

World
Watch
Research

Libya: Full Country Dossier

December 2022



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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).

External Links - Introduction

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

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Libya

Brief country details

Libya: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
7,041,000	35,400	0.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Libya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	88	5
WWL 2022	91	4
WWL 2021	92	4
WWL 2020	90	4
WWL 2019	87	4

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Libyan Christians with a Muslim background often 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

- Several church buildings and other places of Christian worship, mostly belonging to Sub-Saharan African Christians, were attacked and demolished or damaged.
- Several Sub-Saharan African Christians were kidnapped for ransom.
- Several Christian migrants held in detention centers in Libya (mostly from Sub-Saharan African countries) have reportedly been raped and beaten.
- One Christian from a Muslim background received a death sentence ([MEC, 12 September 2022](#)).
- December 2021/January 2022: Despite deep political divisions, a nationwide campaign was launched by government officials to confiscate Christmas decorations. In addition, a group of expatriate Arab Christians were arrested for celebrating "Christmas" on New Year's eve ([MEC, 12 January 2022](#)).
- It was reported that in a city in East-Libya, rewards were being promised for those informing radical Islamic groups about the presence of Christians, whether Libyan converts, foreign Copts or Sub-Saharan Africans.
- Slavery and human trafficking still take place despite an international outcry in 2017 when [CNN showed video evidence](#) of an auction of Sub-Saharan Africans (CNN, 14 November 2017). Many of the Sub-Saharan African migrants are Christian.

Specific examples of positive developments

Parliamentary and presidential elections were planned for 24 December 2021, but had to be postponed indefinitely after major disagreements meant that not even a list of candidates could be published ([The Guardian, 21 December 2021](#)). Although the country currently has two rival prime-ministers, and the possibility of violence erupting is never far away, it is nevertheless quite likely that a political solution to the conflict can be found in the near future. One 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 - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: MEC, 12 September 2022 - <https://meconcern.org/2022/09/12/libya-convert-sentenced-to-death-for-apostasy/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: MEC, 12 January 2022 - <https://meconcern.org/2022/01/12/libya-authorities-act-against-christmas-celebrations/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: CNN showed video evidence - <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/14/africa/libya-migrant-auctions/index.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: The Guardian, 21 December 2021 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/21/fears-of-libya-violence-as-un-races-to-manage-election-postponement>.

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Libya

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report - 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 - pp.234-238	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	18 May 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13754897	18 May 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 - 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/LBY	18 May 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/libya/	18 May 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) - 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/libya	18 May 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 - 167 countries	EIU 2021 - p.16	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	18 May 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	27 July 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index - 29 countries, Libya is not included	Freedom House/Democracy 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index - 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/libya/freedom-world/2022	18 May 2022

Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report - 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/libya/freedom-net/2021	18 May 2022
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 - 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/libya	18 May 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ly	18 May 2022
Middle East Concern country profile	MEC country profile	https://meconcern.org/countries/libya/	27 July 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index - 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/libya	18 May 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index - 180 countries	CPI 2021 Libya	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/libya	18 May 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	UNDP's HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/LBY	13 December 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/libya/	6 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports (15 CPC / 12 SWL, Libya not included)	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview - 178 countries	World Bank 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya	18 May 2022
World Bank country profile data - 222 countries	World Bank profile 2020	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tb ar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=LBY	18 May 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 - 147 countries	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 MENA	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mena.pdf	18 May 2022

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 lawlessness - see below: *Political and legal landscape*.

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 ([The Guardian, 26 October 2011](#)). On 7 July 2012, Libyans voted in their first parliamentary elections since the end of Gaddafi's rule. The newly-elected General National Congress (GNC), consisting of both secular and Islamist parties and independents, was given the task of drafting a new Libyan constitution to be approved in a general referendum. However, the GNC did not manage to maintain order and radical Islamist groups increasingly grew in influence. In response, Khalifa Haftar, the commander of the so-called 'Libyan National Army' (LNA), launched "Operation Dignity", targeting the Islamists, who subsequently united under the name 'Libya Dawn'.

Haftar accused the GNC of supporting the Islamists and insisted on new elections. Losing popular support, the GNC gave in and new elections were held in June 2014. The new parliament, mainly consisting of anti-Islamist parties, became known as the House of Representatives (HoR), led by its speaker Aguila Saleh Issa ([Geopolitical Monitor, 22 July 2020](#)). However, in August 2014 Libya Dawn captured Tripoli, the capital located in the west of the country, forcing the HoR to relocate to the eastern city of Tobruk. Subsequently, the HoR appointed Haftar as commander of the army in March 2015. Meanwhile in Tripoli, the GNC (supported by Libya Dawn) was restored and set up as a rival parliament, dividing the country between east and west.

In an attempt to reunite the country, the envoy of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), following an accord in December 2015, proposed a new government, the Government of National Accord (GNA). Recognized internationally as the sole legitimate executive authority in Libya, the GNA managed step by step to take over Tripoli from the GNC and win the support of most of the groups belonging to Libya Dawn. After initially supporting the GNA, the HoR later withdraw its support, but in May 2018 the major parties agreed on a roadmap that should have led to national elections. However, in April 2019, while preparations for holding elections were underway, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar ordered his Libyan National Army to march on Tripoli. In response, the GNA, joined by Libya Dawn, said they would defend the city at all costs.

In the meantime, on the geopolitical level, the battle for Libya had become a showdown between two opposing blocs which divide the Sunni Middle East: i) The Turkey-Qatar axis, which supports political Islam (Islamism) and Libya Dawn; ii) The United Arab Emirates-Saudi-Arabia-Egypt axis, which views political Islamists as an existential threat to their rule and hence supports Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. Russia also supports the latter in a bid to strengthen its influence in the region.

In the course of 2019, Haftar's LNA forces, supported by Russian Wagner mercenaries, 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, 22 July 2020](#)). The Turkish assistance included the deployment of at least 2,000 - 4,000 Syrian fighters ([The Guardian, 15 January 2020](#)) and naval and drone support. This enabled the GNA and Libya Dawn to force the LNA to retreat and move the battlefield to Sirte; the city in the middle of the country that controls access to Africa's biggest oil reserves ([The Guardian, 2 August 2020](#)). 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](#)). 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 secure stability.

However, it became clear that it would be almost impossible to untangle the web of tribal, political and ideological allegiances that permeates both sides in order to unite the country. In other words, those currently in power are mainly concerned with securing their own interests, rather than finding a political solution for the nation as a whole ([Atlantic Council, 25 February 2021](#)). Following a conference in Berlin in January 2020, the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) was created, consisting of 75 men and women who "represent the full social and political spectrum of Libyan society" ([UNSMIL, 2021](#)). In March 2021, the LPDF elected Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah as the prime-minister of the new Government of National Unity (GNU) ([Libya Herald, 5 February 2021](#)). This time, the HoR endorsed the GNU, something it had refused to do with the GNA ([Atlantic Council, 2 April 2021](#)). Dbeibah's main object was to organize presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2021. However, the elections were postponed indefinitely after major disagreements meant that not even a list of candidates could be published ([The Guardian, 21 December 2021](#)).

Following the failed elections, the HoR withdraw support from Dbeibah and installed former GNA interior minister Fathi Bashaga as a rival prime minister instead, as head of the "Government of National Stability" ([SIPRI, 29 April 2022](#)). Bashaga's election is backed by Field Marshall Haftar, despite having been on opposite sides during Haftar's attempt to conquer Tripoli. However, Dbeibah vowed to only hand over power after elections, and attempts to take over government institutions have been foiled by forces loyal to Dbeibah ([Reuters, 18 May 2022](#), [Al-Jazeera, 25 July 2022](#)). In a surprising move in July 2022, Dbeibah made his own deal with Haftar, replacing the head of the National Oil Company with someone loyal to Haftar, in an apparent bid to secure his own position ([Al-Jazeera, 18 July 2022](#)). Yet, it did not prevent Bashaga from storming Tripoli in August 2022 with allied forces; an attempt that was quickly defeated and resulted in the neutralization of several key Bashaga allies inside Tripoli ([Carnegie Endowment, 3 October 2022](#)). With neither side seeming to be able to seize power, loyalties seem to be shifting again with HoR speaker Aguila Saleh Issa visiting both Turkey and Qatar to "end differences" ([AA, 10 September 2022](#)).

In the meantime, Libya's citizens on both sides of the divide seem to have become tired of their own leadership. At the beginning of July 2022, protesters stormed the HoR parliament building in Tobruk, while other protesters took to the street in Tripoli ([Al-Jazeera, 1 July 2022](#)).

Libya's political future remains uncertain. If elections are to be held, they will most probably not be free and fair. If a political solution is found in the end, it will most likely consist of a power-and-wealth sharing agreement between the parties, in which the current kleptocracy can continue its practices.

Christians in Libya

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. In particular the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians in February 2015 followed by the murder of 30 Ethiopian Christians in April 2015 by Islamic State (IS) militants proved to be a wake-up call. The Coptic Orthodox Church has since canonized the 21 Coptic victims, declared 15 February their official Feast Day and erected a [memorial and museum](#) in their memory (Asia News, 17 February 2020).

Despite the risks, a constant flow migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, many of whom are also Christian, keeps arriving in Libya. Their hope is to reach Europe: Some manage to buy a place on one of the overcrowded boats, but many others get stuck and have to build a life inside Libya, where they become part of a very vulnerable community. 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, 24 September 2020](#)) and the Mixed Migrant Centre ([MMC, 2 December 2019](#)) do not specifically mention Christians as being particularly at risk, the US State Department in its IRFR 2021 report writes: "Armed groups provided security and administered some detention centers for migrants and refugees in the country, where, according to multiple international human rights organizations, Christians said they faced a higher risk of physical assault, including sexual assault and rape, than other migrants and refugees."

Additionally, in its 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

With the country and the judicial system in disarray, the MEC country profile states:

- "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 (HRW 2022) reports:

- "A political stalemate has indefinitely delayed parliamentary and presidential elections slated for December 2021. Parliament approved a new Government of National Stability in March 2022 effectively creating a second authority to compete with the 2020-nominated interim Government of National Unity. Armed groups and authorities remain responsible for systematic abuses including long-term arbitrary detention, unlawful killings, torture, and forced disappearances. Hundreds remain missing since the end of the 2019 Tripoli war and thousands remain displaced due to damaged properties and the presence of explosive ordnance, including landmines. Migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees face arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and extortion by armed groups linked with authorities, armed groups, and smugglers."

Christians among the migrants are obviously in danger too.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2022) writes:

- "Libya is at a politically critical juncture, and the next steps in its political roadmap will have a number of security and economic ramifications. We expect presidential and parliamentary elections to be delayed until mid-2023. The eventual elections will remove some political uncertainty, but factional disagreements and a weak security environment will persist to some degree throughout 2022-26. We expect Libya's oil output to remain steady in 2022, as we forecast some disruption to oil production due to ongoing political disagreements, but the public purse will benefit from elevated global oil prices."

According to the Fragile States Index (FSI 2022):

- Libya ranks 21st (of 178 countries) with a score of 94.3 points, an improvement of four places compared to FSI 2021 (score: 97.0). 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 largely support Islamist groups linked with the Libya Dawn (see above: *Recent History*), while the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Egypt actively support Haftar's LNA, although shifting regional priorities could help in finding a political solution to the conflict ([Washington Institute, 14 March 2022](#)).

Gender specific issues

The legal landscape 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 ([UNFPA, 2018](#)).

According to OECD's Social Indicators and Gender Index 2019 ([OECD 2019](#)):

- 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. Reliable statistics on the rate of early marriages in Libya are lacking. A recent government 'Marriage fund' is thought to have pushed young girls from poor families into marriages to access much-needed money ([Al-Monitor, January 2022](#)).
- Whilst a husband has the right to divorce his wife unilaterally, he must do so through the court. 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.

Neither marital rape nor domestic violence is criminalized under Libyan law. [Article 424](#) of the Penal Code exonerates a rapist if he marries his victim and does not divorce her within three years.

Religious landscape

Libya: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	35,400	0.5
Muslim	6,970,000	99.0
Hindu	6,500	0.1
Buddhist	19,300	0.3
Ethno-religionist	550	0.0
Jewish	130	0.0
Bahai	730	0.0
Atheist	310	0.0
Agnostic	3,500	0.0
Other	4,700	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 April 2022)

According to WCD 2022 estimates, 99% of Libyans are Muslim, virtually all adhering 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. A court ruling sentencing a Libyan Christian to death in September 2022 underlines the complete lack of legal protection for converts from Islam to Christianity ([MEC, 12 September 2022](#)).

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, both in the east and west of the country, are now home to radical Muslims, especially those linked to Madkhali Salafism ([International Crisis Group - ICG, 25 April 2019](#)). 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. Yet, the nation-wide campaign against Christmas celebrations at the end of 2021 is telling in this regard ([MEC, 12 January 2022](#)).

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 (BBC News, 24 June 2019). 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 UNDP's HDI country profile and the CIA Factbook:

- **Gross National Income per capita:** 10,300 USD (2020 est.), down from 15,200 USD in 2019 (constant 2017 PPP).
- **Unemployment rate:** According to World Bank statistics from June 2022, [average unemployment](#) is around 19,6%, with youth unemployment being more than twice as high at 50.5% (World Bank 2022).
- **Poverty:** About a third of the population are affected by poverty.

According to [World Bank's Libya Economic Update \(April 2022\)](#):

- **Economic growth:** "Estimates reveal that growth in Libya rebounded in 2021, driven by a significant acceleration of oil production (average of 1.2 million barrels per day (mb/d) compared to 0.4 mb/d in 2020). However, since mid-December 2021, there have been multiple production disruptions due to weather-induced port closures, infrastructure maintenance issues, and shutdowns by armed groups. ... If oil production and exports continue without major extended disruptions, Libya will benefit from soaring global oil prices which will translate into higher fiscal revenues and inflow of hard currency. This will positively affect the trade, current account, and fiscal balances. Libya may face short-term wheat supply disruptions, higher wheat prices, and in turn higher inflation and lower consumption."
- **Oil and food prices:** "While soaring global oil prices will have a positive impact on growth and fiscal and external surpluses, this hinges on the persistence of oil production. Meanwhile the population faces increasing food insecurity as global wheat prices rise."

Immense sums of money are being spent on weapons by the various sides in the civil war and the fighting has caused widespread destruction and disruption. 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 (FSI 2022) show some signs of improvement, but the economy remains under pressure, with high levels of external intervention threatening the country even further. Nevertheless, the "human flight and brain drain" indicator has kept improving. Libya's economy is heavily reliant on oil exports, but interrupting oil supply lines has been on numerous occasions to force concessions from opposing parties, resulting in the loss of billions of dollars.

[Libya's GDP](#) decreased from 93 billion USD in 2012 to 42 billion in 2021. In 2018, the GDP level had been at the 77 billion mark. Part of the decrease is the result of oil blockades by the warring parties, including a 9-month oil blockade by the LNA in 2020, which saw GDP decrease to an all-time low of 25 billion ([World Bank Press Release, 22 April 2021](#)). In addition, high inflation had previously caused the Libyans to lose half of their purchasing power, driving many into poverty (BTI 2022, p.30). Following a ceasefire, oil production was restarted in October 2020, but disrupted again in the first six months of 2022, following the election of the eastern rival GNS government. Hence, immense (political) challenges remain and keep threatening the oil exports.

Against this precarious economic background, women are typically the most vulnerable, due to both low education and employment rates, and patrilineal inheritance practices ([OECD 2019](#)). Education has been impacted by the conflict for both boys and girls, particularly in active conflict regions ([Institute of Development Studies, 11 September 2018](#)), and more recently by COVID-19 ([ACTED, 10 June 2021](#)). Girls have been prevented from attending school by an increase in gender-based violence and sexual assaults during the conflict, and by early marriage. According to the UNDP, 25.7% of women are in the labor force, compared to 79% of men ([UNDP](#), accessed 9 August 2022).

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. It is usual that Coptic Christians, who have to remain out of economic necessity, keep their faith hidden. In addition, tribal and jihadist groups regularly abduct Sub-Saharan Africans to extort them for ransom; known Christians are especially targeted by these groups since they can be abused without having to risk any backlash (which would be likely to occur if they were harassing a fellow Muslim).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **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 2022, 81,3% of the population lived in urban areas, with an annual urbanization rate of 1.45%.
- **Literacy rate:** 91% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (96.7%) and women (85.6%) (2015)
- **Population/age:** The total population is 7.1 million, with immigrants making up 12% of the total population (2019). 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 202,000, including 168,00 IDPs. Most refugees are from Sudan (18,000) and Syria (16,000).

According to the UNDP's HDI profile:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Libya ranks #104 out 191 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 of 0.718 on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Life expectancy:** 71.9 years on average; women (74.4 years), men (69.6 years) (2022 est.).
- **Education:** On average, Libyans are expected to have 12.9 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 0.975, women are slightly 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 8 December 2022). 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. For example, the cities Tripoli, Misrata, Benghazi and Bayda have their own tribal militias, often linked to a specific political figure ([Reuters, 25 August 2011](#)). FSI social indicators (FSI 2022) show that stress on the social fabric is also coming from large numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees entering Libya.

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 ([OECD, 2019](#)). In light of the pervading honor-shame culture, women and girls are expected to uphold sexual purity; should they be sexually assaulted, shame will fall on the whole family and some women risk being arrested for 'adultery' or becoming victims of so-called 'honor killings' ([Amnesty International, March 2021](#)). Women are careful not to leave the house without a veil.

Libya's very conservative society makes it almost impossible for nationals to convert from Islam to the Christian faith. In almost all cases, Christians from a Muslim background keep their faith hidden from their families out of fear of possible violent reactions. If discovered, converts face significant pressure from both their families and local community. Known 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.

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.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 94.8% penetration - survey date: December 2021.
Internet usage saw an increase of 20% in two years, with the previous survey showing 74.2% penetration in December 2019.
- **Facebook usage:** 94.8% penetration - survey date: January 2022
According to [Napoleon Cat \(July 2022\)](#): 60.3% of Facebook users in Libya are male, compared to 39.7% female.

According to World Bank's country profile:

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

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, 2021/22" p.21). Mobile phones are [cheap](#) in Libya, making them widely accessible (Media Landscapes/Libya, accessed 3 August 2022).

According to Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2021:

- **Internet freedom:** The Freedom on the Net Report ranks Libya as "partly free". Although Libya's level of internet 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.
- "Press freedom groups have documented many cases of disappearances, abduction, and torture of journalists. In a reflection of the extreme risk of speaking out in Libya, many journalists and their family members have requested that rights groups not identify them by name when they report on such abuses. ... Many journalists continue to leave Libya rather than risk their lives by reporting within its borders".

Christians in Libya have to be careful when using the Internet. Christians from a Muslim background have to be particularly cautious 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.

Security situation

The current security situation in Libya is unstable. After the ousting and death of Gaddafi, Libya ended up in a civil war with multiple entities and varying affiliations. Two major blocks remained, with the Tobruk-based HoR aligned with Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) in the east, and the Tripoli-based GNA supported by Islamist groups in the West. Following the ceasefire in October 2020, the GNA was replaced by the current Government of National Union (GNU), which had the approval of the HoR. However, after the December 2021 parliamentary and presidential elections were postponed indefinitely, the HoR appointed a rival prime minister and government (GNS) in February 2022.

A major problem remains the presence of foreign fighters on both sides: The Russian Wagner mercenaries supporting the LNA, and the pro-Turkish Syrian auxiliaries and Turkish troops supporting the western Islamist groups. Russia and Turkey are in a deadlock, both stating that they cannot leave, as long as the other party has not withdrawn first ([RFI, 24 June 2021](#)). In reality, both foreign powers want to protect their economic interests and influence. In June 2022, Turkey renewed its mandate for troop deployment in Libya for another 18 months ([AP News, 21 June 2022](#)). Russia withdraw some of its Wagner mercenaries to support its invasion in Ukraine, but keeps in control of key positions in Libya's oil network ([Foreign Policy, 8 July 2022](#)).

The region controlled by the GNU is limited to the cities of Tripoli (capital) and Misrata with surrounding areas, making up approximately 15% of the country ([Libya Live Map, accessed 8 December 2022](#)). In order to control these cities, the GNU has linked up with various militias who are de facto controlling the areas where they are situated. The LNA controls the majority of the country including the cities of Tobruk and Benghazi. Groups linked to both sides appear to be guilty of taking hostages, torture and other (war) crimes ([Amnesty International, accessed July 2022](#)).

The overall state of anarchy, especially in the GNU 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 has performed 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. Within the context of COVID-19, domestic violence reportedly worsened ([Open Democracy, 14 May 2020](#)). Women navigating the migration route from Sub-Saharan Africa through Libya are vulnerable to sex trafficking and sexual abuse, particularly within the context of detention centers ([Trafficking in Persons Report, July 2022](#)). Men following the same migration pathways are also vulnerable to abuse in the form of [forced slavery](#) and [sexual abuse](#) (Grow Thinktank, January 2021; Euronews, 2019).

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.

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). The internationally recognized GNU is now being rivalled by the eastern GNS. Many actors, both national and international, are primarily concerned about protecting their own interests, making the country vulnerable for renewed armed conflict.

2) Power dynamics are pushing 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 the postponed elections are going to be held in the near future, it is likely that a number of parties would not accept the outcome unless their (economic) interests are secured.

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 situation within the country. If a central government would be able to assert more authority and restore law and order in the country, Christians would probably 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 conservative Islamic culture, it is unlikely that Christians, and especially Libyan Christians from a Muslim background, will enjoy full freedom of religion or belief in the long term.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: The Guardian, 26 October 2011 - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/26/libya-war-saving-lives-catastrophic-failure>
- Recent history: Geopolitical Monitor, 22 July 2020 - <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/a-lost-decade-the-actors-and-geopolitics-behind-the-libyan-civil-war/>
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- Recent history: The Guardian, 15 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: Libya Herald, 5 February 2021 - <https://www.libyaherald.com/2021/02/05/breaking-new-libya-government-selected-by-lpdf-in-geneva/>
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- Recent history: Reuters, 18 May 2022 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/libyas-bashagha-arrives-tripoli-al-arabiya-2022-05-17/>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera, 25 July 2022 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/25/civilians-in-crossfire-as-shifting-alliances-spark-libya-violence>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera, 18 July 2022 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/18/libyas-elites-may-unite-but-elections-still-elusive>
- Recent history: Carnegie Endowment, 3 October 2022 - <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/88078>
- Recent history: AA, 10 September 2022 - <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/libyas-parliament-speaker-set-to-visit-qatar-to-end-differences/2682006>
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- Recent history: memorial and museum - <http://asianews.it/news-en/Memorial-for-21-Christian-martyrs-beheaded-in-Libya-inaugurated-49321.html>
- Recent history: 'Libya is full of cruelty' - https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/libya_is_full_of_cruelty.pdf
- Recent history: Al, 24 September 2020 - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a2fa1cb4.html>
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WWL 2023: 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 in the Bible's New Testament to Simon of Cyrene, who was made to carry Jesus' cross directly before the crucifixion. Cyrenians are also one of the people groups mentioned 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 situation remains very volatile, both for native Libyan and foreign Christians.

Church spectrum today

Libya: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	20,900	59.0
Catholic	10,000	28.2
Protestant	1,500	4.2
Independent	1,000	2.8
Unaffiliated	2,000	5.6
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	35,400	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	800	2.3
Renewalist movement	2,400	6.8

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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.

Almost all expatriate Christians working in the country have left; the main Christian groups in Libya currently consist of Sub-Saharan migrants and some Egyptian Copts.

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 3,000 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.

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 now defunct Islamic Dawn coalition (see above: *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 centers 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

Almost all expatriate Christians have left the country and the main Christian groups remaining consist of Sub-Saharan migrants and some Egyptian Copts. 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. Although they enjoy more freedom than converts from Islam, they 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.

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Libya

Reporting period

01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Libya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	88	5
WWL 2022	91	4
WWL 2021	92	4
WWL 2020	90	4
WWL 2019	87	4

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The three-point drop in score in WWL 2023 was caused mainly by a decrease in reported violence, although the violence score is still categorized as very high. The scores in all spheres of life remain at extreme levels. Although the country stabilized to a certain extent and saw less direct conflict during the WWL 2023 reporting period, the overall vulnerability of Christians in the country remains extremely high.

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. They form an active threat for all foreign Christians residing in the country, including Christian Sub-Saharan African migrants and Egyptian Copts. Amplified by issues of ethnicity and racism, Christian migrants from Sub-Saharan countries face particularly fierce discrimination.

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. In practice, conversion to Christianity is only possible for Libyans if they keep it a secret and are willing to accept severe consequences if their faith is revealed, including being killed.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

The fact that corruption is so rife also contributes to perpetuating impunity and the lack of rule of law 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. Especially Christian Sub-Saharan African migrants are at a clear risk of being kidnapped for ransom. In addition, many of those incarcerated in migrant (detention) camps are reportedly being extorted and face high levels of violence.

Drivers of persecution

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

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. 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: *Clan oppression*), strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for families to target members holding other beliefs.
- **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 the group 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 those who are migrants or converts. At the national level, radical (Wahhabi) Islamic scholars exert influence via both satellite television and Internet. In April 2019, [ICG 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 areas, 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.

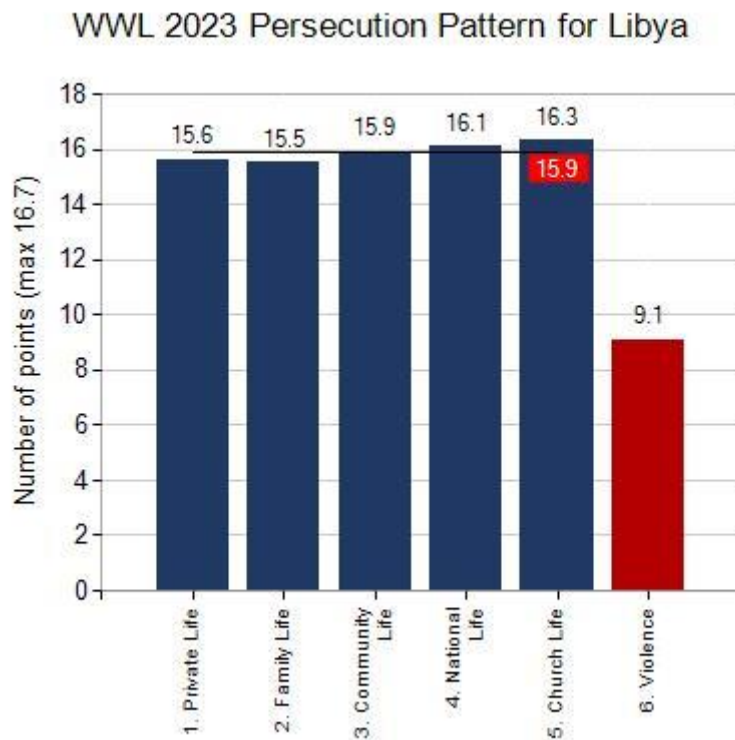
Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (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.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Libya shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at an extremely high level (15.9 points), staying at the same level as in WWL 2022. This extremely high level is not least caused by the anarchy that continues to exist due to the lack of a central government. Radical Islamic groups and governing authorities 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 was very high, but decreased from the extremely high level of 11.5 points in WWL 2022 to 9.1 in WWL 2023. The reason for this drop was a lower number of verified incidents.

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 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://open Doorsanalytical.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.

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 high level of 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)

Libya’s indigenous convert Christians, in particular, cannot publicly or openly meet with other Christians. Discovery might lead to unwanted attention, especially from direct family members. Expatriate Christians also have to be careful in many parts of the country, as they are at risk of being kidnapped or worse. Meetings cannot take place without precautionary security measures, as even travelling within certain cities is dangerous because of checkpoints manned by different groups.

Block 1 - Additional information

Pressure in the private sphere of life has been extremely high for years, as both Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity and expatriate Christians are severely limited in their personal expression of faith. Conversion to Christianity is strongly opposed, making it almost impossible to speak about faith with family members. While owning a Bible carries high risks for convert and expatriate Christians alike, the Internet has brought some solutions here. Nonetheless, recent examples have shown that even using online Christian material is not without risk.

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 teaching influences 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 Christian workers have left the country and the main Christian groups remaining are 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 from their children as they might accidentally reveal it to others. 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.

Block 2 - Additional information

It is impossible for Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity to establish a Christian family life. They can only be baptized in utmost secrecy and cannot give their children Christian names. Marriage and burial can only be carried out according to Islamic rites. In addition, converts are likely to face divorce, lose the custody over their children and be disinherited if their new faith becomes known.

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. Protestant Christians in particular 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 experience 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 live their lives carefully; converts and expatriate Christians alike 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 for persecution, 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.

Block 3 - Additional information

Libyan society is conservative and staunchly Islamic. While Libyan converts have to keep their faith hidden when participating in society, migrant Christians residing in the country do not fare much better. Especially during religious feasts like Ramadan, Christians have to adhere to Islamic religious norms. Due to the presence of radical Islamic and criminal groups, abduction and kidnapping are concrete risks for migrant Christians in Libya. Both local militias as well as groups aligned with the internationally recognized government arrest and interrogate Christians suspected of evangelization, with the possession of a single Bible being enough evidence for

accusations of proselytizing.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity cannot reveal their faith in any way to any authority. They would risk imprisonment, torture or worse, if discovered. Christian migrants also often hide their faith or even use a Muslim name to avoid discrimination by those in authority.

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 Libyan citizens more space to express their views in public. However, criticizing government officials or ruling groups is dangerous, 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.

Block 4 - Additional information

Both the 2011 interim Constitutional Declaration as well as the 2016 Constitutional Draft declare Islam to be the religion of the state and the Sharia the primary source of legislation. Whereas the 2011 Constitutional Declaration allows "non-Muslims the freedom to practice their religious rituals" (a very limited interpretation of the Freedom of Religion or Belief; note that conversion is not recognized and Libyan Christians are considered to be Muslim), the 2016 Draft lacks any reference to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Christian NGOs are not allowed to operate in the country, while media reporting regarding Christians and Christianity is reportedly biased and hate speech not uncommon. Blasphemy accusations are a real threat and can have severe consequences for both Libyan and migrant Christians. Due to the lack of a central government and widespread anarchy, international

monitoring is severely hindered or simply impossible.

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 neighbors, 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, if not impossible. New non-traditional Protestant groups 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 GNU 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. De facto, this means that the few remaining churches have to operate very carefully and cannot invite or accept visits from Muslims to church services.

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. Some parts of Tripoli can be visited by foreigners, but serious security risks remain. This makes it very difficult to encourage and support Christians inside the country.

Block 5 - Additional information

Church life is hardly possible for any Christians. Depending on the region, migrants can gather in churches, but they face serious security risks. Importing 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, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

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

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

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

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Libya: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	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?	8	3
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	15	1
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?	4	4
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	19	10 *
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	14	10 *
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	4	2
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	200	100 *
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	6	3
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?	2	1
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	11	12
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	8	100

The level of violence against Christians in Libya has returned to the category 'very high'. Due to the political instability and absence of law and order in the country, many Christians are subjected to violent, inhumane and degrading treatment. Given the security issues surrounding a Muslim's conversion to the Christian faith, most reports about converts in Libya cannot be published. For the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians attacked:** Christian migrants in particular have been the victim of abduction, rape and other forms of violence. 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 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 2023 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 Misrata 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 recent report by Amnesty International published in July 2021 shows that the situation has not improved, as many migrants are sent back to Libya after being intercepted at sea while trying to reach Europe. Many of them are subsequently detained and abused, while others find they are not able to return to their home countries due to lack of funds ([Amnesty International, 15 July 2021](#)).

5 Year trends

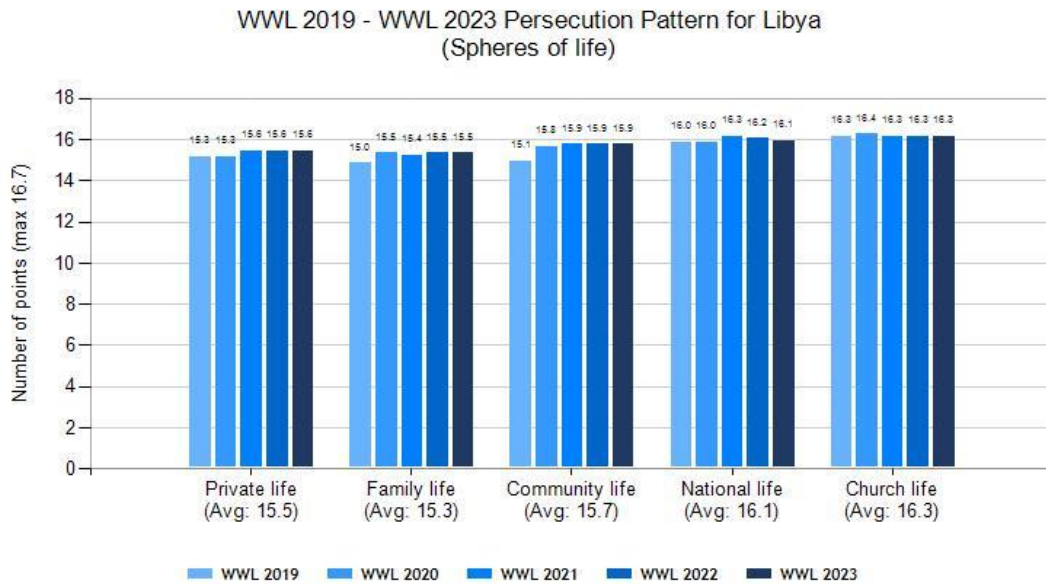
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Libya: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	15.9
2022	15.9
2021	15.9
2020	15.8
2019	15.5

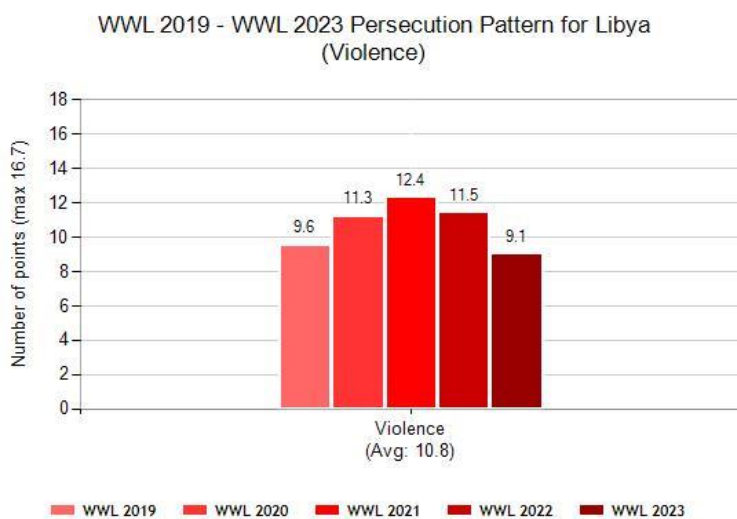
In the table above it can be seen that, over the last five WWL reporting periods, the average pressure on Christians has remained stable at an extreme level (between 15.5 and 15.9 points). Ongoing lawlessness and the presence of radical Islamic groups in a conservative and tribal country have created a situation in which it is very difficult, if not virtually impossible, to live as a Christian.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The levels of pressure in all spheres of life have been extremely high over the last five reporting periods due to the ongoing lawlessness in most parts of the country. The situation of Libyan converts from Islam to Christianity remains extremely oppressive and dangerous, while Christian Sub-Saharan migrants, Egyptian Copts and other expatriate Christians continue to be extremely vulnerable, too.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The scores for violence in the period WWL 2020 - WWL 2022 were at an extremely high level. The scores in WWL 2019 and WWL 2023 were very high. Due to the insecurity in the country, reporting is restricted and it is very probable that a lot of incidents go unreported. This has kept the score for violence lower than it probably is in reality.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

Female and male Christians often face the same means of persecution pressure, but their form or severity can have a gendered component. As Libyan women tend to live secluded from other people and under strict familial control, the severity of domestic persecution experienced by converts can be greater than for men. 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, women 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, due to explicit restrictions 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, contributing to a lack of effective law enforcement. This vulnerability is further compounded by the lack of adequate legislation on sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Christian Sub-Saharan migrant women and men attempting to cross Libya to reach Europe continue to be a significant group of vulnerable Christians in Libya. Christian women are highly vulnerable to trafficking, abduction and sexual enslavement, especially when they are separated from their male companions - such as in migrant detention centers. One expert comments: “The position of women is low, migrant women is even lower mainly because they are seen as house-keepers, or sometimes even as prostitutes.”

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In general, men face higher risks of physical violence in Libya, against a backdrop of considerable volatility ([UN News, 28 March 2022](#)). If the Christian faith of a convert is discovered, men face loss of employment, physical and mental abuse and eviction from their family home. 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 depend on 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. As a country expert explains, “both local converts and migrant men risk conscription, either the militia of their own tribe/family/town (in the case of converts) or in any of the militias (in the case of migrants).” Refusal to fight can be met with death.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022):

- The influence of radical Madkhali Salafist elements continued to spread in both the eastern and western part of the country. 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 militant Sunni groups, as well as general discrimination from society.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2017):

- Two historic Sufi mosques in Tripoli were attacked and severely damaged by unknown assailants in October and 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 the October 2020 ceasefire continues to hold, presidential and parliamentary elections have been postponed indefinitely, and a rival prime-minister has been installed in the east. Radical Islamic and other groups are not likely to hand over control to a new central government. Their influence and (arbitrary) implementation of Sharia law thus remains 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. Secondly, the treatment of Sub-Saharan migrant Christians is not likely to improve, as they are regarded as both religiously and racially different.

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. Thus, *Clan oppression* will remain an important engine for the overall pressure on Christians.

Organized corruption and crime

As long as there is no 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 favored targets.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: ICG 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: Amnesty International, 15 July 2021 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/MDE1944392021ENGLISH.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: UN News, 28 March 2022 - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114842>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Libya>