaking, however, converts face pressure from relatives, family members and the community at large, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, it has been risky for some converts to reveal their faith. Acts of private worship and devotion that could reveal conversion to Christianity also entail the same risk. However, it should be noted that this risk is quite moderate compared to other countries in the region.

Family sphere:

As has been noted above, conversion to Christianity can trigger a hostile reaction from a convert's immediate and extended family. The State considers all Moroccans to be Muslims and Moroccan Christians can be married without being asked if they are Muslims (because it is assumed they are Muslims). However, foreign Christian men wanting to marry a Moroccan woman would have to say they are Muslims because they are asked this question. All children are forced to attend Islamic classes. Some private schools allow children from Moroccan Christian homes to skip the Islamic classes, but this is not the norm. Compulsory Islamic studies in schools that officially takes a very moderate line is common. These intrusions into the religious freedom and family life of Christian converts are less problematic than in other North African countries.

Community sphere:

Christian converts will face ostracization, particularly in rural areas. They also feel a great deal of societal pressure upon them to take part in Islamic religious activities and rituals. For Christians with a Muslim background, societal pressure also makes it difficult to raise their children as Christians. Such pressure could take the form of bullying at school or Islamic instruction without parental consent. In urban areas, Christians have more freedom but expressions of Christian faith could still be perceived as an attempt at proselytization and could have negative repercussions.

National sphere:

Although it can be claimed that there is relative freedom of religion in Morocco, there are still considerable restrictions on Christians in public. For instance, eating in public during Ramadan is considered illegal. Christian evangelism is banned and sharing Christian literature with others and proselytization is illegal. Morocco's High Religious Committee has retracted its 2012 ruling stating that apostasy is punishable by death and seems to have decided to permit Muslims to change their religion. Christians who evangelize could be accused of "shaking the faith of Islam" and this will entail criminal liability. State officials conduct surveillance on Christians and monitor their activities to enforce the ban on evangelism. Christians with a Muslim background are also denied recognition by the State.

Church sphere:

Churches of expatriate Christian communities are always monitored, to make sure that Moroccan nationals do not attend their services. Churches are hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings as these could be construed as proselytism. This will be the case both for Christians with a Muslim background and other Christians. The restriction on fellowship between expatriate Christian communities and other churches affects both communities. The government has continued to permit the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish. A limited number of Arabic translations of the Bible were available for sale in a few bookshops for use in university religion courses. The authorities confiscate Bibles they believe are intended for use in proselytizing. Churches are not hindered in establishing and managing schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medial, social or cultural organizations, but these organizations must refrain from any activities that could be construed as proselytizing. Any perception of being evangelistic would lead to problems. Therefore, although they enjoy more freedom than churches in other countries in the region, churches in Morocco operate under substantial restrictions.

Violence:

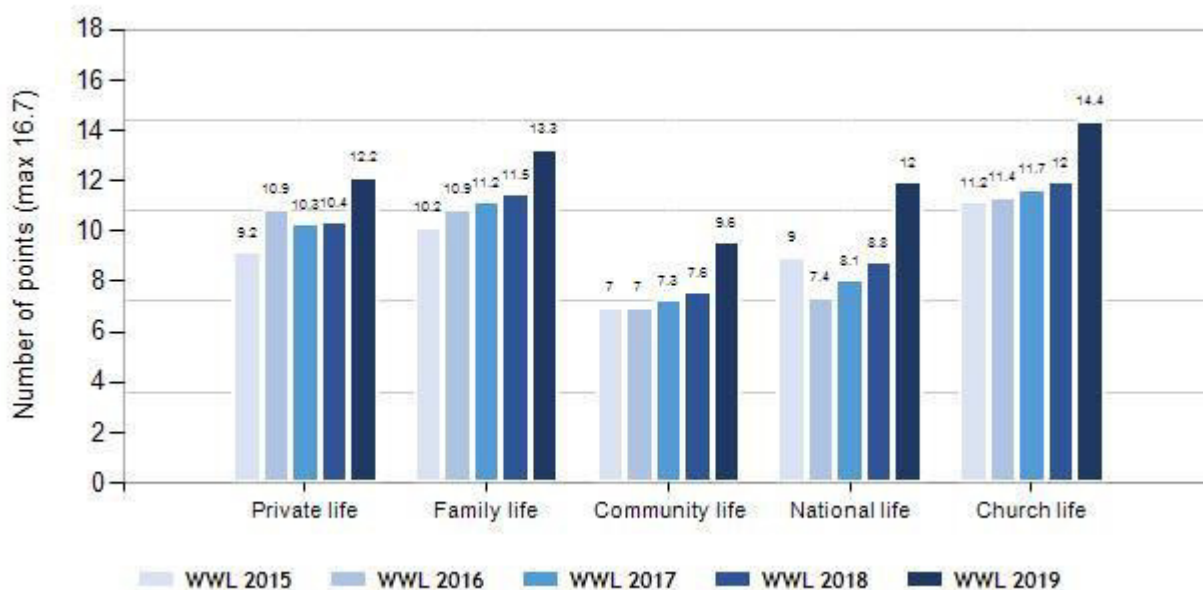
Converts from Islam to Christianity face abuse from their own family members and are at risk of being arrested and interrogated by the government. Female converts are especially at risk of sexual abuse and in some cases forced marriage. Expatriate Christians will be deported or denied entry to the country when they are suspected of proselytization.

For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

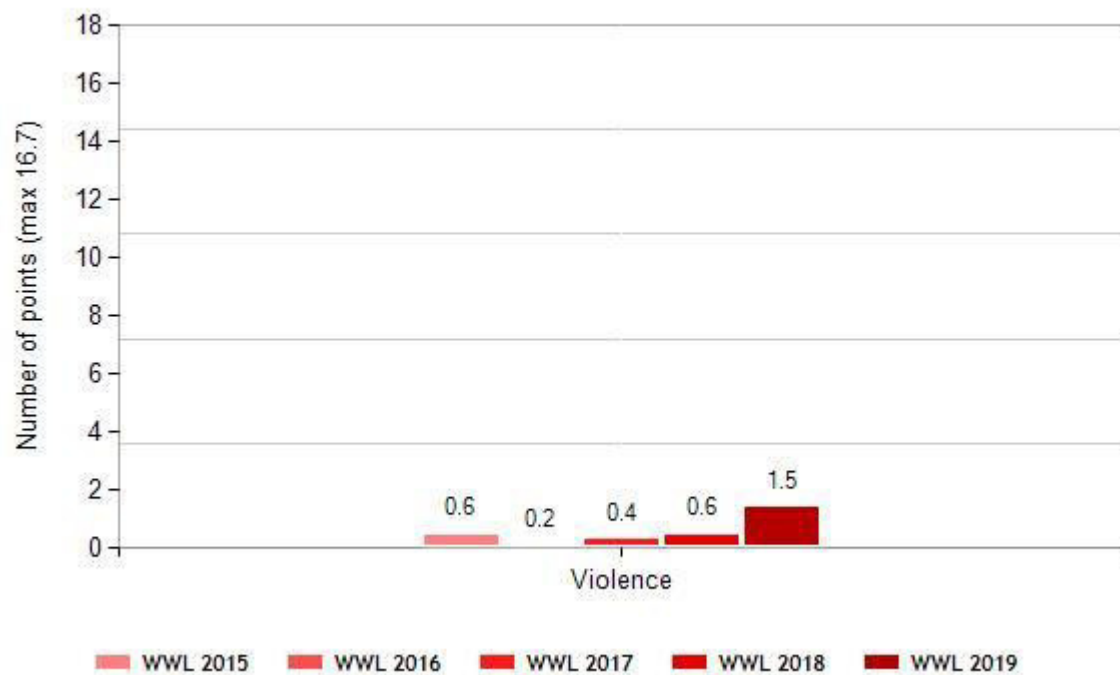
Chart 1 shows that, overall, pressure in all *spheres of life* has increased over the five reporting periods, reaching very high levels (in *Church life*, an extreme level) in WWL 2019. This rise was due in part to more information becoming available on the situation of converts in the country. Chart 2, depicting average pressure, shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has gradually crept up since WWL 2015 and notably increased in WWL 2019 to a very high level (similar to Chart 1). The number of violent incidents (Chart 3) recorded in the period WWL 2015-2018 was very low but the score rose in WWL 2019 to a low level, because more information on violent incidents was available than before.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Morocco (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Morocco	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	12.3
2018	10.1
2017	9.7
2016	9.5
2015	9.3

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Morocco (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

Although women's rights in Morocco have developed over the last fifteen years, which has given women [more legal equality](#), women in Morocco remain in general in a less advantageous position than men. This is especially true for female converts. Expatriate women do not face gender specific persecution, or at least not to the extent convert women do. Women in general have less freedom than men and are expected to be more bound to the household - especially in rural areas. Some female converts are confined to the family home upon discovery of their faith and are not allowed to meet with others without supervision. Female converts are also sometimes forced by their families to marry Muslim men. If they are already married, it is likely that their husbands will divorce them and that they will lose custody of any children, as well as inheritance rights. Personal status law follows the country's Maliki-Ashari Sunni interpretation of Sharia. One expert writes that "as long as the personal status law is not subject to change, this kind of persecution will continue".

Male:

If male converts are still young and living with their parents, they might be banned from their home and lose the (financial) support of their families. They bring shame upon their families by leaving Islam and are therefore regularly ostracized. Men are in most cases the breadwinners of their families, so the whole family suffers if he loses his job and reputation, for example. However, the severity of the backlash after conversion depends on his social position and his political standing within his community.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Judaism is the only minority religion officially recognized in the Constitution and Jews have their own religious courts for family matters. Although Islam is the official religion of the state, de facto only Sunni (Maliki) Islam is socially acceptable. Shia Muslims and Bahai are religious minorities in Morocco facing government restrictions that make it nearly impossible for them to engage in public acts of [worship](#). According to the [Morocco 2017 International Religious Freedom Report](#) (p. 7): "Shia Muslim citizens continued to state that fears of government harassment were one of the reasons they refrained from public worship and instead met discreetly in members' homes."

Future outlook

The political outlook: How the future in Morocco develops depends on a number of factors. These factors include the outcome of the struggle for more influence and control between the monarchy and the Islamist political party that has been leading the government for the past few years. The degree to which the economic marginalization and political discontent of some groups persist might also be a relevant factor, as they can provide an opening for Islamists to exploit. However, if its current overall trajectory continues, Morocco is likely to remain an oasis of stability and relative freedom for Christians in an unstable region. The Moroccan state also seems to be keen on maintaining its image as a tolerant and progressive modern state and is unlikely to scale up restrictions on religious freedom.

The outlook for Christians - viewed through the lens of:

- *Islamic oppression:* Converts from Islam to Christianity are likely to keep facing pressure, mostly from the side of their families and society. Ongoing modernization in urban areas might change the attitudes towards converts in the long term. It is unlikely that the government will change its approach towards converts, especially so long as the king remains "the commander of the faithful, [who] sees to the respect for Islam." ([Constitution of Morocco](#), Art. 41).
- *Dictatorial paranoia:* Morocco remained one of the more peaceful countries during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. Morocco's strong security apparatus plays an important role in keeping the peace. It will keep monitoring all activities that can create unrest, looking especially for any acts of proselytization by Christians. In the past, it has shown it can effectively paralyze the (convert) church. It will probably keep doing so, also to appease Islamists who otherwise might cause unrest.

Conclusion: Christianity will probably remain a foreign religion in Morocco. Article 4 of the Constitution states that "the motto of the Kingdom is Dieu, La Patrie, Le Roi [God, the Country, the King] and many Moroccans feel that way. As long as "God" is interpreted as the God of Islam, Christians will remain outsiders, even if they are from Moroccan descent.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

1. Gender specific persecution: more legal equality - <http://www.genderconcerns.org/the-situation-of-women-in-morocco>
2. Persecution of other religious minorities: worship - <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2017/08/226353/religious-minorities-persecution-morocco-us-state-department/>

3. Persecution of other religious minorities: Morocco 2017 International Religious Freedom Report
- <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281242.pdf>
4. Future outlook: Constitution of Morocco -
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011.pdf

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

At the time of publication there were no items specifically for Morocco.

World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/morocco>

Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Morocco> (password: freedom).