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## Morocco: Country Dossier

December 2020



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
World Watch List 2021 .....	3
Copyright notice .....	4
Sources and definitions .....	4
Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic.....	4
External Links - Introduction .....	5
<b>WWL 2021 Short country profile / Morocco .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Brief country details .....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers .....	5
Brief description of the persecution situation .....	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period .....	6
<b>WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Morocco .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Link for general background information .....	6
Recent history .....	6
Political and legal landscape .....	7
Religious landscape .....	8
Economic landscape.....	9
Social and cultural landscape .....	10
Technological landscape .....	11
Security situation .....	12
Trends analysis .....	13
External Links - Keys to understanding .....	13
<b>WWL 2021: Church information / Morocco .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Christian origins.....	15
Church spectrum today .....	16
External Links - Church information.....	17
<b>WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Morocco.....</b>	<b>17</b>
Reporting period .....	17
Position on the World Watch List .....	17
Persecution engines .....	17
Drivers of persecution.....	19
Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....	20
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	20

The Persecution pattern.....	21
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	22
Violence.....	25
5 Year trends .....	26
Gender-specific religious persecution Female.....	28
Gender-specific religious persecution Male .....	30
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	31
Future outlook.....	32
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	32
<b>Further useful reports.....</b>	<b>32</b>

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2021

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

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

## Copyright notice

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## Sources and definitions

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

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

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

## External Links - Introduction

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

# WWL 2021 Short country profile / Morocco

## Brief country details

Morocco: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
37,071,000	31,500	0.1

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

Morocco: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	27
WWL 2020	66	26
WWL 2019	63	35
WWL 2018	51	0
WWL 2017	49	0

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

Morocco: Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties, Violent religious groups
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

A recurrent problem for Christians who are open about their faith relates to Article 220 of the Penal Code which criminalizes 'shaking the faith of a Muslim'. This puts many Christians who talk to others about their faith at risk of criminal prosecution and arrest. Advocates for the rights of Christians have also been targeted for violent attack by Islamic militants. While the law only punishes proselytization, converts to Christianity can be punished in other ways, for instance by losing inheritance rights and custody of children.

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

- The Moroccan police arrested and detained several Moroccan Christians in a number of places. Both individual Christians and groups have been questioned. Those interrogations were often combined with harassment by the police.
- Several young Moroccan Christians lost their employment after their faith became known. Combined with the economic crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, life has become very difficult for those Christians.
- Several female Moroccan Christians from a Muslim background have been forced by their families to marry a Muslim man.
- Several Moroccan Christians had their shops sprayed with graffiti containing hate speech.

## WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Morocco

### Link for general background information

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

### Recent history

Morocco was a French protectorate from 1912 to 1956, when it gained independence. Upon independence, Morocco was able to take control of some of the territory under Spanish protectorate, the so called "Western Sahara". However, Morocco's claim of sovereignty over other former Spanish controlled territories has been resisted by the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro" (POLISARIO) which proclaimed an independent state called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and managed to secure the recognition of some states.

After the initial Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Morocco was also touched by the wind of liberty and desire for economic change. Large numbers of young people, many of whom found themselves unemployed even after getting university degrees, expressed their frustration by taking to the streets. Responding to the demonstrations and calls for change, the government organized a referendum on constitutional reforms which was held on 1 July 2011. In the elections held since these constitutional reforms were put in place, the Islamist Justice and Development Party has won the largest number of seats in parliament enabling it to form coalition governments. Therefore, Morocco was able to avoid the political upheaval that engulfed much of North Africa.

However, grievances and discontent is especially strong in the Rif region (in the northern part of the country) where the mainly ethnic Berber population feel marginalized and neglected by the government. In previous years, there were occasional demonstrations in this region. In June 2018, some of the protest's leaders [were convicted](#) to lengthy prison sentences (The Washington Post, 27 June 2018). In August 2018, during the Eid al-Adha holiday, King Mohammed VI [pardoned](#) nearly 200 imprisoned protesters (The New Arab, 22 August 2018). However, sentences against 43 others [were upheld in the Court of Appeals](#) in April 2019 (Amnesty International - AI, 26 April 2019).

The COVID-19 crisis affected Morocco significantly: As of September 2020, the total number of Corona-related deaths stood at 2,069 ([Morocco World News, 27 September 2020](#)) and the economy is expected to shrink for the first time in two decades. Both the tourist industry as well as companies depending on trade with Europe have been heavily affected. However, the Moroccan government has also used the pandemic to tighten its grip on society under the guise of introducing health measures. Popular protests have been quelled, and voices critical of the government have been targeted and arrests made ([Bloomberg, 24 July 2020](#)).

In December 2020, Morocco became the fourth Arab country that year to normalize ties with Israel ([The Guardian, 10 December 2020](#)). The deal was brokered by the USA and included important incentives for Morocco: In exchange the USA recognized Morocco's claims on the Western Sahara and it secured an important arms deal including US-made drones ([Al-Jazeera, 12 December 2020](#)). However, Islamist groups in the country denounced the deal, making it a potential stumble block for the king's popular support among the Moroccan people ([The Guardian, 13 December 2020](#)).

Moroccan Christians with a Muslim background continue to face discrimination and marginalization in the meantime. They are not recognized by the government, are closely monitored by the security services and reviled by family and society.

## Political and legal landscape

Morocco is a parliamentary monarchy in which the king is granted extensive executive powers and is both political and religious leader, being officially designated "Commander of the Faithful". He presides over the Council of Ministers and appoints the prime minister following legislative elections from the winning party. On recommendations from the prime minister, he appoints the members of government. The Economist Intelligence Unit ([EIU Democracy Index 2019](#)) classifies Morocco as a 'hybrid' regime (in a ranking ranging from: "full democracy", "flawed democracy", "hybrid regime" and "authoritarian state").

According to Humanists International's [Freedom of Thought report](#) (last updated 13 February 2017), which classifies the government as 'severely discriminating':

- "Although Morocco signed and ratified few UN treaties and resolutions on civil rights and freedom of religion, conscience and thought, ... their primacy over national laws is compromised: ... Morocco commits itself 'To comply with the international conventions duly ratified by it 'subject to their compatibility with the constitution' and 'its immutable national identity'." This means de facto that international civil rights, including the Freedom



of Religion and Belief, are subject to the cultural Islamic values of Morocco and its interpretation of Sharia law.

- The report continues: "The constitution declares that 'Islam is the religion of the State' (Article 3), and that Morocco 'commits itself ... to deepen the bonds of togetherness with the Arabo-Islamic Ummah' (Preamble). It also refers to Islam, as well as monarchy, as one of the 'federative constants' of the Nation (Article 1). The King is considered as a direct descendant of the prophet of Islam, which gives the ruling Alaouite dynasty its legitimacy."

[Middle East Concern](#) (MEC, accessed 26 September 2020) writes:

- "The constitution of Morocco establishes Islam as the State religion, asserts that the free exercise of religion is guaranteed and upholds the principle of non-discrimination. Legal provisions strictly prohibit blasphemy and defamation of religions, as well as non-Islamic proselytism. According to the Penal Code, anyone who attempts to prevent persons from the exercise of their religious beliefs, and anyone who offers incitements in order to "shake the faith of a Muslim" or to convert a Muslim to another religion faces imprisonment and a fine. The Associations Law prohibits any association that seeks to undermine Islam, and the distribution of non-Islamic materials is restricted. Although Rabbinical authorities have jurisdiction over personal status issues for the small Jewish communities, there is no equivalent provision for Christians – those born into Muslim families are subject to Shari'a courts in matters of personal status. Women registered as Muslim are not permitted to marry non-Muslims"

Christians in Morocco, especially those from a Muslim background, are severely limited in their civil and religious rights in Morocco's restricted political and religious environment. Moroccan Christians are not recognized and need to practice their beliefs away from the public eye.

## Religious landscape

Morocco: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	31,500	0.1
Muslim	36,953,000	99.7
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	2,300	0.0
Bahai	36,000	0.1

Atheist	400	0.0
Agnostic	47,800	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

Over 99% of the population is Muslim (majority Sunni), with the remainder being mostly agnostic, Bahai or Christian. Islam is the official state religion. Non-Muslim foreign communities can openly practice their faiths. The majority of Christians in Morocco are Roman Catholic and, in comparison to other countries in the Arab world, Morocco could be characterized as a religiously tolerant state. Nevertheless, proselytization with the intent to convert Muslims from Islam to another religion is still considered illegal.

[Middle East Concern](#) (MEC, accessed 25 September 2020) reports:

- "Registered expatriate Christian communities enjoy considerable freedom in Morocco, provided that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. In recent years (and particularly in 2010) the government has deported significant numbers of expatriate Christians on the grounds that they were contravening the Penal Code provisions relating to proselytism, or on even more vague grounds of 'threat to public order'."
- "Moroccan Christians, who mainly meet in small house churches, are especially aware of close surveillance of their activities by the authorities."
- "In early 2017 Morocco's highest religious authority issued a declaration regarding apostasy which it defined in narrow political terms. A broad ruling by the same authority in 2002 had urged that apostates be sentenced to death. The revised ruling has been widely welcomed, including by Christians in Morocco. Similarly, Christians welcomed a recent ruling that a Christian who offered a bible to a friend did not 'shake the faith' of that friend as the bible is a book that Muslims should read. However, there continues to be family and societal pressure against those who choose to leave Islam. Some who are considered apostates are referred to the courts (facing sanctions such as forcible divorce, loss of inheritance and removal of child custody), and in extreme cases they can face violent responses from family members."

## Economic landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 24 September 2020) and [World Bank data](#) (June 2020):

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$8,600 (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 9.0%, with youth unemployment being twice as high at 21.9%
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 15.0% (2007 est.)

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

- "The global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic compound with the domestic ones and those of drought. Consequently, Morocco's economy is expected to suffer from a recession this year, the first one since more than two decades."
- "Morocco will suffer greatly from the expected recession of Europe's economy. It will also suffer if domestic demand drops further due to the closure of many activities to contain the spread of the pandemic with its impact on the revenues of employees and businesses."
- "However, the newly created COVID-19 fund in addition to the monetary measures, could well avoid the bankruptcy of a good number of companies and save jobs."

Other sources report:

- The [World Bank's](#) "World by Income" report puts the Moroccan economy in the lower middle income category (World Bank, accessed 24 September 2020).
- The [Fragile State Index](#) (FSI) shows that there are small but steady improvements in the economic indicators (FSI, accessed 24 September 2020) in the last years. However, it is likely that this will be negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Morocco's economy has important sectors such as mining, agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Moroccan companies are becoming increasingly active and investing in other African countries, especially in West Africa and this is helping foster economic growth in the country. [FSI](#) economic indicators show slow but steady improvement in the economy, but levels of emigration and 'brain drain' remain worryingly high (FSI, accessed 24 September 2020). Compared with most other countries in the region, Morocco's economy is relatively dynamic and robust. However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant negative effect on the economy.

Moroccan Christians, almost all of them from a Muslim background, often face discrimination in the job market. If their conversion becomes known, they are likely to lose their employment. Finding another job is difficult, especially employment in government departments.

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Morocco is the [world's largest producer and exporter of cannabis](#) (Morocco World News, 29 June 2019).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 24 September 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Moroccan population (99%) are from Arab-Berber decent.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with French being widely spoken in business, government and diplomatic circles. Tamazight (official) and other Berber languages are spoken as well.
- **Population:** Morocco has a population of around 36.000.000 people.
- **Urban population:** In 2020, 63.5% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 2.14%

- **Literacy rate:** 73.8% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (83.3%) and women (64.6%) (2018).
- **Youth population:** The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up almost 44% of the population, making it a country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **Life expectancy:** 73.3 years on average; women (75.1 years), men (71.6 years) (2020).
- **Education:** Moroccan citizens enjoy 13 years of schooling on average (2017).

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

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Morocco ranks #121 out of 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a medium score of 0.676, making Morocco score lower than its North African neighbors.
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.833, women are significantly disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Morocco is socially conservative and Muslim, although there is also a strong Arab youth culture and society is influenced by the large Moroccan population living in Europe.

A Moroccan Christian convert [dedicated an episode](#) of his weekly show “Daring Questions” on the discrimination of non-Muslims encouraged by school textbooks (YouTube video, accessed 26 September 2020). He gave an example of the Islamic education’s book for the 1st grade in primary school which stipulates: “I love those who love the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and I am hostile to those who are hostile towards him”. He also brought attention to a *Baccalaureat* school book which states that the punishment for apostasy is execution.

According to [FFP's Fragile State Index](#) (FSI, accessed 25 September 2020): Social indicators show continued improvements but cohesion indicators show that group grievances are alarmingly high. This trend is confirmed by the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) (EIU, accessed 25 September 2020): "Social tensions, especially in less developed areas, will remain high, but overall stability in the country will not be threatened. King Mohammed VI remains the ultimate arbiter of power; yet, the political spectrum is increasingly polarised."

Moroccan Christians remain side-lined and discriminated by society. Once their conversion becomes known, family and society are likely to put pressure on them to recant their faith. Some of them face divorce by their spouses, while others are forced to marry a Muslim. Converts from Islam to Christianity are also likely to be excluded from family inheritance and lose custody rights in cases of divorce.

## Technological landscape

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

- **Internet usage:** 64.3% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 49.7% penetration – survey date: December 2019

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

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 124.2 per 100 people

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

- Morocco is rated as "partly free".
- Key internet controls include the manipulation of (online) discussion by pro-government commentators, the arrest and detention of journalists and bloggers, as well as (technical) attacks on government critics and human rights organizations.

Internet usage has grown to 64%, but with significant variations depending on how rural the areas are. Journalist and bloggers critical of the government (especially those involved in the Rif protests) have received prison sentences and many apply self-censorship online. [Reporters without Borders](#) (RSF, accessed 25 September 2020) reports a continued pressure on media freedom: "Morocco's media continue to be subjected to judicial harassment. In addition to the trials of a number of media figures that have dragged on for several years, several new prosecutions have been initiated and heavy sentences have been passed. Many journalists and citizen-journalists continue to be imprisoned." Several journalists have been questioned by the police and put on trial in 2020, while others are serving prison sentences ([Committee to Protect Journalists](#), accessed 25 September 2020).

Christians in Morocco, especially converts from a Muslim background, are careful in their social media postings. Criticizing Islam or the (religious authority of the) king can lead to arrest and detention, as well as social hatred. Most Christians in Morocco use a pseudonym to post Christian material. However, with the rise of Internet access and social media, many converts to Christianity can now find fellowship online, even if they are alone and isolated (for example due to the COVID-19 lockdown measures).

## Security situation

In August 2018, the king reinstated military service for men and women aged between 19 and 25 years old ([Reuters, 21 August 2018](#)). Critics say this was a way to quell protests ([Morocco World News, 10 April 2019](#)). Many soldiers are needed to protect the border-wall in occupied Western Sahara, which Morocco sees as its 'southern provinces'. The Western Sahara dispute started after Morocco annexed the former Spanish colony in 1975. The indigenous Western Sahara Sahrawi people resisted the annexation and - led by the POLISARIO Front - they established the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976. After years of conflict, a truce was brokered by the UN upon promise of an independence referendum in 1991. This referendum has still not taken place, while Morocco has allowed thousands of its citizens to settle in the 75% of the area it controls. Meanwhile, the SADR controls a small area in the east of the country, with thousands of Sahrawis actually residing in permanent refugee camps near the Algerian border town of Tindouf ([BBC Western Sahara profile, 14 May 2018](#)).

In December 2018, Morocco was shocked by the murder and beheading of two Scandinavian women by men who had sworn alliance to the Islamic State group (IS). This kind of violence has not happened before in Morocco and the killing was widely condemned. The main suspects received the death penalty, although Morocco has not executed any convicted criminals since 1993 ([BBC News, 18 July 2019](#)).

Morocco's security apparatus is known to be strong and intelligence agencies are well-informed. These capacities have also been used against Christians in Morocco, especially against converts from a Muslim background. The security services monitor all Christians extensively, as they are seen as a threat to the king and his authority, which is derived from the assumption that the king is a direct descendant of the Islamic prophet, Mohamed.

## Trends analysis

### 1) The country's image is progressive except where religious minorities are concerned

Morocco has been a quite stable country in both political and economical terms in a region that has been fraught with political instability and economic crises. Its incremental and evolutionary approach to political reform has proved to be quite successful so far. Morocco's international image is that of a progressive, tolerant and economically dynamic country. However, there is the risk of complacency setting in and this image does not fully reflect the country's record when it comes to the rights of religious minorities. Also, unless the unrest in the Rif region is seriously addressed, the situation could allow Islamic militants to destabilize the country.

### 2) The monarchy and the ruling Islamist party are wrestling for more control

How the future in Morocco develops depends on a number of factors. These factors include the outcome of the struggle for more influence and control between the monarchy and the Islamist political party that has been leading the government for the past few years. The degree to which the economic marginalization and political discontent of some groups persist might also be a relevant factor, as they can provide an opening for Islamists to exploit. However, if its current overall trajectory continues, Morocco is likely to remain stable.

### 3) Moroccan Christians remain unrecognized

Even the Roman Catholic Pope did not raise his voice to call for more acceptance of Moroccan's Christians during his visit in 2019, as this issue remains highly sensitive in Morocco ([New York Times, 29 March 2019](#)). The Pope's visit underlines the keenness of the Moroccan state to maintain its image of being a tolerant and progressive modern state; the state is thus unlikely to increase restrictions on religious freedom. However, Christianity looks set to remain a foreign religion in Morocco. Article 4 of the Constitution states that "the motto of the Kingdom is Dieu, La Patrie, Le Roi [God, the Country, the King] and many Moroccans feel that way. As long as "God" is interpreted as the God of Islam, Christians will remain outsiders, even if they are of Moroccan descent.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Morocco country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14121438>

- Recent history: were convicted - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/moroccan-protest-leader-3-others-get-20-year-sentences/2018/06/27/a7e4c594-79e7-11e8-ac4e-421ef7165923\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.b22c1b7366f3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/moroccan-protest-leader-3-others-get-20-year-sentences/2018/06/27/a7e4c594-79e7-11e8-ac4e-421ef7165923_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b22c1b7366f3)
- Recent history: pardoned - <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/8/22/morocco-king-pardons-jailed-hirak-protesters-for-eid-al-adha>
- Recent history: were upheld in the Court of Appeals - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde29/0267/2019/en/>
- Recent history: Morocco World News, 27 September 2020 - <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2020/09/320927/morocco-confirms-2444-new-covid-19-cases-total-hits-117685/>
- Recent history: Bloomberg, 24 July 2020 - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-24/covid-crackdown-snuffs-out-flickering-embers-of-the-arab-spring>
- Recent history: The Guardian, 10 December 2020 - <http://theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/10/israel-and-morocco-agree-to-full-diplomatic-relations-says-trump>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera, 12 December 2020 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/12/trump-admin-moving-ahead-with-1bn-arms-sale-to-morocco-report>
- Recent history: The Guardian, 13 December 2020 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/13/moroccan-islamist-groups-reject-normalising-ties-with-israel>
- Political and legal landscape: EIU Democracy Index 2019 - <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom of Thought report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/morocco/>
- Political and legal landscape: Middle East Concern - <https://www.meconcern.org/countries/morocco/>
- Religious landscape description: Middle East Concern - <https://meconcern.org/countries/morocco/>
- Economic landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>
- Economic landscape: World Bank data - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/morocco>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's April 2020 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco/publication/economic-update-april-2020>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's - <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/the-world-by-income-and-region.html>
- Economic landscape: Fragile State Index - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Economic landscape: FSI - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Economic landscape: world's largest producer and exporter of cannabis - <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/06/277041/morocco-producer-cannabis-rif/>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: Human Development Indicators (2019) - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MAR>
- Social and cultural landscape: dedicated an episode - <http://youtube.com/watch?v=UtxLJ5nAZ6Y>
- Social and cultural landscape: FFP's Fragile State Index - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Social and cultural landscape: Economist Intelligence Unit - <https://country.eiu.com/morocco>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ma>
- Technological landscape: World Bank's country profile - [https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report\\_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=MAR](https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=MAR)
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- Technological landscape: Reporters without Borders - <https://rsf.org/en/morocco-western-sahara>
- Technological landscape: Committee to Protect Journalists - <https://cpj.org/mideast/morocco/>
- Security situation: Reuters, 21 August 2018 - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-morocco-army/morocco-reinstates-compulsory-military-service-for-under-25s-idUSKCN1L52DA>

- Security situation: Morocco World News, 10 April 2019 - <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/04/270255/morocco-compulsory-military-service/>
- Security situation: BBC Western Sahara profile, 14 May 2018 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14115273>
- Security situation: BBC News, 18 July 2019 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49029505>
- Trends analysis: New York Times, 29 March 2019 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/africa/pope-francis-morocco-christians.html>

## WWL 2021: Church information / Morocco

### Christian origins

Christianity arrived in Morocco when it was part of the Roman Empire and became very prominent in areas like Tangiers, Rabat and Fez. The first known Christian martyr in Morocco was Marcellus (298 AD) in Tangier. By the end of the 4th century, the Romanized areas of Morocco were solidly Christian and inroads had been made among the Amazigh ('Berber') tribes, who sometimes converted en masse. In that same 4th century, it was also one of the countries where Donatism and Arianism became a major theological issue. In the 5th century, German Vandals, coming via Spain, conquered Morocco and brought their Arian version of the Christian faith with them. In 533 AD, the Byzantine Empire [reconquered](#) Morocco to reinstate 'Roman' rule and to re-install orthodox bishops and priests (Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed 29 September 2020).

According to Islamic tradition, Islam reached Morocco by the 7th century. Many Christians were forced to convert and the number of Christians decreased due to the policies of Islamization. In 1220, priests of the Franciscan Order made a brave attempt to re-introduce Christianity and a diocese was set up at Marrakesh in 1234 which was able to function until 1566.

Missionaries from North Africa brought the Protestant faith to Morocco in 1884. The Gospel Missionary Union and Emmanuel Mission Sahara came to the country in 1894 and 1926 respectively. Other churches and movements would follow, such as Anglicans, the Assemblies of God, the Christian Brethren and the Seventh-day Adventists.

Morocco's instability in the 19th century had resulted in European countries intervening to protect investments and to demand economic concessions. In 1912, Morocco became a French Protectorate, and Spain also assured itself of major parts of Morocco. Tens of thousands of French, Spanish and other colonists, entered Morocco and acquired large tracts of the rich agricultural land. During this colonial period, both Catholics and Protestants could freely worship in Morocco and the Reformed Church of France formed the Evangelical Church of Morocco. Churches, hospitals, schools and orphanages were built for the colonists and for mission work among the Muslim population.

When Morocco became independent in 1956, the country was home to 500,000 Europeans and the Roman Catholic Church was very visible. Since then, the Europeans and their churches have largely departed. Today the expatriate Christian community (Roman Catholic and Protestant) consists of a few thousand members.



According to Jack Wald in "Christianity in North Africa and West Asia" (Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 41-44), the indigenous Moroccan church began to emerge in the late 1960s, meeting in house churches held in the homes of missionaries. In 1984 the community suffered a major setback when King Hassan II forced many Moroccan Christians to recant their faith, after suspecting them of a coup. With the arrival of incumbent King Mohammed VI in 1999, a decade of relative freedom started which allowed house churches, this time mostly led by Moroccans, to grow. However, in March 2010, around 150 foreign Christians from all over the country were suddenly deported. [Reportedly](#), the country wanted to take a tough line against proselytism (BBC News, 12 March 2010). Moroccan Christians were interrogated too and it became apparent that the police had inside informers; many house churches disbanded as a result.

## Church spectrum today

Morocco: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	1,100	3.5
Catholic	18,500	58.7
Protestant	4,800	15.2
Independent	5,600	17.8
Unaffiliated	1,500	4.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,500</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	4,000	12.7
Renewalist movement	4,500	14.3

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

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

The majority of Christians in Morocco are Roman Catholic. Recognized churches for expatriates exist only in major cities. Denominations that existed prior to independence in 1956 include the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church and the French Protestant Church. Indigenous Moroccans are not allowed to join these congregations.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: reconquered - <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/06/afw.html>
- Christian origins: Reportedly - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8563111.stm>

# WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Morocco

## Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

## Position on the World Watch List

Morocco: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	27
WWL 2020	66	26
WWL 2019	63	35
WWL 2018	51	0
WWL 2017	49	0

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

The main reason for the increase of one point in WWL 2021 was a slight increase in average pressure, rising 0.3 points to 12.6 points. This was mainly caused by an increase in reported pressure in the *National sphere of life*. The violence score went down from 4.1 to 3.7 points; mainly because no church buildings were attacked during the WWL 2021 reporting period.

## Persecution engines

Morocco: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all

Morocco: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Clan oppression	CO	Weak
Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
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)

Morocco displays a more moderate version of *Islamic oppression* compared to other countries in the region. Restrictions imposed by the Islamic authorities include the confiscation of Christian literature in Arabic (including Bibles) if discovered, bans on cooperating with Christians from abroad - especially if evangelization is planned - and serious challenges in securing recognized places of worship for Christians with a Muslim background. Converts from Islam face pressure as a result of their new faith from family and friends and from the local community if their proclamation of faith is felt to be an attempt at proselytization.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The Moroccan government looks at the Church, especially activities involving converts, with suspicion. Moroccans are expected to be loyal to Islam, king and country; Christianity would seem to threaten this hegemony. In past years, the Moroccan authorities have accused Christians of being disloyal to the king and have deported many foreign Christians without due process. One of the reasons for this sort of government action could be the fear of radical Muslim groups: By appeasing them, the government tries to prevent any unrest. This means in practice that converts are regularly detained and questioned about their motives and contacts.

## Drivers of persecution

<b>Morocco:</b> Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	WEAK	VERY WEAK	-	-	MEDIUM	-
Government officials	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	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

- **Government officials and Political parties (Strong):** Among the main drivers of *Islamic oppression* in Morocco are government officials and leaders of political parties. The Justice and Development Party (PJD) is arguably the most important political player in the country alongside the monarchy. Although it does not advocate banning Christianity, its leaders have exhibited intolerance towards Christianity and do not fully recognize the right to freedom of belief and worship for Christians. State officials are also unwilling to register and allow Christian converts with a Muslim background to congregate freely, gain recognition and evangelize.
- **Citizens (Strong):** Moroccan society views Christianity mostly negatively and converts from Islam to Christianity are seen as shaming family and community.
- **Extended family (Strong):** The extended family of converts from Islam - especially in rural areas - put pressure on converts to renounce their faith in Christ.

- **Non-religious leaders (Strong):** Islamic radical thought is present and preached in Morocco and adds to the pressure on Christians..
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** The murder of two Scandinavian women in December 2018 has shown that the influence of the Islamic State group can also be a threat in Morocco. Salafi influence is reportedly growing in Morocco.

#### **Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia**

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Moroccan authorities and security services are monitoring all church life. Converts to Christianity are actively watched and sometimes interrogated. There is still fear that the security services are infiltrating the convert movement.

### **Areas where Christians face most difficulties**

The Islamic population in rural areas is known to be conservative; most incidents of persecution take place in the mostly Berber populated northeast of the country, the Atlas mountains in the east of the country and the south-eastern desert area. Most converts reside in the urban areas, where it is easier to escape family and community pressure.

### **Christian communities and how they are affected**

#### **Communities of expatriate Christians**

Expatriate Christians, many of whom are engaged in a variety of professional activities, are often under surveillance and risk deportation if they are perceived to engage in acts of evangelization. However, compared to other groups - especially to Moroccan converts to Christianity - expatriate Christians from the West enjoy relative freedom of religion. Recognized churches for expatriates (i.e. those already in existence at Independence in 1956) are only found in major cities. Most own church buildings but the government owns the land. As long as the building is being regularly used for church services, the church keeps control of the building. If it falls into disuse, the government takes over the building and uses it for other purposes. Given the difficulty for these churches to get new members and the fact that it is impossible for Moroccan Christians with a Muslim background to join these churches, historical Christian communities find it challenging to remain active and present in the country.

Expatriate Christians from sub-Saharan African countries, who are often Pentecostal Christians, are usually marginalized and discriminated against.

#### **Historical Christian communities**

These communities are not considered as a separate category in WWL analysis since they consist mainly of expatriate Christians and have been included in the category above.

#### **Converts to Christianity**

Moroccan Christians meet in house churches because they cannot get permission and official recognition to congregate in public. They change location regularly and do not have the history or level of organization to develop into a "denomination" (i.e. non-traditional Christian commu-

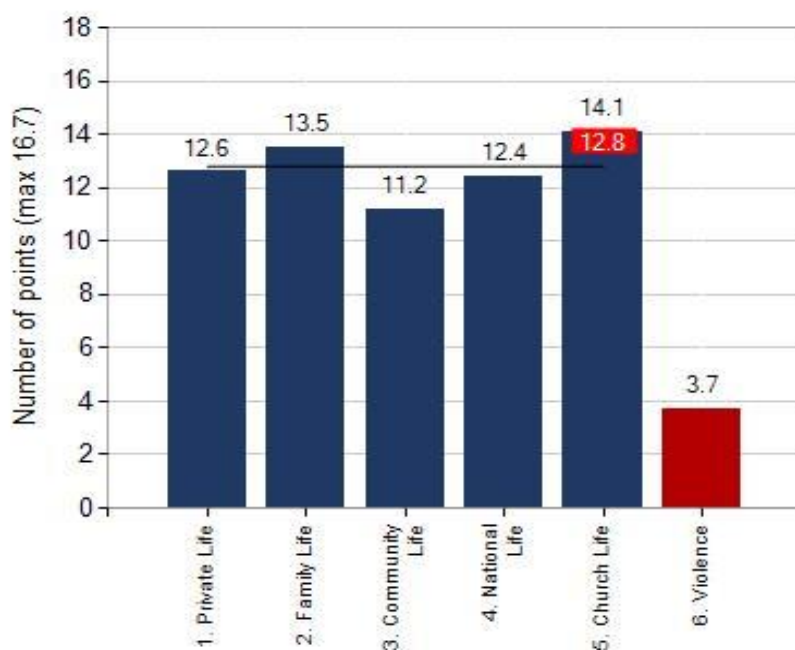
ity). While the level of tolerance from society in urban centers (as well as from the public authorities) towards Christian converts is better than in most other countries in the region, converts to Christianity still face pressure from society at large and family to renounce their faith. They also tend to be under surveillance and risk further forms of persecution, especially if they engage in evangelism.

### Non-traditional Christian communities

This category does not exist in Morocco.

## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Morocco



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Morocco shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.8 points), rising from 12.5 points in WWL 2020.
- The pressure is extreme in *Church life* (14.1 points). This reflects the limitations expatriate churches face if they try to share their faith with others and how the government has effectively strangled fellowship among convert communities. The next highest score is to be found in *Family life* (13.5 points), which reflects the pressure converts have to face when they want to practice their new religion in public: Getting baptized, married or even buried in a Christian way is difficult and they will face pressure from family, society and even the government, especially in rural areas.
- The score for violence went down from 4.1 points in WWL 2020 to 3.7 points in WWL 2021. Although a higher number of Christians have been detained and more Christian houses and business have been attacked in WWL 2021, no church properties were attacked this year.

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

Both local and expatriate Christians can be charged with "shaking the faith of a Muslim" under Moroccan law.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)**

Both family and community members can react harshly or even violently when seeing a convert displaying a cross or Christian symbol. Some converts do share their new faith on social media, using fake identities to hide their real names.

**Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.25 points)**

Many converts are afraid to share their new faith with their families. There are many cases known of converts who have been ostracized or abused because they have spoken about their faith. Therefore, converts often only talk about their faith with their family over time. Nonetheless, the first reaction can be intense, with only some families engaging in dialogue to give them the chance of recanting their new faith.

**Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)**

Although conversion from Islam to Christianity is punishable according to Moroccan law (and although Moroccan Islamic religious leaders have often disputed whether conversion is punishable by death), enforcement of this law is very weak and almost non-existent. Generally speaking, however, converts face pressure from relatives, family members and the community at large, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, it has been risky for some converts to reveal their faith. Acts of private worship and devotion that could reveal conversion to Christianity also entail the same risk.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (4.00 points)**

To adopt a child in Morocco you have to be a Muslim. Part of the adoption procedure entails a meeting with an imam, who will ask the adoptive parents about the tenets of Sunni Islam.

**Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)**

Except for the Jewish community, all Moroccans are considered to be Muslim upon birth.

**Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.50 points)**

This is mainly problematic for female converts, as they are not allowed to marry Christian men.

**Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)**

Baptism of converts take place in secret as baptism is a very clear sign of both conversion and proselytism.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)**

Both local and foreign Christians are being monitored by the Moroccan security services. Local community members regularly inform the police when they are aware of proselytizing activities.

**Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Christianity is seen as a foreign religion and Christians are not considered to be part of Moroccan society. Hence, there is no room for them within communal groups.

**Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.00 points)**

Christians, especially converts, feel a great deal of societal pressure to take part in Islamic religious activities and rituals.

**Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Converts, especially those active in ministry, are monitored and are regularly called in for questioning.



## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion. Although it guarantees all citizens the "free exercise of beliefs", in practice, this means that a Muslim can only practice Islam and cannot change his religion to Christianity.

### **Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)**

Civil society organizations with clear Christian convictions, or who aim to defend the rights of Moroccan converts, are actively opposed by the government.

### **Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.50 points)**

This is the case for Christians with a Muslim background. They are also denied recognition by the State.

### **Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)**

Christian evangelism is banned. Giving Christian literature to Muslims and proselytization is illegal. Christians who evangelize could be accused of "shaking the faith of Islam" and this will entail criminal liability.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Churches are hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings as these could be construed as proselytism. This will be the case both for Christians with a Muslim background and other Christians.

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

Churches of expatriate Christian communities are always monitored to make sure that Moroccan nationals do not attend their services. The restriction on fellowship between expatriate Christian communities and other church groups affects both communities negatively.

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

Only the Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Anglican and French Protestant Church have a special recognized status. Other churches have to register as associations and are legally prohibited from pursuing activities that undermine Islam. Moroccan Christians cannot

officially establish their own churches or belong to foreign churches.

**Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.75 points)**

The government has continued to permit the display and sale of Bibles in French, English and Spanish. A limited number of Arabic translations of the Bible have also been available for sale in a few bookshops for use in university religion courses. The authorities confiscate Bibles they believe are intended for use in proselytizing.

## 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.*

Morocco: 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?	0	2
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	12	9
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?	10	10
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	5	4

Morocco: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	21	10
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?	2	1
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?	3	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	12	10
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

For the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians attacked:** Several Christians have faced abuse, with female converts especially being vulnerable to sexual harassment. This abuse took place mostly in the family sphere, although there have also been reports of police abuse. In addition to the reported cases, many other incidents remain unknown as they often happen in the domestic sphere and are an issue of shame.
- **Christians arrested:** Several Christians were detained and questioned for possessing a Bible, Christian materials or engaging in evangelism.
- **Christian-owned houses and shops attacked:** Several Christian businesses were boycotted and sprayed with graffiti containing hate speech.
- **Violence against female Christians:** Several incidents of forced marriage, sexual abuse and abduction of female converts from Islam to Christianity were reported. Those incidents all took place in the family sphere.
- **Christians forced to leave:** Several Moroccan Christians had to find refuge elsewhere in the country to escape from family pressure.

In previous years, expatriate Christians have been deported or denied entry to the country where suspected of proselytization. Probably because of the COVID-19 restrictions on travelling, no incidents have been recorded during the WWL 2021 reporting period.

## 5 Year trends

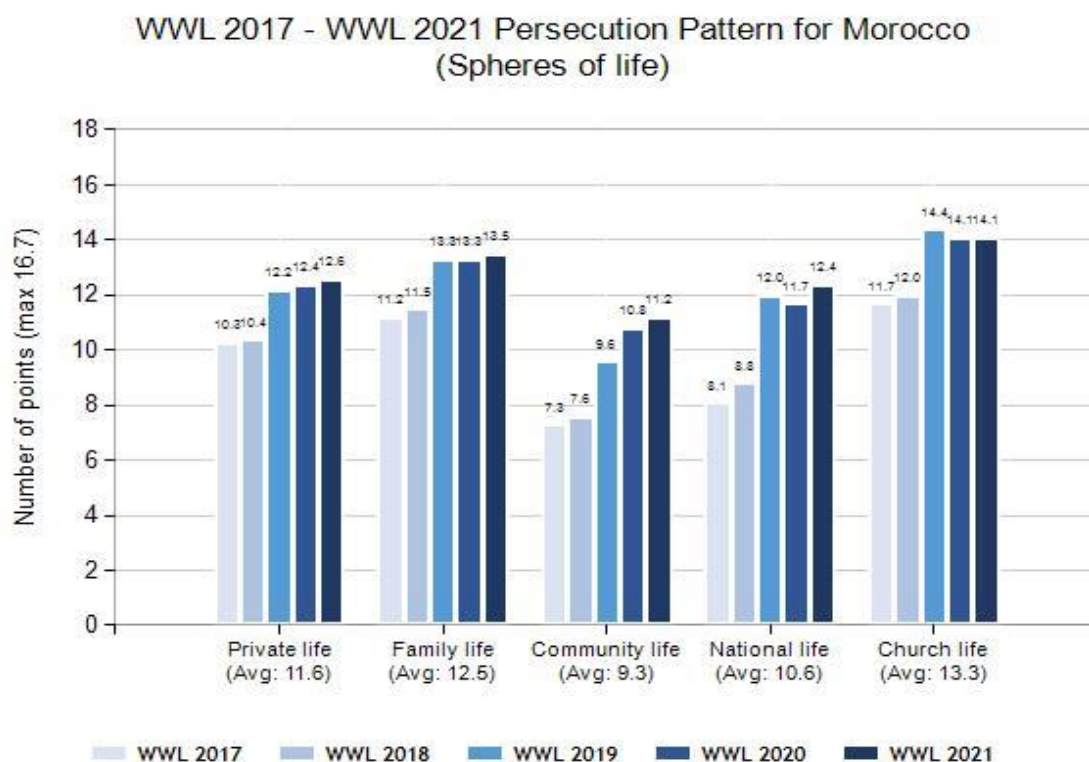
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

## 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Morocco: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	12.8
2020	12.5
2019	12.3
2018	10.1
2017	9.7

The table above lists the average pressure on Christians and shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has gradually crept up since WWL 2017 and increased to a very high level.

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



The chart above shows that pressure in all *spheres of life* increased over the period WWL 2017 - WWL 2019. The levels appear to have stabilized in WWL 2020 and 2021, except in the *Community* and *National sphere* which showed significant increases. Pressure has been at an extreme level in the *Church sphere* for the last three reporting periods.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The number of violent incidents recorded in the period WWL 2017 - 2018 was very low. Since then, the score has risen considerably with more violent incidents being reported than before.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Denied access to Christian religious materials
Denied access to social community/networks
Denied custody of children
Denied inheritance or possessions
Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
Enforced religious dress code
Forced divorce
Forced marriage

Forced out of home – expulsion
Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

According to reports, most people in Morocco who declare their Christian faith are men, because they are less vulnerable to pressure than women. Although women's rights in Morocco have developed over the last sixteen years, which has given women more [legal equality](#), women in Morocco remain in a generally less advantageous position than men (The Parliament, 28 June 2018). For example, they have few economic opportunities, as highlighted in Georgetown's "[Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20](#)" (p.15), making them dependent on men. Cultural expectations bind women to the home and domestic duties, especially in rural areas.

Converts from an Islamic background are most vulnerable to religious persecution. While all Christians from an Islamic background can, in practice, be denied their rights to inheritance or family affiliation, this is a particular risk for women. They are also more vulnerable to arbitrary divorce and the denial of access to their children. Personal status law follows the country's Maliki-Ashari Sunni interpretation of Sharia. One country expert writes that "as long as the personal status law is not subject to change, this kind of persecution will continue".

They are further exposed to domestic confinement, forced marriage to a non-Christian and being expelled from the home. In some instances, the pressure is simply so intense that the girl relents and agrees to a marriage to someone who does not share her faith in order to escape the pressure of her family. As these pressures demonstrate, religious persecution against women characteristically takes place within the private sphere, in the family home. Family members fear the scandal of their daughter's conversion, particularly if she is bold enough to demonstrate it in public. Considering these pressures, it is extremely difficult for converts to grow in their faith. Gaining access to Christian religious materials is extremely difficult. If found with a Bible, she will be severely beaten. Christian women using the Internet as a way to break isolation, risk experiencing cyber harassment for their faith and self-expression.

Although Moroccan society is relatively liberal in some respects, Christians from an Islamic background in rural areas must adhere to the religious form of clothing and way of life and may suffer bullying if they change these customs, especially during Ramadan.

Additionally, rape, or the threat of rape, is a taboo area that is socially associated with a woman’s personal honor, which is linked to her family’s honor. The high stigma makes it a powerful tool for religious coercion. This is the case both for Moroccan women and for the numerous female sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, of whom a proportion are Christian; their rape is not just motivated by exploitation but also by religious intolerance.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Denied inheritance or possessions
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Forced out of home – expulsion
Imprisonment by government
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

In general, converts to Christianity are among the most vulnerable in Moroccan society. By leaving Islam, they are perceived to bring shame upon their families. Within the domestic sphere, they will likely be ostracized by their families. If young and unmarried, a male convert will likely be denied financial support. If already married, he risks abandonment by his wife, whose family will also place pressure on the couple in order to ensure she is freed from his influence. Additionally, a convert can, in practice, be deprived of his inheritance. If single, he will also face pressure to marry a Muslim, although this pressure affects women more. If he reaches the age of 40 however and is still single, the pressure will mount.

Christians, particularly converts, also face difficulties in the public sphere. They are more likely than women to be targeted for government interrogation, beatings or imprisonment. However, the severity of the backlash after conversion depends on their social position and political standing within his community. Employment is also a key area of pressure for men, as they are usually the main providers in their families. They may lose their jobs or be harassed in the workplace, throwing them into economic uncertainty. It will be harder for them to secure new employment if their faith is known. Christians are sometimes accused of having converted for financial gain, since Christianity is associated with opulent Western society. Discrimination has also been reported in educational settings.

Every year, there are reports of a handful of arrests of Christian men. These arrests occur for nothing more than having a Bible in their possession, or for discussing Christian faith with a Muslim. Fines can accompany the harassment.

The pressure from families and society can be so sustained that male converts leave their homes, particularly those who are threatened with death. This makes Christian fellowships harder to form or sustain. As one country expert describes, Christian men have become numb over time: "The prolonged suffering of Christians has made them not feel the severity of persecution. They do not pay attention to the extent of the damage caused, due to the absence of training on how to report gross violations of human rights."

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Judaism is the only minority religion officially recognized in the Constitution and Jews have their own religious courts for family matters. Although Islam is the official religion of the state, de facto only Sunni (Maliki) Islam is socially acceptable. Shia Muslims, Ahmadiyya Muslims and adherents of Bahai are religious minorities in Morocco facing government restrictions that make it nearly impossible for them to engage in public acts of worship.

According to the US State Department's [2019 International Religious Freedom Report](#):

- Regarding Shia Muslims: "[...] the government's refusal to allow Shia Muslim groups to register as associations continued to prevent these groups from gathering legally for public religious observations. There were no known Shia mosques. Shia representatives reported they did not attempt to register during the year because they feared security forces would harass them as had been the case in previous years. [...] there was continued societal harassment of Shia and Shiism in the press and through Friday sermons. Shia reported they observed Ashura in private to avoid societal harassment. Shia Muslims said that many avoided disclosing their religious affiliation in areas where their numbers were smaller." (p. 7, 13)
- Regarding Bahai: "In contrast to previous years, Baha'i leaders said they did not experience harassment during the year. Members of the Baha'i Faith said they were open about their faith with family, friends, and neighbors." (p. 14). However, a local human rights activist reported that several adherents of Bahai have been questioned by the police, but that their leadership does not speak up for them and does not offer them support.
- Regarding Judaism: "Jewish citizens continued to state that they lived and attended services at synagogues in safety. They said they were able to visit religious sites regularly and to hold annual commemorations. Several Jewish citizens, however, reported increased perceived societal intolerance, particularly when news media gave prominent coverage to Israeli-Palestinian issues." (p.13)

Atheists and atheism are suppressed by both society and the government. Several known atheists have received death threats and were harassed by the government in the recent past. In May 2020, a Moroccan actor was arrested and fined on charges of blasphemy after mocking Islam in a social media post ([Morocco World News, 26 May 2020](#)). The Freedom of Thought Report states that a Moroccan court upheld a 6 months prison sentence in July 2020 for Mohammad Awatif Kachchach for 'insulting Islam' after he had shared a satirical cartoon. ([Humanists International, 22 October 2020](#))



## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

Converts from Islam to Christianity are likely to keep facing pressure, mostly from the side of their families and society. Ongoing modernization in urban areas might change the attitudes towards converts in the long term. It is unlikely that the government will change its approach towards converts, especially so long as the king remains "the Commander of the Faithful, [who] sees to the respect for Islam" ([Constitution of Morocco](#), Art. 41).

### Dictatorial paranoia

Morocco remained one of the more peaceful countries during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. Morocco's strong security apparatus plays an important role in keeping the peace. It will keep monitoring all activities that can create unrest, looking especially for any acts of proselytization by Christians. In the past, it has shown it can effectively paralyze the (convert) church. It will probably keep doing so, also to appease Islamists who might otherwise cause unrest.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: legal equality - [https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/partner\\_article/hrwf-international/morocco-advancing-womens-rights](https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/partner_article/hrwf-international/morocco-advancing-womens-rights)
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 2019 International Religious Freedom Report - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/morocco/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Morocco World News, 26 May 2020 - <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2020/05/303884/police-arrest-moroccan-actor-rafik-boubker-for-blasphemy-against-islam/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Humanists International, 22 October 2020) - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/morocco/>
- Future outlook: Constitution of Morocco - [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco\\_2011.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011.pdf)

## Further useful reports

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

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