

World
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Vietnam: Country Dossier

December 2020



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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	-	-

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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 / Vietnam

Brief country details

Vietnam: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
98,360,000	8,924,000	9.1

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

Vietnam: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	72	19
WWL 2020	72	21
WWL 2019	70	20
WWL 2018	69	18
WWL 2017	71	17

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

Vietnam: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Government officials, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Historical Christian communities like Roman Catholics enjoy a certain amount of freedom unless they become politically active which can lead to imprisonment. Where Catholic congregations own large plots of land (e.g. surrounding convents, schools or hospitals) these are sometimes confiscated by the State for development purposes. Both non-traditional Protestants and converts from indigenous religions face intensive pressure and violence for their faith, especially in the remote areas of central and northern Vietnam. Most belong to the country's ethnic minorities, like the Hmong, and face social exclusion, discrimination and attacks. Their homes are sometimes destroyed and they are then forced to leave their villages. In several cases, Christians fled abroad and claimed asylum, e.g. in neighboring Cambodia, but were sent back due to Vietnamese pressure.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians are harassed on the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians are arrested for speaking up for their rights (ICCPR Arts. 9 and 19)
- If arrested, Christians experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian children are ostracized at school and pressured to abandon their faith, their medical needs often neglected on the basis of their faith (ICCPR Art. 18; CRC Arts. 14 and 24)
- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men and pressured to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

See above.

Specific examples of positive developments

Pastor A Dao, was [released](#) after being imprisoned for four years (CSW, 21 September 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 against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: released - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/9/21/press/4813/article.htm>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Vietnam

Link for general background information

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

Recent history

Vietnam became a unified state at the end of the US-Vietnam War in 1975 and has remained one of the few remaining Communist states to this day. All power lies with the Communist Party and although there is a National Assembly, the executive and decision-makers in the politburo are setting the framework for it. The National Assembly is elected, but not under free and fair conditions. By the letters of the Constitution, it is the highest decision making body in the country, but most of its members are members of the Communist Party as well, so all power stays with it. Due to Vietnam's large population and geographical position, economic reforms gained fast track and now the economy is developing fast and the country is said to benefit from the continuing US-China trade war. Political development is slow in comparison.

More important than the National Assembly are the decisions the Communist Party will be taking in the future. A new leadership will be chosen at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party in January 2021. It is expected that from this congress a [sign of continuity](#) will emerge and that the government's comparatively liberal economic approach will be held in bounds by strict political control (ISEAS, 8 May 2020). Civil rights or freedom of religion will remain elusive, especially with the 2016 "Law on Religion and Belief" being enforced.

The anti-corruption drive by the Communist Party continues and members, sometimes even politburo members, have been demoted and/or sentenced to long prison terms for corruption. At times, the efforts of eradicating corruption coincide conveniently with political in-fighting. After the death of the country's president at the age of 61 in September 2018, the General-Secretary of the Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong, was appointed to take over the presidency, which shows that the [consolidation of Communist ideology](#) will remain a priority in the years to come (The Diplomat, 23 October 2018). It is expected that the country returns to a "four pillar strategy" in 2021, separating the two positions, not least because this helps in distributing the workload, advancing careers and balancing regional considerations.

Christians generally prefer to stay away from politics, but are nonetheless closely watched by the authorities for several reasons:

- i) Christians have a history of standing up against injustice (e.g. after environmental disasters, as activists for human rights, and in land-grabbing cases mainly faced by the Catholic church).
- ii) Christians are perceived as being connected with foreign forces and can draw international attention to what is frequently seen as being "internal affairs" of the country.
- iii) Christians usually struggle more with local political leaders than with the national level politics.

Political and legal landscape

As one country observer put it, three groups can be distinguished in Vietnamese politics: Regime conservatives, modernizers and those just seeking to make a profit. These key blocs exist within the ruling Communist Party, within the structures of the state, as well as within society and the economic system. Party leaders regularly acknowledge that corruption and rampant abuse of power have held Vietnam back. Citizens commonly complain about corruption among officials, governmental inefficiency and opaque bureaucratic procedures. The Vietnamese media have played a prominent role in exposing corruption scandals, a role which is complemented and partly taken over by social media. Since the country lacks civil society groups able to act as watchdogs, the exposure of corruption and abuse by officials has largely been in the hands of a small number of newspaper journalists and increasingly, social media activists like bloggers. The authorities act very harshly against all deviations from the Communist Party line. This means that Human Rights or environmental activists – many of them Christians – often have to face being harassed, beaten, detained and sentenced. It fitted this pattern when the Vietnamese authorities [raided and closed](#) a meeting of registered local NGOs in Hanoi in December 2018 (Radio Free Asia, 20 December 2018).

An additional challenge is the growing tension with Vietnam's big neighbor, China. The major stumbling block is China's actions in the South China Sea as well as Vietnam's policy of setting up Special Economic Zones, in which China is active. China is claiming almost the whole South China Sea as its possession, ignoring all claims other states may have, some of which are backed by international law. China not only attacked Vietnamese vessels in waters it claims for itself, it has also continued to build and fortify military structures on reefs and rocks to support its claim. This led to violent reactions against Chinese companies in Vietnam and after an international ruling rejected China's claim (concerning the Philippines), Vietnam reportedly started to deploy [modern short-range missiles](#) on small islands in the South China Sea capable of reaching Chinese military structures (Reuters, 10 August 2016). This did not deter China and the conflict is still simmering in the background, as [confrontations](#) between Vietnamese and Chinese ships in Vietnam's EEZ (exclusive economic zone) in July 2019 showed (Reuters, 17 July 2019). In November 2019, a high-ranking member of the government "made headlines with a suggestion that Vietnam may consider alternative measures in managing the South China Sea disputes it is embroiled in, including [international arbitration](#) which the Philippines had previously pursued against China." (The Diplomat, 13 November 2019) China continued to hinder oil exploration activities in Vietnam's EEZ and sank another [fishing boat](#) in April 2020 (Reuters, 4 April 2020).

Despite all tensions, at least as far as ideology is concerned, Vietnam follows China closely in emphasizing Communism and also in controlling society (see "Technological landscape").

The 13th National Congress to be held in January 2021 does not promise any major surprises, certainly not in domestic politics. It remains to be seen how the leadership will be dealing with China's increasing assertiveness. Christians and other religious minorities cannot expect any increase in personal freedoms or any improvement in human rights to result from the discussions.

Religious landscape

Vietnam: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	8,924,000	9.1
Muslim	171,000	0.2
Hindu	57,300	0.1
Buddhist	49,397,000	50.2
Ethno-religionist	10,000,000	10.2
Jewish	350	0.0
Bahai	430,000	0.4
Atheist	5,950,000	6.0
Agnostic	11,800,000	12.0
Other	11,630,370	11.8
<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 new [official government census](#) from 2019, states the following concerning religion (under No 8):

"As of 1 April 2019, there were 16 religions practiced in Viet Nam. A total of 13.2 million persons identified as religious, or 13.7% of the total population. Catholicism was the most commonly practiced religion with 5.9 million persons, accounting for 44.6% of the total number of religious followers and 6.1% of the total population of the country. The second most common religion was Buddhism with 4.6 million persons, or 35.0% of religious followers and 4.8% of the national population. The remaining religions all had a relatively small proportion of followers." (United

Nations Population Fund, 19 December 2019)

But whatever figures are published by the government, there is a strong bias against Christians and it is likely that many people will anyway be wary of revealing their true religious affiliation. This is especially true for Protestants, as many of them come from the ethnic minorities (who were anyway only partially included in the 2009 census).

Whereas the World Christian Database (WCD) 2020 estimates show that half of the population follow Buddhism and just 10.2% ethnic religions, Pew Forum has the following estimates in its [2010 Global Religious Landscape report](#): 45.3% folk religion, 16.4% Buddhist and 8.2% Christian. Whichever figures best reflect reality, Buddhism and ethnic religions overlap and the latter have a stronger influence than numbers may tell. Christians can expect to be tolerated as long as they do not challenge the existing order. However, as many of the Protestant Christians belong to ethnic minorities, which historically fought on the American side in the Vietnam War, they are quick to be seen as being troublemakers.

To a lesser extent, this is true for the far larger group of Catholic Christians as well, since they have a colonial background and are seen as being connected to a foreign power, the Vatican. Thus Christians are always on the radar of the local and national authorities. Almost 81% of all Christians are Catholics according to WCD 2020.

Economic landscape

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

- **Gross National Income (2011 PPP USD):** 6.220
- **Poverty:** 0.7% of the population live in multidimensional poverty, a further 5.6% are vulnerable to it, according to the country's own national poverty line, 9.8% of the population lives below it.
- **Remittances:** The contribution of remittances to the GDP is 6.51%

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

- The World Bank classifies Vietnam into the lower-middle income group
- **GDP per capita (PPP constant 2017 international USD):** 8.041
- **GDP growth rate in 2019:** 7%
- **Poverty:** The poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP) is 7.4%. Between 2002 and 2018, GDP per capita increased by 2.7 times, reaching over US\$2,700 in 2019, and more than 45 million people were lifted out of poverty. Poverty rates declined sharply from over 70% to below 6% (US\$3.2/day PPP). The vast majority of Vietnam's remaining low-income population – 86% – are ethnic minorities.

Vietnam continues to follow its *doi moi* policy (literal translation: renovation) which was introduced in 1986 and aims at reforming and improving the economic sector. It delivered excellent results in doubling the GDP within the last decade as well as in poverty reduction and in increasing employment rates. Economically, Vietnam is doing well but this policy comes at a price. Many of the Communist leaders, whether in politics or the army, have become rich and

this has led the country's ideology into a crisis. Communism, especially in the cities, is more a matter of rhetoric than real life, and young people have started to ask questions. To counter-act this erosion of credibility, Communist ideology is being emphasized even more strongly and the authorities act harshly against all who deviate from the norm - especially human rights activists. A growing number of them, many of them Christians, have been harassed, beaten, detained and sentenced or expelled from the country, two of them in June 2018 to Germany.

The iron grip of the regime has stabilized the economy and many well-educated Vietnamese are returning to the country to [start up businesses](#) (ASEAN Today, 5 March 2019). Given that the still unfolding trade war between China and the USA is already diverting investment to other states - especially those belonging to the intergovernmental Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) - at least in the short term, Vietnam could reap an unexpected windfall. On the other hand, there had been a possibility that Vietnam might become the [next target](#) of the US trade war (Asia Times, 16 July 2019), something which has become less likely due to the political developments in the region. Further, although the leadership quashed all protests against the policy of setting up special economic zones and giving them in long term leases to China [under strict conditions](#), the law actually implementing this policy (originally scheduled to come into force in May 2019) has been postponed indefinitely (Reuters, 23 July 2018).

In terms of public health, Vietnam has done excellently in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, going more than three months without infections being reported and recorded its first [two deaths](#) only on 31 July 2020 (Reuters, 31 July 2020). By November 2020, the death toll only stood at 35. However, the economic fallout will be much larger as, over the last years, Vietnam increasingly became part of the globalized economy. For the first time in decades, the GDP will slow down and it remains to be seen if this is just a short, sharp dip or if the development will become more of a trough, something which also depends on developments around the world. Still, the World Bank expects that Vietnam will be one of the few countries in the world with a still growing GDP, albeit with "just" 3-4% growth.

Christians will be affected by the general economic downturn just as they had previously benefitted from the economic progress. However, due to the COVID-19 crisis, many people who had migrated to the cities are likely to return to their rural hometowns. If so, this could strengthen rural churches, but it would also put converts under greater pressure (since being back with their family in small villages also means higher social control). Members of communities in the Central Highlands, many of them Christians from the ethnic minorities, are neglected economically and socially, but will feel this even more during the pandemic crisis. There have already been many cases where Christians have been excluded from several government relief programs by local authorities. On the other hand, living in rural and remote areas may benefit them, since the virus is unlikely to reach them.

Social and cultural landscape

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

- **Main ethnic groups:** Kinh (Viet) 85.7%, Tay 1.9%, Thai 1.8%, Muong 1.5%, Khmer 1.5%, Mong 1.2%, Nung 1.1%, Hoa 1%, other 4.3% (2009 est.)

- **Main languages:** Vietnamese (official), some English, French, Chinese, Khmer, mountain area languages
- **Urbanization rate is:** 35.9%
- **Literacy rate:** 93.5% (15 years and above), the mean years of schooling is 8.2
- **Health and school indicators:** Per 10,000 people 8.2 physicians are available and 26 hospital beds; the pupil-teacher ratio in primary school is 20:1

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

- **Age distribution:** The rate of people under the age of 14 is 23.2%, the one of people 65 and above is 7.6%. Vietnam is quickly aging.
- **Education:** The primary school completion rate is 110%, the enrollment rate is 110.6%.
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 2%, the rate of vulnerable employment 54.1%.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** According to the [IOM](#), work migration from rural into urban areas in Vietnam is the rule and an estimated 25-30% of the urban population consists of migrants. An estimated three million Vietnamese are living abroad and another 450,000 are resident abroad as temporary workers.

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

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.693, Vietnam ranks 118th in the list of 189 countries. Its development has been fast and impressive, but slowed down in the last years.
- **Life expectancy:** The average life expectancy is 75.3 years, the median age is 32.5 years.
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.314, Vietnam ranks 68th of 126 listed countries. The sex ratio at birth (female-to-male) is one of the most unequal in the world at 1.12. According to the World Bank April 2020 update, it even reached 1.15, surpassing China.
- **Unemployment, vulnerable employment:** The unemployment rate is 1.9%, the rate of people in vulnerable employment is 54.5%, the percentage of youth (between 15 and 24 years old) not in school or employment is 9.7%

With ethnic minorities comprising 13%-16.5% of the population, depending on the sources used, Vietnam is among the more ethnically heterogeneous societies in the Asian-Pacific region. Communist ideology had succeeded in smothering many ethnic, religious and social differences, but these differences have surfaced again and find their expression predominantly in local protests. Civic protest movements are mostly limited to the local level, are spontaneously organized, and are directed against ethnic and general socio-economic discrimination, but they have not challenged the political regime. Typical topics are protests against land-grabbing or ecological disasters and how local and national authorities are dealing with the issue. Of course, this does not mean that the government does not feel challenged, especially since some tribal groups are still aiming to set up their own autonomous state. Often Christians (and especially Catholics) are among the leading figures of such protest and dissent.

As already indicated above, the healthy economy has led to comparably low unemployment rates. According to the UNDP, the numbers stand at 1.9% for the overall rate and 9.7% for youth unemployment. However, 40.9% are employed in the agricultural sector and the child labor rate (13.1%) and the vulnerable employment rate (54.5%) are high, which shows that economic growth does not come without challenges. The sex ratio at birth is among the most imbalanced

in the world; with considerably more males than females being born, this may lead to increasing challenges in the future.

According to the World Bank data referred to above, 86% of the population considered poor belong to ethnic minorities. This is a telling figure, since these groups are not only neglected because they are living in remote areas and are considered somewhat backward. Some ethnic minorities were previously involved in insurgencies and had hoped for some sort of autonomy; they are seen as being different and as endangering the harmony of wider society. Many of them are also Christians and have historical ties with Christians abroad, especially in the USA. This serves as another reason for the central government to keep them in their difficult economic and social status. COVID-19, if it reaches these communities, has the potential to worsen their situation considerably.

Technological landscape

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

- **Internet usage:** 48.1% penetration - survey date: December 2018
- **Facebook usage:** 41.4% penetration – survey date: December 2018

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

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 147.2 per 100 people

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

- "Internet freedom declined to an all time low in Vietnam, as the government continued to impose stringent controls over the country's online environment. In an effort to scrub any trace of critical or 'toxic' speech online, the state continued mandating companies to remove content, suspended online newspapers, and imposed draconian criminal sentences for online expression. A deliberate disruption to connectivity amid a violent land dispute, as well as a reported throttling of Facebook's local servers by state-owned telecommunications companies, further constrained internet freedom. Vietnam is a one-party state, dominated for decades by the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). Although some independent candidates are technically allowed to run in legislative elections, most are banned in practice. Freedom of expression, religious freedom, and civil society activism are tightly restricted." Consequently, Freedom House categorizes Vietnam as "Not free" and its score decreased by two points.

Vietnam struggles to keep online dissent in check, as the country is among the top ten in having the highest number of Facebook members - a reported [63 million](#) (Statista, April 2020). A [new law on online privacy](#) limits freedom significantly (AsiaNews, 13 June 2018). The fact that private user-data has to be submitted to the authorities clearly shows how importantly the government views control. Vietnam's [June 2018 law on cyber security](#) forces Internet companies such as Facebook and Google to store their users' data in Vietnam itself and open offices there, leaving the very active Christian (especially Catholic) community barely any freedom (International-LaCroix, 28 July 2018).

It is especially noteworthy that one of the largest telecommunication companies of the country, Viettel, is military-owned, so it is not really surprising that content limitations are so strong. Additionally, in December 2017, the army announced that it has set up a cyber unit called "[Force 47](#)", consisting of propaganda specialists tasked with countering what the regime sees as wrong or harmful news in the internet (The Diplomat, 10 January 2018). The force allegedly has up to 10,000 members of staff.

Christians have to live with the aforementioned restrictions, too, and are often at the forefront of facing consequences from censorship, as shown in the examples given above. Whatever they do, be it in the Internet or on their mobile phones, they have to be cautious and always keep in mind that they are watched.

Security situation

In general, Vietnam enjoys a very stable security situation. Apart from continued skirmishes with China in the South China Sea, where Vietnam arguably has the strongest territorial claim in the region, the areas with the highest potential for unrest are the mountainous provinces in the central and northwestern highlands where most of the ethnic minorities are living. Although there are no longer any active fighting insurgency groups in existence, the authorities are still keeping very tight control over these regions and access is very difficult. These minorities are often Protestant Christians, especially those from the Hmong minority.

Trends analysis

1) The Communist Party remains dominant despite facing more challenges

Communists regard the Church as a dangerous sector in society easily capable of mobilizing masses of people. Modernizers within leadership circles would like to see the principles of “doi moi” (i.e. the introduction of at least partly private economy to induce growth) translated to several parts of national life and politics and one observer even called the "M-L-H" (Marx-Lenin-Ho Chi Minh) ideology a religious dogma. No one dares to openly doubt the dominance of the Communist Party but some would like to see a further opening up of the country - a wish that will remain unfulfilled, as far as the Communist leadership is concerned. Apart from conservatives and modernizers, a third group simply accepts the status quo and is eager to extract as much benefit as possible from the economic development for their own purposes. Christians or other minorities getting in their way will face arbitrary treatment or even outright persecution.

Vietnam continues to be challenged in its territorial and economic claims in the South China Sea (in Vietnamese terms: the Eastern Sea) by an ever more assertive neighboring China, shown by the [sinking](#) of another Vietnamese fishing boat in April 2020 and harassing oil exploration activities in Vietnam`s EEZ (Reuters, 4 April 2020). As Vietnam held the rotating ASEAN chair in 2020, it managed to get a [strongly worded statement](#) on the South China Sea issued (Asia Times, 3 July 2020). ASEAN affirmed for the first time that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is the [framework](#) in which solutions have to be found (Geopolitical Monitor, 28 July 2020). If China keeps on pushing, this could lead to Vietnam finding some kind of alliance with the USA, who in July 2020 upped their game in the South China Sea by [publicly rejecting](#) China's claims (Reuters, 14 July 2020).

While the above may hint at a more robust military approach, the struggle also extends to the cultural sphere: In October 2019, Vietnam and Malaysia decided to [ban](#) the DreamWorks co-produced animation movie "Abominable" over a reference to China's territorial claims (ASEAN Today, 18 October 2019). A further sign of US-Vietnam rapprochement is the signing of so called "[fishing agreement](#) against threats in the East Sea" on 22 July 2020 (Asia News, 27 July 2020). Another challenge the Communist Party may be facing is - somewhat counter-intuitive - its successful dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, as citizens may start [wondering](#) why the transparency enforced and applied in this policy cannot be transferred to other fields as well (The Diplomat, 6 August 2020).

2) Trade agreements continue to ignore human rights concerns

The economic *doi moi* policy has not spilled over into the social and political spheres of society and is not expected to do so in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, the authorities are increasingly relying on Communist rhetoric and ideology and act decisively against dissidents and all movements perceived as threatening to its rule. Dreams of an open civil society in Vietnam with public debates on political, economic, social and religious issues (which are common in democratic societies) are still far off.

Although it is true that Vietnam is a modern and thriving country, especially in the bustling cities, international media missed the opportunity to report on [the somewhat shadier sides](#) of life in Vietnam when the US-North Korean summit was held in Vietnam in March 2019 (Yale Global, 14 March 2019). Then, as the European Union (EU) went ahead and [signed a Free Trade Agreement](#) with Vietnam in May 2019 despite all human rights concerns, this showed the Communist leadership that Western economic considerations trump all other issues (Deutsche Welle, 30 June 2019).

The agreement will enter into force after the Vietnamese National Assembly [ratified it in June 2020](#) and time will tell if and how the human rights mechanisms anchored in it will improve the situation, e.g. of the explicitly mentioned freedom of religion (ASEAN Today, 23 July 2020). It remains to be seen if the arrival of COVID-19 and the connected economic disruption will change this assessment in the long term. The scale of the challenge has been aptly made clear by the Vietnamese Prime Minister, who said in his [opening address](#) to the ASEAN summit in June 2020: "It has swept away the successes of recent years...threatening the lives of millions of people." (ASEAN Today, 29 June 2020)

The Communist Party's National Congress is scheduled to take place in January 2021. If the Party decide to keep the positions of President of the Country and Secretary-General of the Communist Party in one hand, this could be interpreted as Vietnam [getting closer](#) to the democratic system of other countries (The Diplomat, 14 September 2020). However, not too much should be read into such decisions.

Whichever way Vietnam develops, as long as the Communist Party rules the country, Christians will be viewed with suspicion and linked to foreign forces. Volatile times are normally more challenging for ethnic and religious minorities in general and as these are more affected by poverty, they will continue to experience discrimination and marginalization from the government and at times far worse from local rulers and communities, especially during the

COVID-19 crisis and in its aftermath.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Vietnam country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-16567315>
- Recent history: sign of continuity - https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_41.pdf
- Recent history: consolidation of Communist ideology - <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/meet-vietnams-new-president-the-communist-party-chief/>
- Political and legal landscape: raided and closed - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/vietnamese-authorities-break-up-civil-society-conference-12202018171124.html>
- Political and legal landscape: modern short-range missiles - <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinesea-vietnam-idUSKCN10K2NE>
- Political and legal landscape: confrontations - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-southchinesea/vietnam-china-embroiled-in-south-china-sea-standoff-idUSKCN1UCOMX>
- Political and legal landscape: international arbitration - <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/what-would-a-vietnam-south-china-sea-legal-challenge-mean/>
- Political and legal landscape: fishing boat - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-southchinesea/vietnam-protests-beijings-sinking-of-south-china-sea-boat-idUSKBN21M072>
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- Religious landscape description: 2010 Global Religious Landscape report - <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>
- Economic landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's April 2020 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam>
- Economic landscape: start up businesses - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2019/03/a-brain-drain-in-reverse-vietnams-economy-thrives-as-top-talents-return/>
- Economic landscape: next target - <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/07/article/trumps-next-trade-war-target-vietnam/>
- Economic landscape: under strict conditions - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-security-trials/vietnam-jails-10-more-for-protests-over-economic-zones-idUSKBN1KD1CW>
- Economic landscape: two deaths - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vietnam/vietnam-reports-first-coronavirus-death-after-months-of-successful-curbs-idUSKCN24W06K>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/VM-summary.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Bank's April 2020 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam>
- Social and cultural landscape: IOM - <https://www.iom.int/countries/vietnam>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/VNM>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#vn>
- 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=VNM
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net Report 2020 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/vietnam/freedom-net/2020>
- Technological landscape: 63 million - <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/>
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- Trends analysis: sinking - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-southchinasea/vietnam-protests-beijings-sinking-of-south-china-sea-boat-idUSKBN21M072>
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- Trends analysis: publicly rejecting - <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-china-maritime-idUKKCN24E2N7?taid=5f0de52c2841fc000146e828>
- Trends analysis: ban - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2019/10/at-the-intersection-of-chinese-censorship-and-globalisation-vietnam-removes-abominable-film-from-cinemas/>
- Trends analysis: fishing agreement - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Vietnam-and-US-sign-fishing-agreement-against-'threats'-in-the-East-Sea-50661.html>
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- Trends analysis: the somewhat shadier sides - <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/vietnam-globalized-party-state>
- Trends analysis: signed a Free Trade Agreement - <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-signs-free-trade-agreement-with-vietnam/a-49418833>
- Trends analysis: ratified it in June 2020 - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/07/what-does-vietnams-trade-deal-with-the-eu-mean-for-the-country-and-asean/>
- Trends analysis: opening address - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/06/vietnam-hosts-virtual-asean-summit-how-they-covered-it/>
- Trends analysis: getting closer - <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/three-horse-race-for-vietnams-next-communist-party-chief/>

WWL 2021: Church information / Vietnam

Christian origins

Christianity first came to Vietnam in the 16th and 17th centuries and was introduced by Dutch and Portuguese traders. When France became the colonial power of Indochina (1859-1954), French missionaries arrived to strengthen the Roman Catholic Church which is still prominently represented by large cathedrals in major cities. Protestantism arrived in 1911 with the coming of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and was later strengthened by various Western missionaries. Some Montagnard churches were even founded by [radio broadcasts](#) (FEBC, 25 April 2020).

Church spectrum today

Vietnam: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	7,221,000	80.9
Protestant	1,586,000	17.8

Independent	529,000	5.9
Unaffiliated	18,000	0.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-430,000	-4.8
Total	8,924,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,650,000	18.5
Renewalist movement	800,000	9.0

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

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

The Catholic Church makes up more than 80% of all Christians in Vietnam and while it is following the pope in its doctrine, there are subtle and less subtle attempts by the government at influencing it, possibly most visible in the election of bishops. Protestants are split in many denominations, two larger state-recognized ones are the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN), but there are also many Reformed, Baptist, Anglican, WEC, Seventh-Day Adventists and others. Mennonites and Baptists have been officially recognized by the state and an estimated two-thirds of all Protestants come from a tribal and ethnic minority background.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: radio broadcasts - <https://www.febc.org/2020/04/25/the-hmong-story/>

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Vietnam

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Vietnam: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	72	19
WWL 2020	72	21
WWL 2019	70	20
WWL 2018	69	18
WWL 2017	71	17

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

The score for violence in WWL 2021 increased by 1.2 points. The score for pressure in the *spheres of life* remained by and large stable; with small decreases in *Private* and *Community life*. The regulations on religion, implemented from 1 January 2018 onwards, have not changed anything substantially, except adding another source of uncertainty (although on paper they looked like an improvement). It also did nothing in cutting bureaucracy or alleviating fears that obtaining government permits comes with pressure to conform with Communist ideology. Tighter regulations on online communication helped in restricting and limiting the space Christians enjoy even further. Pressure and violence against Christians belonging to the ethnic minorities continued unchanged and even increased as there were many reports that they were excluded from COVID-19 aid distribution. COVID-19 restrictions further added to the challenge of obtaining reports from the ethnic minority regions.

Persecution engines

Vietnam: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Very weak
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium

Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Very strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

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.

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Very strong), blended with Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

Vietnam – or as the official name reads: the “Socialist Republic of Vietnam” – is one of the five remaining countries in the world which is still ruled by a Communist party. Vietnamese Communism is more than just cosmetic as one country observer noted when stating that Marxist-Leninist-Ho Chi Minh-ideology is “quasi-religious”. The government monitors Christian activity and exercises a high level of pressure on all Christians. The Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian community in the country, but government authorities always remain suspicious since Roman Catholics are tied to a foreign power, the Vatican, and are additionally often seen as a remnant from French colonial days. Stereotypes such as “Catholics are French and Protestants are American” still prevail, especially in rural areas. The expropriation of church-owned land and the fact that especially Catholics are active in highlighting social injustices underline the chequered relationship Communist leaders have with the Catholic Church. The government is particularly suspicious of the ethnic minorities who live in the central and northern highlands (who are also known as “[Montagnards](#)”) (Radio Free Asia, 23 October 2018). Many of them are Protestant Christians, whose growth in numbers has reportedly continued. It should be noted that all non-Catholic Christians in Vietnam self-identify as Evangelicals, many of whom are Pentecostal or Charismatic.

It is estimated that two-thirds of all Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including minority groups in the north-western highlands (H’mong, Dzao, Thai, and others) and in the central highlands (Ede, Jarai, Sedang, and M’ngong, among others). In a speech in February 2012 summarizing the government’s religious policy goals, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc encouraged stronger monitoring on matters related to land and property rights and urged continued government “management” of Protestantism in order to limit its extraordinary growth. Overall, the deputy prime minister stressed the need to avoid religious “hot spots” forming and to counter “enemy forces” that use religion to “destroy our nation”. These words have guided the policy ever since and counter-measures may involve the use of violence, either explicitly by police raids or implicitly by (silently) approving of violence against religious communities and venues (including the use of violent criminal groups).

Although the new law on religion, which came into force on 1 January 2018, brought some improvements on paper, its implementation so far did not bring any relief on the ground. Since the predominant goal of the Communist authorities is to keep all groups and organizations in check in order to maintain their own level of power, no real changes can be expected. Running Christian churches and registering them will be at least as cumbersome as it is now. Also, testifying about one’s faith will continue to be dangerous, especially for Christians among the ethnic minorities who remain under the close watch of the authorities.

Clan oppression (Medium):

If new Christian believers of a tribal background are discovered by co-villagers or village leaders, where ethnic religions are still strong, they are forced by family and friends to keep following the age-old norms and values of their community. In order to maintain the tribe’s culture, tribal leaders will often exclude Christians from the community, seeing them as traitors of their culture and identity. The community itself will often react violently against new Christian converts as well and expel them from their villages. Local authorities often cooperate with tribal leaders to the disadvantage of those converts.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium):

Especially targeting the Catholic Church, there have been and still are incidents of land-grabbing. These occur mainly in the cities. As one country expert put it: "Corrupt officials are always looking for land and other property to confiscate and sell to private developers, and church lands - typically Catholic - as well as communal lands of ethnic minority Christians, have been frequent targets of this corruption." Eviction has often been done with the help of criminal groups and "Red Flag Guards".

Drivers of persecution

Vietnam: Drivers of persecution per engine									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	VERY WEAK	-	MEDIUM	-	VERY STRONG	VERY WEAK	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Government officials	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong	-	Very strong	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	Medium	-	Medium	-	Medium	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Vietnam:									
Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	VERY WEAK	-	MEDIUM	-	VERY STRONG	VERY WEAK	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak
One's own (extended) family	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong	-	Very strong	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression and Dictatorial paranoia:

- **Government officials and political parties (Very strong):** The government violates the rights of the Christian minority at national, regional and local level. The Communist Party often does this by implementing ideology strictly and by promoting those who hold Communism in esteem. The government implements the control over religion by requiring all religious institutions to submit to the supervision of the government's Committee on Religious Affairs. Laws are passed and then implemented at the grassroots level, often undergoing misinterpretation and even stricter implementation. If violence is needed, the government prefers to hire local thugs, who are not directly connected to them, but locally known as "Red Flag groups", often to prepare and implement expropriations and confiscations.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Occasionally, ethnic group leaders, citizens and even one's own family can become additional drivers of persecution, however, this is usually connected with *Clan oppression*, not *Communist oppression*. But Communist authorities can co-opt ethnic group leaders.

Drivers of Clan oppression:

- **Extended family (Strong):** As the tradition of ancestor worship is very strong in Vietnam and conversion to Christianity means stopping this worship practice, this is viewed by most families in the rural areas as breaking the moral norm. Non-Christian relatives of Christians drive persecution by cutting family ties and denying inheritance; in some cases this means forcing a Christian spouse to divorce and withholding rights of child custody. All this is

usually threatened first in an effort to bring the convert back to the family fold, but if this fails, he or she can be expelled from the family and the village. Villagers persecute Christians – also by conniving with local authorities – giving Christians beatings, expelling them from their village, or disrupting Christian fellowship by throwing stones at their place of worship.

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** As they are protecting their tribe's culture, ethnic group leaders see converts to Christianity as traitors to their tribal identity and usually cut them off from resources or expel them from their villages altogether, destroying their fields etc. in an effort to bring converts back to their ancient faith.

Drivers of Organized Corruption and Crime (Medium)

- **Government officials (Strong):** Corruption is rampant in Vietnam and although the government is countering it with programs and crackdowns against corrupt officials, it is still ubiquitous. One way this affects the Christian minority is through government officials who sell plots of land belonging to a church, or communal land from ethnic minority Christians for making a profit.
- **Normal Citizens (Weak):** Normally, citizens do not act as drivers of persecution, except when they are tied to the Communist Party or act in concert with the family against converts. An important exception is described by a country expert as follows: "A prominent recent example are the 'Red Flag Associations', an openly government-linked network of vigilantes that attacked Catholic priests and lay leaders in Central Vietnam who had protested confiscation of Church property or damage to parishioners' livelihoods as a result of the Formosa environmental disaster."

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Pressure and violence targeting Christians among the ethnic minorities is especially strong in the central and north-western highlands in the following provinces: Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Bin Phuoc, Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Dien Bien, Gia Lai, Ha Giang, Ha Nam, Hoa Binh, Kon Tum, Lai Chau, Lam Dong, Lao Cai, Nghe An, Ninh Thuan, Phu Yen, Quang Binh, Quang Ngai, Son La, Thanh Hoa, Tra Vinh and Yen Bai.

Christian communities and how they are affected

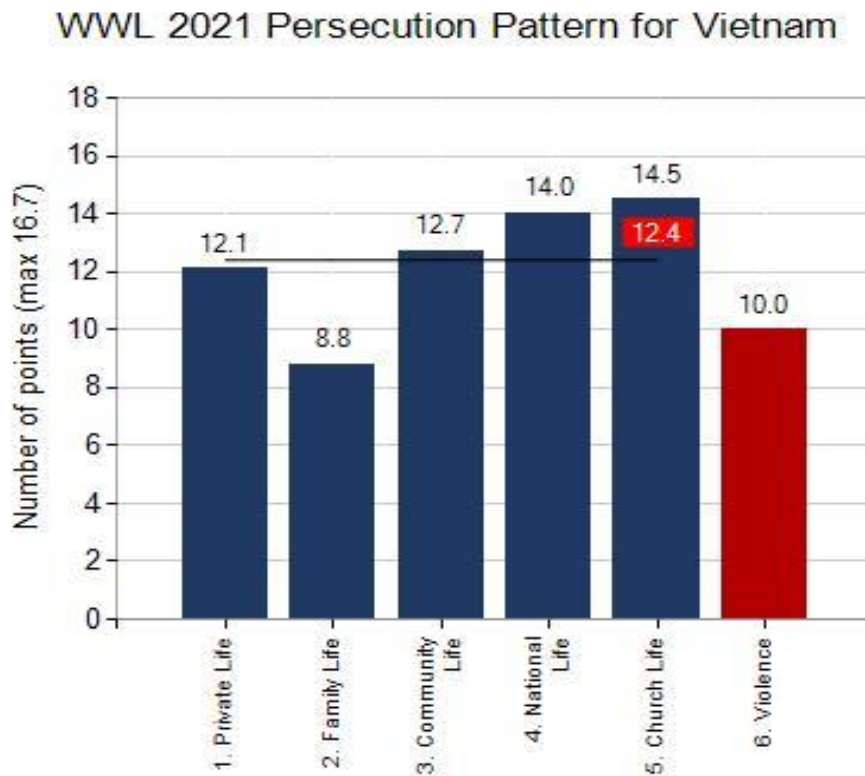
Communities of expatriate Christians: As they cannot mix with local churches in rural areas, which make up the most part of Vietnam, expatriate Christians are involuntarily isolated. This category includes foreign workers from Taiwan, Korea and the Philippines, who face pressure by being monitored.

Historical Christian communities: These are especially the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam. Whereas the former managed to open a Catholic university in 2016, problems with land-grabbing by authorities increased and the arrest of Catholic activists show that historical Christian communities continue to face severe problems.

Converts to Christianity: Converts come either from a Buddhist or Ethnic-animist background and face the strongest persecution, not only from the authorities, but also from their families, friends and neighbors. Since most of them belong to ethnic minorities, the Communist authorities are particularly suspicious of them.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category mainly consists of Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations. Baptists, Mennonites, Churches of Christ and many others gather in house churches. They are closely monitored and face discrimination at various levels of government and society.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Vietnam shows:

- Pressure on Christians in Vietnam remained very high in almost all *spheres of life*, causing the average pressure to stay at the same level of 12.4 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church sphere* (extreme level), followed by the *National* and *Community spheres*. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private* and *Family spheres*, but all Christians face strong pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This pressure is fueled by increasing levels of Communist rhetoric, continued expropriation Catholic church land, the new religion law with its cumbersome requirements and implementation, and an ongoing suspicion towards converts as well as to all ethnic and religious minorities.
- Violence against Christians only rose slightly from 9.8 points in WWL 2020 to 10 points in WWL 2021. There were two killings reported and several churches were attacked. The government also continued its policy of arresting outspoken Christian dissidents. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, it was more difficult than usual to get information from all parts of the country.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

In rural areas, discussing faith is dangerous because it can be seen as stirring up the community. Thus, talking about faith may lead to imprisonment or violence. In the city, there is slightly more freedom, but it may still mean being called in by the police and questioned. As one country expert explained: "If a person is a member of a Christian group the government regards as suspect -- for instance, a Montagnard who is a member of an unregistered Evangelical church which the government regards as 'Dega Protestant' and therefore 'separatist' or 'terrorist' -- he or she had better not discuss it too widely, because there is an excellent chance that a few of his or her neighbors or extended family members are sympathetic to the government and/or might see it as to their advantage to report this information to the authorities."

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

Whereas conversions have not been banned by law, they have been strongly opposed. Christianity is seen as a threat to family members who follow ancestral worship since they fear that nobody would take care of them in the after-life. In some cases, family members evicted converts and ostracized Christian relatives. Christianity is seen as a threat in strongly Communist families as well. Such actions are often supported by local authorities.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.00 points)

In tribal communities, some neighbors would not want any "foreign" symbols in their village as this may offend the spirits guarding their community and village leaders will get active to prevent any "damage" done to the community. Expatriate Christians (for example working as teachers or NGO/community workers) in rural areas also refrain from putting up Christian symbols as this may also offend the people from their community.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.00 points)

In cases where not a whole family converts to Christianity, family members can strongly oppose conversion, which is usually related to the refusal to participate in ancestral worship rituals, for this is seen as the abandonment of filial piety and is considered a serious offense. Therefore

converts will be very reluctant to talk to their families about their new-won faith, especially if they are in a position of some vulnerability (such as young teenagers or women).

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Christian children are taught Communism at school and even in kindergarten, they are taught how to sing praise to Uncle Ho. In some regions in the southern part of Vietnam, Buddhism is being taught to all children. Elsewhere, Christian families in villages are often put under pressure to join in ancestral worship. In the central highlands grown-up children of pastors were being put under pressure to make their parents stop preaching and teaching, threatening them with losing their job if unable to convince their parents to cease such ministry.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

Christian children are sometimes prevented from attending school because of their faith or that of their parents. As one country expert explained: "Children whose families do not have 'household registration' are not allowed to attend school, although in practice they seem to be allowed to attend up to the sixth grade. The families who do not have household registration include thousands of Hmong and Montagnard Protestant Christians who have been denied these documents because they refuse to renounce their faith and/or to join the official government-affiliated Protestant denomination." But even when they are allowed to attend school until grade six, they receive harsher treatment from teachers and are easy targets for being bullied by peers. In another case in the WWL 2021 reporting period, in the Northern Central region, the community put pressure on a family of converts to recant their faith. When they refused, their two children were expelled from school and their mother's contract, who worked as a school cook, was terminated.

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (2.75 points)

It is expected that burials are performed according to traditional rites, which is especially a problem for Christians from the ethnic minorities. Ancestral worship is seen as important, even more so in rural areas, and there is a major fear of angering the spirits. Burials can also become a problem in mixed marriages of Buddhists and Christians.

Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (2.75 points)

This is one of the more common consequences which converts to Christianity face when they leave their ancestral faith. Conversion does not only mean giving up an ancient faith, but also implies that the convert does not care about their family and ancestors in the "other world". Additionally, converts who are married may be threatened with divorce, and it is common for families to disown, evict and cut off support from family members that convert to Christianity.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)

Local communities frequently assist in the monitoring of Christian activities and the authorities encourage the use of neighborhood watch systems. Local authorities encourage the community to restrict Christian groups as these are seen as foreign and potentially dangerous. Local police officers join the monitoring and there are also private groups like the "Red Flag Associations" active in watching Christians, and if authorities see the need, getting active against them. Online activities are also heavily monitored, as are the phonelines of some church leaders.

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

The workplace is one of the most common places where Christians are discriminated against. This is not limited to public employers, but is normal for private employers as well. Christians applying for jobs and those due for promotion often experience exclusion and limitations. Christians may be invited for job interviews, but when the potential employer learns about their religious background, the chances are high that they will not be taken on. In public service, which includes the armed forces and the police, Christians can become rank-and-file members, but are not eligible as officers or for promotion.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

It is very common that pastors and church leaders are called in by the police and interrogated. As Christians are one of the groups of concern, the police often try to compel, persuade or offer incentives for Christians to cooperate with them and to report about their activities. Those meetings are sometimes called "working sessions". In northern Vietnam, the police are known to threaten to cancel the health benefits of Christians if they continue to meet as a church. In villages, Christians are normally summoned by the village elders to report on their activities. Local community members also question them. If they notice anything suspicious, they report it to the police or village leaders.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.25 points)

In schools, students are required to show reverence to a photo of Ho Chi Minh. Cases have been reported where school principals threatened converts with expulsion. Christian students are frequently told to forget about pursuing further education, arguing that, as Christians, no one is likely to hire them after their graduation. A country expert adds: "It is also well-known (although difficult to prove) that access to foreign scholarships at the university level - which are often funded by foreign governments including those of liberal democracies, but which, like just about everything else in Vietnam, are administered in close co-operation with Vietnamese authorities - is denied to anyone who is perceived as disloyal to the government. This would emphatically

include members of unregistered churches, as well as members of registered churches whose religious beliefs had caused them to criticize government programs or policies."

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

Vietnam follows its Communist ideology strictly and reveres the state founder Ho Chi Minh, or "Uncle Ho" as he is fondly referred to, but this is not comparable to the reverence shown to leaders in North Korea. All beliefs other than Communist ideology are opposed, and religion is curbed by laws known under the heading "Decree 92". The new comprehensive "Law on Religion and Belief" came into effect on 1 January 2018.

Assessing the application of the new law, the US State Department's 2019 IRF Country report states on page 14: "Registered and unregistered religious groups continued to state that government agencies sometimes did not respond to registration applications or approval requests for religious activities within the stipulated time period, if at all, and often did not specify reasons for refusals as required by law. Some local authorities reportedly requested documents or information beyond what was stipulated by law. Several religious leaders said authorities sometimes asked for bribes to facilitate approvals. Authorities attributed the delays and denials to the applicants' failure to complete forms correctly or provide complete information. Religious groups said the process of registering groups or notifying authorities of activities in new or remote locations was particularly difficult."

Although there are a few sections in which the new law could be considered to be an improvement for Christians, the practical implementation so far shows no relief for churches. The regulations on registration in particular continue to create great bureaucratic difficulties for churches. A country expert sums up the new law as follows: "The new Law on Religion provides that there shall be freedom of religion but then provides a wide range of reasons it can be restricted, including, for instance, 'national unity' and 'solidarity'. Essentially the Constitution and the Law on Religion provide that there shall be freedom of religion only to the extent the authorities at any given time think it a good idea."

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

Christians are widely regarded as unpatriotic citizens who work against the government and its Communist goals and ideology. Therefore they have to be controlled and discriminated against. Members of the Communist party are not allowed to profess a religion. As the US State Department's 2019 IRF Country report noted on page 18: "According to religious leaders of multiple faiths, the government did not permit members of the military to practice religious rites at any time while on active duty; military members were required to take personal leave to do so. There were no clear regulations for religious expression in the military, leaving individual unit commanders to exercise significant discretion. While religious believers could serve in the enlisted ranks (including during temporary mandatory military service), commissioned officers were not permitted to be religious believers. Religious adherents continued to be customarily

excluded through the process to recruit permanent military staff."

One of the most visible fields where discrimination plays out is in the denial of household registration for ethnic minority Christians (already explained above). There have been cases where the authorities have told them that, even for the most simple of requests (such as for issuing a record), they must renounce their "American religion".

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (4.00 points)

Media reporting on Christians is biased and slander against them is frequent. For example, Christians are portrayed as acting as a tool for reinstating colonial ideology, either the French Catholic variety or US Protestantism. Christian activists have also been subjected to smear-campaigns in the local media (concerning human rights or environmental issues) and accused of disruptive and anti-government activities as well. In a documentary, aired in August 2020, a Benedictine monk was [slandered](#) by being presented as a land-grabber (UCA News, 28 August 2020). In 2020, the website of the Ministry of Defense featured a video aiming to discredit a young Montagnard Christian (a UNHCR recognized refugee outside the country) who had called attention to the absence of religious freedom in Vietnam. Websites maintained by the government-linked "Red Flag Associations" also viciously attacked two Catholic priests who had been leaders of protests criticizing the government's handling of the environmental disaster caused by the Formosa Steel factory.

Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (4.00 points)

Perpetrators of violence against Christians are almost never brought to trial. Local authorities often hire thugs for acts of violence, which are never brought to justice. Those Christians who have had to go to court have not received a fair trial. A country expert explained pointedly: "In a way this is a trick question, because nobody gets due process of law in Vietnam, so arguably Christians are no worse off than anyone else. However, Christians and others who are prosecuted for political crimes such as 'propaganda against the state' or 'injuring the national unity' are subjected to solitary confinement, denial of family visits, particularly harsh sentences, imprisonment in remote locations in parts of the country far removed from their homes, and other gross violations of due process, more often than defendants who are charged with ordinary crimes such as robbery or drunk driving." In a vivid illustration of this, a Catholic [music teacher](#) has been sentenced to 11 years because of "anti-state propaganda" (Asia News, 16 November 2019).

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)

Churches are closely monitored and occasionally meetings are hindered or disrupted. The limit of monitoring is only determined by the limited manpower of the government. According to law, churches need to register activities with the authorities. For churches in rural areas, the monitoring is even stronger, including neighbors and village leaders also checking on the church. Registered churches submit to the rules of the Committee on Religious Affairs, which is widely

known to be composed of atheists and the local and regional People's Committees of the Communist Party. The government seeks to direct the activities of the Catholic Church through a "Committee of Patriotic Priests".

Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (4.00 points)

All published material needs to be approved by the government. As imports are highly restricted, materials have to be (re-)printed in Vietnam. Translated material needs to be reviewed; approval depends on how sensitive and dangerous the authorities consider the content to be. There are no clear criteria for the "harmfulness" of a material. Just to give one example: The production of a Hmong language Bible is likely to face far more hindrances than a Vietnamese language Bible.

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

Church registration demands a tremendous amount of administrative work and there is no guarantee of actually getting the permit in the end. This is just one way the government controls the growth of the Church and keeps it under Communist rule. Even churches affiliated to registered churches find it difficult to be recognized by the government and the local authorities. According to the new 2018 Law on Religion, churches now only have to have been in existence for 5 years (instead of 20 years) before a registration application can be made, and assuming that the authorities have received no negative reports in that time. The 2018 Law also sets time limits within which the registration process should be completed. Nevertheless, many churches that have applied lack any information about progress being made.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.75 points)

There are plenty of examples where speaking out against local or national authorities have landed Catholic and Protestant church leaders and activists in prison or forced them into exile. Village heads and families also apply sanctions if converts dare to speak out, be it by exerting even more pressure or by expelling them from the village completely.

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.

Vietnam: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	2	1
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?	10	10
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	18	134
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?	10	60
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	2
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	29	105
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?	13	128
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000	1000
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100	50

For the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** According to reports, two ethnic tribal Christians were killed during the reporting period. For security reasons, no further details can be given.
- **Christians attacked:** In several incidents, at least 29 Christians were attacked, sometimes in connection with police raids on churches and church compounds. Due COVID-19 travel

restrictions, not all regions could be reached for information, so the true number may well be closer to 100.

- **Christians arrested:** Several pastors and church leaders have been arrested, and a Catholic music teacher was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment. For security reasons, no details can be published on other cases.
- **Churches attacked:** In more than ten incidents, church buildings have been attacked and/or destroyed, mainly house churches. For security reasons, no further details can be given.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** There have been several attacks on houses where Christians live, but none against shops run by Christians.

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

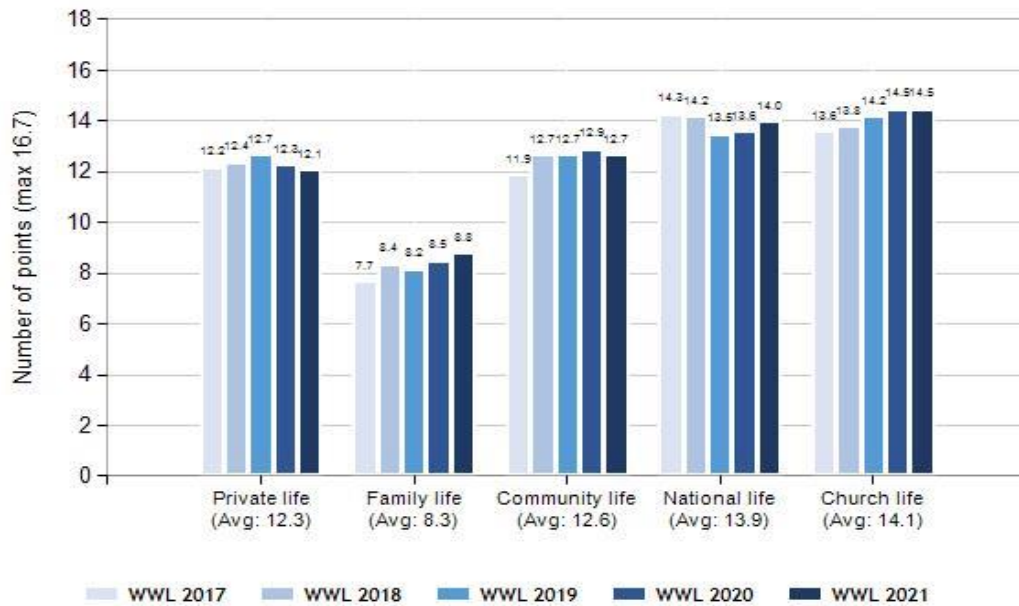
Vietnam: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	12.4
2020	12.4
2019	12.3
2018	12.3
2017	11.9

The table above shows how the average level of pressure on Christians has been at a very high level over the last five reporting periods and has gradually increased from 11.9 points in WWL 2017 and has levelled off at 12.4 points in WWL 2020 and 2021.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

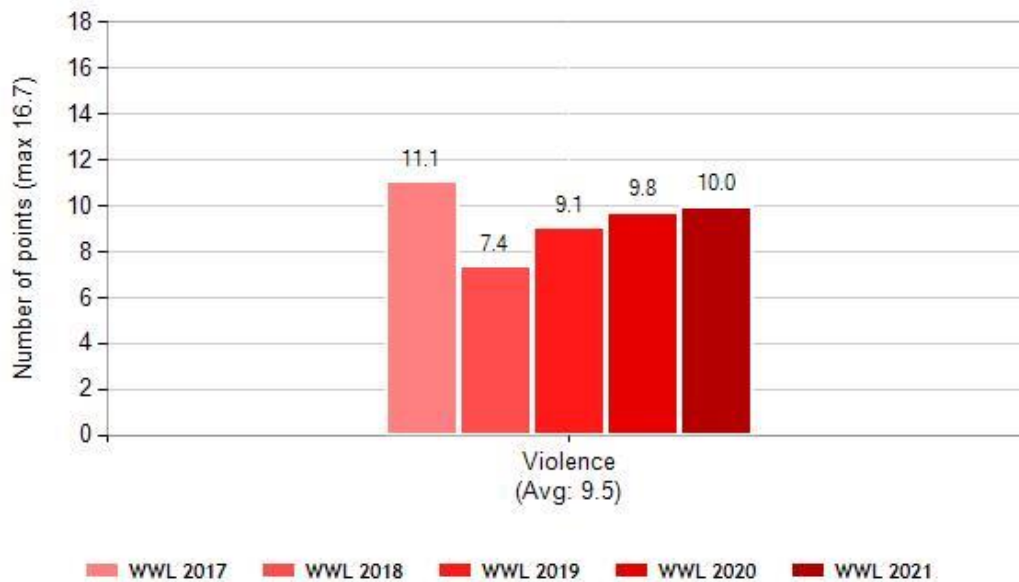
The chart below shows that the pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* has consistently been at a very high level or higher (except in *Family life*) over the last five reporting periods. The pressure in *Church life* increased each year and has now plateaued at the extreme level of 14.5 points. This reflects the increasing insecurity and restrictions. The pressure in *National life* has also reached an extremely high level again in WWL 2021; although the level is now not as high as in WWL 2017-2018, the trend shows that it is increasing.

WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Vietnam (Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Vietnam (Violence)



Persecution in Vietnam has always been violent. The chart below shows the very high scores over all 5 years, with a peak in WWL 2017. Killings do not happen on a large scale; the Communist government's preferred means are prison sentences or deportation.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points

Forced divorce

Forced marriage

Trafficking

Violence – physical

Gender equality has been a topic given much attention in Vietnam. Unlike so many countries where women are at a significant economic disadvantage, Vietnam has one of the highest participation rates of women in the workplace. 79% of women are in the workforce, compared to 86% of men (The Economist, 8 June 2019). Nevertheless, women bear an unequal share of domestic work in the home. As in much of Communist Asia, women are traditionally expected to care for their parents, which requires a significant investment of time and energy. Despite socialist ideals of equality, [Confucian values](#) remain, embodied in sayings such as “1 boy is something, 10 girls is nothing” (Inside Asia, accessed 14 December 2020). This is also reflected in Vietnam’s son-bias and the ongoing practice of sex-selective abortions (VN Express, 19 July 2020).

Within this context, female Christians face pressure both for their faith and their gender. Some Christian women, particularly converts and those in tribal cultures, may be forced into early marriages. Youth leaders commonly report that following marriage, young converts will stop attending church. Indeed, these marriages cause some women to give up their Christian faith. Within marriages, women also face oppression, violence and threats of divorce from their husbands. This reinforces the feeling that they are unequal, creating fear and despondency.

Christian women and girls have also been victims of sexual assault for their faith, although there are no specific incidents which have been reported in 2020. However, forced marriage and the trafficking of brides to China among Hmong women (in northern provinces) continues to be an area of concern for Hmong Christians.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points

Economic harassment via business/job/work access

False charges

Imprisonment by government

Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – death
Violence – physical

Although men generally have [higher positions than women](#) in the workplace (VOA News, 16 April 2019), Christian men also face discrimination and harassment at work, with some losing their jobs altogether because of their faith. Government officials have monitored and interfered with the work of known Christians. As men are the primary providers in Vietnam, this paralyses the whole family economically and weakens their place within society. If they are church leaders, their congregations are weakened and may even face closure.

Christian men in Vietnam are targets for arrest (on faith-related grounds) and abduction, causing many to flee their villages. According to a [2019 Amnesty International report](#), 128 prisoners of conscience were in prison at the time of publication, including several Catholic activists who were speaking out for religious freedom. One such activist was reportedly arrested for ‘producing, disseminating or spreading information and documents aimed at undermining Vietnam.’ Christians have also been jailed as a result of false charges. In one recent case, a Hmong Christian was accused of illegal logging when he was just re-building his home after villagers and local authorities destroyed it the previous year. Pressure is high on Hmong Christians in particular – several have reportedly been arrested in the WWL 2021 reporting period. Generally, once in custody, Christian detainees suffer harsh treatment, physical beatings and are put under pressure to renounce their Christian faith. According to reports, two church leaders who had been in prison, died just days after being released. They had been tortured.

Christians also experience pressure within the armed forces. Military service is compulsory for all men; evasion is punished by a prison sentence. Religious convictions are not grounds for non-participation. Within the armed forces, Christians are unable to read the Bible freely or partake in other Christian practices.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department’s IRF 2019 report](#) (pages 132-138):

- "From June to October, independent Hoa Hao followers in An Giang reported that local authorities and state-recognized Hoa Hao Buddhists groups in Phu Tan District, An Giang Province, advocated tearing down the 100-year-old An Hoa Pagoda, one of the first independent Hoa Hao pagodas founded by Prophet Huynh Phu So, citing a purported need to build a new pagoda. Independent Hoa Hao followers opposed the pagoda’s demolition due to its religious importance and proposed it be renovated instead. Plainclothes police reportedly assaulted independent Hoa Hao Buddhists who tried to prevent the pagoda’s demolition. The government temporarily halted demolition of the pagoda, and it remained intact at year’s end." (Page 17)

Being Communist, the government acts against all religions which are not under its umbrella, including Buddhists, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhists and Muslims. This starts with harassment and may end up in detention or expulsion from their homes, villages or country. Particularly members of the country's ethnic minorities are on the authorities' radar. As is typical for all Communist governments, the Vietnamese authorities seek to keep all religious groups under control. As long as they are organized under government-controlled councils and thus meet with the government's knowledge, the latter will leave them alone, except for controlling what is preached. Independent groups, however, come under serious pressure from the government, especially their leaders. This can lead to serious health issues and even end up with the imprisonment of [unruly monks](#) from one of the many Buddhist sects (Radio Free Asia, 23 January 2018).

In the words of the [Human Rights Watch 2020](#) report: "Unrecognized religious groups, including Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Christian, and Buddhist groups, face constant surveillance, harassment, and intimidation. Followers of independent religious group are subject to public criticism, forced renunciation of faith, detention, interrogation, torture, and imprisonment."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Communist and post-Communist oppression - blended with Dictatorial paranoia

It is no surprise that the implementation of the new "Law on Religion and Belief" does not bring any tangible positive change. The registration and running of Christian churches will be at least as cumbersome as it is now, and speaking about one's faith in public is likely to remain potentially dangerous. Civil rights and freedom of religion will remain elusive and *Communist oppression* will continue to be heavily felt by Christians for the time-being. This pressure may even increase if relations with Vietnam's big neighbor China are warming up again, although this does not seem likely in the close future. Repression against Christians will also continue because the [dynamics of oppression](#) whereby civil servants seek to please their superiors by adding to the pressure on Christians (The Diplomat, 28 June 2019). Ethnic minorities will continue to be watched with suspicion, especially when they are following a religion not under the government's control.

Clan oppression

Many Vietnamese follow age-old traditions of worshiping ancestors and spirits. Whoever decides not to join in these traditions puts themselves outside of the family and community and will therefore be put under strong pressure to belong again. As family bonds are still strong, especially in the rural areas, this pressure will not cease for Christians coming from this background.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: "Montagnards - <https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/vietnam-montagnards-10232018155849.html>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: slandered - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/vietnam-monks-reject-state-run-tv-stations-accusations/89322>

- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: music teacher - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Catholic-music-teacher-sentenced-to-11-years-for-%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%98anti-state%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%99-propaganda-48562.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Confucian values - <https://www.insideasiatours.com/blog/2017/10/18/women-in-vietnam/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: higher positions than women - <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/men-still-have-edge-communist-vietnams-gender-equal-system?amp>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: 2019 Amnesty International report - <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA4103032019ENGLISH.pdf%22%20/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department's IRF 2019 report - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: unruly monks - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/hermit-sentence-01232018153825.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Human Rights Watch 2020 - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020>
- Future outlook: dynamics of oppression - <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/why-is-repression-rising-in-vietnam/>

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=Vietnam>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Vietnam>