
World Watch Research

Eritrea: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2024

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50.....	2
World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78	4
Copyright, sources and definitions	5
Reporting period	5
Brief country details.....	6
Map of country	7
Dominant persecution engines and drivers.....	7
Brief description of the persecution situation.....	8
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	8
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	9
Specific examples of positive developments	9
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	9
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	9
Position on the World Watch List	10
Persecution engines.....	10
Drivers of persecution.....	13
The Persecution pattern	15
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	16
Violence	21
5 Year trends.....	23
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	25
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	26
Persecution of other religious minorities	27
Trends Summary	27
Further useful reports.....	28
External Links	28

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

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

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

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

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

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

Copyright, sources and definitions

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

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

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Reporting period

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

Brief country details

Eritrea: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
3,818,000	1,687,000	44.2

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

Eritrea: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	1,687,000	44.2
Muslim	2,049,000	53.7
Hindu	1,200	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	31,000	0.8
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	1,300	0.0
Atheist	250	0.0
Agnostic	47,800	1.3
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

Map of country



Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Eritrea: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks
Islamic oppression	Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Eritrea has many complex actors - as well as victims - of discrimination, hostility and other forms of persecution. Young Christians are being forced to join the armed forces indefinitely as per the law of the country but without upholding the right of conscientious objection. This intensified during the war in northern Ethiopia where Eritrea allegedly fought on the side of the Ethiopian government against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Both recognized and unregistered Christian denominations face serious problems in accessing community resources, especially social services provided by the state authorities. Christians from non-traditional church groups face the harshest violations of their rights both from the government and from the Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC).

The government has refused to register or recognize any religious groups except the Eritrean Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches, and Islam. Converts from a Muslim background (and those with an Orthodox Christian background joining a non-traditional church) face harsh mistreatment from their families and communities. Over the years, government security forces conducted many house-to-house raids and arrested hundreds of Christians. The extreme levels of pressure and state-sanctioned violence is forcing some Christians to flee the country. The ongoing conflict in Sudan has also restricted the escape route for Christians from Eritrea. In fact, there are fears that the Eritrean government might exploit this situation to enter Sudan and reclaim some of the Christian dissidents residing in Sudanese refugee camps.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Eritrea 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)

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

- Christians die in prison because of torture, denial of medical care or other inhumane conditions (ICCPR Arts. 6 and 10)
- Christians are imprisoned in inhumane conditions and subjected to torture (ICCPR Arts. 7 and 10)
- Eritreans are forced to serve indefinite military and national service in inhumane conditions (ICCPR Art. 8 and ICESCR Art. 11)
- Christians are arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned without trial (ICCPR Art. 9)
- Christians from non-registered groups are not allowed to practice their religion (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians from non-registered groups are not allowed to gather or meet to worship (ICCPR Art. 21)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Hundreds of Christians have been in detention for years. For instance, Pastor Ghirmay Araya, one of the founding fathers of the Full Gospel Church in Eritrea, died in prison in May 2024 after being arrested in 2021 and never being charged with any crime ([Release International, 17 May 2024](#)).
- Between January and May 2024, over 120 Christians were detained without any charges (Open Doors research).
- On 24 April 2024, in the towns of Agordat, Barentu, and Teseney in western and central Eritrea, over 35 Christians were arrested from their homes during coordinated nighttime raids (Open Doors research).

Specific examples of positive developments

None.

Christian communities and how they are affected

All four WWL categories of Christianity are present in Eritrea. The different types of Christians face varying levels and forms of violence, intolerance and discrimination.

Communities of expatriate Christians: The number of expatriates is significantly declining due to government pressure. This group of Christians experience difficulties in traveling in the country and meeting with other Christians.

Historical Christian communities: This is the biggest group in the country and includes the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Anglicans, Lutherans and Roman Catholics. These Christians live mainly in the Christian-dominated areas of central and southern Eritrea. They are affected by *Islamic oppression* and also government action.

Converts: This category refers to Muslims who have converted to Christianity and face violence, intolerance and discrimination from their Muslim families and society.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This group faces the harshest persecution in the country. Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are regarded by the government as agents of the West. The Pentecostal communities in particular face serious pressure and violence and their rights are regularly violated by government officials and the Eritrean Orthodox Church. This category also contains those who have left the historical Christian communities (especially the EOC) to join non-traditional congregations; they face serious pressure and violence from EOC adherents.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Dictatorial paranoia is present in the whole country. However, for *Islamic oppression*, particular hotspots are the lowlands, both in the western and the eastern part of the country. *Christian denominational protectionism* has its particular hotspot in the highland areas (the central part of the country).

Position on the World Watch List

Eritrea: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	89	6
WWL 2024	89	4
WWL 2023	89	4
WWL 2022	88	6
WWL 2021	88	6

Eritrea continues to pose significant challenges for Christians, maintaining a score of 89 points in WWL 2025, mirroring the previous year's score.

Despite the country's reintegration into the international community and the lifting of UN sanctions, no tangible improvements in freedom have been realized for Christians. The government exerts extreme pressure on Christian communities, particularly in the *National* and *Church spheres*, through policies and widespread surveillance. Security forces frequently conduct raids, detaining hundreds of Christians, and those temporarily released often face conditions requiring them to renounce their faith and report regularly to authorities, with non-compliance resulting in further imprisonment. Many detainees endure harsh conditions for years, highlighting the regime's repressive nature. Additionally, the government fosters a climate of suspicion by labeling non-traditional Protestant groups as unpatriotic. Complicating the situation, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, which also suffers under the regime's oppression, suppresses the growth of Protestant churches, illustrating a cycle where both perpetrators and victims exist within the broader Christian community. This multifaceted persecution underscores the dire and complex reality for Christians in Eritrea.

Persecution engines

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

Eritrea: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
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.

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)

Eritrea became an independent nation following the 1993 referendum. Since 1993, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice party (PFDJ) has been exercising full control over Eritrea, under the leadership of President Afewerki. The regime has become synonymous with absolute authoritarianism and is doing everything possible to maintain its power: It has arrested, harassed and killed Christians because they are considered to be agents of the West and hence a threat to the state and the government.

Sources from inside the country are suggesting that the president is grooming his son to replace him. One country expert says: “After decades of bloody war for independence which is responsible for the loss of tens of thousands of lives and bodily and physiological injury for thousand others, the last thing that was expected of the current ruling party was another oppressive government. However, the current ruling party, in clear disregard of its promises during the armed struggle, formed an absolute authoritarian regime wherein any form of dissent is not tolerated. The number one goal of the ruling party is to stay in power at any cost.” It is in this context that the government is persecuting Christians.

There have been suggestions from some analysts that the Eritrean government is now open to upholding human rights and is ready for democracy. However, that line of thinking misunderstands the nature of the Eritrean leadership. The Eritrean government - despite the recent attempts to heal relationships with neighboring and Western countries - has not shown in any way that it is ready to bring change to how it deals with domestic issues.

Christian Denominational protectionism (Very strong)

The Eritrean Orthodox Church has a long historical presence in the country and sometimes puts pressure on Christians with a different background, looking down upon them as inferior newcomers. The Pentecostal groups in particular are not regarded as legitimate. One country researcher stated: “There is a serious reservation by Orthodox Christians to accept followers of other forms of Christianity as Christians. And such reservation manifests itself in different forms in different parts of the country. While the reasons for such actions could be mainly [theological differences], the fear of losing the dominant influence which the Orthodox Church has played in the lives of citizens of the country for centuries, plays a huge role.” The irony is that this denomination also faces violence, intolerance and discrimination carried out by the government and drivers of *Islamic oppression*.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Eritrea is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. According to Transparency International ([CPI 2023](#)), Eritrea ranks #161 out of 180 countries, scoring 21 points. Corruption mainly involves the army which controls many aspects of life in the country. A country expert reported: "The military is the

strongest amongst all sectors of the government, and abuse of power and corruption are rampant at different levels. One good example in this regard is the bribe that Christians are asked to pay if they get caught while trying to escape the country. Failure to pay such bribes could lead to arbitrary detention or death."

Islamic oppression (Medium)

Approximately half of the Eritrean population is Muslim. Most Muslims reside in the lowlands along the Red Sea coast and the border with Sudan and are showing a tendency towards radicalism, partly due to what is going on in the wider region. This means that Christians living in those areas are particularly vulnerable, especially converts from Islam. Eritrean Muslims are "Muslim first" and "Eritrean second". Conversion to Christianity is seen as a betrayal of community, family and Islamic faith. One country expert states: "This engine is not as strong in the highlands of the country compared to the remote parts of the country where the majority of the population is Muslim. Despite the desire of such [radical] groups to form an Islamic state, the fact that the government is not willing to tolerate groups which are considered as a challenge to its power, has played a major role in preventing the spread of their [Islamist] ideas. However, it does not mean that such groups are not a danger to the way of life of Christians especially those living in the lowlands of the country. Christians cannot freely exercise their religion as they wish and getting schools for their children free from the influence of the teaching of the above-mentioned [radical Islamic] groups is not easy."

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- Government officials (Very strong):** Eritrea is not a democracy. Its government is known for suppressing the freedom of its citizens. Government officials are responsible for harassing and arresting Christians, especially those not recognized by the government. A country expert states: "It is very important to note that Eritrea is virtually under a one-man rule. There is a strong feeling among the leaders of the country including the president that churches, especially the Orthodox and Protestant churches, are a hindrance to the new national identity the ruling group wants to create in the country. It should also be noted that the Communist affiliation of the current leaders of the country plays a big role in their disliking of organized religious institutions. The extent of involvement of leaders at different level varies from one region of the country to another, but it should be noted that anything done by any churches or its members seen as a threat to the absolute control currently in place will be subjected to punishment. Detention of Christians who refused to take part in the national military training at the infamous SAWA Military Academy is

one good example of the persecution faced by Christians at the hands of the leaders both at the local and national level."

- **Political parties (Strong):** The ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice party (PFDJ) is responsible for many challenges that Christians in the country face. A country expert stated: "The current ruling party ... is the sole legal political party in Eritrea. The draft constitution is yet to be ratified and what the party decides will be the law in absence of any opposition party and democratic process in place. The PFDJ, as the ruling party in the country, was supposed to respect and protect the rights of Christians in the country. The reality, however, is that the party who was supposed to afford protection to religious groups is the one responsible for violating the rights of Christians. The PFDJ employs tactics of coercion, imprisonment, torture, intimidation, and killing to secure obedience while simultaneously pursuing divide-and-rule strategies among different groups (including religious groups)."
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (Strong):** In Eritrea, the entrenchment of crime and corruption within the governance system presents a dire reality, where security and military institutions, the ruling political party, and other government entities are deeply involved. This systemic corruption significantly impacts societal dynamics, especially for the Christian population, who are compelled to resort to bribery for basic freedoms like leaving the country, underscoring the oppressive nature of the government. The lack of judicial recourse for victims of persecution further exacerbates their vulnerability, leaving them without legal protection. Additionally, families of Eritreans who criticize the government from abroad face severe repercussions, illustrating the regime's intolerance towards dissent. Governance, human rights and individual liberties are all deeply affected by pervasive corruption and control.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Religious leaders of other churches (Strong):** The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOC) is the oldest Christian community in the country and is home to the majority of Christian followers. Its leaders exert great influence on many aspects of life. The problem with such influence is that the leaders do not welcome new forms of Christianity in the country, above all the Pentecostal groups, and are known to actively support efforts to limit the growth of other church groups and denominations.
- **(Extended) Family (Strong):** Family members make life difficult for those who leave the EOC to join new denominations. They see such new denominational loyalty as a betrayal of family values and the 'faith of their forefathers'. Thus, it is not surprising to see a family relative informing government contacts about one of their family members who has joined a non-EOC church.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Some government officials act as protectors of their own Orthodox faith and will thus persecute followers of other church groups.

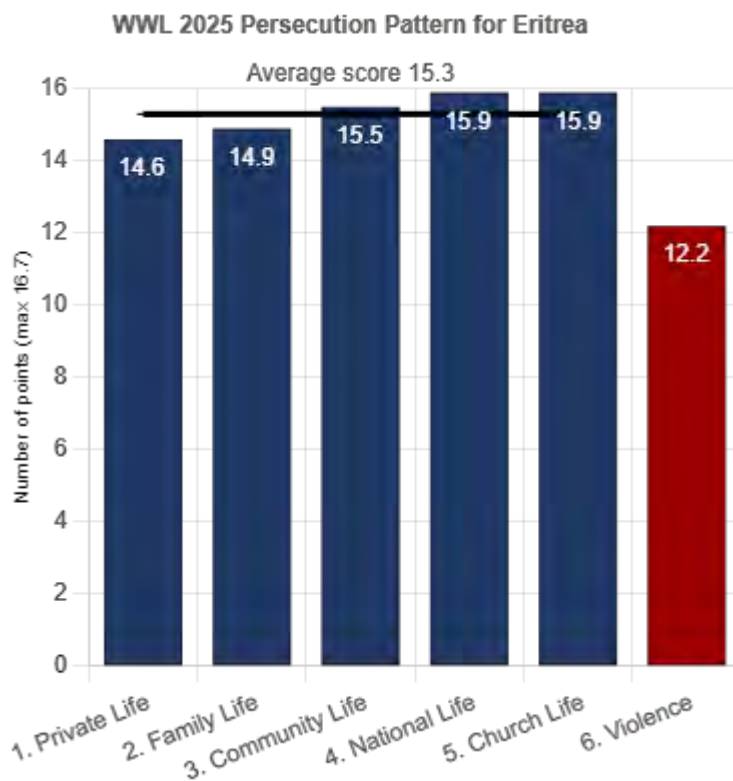
Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Corruption networks (Strong):** The existence of criminal and corruption networks within the army and the ruling party has made life for many Eritreans (especially Christians) very difficult; there is nowhere for them to appeal to for their rights to be respected.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **(Extended) Family and Citizens (Strong/Strong):** Converts from Islam to Christianity often face violence and severe pressure at home. As a result, they often hide their faith and cannot keep religious materials at home. Since a close, communal way of life is the norm, the extended family has extensive power. Ordinary citizens are sometimes encouraged by Islamic religious leaders (see below) to act with hostility towards local Christians.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** In the lowlands (in both eastern and western parts of the country), imams in mosques and madrassas sometimes preach anti-Christian sentiments. Muslim religious leaders have played an important role in creating an anti-Christian attitude among their followers which has, in turn, resulted in discrimination, intolerance and violence towards Christians.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Eritrea shows:

- Average pressure remains at an extreme level of 15.3 points, unchanged from WWL 2024, indicating a consistently harsh environment for Christians.
- Both the *National* and *Church spheres of life* scored 15.9 points, representing the highest level of pressure. This reflects the government's active role in restricting religious freedoms through stringent policies and regulations. The score for pressure in the *Community sphere of life* was 15.5 points, highlighting the intolerance and discrimination faced by Christians at the community level. *Christian Denominational protectionism* significantly contributes to societal discrimination, with some Christian groups opposing others, exacerbating the challenges for non-traditional denominations.

- The score for violence is categorized as 'extreme' at 12.2 points, a decrease from 12.8 points recorded in WWL 2024. This decrease is primarily due to a reduction in the number of Christians killed during the WWL 2025 reporting period. Despite this decrease, many Christians remain imprisoned due to their faith, some facing unknown fates, and churches continue to be targeted.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2025 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (4.00 points)

In Eritrea's repressive environment, Christians face severe persecution for even the most innocuous forms of personal expression. Writing about their faith on blogs or social media platforms becomes a perilous endeavor. This atmosphere of oppression compels many believers to either practice their faith in secrecy or contemplate dangerous escapes through neighboring countries, such as Sudan and Ethiopia, often navigating treacherous routes through Libya. While assessments of persecution differ, a common reality persists: Expressing one's faith in written form constitutes both an act of defiance and a profound risk.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.75 points)

Accessing radio or television stations that are either affiliated with unrecognized Christian groups or critical of the Eritrean government poses significant danger for Christians in Eritrea. The government strictly monitors media consumption, and possessing or listening to broadcasts from such sources is viewed as a subversive act. Christians who attempt to access these stations risk being labeled as dissidents, leading to potential harassment, arrest or imprisonment. The authorities maintain a tight grip on information, and any association with media that questions the state or promotes non-sanctioned religious perspectives is treated as a direct threat to national security.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.75 points)

Christians, especially those not recognized by the government, face persistent and multifaceted persecution in Eritrea. These unrecognized groups are subject to repeated harassment, arbitrary detention, and imprisonment by state authorities. In the lowland areas, they encounter the additional challenge of Islamic oppression, which further exacerbates their marginalization and heightens the risks they face. In the highland regions, the situation is equally perilous. Here, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, particularly its youth, often coordinates with the government to monitor and suppress unrecognized Christian communities. This collaboration creates an environment where unrecognized Christians are not only targeted by the state but also by dominant religious institutions, compounding their vulnerability.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)

Displaying Christian images is often a serious risk for unrecognized Christian groups in Eritrea, especially in the lowland regions. Such displays frequently provoke attacks and threats (Islamic oppression). For these communities, the mere act of placing Christian symbols on houses or buildings can draw dangerous attention. Those associated with these displays become marked targets, facing harassment, violence, and persecution. This visibility makes them highly vulnerable, as both state authorities and local groups view these symbols as defiance against the accepted religious norms.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere***Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.75 points)***

Christian couples belonging to unrecognized groups in Eritrea often face significant obstacles when attempting to adopt children or serve as foster parents due to their faith. Lacking legal recognition, these Christians find their rights routinely compromised, particularly by dominant religious groups that oppose their involvement in child adoption. The government's alignment with these recognized religious institutions further undermines the rights of unrecognized Christians, creating an environment where their ability to adopt or care for children is systematically blocked. This denial not only restricts their family life but also reinforces the marginalization imposed on these communities.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.75 points)

Christians, especially those belonging to unrecognized churches in Eritrea, face severe restrictions when attempting to raise their children according to their faith. The government's crackdown on unrecognized religious groups instills a constant fear among these parents. They worry that teaching their children Christian virtues and values could draw the attention of authorities, leading to harassment, detention, or other forms of persecution. This environment of fear makes parents hesitant to openly express their faith within their own households, as doing so could expose both themselves and their children to serious risks. Consequently, the right to instill their beliefs in the next generation is severely compromised for those within unrecognized Christian communities.

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

Christian children, particularly those from unrecognized churches in Eritrea, face pressure to attend government-led education that often includes teachings hostile to their faith. With no option for Christian-based education, these children are subjected to conflicting religious teachings and an environment that undermines their beliefs, creating additional obstacles for both them and their families.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.75 points)

In areas where *Islamic oppression* is prevalent, children of Christians regularly encounter targeted hostility from their communities. For children of unrecognized Christian groups, discrimination is widespread, occurring throughout the country. These children are often marginalized in schools,

communities, and public spaces, facing bias and mistreatment because of their association with an unrecognized faith.

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)

In Eritrea, Christians face significant challenges, particularly those from unrecognized churches in Orthodox-dominated areas. This extends to various aspects of daily life, making it difficult for unrecognized Christians to freely express their faith without facing social and sometimes official repercussions. In areas affected by *Islamic oppression*, all Christians, regardless of their denomination, encounter pressure: They may be targeted for not following Islamic dress codes, creating an atmosphere of constant tension and fear. For unrecognized Christian groups, the situation is especially harsh, as they lack any form of community support or government protection, leaving them vulnerable to ongoing discrimination and hostility in both Orthodox and Muslim-majority regions.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.75 points)

Christians in Eritrea, particularly those from unrecognized churches, are often hindered from accessing community resources due to their faith. This exclusion occurs in various forms, whether in urban or rural settings. In rural areas, for example, Christians may face hostility when attempting to share drinking water for their cattle or use communal wells.

Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Christians, especially those from unrecognized churches in Eritrea, face significant barriers when attempting to participate in communal institutions and forums. They are often excluded from local decision-making bodies, community meetings, and social organizations due to their faith. This exclusion limits their ability to voice concerns, contribute to community development, and access support networks, deepening their marginalization within society.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 points)

Christians in Eritrea, particularly converts, face intense pressure from their communities to renounce their faith. Converts often bear the brunt of this persecution, as they are seen as rejecting traditional or majority religious practices. This pressure can take many forms, including social ostracism, threats and violence. For converts, this hostile environment affects every aspect of life, from personal relationships to employment opportunities, forcing them to navigate constant scrutiny and intimidation.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

In Eritrea, national laws impose severe restrictions on religious freedom, making it virtually impossible for individuals, especially those from non-recognized or minority Christian groups, to freely practice their faith. The state's emphasis on the Eritrean Orthodox Church's authority results in restrictive measures, such as biased registration requirements and legal barriers that prevent unrecognized denominations from worshiping openly. Due to these and other related violations of religious freedom, Eritrea has been designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) by the US Department of State, highlighting its systemic abuses and disregard for fundamental human rights.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (4.00 points)

Christians in Eritrea often face severe challenges due to laws and practices that force them to act against their conscience. National service laws, in particular, do not respect the rights of conscientious objectors, compelling individuals to engage in activities that directly conflict with their religious beliefs. Mandatory military service is a key example, where Christians are required to participate in actions contrary to their faith. Additionally, certain professions may impose demands that compromise their conscience, creating significant ethical dilemmas.

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Christians in Eritrea often face strict restrictions on movement, regardless of whether they belong to recognized or unrecognized denominations. Those suspected of harboring anti-government views are particularly affected, with both their domestic travel and attempts to leave the country tightly controlled. For unrecognized Christians, the situation is even more severe. Their movements are closely monitored, and they frequently encounter obstacles when trying to visit other communities or attend religious gatherings. Some bribe security personnel to escape the country, risking their lives in the process.

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

In Eritrea, freedom of expression is severely restricted, making it one of the most repressive and reclusive countries in the world regarding the flow of information. The right to freedom of expression, intrinsically linked to freedom of religion, is heavily curtailed for Christians, particularly those who are unrecognized by the state. Any attempt by Christians to express views that contradict the government's stance is met with harsh repercussions. Individuals who speak out or share information contrary to state-sanctioned narratives risk imprisonment, often without trial or any indication of when, or if, they will be released. This oppressive environment effectively silences Christian communities, leaving them unable to express their faith openly or share their experiences without fear of indefinite detention.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Churches in Eritrea, both registered and non-registered, face intense challenges, including constant monitoring, obstruction and interference. The government's tight control over religious activities imposes severe restrictions on worship, gatherings and outreach, greatly limiting the freedom to practice and express faith. For non-registered Christians, often from non-traditional denominations, the risks are even greater. They endure continuous surveillance, harassment, and the constant threat of arrest. Both registered and non-registered churches experience disruptions to their services, confiscation of property, and the interrogation of their leaders and members.

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

Churches in Eritrea face significant obstacles when attempting to organize Christian activities outside their designated buildings. Government authorities strictly limit religious gatherings beyond church premises, often denying permits or intervening to disrupt such events. This restriction particularly affects outreach efforts, community services, and religious education, confining faith practices to narrow, state-approved spaces. For unrecognized churches, the situation is even more restrictive, as any attempt to hold activities outside is met with immediate scrutiny, harassment, and the risk of arrest. These limitations severely curtail the ability of Christian communities to freely express and practice their faith.

Block 5.9: Christians have experienced interference when choosing their own religious leaders. (4.00 points)

Christians in Eritrea commonly experience interference when selecting their own religious leaders. This issue extends even to the majority religious group, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, which saw its patriarch removed and placed under house arrest for years. The government exerts tight control over religious institutions, allowing no entity to operate independently. For smaller, unrecognized churches, the situation is even more dire. They face intense scrutiny and pressure, with government authorities often dictating or rejecting leadership choices, further undermining their ability to function autonomously and practice their faith freely.

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

Obtaining registration or legal status for churches in Eritrea is an incredibly challenging and arduous process. By law, (apart from Sunni Islam) only the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea are officially recognized. This leaves all other Christian denominations facing significant obstacles when seeking official recognition. The government enforces stringent regulations that create virtually impossible barriers for non-traditional Christian groups, effectively denying them legal protection and exposing them to various forms of persecution.

Even those churches that manage to secure registration are not free from government interference. They continue to face ongoing oversight, including surveillance, restrictions on their activities, and

limitations on the free expression of their faith. This heavy-handed approach by the Eritrean authorities fosters an environment of fear and uncertainty, pushing many Christians to practice their faith as discreetly as possible (or 'underground') to avoid harassment and further persecution.

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

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

3. The use of symbolic numbers:

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

Eritrea: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	2	3
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	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	245	300
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?	100 *	100 *
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	10 *
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?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1000 *	1000 *
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?	10 *	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *

- **Christians killed:** Two Christians died in detention.
- **Christians arrested:** Hundreds of Eritreans are still detained from earlier reporting periods without charge or trial in various detention sites across the country, often in horrific conditions, many are being held on account of their political views or religious beliefs. Among those held are also Haile Naizge, Chairman of the Full Gospel Church, and Kufu Gebremeskel, Chairman of the Eritrean Evangelical Alliance and member of the executive committee of the Full Gospel Church of Eritrea.

- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** In some cases, it was government agents who ransacked and looted houses of evangelical Christians during raids; in other circumstances, ultra-conservative EOC followers targeted property belonging to members of unregistered churches.

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.

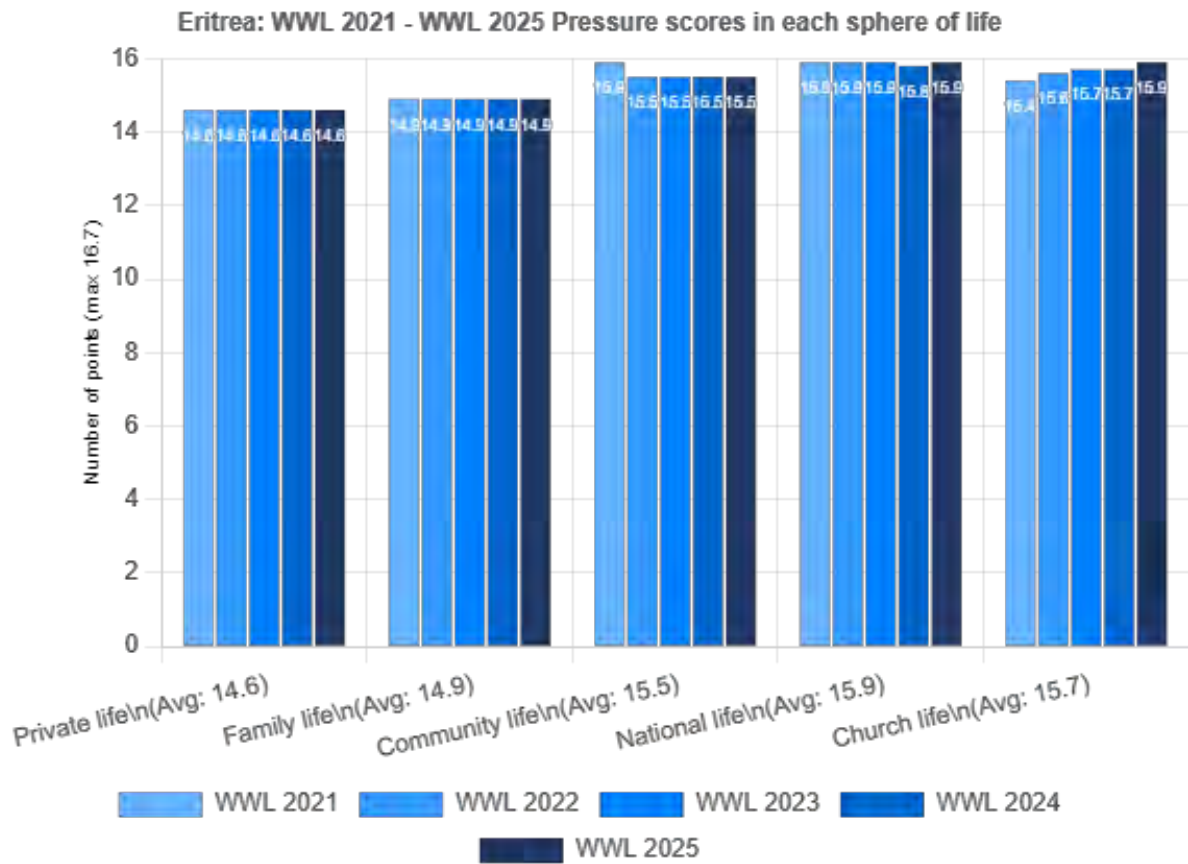
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Eritrea: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	15.3
2024	15.3
2023	15.3
2022	15.3
2021	15.3

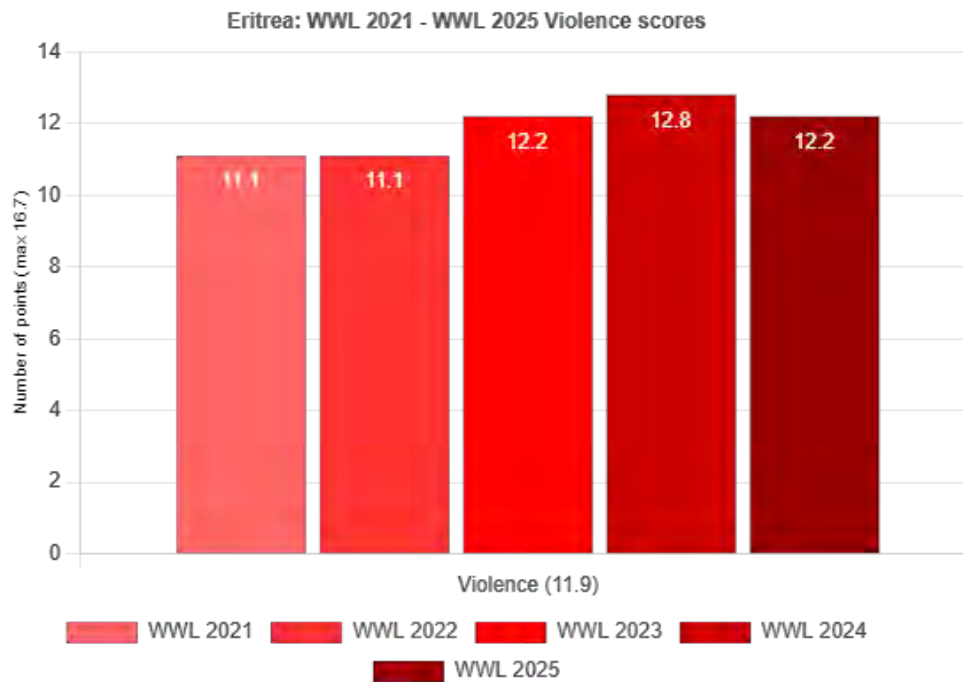
The table above indicates that the average pressure on Christians has remained consistently extreme at 15.3 points. This unrelenting pressure highlights the severity of multiple persecution drivers squeezing Christian communities at various levels and with differing intensities, whether the engine is *Dictatorial paranoia*, *Christian denominational protectionism*, *Organized corruption and crime* or *Islamic oppression*. These overlapping forces amplify both human rights and religious freedom issues, echoing descriptions by numerous organizations. Despite a growing demand for change and recent re-entry into the international community following the lifting of UN sanctions, the government has shown no sign of softening its stance. Instead, it has kept pressure intense, using the civil war in northern Ethiopia as justification to forcefully recruit young adults, disregarding the rights of conscientious objectors.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The chart below illustrates the extreme levels of pressure that Christians in Eritrea have been facing across various aspects of their lives over the last five WWL reporting periods. The most intense pressure is observed in the *National sphere*, with an average score of 15.9 points, highlighting the pervasive nature of governmental persecution across the country. This trend is closely followed by the extremely high levels of pressure in the *Church* and *Community spheres*, with average scores of 15.7 and 15.5, respectively, indicating that challenges faced by Christians permeate not only religious institutions but also their wider communal and national lives. Such high scores reflect a comprehensive, systemic form of persecution, largely influenced by the government's *Dictatorial paranoia*. Meanwhile, the *Private sphere* holds the lowest five-year average score at 14.6 points, although this, too, is in the category 'extremely high'.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Violence against Christians has entered the 'extremely high' category, increasing from 11.1 points in WWL 2021 to 12.2 in WWL 2025. The comparatively lower violence score in WWL 2025 compared to

WWL 2024 - and especially when compared with countries like CAR, Mali or Burkina Faso - was largely due to fewer recorded instances of Christian fatalities. Often, reports of such fatalities surface only after a significant delay, frequently missing the WWL reporting period in question. In this highly restrictive country with limited access to information, the lower score often results from a lack of substantiated evidence, despite indications of numerous cases of Christian fatalities and forced disappearances.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Eritrea	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Abduction Denied access to social community/networks Denied custody of children Denied inheritance or possessions Forced divorce Forced marriage Imprisonment by government Incarceration by family (house arrest) Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence – sexual

Christian women are caught in a pincer of pressure from the Eritrean government and social pressures. Not only are Evangelicals and converts alike subject to increasing government persecution, but they experience the usual social and domestic pressures of belonging to an unacceptable minority. Converts face abduction and forced marriage, particularly in rural areas. If a Christian woman is abducted by a Muslim and forcibly married, or lured into a romantic relationship by one, she will be forced to accept his religion as well. Forced marriage is a widely reported tool utilized against female converts in Eritrea.

While pressure is reportedly highest against converts both from Muslim and Eritrean Orthodox Church backgrounds, families have also been known to look down on converts, isolating them within the home. While parents may appear to fulfill their parental responsibilities, such as providing school fees, clothing and housing, they may ignore them entirely, causing psychological distress. In some situations, they could be expelled from home, shunned without any help.

Whereas in many countries women are exempt from military service, in Eritrea, women are also subjected to obligatory military training and national service at the infamous SAWA military training camps, a highly controlled environment in which every behavior and belief is scrutinized. [Female conscripts](#) – mostly unmarried women subjected to indefinite military service – are vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence, including from prisoner guards and commanders (HRW 2022 Eritrea country chapter). Many choose to flee the country in order to evade such a fate.

Hundreds of women also experience gender-based violence in detention centers. This is within the context of Eritrea’s practice of indefinite detention for no reason other than being Christian. Women and girls are prone to rape and sexual violence as a form of persecution especially when under

detention on religious grounds. A country expert explained: “Though not officially recognized, Christian women and girls are particularly prone to this mode of persecution. They are easy targets because they cannot report to authorities if they are harmed”.

Women detained or forced to escape the country are not the only victims. The families and children of such detainees and escapees will likely also become victims. In addition to being denied the chance to see their loved ones, they are likely to face other punitive acts, simply for being related to the detainee or defector. In a similar vein, when men flee the country, or are killed or imprisoned for their faith, women are responsible for taking on family responsibilities in their absence, with many families ending up impoverished due to the ostracization and lack of financial provision.

Women are also reported to be subject to restricted movement, due to the implication of legal requirements stating that documentation is required to travel. Even if children are not travelling with them, women are obliged by law to present one of their children’s baptism certificates in order to travel ([Equal Rights & IRAP, April 2021](#)). Whilst baptism of children is common practice for the Eritrean Orthodox church, which is the predominant religion in the highlands of Eritrea, Pentecostal believers do not practice infant baptism and other identity documents they may present are not officially accepted. Pentecostal believers are seen as the intended targets of this legislation.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Eritrea	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Forced to flee town/country Imprisonment by government Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence - death Violence - physical

Christian men are subject to the same system of obligatory military conscription that women are subject to, which places them in a highly controlled environment. Compulsory military service is identified by a country expert as having particularly severe consequences on men. The result is that many young Eritreans seek to escape the country.

Everyday life is under scrutiny; phone calls are monitored, bandwidth is kept slow and a network of citizens (usually women) are tasked with spying on their neighbors. Indeed, the level of monitoring has caused Eritrea to hold the infamous title of “[North Korea of Africa](#)” and topping the list of the [most censored](#) countries (The Economist, 26 May 2022; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019). Those suffering particularly are Christians who are not recognized by the state.

In Eritrea, there is typically no disparity in the treatment of both men and women found in secret Christian cell group meetings; all suffer the same fate of arbitrary arrests and indefinite detention. However, pastors, who tend to be men, can be especially targeted for imprisonment. Pastors, Christian leaders, and their family members often find themselves subjected to targeted harassment due to their faith-related roles and beliefs. This persecution extends not only to non-traditional Christian

denominations but also to registered ones, reflecting the broader challenges faced by Christians in the country. These Christian leaders, who play a vital role in guiding and shepherding their communities, often face various forms of intimidation, threats and harassment by both government authorities and societal groups. The government's stringent control over religious activities and expressions significantly impacts the lives of pastors and Christian leaders. They are frequently monitored and their activities restricted. This environment of surveillance and pressure makes it difficult for these leaders to carry out their pastoral responsibilities and to provide spiritual guidance to their congregations freely. Moreover, the restrictive social and religious landscape can also lead to stigmatization and hostility from local communities, causing additional challenges for pastors and their families. All of these factors combined contribute to the deeply challenging and hostile environment that Christian leaders face. A country expert describes how pastors are always the main target for persecution and arrest, stating that many have been in prison for more than 16 years. Any arrests among them causes a leadership vacuum. In cases where an arrested man is the breadwinner, his arrest causes economic distress to his family, an unstable childhood for his children and fear. His children find they are often taunted by fellow children and branded as a 'Pente', a label which is deemed to be shameful across Eritrea. Many are also 'released' into forced military service after such arrests.

Persecution of other religious minorities

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

- The Eritrean government continued to ban all non-Sunni practices of Islam.
- As reported by the Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Freedom Report for Eritrea released in December 2023, Eritrean authorities continued to detain 36 Jehovah's Witnesses, including 26 men and 10 women. Among these detainees, five individuals were arrested in 2023, with one being 81-year-old Tesfazion Gebremichael. Concerns about Gebremichael's health have not been heeded to date. Additionally, the report revealed that as of December 2023, four Jehovah's Witnesses aged between 62 and 77 had died while in government custody since 2011.

Trends Summary

1) The government continues to impose authoritarian restrictions

For over a quarter of a century, Eritrea has been ruled by a one-party system. This rule has curtailed the freedom of citizens to enjoy their fundamental rights. The regime is still strong enough to impose authoritarian restrictions. Isolated and condemned by the international community, Eritrea had also suffered sanctions imposed by the UN, which were then lifted after the country signed a peace treaty with Ethiopia. Coupled with involuntary military conscription, persecution and harsh economic conditions, thousands of Eritreans have fled the country. Some of them have ended up in the hands of human traffickers, for instance in Libya.

2) The government is trying to re-establish international relations

Despite protests from international human rights groups and the UN Human Rights Commission's report on crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Eritrean government in previous years, the regime has not yet faced serious consequences for its appalling human rights record. In fact, the country is trying to work out ways of re-establishing a strong relationship with Western countries. The visit to Asmara by a [senior US diplomat](#) in April 2018 was a testament to that effort (Africa News, 23

April 2018). More importantly, the country has resumed peaceful relationships with Ethiopia. The Eritrean president has visited the country on two occasions. This closer relationship was scaled up in 2020/2021 when Eritrea sent troops to support Ethiopia in the conflict with the TPLF. Through the involvement of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia, the Eritrean president had hoped to be valued as an important leader whose role is significant for security and stability in the region. However, this image was tarnished by Eritrea being implicated in atrocities in Ethiopia's Tigray region. In November 2022, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF signed a peace agreement in South Africa to declare a permanent cessation of hostility. In 2023, there were some reports suggesting that Eritrean troops were still occupying certain territories in Tigray.

3) Many Eritreans are deeply dissatisfied with the current regime

Eritrea has been facing many challenges, of which poverty and security have been main issues. The number of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya and beyond clearly indicates that many Eritreans are deeply dissatisfied with the current regime and the living conditions in the country. Concerning foreign policy and aid, the Eritrean regime is likely to continue its cooperation with China, Iran and Gulf countries and resist pressure from the West to open up its doors to Western NGOs, including Christian organizations. The regime is likely to continue violating the human rights of citizens and suppress in this process those forms of Christianity and Islam, which are not perceived as indigenous, in an attempt to foster social harmony. This could play into the hands of Muslim groups aiming to further a radical Islamic agenda. However, it could equally well weaken both the Orthodox Church and non-traditional Protestant dominations and their ability to reach out to Eritrean Muslims. The clash within the Eritrean diaspora is testament to this.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

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

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Release International, 17 May 2024 - <https://releaseinternational.org/church-leader-dies-in-prison/>
- Persecution engines description: CPI 2023 - <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/eritrea>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Female conscripts - https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/01/World%20Report%202022%20web%20pdf_0.pdf
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Equal Rights & IRAP, April 2021 - https://refugeerights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report_access_to_official_documents_eritrea_equalrights_irap.pdf
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: North Korea of Africa - <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2022/05/26/containing-eritrea-the-north-korea-of-africa>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: most censored - <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/09/10-most-censored-eritrea-north-korea-turkmenistan-journalist/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Eritrea - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/eritrea/>
- Trends Summary: senior US diplomat - <https://africatimes.com/2018/04/23/yamamoto-heads-to-djibouti-after-rare-eritrea-visit/>