
World Watch Research

Myanmar: 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.....	8
Brief description of the persecution situation.....	8
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	9
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	9
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	10
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	10
Position on the World Watch List	11
Persecution engines.....	12
Drivers of persecution.....	14
The Persecution pattern	17
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	18
Violence	28
5 Year trends.....	31
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	33
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male.....	34
Persecution of other religious minorities	35
Trends Summary	35
Further useful reports.....	36
External Links	36

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

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

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

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

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

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

Copyright, sources and definitions

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

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

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

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

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

Reporting period

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

Brief country details

Myanmar: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
54,965,000	4,760,000	8.7

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

Myanmar: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,760,000	8.7
Muslim	2,123,000	3.9
Hindu	962,000	1.8
Buddhist	40,603,000	73.9
Ethnic religionist	5,159,000	9.4
Jewish	34	0.0
Bahai	96,700	0.2
Atheist	21,700	0.0
Agnostic	251,000	0.5
Other	988,130	1.8
<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



Since 2006, Yangon (formerly Rangoon) is no longer the country's capital city.

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Myanmar:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders
Religious nationalism	Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials, One's own (extended) family, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders
Ethno-religious hostility	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Government officials, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

As 2025 sees Myanmar entering a fifth year of an increasingly violent conflict, solutions - or even just a ceasefire - are nowhere in sight. After the army staged a coup on 1 February 2021, fighting has continued and increased in many parts of the country; with the levels of violence rising, the government resorts more and more to aerial and missile attacks. An offensive named "[Operation 1027](#)" mounted in Northern Shan state in October 2023 by three powerful ethnic armed groups is still ongoing, but has overall put the military junta on the backfoot and forced it to focus more on the Burmese heartlands. Mounted by the "Brotherhood Alliance" of the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, the offensive overran and occupied more than 100 army posts, posing a formidable challenge to an already overstretched army (Reuters, 10 November 2023). However, the government forces are far from being defeated.

The Christian minority is among those bearing the brunt of attacks. Even well-established churches belonging to historical Christian communities are being attacked in predominantly Christian states like Chin, Kachin and Kayah states, but also in states with a strong Christian minority, like Karen state and northern Shan state. More Christians than ever have been driven out to live in IDP camps, take refuge in churches or even flee to the jungle where they are often deprived of access to food and healthcare. Since the beginning of the civil war, an estimated 2.8 million citizens of Myanmar have become IDPs, a sharp increase compared to earlier numbers and a strong indication of how the conflict has expanded both in territory and viciousness. Christians are part of the generally peaceful resistance movement, but fighting has increased across the country and although not all ethnic minority armed groups are involved, some Christian ones are, even those that have been out of the spotlight for a considerable time, like the Karen. Government forces continued to attack Christian villages and churches (while leaving Buddhist monasteries largely untouched) and also killed Christian aid workers and pastors. The

destruction of a complete village with 400 houses and five churches in Chin state in April 2024 is just one example. The fate of a prominent Baptist pastor is another: It had been seen as an encouraging sign that the military authorities [released](#) over 3,000 prisoners in a traditional amnesty on the recent Thingyan festival, among them Baptist Pastor Dr Hkalam Samson (The Diplomat, 18 April 2024). However, the fact that he was [re-arrested](#) only one day later shows the sort of difficulties the Christian minority in Myanmar is facing (AP News, 19 April 2024).

Converts to Christianity find themselves additionally persecuted by their Buddhist, Muslim or tribal families and communities because they have left their former faith and have thereby removed themselves from community life. Communities who aim to stay "Buddhist only" make life for Christian families impossible by not allowing them to use community water resources. Non-traditional church groups experience opposition too, especially when they are located in the rural areas of Myanmar and/or are known for proselytizing. While Buddhist monks are somewhat divided concerning the February 2021 coup, many of the more radical ones support it.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
2. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
3. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christian children are forced to receive Buddhist religious education and to participate in religious ceremonies and festivals that are not in line with their religious beliefs (CRC Art. 14)
- Christians are denied access to communal resources because of their faith (ICESCR Art. 2)
- Christian homes and shops are attacked and destroyed, in violation of the right to an adequate standard of living and to a continuous improvement of living conditions (ICESCR Art. 11)
- Christian female converts are forcibly married to Buddhist men and pressured to renounce their new faith (CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Kachin Christian women and girls are trafficked into sex trade (CRC Art. 34 and CEDAW Art. 6)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **12 April 2024:** Catholic priest Paul Khwi Shane Aung was [shot](#) and seriously injured while holding a morning church service in Mohnyin town, Kachin state (UCA News, 12 April 2024).
- **18 March 2024:** Christian leader Nammye Hkun Jaw, was [killed](#) in his shop in Mogaung, Kachin state, by unknown assailants (Asia News, 19 March 2024).
- **February 2024:** Nine Christians were abducted by an ethnic insurgent group in northwestern Myanmar.
- **7 January 2024:** A church in Kanan village, Sagaing Division, was targeted by airstrikes, killing 17 people and wounding nine. According to a [report](#), 11 of those killed were Christians (Mission News Network, 15 January 2024).

- **26 November 2023:** State military attacked Loikaw Cathedral in Kayah state with aerial strikes, causing the IDPs seeking protection in the compound to flee elsewhere (Asia News, 28 November 2023).
- **October 2023:** in an airstrike against a refugee camp near the town of Laiza in Kachin state, 29 Christians were killed and at least 56 wounded.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. Due to the ongoing war situation (also partly due to the aftermath of the COVID crisis), this community has become very small and is not scored in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: This category consists of groups such as the Roman Catholic Church, but also traditional churches among the Christian minorities like the Kachin Baptist Church. These Christians are facing everyday pressure and violent attacks from the Myanmar army or sometimes also from insurgent groups, as they are under general suspicion of supporting or aiding the opposition.

Converts to Christianity: Converts from a Buddhist, Muslim or Ethnic-animist background are facing the strongest violation of rights both from the authorities and from families, friends and neighbors as well. Leaving Buddhism is not accepted for someone of *Bamar* ethnicity and known converts are likely to be expelled from their villages. Radical Buddhist groups like Ma Ba Tha and the Pyu Saw Htee are instrumental and active in monitoring the activities of Christians including those from Buddhist background. In all the publicity about Rohingya refugees being forced to flee to Bangladesh, it is less well-known that there is a small number of Christian converts from a Muslim background among the Rohingya who stayed behind. These converts not only face persecution because of their ethnic affiliation, but also because their Muslim families and communities put them under enormous pressure to return to Islam. (The converts who fled to Bangladesh are scored for Bangladesh.)

Non-traditional Christian communities: Many Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are facing persecution from the community they live in, especially in rural areas. They are not just monitored, but are sometimes also hindered from gathering or holding Sunday school classes. Because of the prevailing perception that being a Burmese means being a Buddhist, outreach is especially challenging. Apart from this, as civil war unfolds, they are facing similar difficulties as the historical Christian communities.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Myanmar is arguably the nation suffering from the world's longest civil conflict, which began immediately after the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. The core of the conflict is that the central government has tried to impose its control over regions, which had been promised a certain measure of autonomy. The conflict has become entrenched in areas with Christian majorities (such as Chin state) and in areas where there are significant Christian minorities. The Tatmadaw has indiscriminately attacked Christian villages, church buildings (which have sometimes been hosting refugee or IDP camps) and killed Christians. While the atrocities in Chin state have continued, other hotspots are Kachin state in the north and Kayah state in the southeast. Fighting there continues, an increasing number of people - many of them Christian - are living in IDP camps, most of them have been there for years, and humanitarian access to them is blocked. Fighting intensified in neighboring

Shan state, which has a large minority of Christians, especially in the north. Although the conflict with the Karen and Karenni is not in the focus of international attention, it is still smoldering and many have become IDPs (or refugees in Thailand). The government narrative about the alleged danger the Karenni minority is posing (see below: *Trends Summary #2*) shows that the military government will not ignore Christian minorities - even those outside the international focus. In terms of refugees, a not-so-different story could be told about the Chin, who are predominantly Christian, only that their choice of refuge is India. Other hotspots are Kachin state in the north as well as Kayin and Kayah states in the southeast. The lawless zones bordering Laos and Thailand, in which organized crime is booming, are located in minority regions, where many Christians are living as well.

Position on the World Watch List

Myanmar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	81	13
WWL 2024	79	17
WWL 2023	80	14
WWL 2022	79	12
WWL 2021	74	18

The rise of 2 points in overall score was caused by an increase in violence against Christians (rising from 16.1 points to 16.5 points) and by small increases in pressure in all *Spheres of life* except in *Church Life*. 2025 sees Myanmar entering a fourth year of increasingly violent conflict, marked by a severe deterioration in human rights, economic stability, and humanitarian conditions, as violence between the military junta and resistance forces continues to escalate. Christians, as a minority, face some of the worst human rights abuses, with the destruction, bombing, and burning of churches persisting across the country. Restrictions on gatherings, curfews, and targeted attacks on places of worship have left many Christians unable to attend services, while widespread conflict has forced numerous believers to become internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees. One notable development during this period has been the introduction of mandatory military conscription, leading to heightened fear and prompting many young people to flee the country, further weakening the fabric of Christian communities.

Persecution engines

Myanmar: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Very strong
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Strong
Clan oppression	CO	Very weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Weak
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

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

Religious nationalism - Buddhist (Very strong), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

Buddhism is embedded in the nation’s culture; this is commonly emphasized by radical Buddhists and tolerated - and to some extent supported - by the national government and the army. The majority of Myanmar’s population (an estimated 60%) are of Burmese ethnicity, also called Bamar. Being Bamar is equated with being Buddhist. As early as 1962, the campaign "One country, one religion" started. Everyone deviating from this heritage is labelled as being outside the community and therefore potentially dangerous. Consequently, there are Buddhist communities which would like to remain purely Buddhist.

Pressure on Christians comes from two sides:

- i) One side is society, which includes the radical Buddhist movement Ma Ba Tha. The fact that this movement was officially banned in 2017 and again in 2018 did not have real consequences. In July 2019, the Ministry for Religious Affairs announced that it would [take over regulating radical Buddhist groups](#) from the Buddhist leadership (the "Sangha") (The Irrawaddy, 31 July 2019). The implementation of the “Laws for the Protection of Race and Religion” is a sign of the continued influence of radical Buddhist groups. They have kept a lower profile after the war has started, but they continue to be a force to be reckoned with, especially for religious minorities such as Christians, and for converts. With the military coup, efforts towards Burmanization and Buddhization [increased](#) and as a result religious rights deteriorated, especially for minorities in the country (Asia Centre, "Burmanization and Buddhization" Report, 22 June 2023). There have also been reports that Ma Ba Tha members were appointed ward administrators by the military regime.
- ii) The other side is family. When a conversion takes place in a strongly Buddhist family, the convert will face high pressure from relatives to return to the Buddhist fold.

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)

Myanmar has a long history of being ruled by the army and while the 2015 elected government could not be called paranoid (neither could the short-lived 2020 one), behind the scenes Myanmar is one of the very few countries where it has always been the army holding almost dictatorial powers, as became apparent when the military coup took place on 1 February 2021. Hopes for democracy have been seriously dampened by the coup and the resistance movements, be it the CDM, PDF or any other of the acronyms explained above, have contributed to the paranoia of the army leadership.

In recent months, the Myanmar army has continued to do everything possible to stay in control, including using extremely violent and indiscriminate means. It even fought more violently, as a reaction to it losing territory, even alienating (at least) parts of the ethnic majority group. It has also called upon Buddhist nationalism or ethnic heritage, when needed. Therefore, one could also see this persecution engine as being blended with *Religious nationalism*. However, as the alienation includes a growing number and even the majority of Buddhists, it is better to keep these engines separate. The armed forces continue to run so-called “Border Areas National Races Youth Development Training Schools” (or Na Ta La - schools), which are attractive for minority people as they are boarding schools run without school fees. These schools are used to influence young people and to introduce them to Buddhism. *Dictatorial paranoia* is here to stay and, as the war grinds on, it continues to grow.

One country expert explained: "There is a strong link between a Burmese government's 'right to rule' (comparable to the Chinese 'Mandate from Heaven') and their ability to create, sustain, and expand a Buddhist ecumene. So, it is vital to the current junta to win against the ethnic minorities in order to expand/assert Buddhism to those areas that the Burmese have NEVER traditionally owned or governed. Their ability to win against them is a referendum on their Karma."

Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

In some of the states where most Christians live, like Kachin or Shan states, some of Myanmar's most precious resources are to be found - such as jade and timber. According to a [UN report](#) published in August 2019, this and other businesses the army is involved in, yield enormous sums - an income which is sometimes shared with ethnic insurgency groups in exchange for ceasefires or other agreements (see Paragraph 99 of the UN report). One of Asia's two largest opium-producing hubs covers large parts of that region, especially Kachin state (together with parts of Vietnam, Laos and Thailand), the famous "Golden Triangle". Allegedly, government officials, the Myanmar army and insurgent armies benefit from the drug production and trafficking at different levels and stages. Anyone who opposes this or is simply in the way of traders, exploiters and traffickers is in serious danger. Despite the war-time situation, business continues 'as usual'.

Sources inside the country reported that in some villages the Tatmadaw is providing youths with drugs for free, so that they would not fight against the army. Groups involved in illegal trade are also co-opted for monitoring minority groups, including Christians and Christian churches in these regions. As stated above, since many commodities like jade, timber and various ores can be found in Chin, Kachin and Shan states, the many Christians living there face heavy pressure from the army (and not only out of economic interest). This takes the form of being harassed, attacked and of being used as porters or guides. The emergence of "lawless zones", where casinos, but also all kinds of crimes from online fraud

to human trafficking are committed and which is referred to throughout this dossier, is strong in ethnic minority and border regions and thus also affects the Christian minorities.

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Weak)

Beginning at the end of 2018, the largest insurgency group, the Communist United Wa State army became violently active against Christians. Hundreds of churches were shut down, and hundreds of Christians were abducted or expelled from the territory. Allegedly backed by China, the targeted Christian groups were perceived as "missionaries" - mostly Baptist groups like the Lahu Baptist Convention or the Kachin Baptist Convention. Although reportedly only about half of the church buildings closed were allowed to be re-opened, the persecution engine is still mentioned here, as it helps understand the complex situation Christians find themselves in on the ground. This Communist crackdown resembles the one Chinese authorities have been instigating against Christianity in China for some years now. Since the Myanmar authorities do not have control in the de facto semi-autonomous Wa region with its 450,000 inhabitants, the persecution engine here is not *Religious nationalism*. And as the engine is limited to a comparably small territory within Myanmar, the strength of this engine is weak.

Drivers of persecution

Myanmar: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
		VERY STRONG	STRONG			WEAK		VERY STRONG	MEDIUM
Government officials		Very strong	Strong			Weak		Strong	Strong
Ethnic group leaders		Medium	Medium			Weak		Medium	Weak
Non-Christian religious leaders		Very strong	Strong					Strong	
Violent religious groups		Strong	Strong					Strong	
Ideological pressure groups		Strong	Strong						
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs		Medium	Medium						Very weak

Myanmar: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
		VERY STRONG	STRONG					VERY STRONG	MEDIUM
One's own (extended) family		Strong	Strong						Very weak
Political parties		Medium	Medium			Weak		Medium	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups						Strong			Medium
Organized crime cartels or networks		Weak	Weak			Medium			Medium

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 Religious nationalism - Buddhist, blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Some Buddhist monk leaders stir up the local population to act against Christians in predominantly Buddhist communities, for example when Christians do not want to send alms to the Buddhist temples. The radical Buddhist movement behind the Ma Ba Tha groups continues to 'protect' Buddhism as the country's national religion at all costs. This is intertwined with the protection of the ethnic 'Burmese race' as well. The two bans on Ma Ba Tha activities have not changed anything as they have always found other ways to continue their influence, often exercised by false accusations against the Christian minority in a local community.
- **Government officials (Very strong):** Local government officials, especially from rural areas, are often influenced by and biased towards Buddhist leaders, so minorities like Christians, who in many cases happen to be a religious and an ethnic minority, are disadvantaged and have no way of seeking justice. Particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, the military-run Ministries of Border Affairs and Home Affairs, and the Burmese military itself are directly responsible for religious freedom. A country expert stated: "The government officials are stricter than last year, we are required to inform them about any activities, no matter if it is a Christian program or not. Without explicit permission, we cannot do anything." One country expert reported that the military regime appoints Ma Ba Tha members as ward administrators.
- **Violent religious groups and ideological pressure groups (Strong):** Groups such as the already mentioned Ma Ba Tha not only call to protect and preserve Buddhist dominance, they also instigate violence and seek to indoctrinate people - especially soldiers - by upholding Buddhism as the only acceptable religion in Myanmar and regarding all other religions as dangerous cults. Whereas the main target has been the Muslim minority, Christians were affected by their call to take action as well. Insurgents sometimes also become drivers of persecution if they feel Christian churches are not supporting them strongly enough or when pastors are found advising young

people not to join in the fighting. Lastly, fighting groups like the already mentioned ARSA act violently against all converts among the Muslim minority.

- **Extended family (Strong):** Buddhist, Muslim and Ethnic-animist families actively persecute family members who convert to Christianity, as conversion is seen as betrayal. Children of Buddhist converts in mixed marriages are often forced - on a regular basis - to spend a week at a Buddhist monastery and follow the monks' way of life.
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Ethnic community leaders can stir up communities to stop Christians from using resources and aid meant for everyone living in the community. Especially among ethnic minorities, each conversion to another faith is seen as weakening the group and threatening the struggle many ethnic groups find themselves in. Leaders will therefore act to prevent conversions and put strong pressure on converts, up to the point of expelling them from the community.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** If someone in a village converts to Christian faith, this is seen as a disturbance of the harmony and is strongly opposed. Communities will put pressure on converts to give up their Christian faith. Mobs are easily stirred up and villagers often exclude Christians from support or any help they may get.
- **Political parties (Medium):** All non-minority political parties stand for Buddhist supremacy in one way or another and the (pre-coup) ruling NLD turned out to be a disappointment for the Christian minority. The erstwhile opposition USDP was closely connected to the Myanmar army and enacted the 2015 Law on the Protection of Race and Religion. In the current situation, political parties only play a subsidiary role in Myanmar.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** The army is the main force behind this persecution engine. What has been said for *Religious nationalism* applies here as well.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The Myanmar army took over power directly and will do everything it sees necessary to protect and defend its position. Its decades-long experience in dealing (violently) with insurgency movements helps in these efforts, however, the opposition is fierce and has been more successful than initially thought. Therefore, officials - and especially the army - are fighting even harder than before.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Groups such as Ma Ba Tha are at the forefront of supporting the constitutional status of the army and the predominance of the Burmese. They want this equilibrium retained at all costs.
- **Political parties (Medium):** What was said above for *Religious nationalism*, applies here as well.
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Where they are in power, leaders of ethnic minority groups and insurgencies tend to do everything to stay in power. Whoever is seen as a threat to this power will be fought against, even if it is a fellow Christian.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

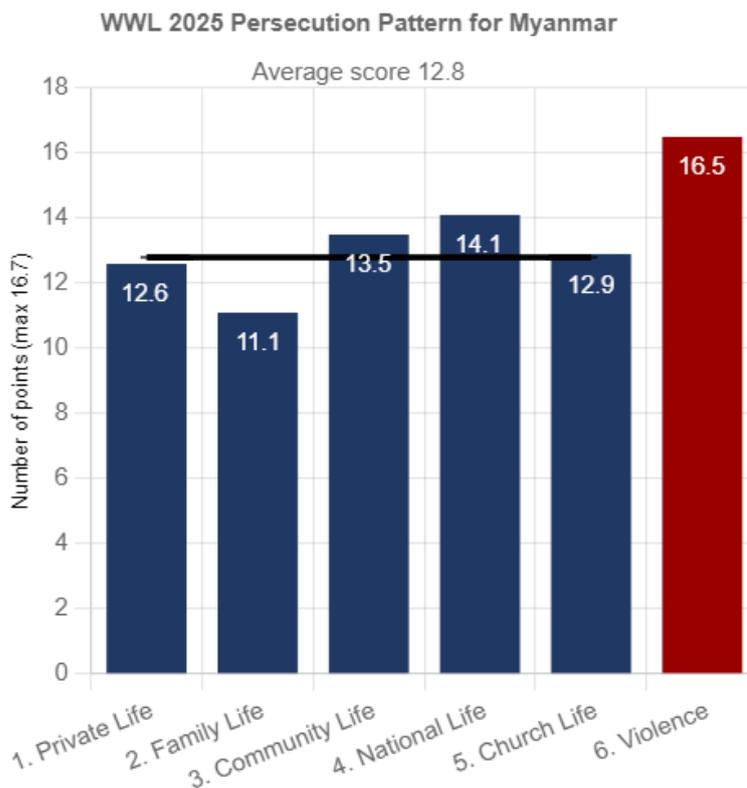
- **Government officials (Strong):** As indicated above, certain branches of the army are involved in various forms of illicit trade; this is sometimes carried out by proxies such as the BGF. If Christian settlements are in the way or they speak up against drugs and illegal trade, they are driven away to become IDPs. As the army dominates, the level of force is higher.

- **Revolutionary or paramilitary groups (Medium):** Most of Myanmar's landbound resources can be found in states which have a mainly Christian population or where Christians are a significant minority. The Myanmar army colludes with local strongmen, politicians and insurgents to take control of this wealth at the expense of the local population, it has also set up Border Guard Forces (BGF) it cooperates with. BGF are also instrumental in running the "lawless zones", referred to above. Fighting continues and if Christians and minorities are in the way, they are simply driven away. If they dare to speak out against the prevailing injustice (or try to give young people a hope for the future), they may be actively targeted, particularly by those benefitting from the illicit drug trade.
- **Organized crime and cartels (Medium):** Illegal trade is often organized by well-connected local strongmen, who can become drivers of persecution, too, if they see their profit threatened.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Some political leaders are likewise involved in illegal trade, especially those at the local level.

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression

- **Revolutionary or paramilitary groups (Strong):** Revolutionary and paramilitary groups started to become very visible drivers of persecution in September 2018, when the United Wa State army (UWSA), the largest insurgency group (estimated to have around 40,000 fighters) closed dozens of churches and detained almost a hundred Christians in a crackdown against "new churches".
- **Organized crime and cartels (Medium):** Reportedly, the UWSA is heavily involved in drug trafficking as well, so the 2018 crackdown may have had mixed motives.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Myanmar shows:

- The overall pressure on Christians in Myanmar increased slightly to an average of 12.8 points, reflecting new challenges such as those brought by increased conscription. At the same time, Christians (and other civilians in these areas) are threatened to be attacked by the army relentlessly.
- Converts are particularly affected by the levels of pressure in the *Community sphere* (extreme pressure) and the *Family* and *Private spheres of life*. All Christians face pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This pressure is fueled i) by an increasing emphasis on Buddhism by the regime, excluding all other minorities and ii) by the widening civil war, affecting among others Christian Kachin, Chin, Shan and Karen states. News blackouts hinder and delay reporting in these areas, causing verified details about the fighting to be difficult to obtain for international observers.
- The score for violence against Christians increased from 16.1 points in WWL 2024 to 16.5 points in WWL 2025, close to the maximum possible. There have been several killings of Christians, but those who have been killed by indiscriminate shelling of villages or by being caught between battle-lines have not been included in the scoring. In the WWL 2025 reporting period, more Christian churches were damaged and looted (whereas Buddhist monasteries have been largely left alone, but were not spared where seen as supporting the opposition). Also, more incidents were reported involving arrests, attacks against houses where Christians live or shops they owned and rape/sexual abuse. Due to the growing civil war, especially in Chin, Kachin, Kayah and Shan states, it is very difficult to obtain accurate reports on faith-based attacks against Christians and on churches attacked. In reality, the numbers are almost certainly higher than as listed below in the Violence table.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

Myanmar's current laws make it hard for an individual to convert. The Religious Conversion Law, part of the 2015 "Law for Protection of Race and Religion", requires that Myanmar citizens who wish to change their religion must obtain approval from a Registration Board for religious conversion, set up in all townships. The potential convert must also undergo an interview and engage in religious studies for a period not exceeding 90 days from the date of application, but extendable to 180 days at the applicant's request. If after that period the applicant still wishes to convert, the Registration Board will issue a certificate of religious conversion. During this period the application would be posted on a community board and converts are likely to be put under severe pressure by everyone around them to retract their application. Because of this, there are very few cases of this law being applied as

conversion is usually done in secret without the complicated process (including public exposure) described above. Converts face even more pressure from their family and community and are sometimes disowned and expelled from the family home, face community rejection, social isolation, and even physical punishment and are often brought before religious authorities.

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.). (3.25 points)

In Myanmar, it is highly risky for Christians to express their faith in written forms, including social media posts, blogs, and other public platforms. Even before the ongoing conflicts intensified, Christians had to exercise caution when discussing their beliefs. Statements as simple as "There is only one God" can attract criticism for promoting monotheism. Sharing faith-related content often leads to accusations of proselytization, government scrutiny, and backlash from the broader community. Restrictions extend to uploading sermons on platforms like YouTube, publishing Christian articles, or distributing written materials, all of which are strictly prohibited and monitored by the authorities. Those who violate these unwritten rules face harassment, threats, and potential imprisonment. For example, during the WWL 2025 period a convert sharing his testimony on social media was detained for a week. In some cases, public expressions of faith have led to business losses, social ostracism, and abandonment by family. Influential figures, such as pastors and celebrities, face heightened risks, including direct threats. In some cases, Christian missionaries posting sermons or traveling to preach have been forced into hiding due to threats from armed groups.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

In Myanmar, speaking about one's Christian faith outside immediate family members, such as with extended family or others, is highly risky. Discussions about faith, especially those perceived as proselytizing, can provoke backlash from both local communities and authorities. Christians engaging in such conversations risk being reported to extremist Buddhist groups, local authorities, or even the local army group. Converts from Buddhist or Muslim backgrounds face particular danger, as their actions may be seen as betraying cultural and religious norms. Myanmar's honor-and-shame culture exacerbates this, as conversion is often viewed as bringing dishonor to the family, leading to ostracism or even threats of violence.

Younger Christians face additional challenges due to traditional family hierarchies, which discourage them from expressing opinions, especially to elders. The deeply ingrained belief that "To be Burmese is to be Buddhist" further isolates Christians from their communities.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.25 points)

It is highly risky for Christians to meet with other believers, whether for fellowship, prayer or worship. The combination of military control, societal stigma, and cultural opposition creates a hostile environment where even small gatherings of Christians can lead to violence, ostracism, or legal consequences. Government-imposed restrictions severely limit gatherings, particularly in larger groups, with curfews and military surveillance further complicating such activities. Many churches have been destroyed, and Christians in rural or conflict-affected areas live in constant fear. The government and military authorities monitor Christian gatherings, and in areas under strict control,

meetings are limited to fewer than five people. Even when curfews are absent, believers often meet secretly or make excuses to avoid drawing attention. The pervasive ideology of "Buddhistization" and societal prejudice compound the risks with reports during the WWL 2025 period of violent attacks on some Christians who continue to meet including a woman who was violently attacked by her husband for hosting a Christian meeting, with the attending pastor also beaten.

Block 1 - Additional information

Depending on where a Christian is living and - for converts - depending on the family he or she is living with, it can be risky to display Christian images or symbols. Converts would rarely have Christian images at home or wear jewelry displaying a cross, for instance. The latter could also be perceived as inviting others to the Christian faith or even as mocking Buddhist symbols, so Christians usually refrain from doing so. In the existing war situation Christians are extremely cautious about when and where to display such symbols. In villages with a strong Buddhist presence, pastors who come visiting Christians are often met with hostility. Such visits have become even rarer due to the expanding war and even in opposition-ruled areas, such meetings come at a high risk.

In some Buddhist villages, especially in Rakhine state and the central part of Myanmar, Christians are not allowed to participate in community life. In such places, Christian converts have to be very careful not to be discovered, especially when they are the only ones in the family. On being discovered, they are usually forced to leave the village. But even in other places, converts prefer to be cautious as conversion to Christianity is seen as bringing shame and any visible act of Christian worship would be met with harsh opposition from families and local communities. In most urban areas, the pressure is not as high as in rural parts.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Christian children face significant pressure to participate in Buddhist religious teachings and practices at all levels of education, which often leads to trauma, marginalization and forced assimilation. The national curriculum, dominated by Buddhist ideology, integrates Buddhist teachings, prayers and rituals into daily school activities. Students are required to chant Buddhist precepts and participate in rituals such as offering flowers to Buddhist images and paying homage to teachers through bowing. Participation in these activities is mandatory in government and monastic schools, leaving Christian children with no alternative but to comply to avoid discrimination, punishment or exclusion.

Teachers frequently show favoritism toward Buddhist students, offering them better grades, awards, and opportunities. Christian students are often denied these advantages unless they conform to Buddhist norms.

Furthermore, Dhamma and Na Ta La Schools focus explicitly on Buddhist teachings, offering free education, meals and lodging to entice impoverished Christian families. Enrolled children are compelled to adopt Buddhist practices, including shaving their heads and wearing monks' robes.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)

Christian parents face substantial challenges in raising their children according to their beliefs, particularly in Buddhist-majority areas. These challenges stem from societal, familial and institutional pressures, which collectively hinder the transmission of Christian values to the next generation. In families with Buddhist or Muslim backgrounds, grandparents and other elder relatives often exert significant influence, insisting on raising children in the family's original religion. This is particularly evident in interfaith marriages and families with recent converts to Christianity. Furthermore, Myanmar's deeply embedded Buddhist traditions influence societal expectations, making it difficult for Christian families to opt out of cultural norms. For instance, during the Thadingyut Festival, kneeling and bowing before elders is expected, further entrenching Buddhist practices in daily life.

Due to economic hardship and conflict, many Christian families are forced to send their children to the aforementioned government-funded Na Ta La schools, where Buddhist teachings are mandatory. These schools promise better employment prospects, creating a dilemma for Christian parents who prioritize both their faith and their child's future opportunities.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)

Children of Christians in Myanmar face significant harassment and discrimination due to their parents' faith, particularly in Buddhist-majority areas. This systemic mistreatment manifests across various areas of daily life, including schools, communities and even within extended families, shaping a challenging environment for Christian families and their children. At school, for example, it is almost impossible for children of Christians to go unnoticed, as each school day starts with Buddhist prayers and if the children refuse to participate, they are known as outsiders and will be regularly bullied by their Buddhist peers. In village schools it is normal to blame Christian children for anything bad that happens. Christian schoolchildren also receive fewer opportunities and are unlikely to be chosen for further education, scholarships or special honors. They are also seldom given the opportunity to correct mere administrative errors like the misspelling of a name or a wrong birthdate. As a consequence, they have been blocked from taking exams.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.00 points)

A typical voice from within the country sums it up best: "Due to the religious conversion law, pastors cannot perform Baptism openly. If they are caught, they will be imprisoned." Churches therefore carry out baptisms discreetly. For converts from a Buddhist or Muslim background, there is no other choice, it has to be done secretly. Baptismal certificates cannot be issued and only a few fellow Christians would be able and allowed to witness the baptism. In regions where Christians are the majority, baptisms of non-Buddhist background believers are less problematic.

Block 2 - Additional information

Converts do not necessarily face the threat of losing their inheritance or custody rights, but women converts may well face the threat of divorce (if married). The Kittima Adoption Act of 1941 allows only Buddhists to adopt a child. All other forms of adoption are not official and not legally-binding. Muslim converts are also subjected to the wider Muslim minority's problem of being denied citizenship.

Muslim Rohingya - and with them the minority of Christians from a Muslim background - are perceived as being Bengalese and effectively lack any legal status. Most of them are currently residing in refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh. One Christian from Myanmar explained: "Because Buddhists believe that the spirit of a deceased is still present at home, only after seven days, the spirit will be freed by a Buddhist prayer. If this does not happen, the village or community will be harmed. That's why they frequently force burials of Christians to be performed with non-Christian rites."

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)

The monitoring of Christians in Myanmar is intense and multi-faceted and reflects a combination of community-driven suspicion, religious nationalism, and state-sponsored digital authoritarianism. This scrutiny is most acute for Christian converts and those in areas under military control and somewhat less pronounced in areas under the control of the opposition. Since the military coup in February 2021, the government has used surveillance technology such as facial recognition, phone tapping, internet censorship and social media monitoring to track and identify Christians, especially those involved in protest. Nationalist Buddhists have accused Christians of proselytizing and reported them to the authorities or local government. In areas like Magway Division and Chin State, churches must submit weekly reports detailing sermons, church activities, and attendance to local authorities. Some Christians are being shadowed, harassed or threatened by regime forces or armed groups, especially in conflict zones where Christians are a majority. The monitoring methods include physical surveillance, digital tracking, and enforced reporting requirements, creating a climate of fear and oppression that stifles religious freedom. The junta has also deployed local informers ("*dalan*") and vigilante groups ("*Pyu Saw Htee*") to monitor and report on Christian communities. Monitoring is somewhat less pronounced in regions controlled by opposition forces, such as the People's Defense Forces (PDF) and ethnic armed groups. However, Christians in these areas still face significant risks due to the ongoing conflict.

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

Christians face significant threats of abduction and forced marriage, which are exacerbated by the ongoing political and military instability in the country. The risk of abduction is pervasive, with Christians in conflict zones abducted by military forces, ethnic armed groups, or rebel factions. These abductions are often carried out for forced labor, such as being used as porters or human shields, or for ransom. There are also cases where abducted individuals are coerced into joining armed groups. As a result, many people live in constant fear, avoiding leaving their homes after dark. However, the exact number of abductions remains difficult to ascertain, as these incidents are frequently kept secret, with those affected being discreet about their experiences.

Forced marriages, especially for converts, have been reported as a common form of persecution when families or communities exert control over the religious choices. For example, Christian women who convert face intense pressure from their families to renounce their faith and marry within the religion of the family. There is no legal protection against forced marriages in Myanmar, which contributes to the normalization of such practices.

Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Christians in Myanmar face significant hindrances in participating in communal institutions and forums, especially in areas dominated by Buddhism. Discrimination against Christians is common, and their exclusion from social and community activities is widespread. In many instances, Christians are not allowed to attend communal meetings or are excluded from the selection of community representatives. Even when Christians are involved in communal activities, they are often sidelined, with their contributions overlooked or undervalued. For instance, during the WWL 2025 period, in Kyaukpalin village, two Christian families were excluded from a government project intended to provide electricity to all homes in the village. Despite this, a local pastor donated solar electricity to support these families, highlighting the community's solidarity amidst systemic discrimination. Further incidences reported during the WWL 2025 reporting period included being denied access to school meetings and other village level meetings.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Christians in Myanmar face widespread discrimination in both public and private employment due to their faith, particularly in areas where Buddhists dominate. This discrimination is evident in several ways, including limited access to jobs, reduced opportunities for promotions, and negative treatment in the workplace. Christians are often passed over for jobs and promotions in favor of Buddhist candidates, and their participation in religious activities such as church services on Sundays is typically discouraged. For example, in many companies, Christians are expected to work on Sundays, and failure to comply often results in job loss or denial of promotions. This is particularly prevalent in large businesses owned by Buddhists, where Christians are believed to be less reliable due to their church attendance.

In the government sector, Christians face even more pronounced discrimination. They are rarely hired for positions within the civil service or military, and if they do secure employment, they are seldom promoted beyond certain mid-level ranks. This is largely due to a societal bias that favors Buddhists and the military regime's perception that many Christians are aligned with the opposition and the People's Defense Forces (PDF). For example, one military officer in Pantanaw, Ayeyarwady, was advised to change his religion to Buddhism in order to receive a promotion. Upon changing his religion, he was promoted within a month.

Block 3 - Additional information

Areas with a high percentage of Christian residents are deliberately disadvantaged through poor infrastructure and health-care and the government prefers to build Buddhist Na Ta La schools instead of regular state-run schools. With the developing civil war and a growing number of IDPs and IDP camps, health care and humanitarian aid to Christians is either not possible, not allowed, or is only given in minimal portions and international monitoring (and sometimes even access) is blocked. When converts are poor and thus visit a Buddhist clinic, they will routinely be asked their religion and, in order to be treated, will have to claim that they are Buddhist. Only if medicine is left over, will it be provided to Christians, while additional limitations apply, e.g. that the clinic only opens for them in the evening for one hour.

Another problem Christians are facing are the local oral laws (“Gamma laws”), declared in several communities and villages by Buddhist monks and officials in order to restrict Christians. Preferential treatment given to businesses and companies owned by Buddhists for obtaining loans and government subsidies is common, and for Christian and Muslim business-owners registering their businesses is made complicated. At times, Buddhist monks call for a boycott of shops and establishments owned by Christians and Muslims. Even in the small things of daily life, Christians are facing discrimination, for instance: In many villages, it is normal to rent kitchenware for larger festivities from the community. Christians find they are charged more for it than other villagers.

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)

Section 361 of the now suspended 2008 Constitution reads: "The Union recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union" while also recognizing the presence of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism in section 362. Although the 2008 Constitution is now invalid, the mindset behind the quoted section will prevail and re-appear in any new rules the Tatmadaw may implement. This "special position of Buddhism" has been abused by Buddhist radicals. In order to gain additional support from such groups and the Bamar majority in August 2015, a previous government adopted four religious conversion bills which all aimed to protect Buddhism by controlling conversion to other faiths, banning interfaith marriages and polygamy, and introducing birth controls.

Buddhist women wishing to marry non-Buddhist men must first receive permission from their parents and local government officials and the non-Buddhist men would first need to convert to the Buddhist faith. Concerning conversion, the law states that anyone seeking to change their faith needs to get permission from the Religious Conversion Registration body, which is comprised of local religion and immigration officials, a local administrator, the women’s affairs chairman and a local education officer. Thus, the community knows if a person wants to convert and they are given 3-6 months to try to convince him or her to withdraw their papers. The law’s first target is the Muslim minority, but all other minorities are affected likewise and it discourages both citizens considering conversion and converts from testifying about their new faith. In Myanmar, some tribes have their own additional laws which are used by some communities to drive Christians out of their villages.

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 have been forced to act against their conscience in numerous ways: For instance, Christian teachers and officials in Buddhist-majority areas often face pressure to participate in Buddhist religious activities, Christian professionals in healthcare and humanitarian roles sometimes face restrictions on offering aid based on religious affiliation and in areas under strict government or local control, Christians in the public sector are often expected to comply with Buddhist customs as part of their professional duties.

Furthermore, in February 2024 the government enacted the mandatory military conscription law, which has profoundly affected the lives of Myanmar's youth, particularly Christians. Pastor Mana Bu

from Yangon sought exemption as a religious leader but was targeted by a hostile local official and forced to flee to Magway for his safety. Many conscripts must pay exorbitant ransoms, such as MMK 10,000,000, to avoid service, while ethnic insurgent groups like the Zomi Revolutionary Army forcibly recruit even children under 13, as seen in Chin State's Tungzang village. These pressures have driven men under 30 to flee their homes in regions such as Chin, Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, and Sagaing. Many escape to neighboring countries like India, Thailand and Malaysia, where they face discrimination, exploitation and harsh living conditions. This exodus is devastating for churches, which are losing their young people to both forced conscription and migration.

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

Those who have harmed Christians in Myanmar often remain unpunished, operating within a culture of impunity fostered by the army and the Buddhist nationalist movement. When the army is involved, neither Christians nor other minorities can expect fair treatment in courts, nor is there any international monitoring of their plight. For example, justice remains elusive for the two female Baptist teachers murdered in 2015. Similarly, during the WWL 2024 and 2025 reporting periods, cases of rape went unpunished. This lack of accountability is further compounded by authorities' assumptions that the Christian minority supports the National Unity Government (NUG) and People's Defense Force (PDF).

Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial. (4.00 points)

Trials involving religious leaders or ethnic minorities are often held under opaque conditions, with restrictions on public or international access. This aligns with the military leadership's broader strategy of curtailing accountability and suppressing dissenting voices. For example, Pastor Samson was charged with violating the Unlawful Associations Act in 2019 after he publicly reported military abuses in Kachin state, including the bombing of a Baptist church. His trial, like many cases involving ethnic or religious minorities in Myanmar, lacked transparency and was conducted under conditions that prevented local media and international observers from monitoring proceedings effectively.

Block 4 - Additional information

Media reporting about Christians is often distorted. One country expert says: "There is heavy government regulation when it comes to the media. As such, pro-government narratives are transmitted through the media, especially when reporting on conflicts in predominantly Christian states." Buddhist nationalists and hardliners broadcast a negative picture of Christians, claiming that deception is used to force people to convert, and that converts are used for purposes of enrichment. Converts are often labeled traitors for leaving Buddhism. This is done via all media channels available - from sophisticated approaches on social media to public announcements via loudspeakers in villages. With the developing civil war, Christian aid workers and pastors are facing increasing accusations of being PDF supporters or leaders and may be attacked by the army.

One country expert explained: "I would argue that the Buddhist modalities of belonging make it impossible for a business person to not engage in some aspect of Business legitimation cum Buddhist rituals - whether it is giving the expected 'alms' (tax) to the local Buddhist monastery, bribes to the

local officials, or 'favors' to Buddhist religious figures, all of which would run contra to Christian beliefs and practices." He added: "Christians are not allowed to preach against 'culture and religion' of the country. This leaves an incredibly wide lens of interpretation that a Christian could be persecuted for very spurious reasons by other Buddhist businessmen or politicians."

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (4.00 points)

Christian communities in Myanmar face significant barriers in building, renovating or reclaiming church buildings. Obtaining permission to construct or repair places of worship is nearly impossible, with applications frequently denied or indefinitely delayed. Many churches resort to holding services in private homes, which are also under threat, as authorities argue that houses should not be used for worship. Historical churches often remain under government control, allowing limited use but no ownership or renovation rights. Recent incidents illustrate the severity of this issue: churches in Shan state, Sagaing Region, and Yangon have faced forced demolitions or construction halts, sometimes accompanied by threats or violence. In rural areas, pro-military groups have attacked and burned down churches. The destruction of church buildings, particularly in conflict zones, exacerbates the situation, leaving many Christians without designated places of worship.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Christian leaders and their families are frequent targets of harassment, driven by their faith and perceived influence. Pastors, missionaries, and Bible teachers are subjected to suspicion and false accusations, including alleged ties to resistance groups such as the PDFs. They face intense scrutiny, particularly when providing aid or gathering resources for displaced believers. In some regions, merely accommodating or educating Christian youths prompts military raids or community hostility. Christian leaders are often vilified by Buddhist-majority communities for their missionary work, with their movements monitored and activities restricted. Families of pastors also suffer; children are bullied in schools, and pastors' homes have been attacked or subjected to surveillance. This persistent targeting of Christian leaders has created a climate of fear.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)

In Myanmar, it is extremely risky for churches and Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution, especially under the current military dictatorship. Criticism of the military or affiliated groups, such as radical Buddhist organizations, often leads to severe repercussions, including increased restrictions on church activities, closures, or even direct persecution of Christian communities. Victims of persecution, including children and pastors, frequently remain silent, as complaints are typically ignored or lead to retaliatory actions, making the situation worse.

The legal system is heavily biased, and cases are often reversed against the victims, leaving Christians without recourse. Incidents like vandalism during worship or harassment of church leaders go unpunished, while speaking out risks further violence or accusations. Despite these challenges, some

courageous individuals have raised their voices, but such actions remain rare due to the immense risks involved and the repercussions faced by those who have spoken out. One such example is Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng who has been detained several times, after she peacefully knelt in the dust to beg Myanmar police not to shoot anti-coup demonstrators in Myitkyina in Myanmar's Kachin state ([UCA News, 28 January 2022](#)).

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

Church activities in Myanmar are subject to heavy monitoring and obstruction, especially in regions affected by the military coup and ongoing civil unrest. The government, local authorities and Buddhist monks, including those affiliated with Ma Ba Tha, closely watch Christian gatherings, perceiving them as potential centers of opposition. This scrutiny has led to frequent interference with church activities, including surveillance, disruptions during services, and even violence. In some cases, church buildings have been attacked, and leaders and members face harassment or even death. Churches are often required to obtain permission from authorities before holding meetings, with some services being shut down or prevented altogether. For converts, the situation is particularly precarious, as they face not only external pressure but also hostility from their families and communities. Surveillance has intensified under the current regime, with even small gatherings being closely monitored, and any perceived disobedience can result in severe consequences, such as church closures or arrests. In some instances, Christian communities have been forced to cease worship services entirely or relocate due to threats or violence from local authorities or neighbors.

Block 5 - Additional information

In the ongoing situation of war, it is very difficult to conduct training sessions; even if these can be carried out, they can involve intense questioning of pastors by village leaders and local military groups. Even before the coup, church leaders and pastors were frequently targeted for harassment and attacks by radical Buddhists, since this was seen as being an effective way of paralyzing church life. More recently, pastors are often suspected of being leaders of opposition movements. All religious publications are censored and reviewed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Some churches have started to print their own materials, but owning a printing press has been made very difficult, publishing in minority languages remains out of the question and strict censorship rules apply. Importing Christian materials is very difficult and even impossible in minority languages. Churches in ethnic minority areas face even more difficulties, as they are often regarded as being places for hosting anti-government meetings and communication points for ethnic minority groups.

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.*

Myanmar: 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)?	60	34
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?	80	32
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	100 *	18
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?	10 *	1
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	70	45
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100	100 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	5	2
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100000 *	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?	1000 *	1000 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	40000	100000 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	10000 *

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- Christians killed:** The number of Christians killed in the reporting period is very difficult to count, even if one limits oneself to the number of civilians killed in attacks against churches and Christian villages. First, it is not clear that all civilians were Christian; and secondly, numbers of casualties are seldom stated. For the WWL 2025 reporting period, as with the WWL 2024 period, it was decided to limit the number to the killings resulting from the targeting of Christian villages and pastors. Counted in that way, at least 60 Christians were killed because of their faith in the report-

ing period. Examples are mentioned above in: Specific examples of violations of rights.

- **Christians attacked:** There have been hundreds of Christians attacked for their faith, including converts from a Buddhist or a Muslim background. The attacks were sometimes carried out by family members, but also by ethnic insurgent armies. The Myanmar army is also launching indiscriminate attacks in some predominantly or strongly Christian states.
- **Christians arrested:** Many pastors, Catholic priests and ordinary church members have been detained by the army, often suspected of supporting or even leading the opposition forces. In most cases, they were released after a few days, often after their churches had publicly reported such arrests.
- **Churches attacked:** Churches came increasingly under attack where they were considered to be centers of opposition. There are claims that churches provide spaces for dissidents to gather and plan armed attacks against the military. However, these claims could not be independently verified and the army was not known for distinguishing between church structures and "center of opposition resistance". As communication is often restricted by the armed forces, it is difficult to give a concrete number. Reports on file indicate at least 54 churches were attacked, but the real number may be closer to or even above 100.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** There have been dozens of attacks, in which houses and shops were destroyed.
- **Christian fleeing:** The number of Christians fleeing the constant army attacks is impossible to know, but reported estimates are around 250,000 and in reality the numbers are likely to be much higher. As WWR only looks at Christians who have been newly internally displaced or made refugees in the WWL 2025 reporting period, the estimations given in the table above are an estimated 40,000. All reports have to be seen as being only anecdotal, but many Christians have become [IDPs](#) in an effort to avoid airstrikes and regime army raids (UCA News, 1 August 2022). In some IDP camps in Shan state, there is fear among the Christians that they will be forced by the Tatmadaw [to return](#) to their villages, despite a lack of security (UCA News, 6 October 2022). Others had to flee abroad; for example, hundreds of Christians from Chin state have been fleeing to neighboring Indian [Mizoram state](#) (UCA News, 22 August 2022). The military regime announced that it will order 25 IDP camps in and around Myitkina, Kachin state, to be [closed](#): These camps were run by Catholic and Baptist churches, served IDPs since 2011 and hosted around 11,000 people (UCA News, 17 February 2023).

5 Year trends

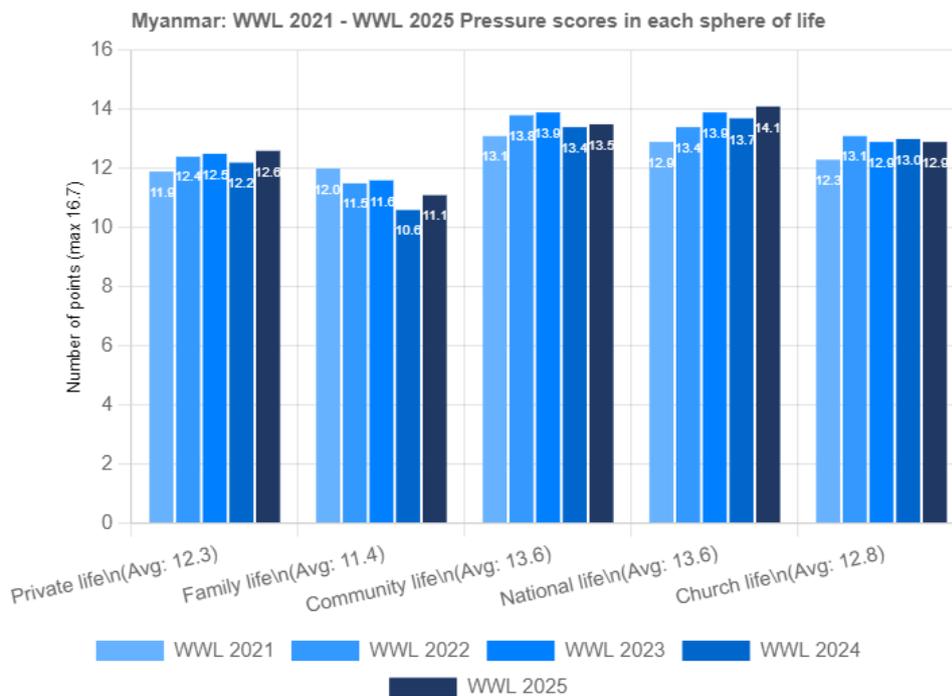
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Myanmar: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	12.8
2024	12.6
2023	13.0
2022	12.8
2021	12.4

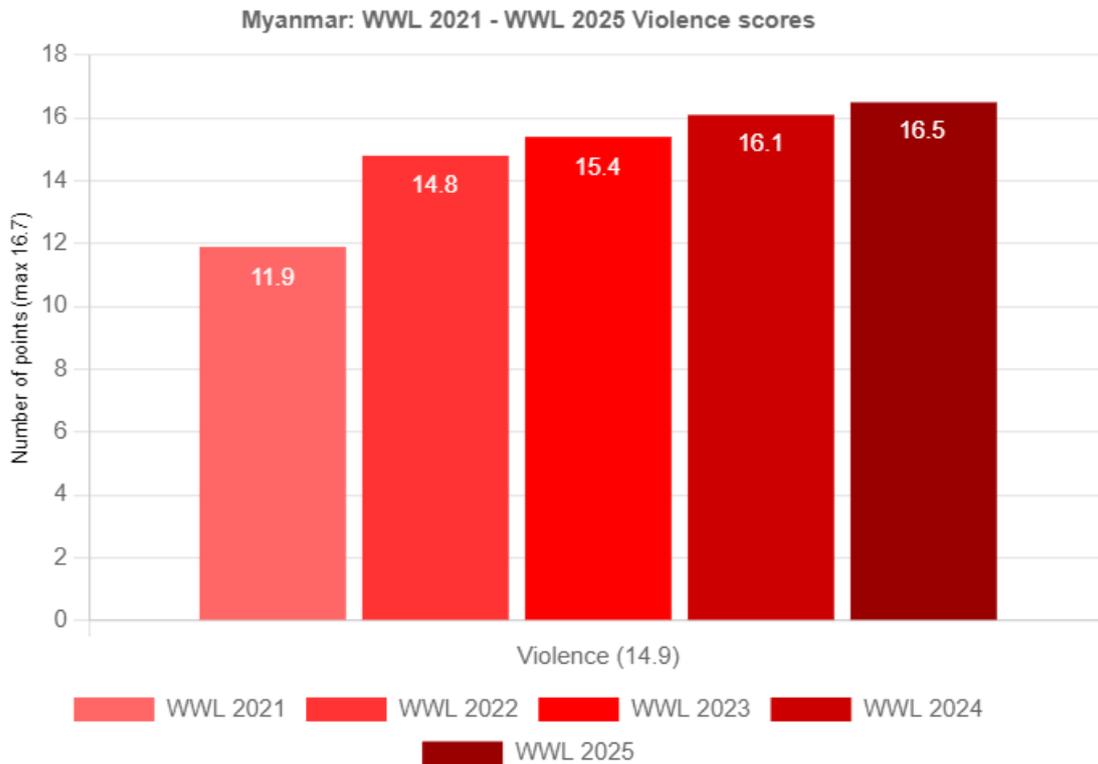
The table above shows how the average level of pressure on Christians returned to a score of 12.8 points in WWL 2025. This increase compared to WWL 2024 occurred for a number of reasons including forced military conscription, increasing dependency on aid and an increasingly desperate military leadership. While the ousted civilian government did nothing to improve the situation for religious minorities in Myanmar (including Christians), the military regime is making things unbearably worse. As the military regime continues to fight to retain its territory, the situation is becoming increasingly challenging and complex, affecting both pressure and violence scores.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows the pressure scores for *National life* and *Private life in WWL 2025* are at the highest they have been throughout the last five reporting periods. The strong emphasis on Buddhism (and the nationalism connected with it), the continuing and compounding impact of the civil war, the increasing number of IDPs and the attacks against Christian villages and churches have kept the average scores for *Community, National* and *Church life* very high - with church life barely possible in many areas.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the last 5 WWL reporting periods, the violence score has constantly increased. With the unfolding civil war and the deliberate tactic of attacking churches and killing Christian aid workers and pastors, the level of violence climbed to a new peak in WWL 2025. It should, however, be kept in mind that it is very difficult to get detailed information from regions like Kachin, Shan, Chin and Kayah states, so the real level of violence and pressure may be even higher. The Myanmar army has been quite successful in keeping these regions isolated.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points (WWL 2025)
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

The February 2021 military coup in Myanmar has significantly worsened conditions for women, reversing progress on women’s rights made over the past decade ([UNDP, 8 March 2022](#)). The government armed forces are a known perpetrator of sexual and gender-based violence, which has escalated since the coup, particularly during interrogations ([The Diplomat, 13 August 2024](#)). Christian women, especially those from ethnic minorities, face heightened risks of rape and physical assault by armed forces. Despite these challenges, many women continue to engage in activism ([BBC News, 9 December 2021](#)).

Christians in Myanmar are often treated as second-class citizens with less legal protection compared to the Buddhist majority. Thousands have become internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees due to the coup. Cultural norms that subordinate women exacerbate obstacles to reporting sexual violence, as it remains a taboo subject ([The Diplomat, 13 August 2024](#)). Legal protection for women is weak, with domestic violence victims often left without recourse. Christian women married to non-Christians face legal pressure to adopt their husband’s religion, particularly affecting female converts from Buddhism.

Rohingya Christian women have historically faced abductions, forced marriages, and conversions, though no such cases have been reported in recent years. However, the overall human rights situation in Myanmar remains concerning, with various forms of violence and discrimination persisting against minority communities. In predominantly Christian Kachin state, women remain vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation inside and outside the country ([HRW 2024 country chapter Myanmar](#)). Reports indicate a resurgence in the trafficking of women from Myanmar's Kachin state to China, where they are sold as brides. This increase is attributed to rising unemployment and economic hardships, leading traffickers to lure women with false promises of employment ([Myanmar Peace Monitor, 16 May 2024](#)). Historically, traffickers exploited the desperation of women from conflict-affected areas, selling them to Chinese families. Victims were often confined and subjected to rape to induce pregnancy ([HRW 21 March 2019](#); [Family Research Council, 15 December 2020](#)). These abuses continue to affect Kachin Christians, even in IDP camps, where the Myanmar military reportedly commits further atrocities.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points (WWL 2025)
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Due to the insecurity and resulting displacement prompted by the ongoing conflict, the threat of death affects both men and women without gender differentiation, illustrating the precarious position that families are faced with. In Myanmar, men are culturally encouraged to find work as the primary breadwinners within the family unit; if they lose their job or are driven from their village or town because they are Christians, the whole family suffers and it causes emotional distress ([Care International, “Rapid Gender Analysis, Myanmar – Rakhine State”](#), 4 August 2020). Male converts often face limited job opportunities, forced labor, threats, ridicule, and physical violence.

Reports indicate that Christian men in the military face unique persecution, including forced labor designed to prevent them from attending Sunday services and engaging with their faith community. While specific instances targeting Christians have not been extensively documented in recent months, the military's ongoing human rights abuses suggest that such practices persist. For instance, government forces have been implicated in forced recruitment and labor in conflict zones ([HRW, 9 April 2024](#)). This pressure has led some to abandon their faith. Additionally, reports indicate that Myanmar's military continues to forcibly recruit individuals, particularly targeting minority groups such as the Rohingya. Since February 2024, over 1,000 Rohingya men and boys have been abducted and conscripted in Rakhine State (Human Rights Watch, 2024). While specific data on the forced recruitment of Christian men is limited, the military's ongoing conscription efforts, including the activation of a national conscription law in February 2024, suggest that Christian men continue to be at risk (Fair Wear, 2024). Experts state that Christian men are sometimes forcibly recruited as guides for troops in unfamiliar terrain. Arrest and torture remain real risks for Christian men in Myanmar.

In addition, Na Ta La schools target Christian children to suppress the spread of Christianity, raising boys to become Buddhist monks. Na Ta La schools—officially known as Border Areas National Races Youth Development Training Schools—continue to operate in Myanmar, primarily targeting ethnic and religious minorities, including Christian communities. These institutions function outside the mainstream education system and often recruit impoverished children from minority backgrounds, offering free education and meals. However, attendance frequently requires participation in Buddhist practices, effectively coercing conversions to Buddhism ([The Irrawaddy, 5 September 2012](#)).

Persecution of other religious minorities

The persecution of the Muslim Rohingya minority is now being discussed in front of an international audience in a court room in The Hague, but this will neither bring immediate relief to the refugees stuck in camps in Bangladesh nor to the Muslim minority left behind in Myanmar, mainly in Rakhine state. The court process has been slow, but more recent developments in the WWL 2025 reporting period and beyond include the ICJ's decision to admit the declarations of intervention filed by seven states in the case concerning Myanmar's application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar) ([ICJ, Latest developments, accessed 12 December 2024](#)). Since the Tatmadaw took over power in the February 2021 coup, the whole court process has become much more of an uphill battle. It is also unthinkable that Rohingya refugees will return willingly to Myanmar from Bangladesh, where they fled to save their lives, even when some of them have been relocated to a remote island. This relocation policy is driven by the Myanmar army and Buddhist religious leaders and is widely backed by many citizens: It fits the country's increasing *Religious nationalism*.

Non-Rohingya Muslims in other parts of the country are also facing restrictions, discrimination and attacks. Hindus sometimes also face restrictions and pressure from Buddhist supremacy, but such hostility is at a much lower level than experienced by other religious minorities.

Trends Summary

1) Myanmar's prolonged military rule and civil war

The situation in the country remains dire, with the conflict intensifying as the Tatmadaw focuses on the heartlands of Myanmar. The rise in airstrikes (increasing from 85 in 2021 to over 1,200 in 2023) has raised the risks for all ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, who are often targeted by such aerial assaults ([HRW 2024 country chapter Myanmar](#)). Despite growing international concern, Myanmar continues to descend into a state of prolonged civil war, with the military leadership increasingly using harsh tactics, including airstrikes and the targeting of civilian areas, to maintain control. Moreover, while the National Unity Government (NUG) has claimed control of around 15% of Myanmar, and ethnic armed organizations control up to 35%, the military regime's grip on the country remains tenuous but violent.

2) Use of religious sentiments and tensions

The military regime's efforts to maintain its religious legitimacy through actions like the consecration of a large Buddha statue in Naypyidaw ([AP News, 21 July 2023](#)) and increased attacks on religious minorities underscore the regime's strategy to shore up Buddhist nationalism. However, as the regime's control weakens, particularly in areas with strong Christian and ethnic minority resistance, the role of religion in post-conflict Myanmar remains uncertain. Many ethnic armed organizations, like the Kachin Independence Organization and the Chin National Front, have Christian leaderships and constituencies, which complicates the regime's claim to religious unity. Additionally, the recent sentencing of Baptist pastor Dr. Hkalam Samson, who was later re-arrested after a temporary release, underscores the ongoing repression of religious leaders ([UCA News, 10 April 2023](#)). This continuing targeting of religious leaders exacerbates religious tensions in the country, particularly as government forces focus on consolidating Buddhist dominance.

3) International reactions

ASEAN's failure to make substantial progress since the coup reflects the broader international challenge. The situation in Myanmar has become a "forgotten crisis," overshadowed by other global conflicts like those in Ukraine and Gaza. Myanmar's increasing reliance on China for support, including China brokering a ceasefire in January 2024, indicates a shift towards greater Chinese influence, despite the military regime's unpopularity domestically. China's pragmatic approach—focused on border stability and curbing online scams—aligns with its broader geopolitical goals, but it also underscores the regime's increasing isolation. At the same time, while the West imposes sanctions, these measures seem ineffective in changing the course of the conflict ([The Conversation, 1 February 2024](#)). Myanmar's trajectory suggests that, unless there is significant international intervention, the conflict will continue unabated with devastating consequences for civilians.

4) Rohingya crisis and broader ethnic discrimination

The Rohingya issue, despite being prominent in international discussions, has faded from global attention due to the coup and subsequent civil war. While Myanmar's military regime continues to repress other ethnic and religious minorities, including the Christian population, the plight of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh remains unresolved. The broader international response, including the ICJ's ongoing case regarding genocide, remains a slow-moving process, leaving millions of Rohingya without resolution ([ICJ Press Release 2024/80](#)).

Further useful reports

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

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

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: "Operation 1027" - <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/losing-ground-rebel-alliance-myanmar-junta-faces-biggest-test-since-coup-2023-11-10/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: released - <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/myanmar-military-releases-over-3000-prisoners-in-thingyan-amnesty/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: re-arrested - <https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-religion-baptist-kachin-human-rights-christian-52ad39817bd1bfb8633fe39427283c39>
- 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 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: shot - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/gunmen-shoot-myanmar-priest-while-he-celebrates-mass/104766>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Targeted-killing-of-Christian-leader-in-Kachin-shocks-community-60375.html>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: report - <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/myanmar-military-church-bombing-kills-11-believers/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: attacked - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Myanmar%26rsquo%3Bs-military-violate-Loikaw-cathedral-to-strike-at-those-fleeing-the-war-59649.html>
- Persecution engines description: take over regulating radical Buddhist groups - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/religion-ministry-done-leaving-sangha-govern-ma-ba-tha.html>
- Persecution engines description: increased - <https://asiacentre.org/wp-content/uploads/Burmanisation-and-Buddhisisation-Accelerating-the-Dcline-of-Religious-Rights-in-Myanmar.pdf>
- Persecution engines description: UN report - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/MyanmarFFM/Pages/EconomicInterestsMyanmarMilitary.aspx>
- Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points): UCA News, 28 January 2022 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/the-myanmar-nun-who-faced-down-a-junta/95899>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: IDPs - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/myanmars-catholic-villagers-live-in-mortal-fear/98186>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: to return - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/idps-fear-forced-return-under-myanmars-junta/99004>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Mizoram state - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/more-myanmar-christians-flee-to-india/98475>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: closed: - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/myanmar-junta-to-close-kachin-idp-camps/100406>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UNDP, 8 March 2022 - <https://www.undp.org/publications/regressing-gender-equality-myanmar-women-living-under-pandemic-and-military-rule>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Diplomat, 13 August 2024 - <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/the-devastating-gendered-impacts-of-myanmars-coup/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: BBC News, 9 December 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-59462503>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Diplomat, 13 August 2024 - <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/the-devastating-gendered-impacts-of-myanmars-coup/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2024 country chapter Myanmar - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/myanmar>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Myanmar Peace Monitor, 16 May 2024 - <https://mmpeacemonitor.org/en/327817/bride-trafficking-in-china-myanmar-border-areas-on-the-rise-due-to-unemployment/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 21 March 2019 - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/03/21/give-us-baby-and-well-let-you-go/trafficking-kachin-brides-myanmar-china>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Family Research Council, 15 December 2020 - <https://www.frc.org/blog/2020/12/chinas-bride-trafficking-problem>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Care International, “Rapid Gender Analysis, Myanmar – Rakhine State” - https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/assessment_file_attachments/Myanmar-RGA_Rakhine_CARE_4Aug2020.pdf
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: HRW, 9 April 2024 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/10/myanmar-military-forcibly-recruiting-rohingya>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: The Irrawaddy, 5 September 2012 - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/christian-chin-coerced-to-buddhism-by-state.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: ICJ, Latest developments, accessed 12 December 2024 - <https://icj-cij.org/case/178>
- Trends Summary: HRW 2024 country chapter Myanmar - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/myanmar>
- Trends Summary: AP News, 21 July 2023 - <https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-giant-buddhist-statue-7c20f527892a4b4bf2d17644c0ff0572>

- Trends Summary: UCA News, 10 April 2023 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/prison-term-for-myanmar-pastor-sparks-outrage/100930>
- Trends Summary: The Conversation, 1 February 2024 - <https://theconversation.com/3-years-on-from-coup-economic-sanctions-look-unlikely-to-push-myanmar-back-to-democracy-221297>
- Trends Summary: ICJ Press Release 2024/80 - <https://icj-cij.org/case/178>