

World
Watch
Research

Sudan: Full Country Dossier

Revised version: March 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

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

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

Copyright notice

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Sources and definitions

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

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

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

External Links - Introduction

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

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Sudan

Brief country details

Sudan: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
43,541,000	1,970,000	4.5

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

Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	79	13
WWL 2020	85	7
WWL 2019	87	6
WWL 2018	87	4
WWL 2017	87	5

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

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

As in the previous reporting period, the WWL 2021 reporting period has been difficult for Christians in many ways: i) Christians are being deprived of churches that they have used for worship for years; ii) the government has arrested or intimidated many Christian leaders; and iii) the current political chaos in the country has left Christians in limbo. Even though the army and pro-democracy activists have signed a set of agreements, a good degree of unclarity remains.

The ethnic-cultural landscape of the country is also complicated: Arab versus ethnic African, Muslim versus Christian. The secession of South Sudan in 2011 did not solve these problems. This is particularly true for ethnic Africans, as a significant number are Christian and still living in the country. All Christian communities in Sudan are afraid of having conversations about their faith with Sudanese Muslims as this might be construed as being an 'act that encourages apostasy against Islam'. The level of persecution that converts and ethnic Africans face is enormous. There have been arrests; many churches have been demolished and others are on an official list awaiting demolition; many Christians have been attacked indiscriminately in areas like the Nuba Mountains where there is an ongoing conflict between government forces and rebel groups.

So as not to be discovered, converts will often refrain from raising their children as Christians because this might attract the attention of the government and community leaders (since children might inadvertently reveal the faith of their parents). This fear even extends to funerals where deceased Christians with a Muslim background are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, even though Christian and Muslim cemeteries are separate.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Sudan 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 on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Church buildings are attacked and burnt down (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian women and girls are harassed for not covering their head or wearing trousers (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians can be accused and charged of blasphemy (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian children are often harassed due to their parents' faith (CRC Art. 14 and ICCPR Art. 18)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- [28 December 2019](#): Three churches (a Roman Catholic, an Orthodox and a church belonging to the Sudan Interior Church) were burned down by Islamic radicals in the town of Bout (International Christian Concern - ICC, 25 January 2020).

- [29 February 2020](#): A building belonging to the Sudanese Church of Christ was attacked and burned down in the city of Omdurman (ICC, 19 March 2020).
- [9 March 2020](#): A church belonging to the Presbyterian Evangelical Church was attacked and burned down by Islamic militants in the village of Bout (ICC, 19 March 2020).
- [6 June 2020](#): three young Muslim men beat two Christians with rods, sticks and rifles as they left a market area in east Khartoum. This followed calls from mosque leaders to rid their “Muslim area” of South Sudanese Christians (International Christian Response - ICR, 25 June 2020).
- [7 June 2020](#): Mobs of young Muslim men sent South Sudanese refugees fleeing for their lives as they set fire to 16 make-shift shelters of plastic sheeting where the refugees were living in the Al-Jerif East area of Khartoum. 10 South Sudanese Roman Catholics in the area were injured, including a woman (ICR, 25 June 2020).
- [20 June 2020](#): A Christian man was stabbed to death and 4 others injured in Omdurman, across the Nile River west of Khartoum (ICR, 25 June 2020).

Specific examples of positive developments

- The transition government has been working tirelessly to improve the human rights situation in the country.
- The scrapping of the Apostasy law is one of the [proposed changes](#) in the country (BBC News, 12 July 2020).
- Due to improvements in Sudan, the [US State Department's 2019 IRF report](#) states: "On December 18, in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, the Secretary of State placed Sudan on a Special Watch List for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom. Sudan was designated as a Country of Particular Concern from 1999-2018 and moved to a Special Watch List after the Secretary determined the government had made substantial progress in improving respect for religious freedom."
- [In March 2020](#), the new transitional government returned a truck to a Baptist Church in Khartoum which had been confiscated for 8 years. In 2012, the truck had been seized en route from Khartoum to the the town of El-Obeid by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). It had been carrying students and Christmas materials for Christian contacts (ICC, 30 March 2020).

External Links - Short country profile

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention 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: 28 December 2019 - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/25/three-churches-burned-southern-sudan-twice/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 29 February 2020: - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/19/two-churches-burned-sudan-amidst-changes/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 9 March 2020: - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/19/two-churches-burned-sudan-amidst-changes/>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 6 June 2020: - <https://christianresponse.org/news/christians-attacked-in-sudan-after-incitement-by-mosque-leaders-in-khartoum/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 7 June 2020: - <https://christianresponse.org/news/christians-attacked-in-sudan-after-incitement-by-mosque-leaders-in-khartoum/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 20 June 2020: - <https://christianresponse.org/news/christians-attacked-in-sudan-after-incitement-by-mosque-leaders-in-khartoum/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: proposed changes - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53379733>
- Specific examples of positive developments: US State Department's 2019 IRF report - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: In March 2020 - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/30/sudanese-government-return-confiscated-truck-church-8-years/>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Sudan

Link for general background information

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

Recent history

Since becoming independent from Great Britain in 1956, Sudan has experienced persistent and recurring violent conflict, primarily driven by struggles between the central government in Khartoum and armed groups from the country's peripheries. Sudan's traditional power structures were dominated by an Islamist regime, headed by President Omar al-Bashir, who came to power in a coup in 1989. Sudan became infamous in the international community for funding radical Islamic groups, committing atrocities, and fundamentally undermining freedom of religion. The government has also been fighting against various rebel groups in Darfur and other parts of the country. In places such as the Nuba Mountains, the government has been using attacks by anti-government groups as a pretext for indiscriminately attacking civilians, a significant number of whom are Christians.

In 2018, the year began with [demonstrations](#) against the imposition of austerity measures that effectively tripled Sudan's US dollar exchange rate and the increased price of basic commodities (Human Rights Watch - HRW, 29 January 2020). But the government resorted to excessive force to disperse the peaceful demonstrations; that included the use of beatings and the unlawful detention of hundreds of protesters, activists and opposition party members. In December 2018, the US categorized Sudan as one of 10 "[Countries of Particular Concern](#)" deemed guilty of severe violations of religious freedom (CNN, 11 December 2018). Meanwhile, Sudan's anti-government protests grew as 2018 drew to an end, with security forces [killing](#) the first 9 student protesters (Amnesty International - AI, 21 December 2018) and then [37 protesters](#) within a few days in demonstrations that rocked the country (AI, 24 December 2018). In April 2019, the unthinkable happened - one of the longest-serving dictators in Africa, President al-Bashir, was overthrown. He had declared a state of emergency on 22 February 2019 and dissolved government at federal and provincial levels and appointed security chiefs to head all the country's 18 regional states.

The ensuing [brutal crackdown](#) intensified the demonstrators' defiance. The standoff continued throughout March until finally on 11 April 2019, the army [removed al-Bashir from office](#) (BBC News, 11 April 2019) and assumed provisional power, with Sudan's Prosecutor General later announcing that the former president would be [charged](#) for the killing of protesters (AI, 14 May 2019). However, on 2 June 2019, the security forces [killed scores of protesters](#) who were holding a sit-in in Khartoum to protest against the military council's declaration that it would remain in power for three years (AI, 5 June 2019). Sudan's Transitional Military Council later [admitted](#) to deciding on the action that killed more than 100 protesters (AI, 14 June 2019).

The ex-president and some top members of his cabinet were allegedly moved to a prison and were [charged with corruption](#) (Al-Jazeera, 13 June 2019). However, the protesters demanded a civilian rule and the first transitional leader (former defense minister) was [forced to resign](#) after one day (New York Times, 12 April 2019). The protest leaders and the transitional council failed to agree on the course the army was taking, particularly after so many protesters had been killed in the process. Finally, the following [agreements](#) were made (BBC News, 16 August 2019):

- Power-sharing will last for 39 months.
- A sovereign council, cabinet, and legislative body will be formed.
- A general will head the council for the first 21 months, a civilian for the remaining 18 months.
- A prime minister, nominated by the pro-democracy movement, will head the cabinet.
- The ministers of defense and interior will be chosen by the army.

Political and legal landscape

In April 2019, one of the longest-serving dictators in Africa, Omar al-Bashir, was overthrown by the pressure of a popular movement demanding more democracy. There had been signs of discontent for some time among the general population due to the rise in prices of oil, bread and other goods. Even though the ousting of the president can be seen as a triumph for the pro-democracy movement, it is also a cause for concern since former ruling Islamists are still very influential in the country and another civil war could easily be ignited. The army's Transitional Council and the leaders of the pro-democracy movement have signed an agreement that can pave the way for democracy in the next 3-4 years. The Council is currently led by the army but should transition to civilian leadership in May 2021 until elections are held. However, there is no guarantee that the agreement will be honored. The existence of the Janjaweed (pro-al-Bashir) militias might also sabotage the intended progress.

Sudanese politics has always been controversial and the country has never been at ease with the international community nor with its own people. This was particularly the case for the indigenous Africans in the country which led to the independence of South Sudan. The secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 (after a referendum in January 2011) was the culmination of a painful and decades-long history of internal conflict between the powerful Muslim Arabs in the north and the Christian and Ethno-religious indigenous African population of the south. Despite South Sudan's independence, armed conflicts over dwindling resources and political power (typical aspects of Sudan's post-independence situation) have persisted.

While the root causes of the conflicts remain constant (e.g. political marginalization, land dispossession and unimplemented promises), ethnic dynamics in the various regions of Sudan and South Sudan have kept changing. For example, in Abyei, a province that is being claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan, the Misserya Arabs (the government of Sudan's main local supporters) have grown increasingly frustrated with Khartoum, while the Ngok Dinka tribe (which enjoys support from the government of South Sudan) has become vocal and strong. Although Sudan's political system is based on a decentralized system of governance and multi-party politics, real power was wielded by President al-Bashir and his ruling Islamist National Congress Party (NCP). The independence of South Sudan, which signaled the end of the Government of National Unity and the withdrawal of the South's representatives from parliament, further reinforced the dominance of President al-Bashir's political party. It also signaled the start of another civil war: SPLA-North versus the government of Sudan.

This war resulted from the fact that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) failed to solve the problem of the marginalization of Sudan's peripheral regions, in particular, the so-called 'three areas', consisting of Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Located strategically along Sudan's volatile North-South border and possessing considerable natural resources (including oil), finding solutions to the contested issues in these three areas has long been deemed critical for the stability of the two countries. Dominated by two main tribes, Abyei in particular were influential in the domestic politics of both Sudan and South Sudan. The Ngok Dinka tribe, a subset of South Sudan's largest ethnic group, have traditionally lived in Abyei, and have strong representation in the leadership of both the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). During the civil war years, the Dinka - which has a largely African Christian population - was heavily displaced. At the same time, the Misserya, a largely Arab Muslim nomadic tribe which migrates through the region to graze their cattle, form an important constituency of the NCP and fought against the Ngok Dinka during the civil war. This problem is expected to continue in the foreseeable future. It could also be a serious challenge for the transition government.

The current intended reforms, if successful, will open up political and civil space in the country. That would also mean more freedom for Christians.

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive, in particular making marriage a place of enacting violent repression of female converts. Sudan is one of just six UN states not to have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Sudan recognizes multiple forms of family law, connected to a person's religious community. To provide judgement on family matters, there are [three types of religious court](#) in operation: Sharia courts, Christian/civil courts and traditional courts (OECD, "Social Institutions and Gender Index: Sudan," 2019). There is no legislation that prohibits domestic violence or child marriage and Article 40 of the 1991 [Muslim Personal Law](#) provides that once a child is 10 years old, they may be married with parental or guardian consent. Child marriage is widespread and according to Girls Not Brides, [34% of girls](#) are married before the age of 18. Insufficient implementation of legislation prevents women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. Whilst a man has the right to divorce his wife by talaq, a woman must file for divorce through the courts. [A UN report](#) indicates that women seeking redress from State fig-

ures - including seeking a divorce - have limited success; it cites a culture of impunity for perpetrators of domestic violence and a silencing of victims (UNGA, 18 April 2016).

The proportion of seats held by women in the Sudanese Parliament has risen from [just 5% in 1997 to 27.5% in 2019](#) (Index Mundi); Under al-Bashir there was a 25% quota of seats reserved for women. Women have been [calling](#) for greater participation in Parliament under the transitional government, in particular not to just assume ‘soft’ positions in which they have nominal power, (Chr. Michelsen Institute, Jul 2020). Military service is [compulsory](#) for men between the age of 18 and 33, who must serve 1-2 years (World Population Review).

Religious landscape

Sudan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	1,970,000	4.5
Muslim	39,954,000	91.8
Hindu	840	0.0
Buddhist	920	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,146,000	2.6
Jewish	50	0.0
Bahai	2,600	0.0
Atheist	65,000	0.1
Agnostic	400,000	0.9
Other	1,900	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)

The religious composition of Sudan is a controversial issue. World Christian Database (WCD 2020) estimates the Christian population at 4.5% and the Muslim majority at 91.8%. According to the government, around 97% of the population is Muslim, which would make the Christian presence less than 3%. Various advocacy groups contest these low figures (and those of WCD), claiming that non-Muslims in the country make up 15-20%. Coptic Orthodox, Roman Catholic and various Protestant denominations are present in the country. These groups are found mainly in Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El-Obeid, El-Fashe and many parts of the Nuba Mountains.

Almost all Muslims are Sunni but significant distinctions exist, particularly among the Sufi orders. In addition, there are small Muslim minorities, including Shia and the Republican Brothers, based predominantly in Khartoum. There is also a growing (yet still small) percentage of Salafists. The main traditional Salafist group, *Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Mohammediya*, advocates peaceful means for achieving its objectives. However, the newer radical groups tend to be more militant and confrontational and staged attacks on Sufi, Shia and Christian targets in 2011 and 2012.

For over a decade (1999-2018), Sudan had been designated by the US Secretary of State as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its serious and systematic violations of religious freedom. Religious freedom, although guaranteed by the 2005 Interim Constitution, was not upheld in practice. Moreover, Sudan's criminal law based on Islamic law (allowing punishments such as amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of 'indecent' and 'immorality') has been applied indiscriminately especially against indigenous African Christians. In 2020, the transitional government vowed to abolish all laws that violate fundamental human rights - including the apostasy law.

Christian converts have come under particular pressure, such as the case of [a woman](#) who was sentenced to death in 2014 for marrying a Christian man (BBC News, 15 May 2014). In July 2020 however (following the fall of al-Bashir) it was announced that Sudan would scrap the [apostasy law](#), which prohibited anyone converting from Islam to a different religion, adding further that women would no longer require a permit from a male relative to travel, and that FGM would be banned (Human Rights Watch, 16 July 2020). In September 2020 it was later [announced](#) that Sudan's transitional government had agreed to separate religion from the state, ending 30 years of Islamic rule in the nation (Bloomberg, 4 September 2020).

Economic landscape

According to [the World Bank](#) (2020):

- Driven by reductions in private consumption and investment, which were negatively impacted by political unrest and an ongoing currency crisis, Sudan's economic performance continued to deteriorate in 2019, with real GDP contracting by an estimated 2.6%, after a contraction of 2.3% in 2018. Weak economic performance in 2019 also reflects declining agriculture production, amid continued droughts.
- The fiscal deficit (excluding quasi-fiscal operations of the Central Bank of Sudan) deteriorated from 6.6% of GDP in 2017 to 10.5% of GDP in 2019 due to higher fuel subsidies (driven by higher international oil prices and a sharp depreciation of the currency) which increased by 7.5 percentage points to 11.8% of GDP between 2018 and 2019.
- The exchange rate on the parallel market depreciated to 85 SDG to 1 USD in December 2019, prompting the government to devalue the official exchange rate from 47.5 SDG to 1 USD to 53.9 SDG to 1 USD.
- The inflation rate averaged 51.3% in 2019.
- Sudan's debt to GDP ratio as at end-2019 stands at 213% of GDP of which external debt accounts for approximately 90%. External debt is US\$54.5 billion of which 85% is in arrears.
- The current account deficit increased from 6.3% of GDP in 2018 to an estimated 8.1% of GDP in 2019 as months of protest and the droughts affected exports.
- The Gross international reserves are low at \$1.4 billion in 2019 (2 months of imports).

- Assuming distribution-neutral consumption growth, poverty rates may have increased consistently in recent years, to reach in 2019 an estimated 14.2% at \$1.90/day PPP and 47% at \$3.20/day PPP. The 2018 food price hikes are estimated to have aggravated the poverty, inequality, and overall economic welfare situation. The price increases of wheat, sorghum, millet, and their derivative products alone resulted in an increase in extreme poverty by an estimated 3.2 percentage points.

South Sudan's secession caused a watershed in Sudan's economic history. Sudan lost about 80% of its agricultural and water resources, in addition to the loss of about 75% of oil reserves and about 90% of total exports and about 50% of government revenues. Following the loss of oil and population, economic growth contracted by 4.4% in 2012. Even as it concluded an agreement with South Sudan to cover the export of oil from South Sudan, as well as US\$3.03bn of "transitional assistance" to be paid by South Sudan, Omar al-Bashir announced a series of deep budget cuts in June 2012 to control a ballooning fiscal deficit. Moreover, the World Bank projected that Sudan would fall back into the low-income country category, with 47% of Sudan's population living below the poverty line. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also pushed for austerity measures. In 2018, the country saw a series of demonstrations protesting about the poor [economic situation](#) (Sudan Tribune, 5 January 2018). The crisis and the protests finally led to the overthrow of the president. According to one observer writing in the Mail & Guardian on 11 May 2018, the collapse started with "a [major devaluation](#) of the Sudanese pound in an effort to make the official rate for the pound drop to that of the black market. With the International Monetary Fund pushing for austerity and the rate of inflation hovering around 70%, the camel's back was finally broken."

The Transitional Council might be willing to negotiate with South Sudan to ease this economic crisis so that it can obtain payment for letting South Sudanese petroleum use its pipelines. The [comprehensive US sanctions](#) which were lifted in October 2017 also had a tremendous impact on the economy (World Factbook, updated 4 August 2020). The country is also attempting to develop non-oil revenues, such as gold mining and agriculture while carrying out austerity measures to reduce expenditures.

According to [World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2020](#):

- "Economic growth is expected to remain subdued in the medium-term as the country grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic and economic imbalances continue. Specifically, economic growth is expected to decline by a further 0.8 ppt in 2020 to -2.1 percent due to disruptions associated with the COVID-19 outbreak. Under the baseline scenario, closure of ports and collapsing demand from trading partners like United Arab Emirates (37 percent of exports), Saudi Arabia and China (13 percent) will result in drop in exports. Domestic (private) consumption is also expected decline as a result of domestic containment measures. In addition, if economic reforms are further delayed high inflation will persist as the exchange rate continues to depreciate and monetary aggregates continue to expand due to the monetization of fiscal deficits."
- "The 2020 budget depends on significant external financing from the gulf countries and Arab development funds. The current crisis could affect that supply adversely, and thereby increase budgetary imbalance. On the positive side, lower oil prices will decrease the size

of fuel subsidies that are currently a huge burden on the budget. The outlook for poverty remains negative. Poverty rates are projected by 2022 to increase to 18.3 percent at \$1.90/day PPP, and 53.5 percent at \$3.20/day PPP. High inflation, shortage of fuel and other basic commodities are expected to continue having negative effects on living conditions. The impending economic stabilization reforms are expected to take time to deliver positive results.”

According to the [2020 Economic Freedom Index](#):

Sudan has an economic freedom score of 45.0 and ranks at 173. The score has decreased by 207 points due to a substantial drop in the fiscal health score. Among the sub-Saharan region, Sudan is ranked 44th out of 47 countries.

Women are the most economically vulnerable within Sudan. This is in part due to [low education rates](#) for girls; as of 2016, illiteracy rates for women stood at 50% compared to 30% for men (UNICEF). According to Islamic law, sons and daughters do not have equal [inheritance rights](#) in Sudan (OECD, 2019). Under the 1991 Muslim Personal Law Act (Articles 356, 357, 359, and 373), a woman inherits half of the property of her brother(s). Under customary law, widows are commonly expected to marry a male relative within her deceased husband’s family.

The [beating, killing and detention](#) of male converts, too, places economic pressure on their wider families. As men are the primary breadwinners, the loss of a Christian man impacts his wider family (Barnabas Fund, 6 November 2018).

Social and cultural landscape

According to [the UNDP 2019 report](#) and [World Factbook](#) (accessed 27 January 2021):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Unspecified Sudanese Arab (approximately 70%), Fur, Beja, Nuba, Fallata
- **Main languages:** Arabic (official), English (official), Nubian, Ta Bedawie, Fur
- **Total population:** 41.8 million
- **Median age:** 19.7 years
- **Urban population:** 43.6%
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.7 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 and older):** 53.5%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 and older):** 41.1%
- **Unemployment, total of labour force:** 12.9%
- **Unemployment, youth (age 15-24):** 26.7%

According to [the UNHCR \(2019\)](#):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** “In addition to the over 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers residing in Sudan in 2019, a further 1.9 million people were estimated to be internally displaced. The large majority of refugees (some 815,000) were from South Sudan, with large populations of Eritreans (121,000) and Syrians (94,000) residing in south and central Darfur and Khartoum states respectively. Refugees and asylum-seekers from Ethiopia, the CAR, Chad and Yemen also constituted considerable populations of concern.”

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

- **Human Development Index:** Sudan ranks 168th out of 189 countries, with a human development value of 0.507.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 65.1 years
- **Gender development index (GDI):** 0.836
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** 0.560

In general, Sudan has a rich history and culture and belonged to the Nuba Kingdom. This is the country where the art of building pyramids may have first started.

Sudan has a patriarchal society in which men and women are expected to assume traditional gender roles. The pervading societal belief that women belong in the home and should undertake domestic responsibilities has prevented many girls from accessing school. A lack of education serves to fuel the widespread practice of early or forced marriage, as girls feel ill-equipped to search for an alternative route. Women play a leading role in raising children, representing the family at societal events and helping with agricultural duties. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a significant negative impact on her wider family and community.

Technological landscape

According to [the World Internet Stats](#) (accessed 7 July 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 29.9% of the population – survey date 31 December 2019.
- **Facebook usage:** 3.0% of the population – survey date 31 December 2019.

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

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 72.0 per 100 people

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (updated 25 April 2020):

- Mobile market penetration is far higher than the Internet. The country has a relatively well-equipped telecommunications infrastructure by regional standards, including a national fiber optic backbone and international fibre connections. In common with a few countries in Africa, including neighboring Ethiopia, Sudan is developing space technologies in a bid to support economic growth and improve the capabilities of its military and agricultural sectors. Sudan's Chinese built-satellite was launched (from China) in November 2019.

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 27 January 2021):

Compared to other countries in the region, Sudan has a well-equipped cellular communications system which covers most of the major cities: “The Sudanese government directly controls TV and radio, requiring that both media reflect government policies; TV has a permanent military censor; a private radio station is in operation (2019)”.

The majority of Christians in the country reside in cities, which generally have better infrastructure and technology than rural areas.

According to a Georgetown report, [68.1%](#) of women use a mobile phone (Georgetown, “Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20”). This falls slightly under the national average of [72%](#).

Security situation

Under ex-President al-Bashir, there was a coordinated effort by the government to mobilize and militarize tribal militias (including but not limited to Arab militias) known as *Janjaweed*. The aim was to use these groups to work towards creating an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country. Several reports by different human right groups have accused these militias of committing gross violations of human rights against non-Arab citizens of Sudan.

Christians in the Nuba Mountains and other areas in the southern parts of the country are facing aerial bombardment from government forces and ground offensives from state-sponsored militia targeting churches and Christian families. It has been reported on several occasions that Christians are being targeted by the militias who even conduct house-to-house searches for Christians.

In late January 2018, the joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission to Darfur agreed with the Sudanese government to open a temporary base in [Darfur’s Jebel Marra](#), as mandated by the June 2017 UN Security Council resolution, in the wake of sectarian violence and a suspected chemical attack that caused horrific suffering to civilians (AI, 1 February 2018). Reports of abuse by government forces and affiliated militias continued to surface, including attacks that damaged or destroyed at least 45 villages in Jebel Marra between July 2018 and February 2019. Meanwhile, possible plans to [close the joint mission](#) has unnerved civilians who rely on the base for protection (AI, 11 June 2019).

[In March 2020](#), the Security Council was expected to decide regarding the drawdown and exit of the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur, UNAMID (Security Council Report, 28 February 2020). The Council is likely to adopt a resolution establishing a follow-on presence to UNAMID by 31 March, in accordance with [resolution 2495](#) (UN Security Council, 31 October 2019). The peacekeeping mission is due to withdraw from Sudan by October 2020, following years of downsizing under pressure from Sudan’s previous government and western governments eager to reduce costs. The mission will close its last 14 bases and withdrew all its remaining 4,040 military personnel and 2,500 police by 31 October 2020. This has received wide criticism from human rights groups. According to an article by HRW director Kenneth Roth, published on 16 March 2020: “[Darfur](#) is not like the rest of Sudan. The UN Security Council should recognize that Darfur requires a far more gradual withdrawal and keep a UN security presence on the ground to actively protect civilians. Past and ongoing violence there means civilians can’t trust Sudanese security forces alone and still look to peacekeepers for protection.” Lack of accountability and absence of rule of law means Christians whenever aggrieved would not get the justice they deserve.

Against this backdrop of extreme violence towards Christians, daily life is a challenge for both men and women. If identified Christian men might be beaten, detained or killed. Women and girls also face the threat of sexual violence; converts are particularly vulnerable to rape and domestic violence. While there are no reliable statistics on the prevalence of rape, it is under-

stood to be widespread. Marital rape is not explicitly criminalized. Although rape is (Article 149 of the Criminal Act 1991), a culture of impunity and hesitancy to report crimes protects perpetrators of gender-based violence.

Trends analysis

1) Despite reforms, Islamic oppression is likely to remain a dominant issue

In 2019, Sudan entered a new era; for the first time in three decades, the nation is being ruled without al-Bashir at the helm. However, there are still many challenges ahead. The countries in the Middle East want to exert their pressure using aid and loan as negotiation tools. Sudan is also trying to conform to the Western nations by showing that it should no longer be associated with terrorism and egregious human rights violations. The country has already proposed changes to laws that were repressive. The economy is still suffering and inflation also remains a serious problem.

In this context, the following points are most likely in the coming months:

- Society will remain dominated by conservative Islam.
- The demolition of churches might cease.
- Christians will continue to find it difficult to get building permits for new churches as the government does not want to offend the local conservative Muslims (at least for now).

2) Darfur and SPLA-North will be one of the toughest tests for the transitional government

Sudan is one of the most complex countries in Africa. After a civil war that lasted more than two decades, South Sudan decided to go its own way and become an independent nation in 2011. That did not end the problems, however. There are still major issues to be dealt with in Darfur, the Blue Nile and Kordofan areas. In these areas, there are key questions to be answered. The government has shown its commitment by starting negotiations after the August 2019 Draft Constitutional Declaration emphasized that solving the issues in Darfur and other parts of the country was declared essential. It was followed by agreements in October 2019 and January 2020. So far, it seems the discussions are moving smoothly, however, there are still outstanding issues that need serious attention.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Sudan country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094995>
- Recent history: demonstrations - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/29/sudan-stop-abuse-peaceful-demonstrators>
- Recent history: Countries of Particular Concern - <https://www.edition.cnn.com/2018/12/11/politics/pompeo-religious-freedom-designations/index.html>
- Recent history: killing - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/sudan-shooting-of-protestors-must-be-immediately-investigated/>
- Recent history: 37 protesters - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/sudan-protesters-dead-in-government-crackdown-on-protests/>
- Recent history: brutal crackdown - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/bashir-moves-sudan-dangerous-new-ground>
- Recent history: removed al-Bashir from office - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-47891470>

- Recent history: charged - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/05/sudan-omar-al-bashir-must-face-justice-for-recent-and-past-crimes>
- Recent history: killed scores of protesters - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/sudan-soaring-violence-calls-for-urgent-international-response/>
- Recent history: admitted - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/sudan-urgent-un-and-au-investigation-needed-after-military-admits-deadly-decision-on-protestor-crackdown/>
- Recent history: charged with corruption - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/sudan-toppled-president-omar-al-bashir-charged-corruption-190613173532177.html>
- Recent history: forced to resign - <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/world/africa/sudan-al-bashir-extradition.html>
- Recent history: agreements - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48511226>
- Political and legal landscape: three types of religious court - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/SD.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Muslim Personal Law - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/SD.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: 34% of girls - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/sudan/>
- Political and legal landscape: A UN report - <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1607916.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: just 5% in 1997 to 27.5% in 2019 - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/sudan/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- Political and legal landscape: calling - <https://www.cmi.no/publications/7267-patriarchy-politics-and-womens-activism-in-post-revolution-sudan>
- Political and legal landscape: compulsory - <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-with-mandatory-military-service/>
- Religious landscape description: a woman - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-27424064>
- Religious landscape description: apostasy law - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/16/sudans-law-reforms-positive-first-step>
- Religious landscape description: announced - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-04/sudan-ends-30-years-of-islamic-law-by-separating-religion-state>
- Economic landscape: the World Bank - <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/720441492455091991/mpo-ssa.pdf>
- Economic landscape: economic situation - <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64425>
- Economic landscape: major devaluation - <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-05-07-how-sudans-economic-crisis-had-a-role-in-protests-that-toppled-al-bashir/>
- Economic landscape: comprehensive US sanctions - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/su.html>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2020 - <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/720441492455091991/mpo-ssa.pdf>
- Economic landscape: 2020 Economic Freedom Index - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/sudan?version=1431>
- Economic landscape: low education rates - <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/education>
- Economic landscape: inheritance rights - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/SD.pdf>
- Economic landscape: beating, killing and detention - <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/christian-converts-from-islam-arrested-and-tortured-in-darfur-sudan/>
- Social and cultural landscape: the UNDP 2019 report - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SDN>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/sudan/>
- Social and cultural landscape: the UNHCR (2019) - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2535?y=2019#year>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SDN>
- Technological landscape: the World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#bf>
- 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=SDN

- Technological landscape: BuddeComm research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Sudan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Technological landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/sudan/#communications>
- Technological landscape: 68.1% - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Technological landscape: 72%. - https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Sudan/Mobile_phone_subscribers_per_100_people/
- Security situation: Darfur's Jebel Marra - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/02/sudan-au-un-peacekeepers-must-be-given-access-to-protect-civilians-in-jebel-marra/>
- Security situation: close the joint mission - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/sudan-fresh-evidence-of-government-sponsored-crimes-in-darfur-shows-drawdown-of-peacekeepers-premature-and-reckless/>
- Security situation: In March 2020 - <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-03/sudan-darfur-9.php>
- Security situation: resolution 2495 - https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_RES_2495.pdf
- Security situation: Darfur - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/16/sudan-un/au-plan-darfur-falls-short>

WWL 2021: Church information / Sudan

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in Sudan. The [discovery](#) of one of the oldest cathedrals in the world is a testament to this (Ancient History Encyclopedia, accessed 17 August 2020): "The Cathedral of Faras, a city in ancient Nubia and once the capital of the Kingdom of Faras (aka Nobatia), was built and rebuilt from the 8th to 11th century CE. Its interior was decorated with hundreds of frescoes which are amongst the finest examples of early Christian art seen anywhere."

However, the role of Christianity started diminishing with the arrival of Islam, especially after the rise of the Mahdist movement of the 19th century. The situation worsened after the independence of Sudan in the second half of the 20th century, as powerful Islamists took over political power. When al-Bashir assumed office by coup 1980s, he proclaimed that Sharia law would be the source of all laws in the country. As a result, the Christian influence decreased in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Christianity had been very influential in Sudan from the 4th century onwards and for nearly a millennium the majority of the population was Christian. Christians suffered when invading Arabs brought Islam - especially in the northern part of the country - and gradually Islamized the region by the 15th century. However, the Greek Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox churches survived. Following the defeat of the self-proclaimed Islamic Mahdi and his supporters by the British in 1898, many Christian groups entered the country. Roman Catholics, Anglicans (via the Church Missionary Society) and American Presbyterians also came from their base in Egypt. The Anglican Sudan United Mission, the Africa Inland Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission all followed. Several African-initiated churches have also become established. Many missionaries went to South Sudan from Khartoum.

Church spectrum today

Sudan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	100,000	5.1
Catholic	1,100,000	55.8
Protestant	815,000	41.4
Independent	21,000	1.1
Unaffiliated	34,000	1.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-100,000	-5.1
Total	1,970,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	420,000	21.3
Renewalist movement	145,000	7.4

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

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

Generally speaking, Christians reside throughout the country. However, they are primarily in major cities, such as Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El Obeid, and El Fasher. Christians also are concentrated in some parts of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State. The US State Department's 2019 [2019 IRF report](#) states: "Relatively small but long-established groups of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians are in Khartoum, El Obeid in North Kordofan, River Nile and Gezira States, and eastern parts of the country. Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities largely made up of refugees and migrants are in Khartoum and the eastern part of the country. Other larger Christian groups include the Catholic Church, Episcopal Anglican Church, Sudan Church of Christ, Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and Presbyterian Church of the Sudan. Smaller Christian groups include the Africa Inland Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Sudan Interior Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church."

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: discovery - https://www.ancient.eu/Faras_Cathedral/
- Church spectrum today - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/>

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Sudan

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	79	13
WWL 2020	85	7
WWL 2019	87	6
WWL 2018	87	4
WWL 2017	87	5

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

One of the main reasons why the country dropped six points in WWL 2021 was the positive change in the country situation. The country's national government has shown huge willingness to change the system in the country - a system that had been designed to make sure that Sudan remained an Islamic country. The apostasy law was scrapped and other laws that restricted freedom of religion were also repealed. As a result, Sudan was removed both from the US list of countries sponsoring terrorism and from the list of 'countries of particular concern' (CPC). Nevertheless, the reasons why the country still scores 79 points should be obvious: The average pressure on Christians and churches is still at an extreme level; the churches which had been forced to close have not been re-opened (despite positive changes), Christians are still deprived of their rights in many ways, and the government has continued to take legal action against certain church leaders.

Persecution engines

Sudan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all

Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Strong
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

This persecution engine is rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood ideology advocated by the founder of the (up until April 2019) ruling party, Hassan al-Turabi, who helped Omar al-Bashir consolidate power during a bloodless coup in 1989. The Sudanese government then worked towards forming an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country and has been accused of supporting radical Islamic militants for the past three decades. The USA first labeled Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism on 12 August 1993 for knowingly harboring local and international terrorists and for allowing the country to be used as a transit point for terrorists and weapons. Osama Bin Laden was there before he moved to Afghanistan, for example. Historically, Islam - including its radical tendencies such as the [19th century Mahdist movement](#) (African History, The History of Sudanese nationalism, accessed 30 November 2020) - is firmly rooted in Sudanese society. Even though the overwhelming majority of the population in the country is Sunni Muslim, the government of Sudan under al-Bashir also had strong ties with Shia Iran. Sharia law is the foundation of Sudan's legal system and Sudan's elite has aimed at enforcing an Islamic regime in the country. Under al-Bashir, apostasy was criminalized and punishable by the death penalty. Blasphemy laws were used countrywide to prosecute Christians. Although this is now changing, [Islamic law is still very in place](#) (World Watch Monitor/WWM, 18 August 2020). This engine also has a nationalist element. There are also violent Islamic militants still active that were part of the former Sudanese president's *janjaweed* militia.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

Up until April 2019, Sudan was run by an authoritarian regime ever since al-Bashir came to power through a coup in 1989. The influence of the government in private and public life was enormous. The country has its own deep-rooted challenges: The Darfur crisis has continued, the conflict with Sudan's People Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) shows no sign of reaching a permanent solution even though [ceasefire agreements](#) were reached (WWM, 14 November

2017). Some argue that the agreements were made due to the pressure of sanctions from the US government and that the Sudanese government complied in the hope that the sanctions would be lifted. Whenever ex-President al-Bashir's government faced socio-economic and political challenges, support among the population at large was revived by using inflammatory language against the West. This, in turn, had an adverse effect on Sudanese Christians, as the government regards Christians as the agents of Western countries.

There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia* since those leading the regime under al-Bashir were mainly people adhering to radical Islamic ideology; indeed, the National Congress Party (NCP) served as a means to strengthen the Islamic agenda. This implies that the role of the government in the persecution of Christians was not only driven by totalitarian tendencies but also by radical Islamist sympathies as well. In the past three decades, the willingness of the ex-president to opportunistically discard beliefs and promises in exchange for hanging on to power became increasingly evident. Almost all of his decisions – whether related to supporting armed militias groups or cracking down on all forms of dissent - were motivated mainly, if not solely, by the desire to stay in power at all costs. He was able to do this despite the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicting him of [war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide](#) for what happened in Sudan under his leadership and issued a warrant for his arrest in 2009 (ICC, 4 March 2009).

In the context of the current transitional period, early indications are that the new prime minister is seeking to improve the situation in the country. It will be important for the international community to encourage this process, particularly as regards the protection of minorities in the country.

The country was rated 'not free' in Freedom House's [2019 Freedom in the World report](#) (with a low score of 7/100). However, this is likely to change now that al-Bashir has been ousted from power.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

The government of Sudan under ex-President al-Bashir employed all means available to stay in power, including the mobilization of tribal militias (See *Security issues* above). There have been allegations of gross violations of human rights against the non-Arab citizens and Christians are among the minorities who are victims of this sort of organized crime.

Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

The Sudanese population consists of about 19 different ethnic groups and almost 600 subgroups. Most of the inhabitants of the southern parts of the country are of ethnic African origin, and Arabs live predominantly in the northern parts of the country. Due to the deeply religious nature of the Sudanese people, most of the population are adherents to religious faith, mainly to Christianity or Islam, however, indigenous religions still persist. For many years, the Arabs from the North have tried to spread not only Islam but also a specific cultural and ethnic identity associated with Arabism. This led to decades of civil war and was ultimately responsible for the independence of South Sudan. However, even today, this is happening all over the

country. What makes them a special target is that the majority of those Africans happen to be Christians.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Imams in mosques and madrassas preach anti-Christian sentiment. This comes mainly from radical Muslim clerics wanting to see Sudan become an Islamic state. There is also a Shia influence through Iran.
- **Ordinary citizens (Very strong):** Followers of Wahhabism and advocates of Sharia law (as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Sudan) are closing the spaces available for the Christian life. Islam is deeply embedded in Sudanese society and everyone is encouraged to follow the government policy of one religion, one culture and one language. This quickly

leads to the persecution of Christians.

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Around the end of the WWL 2021 reporting period, the transitional government decided to abolish the apostasy law. However, changing the attitude of such a conservative society and government institutions that have been built on exclusions of Christians will take time. That is why it has been observed that, state security forces have still been arresting, harassing and intimidating Christians and demolishing churches. Christian converts face serious persecution from family and can be sentenced to death if reported to the authorities (since apostasy carried the death penalty for most of the WWL 2021 reporting period).
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Militias organized by the government are responsible for killing Christians and for the destruction of property of Christians all over the country.
- **Extended family (Strong):** Both at the individual and family level, citizens have been involved in persecuting Christians in the country. A country expert states: "Family members fear that conversion to Christianity of a family member could lead to the whole family being barred from attending community activities for no fault of their own. Thus they will do whatever it takes to pressure converts into renouncing their faith."

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Despite the change in the leadership at the top level, government officials are still a significant driver of persecution and have continued to impede Christians' rights. For example, where Christians have tried to reclaim their church building. Government officials are also forcing Christians to go to school on Sundays. Ten years ago an arrest warrant was issued against al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court for crimes that include many against the Christian minority. While al-Bashir was charged in his position as head of state, there were numerous officials at various levels of government involved.
- **Political parties (Strong):** The long-ruling National Congress Party (which was founded in 1996 and was led by Omar al-Bashir until he was deposed in April 2019) is Islamist and has also pushed for (and participated in) the persecution of Christians.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** Although officially illegal, many groups operating like gangsters towards Christians are state-sanctioned.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Sudan is one of the most corrupt countries in Africa. Politicians and corruption networks have been conspiring against Christians and undermining the rule of law. They work hand in hand so that Christians lose their churches and other property before courts of law.
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Ethnic leaders also work against Christians within the existing networks of nepotism and corruption.

Drivers of ethno-religious hostility

- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** Some ethnic leaders have received government backing, especially where their ethnic groups see ethnicity and Islam as one and the same. Thus if they see one

of their members converting to Christianity, they will persecute them. These government-supported groups with Arab ethnic background also seek to exert pressure on non-Arabs, especially on ethnic African Christians. Most of the inhabitants of the southern parts of the country are of ethnic African origin and Christian (or Ethno-religionist) and Arabs live predominantly in the North. For many years, Arabs from the North have tried to spread not only Islam as a religion but also the cultural and ethnic identity associated with Arabism. This played a major part in the decades-long civil war that resulted in the loss of millions of lives, bodily injury and displacement of millions of others from their homes.

Map of country



Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Pressure and violence targeting Christians has always been more intense outside the capital city.

In addition to the simple harassments and threats that Christians face in their daily lives, it is very important to distinguish between what is going on in the Nuba Mountain and the Blue Nile regions of the country from what is taking place in other parts of the country. Starting in June 2011, the government has been fighting against alleged “rebels”. A [peace agreement](#) between the government and rebel groups was reached in August 2020, but the sustainability of the agreement remains to be seen (The Guardian, 31 August 2020). What is clear is that the actions of the government have borne elements of ethnic cleansing of minority ethnic groups, and most importantly of Christians. Samuel Totten, a US scholar on issues of genocide, calls this

"genocide by attrition". Over a period of 8 years, thousands of Christians have been killed in attacks by government-supported groups and many thousand have been displaced from their villages for no other reason than that they have a different religion from those leading the country.

Christian communities and how they are affected

In Sudan, all Christian communities face some form of persecution. However, the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians who are ethnic Africans or converts with a Muslim background are particularly high. Many of them have been arrested and charged with crimes like espionage; many churches have been demolished; many Christians have been attacked indiscriminately in areas such as the Nuba Mountains region where government forces and rebel groups are in conflict. Many churches are under pressure to close down.

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriates are being forced to close their churches. These are groups mainly from Western countries and South Sudan. Their churches have been denied registration and many have faced demolition. Some expatriate Christians face arrest and detention without due process of law.

Historical Christian communities: Christians belonging to historical churches such as the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches face persecution resulting from both *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. In the past two decades, a program of church demolition was implemented. Under al-Bashir's government many churches including those belonging to the Historical Christian communities were targeted. Under the new administration, things are improving, but what has been lost has not been returned.

Converts to Christianity: This group, which consists mainly of Christians with a Muslim background, experiences the most intense pressure. Not only do converts feel the pressure of persecution in the *National* and *Church spheres of the life*, but also in severe form from family and neighbors in their *Community, Family and Private life*.

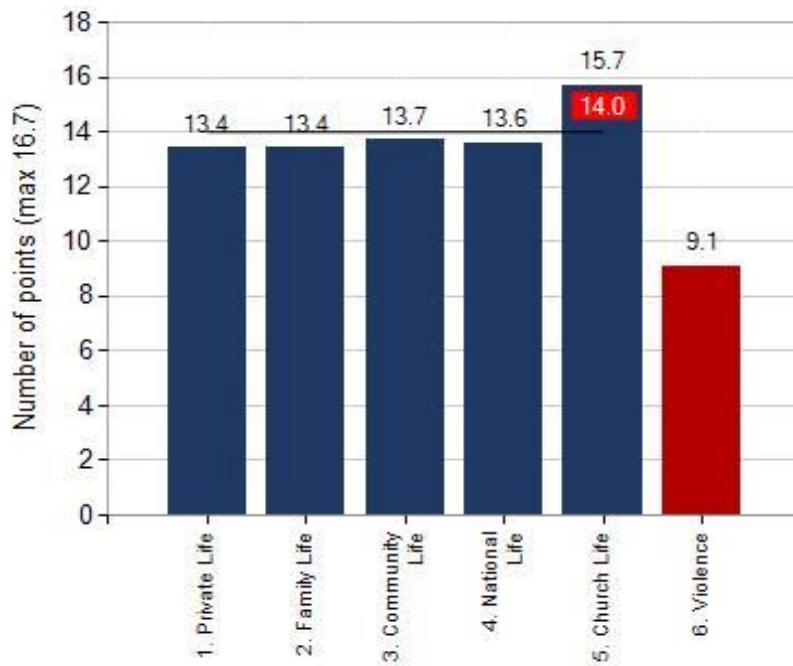
Non-traditional Christian communities: Sudanese Christians who belong to Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations also face persecution in the form of *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. This group is also facing the prospect of having most of its churches in the country closed down.

The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Sudan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Sudan is at a very high level of 14.0 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church sphere*, which reflects the fact that churches in the country face enormous challenges. This is followed by followed by the *Community sphere*, an indication that Christians do not enjoy equality in the communities where they live.
- The score for violence was 9.1 points, a reduction from the 10.4 point score of WWL 2020.

WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Sudan



Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

The country remains a risky place to openly demonstrate Christian faith. If Christians mention details about their faith in written form, it is likely that they will be traced and attacked. That is why Christians often prefer to meet and pray privately, not publicly. This affects all categories of Christianity in the country.

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)

Christians tend to avoid talking about their faith to guests or other members of the local community for safety reasons: It can lead to arrest or mob attack. It could be seen as evangelizing and is a problem that all Christians have to avoid.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points)

Meeting with other Christians (especially for converts) always carries the danger of abduction or arrest by government security agents. This is one of the issues that all Christian communities in the country face. There is this constant surveillance and follow-up by the community and the police. Even though things are improving, there are still problems.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Sudan has been well-known for charging converts with apostasy. According to one country researcher: “Due to the risk of discovery and use as evidence against them by family, society and officials, [converts] refrain from owning Christian materials or accessing Christian TV or websites.” There have been instances where converts have been put under house-arrest by family members due to their conversion to Christianity. Even though the government plans an overhaul of the legal system including repealing Article 126 of the Criminal Code which clearly indicates punishment for converts coming from a Muslim background, there is still fear. Furthermore, all categories of Christians are wary of having conversations about their faith with Sudanese Muslims as these might be construed as being “acts that encourage apostasy against Islam”. Although the government has proposed to repeal the apostasy law (and other laws that restrict human rights), it is clear that there are still fears for the safety of converts, especially in rural areas.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.00 points)

Especially converts within a Muslim family cannot risk keeping a Bible or Christian artefacts at home. These might be discovered and lead to severe opposition from members of the wider family, aiming to make the Christian return to Islam. It can lead to loss of property, expulsion from the community and further acts of violence. Until the government recently announced the repeal of the apostasy law, owning Christian materials could also lead to a convert being charged with apostasy.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Sudan is not an easy place for Christians to marry in. If a marriage is between a Muslim and a Christian, the Christian is expected to convert to Islam. While the law (to a certain extent) allows that non-Muslims will not be subjected to the application of Islamic law, in practice a Christian wedding will not take place as smoothly as a wedding between Muslims.

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

Christian children are often harassed in school or playgrounds due to their parent's faith. As a result of this, Christians (especially converts) often hesitate or avoid talking about their faith to their children. The way they dress, or if they have any symbols that indicate their faith, is widely

regarded as a symbol of inferiority among Islamic groups in the country and can cause acts of discrimination, intolerance and persecution.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)

Converts often refrain from raising their children as Christians because the children might inadvertently reveal the faith of their parents to others. Linking this to the school system, a country researcher states: "It is very tough to raise children according to Christian belief and faith. The school system, the welfare system and society in general complicate many things. In public schools located in majority Muslim areas of the country, the government requires instruction in Islam. In state schools in areas where Muslims are not a majority, students have a choice of studying Islam or Christianity. However, Christian courses are not offered in the majority of state schools. The reason given by the government for not offering Christian courses is a shortage of teachers or Christian students. Regardless of the reason, in practice, this means that many Christian students attend Islamic courses."

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. (3.00 points)

This has to be seen in the context of Sudan being a Sharia state. Such exclusion is to make sure that the next generation remains Muslim majority and is all too common as an initial reaction when one parent converts to Christianity. Hence, in the case of separation of a Christian convert and non-Christian parent, the family of Muslim faith will take the child into their custody by force.

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)

At community level, Christians have been struggling to live out their Christian faith. In the past, community leaders and morality police used to work hand in hand to suppress Christians in the community, especially in Khartoum. After the departure of President al-Bashir and changes in the political system, especially the repeal of Public Order Law in December 2019, the role of such police decreased. However, that does not mean that Christians in society (especially women) are now free – they are still required to adhere to strict dress code by community leaders. Sharing community resources, dress code, and other requirements are unreasonably placed on the shoulder of Christians.

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.). (3.75 points)

Christians, especially converts, are monitored by Muslim religious leaders, politicians, and vigilante groups. Sudan has been a police state and the hope since April 2019 is that the removal of the former president will change this.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.75 points)

All Christian communities in the country struggle to access their share of community resources. This is particularly true outside the urban areas where life is extremely difficult if community resources are not made available. In the cities, this means Christians incur extra costs to get what they need for daily life.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.50 points)

The general attitude in society and the government is that Sudanese citizens should be Muslim. The government uses all available opportunities to downgrade and punish Christians by restricting them from using community resources. Christians in the Nuba Mountains and other areas in the southern parts of the country face aerial bombardment from government forces; state-sponsored militia are also known to carry out house-to-house searches looking for Christians. For Christians living in these areas it is hardly possible to lead a normal life and access community resources without fear.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)

Christians in Sudan have to face many hurdles in Muslim-dominated communities and cannot fully participate. They are systematically alienated by community leaders; this means that - as long as they remain Christians - they are not permitted to have a say on political, social and economic matters that affect their daily lives.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.50 points)

At the national level, the general environment is not favorable to Christians since they are regarded as second-class citizens. Even though Article 38 of the Interim Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the ruling party believes that the country belongs to Muslims. Emanating from this, almost all of laws and policies are derived from Sharia and are not flexible to accommodate freedom of religion. The other laws also limit freedom of religion in their additional claw-back clauses. Christians - especially those from South Sudan and Western missionaries – are frequently monitored by government security forces. There is great hope that this is going to change, as was made public by the transitional government. In late 2020, the government has taken a giant leap toward changing some of the most repressive laws. For example, repealing the apostasy law and other policies and regulations that restrict freedom of religion/human rights. However, at the practical level, this hope is not reflected at the community level.

Block 4.7: Christians have been hindered in running their own businesses without interference for faith-related reasons (e.g. personnel policy, client admission policy). (3.50 points)

It has been reported that - compared to Muslim business owners - it is very difficult for non-Muslims to get a license for starting up a business. Most Christian business owners are discriminated against by customers because of their religion. In most cases, while dealing with the government, it is very difficult for Christian business owners to win government-sponsored bids because of the discriminatory attitude of the officials in charge of the government offices responsible for these bids. With the new government's initiative to make Sudan a secular state, this situation may improve in the near future.

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

Freedom of expression in the country is highly restricted. The Church is hindered from expressing its faith, practices and opinions in public because the authorities fear they are giving Christians the chance to influence others to become Christians. The censorship affects everyone; for Christians, the risks of speaking out are higher as the state is likely to give impunity (in whole or part) to anyone acting against those whose comments could be understood as a criticism of the government or local officials. Here also, there is a big hope that this is going to change as it is made public by the transitional government.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

Hinderance and bans occur where organizations are perceived to be critical of state institutions or are overt about the evangelistic effect of their work; many international NGOs are barred from the country if known to be Christian. There are still some Christian organizations operating in the country despite the challenges. The country has numerous political parties but none have a Christian agenda.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

This is another area where churches face particular pressure. Whatever activities churches want to carry out, they are required by the local authorities to only operate inside churches. Undertaking any church-related activities outside churches without express permission from local authorities will result in the arrest of individuals taking part.

Block 5.9: Christians have experienced interference when choosing their own religious leaders. (4.00 points)

This issue was prevalent under al-Bashir. The problems that started under that regime are still what many churches are continuing to deal with.

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

While Christians in the capital city and other major cities are subject to monitoring and obstruction mainly from government sources, churches in the remote parts of the country, especially in areas affected by the civil war, are subject to more obstruction and monitoring from both government and non-government groups.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points)

Christians have found it difficult to build new churches, the major obstacle being the government offices responsible for issuing the required permit. Even if a permit is issued, Christians then face challenges from local Islamic leaders and radical Muslims on a daily basis.

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.

Sudan: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	1	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?	9	32
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	10
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	2
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	0
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?	10	10
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100	100
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	525	100
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	10
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	10
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10	10

In the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** One Christian was killed by a mob attack in Omdurman in June 2020. [CSW](#) reported that four were also seriously injured (CSW, 29 June 2020).
- **Christians arrested:** None.
- **Churches attacked:** 4 churches in Blue Nile, 2 churches in Abeyei and 3 churches in Mairam were attacked.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Over 525 Christian homes were burned down or otherwise attacked. For example, 205 homes in Abeyei, and 110 homes in Mairam were burned down.

5 Year trends

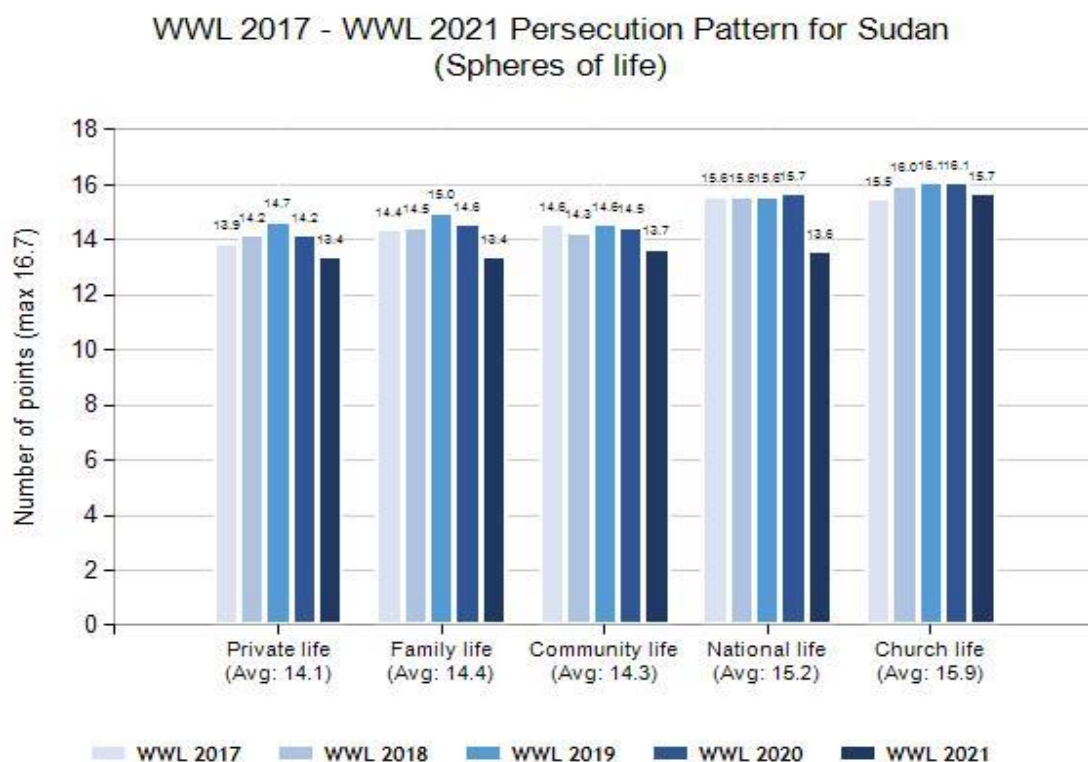
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows that the average pressure on Christians in WWL 2017 - WWL 2020 was stable around 14.8-15.2 points. In WWL 2021, with the ousting of President al-Bashir, there has been a reduction of 1 point. Both the reduction of 1 point recorded this year (WWL 2021) and the high scores in the previous four years are consistent with how other organizations describe the situation in the country. For example, the US State Department has removed Sudan from the list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) in December 2019 after being on the list for more than 15 times for gross violation of freedom of religion.

Sudan: WWL 2017 – WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	14.0
2020	15.0
2019	15.2
2018	14.9
2017	14.8

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows the pressure on Christians in the various *spheres of life* over the last five reporting periods. It can clearly be seen that the pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* has been at extreme levels until WWL 2021. The *National* and *Church spheres* scored highest (over 15 points), an indication that church worship and activities are particularly being targeted, with the government playing a key role (with the role of government slightly diminishing in WWL 2021).

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above depicts the scores for violence over the last five reporting periods. The scores have been clearly decreasing over the past five years from an extreme level in WWL 2017/WWL 2018 to a lower but still very high level in the following reporting periods. Indeed, the average score for the last five reporting periods is still very high with 11.1 points.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to social community/networks
Denied inheritance or possessions
Enforced religious dress code
Forced divorce
Forced marriage
Forced to flee town/country

Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

Under the transitional government there have been positive changes impacting women’s rights and safety in 2020. In July, it was announced that the apostasy law would be eliminated (which prohibited anyone converting from Islam to a different religion), that women would no longer require a permit from a male relative to travel, and that FGM would be banned (Human Rights Watch, 16 July 2020). In September, it was then [announced](#) that Sudan’s transitional government had agreed to separate religion from the state, ending 30 years of Islamic rule in the nation (Bloomberg, 4 September 2020). Notwithstanding these positive developments, female Christians continue to face tremendous challenges and are at a disadvantage in society simply because of their gender. Continuing gaps in protective legislation remain avenues for religious persecution.

Christian women and girls, particularly converts, are vulnerable to rape, forced marriage and domestic violence. As a country expert explained, forced marriage can be used to “silence young Muslim background believers”. On a broader level, Islamic extremists have reportedly kidnapped Sudanese girls for marriage and/or sexual slavery. Converts may also be isolated within the home to reduce the embarrassment and shame of the conversion on the family, as well as to ensure they cannot meet with other Christians. Converts will also be denied inheritance and if already married, divorced from their husbands.

It is challenging for women and girls to report sexual crimes and domestic violence to the authorities, in part as the testimony of women is not considered equivalent to that of men, and there is significant social stigma attached to rape so many choose not to come forward. Additionally, it has been reported that policemen themselves have raped Christian girls. According to one expert, a security intelligence officer was “proudly speaking about Christian girls he had raped”. This feeds into a landscape of impunity for perpetrators. Women play a major role in raising their children, representing the family at societal events and helping their husbands with agricultural tasks. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a rippling negative impact on the wider family and community.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
False charges

Forced out of home – expulsion
Forced to flee town/country
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – death
Violence – physical

Violent Islamic militancy continues to plague many African nations and has led to an increase in the persecution of Christians. Men and boys remain targets of forced recruitment into these militias, where they are forced to fight. The government of Sudan targets male Christians with a variety of serious false charges, including 'terrorism'. Reports also indicate that drugs have been planted in the bags of Christians for police to find. Church leaders are the most frequent targets and government security forces monitor their activities daily.

Christian men and boys, particularly converts, are vulnerable to beatings, imprisonment, killing, harassment within the workplace and displacement. Converts may be kicked out of their house and shunned by their families. Others feel forced to leave their home due to the pressure of persecution.

Men are usually the head of households and providers of the family. If they are unable to provide for their families due to persecution, the family will experience trouble financially. In addition, in remote parts of the country, men are important to their families for providing security; absence can lead to family property being looted and wife and daughters being sexually attacked.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities such as the Jewish community also face serious challenges in Sudan:

- The website Everyday Antisemitism reported on 28 November 2017, that football fans were seen [praising Adolf Hitler](#) and the 'Holocaust'.
- In February 2019, an [Islamic cleric](#) explained in a TV broadcast how "Jews epitomize all trickery" (Jewish News Syndicate, 21 February 2019).

The Bahai community is not recognized in the country and can only operate in secret. Jehovah's Witnesses also face harassment. [Shia Muslims](#) are not allowed to hold worship services (USCIRF, 2019). In a nutshell, any religious group apart from Sunni Islam faces tremendous challenges to exercise their faith.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Besides the authoritarian government, radical imams and even radical armed groups like the Janjaweed militia are targeting Christians. These militias had been funded and trained by the Sudanese government and may continue to be active if the transitional government does not find a way to disband these groups. *Islamic oppression* is likely to remain in operation in the coming years because it is so deeply embedded in society.

Dictatorial paranoia

Known for its poor record in human rights, the government of Sudan has continued violating the rights of Christians in the country. Until December 2019, it had been on the US State Department's list of "Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)" since 1999. Pressure from the international community helped the release of some Christians who were detained because of their faith; however, the government has not changed its general attitude and behavior towards Christians. The looting and destruction of churches, hospitals, and schools are all common, especially in the Nuba Mountains region. It remains to be seen whether *Dictatorial paranoia* will continue to be as strong in the future now that al-Bashir has been removed from power. Early indications show that there is a definite desire to reform the country. It is in this context that the USA [removed](#) Sudan from the CPC category, moving it to the "Special Watch List (SWL)" in December 2019 (Sudan Tribune, 20 December 2019). The transition government moved with surprising speed by proposing drastic changes to some of the draconian laws that were used to suppress dissidents and Christians. In this regard, the proposal to scrap the apostasy law can be seen as a significant step in the country.

Organized corruption and crime

Organized corruption in the country has served to protect the interests of the ruling party and president. The ex-president was behind the creation of the Janjaweed militias who became his most trusted force in the country. These militias were behind the killing, rape and displacement of civilians in the Darfur region - including Christian civilians. Although in a post-Bashir situation it is to be expected that these militias will play a less dominant role, they are likely to remain potent enough to persecute Christians.

Ethno-religious hostility

Many social, political and economic issues in the country involve a mixture of factors. In the past, al-Bashir had used ethnicity (Arab) and religion (Islam) to rally his supporters. He successfully presented Christians as villains and Christianity as the source of the problems which Sudanese society needed to combat. Despite his fall from power in April 2019, ethnic groups still possess huge political leverage in the country. However, it is very unlikely if the next leader will repeat the mistakes that the former president made as that would undermine the whole pro-democracy movement.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: 19th century Mahdist movement - <http://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-256>
- Persecution engines description: Islamic law is still very in place - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2020/08/ngos-say-changes-to-sudans-islamic-laws-dont-go-far-enough/>
- Persecution engines description: ceasefire agreements - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/11/ceasefire-holds-but-food-shortage-threatens-sudans-nuba-people/>
- Persecution engines description: war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide - https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2009_01514.PDF
- Persecution engines description: 2019 Freedom in the World report - <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/sudan>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: peace agreement - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/31/sudan-government-agrees-peace-deal-rebel-groups>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: CSW - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/06/29/press/4702/article.htm>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: announced - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-04/sudan-ends-30-years-of-islamic-law-by-separating-religion-state>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: praising Adolf Hitler - <http://everydayantisemitism.com/2017/11/28/football-fans-in-sudan-display-banner-of-hitlers-face-with-the-word-holocaust-in-gruesome-first-for-the-country/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Islamic cleric - <https://www.jns.org/sudanese-cleric-the-jews-epitomize-trickery-employ-trickery-against-allah/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Shia Muslims - https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_SUDAN_2019.pdf
- Future outlook: removed - <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article68734>

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=Sudan>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Sudan>
- [SUDAN – Ethnic cleansing – 2016](#)

External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: SUDAN – Ethnic cleansing – 2016 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Sudan-Ethnic-cleansing-WWR.pdf>