

World  
Watch  
Research

## Niger: Full Country Dossier

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**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

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

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

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

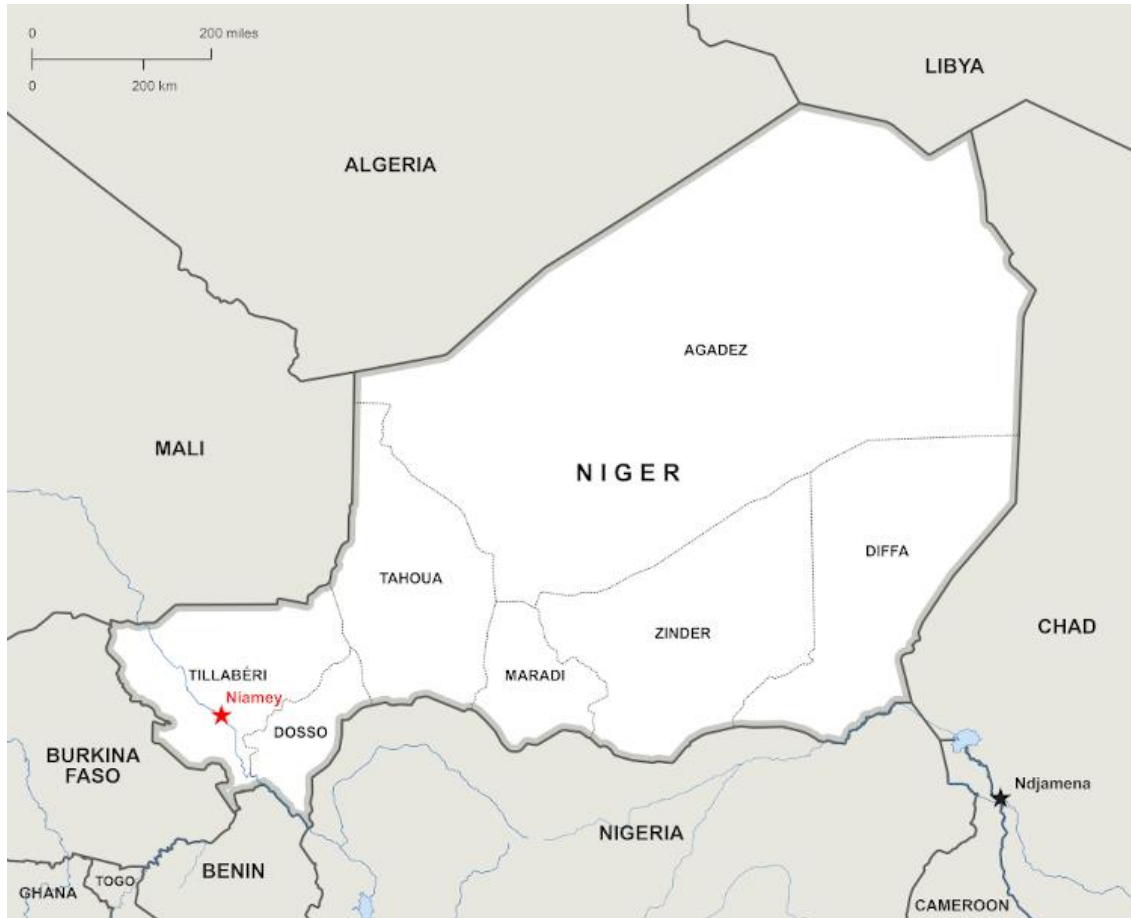
# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Niger

## Brief country details

Niger: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
26,084,000	65,300	0.3

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

## Map of country



Niger: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	70	28
WWL 2022	68	33
WWL 2021	62	54
WWL 2020	60	50
WWL 2019	52	58

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

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Niger: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Organized crime cartels or networks, Ethnic group leaders
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Challenges that Christians face in Niger are increasing every year. The families of converts from Islam try to make them renounce Christianity by threats or use of force. Christians have been hindered from celebrating Christian weddings in border regions under Islamist control. Communal worship and meetings of Christians have to be conducted with caution in such areas due to the threat of violence from militant groups. Christians are not treated equally in the public sector, are rarely able to secure employment within local government services and are frequently denied promotion. Christians have occasionally been hindered from gathering for meetings and the legal process for the registration of churches is very long and difficult. It is also important to note that the Sahel region as a whole is threatened by the activities of jihadists and criminal cartels. These groups are powerful in many ways.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians can be harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians often experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians can face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

- Christian converts lose custody of their children and inheritance rights (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings and to receive licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26).

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

- Significant numbers of Christians have left their homes due to the threat of jihadist attack. This threat is posed by the group often known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP - formerly known as *Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad*), as well as by Boko Haram, based in northeastern Nigeria and active in southeastern Niger's Lake Chad region.
- Militants in western Tillaberi region have burned down government-funded schools, telling villagers their children should not attend secular schools and forcing many villagers to flee their homes. Some of these schools were built by Christian organizations. They have also set fire to churches and public church properties in the towns of Fantio and Dolbel in Tillaberi region.
- According to the [Global Terrorism Index 2022](#), Niger recorded the largest increase in deaths through violent attack, increasing by 129% to 588 in 2021 while the number of attacks remained much the same. The increased lethality is largely driven by the growing sophistication and organizational capabilities of ISWAP. This is the highest terror-related death toll in the last decade. Civilians accounted for 78% of these casualties, resulting in Niger becoming the country with the third-highest civilian death toll in 2021.

## Specific examples of positive developments

The international community - especially US forces - are assisting Niger in combatting jihadist groups in the country and region.

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Global Terrorism Index 2022 - [file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/GTI-2022-web\\_110522-1.pdf](file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/GTI-2022-web_110522-1.pdf)



# WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Niger

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 273-276)	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf">https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf</a>	10 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662</a>	10 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/NER">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/NER</a>	10 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/niger/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/niger/</a>	10 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/niger">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/niger</a>	10 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.58)	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>	10 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	22 July 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Niger not included	Democracy Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/niger/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/niger/freedom-world/2022</a>	10 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Niger not included	Freedom on the Net 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries, Niger not included	HRW 2022 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022</a>	
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ne">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ne</a>	10 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/niger">https://rsf.org/en/niger</a>	10 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/niger">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/niger</a>	10 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/NER">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/NER</a>	10 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/niger/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/niger/</a>	10 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Niger not included	USCIRF 2022	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/niger</a>	10 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	<a href="https://datatbank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=NER">https://datatbank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=NER</a>	10 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp.66-67)	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fec5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fec5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf</a>	10 June 2022

## Recent history

Niger declared independence from France in 1960. Since then, the country has seen at least four military coups. Despite the improvements since Mahamadou Issoufou came to power in 2011, there have been concerns about the 'securitization' of Niger's foreign policy and domestic politics. The country is battling against various Islamic militant groups: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) on its northern western border with Mali, and ISWAP and Boko Haram on its southern border with Nigeria.

Islamists are by their very ideology opposed to the secular nature of the government. Many imams give *khoutbas* (sermons) opposing Boko Haram and other militant groups, especially the Shiite imams who are in the minority. These imams do not want to see what has been happening in Nigeria taking place in Niger, and they support the US-led operations against Islamic militancy. However, in recent years there has been an increasing adherence to stricter Islamic practice in Niger's cities, especially in places like Zinder, Maradi and Diffa, which have long been connected to the Islamic communities in northern Nigeria. There is therefore concern about the spread of more violent Islamic groups like ISWAP and Boko Haram. Because of the close proximity of the cities (just mentioned) to Boko Haram's chief area of operations in northern Nigeria, some religious leaders in Niger have taken a public stance against the group, while other religious leaders fear the potential backlash from doing so. While no radical Islamic movement within Niger has yet emerged to challenge the government, the possibility of this happening in the near future cannot be discounted, especially given the external pressure on imams and vulnerable local leaders exerted by Boko Haram and other groups like MUJWA.

There were major domestic political incidents in 2018 that pitted the government against human rights defenders and activists, largely involving the government's use of repressive measures. Arbitrarily detaining a group of human rights defenders for nearly four months after their arrest in March 2018, Nigerien authorities opened the [prosecution](#) proceedings against them in an attempt to silence dissenting voices and ban peaceful demonstrations (Business and Human Rights Resource Center, 24 July 2018). A similar case occurred again when activists were [arrested](#) while protesting in March 2020 (Amnesty International - AI, 30 September 2020).

Since 2018, there has been a rise in the levels of violence (see below: *Security situation*). In 2019 and 2020, the country faced numerous jihadists attacks. Since the beginning of 2021, Niger witnessed an uptick in jihadist violence especially in the 'tri-border' region between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, with an estimated 300 people being killed in attacks in the first three months of 2021. Attacks continued throughout 2022, although there also appears to be great [rivalry between ISWAP and Boko Haram](#) (Naija News, 12 January 2023). The government seems to have no effective way of bringing the situation under control.

## Political and legal landscape

Politics in Niger takes place within the framework of a semi-presidential representative democratic republic, with the President of Niger as head of state and the Prime Minister as head of government, which is established as a multi-party system. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the National Assembly.

Politics, tribe and militancy have always been intertwined in Niger's political landscape. Since 2011 there has been an improvement in civil liberties and political rights. The turning-point occurred in 2009-2010 when the president in office, Tandja, announced his intention to alter the Constitution of Niger's Fifth Republic via a referendum, which included extending his presidential term by three years. The main opposition groups opposed and boycotted the referendum. Then, in February 2010, amid pressure from the international community, the army overthrew the government in a coup. In the autumn of 2010, a new Constitution was passed through a national referendum and on 31 January 2011 Mahamadou Issoufou of the Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) won the presidential election against former Prime Minister Seyni Oumarou (National Movement for a Developing Society- MNSD - Nassara). President Issoufou's new government assumed power in April 2011. Since then, political and civil groups have been able to assemble peacefully, the situation for journalists and the freedom of the press has improved, and Niger is on the way to forming a multi-party democracy.

This political development was also of major importance to Christians in the country, especially since the region was otherwise very much influenced by Boko Haram and AQIM activity. However, the 2016 elections did not advance the consolidation of democratic rule and corruption remains endemic. Despite these setbacks, the electoral outcome was accepted by all political parties. General elections were held again in Niger on 27 December 2020 to elect the President and National Assembly. As no presidential candidate received a majority of the vote, a second round was held on 21 February 2021. [Mohamed Bazoum was declared the winner](#) in the second round with 55.67% of the vote. He was the former Interior Minister and the preferred successor and right-hand man of outgoing President Mahamadou Issoufou (Al-Jazeera, 22 March 2021). He assumed office on 2 April 2021, marking the the country's first peaceful transi-

tion of power between two democratically elected heads of state. However, protests were staged by opposition groups following the election and more than 400 people were arrested.

### Gender perspective

The legal landscape in Niger remains discriminatory towards women and girls, particularly in respect to marriage ([CEDAW, 2015](#)). Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 76% of girls married before 18 ([Girls Not Brides, 2022](#)). Whilst the legal age for marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys, underage marriage can occur with parental consent. The government has introduced campaigns to end child marriage, although progress remains slow ([OECD, 2019](#); [Girls Not Brides, 2022](#)). Legislation is further insufficient in regards to protecting against domestic violence and marital rape; many victims choose not to report crimes for fear of stigma and retaliation. Making it challenging for women to escape abusive marriages, divorce and custody laws also favor men ([OECD, 2019](#)).

### Religious landscape

Niger: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	65,300	0.3
Muslim	25,076,000	96.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	913,000	3.5
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	9,200	0.0
Atheist	170	0.0
Agnostic	14,300	0.1
Other	5,700	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 April 2022)

Niger is a Muslim majority nation. As can be seen from the WCD 2022 figures in the table above, an estimated 96.1% of the country's population follows Islam. Most Muslims in Niger are members of either the Tijaniya or Qadiriya Sufi orders, although Islamists seek to disassociate the population from Sufism and encourage Salafism. Additionally, there are smaller Islamic groups in Niger, including the Kalikato, who have a belief system like Boko Haram in rejecting all influences from the West. Indeed, the influence of Boko Haram seems to be spreading from northern Nigeria into Niger.

Despite the government's attempts to control what is taught in the many madrassas in the country, there is concern that these could be playing a role in the radicalization of the youth. Any such radicalization is likely to make life more difficult for Christians in the country, especially as the whole Sahel region is already under serious jihadist threat.

## Economic landscape

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 for Sub-Saharan Africa (pp.66-67):

- **Economic growth:** "The pace of economic growth came to a sudden halt in 2021, falling to 1.4 percent from 3.6 percent in 2020 due to the collapse of cereal production (-38 percent), caused by drought in September, crop infestation, and insecurity. This agricultural production shock left more than 2.5 million people food insecure." "Amidst high uncertainty, economic growth in 2022 is projected at 5.2 percent. This forecast hinges upon several positive developments, particularly the absence of new climatic shocks, and on an improvement in the security situation."
- **Inflation:** Inflationary pressures persisted, fueled by rising food prices (7.8 percent), particularly cereals (16.8 percent). Average annual inflation reached 3.8 percent for 2021. Niger's monetary and exchange rate policies are managed by the BCEAO, which maintains a fixed peg between the CFA Franc and the Euro. Its reserves reached 5.8 months of imports of goods and services in 2021, as a result of the recovery in export repatriation proceeds, the August 2021 SDR allocation, and portfolio inflows linked to Eurobond issuances in the region.
- **Poverty:** "The 2.3 percent decline in per capita GDP in 2021 resulted in an increase of 1.4 percentage point in the international extreme poverty rate (US\$1.90/day per capita, 2011 PPP) to 41.8 percent in 2021. As a result, the number of extreme poor rose from 9.8 million to 10.5 million." "Extreme poverty is expected to decline to 41.0 percent in 2022 as growth, particularly in agriculture improves. However, in order to achieve a reduction in the absolute number of poor, annual GDP growth must be significantly above Niger's projected high population growth rate of 3.8 percent during the period 2022-2024, and the rents from the petroleum sector must be broadly shared through proactive government policies for inclusive growth."

Niger is one of the poorest countries in Africa. As a landlocked and mostly desert country that is plagued by drought and famine, Niger consistently ranks near the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index. The country's only major exports are crude oil and unrefined uranium. With the exception of an oil refinery in Zinder that opened in November 2011, Niger is otherwise an entirely resource-dependent country. Power lines for electricity and the Internet come from Niger's southern neighbors, Nigeria (electricity), and Benin (Internet cable), along with the majority of oil, agricultural produce, and other commercial products. The agricultural sector contributes about 40% of GDP and provides the livelihood for approximately 80% of the population. There are plans in the international development community to move Niger towards solar power and other innovative energy sources that rely on indigenous solutions.

60% of Niger's economy comes from international aid and for the foreseeable future, this is likely to continue, especially because the international community fears that if Niger's economy fails, it will allow Islamic militants to exploit the situation and become more powerful. The influx

of refugees from Mali and Nigeria - as well as a growing number of IDPs - are another challenge to the socio-economic growth and has a negative impact on the whole population.

According to World Bank (country overview):

- "A combination of health, climate, and security shocks and crises has hampered the growth of Niger's economy which, after growing by 5.8% in 2019, slowed to 3.6% in 2020 and could fall back below 1.5% in 2021, a significant deterioration compared to the initial projection of 5.5%. This poor performance is due to the slowdown in cereal production."
- "Inflationary pressures persisted in 2021 with rising food prices, especially of cereals, the result of the decline in local production and in yields due to rainfall deficits of more than 78% and to the insecure environment and the suspension of cereal exports by neighboring countries. Average annual inflation reached 3.8% in 2021, compared to 2.9% in 2020".
- "COVID-19 and security spending has reduced fiscal space and increased debt vulnerability. Countercyclical fiscal policy to mitigate health and security shocks has led to an increase in public spending and a fiscal deficit above the WAEMU norm of 3% of GDP. This deficit, financed mainly by grants and loans, has implications for the country's debt level, which was more than 50% of GDP in 2021."

According to Heritage Foundation's [2022 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- "Niger's economic freedom score is 54.9, making its economy the 121st freest in the 2022 Index. Niger is ranked 22nd among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is above the regional average but below the world average. Property rights can be enforced, but disputes are common, particularly when community-owned land or customary land titles are involved. The judicial framework is ineffective, and the court system is weak and vulnerable to political pressure. High rates of illiteracy among the semi-nomadic Nigeriens contribute to a political culture that is overly tolerant of widespread corruption".

### Gender perspective

Women and girls are among the most economically disadvantaged, in part due to reduced access to education and employment (UN Human Development Indicators, HDI 2020). Niger is one of just three countries worldwide where married women require permission from their husband to open a bank account (Georgetown Women Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p.34). Making it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence, women cannot inherit land under customary law, and under Islamic law women inherit less than men ([OECD, 2019](#)).

### Social and cultural landscape

According to UNDP's HDI profile and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hausa 53.1%, Zarma/Songhai 21.2 %, Tuareg 11%, Fulani (Peuhl) 6.5%, Kanuri 5.9%, Gurma 0.8%, Arab 0.4%, Tubu 0.4%, Other/unavailable 0.9% (2006 est.)
- **Main languages:** French (official), Hausa, Djerma
- **Median age:** 15.2 years
- **Urban population:** 16.5%

- **Expected years of schooling:** 6.5 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 30.6%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 71.7%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 0.5%
- **Unemployment, youth (15-24 years of age):** 0.6%

According to [UNHCR Niger Operational Update May 2022](#):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** “As of the end of May [2022], Niger is hosting 291,629 refugees and asylum seekers from Nigeria (69%), Mali (21%), Burkina Faso (5%), and other countries (5%). More than 300,000 people were internally displaced and/or Nigerien returnees. In 2022, a total of 13,706 persons from North-West Nigeria crossed the border into Niger’s Maradi region fleeing insecurity and violence. Registration, need assessments and response is ongoing. Since the beginning of this year, Niger has witnessed various waves of Malian refugee arriving in Tillabery region. Since January [2022], the number has accumulated to 3,617 persons arriving. Furthermore, 10,608 Malians have arrived in various waves to the Tahoua region in Niger”.

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **Human Development Index:** Niger is ranked 189th out of 189 countries with a value of 0.394
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 62.4 years
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.724
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** 0.642 (this indicates a high level of gender inequality. The GI is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market).

Although the country’s official language is French, each tribe and ethnic group has its own language and culture. Eight of the nine presidents since independence in 1960 have been of Hausa or Zarma descent. These two tribes dominate the country and therefore it should not be surprising that Tuaregs have engaged in two major rebellions since the 1990s and early 2000s and that the Songhai tribes were the main targets for recruiting by the radical Islamic group MUJWA. MUJWA, for example, used Songhai traditional symbolism in its recruiting videos. Niger’s most fertile areas are also in the Zarma region south of Niamey, and therefore the Zarmas are the wealthiest tribe in the country. The Hausas are descended from the Hausa states that formerly occupied the region in the jihads of the 19th century, so they have a tradition of being in power. The Tuaregs of northern Niger live in the most arid region of the country and are the poorest of the major tribes.

### Gender perspective

While education is not guaranteed in any part of the country, the levels are particularly low in the Tuareg region, especially for women. These low education levels reflect social norms and gender stereotypes that place women in the roles of wives and mothers ([OECD, 2019](#); [CEDAW, 2015](#)). The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated gender-based vulnerabilities, hampering campaigns against child marriage ([UNICEF, 30 April 2021](#)) and providing the context for domestic violence

levels to soar ([USDG, 27 May 2021](#)). Child marriage remains a widespread issue, with parents viewing it as a protective mechanism for daughters against potential predators in a context of poverty, conflict and widespread sexual violence against girls ([Girls Not Brides, 2022](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 13.1% of the population – survey date: December 2021 (latest survey available at time of writing)
- **Facebook usage:** 33.9 % penetration rate – survey date: January 2022

According to World Bank (country profile):

- **Mobile phone (subscriptions per 100 people):** 40.6

Whilst recent statistics are lacking, a 2015 report by the GSMA indicated a 45% gender gap in mobile phone ownership ([GSMA, 2015, p.14](#)). 2022 statistics on social media usage indicate that this gender gap has not closed: 80.4% of Facebook users were men and only 19.6% women, according to [Napoleon Cat, December 2022](#).

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (publication date: January 2023):

- "Niger is one of the largest countries in West Africa but also one of the poorest in the world. As with many African markets, a lack of fixed telecoms infrastructure has led to growth in mobile services. Niger's mobile penetration is modest compared to other countries in the region, while fixed broadband penetration is negligible. Recent international investment to complete the Trans-Saharan Dorsal optical fibre (SDR) network has extended the reach of fibre infrastructure in the country, and also increased international capacity. New cables linking the country with Chad and Burkina Faso have extended Niger's connectivity with international cable infrastructure. Following years of financial difficulties, the state-owned fixed line operator, Sonitel, was merged with its wholly owned mobile unit, SahelCom, in late 2016 to form a new entity, Niger Telecom. The merged company secured a global telecom licence in November 2017 and is aiming to develop greater efficiency through sharing resources and infrastructure."

Niger is one of the poorest nations in the world. Its technological infrastructure is poor. Road, schools, and hospitals lack facilities. Christians are concentrated in the main cities and as a result, they are better served with technology compared to those living in rural areas.

## Security situation

Security conditions have deteriorated in recent years, particularly in the areas bordering Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali, where armed groups have established bases and carry out repeated attacks against the security forces and civilians. Since 2017, the government has declared a [state of emergency](#) in the Diffa, Tahoua, and Tillabéri regions (UNHCR Factsheet, June-July 2021).

The attacks by Boko Haram, ISWAP and other radical Islamic groups continue to cause fear among the Christian community. There is a likelihood that the violence of militant Islamic groups

from northern Nigeria (as well as from Mali) could in the long run seriously affect society throughout Niger. A major challenge remains the fight against Islamic militancy in the Diffa region. Military confrontation between government troops and Boko Haram has caused a large number of IDPs and a humanitarian disaster. Many Christians who have escaped the conflict are living in IDP camps in Bosso, Yebbi, Maiduguri and Yola. There is also ongoing community violence. Since 2018, there has been an overall rise in the level of violence.

According to [Vision of Humanity, Global Terrorism Index 2022](#) (accessed 31 January 2023):

- “Niger had the largest increase in deaths from terrorism, with deaths more than doubling over the past year. This is the highest terrorism death toll in the country since 2007. Although the majority of deaths were attributed either to unknown groups or to unspecified Muslim extremists, it is suspected that these attacks could be the work of either Islamic State in West Africa [ISWAP] or Boko Haram who were active in the country in 2021”.
- “The rise in terrorist activity in Niger is part of a larger increase across the Sahel region, with similar surges seen in Mali and Burkina Faso over the past few years. One possible reason for the rise in violence in Niger is that Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’adati wal-Jihad (JAS) and ISWA appear to operate in those areas, whereas Ansaru seem to operate in Kaduna State, Nigeria.”

### Gender perspective

The lack of security in the country has affected the Christian community significantly. Since Islamic militants target Christians as well as the state authorities, Christians have to be careful to keep a low profile. Male and female Christians face different risks against this backdrop of instability and violence. Women and girls are vulnerable to abduction and sexual violence from extremist groups, whereas boys are more prone to being recruited into the ranks of militant groups.

## Trends analysis

### 1) The presence of violent Islamic militants remains a constant threat

In the past five years, the Sahel region has seen a huge increase in violent Islamist attacks and the government of Niger has lost a lot of territory to jihadist groups. Taking this territory back is likely to take a significant length of time, especially due to the 'hiatus' on the side of the government caused by having to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. Simply put, the presence of Boko Haram, ISWAP and AQIM has become a constant threat both to the state authorities and to Christians in the country and region.

As noted by the US State Department (IRFR 2021), Niger faces a “series of persistent and growing security threats from the group alternatively known as the ‘Islamic State in West Africa’ or ‘the Islamic State’s West Africa Province’, formerly known as Jama’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihad, as well as from Boko Haram, a terrorist organization based in northeastern Nigeria and active in southeastern Niger’s Lake Chad region.”



As in Burkina Faso and Mali, it is very likely that jihadist groups will keep expanding and eventually destabilize the government, as occurred in Mali which has recently seen two coups in less than one year (2020-2021). Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Libya, and Mali are all under serious threat from the ever expanding jihadist influence, which is now threatening the relatively stable government of Niger. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems noted: "Despite security and political challenges, Niger's democracy has proven resilient, particularly in the context of a series of coup d'états that have occurred in the region since the summer of 2020" ([IFES](#), accessed 31 January 2023).

## 2) Niger has international military support to secure its borders

A considerable part of the southern third of the country is prone to persistent Islamist hostilities. The proximity of radical Islamic groups in the upper north of Nigeria and northern Mali is far from reassuring. The country is not a well-developed democracy with institutions that can deal with crises. Because the region is seeing a proliferation of radical Islamic groups, the UN and Western countries have been supporting the government with military assistance. There are [forces](#) from the USA, France, Germany, Mali, and from other countries in the region actively assisting (CNN, 5 October 2017). However, this is unlikely to be enough if it is not coupled with profound changes in the country in both political and economic ways. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, those changes are unlikely to be possible in the short-term. The presence of international forces might face extreme challenges if the problems in the neighboring countries continue to grow. Jihadist groups are expanding in West Africa in general. The coups in Burkina Faso and Mali only increases pressure on the government of Niger.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: prosecution - <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/niger-release-of-activists-must-signal-end-to-repression-of-dissenting-voices/>
- Recent history: arrested - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/09/niger-charges-must-be-dropped-following-release-of-three-activists/>
- Recent history: rivalry between ISWAP and Boko Haram - <https://www.naijanews.com/2023/01/12/10-iswap-fighters-surrender-after-boko-haram-attacks-in-niger-republic/>
- Political and legal landscape: Mohamed Bazoum was declared the winner - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/22/nigers-top-court-confirms-mohamed-bazoums-election-win>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2015 - [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&Lang=en)
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2022 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/niger/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2022 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/niger/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Economic landscape: 2022 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/niger>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Niger Operational Update May 2022 - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/2690>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NE.pdf>

- Social and cultural landscape: CEDAW, 2015 - [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW%2fC%2fNER%2f3-4&Lang=en)
- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF, 30 April 2021 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/covid-19-threat-progress-against-child-marriage-niger>
- Social and cultural landscape: USDG, 27 May 2021 - <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/violence-and-control-lockdown-more-support-needed-women-and-girls-niger>
- Social and cultural landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2022 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/niger>
- Technological landscape: GSMA, 2015, p.14 - <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Connected-Women-Gender-Gap.pdf>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat, December 2022 - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-niger/2022/12/>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Niger-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: state of emergency - [file:///C:/Users/davidat/Downloads/UNHCR%20Niger%20%20Factsheet%20Sahel%20%20June\\_%20July%202021.pdf](file:///C:/Users/davidat/Downloads/UNHCR%20Niger%20%20Factsheet%20Sahel%20%20June_%20July%202021.pdf)
- Security situation: Vision of Humanity, Global Terrorism Index 2022 - <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/sahel-emerges-as-the-new-epicentre-of-terrorism/>
- Trends analysis: IFES - <https://www.ifes.org/niger>
- Trends analysis: forces - <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/04/politics/us-forces-hostile-fire-niger/>

## WWL 2023: Church information / Niger

### Christian origins

Although there were [missionary expeditions](#) along the Niger River in the 19th century, Christianity did not become established in the country until the 20th century. The Sudan Interior Mission started working in Niger in 1923 and the Evangelical Baptist Mission in 1929. The Roman Catholic Church came to Niger in 1931 from its main mission base in Dahomey (now Benin) and has since set up two dioceses. (Source: *Dike K O: Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891, Anglican History, 1962*)

### Church spectrum today

Niger: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	21,400	32.8
Protestant	22,500	34.5
Independent	21,100	32.3
Unaffiliated	300	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,300</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	20,400	31.2
Renewalist movement	22,400	34.3

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

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

Many of the older Protestant and Catholic churches were established by American mission groups. They can be found in all seven departments of Niger: Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri, Zinder and Niamey (the capital). Several independent, non-denominational churches originating from Nigeria exist - especially in the capital Niamey and in the departments of Maradi and Zinder. Outside of the bigger cities and in areas closer to the southern border of the country, Christians with a Muslim background are treated as outcasts by the local communities and at times face violent attacks.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The areas outside the main cities, especially outside the capital city, are the main areas where Christians experience persecution. Taking advantage of the COVID-19 crisis, Islamic militants have been able to expand their areas of influence, which has put more Christians under pressure as well.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians in Niger are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included for scoring in the WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** Both older Protestant and Catholic churches belong to this category. They suffer from the growing Islamic militancy in Niger and, in the past few years, there have been attacks by armed groups such as Boko Haram in the departments of Diffa, near the border to Nigeria. Pastors and church leaders from such villages have been forced to flee to larger cities fearing for their safety. Such incidents have also been observed in the department of Tillabéri. Many historical Christian communities in areas close to Nigeria live under fear of violent attack.

**Converts to Christianity:** In some cases, the pressure on converts from Islam is particularly pronounced, especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life* (see below). Parents and relatives may oppose a family member's conversion to Christianity more than the government. Radical Islamic imams and teachers influence ordinary Muslim people to attack and chase converts away - and any Christians found ministering to converts.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are present in Niger and face pressure. This category faces more or less the same kind of pressure as historical Christian communities and - in comparison to converts from Islam to Christianity – are

less vulnerable to societal pressure.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: missionary expeditions - [http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike\\_origins1957.html](http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike_origins1957.html)

# WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Niger

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

Niger: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	70	28
WWL 2022	68	33
WWL 2021	62	54
WWL 2020	60	50
WWL 2019	52	58

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

Explanation for the rise in total score: The score for violence increased by 0.8 points to 15.4 points. Ongoing violence by Islamic militants in the Sahel region has seriously affected Christians, with jihadist groups further expanding their areas of influence in the country. Average pressure on Christians in Niger also rose and is now categorized as being very high (rising to 10.8 points from 10.5 points in WWL 2022). Pressure increased in the *Community sphere* (now at the extreme level of 14.5 points), as it did in the *Church sphere* (now at the very high level of 13.1 points). This reflects how Christians have been facing serious difficulties in living according to their faith and values in the Islamic communities. The very high score in the *Church sphere of life* is also an indication that church activities in the country have been restricted due to the presence of Islamic militants.

## Persecution engines

Niger: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak

Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

### **Islamic oppression (Very strong), blended with Clan oppression (Medium)**

In Niger, the Muslim population is 96.1% according to WCD 2022 statistics. For most of the population, Islam is regarded as being part of their ethnicity: If you are a Nigerien, you are a Muslim. Anything to the contrary is regarded as betrayal, which causes converts to Christianity in particular to face hostility from their Muslim family and local community if their faith is discovered. The secular nature of the state, which has always meant that state and religion are kept separate, is increasingly under pressure. Muslim religious leaders of the *Izala* group, a radical Islamic group originating in northern Nigeria, are active in Niger and threatening the freedom of Christians. Other Islamic pressure groups like the *Tariqa* (“the way” in Arabic – the Sufi way of approaching Allah) are active in certain parts of the country (e.g. in Maradi and Niamey). *Izala* and *Tariqa* create pressure on minority religions and on Muslims they consider to be deviating from Islam. Niger has a history of good relations between the majority of Muslim believers and the much smaller minority faiths. Niger’s battle against Boko Haram, however, has stoked local intercommunal tensions and undermined the security and freedom of Christians in the country.

### **Organized corruption and crime (Strong)**

Ex-President Issoufou made it one of his main priorities to combat corruption within the government. Anti-corruption measures have now become law targeting government officials, their family members, and all political parties. In the same way, there are now laws to counter conflict of interest issues in awarding contracts; the bribery of public officials by private companies is officially illegal. However, corruption is a problem in the judiciary and impunity is a serious challenge facing the country; office-holders who break the law and engage in corrupt practices attract adverse publicity but are not adequately prosecuted. This situation affects society negatively, including the Christian population.

## Drivers of persecution

Niger:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK				
Government officials				Very weak					
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Religious leaders of other churches					Very weak				
Violent religious groups	Very strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Strong								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong								

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

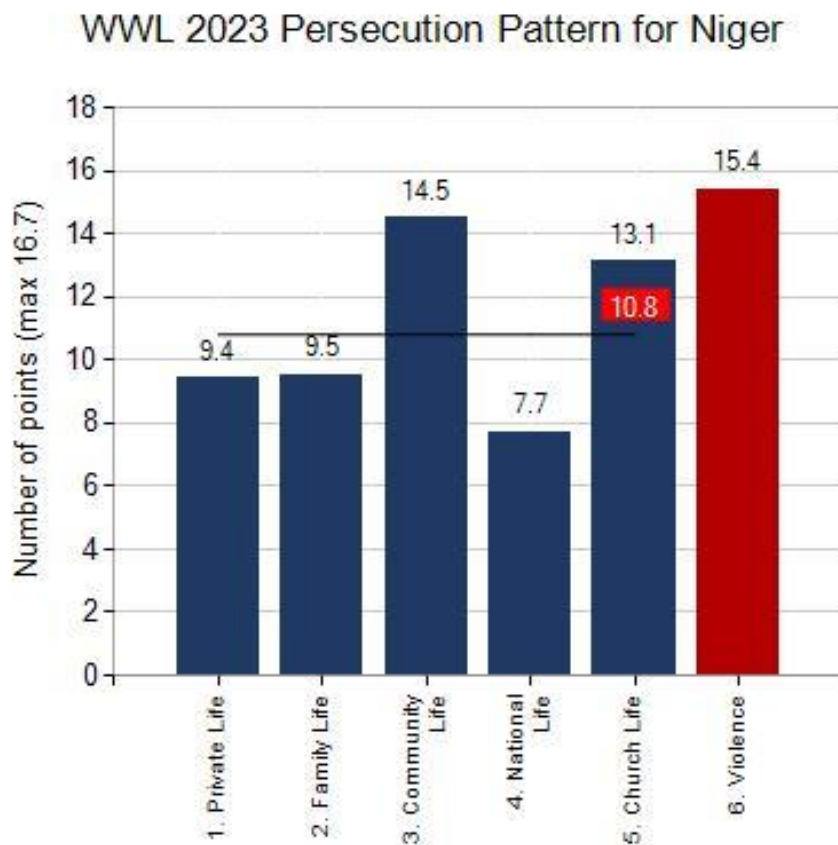
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** This is probably the strongest driver in the country. Radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP and al-Qaeda affiliated militants attack Western-aligned institutions and tourists, soldiers and peacekeepers. Broader society and citizen-mobs have been a major source of persecution for Christian too. They kill Christians and attack churches and Christian schools. The Wahhabis, a radical branch of Islam originating from Saudi Arabia, are regularly preaching opposition to Christianity in public and via mass media (radio and television).
- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** There is a strong link between criminal and violent religious groups in the Sahel region. This driver plays a vital role in financing the operations of the jihadists and in making the environment easy for them to operate in.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Non-Christian religious leaders such as Islamists and violent militant leaders of Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa have all combined to threaten, intimidate and persecute Christians in Niger. Also, leaders among such groups as the Fulani are trying to enhance the ancient Islamic pedigree of their ethnic group by cleansing their communities of Christians. At Tunga, in Dosso State, no Christian presence is tolerated by the religious and tribal leaders who have enormous influence in these areas.
- **Extended family (Strong) and ordinary citizens (Strong):** Extended family members in the community oppose and often reject converts to Christianity.

- **Government officials (Very weak):** Many of Niger's government officials are Muslim and some would like to pursue policies and agendas that are discriminatory against Christians and would exclude them from public life. President Issoufou promised to counter the expansion of radical Islamic teaching promoting violence in his February 2016 re-election campaign but no concrete measures were delivered. Furthermore, in some places, some government officials are also subscribers to jihadist ideology.

#### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** Various criminal organizations are operating in the country. Lawlessness and criminal activities are common in the vast uninhabited areas of the country. Some criminal organizations are operating in cooperation with militant groups and persecute Christians.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Radical Islamic groups in the country earn money through drug trafficking and kidnapping to purchase weapons. Thus, violent religious groups in Niger are also drivers of organized crime and corruption.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Corruption continues to be a problem in the judiciary and impunity is a serious challenge facing the country.

### The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Niger shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Niger is high at 10.8, increasing from 10.5 points in WWL 2022.
- The *Community sphere* score is highest 14.5 points, up from 13.9 points in WWL 2022, followed by the *Church sphere* score with 13.1 points (rising from 12.8 points in WWL 2022). This reflects how Christians in the Islamic communities are facing serious difficulties to live according to their faith and values. The high score in the *Church sphere of life* is also an indication that church activities in the country are restricted due to the presence of Islamic militants.
- The score for violence is 15.4 points, increasing from 14.8 points in WWL 2022. The increase is due to the high level of violent Islamist activity in the country and surrounding Sahel region. The presence of jihadists in the country is growing rapidly.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

**Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.50 points)**

Niger has become a hub for jihadist activity just like Burkina Faso and Mali. Being at the heart of the Sahel, Niger has seen a massive rise in radicalization. As a result, anywhere in the country, performing acts of worship is risky for converts to Christianity. Converts face hostility from family members and the community at this private level since conversion is demonized. Other Christians do not face this form of persecution and are generally allowed to practice their faith in private. Converts usually go underground, refuse to be identified and live their new faith in secret. Some converts also decide to leave the country. Outside the major towns and cities, all types of Christianity must make sure that they are not seen by others when they conduct acts of worship.

**Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.50 points)**

In the context of the ongoing jihadist movement and the fact that radical Islamic ideology is taking roots, this issue is challenging. Jihadists are highly influential and for any Christian groups and individuals in remote areas it is dangerous to own and keep Christian materials. For converts, the danger is even greater. It is particularly risky in communities in the border areas. Most Christians have decided to move from areas where jihadists are very active.



**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.). (2.50 points)**

Jihadist and some community members will not accept expressions of Christian faith. Jihadists (and militants with strong ties to jihadist groups) are controlling large areas of the country; in such areas, Christians must be very careful how they show their Christian faith. This is especially true for converts from Islam. Besides the dangers of expressing themselves in public, it is also becoming dangerous for Christians to be found with non-Muslim religious materials.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.50 points)**

Similar to 1.4 above, showing Christian symbols is also problematic. This is currently the case for all Christian groups all over the country, and is particularly risky in regions such as Tahoua, Agadez and Zinder; however, in the capital city it only affects converts. In the border areas of Lake Chad, security is so limited that Christians are forced to keep a low profile.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.50 points)**

As in many other countries, persecution is not limited to adults alone. The discrimination of children of Christian parents is something that has become more or less expected. In schools or in the streets while playing with their friends, Christian children are seen as second class citizens and are hence often discriminated against, causing them to be less inclined to follow their parents in standing firm in Christian faith.

**Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.50 points)**

This form of persecution is applied to put pressure on people to reconvert to Islam. In general this is not the case unless one of the parents or the children are targeted for abduction. In the case of converts, the extended family considers the children of converts to be Muslims and, in case of divorce or death, claim the children as Muslims. This is done to put pressure on possible converts.

**Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.50 points)**

Religion plays a paramount role in many aspects of social life. One of them is on the issue of child custody, particularly affecting converts. Family and community members will do everything possible to deny a convert the right to inherit or keep custody of children when they push for divorce.

**Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (2.25 points)**

The extended family, relatives and immediate family of converts from Islam try to pressure them into renouncing Christianity by threats or use of force. One method is to get their spouses to di-

force them. This plays a big role in family disintegration. To achieve this end, severe pressure such as house-arrest, denied access to children or homes can be applied.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)**

Hostility towards Christians comes mainly from the surrounding Islamic society - i.e. from (extended) family and local chiefs - and includes harassment, threats and obstruction. For instance, Christians face pressure to dress like Muslims; this issue can become violent (and possibly even fatal) especially in areas influenced by radical Islamic groups.

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

Niger is located in a region where abduction has become one of the most common practices employed by jihadist groups. Abduction is very common in the Sahel region and a lucrative business. In some areas, communal worship and meetings of Christians have to be conducted with caution to avoid drawing the attention of militant groups in the locality. This threat is increasing with the growing influence and capabilities of jihadist groups.

**Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 points)**

The jihadist influence is radicalizing society and promoting an 'us-versus-them' dichotomy. In the region of Alambare (Makalondy), Christians are denied potable water and education. In north Maradi, Christian Fulanis also lack potable drinking water because of their faith.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)**

In the context of communal clashes and jihadist operations as well as the fact that Wahhabist ideology is taking roots in the country, pressure on Christians to renounce their faith is strong. Society is being radicalized by Wahhabist preachers. Radical Muslims in the country and Sahel region are basically giving Christians the choice of converting, dying or fleeing. This issue has been affecting all Christians, but converts in particular.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Niger has become a hotspot for jihadist activity. Safety is a concern in many parts of the country and Christians must take serious precautions when they travel to avoid abduction or other forms of attack. Even military personnel are not safe: IS affiliates are known to ambush and kill Nigerien and international troops.

**Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)**

Niger is a Muslim majority country and the discrimination of Christians is ever present. Virtually all local officials have become afraid of jihadists and their informers in society. As a result, they regularly support giving preferential treatment to Muslims - for instance, for gaining professional positions of employment. Christians are not treated equally in their dealings with the public sector, are rarely able to secure employment within local government services and are frequently denied promotion. In some places it is the jihadists themselves who function as local administrators and provide social services.

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (2.50 points)**

The general security situation in the country does not allow for Christian organizations to operate in the country freely. Niger's Constitution and laws respect freedom of religion in theory, but in practice Christian NGOs experience difficulties. Pluralism and civil society are virtually unknown concepts in Niger and some groups equate these organizations with missionary agencies. There are also no Christian political parties in the country. In many parts of the country where jihadists are operating, it is very risky for Christian civil society organizations to operate in safety.

**Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (2.50 points)**

There are some religious leaders that are engaged in smearing Christians. Christians are often subjected to hate-speech and ridicule from Islamist groups. This is particularly the case with followers of Boko Haram, whose area of influence spans the Lake Chad border region. Christianity in Niger is seen as a foreign religion of 'infidels' and radical Islamic religious leaders freely promote hatred and intolerance.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Christians are watched and must face the dangers of being attacked in churches and targeted for kidnap and assault. Local youth and religious leaders participate in monitoring church activities. The government also monitors all religious expression it views as potentially threatening to public order or national unity.

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

This issue is related to both the lengthy process and the unwillingness of some local authorities to allow Christian churches or NGOs to operate in their areas, at times for fear of angering local people. There is no law that prohibits registration. However, the legal process for the registration of churches is very long and difficult. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain permits for new churches and to buy land for building new churches and Christian schools. Churches are

always advised to keep to the outskirts of cities and towns. Some of those that work in government offices are radical Muslims who deliberately make it difficult for churches to obtain permits for new buildings.

**Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points)**

Outside events are very risky in many parts of the country due to the presence of radical Islamic groups. Large gatherings of Christians can be seen as an act of defiance to the local jihadist groups and this can put pressure on the government as well. Thus, it is not surprising to see the government restricting such church activities.

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

In Niger proselytizing in public is prohibited. It is very easy for someone to be charged with proselytizing as a result of distributing Bibles. Moreover, the distribution of Bibles outside the security of the capital city is extremely dangerous and could easily prompt an Islamist attack. It is also very dangerous for people to own Bibles in those areas where jihadists are active. As mentioned above in 5.1, even just being a Christian can attract attacks, let alone distributing Christian materials. The capital city is safer for selling and distributing, but those who do this can be easily targeted in the capital city as well.

## Violence

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

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

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

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

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*

- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

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

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

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

Niger: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10 *	10 *
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	30 *	20
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	3
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)?	5	2
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10	1
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	20 *	1
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100	43
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?	100 *	8

6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100	12
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	35

## 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

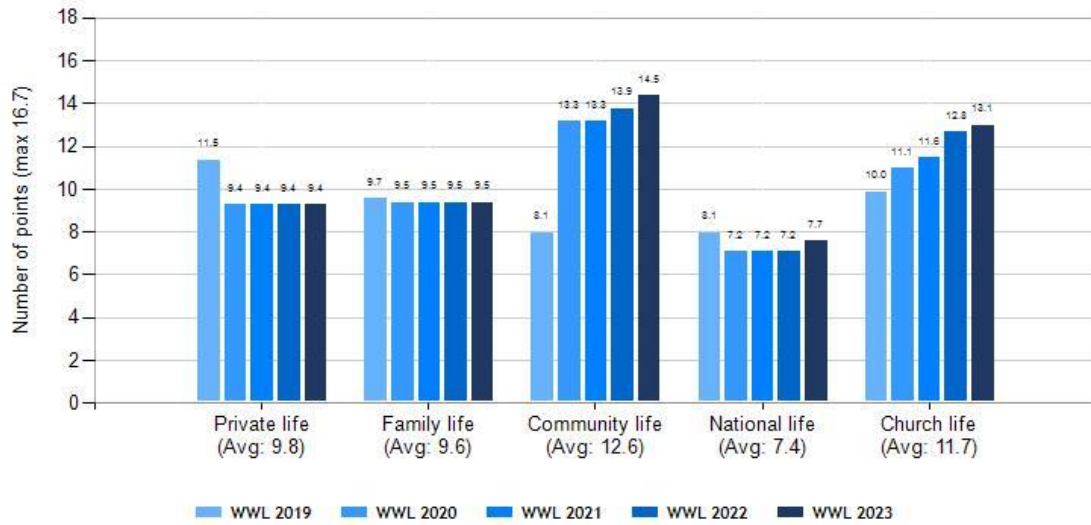
Niger: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	10.8
2022	10.5
2021	10.2
2020	10.1
2019	9.5

The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has been increasing every year. This is an indication that the situation for Christians in Niger is deteriorating, as is happening in neighboring countries in the Sahel region.

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

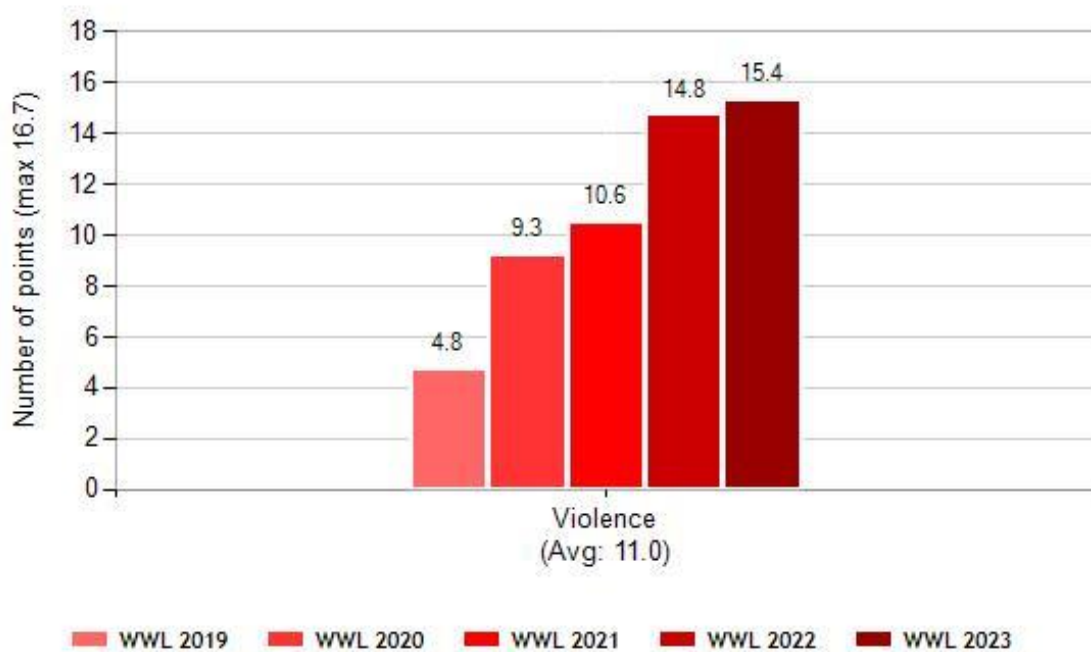
In the chart below, the five year average shows that the *Community life* is the most affected *sphere of life* by scoring on average 12.6 points, followed by *Church life* with an average score of 11.7 points. This shows that the presence of jihadists in the country and the region is highly affecting every day life for all Christians. In contrast, *National life* scores the lowest.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Niger  
(Spheres of life)



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Niger  
(Violence)



The five year trend shows a dramatic and continuous increase of violence in the country targeting Christians. In the last five reporting periods the score for violence increased a total of 10.6 points, from 4.8 points in WWL 2019 to the extreme level of 15.4 points in WWL 2023.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Although the law mandates equal treatment of women and men, Niger’s society is heavily male-dominant and harmful traditional practices like forced marriage and widow inheritance cause women to be more vulnerable to persecution. It has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with [76% of girls](#) being married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, accessed 25 November 2022). This is in part due to [wide-scale poverty, food insecurity crisis](#), and continuing instability within Niger and in neighboring countries (Concern USA, 10 January 2022).

Like many other countries in the Sahel, women and girls in Niger are also particularly vulnerable to abduction, rape and sexual abuse by extremist groups. A country expert comments: “Abducting and marrying girls to militants is part of an organized program by Islamist militants to breed its next generation of fighters.”

Beyond the threat from extreme jihadist groups, female Christians face the possibility of rape and targeted seduction for the purposes of forced conversion. Due to the high poverty rate, some Muslims allegedly use money, clothes, and phones to entice Christian girls, according to reports. Families also do not report instances of rape as it will impact the marriage prospects of the victim and is viewed as a source of shame. More broadly, many Christian girls also face sexual harassment and discriminatory remarks for failing to wear the hijab. Female genital mutilation remains a live risk for Christian girls living among ethnic communities, for instance, the Gurma tribe in the Tillaberi region.

Additionally, Christian women in Niger are affected by living under Sharia. For example, according to Sharia, a Christian woman has no right to claim custody of her children in divorce cases, even though Niger is officially a secular country. Converts to Christianity can face extreme hostility from their families and local communities. They can be denied custody of their children, forced out of the home, forced into marriage with a Muslim man and raped. “Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical cleric as a corrective measure”, a country expert explained. Many have also been denied their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity. Reports also suggest that women are often unaware of their legal options to defend their rights but when the case is taken to court, the problem is often settled satisfactorily (OECD, 2019, “[Social Institutions and Gender Index: Niger](#)”).



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Trafficking; Violence – death
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Converts to Christianity can face the most severe forms of persecution, as conversion from Islam to any religion is considered a betrayal by some families. They may be rejected by their families, chased out of their family home, or put under house arrest.

There is another phenomenon in Niger – although not specifically a form of targeted religious persecution – which affects all communities and has a strong negative impact on Christian families: Boys in Niger are subject to recruitment as child soldiers. There is a high potential for boys to be abducted and forced to join the ranks of militant groups, or physically harmed during raids. They can also be abducted for forced labor, and/or trafficked between militant groups in exchange for money, weapons, or other resources. Christian men and boys have also been targeted for killings by extremist groups. A surge in attacks by armed Islamist groups over the last year has forced many men, especially pastors and church leaders to flee to safer cities like Niamey, or across the border to Burkina Faso. Since Nigerien tribes are close-knit, this situation can harm all families in a community. “There were numerous reports of abduction or kidnap of priests and other religious leaders, especially in the Tillaberi and Diffa regions”, a country expert shared. Older men who cannot flee are at a higher risk of being killed ([Human Rights Watch, 23 February 2022](#)).

Christian men in Niger can also face dismissal from their jobs because of their faith or have their business boycotted by the Muslim community. As men and boys are usually the financial providers, this leaves his family vulnerable and exposed.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021), there are no hindrances for specific faiths from the side of the government:

- "The government prohibits open air, public proselytization events by all religious groups due to expressed national security concerns. There is no legal restriction on private, peaceful proselytization or conversion of an individual from one religious faith to another as long as the group sponsoring the conversion is registered with the government."

However, Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahai, who are mostly present in major urban centers, do face the threat of violence from radical Islamic groups and have to tread carefully so as not to attract too much attention or provoke persecution.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression**

Many Nigerien see their religion very much connected with their ethnicity. In this context, to be a Nigerien and a Christian is not seen as being compatible. Although this attitude could change in the future through dialogue and cooperation, this is not likely in the short-term since *Islamic oppression* is likely to increase, with the numbers of jihadists growing fast and the government showing little determination to fight back. Many churches are concentrated in the political capital, have limited outreach programs and seem ill-prepared for higher levels of pressure from radical Islam.

Furthermore, as reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2021), there is extensive external funding for the growth of jihadist groups in the country:

- "Government officials continued to express concern regarding funding from foreign government sources for the construction of mosques and the training of imams, but according to observers, the government had insufficient resources to track the extent of the funding and fully understand its consequences."

What has exacerbated the situation is that during the COVID-19 crisis the government shifted its focus from fighting Islamic militants to fighting the fall-out from the virus. This gave the jihadists an enormous opportunity to expand and they took it without hesitation. This will have a long-term impact for years to come.

### **Organized corruption and crime**

The existence of organized crime and widespread corruption is tied to the weakness of the government and the presence of the jihadist groups in the country. There is no sign that this will change in the near future.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 76% of girls - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/niger/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: wide-scale poverty, food insecurity crisis, - <https://www.concernusa.org/story/poverty-in-niger/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Social Institutions and Gender Index: Niger - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/NE.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Human Rights Watch, 23 February 2022 - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/02/23/no-one-spared/abuses-against-older-people-armed-conflict>

## Further useful reports

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

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Niger>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf>