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World Watch Research

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# Afghanistan: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



**Open Doors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2024

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Afghanistan: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
43,373,000	thousands	-

## Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Almost all Afghan Christians are converts from Islam and are not able to practice their faith openly. Leaving Islam is considered shameful and punishable by death under Islamic law, implementation of which has continued in the WWL 2025 report period throughout the country by the Taliban government, which took over the country on 15 August 2021. If exposed, Christian converts have to leave their place of living, many try to flee the country. The family, clan or tribe must save its 'honor' and deal with any known convert. After the Taliban took over, most Christians tried to leave the country and/or went into hiding. The take-over meant a reintroduction of stringent restrictions on the role of women in public life, but also less freedom for ethnic and religious minorities, including Christian converts, who are seen as apostates. Now that Taliban control is consolidated - although an occasional dissenting voice can be heard -, Christian converts are having to adapt and conform to the rigid form of society implemented.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Afghanistan 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 \(CRC\)](#)

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

- Christian converts are killed on suspicion of their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Women converts are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23.3 and CEDAW Art. 16)
- Afghans are assumed to be Muslims and are not allowed to change their religion (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians cannot display any religious images or symbols (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Children of Christian converts are forced to adhere to Islamic religious precepts and receive Islamic teaching (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)

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

No specific examples can be given for security reasons. For more information, please refer to the section on Violence below.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Since the WWL 2023 reporting period, it was decided to include expatriate Christians as a separate WWL category again since NGOs have re-started their work in Afghanistan. Due to the moderately improved security, expatriates are no longer restricted to highly secured compounds. However, it remains impossible for them to mix with Afghan Christians and hence they are still involuntarily isolated.



**Historical Christian communities:** These do not exist in Afghanistan.

**Converts to Christianity:** Different communities of converts exist in Afghanistan. There are those who left as asylum seekers for Western countries and found the Christian faith and then returned to tell others; those who came from the first converts to Christianity in the 20th century - which accounts for a majority of the Christian underground church network; and those who recently converted after being exposed to teaching and evangelism through radio, Internet, satellite TV or word of mouth. All these Christians come from a Muslim background and try their utmost not to be discovered by family, friends, neighbors or the wider community. Depending on the family, they may even have to fear for their lives. For them, living openly as a Christian is simply not possible - even the suspicion of being a Christian can bring severe persecution. This is true under Taliban rule as well.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These do not exist in Afghanistan.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

- **Main areas for Islamic oppression:** The Taliban has consolidated power across the country, though are having to work out whether the benefits of greater international recognition are worth the risks of [more radical elements splitting off](#) (Al-Jazeera Opinion, 14 September 2024) all the while managing some more [regionally based groups](#) (RFE/RL, 14 August 2024). It should be kept in mind that the whole country is strictly Islamic, so Christians are facing difficulties wherever they are in the country. As a general rule, control and supervision in rural areas is stricter than in most cities.
- **Main areas for Clan oppression:** Family and clan affiliation is strong across the country and even extends into cases where (predominantly) young men migrate to the cities. Filial piety and clan loyalty is expected and given in such cases as well.
- **Main areas for Organized corruption and crime:** Whereas criminal activities and corruption occur countrywide, drug production and distribution are particularly dominant in the south. With the decrease in funds flowing into the country, corruption is less of a problem than it was during the more recent years of war and conflict.

## Position on the World Watch List

Afghanistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	85	10
WWL 2024	84	10
WWL 2023	84	9
WWL 2022	98	1
WWL 2021	94	2

For many years, Christians in Afghanistan endured the same extreme levels of pressure as in North Korea, although by different means and actors. In terms of scoring for the spheres of life, for many years Afghanistan and North Korea did not differ at all, scoring the maximum for each of the five

spheres. However, the take-over of the government by the Taliban changed everything and the violence score in WWL 2022 increased to an unprecedented level of 15 points. Since then Christians have largely gone abroad or underground and it has become more difficult than ever to verify reports of violence. As a result, the violence score dropped sharply from 15 to 5 points. It has to be emphasized here that this does not mean that the country has become safer for Christians. A second change is the return of the expatriate community as a separate category alongside the category for converts (see explanation in Christian communities above); as some questions in the WWL questionnaire are limited to converts, this has led to a decrease in the score for pressure. Again, this does not mean that the situation for converts has improved in any way.

The overall score for Afghanistan remains extremely high. This does not mean that each and every Christian in the country is being forced to flee (although each and every Christian will hide his or her faith even more carefully with the Taliban in power); it does not mean that church life is not possible at all or that house-churches cannot meet at all. It also does not suggest that the persecution situation cannot get worse again. However, as one country expert put it: "There is no way to speculate on the growth of the church. The usual indices are missing. ... [T]he underground church is maintaining silence."

## Persecution engines

Afghanistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Very strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

### **Islamic oppression (Very strong), blended with Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)**

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan neither allows any Afghan citizens to become Christians nor recognizes converts as such. Conversion is seen as apostasy and brings shame on the family and the Islamic community. Therefore, converts hide their new-won faith as far as possible. As one country expert shared, the Islamic ideology of Wahhabi Islam, which comes through links with Saudi Arabia, is widely practiced in the country and it has been used successfully to attack and destroy invaders. With

power now in the hands of the Taliban, which is more inclined to radical Islamic views, all Afghan citizens are facing strict limitations in everyday life inspired by Islamic tenets - and women even more so. Christian converts do not have any space to deviate from the behavior expected from everyone. The extreme violence used by groups such as the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (ISKP) has translated into a decreasing, but still considerable number of people being killed in attacks or displaced. IS appears to have begun a "holier than thou"-competition, trying to brand the Taliban as un-Islamic. Although its success seems limited so far, this competition will find religious minorities, including Christians, in the crosshairs.

The Taliban will do whatever it sees necessary to stay in power and keep its own movement unified. Its ideological resolve can be seen in the dedication with which they took hold of the education sector. In what Taliban believes is a '[war of thoughts](#)' (AAN, 6 August 2023), they started by installing Taliban sympathizers to take charge of university leadership. In a second step, university courses were revised in such a way that mandatory religious topics were now streamlined to fit Taliban ideology and extended from 16 to 48 hours per semester. The AAN report recounts how one university lecturer described his meeting with the Taliban and their fixation on radical Islamic theology:

- "One official who looked more knowledgeable than the others spoke about the importance of higher education. He said when God said that the stomach was the source of all diseases, this was medicine. When God said that we must save resources, this was economics. When God said that water descended from the sky and would make this or that happen to the soil, this was engineering. This was their understanding of higher education."

Christians of Afghan nationality are all converts with a Muslim background. If they are discovered, they face discrimination and hostility (including death) at the hands of family, friends and community. Muslim religious leaders will frequently be the instigators and the local authorities can be involved, too. The Taliban puts an even stronger emphasis on frequent mosque attendance, increasing the role of religious leaders. According to an [Asia Foundation survey](#) published in November 2019 (the latest available data), Afghan people display the highest levels of confidence in their religious leaders and in the media - far ahead of their trust in any politicians. More than 57% of respondents said they would welcome religious leaders being more involved in politics, but some provinces saw percentages of up to 98.5% (Reliefweb, 3 December 2019).

### **Clan oppression (Very strong)**

The concept of nation is alien to the Afghan way of thinking. One's own family comes first, followed by the clan and then the tribe – and all of these are much more important than the country as a whole, which may have been one underlying reason why the Taliban experienced so little resistance in the 2021 take-over. People are deeply entrenched in caring for their families, villages and tribes. If someone dares to turn from his tribe to embrace something new and maybe even foreign, this results in high pressure being exerted to make that person return to traditional norms. If this does not happen, such a person will be looked upon as a traitor of the community and hence excluded. This applies to all 'deviations' but even more if someone turns to Christianity. The Christian religion is considered to be Western and hostile to Afghan culture, society and Islam, and leaving Islam is seen as treason. This is confirmed by a report on the Taliban's perception of [international aid and NGOs](#) (AAN, 29 July 2023),

according to which among other points of criticism, suspicion of conversion agendas rank high under ideological motives.

### Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

While the Taliban have restored some form of order, corruption and crime, primarily related to the drugs trade, remain a threat to Christians, who are normally at the lower end of the income scale. While the Taliban crackdown on opium production has been described as one of the most successful anti-drug reduction efforts in history, it has caused huge economic dislocation in the opium growing areas affecting the livelihoods of almost [seven million people](#). "Farmers have lost an estimated \$1.3 billion annually, or 8 per cent of GDP in 2023". However, "underworld kingpins and big landowners have thrived under the ban, reaping the benefits of skyrocketing prices by selling stockpiles" (International Crisis Group, 12 September 2024).

### Drivers of persecution

Afghanistan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			VERY STRONG				VERY STRONG	STRONG
Government officials	Very strong			Very strong				Very strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Very strong			Very strong				Very strong	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong			Very strong				Very strong	Medium
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong			Very strong				Medium	Weak
One's own (extended) family	Very strong			Very strong				Medium	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Medium			Strong				Medium	Medium
Organized crime cartels or networks	Weak			Very weak				Weak	Weak

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

## Drivers of Islamic oppression and Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Since Afghanistan - as stated in the now obsolete Constitution - is an Islamic state, all other religions are seen as alien to the country and consequently government officials (Taliban and pre-Taliban) are hostile towards all signs of Christianity. The term "government official" increasingly means a member of the Taliban (sometimes even with religious credentials) and the growing power of the revived "Ministry of Virtue and Vice" is already strongly felt across society. The attitude towards Christian converts, if discovered, will not change in that respect. Political parties, which had been a driver up to August 2021, have been ruled out now.
- **Ethnic group leaders, Islamic leaders, violent religious groups and revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Very strong/Medium):** Ethnic and religious leaders often hold more power than government officials, and sometimes there is an overlap of the different roles. Ethnic group leaders are the law in many parts of the country, religious leaders are often co-opted or volunteer to do a sort of grid management, e.g., by checking who is not attending the mosque frequently. The small, but very violent IS influence, puts additional pressure on the already hidden group of Christians. As one country researcher said: "Although things may [generally] have got worse - things for Christians facing persecution have not changed that much. It is the access to data by the Taliban which was collected by the former government (identity card databases etc.) that makes this situation particularly dangerous."
- **Families (Very strong/Medium):** Although this depends on the family's general ethos, for most families a conversion brings shame, and the family will do much - in some cases everything necessary - to bring the convert back to Islam and to atone for the shame. With the Taliban in power, the pressure on families to follow 'the right version of Islam' is high and there is little - if any - tolerance of any kind of deviation (whether real or only perceived).
- **Normal citizens (Very strong/Medium):** What has been said for families can be said about the wider community (neighbors and friends) as well. Control within society is very strong and leaving Islam is seen as a rejection of Afghan culture and society which needs to be stopped - if needed, by mob violence.

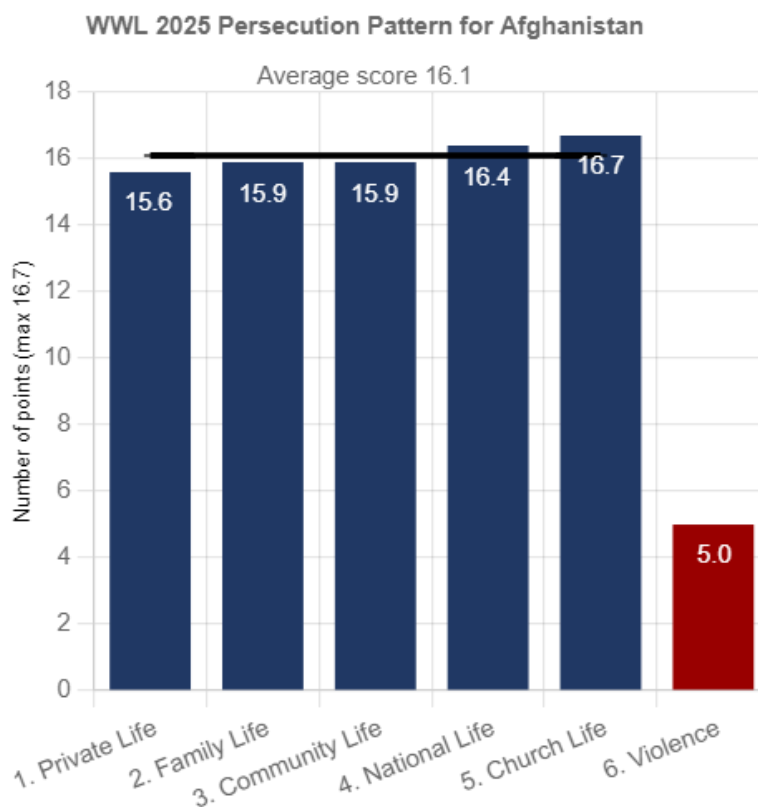
## Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Government officials (Very strong):** As Afghanistan is organized first and foremost along ethnic lines, affiliation to an ethnicity and tribe is the highest priority and needs to be protected and defended above all else, not just on the national, but even more so on the provincial and district level.
- **Ethnic group leaders, Islamic leaders and violent religious groups (Very strong):** Ethnicity, often backed by religious affiliation, defines a person's being and consequently, ethnic leaders wield a strong influence over people. The very same dynamics described for Islamic oppression are active in this respect as well.
- **Normal citizens and (extended) Family (Strong):** Everyone leaving his or her given community, for example by changing his or her religion to Christianity, is seen as committing treason and in need of being brought back to the fold. The very same drivers already mentioned under Islamic oppression are active here as well, since in Afghan culture, ethnic and religious identity are regarded as being one and the same.

### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Strong):** The central government in Afghanistan has always been weak and its officials, especially at the local level, have done everything to capitalize on the (limited) power and authority they hold. So far, the Taliban have appeared unable to break this pattern, despite some effort and strong rhetoric. When Christians are exposed or simply oppose illicit practices, they are in a weak position, and no-one will protect them. They can even become a high value hostage to barter over and be used for striking deals.
- **Violent religious groups and revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks (Very strong/Strong):** It is a well-known fact that opium cultivation and trade is particularly intense in the southern province of Kandahar. The revenue from the drug trade has always been an important source of funds for various groups. The drug-lords - of any affiliation - will protect their business and transportation routes at all costs. Christians, who are deeply hidden in society anyway, will have no protection against them at all if discovered.

### The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Afghanistan shows:

- Pressure on Christians in Afghanistan is at an extreme level, with the average pressure reaching 16.1 points. Christian converts continue to face the fact that they need to comply with all Taliban rules and remain hidden.
- While extreme scores for pressure in the *Family, Private* and *Community spheres* are typical for strictly Islamic countries, the extreme pressure in the *National sphere* and the nearly maximum

score in *Church sphere* highlight two things: i) a government relying on strictly interpreted Islamic rules and a basically tribal society; and ii) the impossibility of any visible church being able to function within the country. All promises made to international bodies by the Taliban about making attempts to live up to and implement human rights standards have evaporated.

- The violence score slightly increased from 4.6 to 5 points, based on reports from a number of sources, though it continues to be difficult to verify incidents of violence against Christians. The long-term trend is for Christians to leave the country or stay underground given the overwhelming hostility and violence they would face if identified as Christians in 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 2025 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

#### ***Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (4.00 points)***

Any Christian materials, particularly obvious items like crucifixes, will attract attention as it points to the interests of its owner. Converts do their very best to hide their copies of the Bible or any other Christian material. Those who have smartphones and access to internet would delete any trace of these materials, messages and browser history as religious police arbitrarily check on phones. Being legally allowed in the country as NGO workers, expatriates engage with locals very cautiously as they cannot be seen to be doing something else outside of their disclosed nature of work. Being found to be in possession of Christian materials in the presence of Afghans may be construed as proselytizing and risk arrest or deportation.

#### ***Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (4.00 points)***

No one will reveal symbols or any other signs of Christianity in Afghanistan, as this will lead to a public outcry and harsh consequences and directly point to the converts themselves. Even members of the expatriate community will avoid showing any hint of their Christian faith, as it may be interpreted as proselytizing, thus illustrating the levels of pressure experienced. And even anyone just showing interest in any religion other than Islam, runs the risk of being strongly opposed, including being questioned and isolated.

#### ***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (4.00 points)***

Converts always have to be very cautious as even the suspicion of having converted can lead to severe consequences such as arrest and the destruction of homes. Families often hide their faith from their own children and have to exercise great caution when speaking with other people about faith-related issues. As they can never know which members of their clan have been recruited by or sympathize with the Taliban, they are intensely cautious about whom they trust in regard to their faith. Even if their names are not passed on to the Taliban, they will face severe consequences from their clan if

their faith is known. Social control is high, and it is difficult to hide newly won Christian faith over a long period of time, especially if the convert has children. Additionally, converts are in a catch-22 situation as they do not want to send their children to an Islamic madrassa but cannot speak about Christian faith to their young children either, because that would be too dangerous. Expatriates are expected not to speak to other people, especially Afghans, about religion.

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

Afghanistan is an Islamic nation and any deviation from Islam is forbidden by law and tradition, and conversion is punishable. The Taliban government's position (as well as that of the average Afghan in the street) remains that Afghans cannot be Christian and that it is illegal and impossible to have any other faith than Islam. Converts are dealt with "swiftly and silently", as stated by one country expert, but at this stage of Taliban rule, authorities seem more interested in uncovering networks than in immediately dealing out capital punishment. Since society is tightly knit, social control is high and keeping things private is difficult; as a result, converts run a high risk of being discovered, depending on the circumstances. Expatriates suspected of trying to convert locals can be imprisoned or expelled.

***Block 1: Additional information***

The high pressure under which converts in Afghanistan find themselves means they have great difficulties in meeting each other and need to exercise the utmost care when listening to Christian radio or programs in the internet, especially as there is very little privacy in Afghan culture. Additionally, as many Christians have relocated inside the country, this adds to the difficulties. Still, these programs enjoy a growing audience. Praying and Bible reading for oneself is only possible when converts are sure they are alone. Back in May 2021, a small group of Christians decided they wanted to have 'non-Muslim' officially stated on their ID cards; as a consequence, they were hunted down after the information fell into the hands of the Taliban. Biometric data systems in the hands of Taliban authorities are [recognized](#) as being a far-reaching danger for many Afghan citizens (HRW, 30 March 2022). Due to the extended economic and social crisis and also due to the very restricted environment and insecure future Afghans are facing, many Afghans have become more open and keener to search and talk about the deeper issues of life; however, this does not diminish the overall risk associated with sharing the Christian faith.

**Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere**

***Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (4.00 points)***

In a context in which conversion to Christianity is considered apostasy, there is really no concept of Christians being allowed to raise their children in accordance with Christian faith. Even introducing Christian teaching to the children would only be possible if the male head of the family converts. And then parents have to weigh up the risks of sharing with their children about the Christian faith - if the children inadvertently mention this to others, or behave differently in public spaces, this might expose the whole family.



***Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)***

Children who go to school are required to attend Islamic classes, and the Taliban has been targeting the education system as the means by which their strict interpretation of Islam is reproduced. Children of converts who do not know about their parent's faith will most likely not be affected much, but this cannot be said of children who are converts themselves.

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

Religion is not required information in registering birth in Afghanistan, as the assumption is that all are children are Muslims. In cases where one's religion is asked, converts will have to say they or their child is a Muslim. Anything else is unacceptable and unthinkable. As stated above (in *Block 1: Additional information*), the few Christians who tried to opt for "non-Muslim" in their ID cards paid a high price for it.

***Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (3.50 points)***

Divorce is allowed in Islam, so conversion is an acceptable reason for divorcing a spouse. But in Afghanistan, except in cases where the convert is the male head of the family, a woman who is found out to have converted to Islam by her husband will not only be divorced, but she will experience terrible abuse and killing her is justifiable. In cases when the husband converts, the wife's family will put pressure on her to secure a divorce. Converts are sometimes sent to a mental hospital, since families believe that no sane person would ever leave Islam. This reasoning makes it also easier to nullify a marriage.

***Block 2: Additional information***

Converts face many more limitations than those listed above. Baptism as the most visible sign of becoming a Christian is considered a crime punishable by death. Baptisms therefore have to be carried out in secret. As most Christians will keep their conversion secret, they will be buried according to Islamic rites. If Afghans are discovered to have become Christians, their children will automatically be taken away and given to adoption by Muslim families. Those children will be harassed in their new family and at school. If a family succeeds in keeping their conversion secret, the children will have no option but to continue attending madrassa classes and are likely to grow up confused about the divergent beliefs if they know about the Christian faith of their parents.

**Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere**

***Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (4.00 points)***

As the Taliban tightens its control over society, everyone in Afghanistan is forced to follow all regulations and norms that the group has imposed such as the ban on women employees, having to wear a *burqa* in schools, and the requirement to have a male companion when going outside the home. Everyone is expected to be rigidly following Islamic disciplines, especially going to the mosque.

Failure to observe such will raise suspicion and anyone can report the violators to the local imam and/or Sharia police.

***Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (4.00 points)***

Whether an Afghan is known as a Christian (e.g., in a more tolerant family) or unknown, participation in Islamic activities such as Namaz (prayer), mosque visits, fasting, Eid celebrations, funerals, births, weddings, sacrifices etc. is expected by family and society and even mandatory under Taliban rule. Converts are also pressured into attending mosque prayers, especially on Fridays. Anyone observed to have repeatedly failed to attend the mosque may be reported to the imam and/or Sharia police which will lead to interrogation.

***Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)***

If Christian converts are discovered, they will be taken away for investigation and interrogation. These interrogations are intense, regardless of whether they are carried out by the Taliban, ISKP or any other group. Individual Christians often know very little about church networks in the country, but the interrogators will nevertheless try to find out as much as possible, including house searches and checking cell phones and other devices. If identified, church leaders receive particular attention.

***Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.50 points)***

Christian parents fear sending their children to school because they want to protect them from Islamic indoctrination and from revealing their hidden Christian identity. If they are discovered and are not immediately publicly exposed, the children will be pressured into leaving school without being given the necessary documents to continue school elsewhere. Of course, Christian students have to follow the general curriculum, which puts a strong emphasis on Islam. As a country expert explained: "Madrassas are the main form of education for those living in the rural areas, therefore Christians are limited and severely restricted in gaining an education. In urban areas they have to pretend to be Muslims so that they can access even other schools."

Since the Taliban take-over in 2021, girls have been refused the possibility of continuing their secondary education and the Taliban has strengthened the madrasa system across the country.

***Block 3: Additional information***

Any convert discovered will lose access to community resources and healthcare. Communities exercise immense pressure to ensure allegiance and order; consequently, they monitor everyone. Whoever is perceived as deviating from the norm is put under pressure to return to the mainstream religious and political views, be it by physical abuse or by using occult practices (such as forms of witchcraft) which continue in Afghanistan.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

The Constitution - since August 2021 suspended by the Taliban - guaranteed that adherents of other religions were free to exercise their faith. However, Article 3 of the Constitution, which stated that no law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of Islam, led to restrictions in many areas. Although the wording was flexible and it did not state what may be deemed as inappropriate and against Islam, in practice accusations of conversion were equated with blasphemy and neither Christians nor other religious minorities (including non-Sunni Muslims) enjoyed freedom of religion. Meanwhile, the country is back under the direct rule of Sharia law and it does not look likely that the Taliban plan to implement a new constitution, even though a book on jurisprudence, published by the Taliban's [Chief Justice](#), did acknowledge the need for a constitution (AAN, 3 September 2023).

### ***Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)***

The Taliban's capture of Kabul in 2021 effectively ended twenty-years of civil war, and while there remain some separative elements, travelling around the country has become less risky for the population (and humanitarian workers). However, any travel by anyone suspected of being a Christian (native Afghan or expatriate) or of having interest in or connections to the 'Christian West' is monitored and often hindered if it is suspected that a journey is being conducted for faith-based reasons (e.g., to attend a conference). The Taliban is known for notoriously strict and frequent searches.

### ***Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (4.00 points)***

As a country expert explained: "The media is afraid to contradict the Taliban line - Christians are not recognized by the media as they do not want to bring attention to any Christian activity, this would be seen as promoting Christianity. Communication against Christians takes place at the grassroots levels, with leaders and militants targeting Christians." In general, Christians are seldom the topic of media reports, but if they are, the reporting is always distorted and stirs up anti-Christian sentiment, e.g., by exaggerating the number of Christians in the country. The voice of independent media from within the country has almost been silenced completely since the Taliban took over power.

### ***Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.50 points)***

The punishment for blasphemy is not so much a rights issue as it is a societal one; the punishment is carried out swiftly by the local religious authorities, jihadist groups or (since the Taliban take-over) by government officials. In many cases, blasphemy charges are reportedly made for reasons of personal enmity or envy. Even a mere suspicion or allegation can end in immediate death or the individual fleeing.

### ***Block 4: Additional information***

Christians are discriminated against when they have to deal with the authorities. Christians have difficulties in running their own businesses and of course face unjust treatment when they have to stand trial. If they have experienced such problems, it is usually (and officially) not because of their faith, but due to other alleged crimes (e.g., due to treason by working with foreign intelligence

agencies, murder or drug dealing). Even people only suspected of being a Christian are likely to face similar ordeals. Smear campaigns can be run against them, rumors spread, causing people to look more deeply at their lifestyle, asking questions like "Why don't you pray as much as we do?, Why do you shave?, Why don't you attend the mosque regularly?".

## **Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere**

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

There is no publicly accessible church in Afghanistan. The only functioning chapel was reported to be in the basement of the Italian embassy in Kabul and only open for the small number of expatriates still working in the city - mainly diplomatic and military staff, but it is now closed (or to be more precise - it has relocated to Qatar) for the time being. Any form of meeting noted by the Taliban receives high attention, this includes meetings carried out by expatriates as well. Christian groups (no matter how small they are) have to be cautious about how they meet. A country expert states: "Churches are underground and [services are] held in secret; people are not able to share their faith openly, sing loudly or meet for communion. Therefore, 'church services' tend to look like a group of people meeting over a meal".

### ***Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)***

Leaders of Christian groups are not known in public. As one country expert stated, if the radical groups or Muslim society in general knew who was a Christian leader, they would interrogate him in order to seek to destroy the group or a whole network. They might kill the Christian leader afterwards to set an example and intimidate other hidden Christians even further.

### ***Block 5.12: Churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses. (4.00 points)***

When the Taliban ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s, they became infamous for banning all "objectionable literature", particularly anything deemed as "contrary to Islam". After returning to power in August 2021, they have imposed [11 rules for journalists](#), which essentially rephrase and reinstate this ban (Reporter without borders, 22 September 2021).

### ***Block 5.16: Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (e.g. via local or national radio, TV, Internet, social media, cell phones). (4.00 points)***

All forms of media are controlled by the Taliban, except shortwave radio and social media. But it has been reported that the Taliban has increased their capability to block radio signals and monitor online activities, though Christian organizations outside the country are still able to use various media platforms to give Afghans access to Christian material and ways are found to access this discretely.

### ***Block 5: Additional information***

Christians cannot set up charitable organizations, train their own leaders or apply for registration or permits for building a church. Open work of any kind among youth is not possible. A country expert states: "Youth are very much at risk due to the recruitment of young people to fight in the wars against

different factions. We are seeing a new kind of war - which is a war of showing the rest of the country who is more extreme than the other." In this kind of conscription race, everyone working openly with youth will be perceived as a competitor for their hearts and minds. Finally, the Afghan Church is deeply underground and as far as the official view is concerned, non-existent. This means that, unlike the few visible religious minorities in the country, they are not able to speak out against any violations of rights.

## Violence

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

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

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

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

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

### **3. The use of symbolic numbers:**

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

### **4. The symbol “x” in the table:**

- *This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.*

Afghanistan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	x	x
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	x	x
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?	x	x
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	x	x
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	x	x
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	x	x
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?	x	x
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?	x	x
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	x	x

Due to security concerns, few details can be published. Incidents continue to be extremely difficult to verify since many Christians have i) gone into hiding; ii) relocated within the country; iii) tried to leave the country; and iv) disposed of their cell phones for security reasons. Despite their extra vulnerability (as convert Christians, often coming from an ethnic minority background) or even triple vulnerability (as women), in many cases it is not possible to determine whether they were targeted because of their Christian faith or for other reasons, e.g., for having cooperated with the former government, or with Western forces, or NGOs etc. The reports obtained indicate that the Taliban are more interested in

arresting and interrogating suspected Christians (in order to identify networks) than in killing them right away. One country expert rightly sees this practice as being particularly "devastating" for the small Christian community in Afghanistan.

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** For the reasons stated above, the number has remained low. This does not mean that the situation for Christians has improved in any way. According to Sharia law, if a convert is not willing to repent, he is punishable with death.
- **Christians attacked:** The Taliban has prioritized the hunting down of anyone who either openly spoke out against them or was aligned with anything the new rulers do not approve of, e.g. being involved with the previous government. Whatever they perceive as a threat to their authority, will be targeted. This naturally includes Christians, who have to be dealt with for religious reasons.
- **Christians detained:** Detention is very violent and it is aimed at investigating and identifying Christian networks. The end-result of a detention is often pre-determined.
- **Churches attacked:** Afghanistan has not had an official church building for almost fifty years. With the Church deeper underground than in previous WWL reporting periods, they have been less visible for attack. When the Church is deeper underground, incidents may, of course, occur which are not reported. Additionally, the Taliban take-over led to many Christians fleeing and 'taking their church with them'. However, such situations are not considered as a church attacked or closed in WWL methodology (this is not only the case in Afghanistan, but for other countries as well). This is not to say that church life and gatherings are not strongly affected by a life in hiding or on the run.
- **Christian homes attacked:** No matter if converts have been abducted, had to go into hiding within the country or even try to relocate abroad, they lost their homes, most of which were either destroyed or taken over by neighbors or Taliban fighters moving in.
- **Christians raped/forcefully married:** There have been reports of women and girls being taken and married to young Taliban fighters who want 'spoils of war'. However, it could not be confirmed that they have been targeted because of their Christian faith. This does not mean that such cases do not happen.

## 5 Year trends

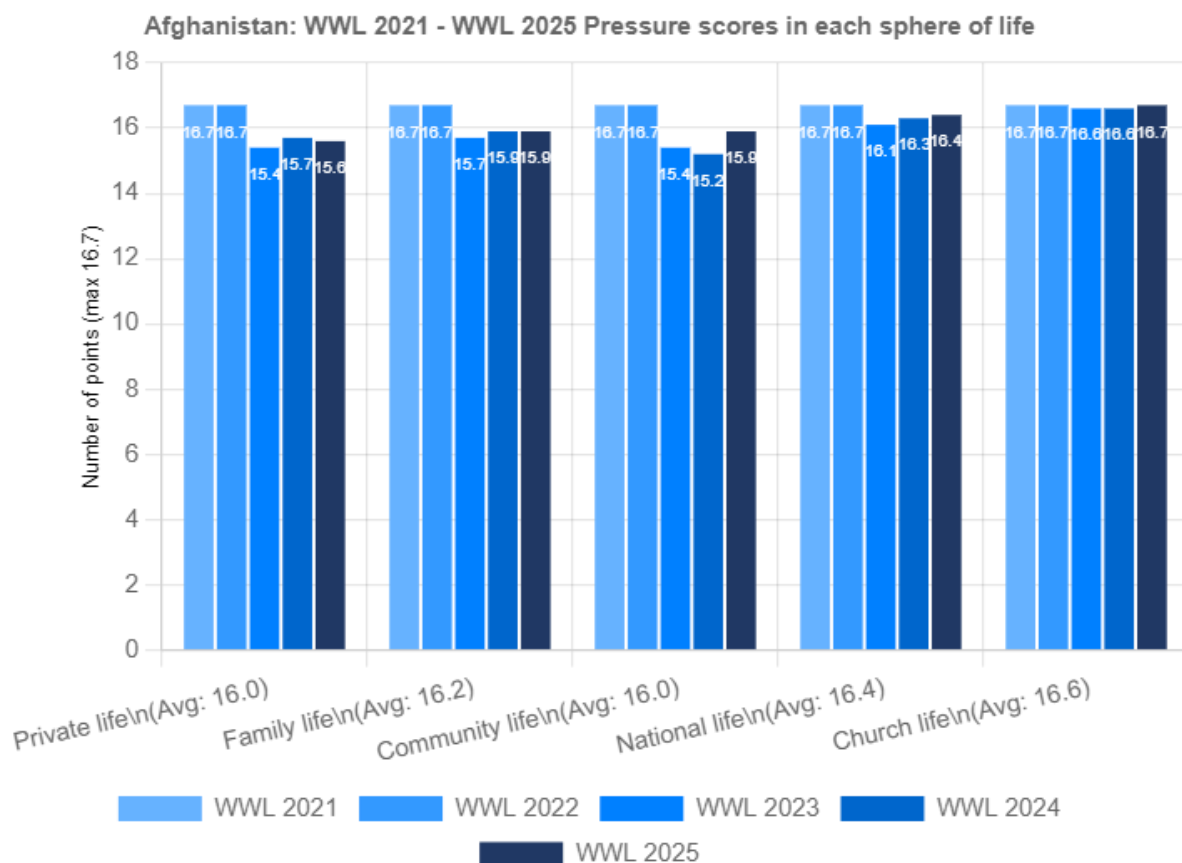
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

The chart below shows how the average pressure in the period WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 has been close to the maximum level. Since WWL 2023 the category of expatriate Christians working for NGOs in the country has been reinstated (after being removed for a number of years when expatriate Christians were hardly present). It remains difficult but expatriate Christians are able to some degree to practice their faith privately, which explains why the average pressure score is now lower and not so close to the maximum of 16.7 points.

Afghanistan: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	16.1
2024	15.9
2023	15.8
2022	16.7
2021	16.7

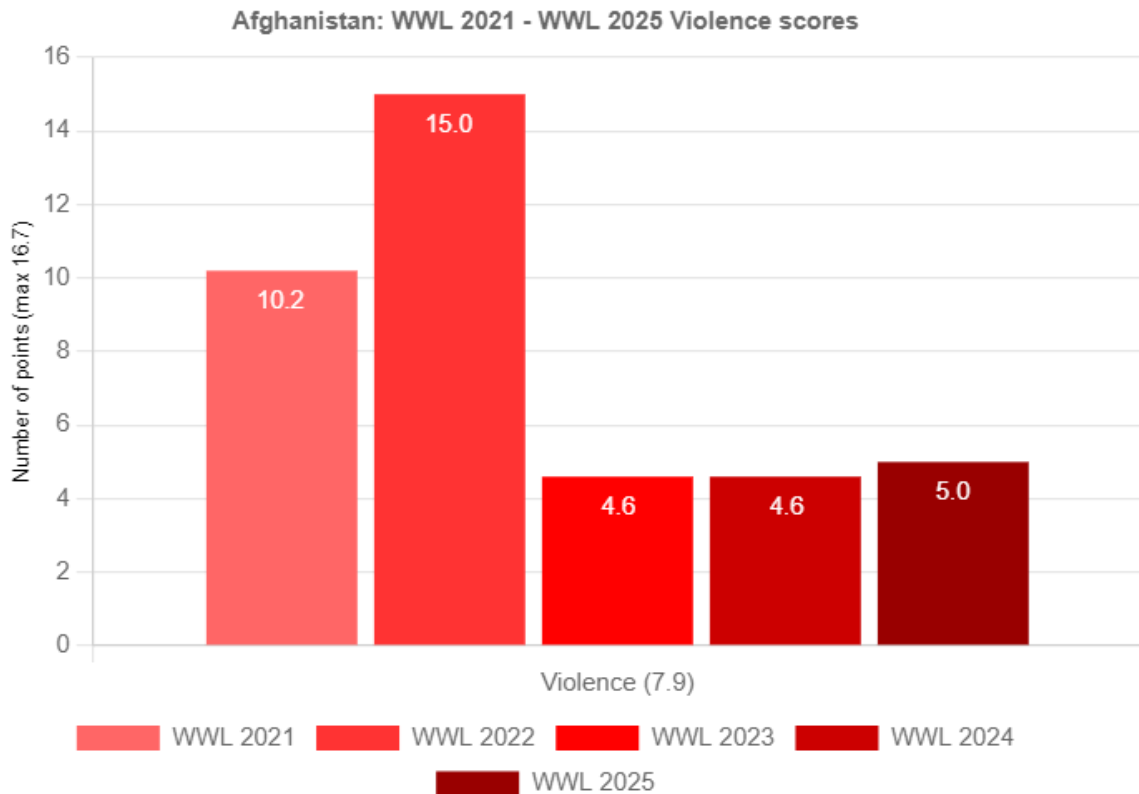
### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



In the period WWL 2020 - WWL 2022, the score for pressure in each sphere of life consistently reached the maximum level of 16.7 points, as the only category of Christians were converts. Due to the reasons explained above (i.e., the inclusion of the expatriate Christian community as a separate category again), from WWL 2023 onwards, the score for pressure in each sphere of life is no longer at the maximum level, but still extreme.



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The peak for violence against Christians came in the WWL 2022 reporting period with the sudden government take-over by the Taliban in August 2021. From WWL 2023 onwards, it has become more necessary than ever for Christians to stay hidden and follow all Taliban's Islamic rules, as a result, the number of incidents reported (and hence the score) decreased accordingly. Security concerns and the risk of having electronic devices have meant many converts in the country went 'incommunicado', which further reduced their ability to report on incidents of violence.

### Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Afghanistan	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abduction</li> <li>Forced divorce</li> <li>Forced marriage</li> <li>Trafficking</li> <li>Violence – physical</li> <li>Violence – psychological</li> <li>Violence – sexual</li> <li>Violence – Verbal</li> </ul>

The swift take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021 effectively stopped the advancement of women's rights, in a country where women have long had a lower social status and been viewed as second class citizens. Women from religious minorities, including Christians, are especially vulnerable. In an early announcement following their take-over, a Taliban statement declared: "Our women are Muslim. They will be happy to be living within our frameworks of Sharia" ([Al-Jazeera, 17 August 2021](#)). Since then, the Taliban has faced international condemnation for severely hindering girls' access to education, banning females from accessing secondary education and closing the doors of universities to young women ([HRW 2023 Afghanistan country chapter](#); [VOA News, 5 May 2023](#)). In addition, women and girls are forced out of their jobs, restricted in their ability to move around, and denied rights, amounting to gender persecution so severe it has been named by some as "the Taliban's war on women" ([Amnesty International, 26 May 2023](#)).

Female converts also face extreme pressure on a familial and societal level, facilitated in part by the limited role women play in Afghan society and their few rights to social protection. Although conversions usually happen together as a family unit in Afghanistan, when a woman decides to convert to Christianity on her own, she is likely to keep it a secret. If her faith is discovered, she is vulnerable to physical abuse and being put under house arrest. She may also be forcibly married to a Muslim or sold for sexual enslavement. A country expert summarizes that female converts experience harsh penalties, in most cases from their family and sometimes the community: "They would most likely be beaten up or killed (either by their male spouse, their own family or the spouse's family), as turning one's back from Islam is considered a dishonor to the clan. And even if they manage to escape, they will be pursued."

Forced marriages and rape are used as tools for forced (re-)conversion, particularly against women and girls from a Muslim background. A young female Christian convert can be forced to marry a non-Christian (often older) with relative ease. Reflecting the severity of the situation, a country expert reports that some women and girls have died by suicide to avoid such a fate. Due to Afghanistan's honor-shame culture, women are unlikely to report instances of rape or sexual abuse due to both the stigma attached and the lack of legislative justice.

According to a country expert, in the first few weeks after the takeover Christian women and girls were being targeted and abducted in order to be forcibly married to Taliban fighters, with fathers being forced to give up their daughters at gun point. The expert explained that women were perceived as "spoils of war," but there are doubts as to whether this is ongoing. In light of such pressure and violence, female converts choose to keep their faith secret from their families. This means they have fewer opportunities to connect with other believers.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Afghanistan	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abduction</li> <li>Imprisonment by government</li> <li>Violence – death</li> <li>Violence – physical</li> <li>Violence – psychological</li> <li>Violence - verbal</li> </ul>

The Taliban take-over also increased pressure on Christian men. Church leaders - the majority of whom are men - have been specifically targeted by the Taliban; many have disappeared, others have been beaten, tortured and killed.

As men are at the forefront of public life, male Christians are extremely vulnerable to community and family pressure and violence if their faith is discovered. They will be harassed, socially isolated, beaten or killed. If married, they will likely have their wives and children taken away from them. Given that men and boys have greater freedom of movement, they are additionally vulnerable to kidnapping, sexual violence, or killing, in the streets. A country expert summarizes: “The acts of daily violence on men and boys are now greater as women are not allowed alone on the streets.” In light of such pressure, Christian men choose to keep as low a profile as possible, with some choosing low-level positions in the workplace so as not to gain unwanted attention. They are forced to live, work and identify as Muslims. Since men are the economic providers in their household, families rely on them financially. If male converts are killed, female family members are left vulnerable to exploitation and poverty.

There is a tradition of abusing young boys in Afghanistan, as well as girls. According to a country expert, this is “part of a culture of paedophilia in the region; which is linked to attacks on minorities and those weaker than them whom they can abuse.” Christian boys, who have no worth on the basis of their faith, are thus vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

### Persecution of other religious minorities

Religious minorities, including Hazaras, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs all face [intensified persecution](#) (UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief, November 2024); Taliban's public statements claiming protections for minorities are contradicted by the reality on the ground. There are some nuances in the way these religious minorities are treated: A government spokesman recently said that the Taliban are “[particularly committed](#)” to defending the rights of Hindus and Sikhs in the country (The Hindu, 16 April 2024) and this seems to relate to the Taliban's interest in strengthening trade relations with India. In addition, these groups are less likely to be seen as apostates from Islam or likely to proselytize.

The Hazaras, Afghanistan's third-largest ethnic group and predominantly Shi'a Muslims, have been more directly targeted both by the Taliban and by ISKP, which frequently attacks minority religious sites

and gatherings. By virtue of being Shi'a they are seen as apostate and a direct threat to the Taliban's interpretation of Islam.

## Trends Summary

### 1) The Taliban seeks to consolidate its domestic control, but is making slow progress in gaining international recognition.

Since the Taliban's swift take-over of power, the ISKP has been contesting the Taliban fiercely but even though it is more of a challenge than the Taliban would like to admit, it is unlikely to affect Taliban rule in general. However, every rocket attack on neighboring countries breaks the Taliban's promise in the 2020 withdrawal agreement stating that no terrorist attacks would be carried out on other countries from Afghan territory. These rocket attacks underscore the Taliban's inability to establish national security, as highlighted by their struggles with ISKP's continued attacks and influence. This is also the case for [every attack](#) on ethnic and religious minorities by ISKP (Gandhara, 5 May 2022). Saudi diplomats [relocated to Pakistan](#) in February 2023 amid growing security concerns linked to ISKP's targeted attacks on embassies and officials (Reuters, 6 February 2023). And although the Saudi diplomats officially left for unspecified training and were allegedly supposed to return, this illustrates how successful the ISKP's tactic of targeting embassies and politicians has been, leading to further isolation of the already isolated Taliban regime. The Taliban's efforts to engage the international community has led to some recovery of diplomatic ties. As of February 2024, [17 countries had embassies](#) open in Kabul, up from [13 countries](#) in January 2023, though relations with neighboring Iran and Pakistan continue to deteriorate and [international recognition](#) of the Taliban government is still a long way off (RFE/RL, 2 February 2024). The Taliban's participation in the June/July 2024 Doha conference highlights [international efforts to engage](#) despite ongoing governance and human rights concerns (International Crisis Group, 14 August 2024).

### 2) Improving the life of the Afghan people does not seem to be a main priority

The Taliban seem to be most interested in implementing their vision of a truly Islamic society. While the security situation has clearly improved, and the corruption associated with international support has lessened, increased poverty and oppression is the lived experience of most Afghans. Most notably, the Taliban continue to tighten their grip on the education system, following up on their ambition to build [new madrassas](#) in each province of Afghanistan (Gandhara, 25 June 2022). Given that the very name of the Taliban means “students (from a madrassa)”, it seems likely that these schools are intended for indoctrination and recruitment. All these policies continue to be implemented and by issuing the decrees on limiting women's work with NGOs, the Taliban made it clear that they are not interested in compromising for the sake of improving people's lives. The Taliban's [perception of humanitarian aid](#) further complicates the task of NGOs trying to bring much-needed supplies and services to the most vulnerable in Afghan society (Afghan Analysts Network - AAN, 29 July 2023). Apart from wishing to crack-down on corruption, the suspicion that aid distribution could be used to spread Christianity (or any other religion) plays a prominent role in the Taliban's determination to control and vet all aid programs (AAN, pages 12-13).

## Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.
- [Afghanistan - What does the Taliban takeover mean for other jihadists - August 2021](#)

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- 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>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: more radical elements splitting off - <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/9/14/not-all-is-well-inside-the-taliban>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: regionally based groups - <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-islamic-state-isk-khorasan/33067638.html>
- Persecution engines description: war of thoughts - <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/the-emergent-taliban-defined-university-enforcing-a-top-down-reorientation-and-unquestioning-obedience-under-a-war-of-thoughts/>
- Persecution engines description: Asia Foundation survey - <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/survey-afghan-people-afghanistan-2019>
- Persecution engines description: international aid and NGOs - <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/taliban-perceptions-of-aid-conspiracy-corruption-and-miscommunication/>
- Persecution engines description: seven million people - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/340-trouble-afghanistans-opium-fields-taliban-war-drugs>
- Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere: recognized - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/30/new-evidence-biometric-data-systems-imperil-afghans>
- 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): Chief Justice - <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/a-taliban-theory-of-state-a-review-of-the-chief-justices-book-of-jurisprudence/>
- Block 5.12: Churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses. (4.00 points): 11 rules for journalists - <https://rsf.org/en/afghanistan-11-journalism-rules-imposed-taliban-open-way-censorship-and-arbitrary-decisions-rsf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Al-Jazeera, 17 August 2021 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/17/transcript-of-talibans-first-press-conference-in-kabul>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2023 Afghanistan country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/afghanistan#49dda6>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: VOA News, 5 May 2023 - <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-experts-call-perpetration-of-gender-persecution-in-afghanistan-alarming/7081038.html>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Amnesty International, 26 May 2023 - <https://www.amnesty.org.au/report-the-talibans-war-on-women-the-crime-against-humanity-of-gender-persecution-in-afghanistan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: intensified persecution - <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/APPG-FoRB-2024-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: “particularly committed” - <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/taliban-is-particularly-committed-to-protect-rights-of-hindus-and-sikhs-spokesperson-of-taliban-justice-ministry/article68068378.ece>
- Trends Summary: every attack - <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/islamic-state-afghanistan-taliban-security/31836037.html>
- Trends Summary: relocated to Pakistan - <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/saudi-diplomats-leave-afghanistan-relocate-pakistani-capital-sources-2023-02-06/>
- Trends Summary: 17 countries had embassies - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_diplomatic\\_missions\\_in\\_Afghanistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_diplomatic_missions_in_Afghanistan)
- Trends Summary: 13 countries - <https://www.embassypages.com/afghanistan>
- Trends Summary: international recognition - <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-china-diplomatic-ties-credentials-corruption/32802674.html>
- Trends Summary: international efforts to engage - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/afghanistan-three-years-after-taliban-takeover>
- Trends Summary: new madrassas - <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/taliban-secular-schools-converted-madrasahs-education/31914672.html>
- Trends Summary: perception of humanitarian aid - <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/taleban-perceptions-of-aid-conspiracy-corruption-and-miscommunication/>
- Further useful reports: Afghanistan - What does the Taliban takeover mean for other jihadists - August 2021 - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/reports/Afghanistan-What-does-the-Taliban-takeover-mean-for-other-jihadists-August-2021.pdf>