

World  
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## Libya: Full Country Dossier

Revised version: February 2021



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

## Copyright notice

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

## Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

# WWL 2021 Short country profile / Libya

## Brief country details

Libya: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
6,662,000	34,500	0.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Libya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	92	4
WWL 2020	90	4
WWL 2019	87	4
WWL 2018	86	7
WWL 2017	78	11

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

Libyan Christians with a Muslim background face violent and intense pressure from their family and the wider community to renounce their faith. Foreigners from other parts of the African continent are also targeted by various Islamic militant groups and organized criminal groups. These groups kidnap Christians and there have also been instances in which Christians have been killed in brutal fashion. Even when they do not face such a fate, Christians from sub-Saharan Africa are harassed and subjected to threats from radical Muslims. Christians who publicly express their faith and try to share the Christian faith with others also face the risk of arrest and violent opposition. The absence of a single central government to impose law and order in the country has made the situation for Christians precarious. The level of violence against Christians in Libya is now categorized as 'extreme'.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians are targeted and killed by extremist groups on the basis of their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christians are harassed and targeted for wearing religious symbols (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian converts are tortured and pressured to recant their conversion from Islam (ICCPR Arts. 7 and 18)
- Christians are arrested and detained on blasphemy charges for sharing Christian material online (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

Given the security issues surrounding a Muslim's conversion to the Christian faith, most reports about converts in Libya cannot be published.

- During the WWL 2021 reporting period, a Coptic Christian, was kidnapped, tortured and killed, allegedly by the Islamic militant group *Ansar al-Sharia*, which tried to force him to renounce his Christian faith. There were also reports of seven other Christian Coptic men going missing.
- Slavery and human trafficking still take place despite an earlier international outcry when CNN showed video evidence of an auction of sub-Saharan Africans in November 2017.

- Although the ill-treatment and violence is not limited to Christian refugees, Christian migrants held in detention centers in Libya (mostly from Sub-Saharan African countries) have reportedly been raped and beaten.
- It was reported that several sub-Saharan African Christian men have been forced to fight for local militias.
- It was reported that several sub-Saharan African Christians have been kidnapped for ransom. Christians are especially vulnerable for kidnapping, as local militias do not protect them.
- It was reported that in a city in East-Libya, rewards are being promised for those informing radical Islamic groups about the presence of Christians, both local converts as well foreign Copts and sub-Saharan Africans.
- Several church buildings and other Christian places were attacked and damaged during the WWL 2021 reporting period.

## Specific examples of positive developments

It is not unlikely that a political solution to the conflict will be found in the near future. A central government controlling the whole of Libya could end the lawlessness in the country and curb the violence targeting foreign Christians in Libya. However, the situation for converts from Islam to Christianity will nevertheless remain very sensitive and insecure.

## External Links - Short country profile

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

## WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Libya

### Link for general background information

- [Libya country profile - BBC News](#)

### Recent history

Before becoming independent in 1951, Libya had been ruled by the Romans, the pre-Ottoman Islamic dynasties, the Ottomans and the Italians. In 1969, a young army officer named Muammar Gaddafi successfully staged a coup and became Libya's strongman till he was toppled in the revolution of 2011. Since then, attempts to democratically form a central government have failed and the country has become divided among several groups with high levels of violence and lawlessness - see Political and legal landscape below.



Gaddafi's regime was overthrown in 2011 after popular protests developed into armed opposition supported by NATO. The civil war caused the death of at least 30,000 Libyans according to estimates by the National Transitional Council of Libya (NTC), as reported by [The Guardian in October 2011](#). The NTC took over government in February 2011 and on 7 July 2012 Libyans voted in their first parliamentary elections since the end of Gaddafi's rule. The new assembly was given the task of drafting a new Libyan constitution to be approved in a general referendum.

Although these developments were considered to be notable democratic advances, due to escalating conflicts between the various groups that fought against Gaddafi, the country has since descended into a state of civil war. Broadly speaking, the war pits a coalition of armed tribal and nationalist groups based in the east of the country against radical Islamic groups and an amalgam of tribal and regional militants based in the western part of the country.

The major antagonists in the civil war are:

- On one side of the civil war there are the forces in the east who launched a military campaign called "Operation Dignity" (which is also serving as a popular designation for the eastern based forces) and are led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. This military campaign is sanctioned by the House of Representatives which was elected in 2014. Although the House of Representatives was recognized by the UN and most of the international community at that time, it was pushed out of the capital by Islamist factions and forced to take refuge in eastern Libya in the city of Tobruk. Operation Dignity gets substantial material and diplomatic support from [United Arab Emirates, Egypt, France and Saudi Arabia](#) which all consider the rising forces of militant Islam in Libya to be a threat to stability in the region (Al Jazeera, January 2020).
- On the other side of the civil war there is the so-called Government of National Accord (GNA). At the beginning of 2016, the UN facilitated a negotiation process that led to the formation of this new unity government. It took this new government a few months to even arrive in Tripoli and take control of the capital city. The GNA has not received the approval of the parliament that is based in Tobruk, but it has had considerable success in its military campaign against the Islamic State group (IS). Forces loyal to the GNA retook the town of Sirte in 2016, which had been the last stronghold of IS militants in Libya. The GNA has the formal backing of the UN.
- A third group is made up of a coalition of forces that largely consist of a variety of Islamic militant groups operating under the name "Libyan Dawn". Many of these militants walked out of the transitional and legal democratic process due to frustration over their poor performance in the parliamentary elections of June 2014. They set up their own rival parliament (from the remnants of the General National Congress of Libya which had taken over power from the NTC for the years 2012-2014) and had their own rival government in Tripoli, which in 2016 made place for the GNA and the also newly formed High Council of State. The Libyan Dawn forces enjoy the support of [Qatar and Turkey](#) (European Eye on Radicalization, April 2019). Elements of this coalition have sworn allegiance to the Islamic

State group (IS) and have perpetrated brutal attacks against foreign Christians in Libya through beheadings.

President Emmanuel Macron of France managed to bring the main antagonists to come together for a Summit in Paris in May 2018. Four of the major parties involved in the conflict agreed on a [roadmap](#) that should have led to a resolution of the conflict and national elections in December 2018 (Al-Jazeera, 29 May 2018). They were: Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj (head of the UN-backed unity government (GNA, based in Tripoli), Khalifa Haftar (the military strongman commanding the Libyan National Army which dominates the country's east), Aguila Saleh Issa (the parliament speaker based in the eastern city of Tobruk, who opposes the UN-backed administration) and Khalid al-Mishri (head of the High Council of State). The Summit was hailed as a success since the parties to the civil war verbally agreed to commit to a peace deal. However, from the very beginning the deal seemed to be tenuous as not all militant groups were involved. In November 2018, the UN special envoy [declared](#) that a special forum would be held early in 2019 in order to have presidential and parliamentary elections taking place in the Spring of 2019 (Al-Jazeera, 9 November 2018). However, on 4 April 2019, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar ordered his Libyan National Army to march on Tripoli. In response, the GNA, joined by the Libyan Dawn, said they would defend the city at all costs.

In the course of 2019, Haftar's LNA forces managed to capture some of the suburbs of Tripoli. However, Turkey significantly increased its military support for the GNA at the end of 2019, after signing an important economic agreement allowing Turkey to drill for gas in Libyan waters ([Geopolitical Monitor, July 2020](#)). The Turkish assistance included the deployment of at least 2000 - 4000 Syrian fighters ([The Guardian, January 2020](#)) and naval and drone support. This enabled the GNA forces to recapture the strategically important Al-Watiya airbase in May 2020, forcing the LNA to retreat and moving the battlefield to Sirte, the city that controls access to Africa's biggest oil reserves ([The Guardian, August 2020](#)). The LNA had captured Sirte during their campaign in January 2020 and losing control over the city would probably be a fatal blow, as Haftar would lose control over the Libyan oil revenues. That explains why in June 2020 Egyptian's President al-Sissi threatened military intervention if Sirte would be attacked.

Although the GNA seemed determined to take Sirte from the LNA, an official ceasefire was reached on 23 October 2020, followed by promises to hold presidential and parliamentary elections within 18 months ([The Guardian, 23 October 2020](#), [Al Monitor, 12 November 2020](#)). In contrast to previous agreements, the oil embargo was lifted by Haftar and oil production restarted. In addition, a bilateral commission, the Libyan Joint Military Commission, with representatives from both sides started talks to withdraw troops from the Sirte frontline. However, a (military) solution depends ultimately on Russia and Turkey mostly since they are the main supporters of the LNA and GNA respectively ([Al-Monitor, July 2020](#)). It is still unknown if they are willing to withdraw their Wagner mercenaries and Syrian fighters.

Before Gaddafi fell from power in 2011, many Coptic Christians from Egypt lived and worked in the country. However, since the start of the civil war most of them have returned to their home countries. Especially the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians in February 2015 followed by the murder of 30 Ethiopian Christians in April 2015 by IS militants has been a wake-up call. The Coptic Orthodox Church has canonized the 21 Coptic victims, declared 15 February their official

Feast Day and erected a [memorial and museum](#) in their memory (Asia News, February 2020).

Despite the risks of persecution, Christian migrants from sub-Saharan Africa keep travelling to the country in the hope of reaching Europe. Amnesty International (AI) wrote in their 2015 report that "religious minorities, in particular Christian migrants and refugees, are at highest risk of abuses, including abductions, torture and other ill-treatment and unlawful killings, from armed groups that seek to enforce their own interpretation of Islamic law and have been responsible for serious human rights abuses. They also face widespread discrimination and persecution from their employers, criminal groups and in immigration detention centres." (AI, ['Libya is full of cruelty' Stories of abduction, sexual violence and abuse from migrants and refugees](#), 2015, p.6).

Although later reports by Amnesty International ([AI, 2017](#)) and the Mixed Migrant Centre ([MMC, December 2019](#)) do not specifically mention Christians as being particularly at risk, the US State Department in its [2019 International Religious Freedom Report](#) on Libya writes: "Christians said they faced a higher risk of physical assault, including sexual assault and rape, than other migrants and refugees." Additionally, in their February 2020 report, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime writes: "Christian migrants have faced greater levels of risk in North Africa, and particularly in Libya. [...] Migrants travelling along routes to Libya and Algeria have also reported that Muslim migrants receive better treatment from Muslim smugglers and have a better chance of securing employment in these Muslim countries." The latter claims are in accordance with the testimonies provided by local sources on the ground ([Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime](#), 'The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel Understanding the Patterns of Vulnerability', February 2020, p.41).

## Political and legal landscape

Libya remains divided with the two main competing factions LNA and GNA being supported by different international actors. On a geopolitical level, the battle for Libya has become a showdown between two opposing blocs which divide the Sunni Middle East: i) The Turkey-Qatar axis, which supports political Islam (Islamism); ii) The United Arab Emirates-Saudi-Arabia-Egypt axis, which views political Islamists as an existential threat to their rule. Russia also supports the latter in a bid to strengthen its grip on the region. The wider international community is divided over which side to support. While the GNA has the support of the UN and EU, others (such as [France](#)) are backing Haftar (Reuters, 10 April 2019). Further talks with various international actors have not led to any significant progress towards peace, including when Germany managed to get all parties round the negotiating table for a Berlin Conference in January 2020 ([Libya Observer, 8 June 2020](#)).

With the country and the judicial system in disarray, [MEC](#) reports (last accessed on 18 August 2020): "Libya's interim Constitution of 2011 establishes Islam as state religion and Islamic law as the main source of legislation. The constitution guarantees the freedom for non-Muslims to practice their religious rituals. In 2017 a new constitution was drafted. Contrary to the interim constitution, this document does not recognize other sources of legislation besides Islamic Shari'a. The draft also fails to guarantee freedom of religion and belief. A referendum on adoption of this draft constitution was planned for the first half of 2019, then delayed. In

practice, all Libyans are assumed to be Muslim, with no scope for changing religion. Personal status matters are determined according to Islamic law. The Penal Code prescribes harsh punishments for perceived attacks or insults against religion." Clearly this leaves little space for the small Christian community.

[Human Rights Watch](#) reports (last accessed 18 August 2020): "Armed conflicts since April 2019 have deepened the humanitarian, political, and security crises. ... The fighting, which includes attacks on civilian homes and infrastructure, killed hundreds of civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands in and around Tripoli. Armed groups, some of them affiliated with the competing governments, carried out extrajudicial executions and abducted, tortured, and disappeared people. The country's judiciary is in disarray and has collapsed in some areas, and police and law enforcement agencies affiliated with competing governments are dysfunctional. Hundreds of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers, most of them from West Africa and the Horn of Africa, including children often en route to Europe, risk torture, sexual assault, and forced labor by prison guards, coast guard forces, and smugglers while in Libya". Christians among the migrants are clearly in danger, too.

The Economist Intelligence Unit writes ([EIU](#), last accessed 18 August 2020): "International involvement in the Libyan conflict has served to prolong it by increasing the resources available to both the self-styled Libyan National Army and the UN-recognised Government of National Accord. Political stability will weaken in the short term, and violence will continue in many parts of the country. The ongoing oil blockade and the coronavirus pandemic will significantly undermine fiscal revenue and economic growth. We expect real GDP to contract by 25.6% in 2020."

The [Fragile States Index \(FSI\) 2020](#) ranks Libya in 20th position (of 178 countries) with a score of 95.2 points. FSI political indicators show that Libya continues to struggle with state legitimacy and external intervention. A political solution for ending the civil war seems far away, not least because international actors continue to finance their political allies on both sides of the conflict. Turkey and Qatar support Islamist groups linked with the Libyan Dawn (see "Recent History" above), while the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Egypt actively support Haftar's LNA ([Geopolitical Monitor, July 2020](#)).

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive. Whilst Libya ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1989, it maintained a [reservation to Article 16](#) which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage, and their rights within a marriage, citing its incompatibility with Sharia law (Amnesty International, "Reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women"). While the 1984 Family Law stipulates that both men and women must be 20 before getting married, it provides that judges can grant permission for marriage [at an earlier age](#) (OECD, 2019, "Social Institutions and Gender Index"). Reliable statistics on the rate of early marriages in Libya are lacking. Understood to be [relatively rare](#) before the conflict (under 3% according to UN Women, Gender Gap Index), [reports](#) indicate that rates of early marriage rose in 2015 as girls were forced to marry jihadists in exchange for protection (The Independent, 15 May 2015).

In Libya only judicial divorces are recognized, and both men and women may apply for divorce. Whilst a husband has the right to divorce his wife unilaterally, he must do so [through the court](#) (UN Women, Gender Gap Index). Women can only file for divorce under set criteria, and face [social stigma](#) should they choose to do so. Following a divorce the mother will ordinarily be granted custody of children until girls are married and boys reach puberty. The father retains guardianship rights and is recognized as the figure with chief [parental authority](#) and decision-making power over the child (OECD, 2019). Neither marital rape nor domestic violence is criminalized under Libyan law.

Female representation in Parliament in 2019 was [15.96%](#) (Index Mundi).

## Religious landscape

Libya: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	34,500	0.5
Muslim	6,592,000	98.9
Hindu	6,000	0.1
Buddhist	20,000	0.3
Ethno-religionist	500	0.0
Jewish	130	0.0
Bahai	730	0.0
Atheist	300	0.0
Agnostic	3,300	0.0
Other	4,600	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

According to WCD 2020 estimates, 98.9% of Libyans are Muslim, virtually all belonging to Sunni Islam. The Amazigh (Berber) ethnic minority include some Ibadi Muslims and there are small Christian communities among sub-Saharan African and Egyptian migrants. Almost all non-Muslims are foreigners; the number of Libyan Christians from a Muslim background remains very low.

The dominance of Islam is given explicit constitutional recognition (Art. 5, Constitution of 1951) while the ancient roots of Christianity in Libya have been almost completely erased. Both the transitional [Constitutional Declaration \(2011\)](#) as well as the [2017 Draft Constitution](#) make clear that nothing has changed in this regard: Both declare that Islam is to be the country's religion and Sharia law the main source of legislation. Although there is the clause stating: "The State shall guarantee for non-Muslims the freedom to practice their religious rituals", theory and practice are two different things. The Freedom of Religion and Belief of converts from Islam to Christianity is not protected under the Constitution.

Sharia law is applied throughout the country. The military conflict in Libya has helped to increase the influence of radical Islamic thought. Islamic militant groups have gained territory in the anarchy created by the civil war and several areas are now home to radical Muslims, with many sympathetic to IS and al-Qaeda. In other areas, local (tribal) groups enforce their own versions of Sharia law. Thus, levels of Islamic radicalism differ from region to region, with some groups being stricter and/or more violent than others.

Despite this growth in radicalism, a 2019 report [commissioned by the BBC](#) found that especially in Libya the number of people identifying as non-religious (probably to be understood as "non-practicing") has grown from 12% to 27% over the last six years. However, the report [has been criticized](#) for using confusing terminology in the questions, resulting in misleading outcomes (Deutschlandfunk, 23 July 2019).

## Economic landscape

According to the [Human Development Index Report](#) (HDI country profile, accessed 20 August 2020):

- **Gross National Income per capita:** 11,685 USD (in 2011 PPP). GNI per capita has significantly deteriorated since then
- **Unemployment rate:** 17.3%, with youth unemployment at 48.7%. According to World Bank statistics from September 2019, [average unemployment](#) is around 18,5%, with youth unemployment being more than twice as high at 50.4% (World Bank 2019).
- **Poverty:** About a third of the population are affected by poverty.

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#):

- Increased oil production significantly increased revenues, resulting in a GDP growth of 21% on average during 2017-18.
- However, "the ongoing fights and the subsequent failure of the political rivals to reach a sustained peace deal have taken a heavy toll on the economy since. The production and export of oil has almost come to a stop since January 2020, due to the closure of oil ports and terminals. [...] As a result, GDP growth will be negative in 2020 (minus 19.4%)."
- The COVID-19 crisis is further exacerbating the deteriorating economy. However, the economy could rebound once oil production has restarted (which happened in October 2020).

Immense sums of money are being spent on weapons by the various sides in the civil war and the violence has caused widespread destruction. While the relatively low population level in relation to the largest oil reserves on the African continent would normally create a wealthy country, it will take many years to rebuild the country's economy. [FSI](#) economic indicators show that Libya's economic situation is worsening, with high levels of external intervention threatening the country even further. Libya's economy is heavily reliant on oil exports and the ongoing civil war has caused widespread destruction and disruption of exports. In addition, due to the COVID-19 crisis, oil prices are historically low and unlike to increase on the short term. This will further problematize economic recovery. [Libya's GDP](#) decreased from 82 billion USD in 2012 to 52 billion in 2019, recovering from an ultimate low of 26 billion in 2016. High inflation has caused the Libyans to lose 80% of their purchasing power over the last four years, driving many into poverty (World Bank, September 2019).

Being economically active as a Christian remains very difficult in Libya. Visible and known Christians will be discriminated against when trying to find employment; sub-Saharan Christians are known to use Muslim names to avoid discrimination. Most Christians from a Coptic background have left the country after several targeted attacks on Copts and other Christians. Coptic Christians that have to remain because of economic necessity keep their faith hidden. In addition, tribal and jihadist groups abduct sub-Saharan Africans to extort them for a ransom; known Christians are especially targeted by these groups since they can be abused without having to risk any backlash for harassing a fellow Muslim.

Against this precarious economic background, women are typically the most vulnerable, due to both low education and employment rates. [Education](#) has been impacted by the conflict for both boys and girls, particularly in active conflict regions (Institute of Development Studies, 11 September 2018). Girls have been prevented from attending school by an increase in gender-based violence and sexual assaults during the conflict, and by early marriage. Just [23.8%](#) of women are in employment (Georgetown Institute, Women Peace and Security Index 2019/20). Boys are also prevented by several factors, including being targeted for child labor or recruitment into militias. Converts in the workplace (mostly men) face intense pressures if their faith is discovered; they may be [threatened](#) by colleagues or lose their job (US State Department, 2018 IRF Report).

Under Sharia rules of inheritance, women have the right to inherit, but typically receive less than men; daughters inherit half that of a son. The 1959 Law on Women's Rights to Inheritance provides a penalty for any person who withholds lawful inheritance from a woman (Article 5).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and [World Factbook](#) (accessed January 2021):

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Libyan population (97%) are from Arab or Berber decent. Other ethnicities include Egyptian, Italian, Turkish and Tunisian, among others.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with several Berber languages also being spoken.
- **Urban population:** In 2020, 80,7% of the population lived in urban areas

- **Literacy rate:** 91% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (96.7%) and women (85.6%)
- **Population/age:** The total population is almost 6.9 million, with immigrants making up 12% of the total population. The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up almost 49% of the population, making it another African country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Around 375,000
- **Life expectancy:** 76.7 years on average; women (79.1 years), men (74.4 years).

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Libya ranks #110 out 189 countries. Despite the ongoing war, Libya remains one of the most developed countries on the African continent. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a high score on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Education:** On average, Libyans are expected to have 12.8 years of schooling. Before the civil war, social services were state-subsidized and education was compulsory and free under Gaddafi's rule; but this has ended
- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 0.931, women are disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Libya is one of the least populated countries on earth ([World Population Review](#), last accessed 20 August 2020). A large part of the country is covered by the uninhabitable Sahara Desert, which is why the majority of the population live in the fertile northern coastal region.

The ongoing civil war testifies to the deeply conservative and tribal Libyan culture where primary loyalty lies with one's family, clan and tribe. Libya is home to more than 30 different tribal groups. The cities Tripoli, Misrata, Benghazi and Bayda, have their own tribal militias. ([Reuters, August 2011](#)). [FSI](#) social indicators show that stress on the social fabric is also coming from large numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees entering Libya.

Libya's very conservative society makes it almost impossible for nationals to convert from Christianity to Islam. In almost all cases, Christians from a Muslim background keep their faith hidden from their families out of fear of possible violent reactions. Foreign Christians are viewed with suspicion and may encounter harassment; which is why foreign Christians, for example, do not wear visible Christian symbols in public. Christians from a sub-Saharan background are known to change their names to Islamic ones to avoid discrimination and harassment.

Libya is a deeply patriarchal society in which women have a lower position within Libyan family life, caused by tribal norms corresponding with Sharia. There is an explicit restriction on a woman becoming head of the household or head of the family. In light of the pervading honor-shame culture, women and girls are expected to uphold sexual purity; should they be sexually assaulted because of their faith, shame will fall on the whole family and some women become victims of so-called 'honor killings.' Women are careful not to leave the house without a veil.



If discovered, converts face significant pressures from both their families and local community. Female converts may be married to a strict Muslim or isolated within the home and denied means of communication. Women stand little chance of escaping danger as there is no scope for them to live autonomously within Libyan society. Male converts face physical and mental abuse, as well as social ostracism.

## Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 74.2% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 74.1% penetration – survey date: December 2018

According to [World Bank's country profile](#):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 91.5 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#):

- **Internet freedom:** The Freedom on the Net Report ranks Libya as "partly free". Although Libya's level of freedom is worse than in neighboring Tunisia and Morocco, it is better than in most Middle Eastern countries. Nonetheless, the report mentions that "pro-government commentators manipulate online discussions", while "Bloggers or ICT users have been arrested, imprisoned, or held in prolonged detention for political or social content" and others have been "physically attacked or killed (including in custody)".

Gaddafi's fall from power in 2011 ended an era of suppression and people have gained far more freedom to express themselves, for instance on social media. However, in the current state of anarchy, journalists and bloggers remain careful, since ruling groups threaten anyone posting online criticism. In addition, Freedom House writes: "Many journalists and media outlets have censored themselves or ceased operations to avoid retribution for their work, and journalists continue to flee the country." ([Freedom House, accessed 20 August 2020](#))

Christians in Libya have to be careful when using the Internet. Christians from a Muslim background have to be particularly careful when accessing (online) Christian content in order not to be discovered by their family members; openly posting Christian content would bring very high risks, both from family members as well as from tribal and/or radical Islamic groups. Foreign Christians also cannot openly post Christian content on social media without risk. If they do, they could be targeted for harassment or even abduction by criminal groups.

According to a [report](#) by GSMA Intelligence, the gender gap in mobile internet usage in the MENA region averages at 21% (GSMA, 2020, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020"). This restricts women's access to both information and community networks. However, [Georgetown research](#) indicates that there has been a major increase in recent years in women's mobile phone usage in Libya, reporting that now 100% of women have access to them (Georgetown, "Women, Peace and Security Index, 2019/20" p.18). Phones are particularly [cheap](#) in Libya, making them widely accessible (Media Landscapes/Libya, accessed 26 November 2020).

## Security situation

The current security situation in Libya is unclear and unstable. After the ousting and death of Gaddafi, Libya ended up in a civil war with multiple entities and varying affiliations. Two major entities fighting each other are the GNA (Government of the National Accord) and the LNA (Libyan National Army) led by Field Marshal Haftar. The region controlled by the GNA is limited to the cities of Tripoli (capital) and Misrata with surrounding areas, making up approximately 15% of the country ([Libya Live Map, accessed August 2020](#)). In order to control these cities, the GNA has linked up with various militias who are given the freedom to do what they want, which means that looting and harassment are common. The LNA seems to be more organized, but groups linked to both sides are guilty of taking hostages, torture and other (war) crimes ([Amnesty International, accessed August 2020](#)). The LNA controls the majority of the country including the cities of Tobruk and Benghazi. As of November 2020, the front-line has been moving between Sirte and Jufra, with Sirte still being controlled by the LNA.

The overall state of anarchy, especially in the GNA controlled area, is well suited for human traffickers to carry out their operations. Their victims are migrants from sub-Saharan countries and the Middle East who are determined to cross the Mediterranean Sea and reach Europe.

Libya performs particularly poorly on security in the [Georgetown](#) Gender Index (Georgetown, 2020, p.27); 40% of women reported feeling unsafe walking at night and 10% had experienced intimate partner violence within the reporting year. [Article 424](#) of the Penal Code exonerates a rapist if he marries his victim and does not divorce her within three years. Article 375 of the Penal Code further provides for reduced punishment for a man who commits a crime of 'honor.'

If discovered, both male and female converts face the threat of physical violence and death. In general, men face higher risks of physical violence, abduction and militia recruitment, whilst women are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. Christian women navigating the migration route from sub-Saharan Africa through Libya are vulnerable to sexual abuse too, particularly within the [context of detention centers](#) (The Guardian, 3 Nov 2019). Christian men following the same migration pathways are also vulnerable to abuse in the form of forced labor and slavery.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Libya is divided into an Eastern and Western bloc

During the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, President Gaddafi was ousted without a clear idea of how the future should be shaped. Since then, Libya has ended up in a nightmarish scenario in which a patchwork of militant groups control different parts of the country and vie for supremacy. Currently, the country is more or less divided into an Eastern and Western bloc. On the geopolitical and ideological level, the country has become an international battlefield in which different military superpowers try to gain influence (i.e. Turkey-Qatar Islamist axis versus Emirati-Saudi-Egyptian dictatorship axis, with Russia playing a major role in favor of the latter).

## 2) Power dynamics in country push democracy aside

It is likely that formal elections will continue to be postponed further into the future, as elections would mean that the parties that now control parts of Libya would have to hand over control to a central government. Many of those groups are profiting from the current situation and have no real interest in democratic elections. If elections were to be held in the near future, it is likely that some parties would not accept the outcome and the civil war would therefore continue.

## 3) Christians cannot expect any guarantees of freedom of religion

Any hope for an improvement in the situation for Christians in Libya is contingent upon an improvement in the political and security condition within the country. If the Government of National Accord is able to assert more authority and restore law and order in the country, Christians would receive protection from the most egregious forms of persecution, even though there would not necessarily be any guarantee of freedom of religion or belief. However, in the long run, the nature of the permanent political and constitutional order that would emerge from the current peace and transition process will be the most decisive factor for the freedom of religion of Christians in Libya. Given Libya's very conservative Islamic culture, it is unlikely that Christians, and especially Libyan Christians from a Muslim background, will enjoy freedom of religion or belief in the long term.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Libya country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13754897>
- Recent history: The Guardian in October 2011 - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/26/libya-war-saving-lives-catastrophic-failure>
- Recent history: United Arab Emirates, Egypt, France and Saudi Arabia - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/libya-war-supporting-200104110325735.html>
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- Recent history: roadmap - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/libya-rival-leaders-agree-hold-elections-december-180529082326218.html>
- Recent history: declared - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/libya-election-place-early-2019-envoy-181109073902372.html>
- Recent history: Geopolitical Monitor, July 2020 - <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/a-lost-decade-the-actors-and-geopolitics-behind-the-libyan-civil-war/>
- Recent history: The Guardian, January 2020 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/15/exclusive-2000-syrian-troops-deployed-to-libya-to-support-regime>
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- Recent history: The Guardian, 23 October 2020 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/23/libya-rival-forces-sign-permanent-ceasefire-at-un-sponsored-talks>
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- Recent history: Al, 2017 - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a2fa1cb4.html>

- Recent history: MMC, December 2019 - <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/what-makes-refugees-and-migrants-vulnerable-to-detention-in-libya/>
- Recent history: 2019 International Religious Freedom Report - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LIBYA-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Recent history: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime - <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/smuggling-trafficking-westafrica-sahel/>
- Political and legal landscape: France) - <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-libya-security-eu/france-blocks-eu-call-to-stop-haftars-offensive-in-libya-idUKKCN1RM2WN>
- Political and legal landscape: Libya Observer, 8 June 2020 - <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/berlin-conference>
- Political and legal landscape: MEC - <http://meconcern.org/countries/libya/>
- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/libya>
- Political and legal landscape: EIU - <http://country.eiu.com/libya>
- Political and legal landscape: Fragile States Index (FSI) 2020 - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
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- Political and legal landscape: reports - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-libya-families-forced-marry-girls-young-12-fighters-protection-clinics-see-growing-number-miscarriages-and-stds-10244257.html>
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- Political and legal landscape: social stigma - <https://spring-forward.unwomen.org/en/countries/libya>
- Political and legal landscape: parental authority - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/LY.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: 15.96% - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/libya/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- Religious landscape description: Constitutional Declaration (2011) - [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Libya\\_2011.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Libya_2011.pdf)
- Religious landscape description: 2017 Draft Constitution - <https://www.temehu.com/CDA/final-draft-libya-constitution-29-july-2017-english-translation.pdf>
- Religious landscape description: commissioned by the BBC - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48703377>
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- Economic landscape: Human Development Index Report - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LBY>
- Economic landscape: average unemployment - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's April 2020 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/publication/economic-update-april-2020>
- Economic landscape: FSI - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Economic landscape: Libya's GDP - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/libya>
- Economic landscape: Education - [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bb2236ded915d259eaa7776/413\\_Girls\\_education\\_Libya.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bb2236ded915d259eaa7776/413_Girls_education_Libya.pdf)
- Economic landscape: 23.8% - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Economic landscape: threatened - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/LIBYA-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
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## WWL 2021: Church information / Libya

### Christian origins

The most important part of ancient Roman Libya was Cyrenaica, named after the city of Cyrene. The Roman Emperor Trajan virtually depopulated the cities of Cyrenaica after extensive Jewish uprisings occurred (115-117 AD). He then repopulated the area with military colonies.

Cyrenaica is mentioned in the earliest Christian literature: One example is the reference to Simon of Cyrene, who was made to carry Jesus' cross before Jesus was crucified. Cyrenians are also one of the people groups mentioned later in the Book of Acts. For Libyan Christians today, it is a great encouragement to know there is such a long history of Libyans following Christ. The first recorded bishop in Libya was Ammonas of Berenice (260 AD). Four bishops from this area attended the Council of Nicea (325 AD). At this council, Cyrenaica became a province of the Coptic Church of Alexandria in Egypt. Arius and Sabellius, two theologians remembered as heretics, were from Cyrenaica.

Christianity remained a matter mainly for Latin and Greek speakers in Cyrenaica; the Saharan Imazighen ('Berbers') were not interested. The decline of the Roman Empire, hastened by invading Vandals, saw the cities and the Roman political and social order fall into ruin. The Byzantine Empire returned to revive the region in the 6th century, but Cyrenaica's cities became like armed camps to ward off Imazighen raids. By the beginning of the 7th century, Byzantine control over the region was weak, Amazigh ('Berber') rebellions were becoming more frequent, and there was little to oppose the Arab invasion of 681-683 AD. In Cyrenaica, Coptic

Christians who were treated as heretics by the Byzantine armies, welcomed the Arabs as liberators from Byzantine oppression. However, when the process of Islamization began, many of the Christians emigrated to the safety of Italy and Egypt. The Amazigh tribes gradually accepted Islam.

Tripolitania, the western part of Libya, was briefly in the hands of Normans from Sicily in the period 1146-1159. In the Middle Ages there was extensive trade between Tripolitania and Europe. From 1510-1551, Spain ruled over Tripoli. In 1911 Italy colonized Libya; about 150,000 Italians moved to Libya, forming 20% of the population. This meant a return of Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. Some Protestant mission work was also carried out. From 1943, Britain ruled over Libya until the country became independent in 1951. Due to its rich oil reserves, many expatriates, including Christians from Europe, the USA and Africa came to work in Libya. Those Christians could worship freely.

In 1970, Muammar Gaddafi staged a coup and steered the country in a radical direction which forced many churches to be closed down. In 2011, civil war erupted and Gaddafi was killed. Since then, the political situation in Libya has been chaotic and dangerous.

Before the civil war began in 2011, there were an estimated 80,000 Roman Catholics, mostly Italian and Maltese Libyans. They were only allowed to use one church in Tripoli and one in Benghazi. Before 2011, about 60,000 Coptic Orthodox Egyptians worked in Libya, served by three churches, in Tripoli, Benghazi and Misrata. Beside this, thousands of Protestant expatriates, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, held various forms of church meeting. However, due to the revolution, the security situation deteriorated badly. When IS beheaded 21 Coptic Christians near Sirte in 2015, large numbers of Christians fled the country. The three Coptic churches are not functioning anymore and only some sub-Saharan African communities are still meeting. The situation remains very volatile, both for native Libyan and foreign Christians.

## Church spectrum today

Libya: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	20,000	58.0
Catholic	10,000	29.0
Protestant	1,500	4.3
Independent	1,000	2.9
Unaffiliated	2,000	5.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Evangelical movement	800	2.3
Renewalist movement	2,400	7.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

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

The Roman Catholic church has two church buildings left in Libya - one in Western Tripoli and one in Eastern Benghazi. Only the Roman Catholic church in Tripoli is still functioning. According to the Apostolic Vicar of Tripoli, Bishop George Bugeja, the church serves around 3000 remaining Catholics in Libya, although their number is dwindling. All of the parishioners are foreigners - mostly Filipinos, Indians and Pakistanis. There are also Catholics from Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. ([Aid to the Church in Need, January 2020](#)).

The Egyptian Coptic Orthodox church had three church buildings, one in Tripoli, Benghazi and Misrata. They are not functioning anymore. Only a few sub-Saharan African groups are currently able to meet for worship, but they have to operate very carefully.

## External Links - Church information

- Church spectrum today - additional information: Aid to the Church in Need, January 2020 - <https://www.acnmalta.org/2020/01/22/our-cry-from-libya-a-stable-peace-is-needed-bishop-george-bugeja/>

# WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Libya

## Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

## Position on the World Watch List

Libya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	92	4
WWL 2020	90	4
WWL 2019	87	4

WWL 2018	86	7
WWL 2017	78	11

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The rise in two points in WWL 2021 was caused mainly by an increase in reported violence which has now reached the category extreme. The scores in all spheres of life are also at extreme levels. The continuing state of anarchy has contributed to the overall vulnerability of Christians in the country.

## Persecution engines

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

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

### Islamic oppression (Very strong)

This engine manifests itself in different ways. Libya has a deeply Islamic culture causing converts from Islam to Christianity to face immense pressure from their family members and community. In addition, following Gaddafi's downfall, various radical Islamic groups have gained more influence and control over society.

### Clan oppression (Strong)

Libya's society is conservative and tribal. Converting from Islam to Christianity is not only seen as betrayal of Islam, but also of the family and tribe. Due to issues of ethnicity and racism,



migrants from Sub-Saharan countries are fiercely discriminated against.

### Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

The fact that corruption is so rife also contributes to perpetuating the lack of rule of law and impunity in the country. This engine is blended with *Islamic oppression* since some of the Islamic militant groups work with or act as organized criminal groups by engaging in human trafficking and other criminal activities.

## Drivers of persecution

Libya: Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	-	STRONG	-	-	-	-	STRONG
Government officials	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC, embassies etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Extended family (Very strong):** Although clearly mixed with issues of family honor (see below under *Clan oppression*), strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for families to target members holding other convictions.

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** The most prominent examples were the beheadings of 21 Coptic Christians in February 2015 by IS, followed by the execution of a group of Ethiopian Christians in April that same year. Meanwhile, IS has lost Sirte as its stronghold, but it is still present in the surrounding area. Other radical Islamic groups are mostly connected to the internationally recognized government in the West, although there are also radical elements among the Eastern parties. Such groups are responsible for the most violent forms of persecution and act with absolute impunity due to the absence of a single government to impose any semblance of law and order in the country.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** At the community level, local imams or sheikhs are known to incite hatred against Christians, especially against migrants and converts. At the national level, radical (Wahhabi) Islamic scholars exert influence via both satellite television and Internet. In April 2019, [Crisis Group especially warned](#) against the growing influence of the Madkhalis, an ultra-conservative Salafi group rooted in Saudi-Arabian Wahhabism with adherents in both Eastern and Western Libya. Although Madkhalis oppose both political activities (e.g. as carried out by the Muslim Brotherhood) and jihadi operations (e.g. as carried out by IS), they still adhere to strict interpretations of Sharia law. Their influence is reported to be growing, causing strict Islamic rules to be enforced in more and more areas of the country.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Libya does not have one central government and the treatment of Christians differs from region to region. However, Sharia law is upheld throughout the country. Converts and Christians involved in proselytization can be arrested by local ruling groups. Detained migrant Christians from a Sub-Saharan background can face worse treatment than other migrants because of their faith.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Ordinary people who subscribe to intolerant and radical interpretations of Islam contribute to the persecution and discrimination of Christians especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life*. This category overlaps with extended family since families and tribes are close-knit and often live together - which is also true in urban area, although to a lesser extent.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Most political factions are supporters of the application of Sharia law and aim to keep Libya a Muslim country.

#### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Very strong):** For converts, one's own family is often the biggest threat. In order to nullify the shame brought upon the family by conversion to Christianity, the family will try to force the convert into recanting his or her new faith. This often comes in the form of social pressure (exclusion, forced divorce, losing custody over children), but converts can also face severe violence.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Libya's population is divided into more than thirty different tribes. Each tribe consists of different clans and families, which have a hierarchical structure

in which the father is the head of the nuclear family. Tribal leaders, often the eldest sons of their families, have a duty to protect the (extended) family and look after the well-being and family honor of the whole group. They put pressure on converts to recant their new faith or encourage families to take action against apostate family members.

### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** Although intertwined with the activities of corrupt Government officials, criminal groups are involved in the persecution and discrimination of Christians. In particular those engaged in human trafficking and kidnapping for ransom are known to single out Christians and treat them harsher than victims from other backgrounds. These groups engage in all sorts of predatory behavior against immigrants who are trying to make their way through Libya to Europe. In addition to being held hostage for ransom, many are sold into slavery and many women are subjected to sexual assault and rape.

### Map of country



## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians are at risk all over the country, but are especially vulnerable in areas where radical Islamic groups are active. Particularly the region around Sirte is notorious for the presence of radical Islamic groups (including elements of IS). Expatriate Christians avoid travelling in general and especially in areas where Islamic militants are likely to have set up checkpoints. Groups such as those connected to the Islamic Dawn coalition (see Keys to Understanding) are in control of areas around Tripoli and some parts of Tripoli itself. In the East, radical groups are at least present in Benghazi.

Migrant Christians who have been arrested and detained while trying to reach Europe, often end up in one of the overcrowded detention centres around Tripoli. Others do not even make it that far, but are directly delivered into the hands of criminal officials or groups by their human traffickers. Subsequently, they are forced into heavy labor in the agricultural sector or pushed into prostitution.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians

Christian migrant workers (most of them coming from sub-Saharan Africa and some from Egypt) are allowed to meet in their own churches, but Libyans are not allowed to attend. Expatriate Christians enjoy some freedom, but are constantly facing threats of kidnapping and other forms of abuse. Sub-Saharan African Christians are doubly vulnerable to persecution and discrimination based on race and religion.

Christian migrants travelling through Libya describe their journey as a living hell. Both Christian and Muslim migrants are subject to forms of severe abuse. Because of the internal divisions, migrants are handed over from one group of human traffickers to another on their journey to reach the coast. Each group of human traffickers tries to extort as much money as possible from the migrants and - for ransom purposes - are known to even send a migrant's family in the home country videos of torture being carried out. Most female migrants face sexual abuse by traffickers; they cannot refuse, as the traffickers otherwise threaten to leave them behind. While waiting to be transported and to be handed over to another group of traffickers, migrants are often held in (temporary) camps. The general conditions in those camps are often appalling and many migrants do not survive their journey. One Christian migrant recounts the complete lack of safety: "You can never sleep with your eyes closed". When they finally reach the coastal area, they often have to find ways to raise additional money to pay for crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. Traffickers put as many migrants as possible onto often unseaworthy boats, putting the lives of the migrants very much at risk.

### Historical Christian communities

This category does not exist in Libya as defined by WWL methodology.

### Converts to Christianity

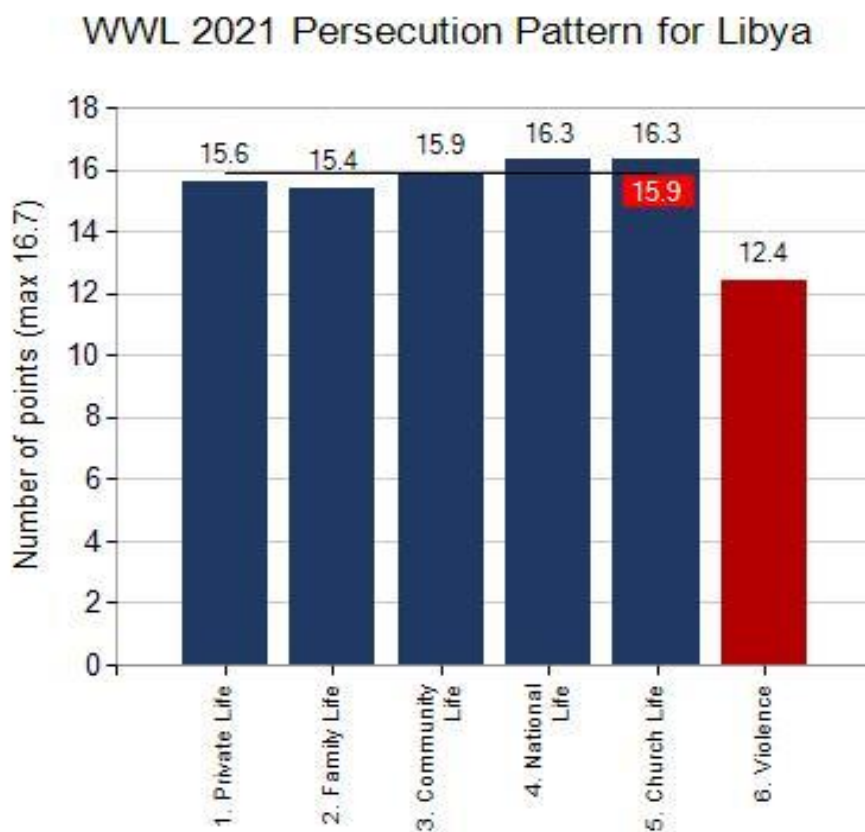
The very small group of Libyan nationals who are Christians keep their faith secret. Libyans are forbidden to attend worship in official churches. The number of Libyan Christians from a Muslim

background is very low, but with the appearance of Christian programs on satellite TV and Christian websites in Arabic, the interest in the Christian faith has been increasing. As in most Muslim countries, converting from Islam brings massive social pressure and converts are always at risk from their families. Most Libyan Christians are afraid to meet with other believers, as any kind of religious gathering (other than Islamic) is forbidden for Libyans.

### Non-traditional Christian communities

This category does not exist in Libya as defined by WWL methodology.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Libya shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at an extremely high level (15.9 points), rising from 15.8 in WWL 2020. The reason for this increase is the anarchy that continues to exist due to the lack of a central government. Radical Islamic groups, but also (in)official government staff, can harm Christians (both sub-Saharan migrants and converts) with impunity.
- Although all *spheres of life* show extreme levels of pressure, pressure is highest in *Church* and *National life*. This also reflects the lack of a central government. Where anarchy and Islamic radicalism rule together, there is no freedom of speech, no equal treatment of Christians, no permits for churches to be built etc.

- The level of violence is now 'extreme', increasing from 11.3 points in WWL 2020 to 12.4 in WWL 2021. The reason for this increase is a higher number of verified incidents. Despite this, the lack of reliable sources for information from within the country remains an issue of concern.

## 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 2021 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: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

Because of the oppression caused by the intolerance of relatives, society and radical Islamic groups, Christians in Libya hardly dare to inform others about their faith, let alone express their faith in written form clearly visible for others. It could i) draw unwanted attention from criminal groups looking to extort or kidnap people; ii) alert Islamic radical groups opposing Christian presence; or iii) lead to accusations of blasphemy if, for example, Jesus Christ is described as “Son of God”. This is in particular risky for converts, as a public expression of their new faith brings shame on their (extended) family.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (4.00 points)**

Being visibly recognizable as a Christian brings risks. Wearing a cross, or like Egypt’s Copts having a tattoo of a cross on the wrist or arm, can be dangerous. Militias and local ruling groups maintain checkpoints monitoring all those entering their territory. In normal daily life, being recognized as a Christian could lead to discrimination or harassment. Especially sub-Saharan migrant Christians have to hide their Christian identity to avoid the increased likelihood of being selected for discrimination and (sexual) abuse by human traffickers and government officials. There have been reports of sub-Saharan Christians being killed upon discovery of their Christian identity.

**Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (4.00 points)**

Libyan society is conservative and radical Islamic thinking has a growing influence in the country. Discussing Christian faith with a Muslim could be interpreted as an act of evangelism. Proselytization is not explicitly prohibited, but “instigating division” and “insulting Islam” is.

**Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (4.00 points)**

Especially Libya's indigenous convert Christians cannot publicly or openly meet with other Christians. Discovery might lead to unwanted attention, especially from direct family members.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)**

Libyan converts to Christianity are viewed as Muslims by the government and cannot have an official Christian wedding. They are outlawed and have to live in secrecy. Foreign Christians are allowed to marry other Christians in their own churches in some parts of the country. Celebrating a wedding might put them all at risk and draw unwanted attention from radical groups, or, in the case of converts, from family members.

**Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (4.00 points)**

Converts will most probably be buried with Islamic rites. Reportedly, funerals for sub-Saharan migrant Christians who died in migration centers have been hindered as well. Many migrant Christians are buried in unmarked graves along the road.

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

Libya is an Islamic country and Islamic teachings influence all school curricula. In August 2018, the Ministry of Education reviewed the curriculum of madrassas to ensure they did not contain passages inciting hate against non-Muslim minorities. Almost all expatriate Christians have left the country and the main group of Christians currently consists of sub-Saharan migrants and some Egyptian Copts. Their children, if they go to school, have to attend Islamic instruction and are vulnerable to harassment.

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (4.00 points)**

Some converts even keep their new faith hidden for their children as they might accidentally give it away. If their parent's new faith would be known, children of converts are highly likely to be bullied by their peers. Children of sub-Saharan migrant Christians are vulnerable to abuse both for their faith and race.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (4.00 points)**

Christians regularly face harassment and discrimination and are generally viewed with suspicion. Especially Protestant Christians are seen as being linked to Western countries and intelligence

agencies, like the CIA. Women have to dress modestly and most Libyan women cover their hair, according to Islamic tradition. Converts, in particular women, have to dress according to Islamic standards in order not to draw attention to their conversion. During Ramadan, all Christians feel social pressure to abstain from eating and drinking during the day; converts have to do this in order not to be discovered.

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)**

Intensified by the civil war, high levels of suspicion exist. All Christians have to operate carefully; converts avoid many parts of the country and tend to live in urbanized areas where secrecy and anonymity are more possible.

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

Not only converts to Christianity will experience pressure to recant their faith. Many sub-Saharan migrant Christians are forced to convert to Islam or do so to protect themselves. Those who do not give up their faith are likely to be singled out, while some have even been killed on the spot.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)**

Known converts will most probably lose their job and will be actively discriminated against when trying to find another job. Christians are generally not employed by the government, certainly not in higher positions. Christian migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are doubly discriminated against, due to their skin color as well as their faith. Many of them are vulnerable to abuse and have to work under harsh conditions, some even being sold as slaves.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

Due to the patchwork of different ruling groups maintaining their own checkpoints, travelling is dangerous for all Christians. They are at risk of being forced to pay a bribe at best, or - in the worst case - of being abducted or killed.

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

The fall of the Gaddafi regime gave the Libyans more space to express their views in public. However, criticizing government officials or ruling groups is risky, as the disappearance of critical journalists and bloggers in recent years has shown. Since most Christians are foreigners, they have to be careful not to appear provocative; converts cannot get involved in public debates as they are regarded as outlaws.



**Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (4.00 points)**

Even the few registered church buildings are careful not to have religious symbols on the outside of their buildings since the public display of Christian symbols is considered to be an indirect form of proselytization and can attract serious punishment from the authorities - or even lead to public lynching.

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

Converts can be harmed or killed with impunity; especially when carried out by family members it will be considered to be a matter of family honor. Other Christians can also be killed with impunity by both radical groups as well as government officials; sub-Saharan Christians are especially vulnerable in this regard.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Converts cannot come together in any church setting without high risks and foreign churches also have to operate carefully. Most churches try to maintain good relationships with Muslim neighbours, but a general hostile attitude towards Christians makes it hard to have a positive influence in society.

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

Converts from Islam to Christianity do not dare to be known as Christians, let alone request the government for any official recognition of their church activities. Expatriate churches with a long historical presence, like the Coptic Orthodox Church from Egypt and the Roman Catholic Church are officially recognized, but building a new church or renovating an existing one is difficult. New Protestant denominations have not been given legal recognition and have had to operate in private homes.

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

Whether the officially UN-recognized GNA government is in charge or a local Salafi militia, no church anywhere in the country can accept converts in their midst. Evangelizing is not officially prohibited, but the criminal code puts the death penalty on those who insult Islam or Mohammed. This means de facto that churches have to operate very carefully in this regard and cannot invite or accept visits from Muslims in churches.

**Block 5.19: Churches have been hindered in their interaction with the global church (both foreigners visiting and nationals being able to visit Christians in other countries to attend conferences etc.). (4.00 points)**

It is very dangerous for foreigners to visit Christians inside Libya. Converts have to be very careful when travelling abroad in order not to raise any suspicions. In past months, some parts of Tripoli could still be visited by foreigners, but the fighting around Tripoli has intensified and made all such visits virtually impossible. This makes it very difficult to encourage and support Christians inside the country.

*Normal church life is hardly possible for any Christians. Depending on the region, migrants can gather in churches, but they face serious security risks. To bring in Christian literature and Bibles in Arabic remains strictly forbidden and the proselytizing of Muslims and missionary activity is officially prohibited in the country. This is another factor that suppresses the growth of the indigenous Church.*

## 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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol “x” denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.*

<b>Libya: Violence Block question</b>	<b>WWL 2021</b>	<b>WWL 2020</b>
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10	10
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	4	3
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10	100
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?	1	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	50	50

6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	20	100
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	3	1
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	250	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?	15	10
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?	1	0
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	15	12
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	20	10

The level of violence against Christians in Libya has reached the category 'extreme'. Due to the political instability and absence of law and order in the country, many Christians are subjected to very violent, inhumane and degrading treatment. For the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** There is an extremely high level of violence against Christians in Libya, caused by the current anarchy, radical Islamic groups and tribal society. There are unverified reports claiming that at least 20 Christians from a migrant sub-Saharan background were killed or died from harsh treatment inside detention facilities. Romany Adly Ayoub, a Coptic Christian, was kidnapped, tortured and killed, allegedly by the Islamist militant group Ansar al-Sharia. The fate of seven other Coptic men who are missing under suspicious circumstances is unknown, but they might have been killed as well. It is not possible to list an exact number for the WWL 2021 reporting period.
- **Christians attacked:** Christian migrants in particular have been the victim of abduction and rape. Many Christian women are reported to have been forced into prostitution.
- **Christians arrested:** Both convert and migrant Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons. Both tribal groups and government officials are responsible for such detentions.
- **Churches attacked:** There are very few church buildings in the country. Churches and buildings used as a church remain a very vulnerable target for attack, especially by radical Islamic groups.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Homes where Christians live are vulnerable to being targeted by criminal groups, radical Islamic groups or even government officials.

Although published well before the WWL 2021 reporting period, a 2016 [report](#) by Amnesty International gives a clear indication of what Christians are still going through today: A 26-year-old from Eritrea who was held in a detention center in al-Zawiya, is quoted as saying: “They hate Christians. If you’re a Christian, all I can say is God help you if they find out...If they see a cross or a [religious] tattoo they beat you a lot more.” Another former detainee (from Nigeria) said that guards in the detention center in Misratah would separate the men according to religion and flog those who were Christians. A 22-year-old man from Eritrea who was beaten in detention after his boat was intercepted, stated: “They beat me, took my money and threw away my Bible and the cross I had on my neck...First they check whether one has money in the pockets, then they take an electrical cable and whip you.”

A [report](#) by Amnesty International published in March 2019 shows that the situation has worsened, as many migrants are sent back to Libya after being intercepted at sea while trying to reach Europe. Many of them are subsequently detained, while others are not able to return to their home countries due to lack of funds.

## 5 Year trends

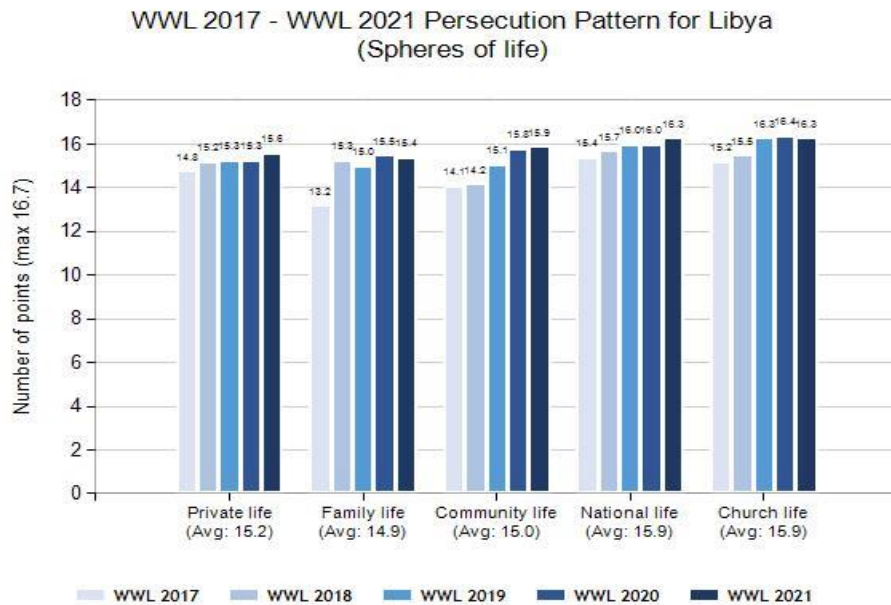
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Libya: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	15.9
2020	15.8
2019	15.5
2018	15.2
2017	14.6

In the table above it can be seen that the average pressure on Christians has steadily risen over the last five WWL reporting periods. This is due both to recording the situation of sub-Saharan migrant Christians in more detail and to the fact that almost all other expatriate Christians have left the country. The better treatment enjoyed by non-migrant (often Western) Christians is no longer offsetting the score for pressure anymore.

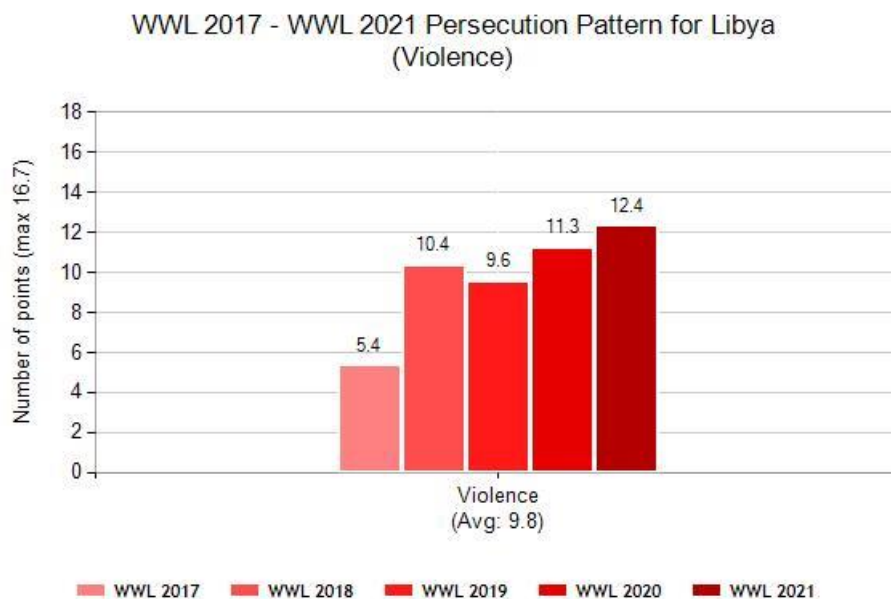
## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The levels of pressure in all *spheres of life* have been rising over the last five reporting periods due to the ongoing lawlessness in most parts of the country. Thousands of Christian sub-Saharan migrants have ended up in Libya and many find themselves stuck there without money. Most have used all their funds to pay traffickers for their transfer to Europe and are now very vulnerable to (sexual) abuse and underpaid labor.

In addition, the situation of Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity remains very problematic.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



With the exception of WWL 2017 (when less killings were reported), the scores for violence have been at a very high (and now 'extreme') level over the last four reporting periods. Due to the insecurity in the country and the lack of reliable sources, it is very probable that a lot of incidents go unreported. This has kept the score for violence lower than it is in reality.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to Christian religious materials
Enforced religious dress code
Forced marriage
Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Trafficking
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual

Female Christians face the same pressures of persecution as men in many regards. However, as Libyan women tend to live secluded from other people and under strict familial control, the severity of their experience is greater. In general, women have a lower position within Libyan family life than men; this is caused by tribal norms corresponding to Sharia. It is extremely challenging for female converts to access Christian religious materials or meet with other Christians. If suspected of being interested in Christianity, a woman can face house arrest, sexual assault, forced marriage or even a so-called 'honor killing.' It is difficult for female converts to escape such dangerous situations. There is almost no scope for them to live autonomously, since there is an explicit restriction on a woman becoming head of the household or family.

In light of Libya's honor-shame culture, all women and girls are expected to uphold high norms regarding their sexuality and dress modestly. It is widely understood that failing to do so brings shame upon the wider family. Christian women who experience sexual violence because of their faith, sometimes as a form of punishment, encounter social and cultural barriers to the prosecution of any offence. This includes police and judicial reluctance to act and family reluctance to publicize an assault, all of which contribute to a lack of effective government enforcement. A [woman's testimony](#) does not carry the same evidentiary weight in court as a

man's (World Bank Group, 2018, “Women, Business and the Law” p.107). This vulnerability is further compounded by the lack of adequate legislation on sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Another significant group in Libya are the Christian sub-Saharan migrant women and men attempting to cross Libya to reach Europe. Christian women are highly vulnerable to abduction and sexual enslavement, especially when they are separated from their male companions - such as in migrant detention centers.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Forced out of home – expulsion
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Trafficking
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

In general, men face higher risks of physical violence in Libya, due to an ongoing "cycle of violence, atrocities and impunity" according to an International Criminal Court [prosecutor](#) (UN News, 6 Nov 2019). Christian men face loss of employment, physical and mental abuse, eviction from their family home, and kidnap for ransom. As the providers for their family, Christian men who lose their ability to provide as a result of persecution often feel that they have lost their role in the family, causing psychological distress. The risks for Libyan Christian men are so high that the formation of fellowship groups is nearly impossible unless whole families convert.

Forced labor and slavery are widespread for sub-Saharan men who have migrated to Libya, including Christian men. They are often young and travel without their family, which makes them vulnerable to being abducted for enforced heavy agricultural labor, especially when they run out of money. Others are abducted or arrested and are only freed if a ransom is paid. If the men

have a family in their home country, those families will be financially at risk as they are expecting their husbands and fathers to protect them and take financial care of them.

Libyan men and boys have been increasingly forced to fight in militias, causing more and more to flee their home towns to evade such a fate. Migrant Christians in detention camps, too, are forced to fight. They are, as a country expert explains, “forced to fight as combatants or provide support for the war efforts of the militias on both sides of the conflict”. Refusal to fight can be met with death.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Especially Ibadi and Sufi Muslims in Libya who do not belong to the Sunni Islamic traditions face persecution in the form of violent attacks by groups like IS and other militant Sunni groups, as well as general discrimination from society. For example, the US State Department's [IRF 2017 report](#) states that two historic Sufi mosques in Tripoli were attacked and severely damaged by unknown assailants on 20 October and 28 November 2017 respectively. Also atheists and those who openly question Sunni Islamic doctrine are very much at risk in Libya.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

It is not likely that pressure caused by *Islamic oppression* will decrease in the short-term. Although talks to end the civil war are ongoing, it is unlikely that radical Islamic and other groups will agree to hand over control to a new central government. Their influence and (arbitrary) implementation of Sharia law will remain a dangerous threat to Christians under their control. Even if radical Islamic groups are driven out of the country, society in general will remain conservative and expect the government to uphold Sharia law.

### Clan oppression

This engine is closely linked to *Islamic oppression* in Libya with tribalism keeping the country conservative. In war-time situations, people tend to cling to their religion and customs and are not open to new ideas, let alone a new religion. Converting from Islam to Christianity will therefore continue to be seen as betrayal of religion, family and tribe. Secondly, the treatment of sub-Saharan migrant Christians is not likely to improve, as they are regarded as both religiously and racially different. Therefore, *Clan oppression* will remain an important engine for the overall pressure on Christians.

### Organized corruption and crime

As long as there is not a central government with effective authority across the country, the current lawlessness will continue. Radical Islamic groups (and also government officials) will continue to earn money through human trafficking, abduction and extortion. Christians will remain vulnerable as they are especially targeted.



## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: Crisis Group especially warned - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/addressing-rise-libyas-madkhali-salafis>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: report - <https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/eu-risks-fuelling-horrific-abuse-of-refugees-and-migrants-in-libya>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: report - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03/europes-shameful-failure-to-end-the-torture-and-abuse-of-refugees-and-migrants-in-libya/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: woman's testimony - <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/926401524803880673/pdf/125804-PUB-REPLACEMENT-PUBLIC.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: prosecutor - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1050771>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRF 2017 report - <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281240.pdf>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>  
e.g.: [LIBYA – Freedom of religion in the land of anarchy – 2016](http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/libya-freedom-of-religion-in-the-land-of-anarchy-2016)
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Libya>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Libya>