

World
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Malaysia: Country Dossier

December 2020



OpenDoors

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

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

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

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

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

External Links - Introduction

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

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Malaysia

Brief country details

Malaysia: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
32,869,000	2,991,000	9.1

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

Malaysia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	63	46
WWL 2020	62	40
WWL 2019	60	42
WWL 2018	65	23
WWL 2017	60	31

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Malaysia: Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Ideological pressure groups, Government officials, Political parties
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Converts from Islam to Christianity experience most pressure and hostility as every ethnic Malay is expected to be Muslim. Whoever deviates from this is not just going against the Constitution, but also against society at large and of course against family and neighborhood. Roman Catholics, Methodists and NGOs are watched by the authorities, but non-traditional Protestant groups are more often targeted for interference as these tend to be more active in testifying about their faith. The recent political shake-ups in Malaysian politics in the WWL 2021 reporting period have emboldened strictly Islamic parties like the PAS, which is member of the federal government now. PAS members are frequently making statements against religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- [December 2019](#): There has been one case of vandalism against a Catholic church in Penang in December 2019 (Malay Mail, 6 December 2019).
- [August 2020](#): During a parliament debate on the Road Transport Transport (Amendment) Bill 2020 to propose heavier fines for drink driving offenders on 26 August 2020, PAS MP Nik Muhammad Zawawi publicly claimed that “*Kitab Injil ini dipesongkan atau pun diubah*” (The New Testament is distorted or changed) (Malay Mail, 1 October 2020). There was no investigation and no apology for this remark.
- [COVID-19](#): There were reports that food supplies were not distributed equally . It was claimed that the distribution of emergency food aid to households "was limited to selected parliamentary constituencies" (Malay Mail, 28 April 2020), indicating that ethnic/religious minorities (including Christians) were being excluded.

External Links - Short country profile

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: December 2019: - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/12/06/deputy-minister-urges-calm-after-vandalism-attack-at-st-annes-church/1816573>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: August 2020: - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/10/01/speaker-told-pas-mp-to-substantiate-distorted-bible-claim-says-dap-lawmaker/1908482>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: COVID-19: - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/04/28/pakatan-mps-urge-accountability-in-covid-19-food-basket-aid-amid-claims-of/1860827>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Malaysia

Link for general background information

[Malaysia country profile - BBC News](#)

Recent history

2020 has been a turbulent year for politics in Malaysia, maybe the most volatile ever, and this proved true up to the end of finalizing this dossier at the end of November 2020. Last year, the author of this document wrote:

"In a truly ground-breaking election on 9 May 2018, the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which had been in charge of the country since independence in 1957, was defeated by the voters who overwhelmingly chose opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH). This happened despite gerrymandering and decisions made by the election authorities benefitting UMNO. During the election campaigning, issues concerning race, ethnicity and religion were used by UMNO to stir up fears among voters that the ethnic minorities (despite being Malaysian citizens) have a hidden agenda and are seeking to Christianize the country. Even slurs made by UMNO against outspoken Christian politicians did not succeed in preventing UMNO from getting voted out. The new government struggles to deliver on its promises and is facing a unified Malay-Muslim opposition, as UMNO and PAS decided to formally join forces. It remains to be seen if this pact holds firm in the long term; it did, however, manage to win [several by-elections](#), dealing the PH government a serious blow (RSIS, 6 March 2019)."

These lines turned out to be even more prophetic than expected as the pact between UMNO and PAS not only held, but they decided to form a government. This happened after the Pakatan Harapan coalition broke apart over internal squabbles and the fact that Prime Minister Mahathir was reluctant to hand over responsibility to Anwar Ibrahim as promised. Be that as it may, in February 2020, PM Mahathir [resigned](#) (Asean Today, 29 February 2020) and a new government (Perikatan Nasional) has been sworn in (more under *Political and legal landscape* below). Christians were shocked by the developments just like all other voters, and are now bracing themselves for facing increasing difficulties, having had ample experience of UMNO rule in the past.

Political and legal landscape

UMNO hit an all-time low in their popularity polls in 2016, which may have served as an early warning sign but the administration wanted to remain in power, despite (former) Prime Minister Najib Razak being entangled in one of the largest cases of corruption worldwide. After the opposition won in May 2018, Razak was detained and [court proceedings started](#), unearthing even more corruption (Malay Mail, 3 April 2019). On 28 July 2020, he was convicted in a first court case and [found guilty](#) of all charges, a verdict which may have far reaching political consequences (Reuters, 28 July 2020). It has to be noted that this is just the first of many more potential cases against Razak, who has appealed the verdict in the first case. However, proceedings are slow and additionally hampered by the COVID-19 crisis.

The Pakatan Harapan coalition government (PH government elected in May 2018) announced its intention to review the Sedition Law and the National Security Act, which had been used against anyone criticizing the former government and Najib Razak in particular. Efforts to repeal the 'fake news law' were blocked by the second chamber of parliament where the PH government lacked a [majority](#) (New Straits Times, 9 April 2019). However, in a second attempt in October 2019, the government succeeded in [repealing](#) the highly contentious 'fake news law' (Benar News, 9 October 2019).

The hard-line Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) was successful in the 2018 elections and managed to regain government control over another federal state (Terengganu). It joined forces with defeated UMNO and focused on the Malay-Muslim fears of losing economic and social benefits. One challenge for them was that several UMNO members of parliament had defected

to the ruling PH and the prime minister's PPBM party "Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia" (also known as BERSATU). However, UMNO and PAS party forged an official [political alliance](#) in September 2019 and did well in several by-elections (Reuters, 14 September 2019).

A large-scale [demonstration](#) just two days ahead of the international human rights day in December 2018, involving around 55,000 protesters and organized by Malay-Muslim parties PAS and UMNO to protest against the country's planned accession to ICERD (the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination), was an illustration of the challenges the new PH government faced (Malay Mail, 8 December 2018). Calls for the [special protection of Malay privileges](#) are nothing new and are in fact in line with Malaysia's Constitution (Benar News, 3 December 2018). Consequently, one observer stated that the protests were [less about ICERD](#) and more about "shaping perceptions" among Malay Muslims that the PH government was "anti-Islamic" and "anti-Malay" (New Mandala, 8 December 2018). This topic remained central and seemed to be used as a rallying point for all economic and social fears at the expense of ethnic and religious minorities, like Christians.

When PM Mahathir resigned on 24 February 2020, UMNO and PAS seized the opportunity and convinced the [king](#) (The Guardian, 3 March 2020) that they command a majority in parliament. As a result, the new PM, Muhyiddin Yassin, was able to set up [a new cabinet](#) (Benar News, 9 March 2020). Three cabinet posts are now occupied by Islamist PAS members. Effectively, the PPBM party split and several MPs changed sides to support the new Perikatan Nasional (PN) government. Citing infection fears due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Parliament sessions were [delayed until 18 May 2020](#), which gave the new government plenty of time to woo MPs and find the necessary majority in parliament (Reuters, 4 March 2020). Even then, the new PM decided to [delay convening parliament](#) due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Accordingly, parliament met on 18 May 2020 for a short session to listen to the king's speech, before being dismissed again (Benar News, 14 May 2020). On 13 July 2020, the PN government replaced the [Parliament's speaker](#) and deputy speakers, a move approved with a majority of one vote and unchallengeable in court (Malay Mail, 25 July 2020). It remains to be seen if and when the new government calls for snap elections, especially now that the opposition is in disarray. Several state governments had unraveled as well.

Radical Islamic voices are still around; Malaysian society is definitely Islamizing and the new government has a strong history of supporting a Malay-Muslim agenda. As one observer astutely [noted](#): "This is a Malay government, not a Malaysian one" (Benar News, 9 March 2020). Time will tell what limitations this will bring for Christians. One other sign of Islamizing is that the ruling PAS in Kelantan State announced it would seek to make the traditional folk ceremony and dance, *Main Puteri*, [sharia-compliant](#) (The Diplomat, 19 August 2020). This came briefly before a PAS member of parliament publicly called the Bible "a [distorted book](#)" in August 2020 and refused to retreat this statement or apologize (Malay Mail, 3 September 2020).

Although the government's motto is "One Malaysia", most observers agree that there is no "one Malaysia" in reality. The age-old practice of discriminating against non-Malay ethnic minorities has continued unabated by giving priority to the "*Bumiputra*" - i.e. the Malay population or literally: "People of the soil". With policies continuing to favor Bumiputra, all non-Malay citizens face explicit disadvantages in employment and other areas. This is particularly the case in:

- i) public offices (i.e. state ministries and administration right down to the local level),
- ii) state bureaucracy,
- iii) state-owned enterprises (such as large oil companies), and
- iv) the armed forces.

It should be noted that Malaysia is a unique parliamentary monarchy: The monarchy is not based on one royal person but is an office which rotates every five years among nine regional sultans. These Islamic rulers hold a powerful position. In principle they are to abide by electoral bodies' decisions, but in fact they can influence all decision-making, since in questions concerning Islam they also have veto power. So far, they have chosen a moderate position in most cases and have opposed demands for more Islamization. In an illustration of the king's (limited) power, he denied the government their wish to call a [national emergency](#), which would have made it easier for the Prime Minister to suspend parliament (Benar News, 25 October 2020).

Finally, in a long awaited ruling, the Federal Court decided that the conversion of children under 18 years of age needs the [consent of both parents](#) (Associated Press, 29 January 2018). The previous government, however, decided to set up a [special department](#) called the "Syariah and Harmonisation of Law division" to address issues pertaining to Islam and Sharia (syariah) law that arise at federal and international levels (Straits Times, 3 February 2018). How the new PN government will deal with this highly political issue may give a first indication of the direction it will be going as concerns minorities. For the time being, it has postponed any decision on this highly contentious issue and the COVID-19 crisis has caused delays in the whole justice system.

Religious landscape

Malaysia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	2,991,000	9.1
Muslim	18,490,000	56.3
Hindu	2,070,000	6.3
Buddhist	1,760,000	5.4
Ethno-religionist	1,100,000	3.3
Jewish	100	0.0
Bahai	75,000	0.2
Atheist	38,000	0.1
Agnostic	126,000	0.4

Other - includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian	6,219,500	18.9
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Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

The [Malaysian Constitution](#) defines “Malay” as a follower of Islam. Every citizen of Malay ethnicity is, therefore, understood to be a Muslim.

One point of contention for religious minorities is the question of claiming custody in divorce cases in religiously mixed marriages. In order to claim custody successfully, the partner most likely to lose custody (almost always the husband) can quickly convert to Islam and file an application with the Sharia courts, which then grant custody to the Muslim spouse. In theory the civil courts are above Sharia courts, but in practice divorce cases are frequently not decided by the civil courts but by Sharia courts (if one parent converts to Islam) since the police prefer the easier implementation of a Sharia decision. The previous government promised to find a solution to this problem but failed to deliver. Court cases on the question of custody are continuing. As the [US State Department's IRF report](#) for 2019 states on page 1: "The relationship between sharia and civil law remains unresolved in the legal system."

The Islamization of society is increasing, although that does not necessarily mean that this is being directly transferred into the political arena as well. The elections in 2018 showed that voters were more interested in economic improvement and were disgusted with the levels of corruption within UMNO circles. However, the developments in 2020 showed that the fear of Malay Muslims to lose privileges continues to be an excellent platform to rally people and run politics on. In everyday life, however, there are more restrictions being introduced which affect non-Muslims too. At the same time, there are frequent warnings from Muslim-Malay organizations and politicians against a supposed agenda of [Christianization](#) (UCA News, 19 September 2019).

While there is a federal department tasked with promoting religious harmony and protecting the rights of religious minorities, a comparison of the different budgets is telling. As the US State Department states in its IRF report for 2019: "The Department of National Unity and Integration's annual budget was approximately 275 million ringgit (\$67.3 million), while 1.3 billion ringgit (\$317.9 million) was marked for the development of Islam under JAKIM alone."

Economic landscape

According to [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300 onwards):

- **Gross National Income:** 27,227 USD (2011 PPP USD)
- **Poverty:** No data are available. This led to heated discussion in the WWL 2021 reporting period (see *Social and cultural landscape*)
- **Remittances:** 0.47% of the total GDP

According to [World Bank's latest analysis](#) (accessed July 2020):

- Malaysia is classified as an upper middle-income economy and was on its way to transform to become a high income economy in 2024 before COVID-19
- **GDP per capita (PPP, constant 2017 international USD):** 28,350

- **GDP growth rate:** 3.0%. As the World Bank stated in a [report](#) in June 2020, Malaysia's GDP is projected to fall by 3.1% in 2020 (from 4.3% in 2019), mainly reflecting a sharp slowdown in economic activity during the first half of 2020.
- **Poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP):** 0.5% (2015)

The seemingly never-ending corruption scandal surrounding the 1MDB development fund (initiated by news portal Sarawak Report and a July 2015 article in the Washington Post) took on a very personal dimension. It is not just that around 700 million USD had been [transferred](#) to the prime minister's private account on behalf of the 1MDB state fund accused of corruption (Reuters, 3 July 2015), former PM Razak also managed to effectively end all domestic investigations. Nevertheless, international investigations in Switzerland and other countries were able to continue. The PH government decided to take up the case again and within a few weeks brought a case together against Najib Razak and his wife. Valuables worth approximately [273 million USD](#) were found at various properties belonging to Razak, when they were searched for evidence in June 2018 (OCCRP, 28 June 2018). Najib Razak was found guilty of all seven charges in a comparably small section of the whole conglomerate, the so called SRC trial, on 28 July 2020. This court case was widely seen as a (high level) litmus test of how seriously Malaysia is fighting corruption. The political fallout remains to be seen, as Razak is still a linchpin figure in the again ruling UMNO; the PN coalition may lose its thin majority, if Razak does indeed go to prison (to join many other members and leaders of UMNO already behind bars).

In terms of the economy, Malaysia is a fast growing and modernizing state. It is one of the economically and politically most stable countries in Southeast Asia, although the COVID-19 crisis stopped much of the progress and brought major challenges. Even before the arrival of COVID-19, the cost of living for many people, including the middle class, had become very high, so the PH government abolished the Goods and Service Tax, tearing a hole in the country's budget. Large infrastructure projects have been put on hold or even cancelled, making relations with neighboring Singapore and big lender China more difficult.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought the aim of the country achieving "high-income status", as classified by the World Bank, to a temporary halt and the economy is expected to decline. At the same time, it should be noted that Malaysia produces and exports some of the most important products for dealing with COVID-19. According to a June 2020 World Bank update, called [Malaysia Economic Monitor \(June 2020\)](#), Malaysia meets about 57% of the global demand for sterile medical gloves and about 53% of the demand for non-sterile gloves for examination. Although this only makes up 1.3% of the total pre-crisis exports (and therefore will not be enough to counter the downturn), it is an important reminder that Malaysia's products are sought after.

Malaysia has vast resources which include rubber and oil. Significant oil and gas reserves have been found in the waters around East Malaysia, especially Sarawak, and it remains to be seen how the revenue will be shared out fairly. The new PN government may also use this as a political pawn. Sarawak is the only state with a Christian majority population. Another commodity Sarawak and Sabah States are exporting is timber, a business riddled with corruption, environmental devastation and harm to indigenous people. After Indonesia, Malaysia is the world's second largest exporter of palm oil and has been strongly challenged by European efforts

to reduce and potentially ban the commodity's use because of [environmental](#) issues (ASEAN Today, 6 May 2020).

Malaysia has a '[political economy](#)', as one observer termed it after the new PN government took over (New Mandala, 6 March 2020). Such an economy promotes the Malay majority and, in the face of economic crisis, this promotion will become even more pronounced. This is bad news for Malaysia's ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, as it means that all the reform efforts to include minorities made by the former PH government will now be brushed aside.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and the [World Factbook](#) (updated March 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Bumiputera 62% (Malays and indigenous peoples, including Orang Asli, Dayak, Anak Negeri), Chinese 20.6%, Indian 6.2%, other 0.9%, non-citizens 10.3% (2017 est.).
- **Main languages:** Bahasa Malaysia (official), English, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow), Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Panjabi, Thai.
- **Urbanization rate:** 77.2%
- **Literacy rate:** 93.7% (of all adults age 15 and higher)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 10.2 years
- **Health and education indicators:** Malaysia has 15.1 physicians and 19 hospital beds per 10,000 people, the pupil teacher ratio in elementary school is 12:1.

According to [World Bank's latest analysis](#) (accessed July 2020):

- **Age:** 23.7% of the population are 14 years old or younger, 6.9% are 65 or above.
- **Education:** 96.4% of primary students complete their education.
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 3.3%; the rate of vulnerable employment is 21.8%.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** According to the UN's [IOM](#), Malaysia is a target country for working migrants, drawing 2.2 million registered and an estimated two to four million unregistered migrants to the country, mainly from South and Southeast Asia, but also from the Middle East and Africa. Additionally, there are 163,000 refugees registered with the UNHCR.

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

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.804, Malaysia ranks 61st of 189 countries, in the range of "Very high human development". The country's progress has been impressive, but has slowed down in recent years.
- **Life expectancy:** The life expectancy is 76.0 years, the median age is 30.3 years.
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.274, Malaysia ranks 58th of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index.
- **Employment:** The unemployment rate is 3.4%, the vulnerable employment rate is 21.8%, youth (between 15 and 24) not in employment or school are 11.7%.

There is a growing middle-class and poverty has been reduced, standing now at one of the lowest levels of all Southeast Asian countries; the UNDP gives a figure of 1.1%. However, there was a [dispute](#) in August 2019 with the UN Special Rapporteur over poverty in the nation, who claimed that the poverty level was closer to 16-20% rather than 0.4% as claimed by the government (Benar News, 23 August 2019). Almost a year after that, the (outgoing) Special Rapporteur [re-emphasized](#) his criticism by stating that according to revised government figures, a family of four would still need to survive on 8 USD a day, which is virtually impossible, especially in the cities (Benar News, 6 July 2020). This serves as a reminder how much such numbers depend upon definitions and can be easily politicized. In reaction, the PN government [adapted](#) its criteria (and thus raised the poverty rate from 0.4% to 5.6%) shortly afterwards (Malay Mail, 11 July 2020). It should also be noted that poverty is more concentrated in the indigenous regions of East Malaysia than on the Peninsula. It is therefore not surprising that Malaysia has the [third-highest GINI coefficient](#) (measuring the inequality of income) after the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, according to the World Bank (Gini Index, accessed 24 August 2020).

Slightly more than half of the population is ethnically Malay, roughly one quarter is of Chinese origin, 11% are indigenous and around 7% have an Indian background. In 1969, the country lived through serious ethnic clashes against the Chinese minority, which are still vividly remembered. Most ethnic Malays are Muslim and together with the indigenous people (who often lack education and live in East Malaysia) they enjoy a strong "affirmative action policy" by the government which gives ethnic Malay advantages in decisions concerning quotas, grants, loans and tax benefits. Indigenous people are also found in Peninsula Malaysia and they are known as Orang Asli.

In the course of the COVID-19 crisis, there have been reports that [emergency aid](#) has also been politicized, meaning that help in some parts of the country may have been distributed according to political affiliation (often connected with ethnic and religious criteria), but there is no indication that this has been done systematically (Malay Mail, 28 April 2020). At the same time, it should be remembered that Malaysia has a [history](#) of rolling out state aid according to ethnicity and political affiliation and it is no surprise if this repeats itself in the current pandemic (New Mandala, 14 August 2020).

Although the state is secular per definition, Islam has a strong influence on everyday life. Malaysia's legal system and its political institutions are strongly influenced by Islam and this influence is growing, much to the disadvantage of the large non-Muslim minority. The nobility is Muslim and is called to be protectors of Islam. Nevertheless, it has had a moderating influence against radical voices and has defended the country's multi-ethnicity and religiosity.

All children in state-run nursery and primary schools are required to attend Islamic education. In state schools, only Muslim pupils (including Christians with a Muslim background) are required to attend Islamic classes. But even for "neutral" subjects this is true. For example, the History lessons in Year 11 (Secondary school form 4) are mainly about Islamic history, which takes up 80% of the syllabus. At the university level, there is a compulsory subject for all students called "Islamic and Asian Civilization" which is felt by many to be a government instrument for furthering Islamization.

Technological landscape

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

- **Internet usage:** 81.4% penetration - survey date: June 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 68.0% penetration – survey date: December 2018

According to [World Bank's country profile](#) (2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions (per 100 people - 2018):** 134.5

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2020](#):

- "The overall state of internet freedom remained steady in Malaysia over the coverage period, although the accession to power of a new ruling coalition in March 2020 threatens recent gains. In December 2019 the Alliance of Hope (PH) government, a reformist coalition elected in 2018, abolished the Anti-Fake News Act. However, criminal prosecutions and investigations for social media posts and other forms of online expression continued to pose threats to internet freedom; in 2020, such cases frequently related to sharing unverified news about the novel coronavirus".
- "In February 2020, the PH government was ousted and replaced by a new ruling coalition, the National Alliance (PN), which included parties from the Barisan Nasional (BN) regime that had ruled Malaysia from independence in 1957 until 2018. These political veterans had maintained power by appealing to ethnic nationalism and suppressing criticism through restrictive speech laws and politicized prosecutions of opposition leaders and activists. The rise of the PN produced uncertainty about whether prior patterns of repression will come into play once again."
- Malaysia is rated as "partly free" and saw a slight improvement compared to the preceding reporting period. According to government statistics, quoted by Freedom House in its 2019 report, the Internet Penetration Rate in 2017 stood at almost 90% - with the rate in Sabah and Sarawak standing at only 43.3% and 51.8% respectively. In general, 70% of all Internet users in Malaysia are living in urban areas.

Apart from the wide gap between East and West Malaysia, which is also an issue in many other aspects of economic and social life, the urban-rural gap has to be kept in mind, too. Especially in the east, there are remote areas with vast stretches of land and little infrastructure, but even in West Malaysia remote areas can be found. As many Christians are living in East Malaysia, particularly in the state of Sarawak, their access to the Internet can be more limited or it may simply be not available at all.

Security situation

The grenade attack on a café in the State of Selangor in June 2016 has been the only successful attack by violent Islamic militants in the country so far. It showed the very real danger of the Islamic State group (IS) making inroads into Malaysia. Already in 2016 the country announced that it would take up joint patrols with Indonesia and the Philippines to counter the threat of Islamic militancy in the tri-border island region. The capture of the city of Marawi/Philippines by radical Islamic militants in May 2017, and the fact that Islamic militants were able to hold it for

five months, shows the very real danger as well as the urgent need for cooperation in this region. As the whole region consists of islands and law enforcement often lacks local knowledge, it is hard to monitor the triangle between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines and reportedly, IS stepped up [recruiting](#) there (Benar News, 23 September 2020). Weak monitoring from any one country has the potential to endanger all three countries. What may be complicating the situation is that the Philippines and Malaysia have taken their [dispute over Sabah](#) in East Malaysia (on the island of Borneo) to the United Nations now, even though the row may have been initiated for domestic political reasons in the first place (Benar News, 3 September 2020).

The IS threat is simmering in the background and Malaysian authorities fear that IS may [shift operations](#) towards Southeast Asia and find a new safe haven there (Jakarta Post, 27 November 2019). Those fears show how important good cooperation is between the three affected countries, especially as all of them host [local militant groups](#) which could or already have aligned themselves with IS (RSIS, 20 January, 2020). By far the most concrete threat at the moment comes from the Abu Sayyaf group, which has its main base in the Philippines, but continues to [kidnap](#) ship crews in the waters between the three countries (IPAC, 27. March 2020). Although Christians do not have a history of being targeted, this could happen, given the ideology IS is so strongly promoting.

Trends analysis

1) Political turmoil brings new insecurity for Christians and other religious minorities

According to a survey, 84.3% of Malaysians feel that the relationship between the government and people is similar to that between a parent and a child. It is therefore by no means certain that Malay citizens want(ed) to vote for a growing openness instead of paternalism. This desire to be protected and safe was well reflected in the election of former long-term Prime Minister Mohamed Mahathir (also known as Dr M), who became the oldest elected head of government worldwide, at the age of 93. This desire was also reflected in the series of by-elections the ruling PH government lost and finally in the taking over of power by the new PN government in March 2020, which would not have been possible if the Malay-Muslim middle-class did not have a [profound fear](#) of losing its advantageous position (The Diplomat, 4 March 2020). It is an open secret that this fear has been stirred up by several groups in [social media](#) and beyond (New Mandala, 8 June 2020).

What was stated in the WWL 2020 country dossier became reality faster than anyone had expected: "If, however, the government fails to deliver on their promises and fails to bring voters relief from the rising costs of living, it is quite possible that the opposition (UMNO and Islamist PAS) will win back power, despite all previous corruption scandals." Of course, political infighting between and within parties of the PH coalition played a huge part as well. The fact that opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim could claim he [commands the majority](#) in parliament, without being challenged to prove it, illustrates just how volatile the momentary political situation is (Benar News, 23 September 2020).

While 2018 will always be remembered as the year when the electorate discovered its power in Malaysia and voted against corruption and for a fresh start, the jury is still out on how 2020 will be remembered. The possibility of snap elections put aside, it is very probable that Malaysia will

go back to its old ruling patterns, not only in terms of kleptocracy and horse-trading (where government leaders use their authority to embezzle public funds for self-gain), but also in terms of ignoring and neglecting the plight of ethnic and religious minorities. While measures introduced to combat the COVID-19 pandemic came in handy for the government (which handled the health side of the crisis much better than many of Malaysia's neighbors), it remains to be seen if the PN government can meet the population's expectation of continued economic prosperity for the majority, and at whose cost this will be. There are already voices indicating that ethnic and religious minorities in the country are [fearing for their future](#) (UCA News, 12 March 2020).

2) Sentencing a former prime minister

The sentencing of former Prime Minister Najib Razak in July 2020 to [twelve years in prison](#) on seven counts, among them corruption, may have the potential to be a game-changer (Malay Mail, 28 July 2020). As the son of Malaysia's second prime minister, Razak is a member of the political nobility in the country, which has been largely untouchable. Just a week earlier, on 22 July 2020, another court found that he had to pay [400 million USD](#) in outstanding taxes, showing that the time of being untouchable may have passed (SCMP, 22 July 2020). On the other hand, it is an open question if the appeal court will uphold the sentence and if there will be political interference. For the time being, Najib Razak remains a free man, cheered on by his supporters, who call him "Bossku" ("my boss"). This case has the potential to serve as a wake-up call to Malaysians to do things differently. But it has also the potential to bring back the old ways of UMNO rule, should Razak be able to evade justice. The fact that [UMNO has not expressed 100% support for the new PN government](#) shows at best that party politics is playing a major role in the new government (The Diplomat, 27 October 2020). It should be kept in mind that the government's majority is very thin, maybe even down to one, so that it depends on the vote of MP (and former PM) Najib Razak.

From the perspective of the ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, this is a critical time. The window of opportunity for real changes for the benefit of all may still be open, but it is closing fast and the first chance has already been squandered. It should also not be forgotten that Islamic conservative PAS rules in several states and has never really been weakened: In December 2019, four Muslims received a [one month prison sentence](#) for missing Friday prayers in Terengganu State (Jakarta Post, 4 December 2019). Christians and other minorities thus seem set to face a worrying future.

External Links - Keys to understanding

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WWL 2021: Church information / Malaysia

Christian origins

Nestorians and Persian traders introduced Christianity to the Malacca islands in the 7th century but Christianity only began to spread with the arrival of Portuguese Catholic missionaries in 1511. The British took over Malacca in 1795 and the London Missionary Society was based there from 1815 onwards. Churches were established mainly to serve British expatriates. By silent agreement between the British authorities and the ruling sultan, missionary work among Muslims was not allowed. Hence, mission work concentrated on animistic tribes. Due to a change in policy by the government, most missionaries had to leave the country by the late 1970s, but the Church continued to grow in numbers - especially in East Malaysia.

Church spectrum today

Malaysia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	4,500	0.2
Catholic	1,500,000	50.2
Protestant	1,180,000	39.5
Independent	236,000	7.9
Unaffiliated	90,000	3.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-20,000	-0.7
Total	2,990,500	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	630,000	21.1
Renewalist movement	640,000	21.4

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

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

To better understand Christianity in Malaysia, an additional explanation is required at this point. For Malaysia, it can be helpful to make distinctions according to geographical distribution and origin. The majority of Christians come from a Bumiputra background, which literally translated reads "sons of the soil", meaning that they belong to the country and come from the indigenous tribal population. From the government's perspective, they qualify for "affirmative action" benefits such as subsidized housing, scholarships etc., but in practice this only applies as long as the Bumiputra are not Christians. If they become Christians, their privileges are quickly withdrawn. Non-Bumiputra Christians come mainly from the Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities and are divided up into a plethora of different Christian denominations, ranging in size from small house-churches to mega-churches.

The geographical distribution is important as well. Most Bumiputra Christians reside in the states of Sabah and Sarawak; the latter still has a relative Christian majority. These states make up East Malaysia and are situated on the island of Borneo (which is shared with Brunei and Indonesia). To complicate the situation, many Bumiputra are migrating to West Malaysia for educational or economic reasons where it is especially hard for them to stay true to their Christian faith.

Converts from a Muslim-Malay background complete the picture of the Malaysian Church. These Christians face a high level of persecution as they not only leave their faith, but this decision is seen as acting against their very ethnicity and nation as well.

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Malaysia

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Malaysia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	63	46
WWL 2020	62	40
WWL 2019	60	42
WWL 2018	65	23

WWL 2017	60	31
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Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The score in WWL 2021 increased by only 0.8 points. It needs to be kept in mind was stated in this section a year ago:

"To understand the increase in score of 2 points in WWL 2020 it is necessary to look back at WWL 2019's drop of 5 points compared to WWL 2018, which reflected the surprising result of the political elections in 2018. Scores dropped most significantly at that time in the pressure experienced in the National and Church spheres of life, but also for violence. Especially minorities, like Christians, Hindus and Buddhists put hope into the new government, however, the government had to backpaddle on many of its initiatives and retained the affirmative action policy towards Muslim Malay. These partly disappointed hopes are reflected in the increase of two points in the WWL 2020. Christians and other minorities are especially disappointed and still feel insecure ever since three Christian workers (and a Muslim social activist) went missing without any trace in November 2016 and February 2017, despite all government investigations. Additionally, laws are changed more quickly than mindsets, so any real change for Christians in society will only be seen slowly, if at all. The already existing rift between East and West Malaysia has been deepened, especially in the case of Sarawak State, which still has a Christian majority."

The hopes connected to the PH government have been dashed for the time being and while the scores of the *spheres of life* by and large remained the same, the violence score increased by almost one point.

Persecution engines

Malaysia: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
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	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

Islamic oppression (Strong)

For a long time, Malaysia carried the image of probably being the world's best role model for a liberal and tolerant Islamic country. However, this image has been fading over the last years. One example of this can be seen in the government's continued attempt to introduce Sharia penal law (*hudud*) in the State of Kelantan. The conservative Muslim PAS party in power in Kelantan immediately called for Sharia penal law after the elections in May 2018 and also took over power in Terengganu. After the change of federal government, PAS joined the ruling coalition and runs three ministries (but not the one for religious affairs).

According to the Constitution, Sharia law is not on an equal footing with civil law, but in practice this regulation is not so clear. This can especially be seen in cases of divorce and custody: Civil courts frequently decide in favor of the child's non-Muslim mother, which is why fathers sometimes decide to convert to Islam. The claim for custody can then be brought before Sharia courts, who will grant custody to the Muslim father. The police prefer to implement the latter's decisions as this causes less trouble for them.

The ban on using the standard vocabulary "Allah" for God in Bahasa Malay, implemented against a Catholic newspaper, which was sanctioned by the High Court in January 2015, is being followed by more court cases, e.g. in the state of Sabah. This case is still pending as the question is [highly sensitive](#) and political, the court has not decided at the time of writing this dossier (Ecumenical News, 16 June 2020).

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

Although *Dictatorial paranoia* is certainly only a subsidiary Persecution engine in Malaysia, it is relevant for understanding the country's situation. This was definitely true when the Barisan Nasional coalition governed the country prior to elections in 2018. This coalition was comprised of a Muslim party in alliance with smaller Chinese and Indian parties and for years had never had to face opposition parties. So the UMNO re-emphasized its policy of preferential treatment for Malay people (instead of following a policy of equality) and increasingly played religious and racial cards in an attempt to stay in power. Now that UMNO and PAS are back in the federal government, what was written last year came true faster than expected: "If his [*i.e. now former PM Mahathir's*] current policies do not give the results voters want to see quickly enough, Dictatorial paranoia may have a revival, especially after UMNO and PAS, both parties advocating for Malay Muslim dominance and preferential treatment, announced their cooperation." This persecution engine has become stronger again since both parties rule the country once more (albeit on a razor-thin majority) and have already announced the planned return to the old preferential treatment policies.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Non-Christian religious and ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Various Muslim NGOs see themselves as “champions of Islam” and have enjoyed government support. At times they stir up racial disharmony and religious discrimination with their statements and actions. They keep reminding citizens that being a Malay means being a Muslim and sometimes warn against alleged Christian mission and conversion efforts. At the same time, leaders of ethnic minority groups can compromise their rights for the sake of getting material benefits.
- **Extended family (Strong):** For converts, family members continue to be the strongest drivers of persecution, as leaving their original faith is seen as a disgrace, putting them outside the ethnic and religious community. Social pressure on the family to bring the convert back into the fold is also high. This can also mean handing the converts over to the authorities.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The Constitution prohibits Malays from converting to other religions and limits the propagation of non-Muslim religions. Government officials hence strive to maintain and increase Islamic standards, to the detriment of non-Muslim minorities. The new government announced to keep up the preferential treatment of the Malay and Bumiputera population.

- **Political parties (Medium):** Political parties like UMNO and PAS uphold and protect Islam. It was PAS, for example, who proposed the introduction of Hudud Law in Kelantan. UMNO and PAS are sowing discord and hatred towards Christians and are using religion to rally support from the Malays, and as PM Muhyiddin and his PPBM are in need of their votes, they will not speak out against this (and anyway share the Malay Muslim supremacist sentiment).
- **Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** Most pressure groups focus on preserving the ethnic dominance of the Malay people. But Islamic groups like ISMA are very active in calling for the protection of Islam as well. One example of this is that of a Chinese ethnic educational group which had opposed the mandatory teaching of the (Arabic) [Jawi script](#) and was immediately blamed for being 'Islamophobic' (Malay Mail, 28 December 2019).

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Islamist Party PAS holds a majority in two states in Malaysia and is back in the federal government after more than four decades. Additionally, civil servants in the administration do not change their thinking quickly. This is especially true for the administration of religious affairs.
- **Political parties (Medium):** What has been stated above for drivers of *Islamic oppression* is applicable here as well.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no hotspots of persecution for Christians in Malaysia. However, the Islamic missionary work among Christians ("dawah") - especially among the Bumiputra - focuses on East Malaysia. Helped by the number of migrating Muslims, the religious affiliation in Sabah State already ceased to be Christian-majority several years ago, and Sarawak is now only a Christian majority state on paper.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: There are many nationalities who have their own Christian fellowships and are self-supporting (e.g. Korean and Japanese churches). They struggle to obtain legal status at times, but are basically free to live their faith as long as they stay within their walls. Nepalese and Vietnamese Christians in most cases join the Historical Christian communities.

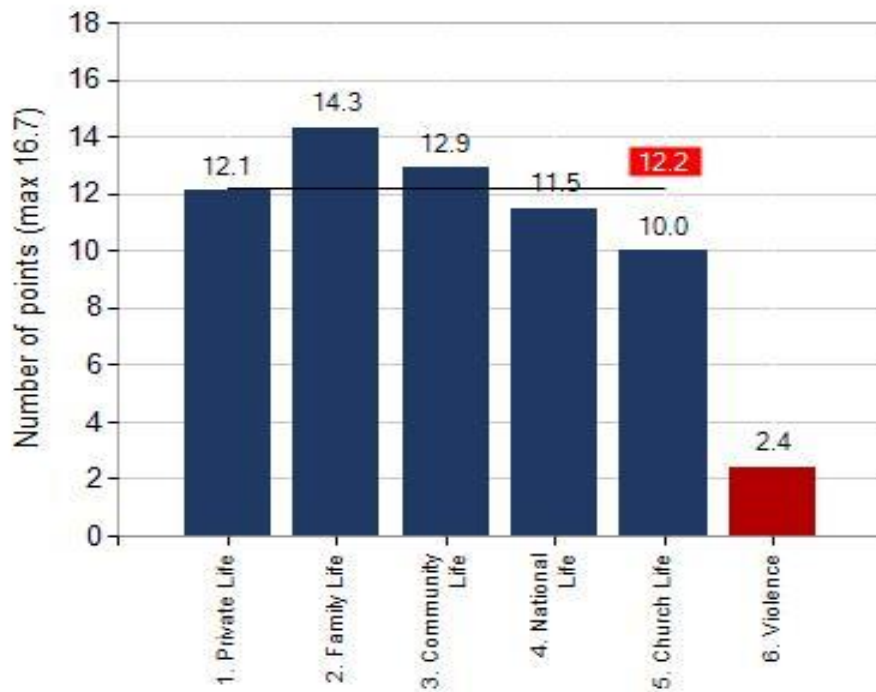
Historical Christian communities: Examples are the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist or Lutheran churches and the Protestant Church in Sabah. These are less affected by persecution than Non-traditional Christian communities or converts, but they do suffer from discrimination.

Converts to Christianity: By law, In Malaysia, apostasy is punishable by death. Malaysia is one out of only 11 countries in the world to have apostasy technically punishable by death, although this has not been implemented. Depending on where they are in the country, Christian converts from a Muslim background are able to meet. But all are facing opposition to varying degrees, namely from family, friends, neighbors and the authorities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Examples are Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army, Sabah Injil Borneo and others. They often face monitoring, discrimination, intimidation and harassment.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Malaysia



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Malaysia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Malaysia remained very high at 12.2 points in WWL 2021.
- Pressure is extremely high and strongest in the *Family sphere of life*, and is at a very high level in the *Community and Private spheres of life*. The pressure in the *Family, Community and Private spheres* points to problems faced by converts from Islam and other religions, driven as well by the country's Islamization policy. Pressure resulting from the persecution engine *Islamic oppression* is present in all spheres. Conservative Islamic groups and parties have increased in strength and influence in Malaysia.
- The score for violence against Christians was 2.4 points, higher than in WWL 2020 (1.5 points). Apart from the abduction of certain Christians in recent years, persecution has rarely been violent in Malaysia. Pastor Joshua Hilmy and his wife Ruth have been [missing](#) for more than two years now, after they disappeared from their home in the state of Selangor; the investigation is ongoing (Benar News, 14 April 2017). Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted while driving on a busy road in Petaling Jaya and is missing since February 2017. His whereabouts are still unknown and according to the findings of the country's human rights commission, the Special Branch of the police was involved in the abduction.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)

By law, Malay Muslims are not allowed to convert from Islam in any state except Sarawak, but even here, the process is long and tedious. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) wants the penalty for apostasy to be death, but so far those efforts were stalled. There was a court case on apostasy in Sarawak in February 2018, but the court ruled that apostasy cases can only be heard Sharia courts, not civil courts. This ruling has left Christians and converts disappointed.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)

In the reporting period, there have been several cases of investigations into how far social media posts have insulted Islam. This prompted the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) to keep [monitoring](#) potential insults against Islam closely (Malay Mail, 22 June 2020). Conversion can be easily seen as insulting or going against Islam. But there are other repercussions if a convert reveals his/her faith in a blog or on Facebook as well: The family is usually the first to act by cutting all family ties. Sometimes religious officials take the convert away for relocation and re-education (see 1.5 below).

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

Since Muslims who convert to Christianity are considered apostates, it is very risky for them to reveal their faith in whatever form, as they will be punished or can be sent to an Islamic 'purification center' where they are pressured into returning to Islam. Some converts are known to disappear from one day to the next with no-one knowing their whereabouts. There is even a guideline from the Fatwa Department, according to which Christmas trees and other decorations that have come to symbolize Christmas celebrations around the world should not be used if a Muslim plans to attend a Christmas event. It also forbids Muslims from attending Christmas functions that have religious songs or the use of the cross, or "speech or gestures in the form of a praise to the non-Muslim religion". However, it is not clear which consequences it would have to ignore this.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

As no Malay is allowed to convert from Islam, each discussion about faith is fraught with the risk of being perceived as proselytizing. It is also possible that Christians - or even atheists - are accused of "insulting Islam" because of such a topic. For converts, discussions about faith come naturally at a much higher risk, as they can lead to one's conversion being discovered.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.75 points)

Under the law, if children born to couples where one parent is a Muslim (either by birth or conversion), their children are automatically registered as Muslims. As converts cannot change their religion to Christianity, their children will be registered as Muslims.

The problem surrounding registering children is an ongoing problem for Bumiputras (Malays and indigenous people). As for the law, on unilateral conversion of children, the Federal Court has now ruled that it is unlawful, and therefore both parents' consent are needed for the conversion of children. The official practice is the religion of the child is registered in the Birth Certificate, MyKID (identity card below 12 years old), and MyKAD (identity card 12 years old and above). However, there had been malpractice where the registry puts the child's religion as Islam especially for Orang Asli (indigenous population). Natives in Sabah and Sarawak have the affixes 'bin' (son of) or 'binti' (daughter of) in their names even though they are not Muslims, which leads officers to believe they are Muslims and put Islam as their religion in the MyKads (Identity Card). This has been one of the problems the Bumiputra Christians have been facing but some of them do not bother to 'fight' over it as the process is long and arduous and very few successful results. And with a growing number of them being converted to Islam, either willfully or through deceits, the parents' children will automatically follow the 'new' religious identity, which is Islam. As the 'religion' is not shown in the physical identity card but in the digital information accessed only via card reader, it is easy for the government to have put many children of indigenous people groups and native/tribal groups under Islam without the parents knowing it or checking it.

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.75 points)

As the registration department also issues death certificates, burials are a problem for converts and - according to what has been said under 2.1 - also for many Christians from the indigenous people. If records show that the person who died is registered as Muslim, the authorities will inform the Islamic religious authority. If the burial rites are not celebrated according to Islam, this Islamic authority has the right to take the body away from the non-Muslim family so that they can perform Islamic rites for the deceased.

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

It is very common for state high schools to teach compulsory subjects such as 'Tamadun Islam' or Islam Civilization, 'Sejarah Islam' or History of Islam, 'Sastera Melayu' or Malay Literature. For example, the History lessons in Year 11 (Secondary school form 4) are mainly about Islamic history and take up 80% of the syllabus. Non-Muslims children must take these subjects as they are compulsory. It is also common for children of the indigenous tribes in Malaysia (Orang Asli) to be pressured into attending religious/Arabic classes. Plans to make Malay-Arabic calligraphy courses called "khat" - and thus the writing of Koran verses - mandatory in all schools created unrest in minority communities. After an outcry, it was made optional. Still, the fact that education has become ["a source of Islamic indoctrination"](#) is showing how high the pressure is (Asean Today, 7 September 2020).

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

Children of converts have to attend Islamic education in schools and there are reports that Christian children are put under pressure to convert to Islam. Sometimes, parents who have converted to Christianity have to take their children out of school as they may unintentionally talk about their parents' faith. Children of Christians are frequently harassed and discriminated against because of their parents' faith. Derogatory comments by peers are common and even teachers have shamed Christian students for what is often a mix of religious and ethnic reasons.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (4.00 points)

One part of Malaysia's "affirmative action policy" is that ethnic Malays get a 10% price reduction when they buy property while others need to pay the full price. This can be regarded as an indirect *jizya* tax, as far as Chinese and Indian Christians are considered, as they do not qualify for such benefits. Muslims are also exempt from certain taxes because they pay the *zakat* and a reduced income tax, while others pay the full income tax.

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

This pressure is acute for the indigenous people in East Malaysia, but as well for the Orang Asli in West Malaysia. The state-driven and financed Muslim mission (dawah) often uses the economic and social weaknesses of Christian and animist natives and entice them to convert to Islam with financial benefits. Such and even stronger pressure is exerted against Christian converts from a Muslim background, as they face stints in re-education camps.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.75 points)

For non-Malay students, access to several universities is limited. Public universities are still adopting the quota system whereby Bumiputra students (Malays and indigenous people) have a higher quota while non-Bumiputra students have less access to the public university. This applies to public universities' intake and government scholarships. In a news article in February 2018, only one student from UiTM (a government university reserved for Bumiputras) openly supported the idea of opening the universities to non-Bumiputras during a forum. He expressed the opinion that non-Bumiputras also had a right to education, but was met with angry and racist remarks from his classmates. The head of the class even said: "Do you think that if UiTM opens its doors for the non-Bumiputras, you would be here? If the Indians and Chinese get into UiTM, you guys will never be able to finish your studies". For qualifying for higher education and scholarships, Christians - as non-Malay in general - need to overcome far higher hurdles than Muslims due to the "affirmative action policy" in favor of Malays.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

There has always been discrimination against non-Malays and preference for Malays in public employment, but the PH government had raised hopes of possible change by calling some Christians into higher positions of state by merit, despite fierce opposition from the Islamic-Malay parties and organizations. Examples for this approach were the call of non-Malay and non-Muslims to serve as minister for justice, attorney-general and chief justice. This led to accusations that the Muslim cause is lost and Malaysia will now be "Christianized" and has been immediately rolled back with the PN government coming to power. As for private businesses (for example owned by Chinese Christians, but also in general to all non-Malay business owners), to get government contracts it is required by law that the owners must have Bumiputra partners. To get round this, some companies are known to have 'Bumiputra partners' on paper only.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

The Constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslims. That is why Malays do not have the religious liberty to leave Islam and embrace another religion. As already stated above, the Federal Court ruled that jurisdiction on the validity of a conversion lies with the Sharia courts, not the civil courts, leaving converts effectively without legal representation for the time-being. The Constitution also prohibits adherents of other religions from propagating their religion among Malay Muslims. Yet it allows Muslims to propagate Islam all over the country. Furthermore, Sharia law is in place in conjunction with civil law, and the proposed *hudud*-bill which plans to allow Islamic corporal punishment in the state of Kelantan is still pending in parliament at the time of writing, although it may be used more as a political threat than for actual implementation.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.75 points)

Officials refuse to recognize an individual's right to convert, especially for Muslims, be they Malay or non-Malay. Muslims desiring to renounce Islam have to go through a long and painful legal process, and are often charged with apostasy. It is virtually impossible for ethnic Malays to legally convert to Christian faith, since even the Constitution stands against it. A citizen's [religious status](#) is stated in the identification card (Malay Mail, 28 January 2020) and it is an uphill battle to have it removed should someone wish to leave Islam. As a result, many Bumiputra are wrongly categorized as Muslims on their ID cards. The authorities provide financial aid to those who want to convert to Islam.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Religion is part of every sphere of life in Malaysia. Discrimination against Christians (and all non-Malay and non-Muslims) takes place at all levels of society, including local administration and government. The authorities give special treatment to Malays and, for example, non-Malay owned companies are required to have at least one Malay as board member. There have been reports of COVID-19 emergency aid [not being distributed equally](#) (Malay Mail, 28 April 2020). As is often the case in Malaysia, this may have happened for a whole host of religious, ethnic or political reasons.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.50 points)

On websites run by Malay Islamic rights groups and in government-owned media, Christians are frequently slandered, for example by spreading rumors that Christians and Jews want to take over Malaysia. Prominent Christian politician Hannah Yeoh remains a preferred target and she faced a [sedition probe](#) because of a Twitter post on child marriage that was wrongly ascribed to her (Free Malaysia Today, 16 June 2020). She was publicly accused of crusading for Christianity in the 2018 election campaign. In parliament, a PAS MP publicly called the bible a ["corrupted book"](#), without facing investigations or apologizing for his remark afterwards (6 October 2020).

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Most churches - even the large and well-established ones - are very cautious when it comes to welcoming converts. It is very risky for churches to integrate Malay converts and they meet in secret, separately from other Christian groups. For security reasons, churches cannot openly integrate Malay converts as they will run into trouble with the authorities. At times, churches have even turned away converts and sometimes even reported them to the authorities, as they did not want to get into trouble. The risk of converts being caught going to church is much higher in West Malaysia.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.50 points)

Article 11(3) of the Constitution states: “Every religious group has the right to: manage its own religious affairs; establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with the law.” Most non-traditional churches cannot register as a religious body, but are registering as a society, which comes with benefits (such as the possibility to open a bank account and rent or buy property) but also with the duty to report to the authorities.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Pastors and church leaders have been natural targets for hostility from religion-based or ethnic groups, especially when they or their church have been perceived as engaging in acts of evangelism, and even more so, when this happens among Muslims. The abduction of Pastor Raymond Koh in broad daylight in February 2017 sent shockwaves through the Christian community and leadership which are still felt today. It is particularly unnerving that his whereabouts more than 1000 days after the incident are still unknown, the perpetrators have not been found (let alone punished), and that findings point to the involvement of the Special Branch of the police.

Block 5.16: Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (e.g. via local or national radio, TV, Internet, social media, cell phones). (3.50 points)

Malaysia has a Christian radio station but, apart from that, churches refrain from using mass media for a variety of reasons, including the risk of being accused of unethical conversion.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (A symbolic number of 10 could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100 could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol “x” denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.

Malaysia: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
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?	1	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	2	14
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?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	3	3
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1	0
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?	0	0
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?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10	1
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	8	8

For the WWL 2021 reporting period - for security reasons only few details can be provided:

- **Christians attacked/arrested:** At least one Christian was attacked and two were arrested.
- **Churches attacked:** There has been at least one case of [vandalism](#) against a Catholic church in Penang in December 2019 (Malay Mail, 6 December 2019).

5 Year trends

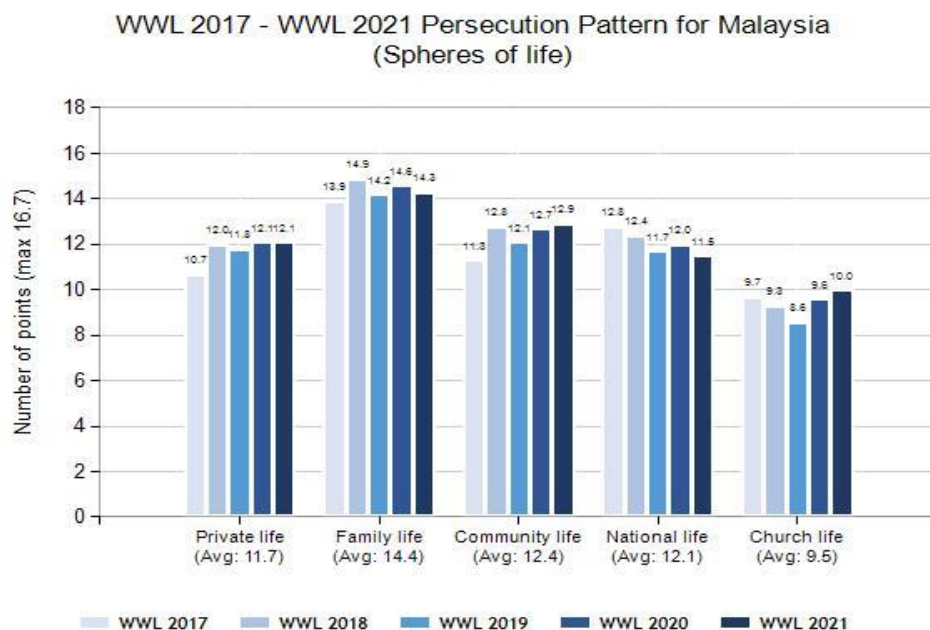
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Malaysia: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	12.2
2020	12.2
2019	11.7
2018	12.3
2017	11.7

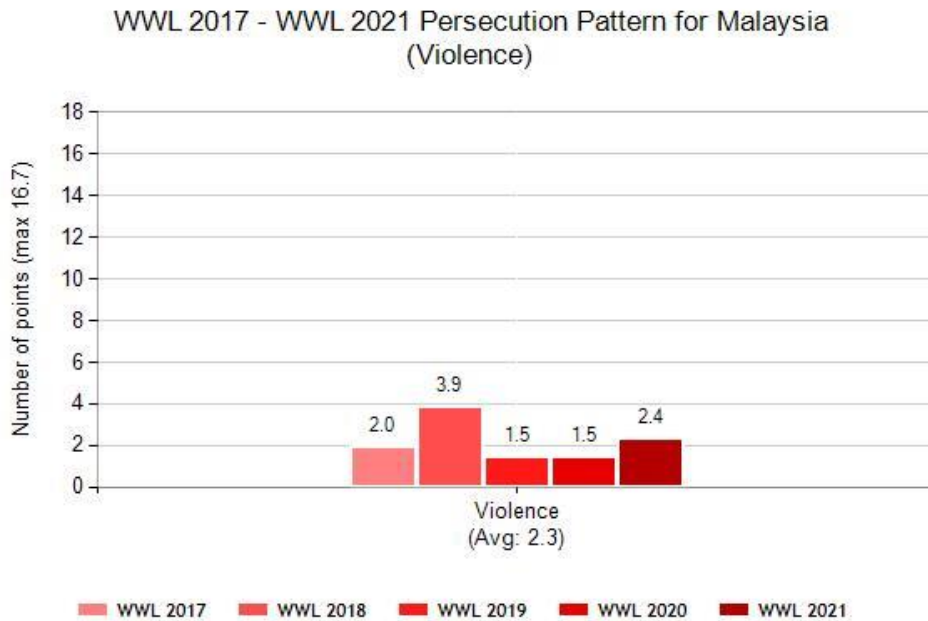
The score for average pressure on Christians has remained very high, within the range 11.7 and 12.3 points for the last five reporting periods, considerably higher than it was in WWL 2016. The PN government only took over power halfway through the WWL 2021 reporting period, so changes in the situation for Christians and other religious minorities resulting from that have not been noted yet.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The level of pressure in *Church life* decreased in the first three reporting periods (reflecting an increasing boldness in church activity more than any changes occurring due to government or society), but bounced back with a continued rise in the WWL 2020 and 2021 reporting periods. The levels of pressure in all spheres (except *Family* and *National life*) are at a higher level in WWL 2021 than in WWL 2017.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The spike in violence in WWL 2018 was due to the (still unsolved) abduction of three Christians; the violence score in WWL 2021 rose compared to WWL 2020 due the increased number of reported detentions and also due to the report of one church being vandalized.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Forced divorce
Targeted Seduction
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual

In Malaysia, the legal rights of women and girls are undermined by provisions that make exceptions for Sharia law. [Civil society organizations](#) stated in a February 2018 [CEDAW](#) report that "Muslim women now enjoy far less rights in marriage, divorce, guardianship of their children and inheritance than their non-Muslim counterparts." The report also stated: "Other areas of gross discrimination against women under the Islamic Family Laws include divorce, polygamy and child marriage" (Musawah, 19 February 2018).

These laws open avenues of vulnerability for females converting from Islam to Christianity, the most prevalent being the threat of sexual violence and/or forced marriage to a Muslim. Since the minimum legal age for marriage in the Islamic family laws (16 for female) can be lowered [with the](#) consent of a Sharia judge, it is possible for girls to be married (OECD, "Social Institutions and Gender Index, Malaysia" 2019). This law can make girls who convert to Christianity much more vulnerable. 'Love traps' have also been reported, whereby Muslim men pursue Christian women with the intention of marrying them and encouraging them to convert to Islam. After a year or two they then divorce the woman. This is an effective tactic because once Christian women are registered as Muslims, there is no mechanism for reversing this, even in the event of divorce. Additionally, all children born as a result of the so-called "marriage" are also legally considered Muslim. Unlike the targeted seduction described above, the forced marriages of Christian women reported in Malaysia are often connected to the socio-economic situation of the family, wherein the family agrees to an arranged marriage as a means of securing financial support.

The COVID-19 crisis has reportedly caused an [increase](#) in domestic violence, which is likely to have impacted Christian female converts too (UNDP, 9 September 2020). On rare occasions, Christian women are also vulnerable to being detained and interrogated by authorities about Christian networks and leaders.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Violence – physical
Violence – Verbal

Following a period of political instability, the new PN government is a point of concern of Christians in Malaysia. While the PH government had pledged to sign the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, ultra-conservative Muslim groups strongly oppose this as they fear it will encourage apostasy and proselytism of Muslims. Men and boys are often the target of these ultra-conservative Muslim groups. The persecution typically impacting Christian men also comes in the form of bullying at the hands of vigilante justice or monitoring by religious authorities.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department's IRF 2019](#) report (pages 210-215):

"Religious authorities arrested at least 30 people in two states in September for participating in Ashura celebrations and violating a state fatwa that declares Shia Islam to be 'deviant'. In November religious authorities caned four men for attempting "sexual intercourse against the order of nature."

The [denunciation](#) of Shiites by the religious authorities of the State of Selangor in September 2019 shows that they continue to be seen as a threat (Reuters, 6 September 2019). Hindus, adherents of traditional Chinese religions and Buddhists are also affected by the government's preferential treatment of ethnic Malays. The Hindu minority saw an attack against one of its temples. The US State Department's IRF report for 2019 reported on the follow-up: "In May police arrested four men from a suspected ISIS terrorist cell for allegedly plotting attacks on houses of worship and an entertainment outlet. Police said the accused wanted to 'avenge' the death of a Muslim firefighter who was killed when responding to a riot at a Hindu temple in 2018. According to media reports, the leader of the four was charged in May with terrorism-related offenses."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

The fact that the PH government collapsed may have had more to do with political infighting and power dynamics than with a carefully planned plot to take over the government for the sake of Islam. Nevertheless, for the newly installed PN government, ethno-religious motives dominate and ethnic and religious minorities will once again face being marginalized. The ongoing saga of trying to introduce Sharia law in Kelantan State shows that the route UMNO was taking has failed. UMNO was wooing conservative Muslims, trying to bridge the gap to conservative Muslim PAS, and trying to exploit the already big ethnic and religious gap the country is suffering from.

A shift towards more rigid and political Islamic practice is taking place with an influx of radical Islamic scholars returning from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Many of these Malay scholars have joined the government as members of the Department of Islamic Advancement of Malaysia to preach in mosques and spread Islam. Islamization of native Christians from Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) is happening at a fast rate. Sarawak still enjoys a greater degree of religious freedom compared to West Malaysia (it is the only place where Islam is not the state religion). But once the population demography tilts towards Islam, more Islamic laws will undoubtedly be set in place. There are reports from remote areas where uneducated indigenous people in Sabah and Sarawak are "drugged" or people are made drunk and forced to sign documents, after which

they turn out to have become Muslims. If this practice will change in the future remains to be seen.

A report from [Kelantan](#) in Peninsula Malaysia showed that the indigenous Orang Asli are neither happy with the state-sponsored Islamization (which officially changes their religious affiliation) nor with Christian missionary efforts (UCA News, 10 July 2019). Consequently, the situation in Malaysia will remain volatile, as its main persecution engine *Islamic oppression* has become more active than before, leading to ongoing challenges and threats for the Christian minority.

Dictatorial paranoia

Given that two important components of the new government are UMNO and PAS and that the former has ruled the country since independence, it will do everything to make the two years of PH rule appear to have been an anomaly. As the government reportedly has a razor-thin majority of just one vote, *Dictatorial paranoia* may climb to new heights, especially if the rumors of coming snap elections prove true. As shown throughout this dossier, Christians have always been a scapegoat to blame for the country's woes and Malay Muslim majority fears. This is even more the case in an economic situation made very much difficult and unpredictable not just by political volatility, but also by the decline caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: highly sensitive - <https://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/ban-on-churches-in-malaysia-using-allah-for-god-arises-again/60738.htm>
- Drivers of persecution description: Jawi script - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/12/28/muslim-students-group-gamis-accuses-dong-zong-of-islamophobia/1822884>
- The Persecution pattern description: missing - <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/missing-persons-04142017152813.html>
- Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere: monitoring - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/06/22/jakim-to-continue-monitoring-insults-against-islam-prophet-says-deputy-mini/1877799>
- Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere: "a source of Islamic indoctrination" - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/09/how-is-malysias-education-system-dividing-the-country-along-religious-and-ethnic-lines/>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: religious status - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/01/28/why-islam-is-on-malaysian-muslims-identity-cards/1831992>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: not being distributed equally - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/04/28/pakatan-mps-urge-accountability-in-covid-19-food-basket-aid-amid-claims-of/1860827>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: edition probe - <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2020/06/16/hannah-yeoh-called-up-by-cops-over-child-marriage-tweet/>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: "corrupted book" - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/malaysian-muslim-mp-unrepentant-over-corrupted-bible-claim/89774>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: vandalism - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/12/06/deputy-minister-urges-calm-after-vandalism-attack-at-st-annes-church/1816573>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Civil society organizations - <https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Malaysia-SIS-Musawah-Joint-Oral-Statement-2018-CEDAW69.pdf>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CEDAW - <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: with the - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/MY.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: increase - <https://www.my.undp.org/content/malaysia/en/home/blog/2020/domestic-violence-amid-covid-19-in-malaysia--diving-deeper-into-.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department's IRF 2019 - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: denunciation - https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-islam/islamic-authorities-in-malaysian-state-denounce-shiites-in-sermon-idUSKCN1VR1BK?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=d4d7f6ba3d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_09_06_01_41&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-d4d7f6ba3d-399904105
- Future outlook: Kelantan - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/malaysias-indigenous-people-protest-forced-conversions/85604>

Further useful reports

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

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Malaysia>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Malaysia>