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World Watch Research

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# Brunei: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Open Doors Sverige  
sweden@od.org | 019-31 05 00 | [www.open-doors.se](http://www.open-doors.se)

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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

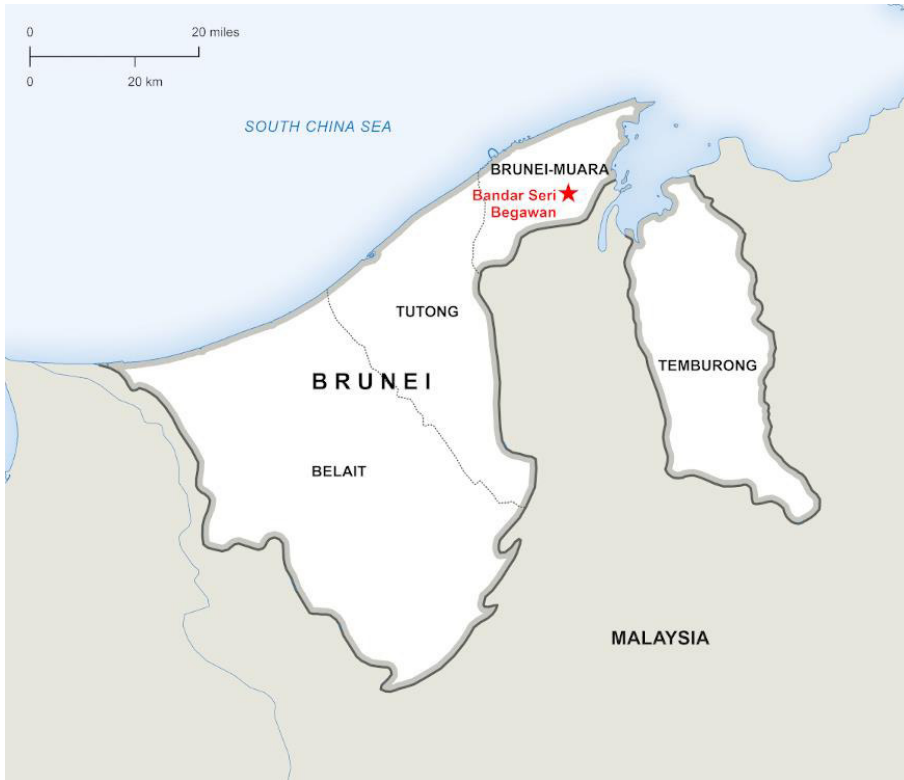
| Brunei: Population (UN estimate for 2024) | Christians | Chr% |
|---|------------|------|
| 456,000                                   | 55,600     | 12.2 |

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

| Brunei: Religious context   | Number of adherents | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians  | 55,600              | 12.2 |
| Muslim  | 267,000             | 58.6 |
| Hindu   | 4,200               | 0.9  |
| Buddhist  | 43,400              | 9.5  |
| Ethnic religionist  | 44,900              | 9.8  |
| Jewish  | 0                   | 0.0  |
| Bahai   | 250                 | 0.1  |
| Atheist   | 140                 | 0.0  |
| Agnostic  | 5,700               | 1.3  |
| Other   | 34,310              | 7.5  |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> |                     |      |

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

## Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

| Brunei: Main Persecution engines | Main drivers   |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Islamic oppression               | Government officials, One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders |
| Dictatorial paranoia             | Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders                              |

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

The Sultan of Brunei is the absolute monarch and serves as the prime minister, finance minister, interior minister, defense minister, and head of religion. Under his rule, Brunei has been in a State of Emergency since 1962, granting him extensive legislative authority. The government enforces the Sharia Penal Code, with recent efforts to expand its implementation. Christians and other religious minorities face significant pressure and punitive measures under Sharia law with converts from Islam targeted with great efforts taken to bring them back to their original faith.

Brunei's national ideology, the Malay Muslim Monarchy (MIB), merges Islamic values with Malay culture. The government actively supports Islamic "*dakwah*" (proselytizing) through sermons and media, with a focus on promoting Brunei as a "*zikir* nation" that remembers and obeys Allah. There



have been numerous recent efforts to strengthen the teachings of the majority religion through education. For example, in November 2023, Islamic education was made compulsory for grades two to six, a move criticized by Christians and other religious minorities. This is supported by a range of initiatives such as the 'Enhance the Pedagogy of Religious Teachers: Improving Teacher Teaching Competencies and Student Learning Quality in the Context of Islamic Education', teacher training program that aims to support the integration of Religious Subjects into the General Education System ([Borneo Bulletin, 16 October 2024](#)).

Non-traditional Christian communities must register as secular organizations, are required to pay taxes and report their activities to the government.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
2. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Brunei citizens are barred from leaving Islam by law and therefore deprived of their right to have or adopt a religion or belief of their choice (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian parents face difficulties to raise their children according to their religious values (CRC Art. 14);
- Christian female converts run the risk of being forcibly married to Muslim men or losing custody of their children (CEDAW Art. 16)

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

- 1 November 2023 saw the commencement of '[The integration of Religious Subjects into the General Education System](#)' where subjects that are normally taught in Islamic religious schools will be absorbed into the general education curriculum in government and private primary schools including international schools.
- By decree, the importing of Bibles and any public celebration of Christmas continue to be banned.
- Christian pastors and workers are facing a multitude of restrictions, including monitoring.
- Both native and foreign Christians have been targets of aggressive Islamization.

## Specific examples of positive developments

None

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored in WWL analysis. Apart from the Roman Catholic and Anglican church, there are a few Protestant churches in Brunei, which also serve expatriate communities (for instance, South Koreans and Indians).

**Historical Christian communities:** These communities, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, face increasing hostility and monitoring necessitating greater levels of caution. Nevertheless, they are less affected by persecution than the newer Protestant groups and convert communities.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts from a Muslim background face strong pressure from family and friends as conversion is considered illegal. Should their conversion become known, both family and the authorities would do their best to bring them back to their original faith.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Evangelical and Pentecostal churches know that they and their meetings (both in their private and church life) are being closely watched by the authorities and surrounding community and are forced to live their Christian life in such a way as not to draw unwanted attention. They may also meet under the roof of an historical Christian community such as an Anglican church.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Whilst the whole country is under the influence of Islam there are some areas such as Temburong and Tutong that are targeted for Islamization through the government-supported *dakwah* movement. Here Christians are offered a range of benefits from free groceries to free funerals if they convert to Islam. These aggressive *dakwah* efforts make life particularly difficult for Christians in these areas.

## Position on the World Watch List

| Brunei: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|--------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2025                 | 66     | 48       |
| WWL 2024                 | 66     | 44       |
| WWL 2023                 | 65     | 46       |
| WWL 2022                 | 64     | 46       |
| WWL 2021                 | 64     | 39       |

Although average pressure rose very slightly (reaching 13.1 points) in WWL 2025, the score for violence fell from 1.3 points in WWL 2024 to just 0.6 of a point. Persecution in Brunei has never been particularly violent. The decrease in the violence score can be attributed to a decline in the number of Christians who have faced physical or mental abuse for faith-related reasons, as well no reports of Christians being forced to leave the country due to their faith. However, overall levels of persecution remain high, leading to significant self-censorship and forcing converts to go into hiding. A notable development contributing to the slight increase in average pressure was the introduction of new educational reforms that mandate Islamic education for all students in government, private and international institutions.

## Persecution engines

| Brunei: 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           | Not at all         |
| Christian denominational protectionism  | CDP          | Not at all         |
| Communist and post-Communist oppression | CPCO         | Not at all         |
| Secular intolerance                     | SI           | Not at all         |
| Dictatorial paranoia                    | DPA          | Very strong        |
| Organized corruption and crime          | OCC          | Not at all         |

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

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

Brunei is an absolute monarchy governed by the Malay Islamic Monarchy (Melayu Islam Beraja or MIB) philosophy, which blends Malay culture, Islam, and monarchy. Though Brunei remains far from being a democracy, this system is promoted as fair to all citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The Sultan, revered as the “guardian and protector” of Islam, is head of state and emphasizes a strictly Islamic state, gradually broadening the application of Sharia in civil and religious life over his six-decade rule. The aim to become a “*zikir* nation”—a community that faithfully remembers and adheres to Islamic teachings—shapes the country’s public life, laws, and policies. Religious observances are heavily integrated into public institutions, and religious education is mandatory in schools as the government’s strives to be an Islamic excellence.

While the government portrays MIB as an inclusive philosophy, it serves as a tool for political control and Islamic consolidation. Efforts to enforce a strict interpretation of Islam extend into everyday life, with initiatives targeting ethnic minority groups, particularly in regions such as Temburong and Tutong. The emphasis on religious conformity and loyalty to the Sultan’s vision is a central theme in national celebrations and messaging, further embedding the MIB ideology within society.

Targeted proselytization of Christian and other non-Muslim communities takes place under the “*dakwah*” movement, supported through state media, incentives, and religious education campaigns. As US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Brunei](#)) states:

- "The government continued to offer incentives, including assistance with housing and welfare support, to prospective converts to Islam, especially those from Indigenous communities in rural areas. The government gave presentations on the benefits of converting to Islam that received extensive press coverage in state-sponsored or regulated media. Converts included citizens and permanent residents, as well as foreigners. Government policy supported Islam through the national MIB philosophy as well as through government pledges to make the country a zikir nation (defined as "one that remembers and obeys Allah")."

Christians and other non-Muslim communities face numerous restrictions in Brunei. Evangelistic activities and public missionary work outside church premises are prohibited and may carry legal consequences. Non-traditional Churches must register as secular organizations, limiting their operational freedoms. These groups also encounter indirect discrimination, such as limited access to top government positions and barriers in obtaining permissions for building or renovating places of worship. The economic and social environment is shaped to favor Islam, impacting Christian’s freedom of religious expression.

### Drivers of persecution

| Brunei: Drivers of Persecution  | IO          | RN | ERH | CO | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA         | OCC |
|---------------------------------|-------------|----|-----|----|-----|------|----|-------------|-----|
|                                 | VERY STRONG |    |     |    |     |      |    | VERY STRONG |     |
| Government officials            | Very strong |    |     |    |     |      |    | Very strong |     |
| Ethnic group leaders            | Medium      |    |     |    |     |      |    | Medium      |     |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Strong      |    |     |    |     |      |    | Strong      |     |
| One's own (extended) family     | Very strong |    |     |    |     |      |    | -           |     |

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

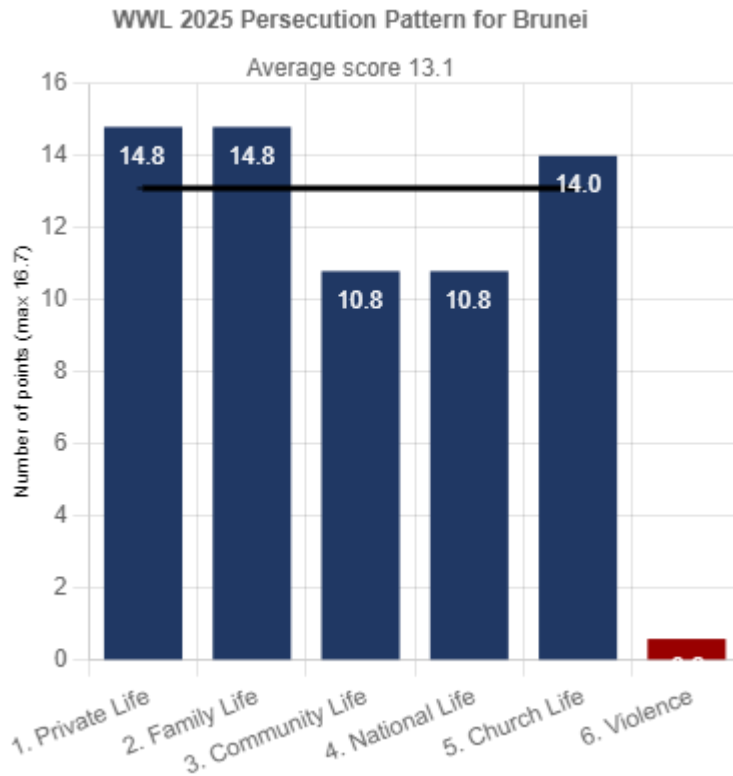
- **Extended family (Very strong):** Conversion is dishonoring to the family. As the family is usually the first to discover a convert, there will be great pressure on him or her to return to the family faith, also to avoid punishment from the government. Family members and neighbors can easily create trouble for converts to Christianity and churches by simply reporting them to the security department KDN, which is frequently happening.

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Since all MIB policies (which favor Muslims over other religions) are legally enforced by the government authorities in all sectors of the country, government officials are major drivers of persecution. Following the introduction of Sharia Penal Code (SPC), the Royal Brunei Police Force (RBPF) and Religious Enforcement Division officers under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) cooperate on investigations of crimes covered by both secular law and sharia. MIB is a compulsory subject for students in both public and private schools, and at university level.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Islamic religious leaders have been sources of indirect pressure for Christians through the process of Islamization. There is much Islamic mission (*dakwah*) being carried out by these leaders and their efforts have been partly successful, which causes rifts in Christian families. For carrying out *dakwah*, Islamic authorities organize a range of proselytizing activities and offer financial incentives to propagate Islam. Both non-Muslims and Muslims alike face social pressure to conform to Islamic guidelines regarding behavior.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** The "M" in MIB stands for "Malay", so ethnic group leaders continue to emphasize the privileged position Malays hold in Brunei. Islamic missionary work targets ethnic minority groups living in Brunei.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials and non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong/Strong):** The government describes its official national philosophy as Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), or Malay Islamic Monarchy, which the government defines as “a system that encompasses strong Malay cultural influences, stressing the importance of Islam in daily life and governance, and respect for the monarchy as represented by His Majesty the Sultan.” A government body, the MIB Supreme Council, seeks to spread and strengthen the MIB philosophy and ensure MIB is enshrined in the nation’s laws and policies. Religious (i.e. Islamic) and Malay leaders exercise great influence on the sultan (who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam) and thereby put pressure on the Christian minority too.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** As ethnic group leaders have a high interest to keep the government in power and secure the dominant position of the Malay people, they will go to great lengths to support the ruler and put pressure on minorities, including Christians, if necessary.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Brunei shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Brunei remained at a very high level at 13.1 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private, Family and Church spheres of life* (where pressure is at extreme levels).
- Pressure on *Community life* increased due to increased reports of Christians being threatened with forced marriage.
- Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private and Family spheres*, while all Christians experience pressure in the *National and Church spheres*. This pressure is fueled by the implementation of Sharia law, although there have been no cases reported of Sharia law being implemented against Christians.
- The score for violence against Christians decreased to 0.6 of a point after having tripled in the previous reporting period. Persecution of Christians has never been particularly violent in Brunei.

## 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 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (4.00 points)***

All media in Brunei is monitored and censored, when the authorities see the need. Whilst some Christians share Bible verses on their social media without any issues there is always the risk that this could be considered evangelization; for this reason some use pseudonyms. However, even under a pseudonym, most would still be very cautious, as they could easily be accused of "propagating a religion other than Islam" (Section 209 SPC), "Persuading Muslim to change religion" (Section 210 SPC) or "Persuading a person who has no religion to become a believer of non-Islamic faith" (Section 211 SPC). An individual found guilty of propagating a religion other than Islam to a Muslim can face a fine of up to BND 20,000 (approx. USD 14,500) or imprisonment for a term of up to 5 years, or both. For converts, writing about Christian faith is out of the question and would bring serious danger.

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

Any private statement about Christianity can be construed as proselytizing for the Christian faith, so even the wearing of a cross is done with much more caution than in previous years. As a result Christians will often avoid public signs of Christian affiliation through stickers, crucifixes etc. in a car. Students have reported teachers confiscating cross necklaces when they have been discovered. One country expert explained: "In general, the Christian community will avoid displaying Christian images or symbols to keep the peace within the community." According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023](#)), although the government's stance on the SPC still prohibits public displays of religions other than Islam, including the celebration of Christmas, MORA did not issue any official warnings about displaying Christmas decorations. Whilst there were no reports of MORA taking action against businesses that sold or advertised Christmas items interviewees reported incidents where religious authorities instructed business owners to remove their decorations noting that shops with Christmas trees and Christmas decorations had been reported and been fined.

***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)***

Christians need to be very cautious about whom they talk with and what about. Spreading Christian 'propaganda' to followers of other faiths or to members of the tribal groups, who are often adherents of ethnic religions, is prohibited and carries the aforementioned penalty of up to five years in prison and a fine of up to 20,000 Brunei dollars. This law is not the only source of fear leading to high levels of self-censorship. There are other social and economic repercussions from sharing one's faith with the wrong person; a commonly heard example is that people who share their faith in their place of work have been asked to resign. Consequently, Christians tend to refrain from talking openly about their faith in case they get themselves into trouble. Fellowship or worship gatherings in houses can also be risky if heard by neighbors. It is particularly dangerous for Christian converts to discuss their faith with immediate and extended family or anyone else.

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

Bruneian laws do not allow Malay Muslims to leave Islam and strict punishments are imposed on those who do so. Section 112(1) of the Sharia Penal Code of Brunei stipulates that a Muslim who turns away from Islam is to be punished with death, or with imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty years and receive corporal punishment, depending on the type of evidence. If a Sharia court is satisfied that the accused has repented, the court must order an acquittal. So far, the punishments do not seem to have been implemented.

### ***Block 1 - Additional information***

Meeting with other Christians is particularly difficult for Christians with a Muslim background, since it is dangerous for the converts themselves and could endanger all those attending the meeting. It is also important to note that there is a law in Brunei that prohibits the unauthorized gathering of more than 5 people (although this is hardly ever used for targeting religious meetings).

### **Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere**

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

The law forbids any non-Muslim person from becoming foster parents. It bans any Muslim from surrendering custody of a minor or dependent in his or her guardianship to a non-Muslim. As such, non-Muslims cannot adopt Muslim children or any child whose religious background is uncertain, for example where the biological parents are unknown.

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

In Brunei, Christian children are deeply affected by educational mandates that emphasize Islamic instruction, a dynamic enforced across both government and private institutions. The Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) manage most schools, and all students—regardless of religious background—are required to study the national Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) philosophy. This curriculum embodies a blend of Malay culture, Islamic teachings, and monarchical loyalty, underscoring the Islamic nature of Brunei's national identity. As one pastor poignantly noted, some Christian students are more fluent in reciting MIB principles than their own religious tenets, such as the Ten Commandments.

Educational reforms beginning in November 2023 have further entrenched Islamic teachings within Brunei's school systems (Borneo Bulletin, 16 October 2024). These reforms mandate Islamic religious knowledge (IRK) as a compulsory subject, even in private and international schools affiliated with the MOE. The integration of Islamic studies from pre-school through Year 3, along with weekly recitations of Islamic verses (*yassin/surah*), underscores this religious focus, with all students, including non-Muslims, required to participate. Additionally, female students must adhere to guidelines that include wearing a headscarf within educational settings.

According to a country expert, these policies contribute significantly to a broader process of Islamization through education. His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah has publicly reaffirmed the



importance of religious education, linking it to the nation's moral and spiritual well-being. The Sultan has called for practical teachings like ablution and prayer to be emphasized from primary school onward, illustrating a deliberate effort to inculcate Islamic values across generations. While the stated goal is national unity and well-being, the lived experience of Christian children reveals the challenges of navigating an educational system that demands conformity with Islamic practices, leaving no room for religious diversity or tailored spiritual education.

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

Children of Christian converts in Brunei face particularly intense pressure, especially when it becomes known that their parents are considered 'apostates'. This often manifests as social and institutional challenges in schools where Christian students frequently experience targeted efforts to persuade or coerce them into conversion. Teachers, along with their peers, may exert significant pressure to abandon Christianity in favor of Islam. Such experiences of discrimination and harassment are not limited to overt attempts at conversion. Daily interactions are frequently laced with ridicule and judgment, especially concerning core Christian beliefs like the Trinity. Most Christian students report encountering criticism from both teachers and peers, who openly challenge the legitimacy of Christianity while promoting Islamic teachings as superior. The pervasive atmosphere of prejudice fosters a sense of isolation, with some students describing how expressions of hatred or disdain become routine. "When they know you are a Christian, they will judge you," remarked one individual, capturing the heavy burden many endure. For some, adapting to this relentless environment of bias has become a necessary part of surviving their school years.

***Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.25 points)***

Whilst this is not a problem for those registered as Christians, converts cannot be openly baptized. Baptisms of converts rarely take place and are a risk to both the individual and the person performing the ceremony. As a result, these take place in secret or abroad. Even among the other categories of Christian communities baptism services are low profile celebrations. Baptisms are possibly the strongest sign that a church is alive and growing, and for converts the strongest sign for cutting ties with their former religion.

***Block 2 - Additional information***

Converts who are parents find themselves in a dilemma as they hardly dare to raise their children according to their Christian faith, since their children could accidentally reveal their conversion. If Christians with a Muslim background are discovered, they will be isolated and put under pressure to recant their faith. If married, a convert will almost certainly be separated from his or her spouse, who in turn will be forced to divorce. Unmarried converts will have difficulties in finding a spouse and even if they do, legal marriage is almost impossible, even marrying abroad and then having the marriage registered in Brunei is not possible. On the other hand, registration officers are described as being particularly diligent: Unlike in many other Asian countries, the officers are very careful not to make a mistake in the system, so Christians will not be 'accidentally' registered as Muslims.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

With the MIB national philosophy, Islam has permeated into every aspect of society. MIB is a system that encompasses strong Malay cultural influences, stressing the importance of Islam in daily life and governance, and respect for the Sultan's monarchy. Thus, Christians are under pressure to take part in Islamic rites and ceremonies and many do so 'voluntarily'. Whilst there is pressure for all, there are certain positions for which attendance is practically mandatory. For example, a country expert explained that 'if a person is in a higher ranking in government, they need to attend all the event and ceremonies.' A refusal is seen as a rejection of the culture, the values of society and - maybe the worst - a rejection of the Sultan, who is the very embodiment of all societal values. It has become so much the norm to participate in Islamic prayers before work and in government meetings, and also to participate in Islamic religious studies in schools etc., that Christians hardly notice it as pressure anymore. There are also strict regulations and penalties during Ramadan concerning the observance of Muslim prayer-times both for Muslims and non-Muslims.

### ***Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (4.00 points)***

Christians in Brunei, especially those who have converted from Islam, often face immense social pressure to renounce their faith. This pressure frequently comes from family, friends and neighbors who seek to bring them back to Islamic faith. However, non-convert Christians also encounter challenges due to the government's broader Islamization initiatives. Many churches are experiencing a decline in membership as individuals convert to Islam, citing not only the desire to avoid social and community pressures but also the appeal of state-sponsored incentives. For instance, converts may receive financial assistance, reportedly amounting to 1,000 BN\$ annually for a decade. In small church communities, the loss of even a few members can significantly impact the morale and cohesion of the remaining congregation.

The public recognition of *dakwah* (Muslim missionary efforts) further underscores the societal emphasis on conversion. When individuals convert to Islam, their new identities are celebrated in national media, including the announcement of their new names (see numerous reports compiled here: [Borneo Bulletin, 2024](#)). Such displays can reinforce a sense of isolation among those who choose to remain Christian, heightening the societal and personal stakes involved in maintaining their faith. While these dynamics are complex and vary for each individual, they reflect the broader pressures faced by Brunei's Christian community within a predominantly Islamic society.

### ***Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)***

Whilst all churches in Brunei face significant scrutiny and operate under a persistent climate of fear and caution, this is particularly true of Malay-speaking churches. Church members and leaders from all Christian communities are acutely aware of being monitored, with informers—sometimes even other Christians—allegedly planted by the authorities to report on activities. This atmosphere of

surveillance extends beyond physical gatherings; there is a strong suspicion that telecommunication channels, such as phone calls and online communications, are also subject to state monitoring.

Beyond church premises, criticism and hostility toward Christianity can permeate daily life. One respondent highlighted pervasive community-level disdain, while others described a reluctance among Christian youth to share their faith on social media, fearing scrutiny and negative comments from Muslim peers and colleagues. This caution is compounded by strict government controls over media and internet content. Online activities, including private emails and chatroom discussions suspected of promoting content considered subversive or immoral, are closely monitored and subject to censorship. Christian gatherings, even those taking place in homes, are subject to community surveillance and potential reporting to authorities for any perceived legal infractions. This comprehensive and invasive monitoring highlights the challenges faced by Brunei's Christian community in expressing their faith freely and underscores a broader culture of caution and self-censorship in religious practice and communication.

### ***Block 3 - Additional information***

Christians in Brunei may encounter discrimination in their professional lives, often tied to broader societal pressures and religious norms shaped by the gradual implementation of Sharia law. Non-Muslims, as well as Muslims, may face expectations to conform to Islamic codes of behavior, including dressing in accordance with Islamic guidelines. Women, in particular, are reportedly singled out and expected to wear a hijab in certain work settings, a practice that underscores broader gender-specific expectations tied to religious conformity.

During the month of Ramadan, non-halal businesses, including restaurants, can face heightened scrutiny and raids, which may disrupt operations and create an environment of apprehension among non-Muslim business owners. While these restrictions impact commercial activity, they also reinforce a sense of exclusion for those outside the dominant faith.

Further to the description in Block 3.7 above, conversion to Islam among expatriates—approximately 50% of whom reportedly adopt the faith—receives national attention, with new converts publicly celebrated in newspapers. Some individuals convert to Islam for practical or material reasons, such as work permits or other incentives. For example, Catholic Filipinos and Indian blue-collar workers have been said to face pressure to convert to secure employment benefits or permits, although motivations can vary widely and are complex. One expert suggested that Christians are often welcomed into communal institutions and local forums with the implicit hope that their engagement may lead to conversion.

Restrictions on non-Bruneian business owners have reportedly increased in recent years, potentially adding another layer of difficulty for non-Muslim entrepreneurs navigating the country's regulatory landscape. These dynamics reflect a mixture of socio-religious pressures and state-led policies that can present challenges for Christians and other religious minorities in their business and everyday lives.

### **Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere**

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

Brunei's Constitution and national laws present significant restrictions on religious freedom, largely rooted in the state's guiding ideology of "Melayu Islam Beraja" (Malay Islamic Monarchy). This ideology prioritizes Malay culture, Islam and the monarchy, shaping governance and legal norms. Islam, specifically the Sunni Shafi'i school, is established as the state religion, and all legislation reflects Islamic principles. Although the Constitution nominally allows for the peaceful practice of all religions, this right is circumscribed by laws that limit the expression and propagation of faiths other than Islam.

In 2014, Brunei enacted the Sharia Penal Code (SPC), which introduced severe restrictions on religious expression, including a ban on proselytizing non-Islamic faiths and limitations on the use of terms considered sacred to Islam. The SPC applies to all residents of Brunei, although its enforcement predominantly targets Muslims. In 2019, the full implementation of the SPC brought further scrutiny and penalties for acts considered blasphemous or contrary to Islamic principles, although a moratorium on the harshest punishments, such as death by stoning for insulting the Prophet Muhammad, was announced later that year. While non-Muslims, including Christians, have reported limited changes in their ability to practice their faith since the SPC's full implementation, ongoing restrictions and pervasive monitoring serve as a stark reminder of the constraints placed on religious freedom.

***Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)***

With a sedition law in place and MIB and SPC always at the back of their minds, Christians face limits on how much they can express their views and faith in public. Bruneian Christians are very careful and law-abiding and self-censor to avoid trouble, especially as it is not totally clear what faith-induced statements could be considered seditious. Additionally, even any mild form of criticism would be perceived as ultimately being aimed against the Sultan, which is unthinkable.

***Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)***

Christians in Brunei encounter faith-related discrimination when engaging with authorities, including local administration, government bodies and the armed forces. These stem from both systemic biases and informal practices and include, for example, the bureaucratic hurdles and delays faced by Christians when attempting to secure permits for religious gatherings, building renovations or community events.

In interactions with the armed forces or law enforcement, Christians experience scrutiny or pressure to conform to religious norms, such as dress codes or behavioral expectations rooted in Islamic traditions. Though such interactions can be subtle, they contribute to a broader perception of Christians being viewed as 'outsiders' within state institutions. Moreover, Christians seeking state benefits, employment opportunities, or participation in public initiatives may be implicitly or explicitly expected to adhere to Islamic practices or align with prevailing religious expectations. Despite the prevalence of such practices, many respondents reported low levels of discrimination evidencing an internalization and normalization of the situation.

***Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.75 points)***

Christians and churches in Brunei face significant restrictions in publicly displaying religious symbols. Reports during the WWL 2025 reporting period include incidents where churches were instructed by religious authorities to remove crosses and students had small cross necklaces confiscated. Additionally, shops displaying Christmas trees and decorations have been reported and fined. While these limitations affect all Christians and churches, they are most severe for house churches. The pressure is so intense that many house churches refrain from displaying any Christian symbols, with one source noting: "If anyone comes to monitor, it will be risky". Moreover, displaying other materials, such as a Bible verse on a car, risks accusations of propagating religions other than Islam—an offense punishable by up to five years in prison, a fine of 20,000 BND, or both ([US Department of State, IRFR 2021](#)).

***Block 4 - Additional information***

Registering a conversion to Christianity is out of the question. Christians are often subjected to discriminatory treatment when dealing with the authorities. In many cases, when permanent residents with a Chinese, Christian or Buddhist background apply for citizenship, they face rejection or delay, but no official reason is given by the officials. Every Thursday from 8:00am-9:30am, all government offices have time reserved for Islamic prayer and reading the Quran and everyone is required to participate. There are neither Christian political parties nor Christian civil society organizations as they are not allowed in the country. Where civil society organizations are owned by Christians, they do not operate as Christian societies or NGOs but as businesses. Christians are not completely barred from public office and even a rare promotion may be granted, but there is a ceiling as to how far they can go. Benefits and most forms of promotion are limited to Malay Muslims and converts to Islam, if they are citizens, with some Christians converting in order to obtain promotion.

**Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere**

***Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)***

Obtaining registration or legal status for churches in Brunei is highly restricted. Churches that currently hold a registration permit obtained it during the colonial era, and only six churches nationwide retain this status. The government does not allow any new churches to register. Even registered churches face challenges. In the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, the government enforces zoning restrictions on Sundays, closing all roads leading to the Catholic and Anglican churches for "recreational" purposes from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. Access is restricted to those with valid permits. Additionally, registered churches are required to regularly provide detailed information about their leadership, officer elections, members, assets, activities, and any other data requested by the registrar.

Unregistered churches face even greater hurdles. As one country expert put it: "As a church, there are so many restrictions for expansion and registration. There's no way for outward movement without

the government's involvement." Churches that are not officially registered often resort to creative means to continue their activities under these restrictive conditions.

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

Churches in Brunei face significant obstacles when attempting to integrate converts due to stringent provisions in the Sharia Penal Code (SPC). Several aforementioned sections of the law criminalize such activities, including Section 210 (Persuading a Muslim to change religion), Section 207 (Doctrine or practices contrary to Islamic law), and Section 209 (Propagating religions other than Islam).

Whilst maximum sentences are rarely used there is intense scrutiny of church activities. For example, a country expert reported that since 2023 a Catholic priest has been prohibited from entering the Temburong district after authorities suspected him of spreading the gospel. Previously, he had visited the area to meet with believers, and occasionally non-Christians were also present. The intense oversight and legal restrictions make it exceedingly difficult for churches to integrate converts, leaving many in spiritual and social isolation.

***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)***

Pastors and Christian leaders in Brunei are frequent targets of harassment and surveillance by authorities due to their faith-related roles. A country expert shared that authorities closely track their activities and emphasized the need for caution regarding social media postings. This pressure stems from the belief that discouraging and intimidating church leaders will have a ripple effect, weakening the resolve and cohesion of entire congregations. Leaders of unregistered churches are particularly vulnerable to such harassment, as they operate outside the limited framework of officially recognized religious institutions.

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

There is a permanent ban on importing printed religious material. However, electronic copies of the Bible and other religious material are available, but converts need to be very cautious when accessing these online. A country expert added: "There is no Christian bookstore in the country and while Christians can purchase Christian literature from abroad, it is subject to screening and may take a long time to reach them." Another expert said: "If you go through the BSB airport, they check your ID and if they find out you're a Christian, they will check your bags. Bibles will be confiscated if they find any in your possession."

***Block 5 - Additional information***

There is a *fatwa* that bans non-Muslim places of worship from being renovated or built, tacitly endorsed by the Sultan. Consequently, church buildings deteriorate further and further, but some churches have renovated their buildings without permission. The US State Department [IRFR 2022](#) (p.13) adds:

- "Christian leaders continued to state that a longstanding fatwa discouraging Muslims from supporting non-Islamic faiths inhibited the expansion or renovation of existing non-Islamic facilities or the construction of new ones. In accordance with the *fatwa*, government officials slowed or did not process building plans and permits for churches. Christian religious groups said that authorities generally only permitted churches and associated schools to repair and renovate buildings on their sites if required for safety. The process for obtaining approval to renovate church buildings and associated school buildings remained lengthy and difficult, and there were continuing reports of the government stalling new construction projects for not meeting the complicated requirements. With only six approved churches in the country, the last built in the 1960s before the country gained independence, facilities were often too small to accommodate their congregations without significant overflow seating outdoors."

All church activities - especially the content of preaching - are monitored, with registered churches being particularly affected by government informers. These informers are sometimes Christians themselves, who are offered bribes. Because Sunday services are monitored closely, pastors (especially those preaching in Bahasa Malay) are very careful not to say anything in their sermons that could be interpreted as criticizing or offending the government or the royal family.

Published materials are also subject to scrutiny. The distribution of Bibles and other Christian materials is punishable under Sharia law; anyone sending or delivering publications relating to religion other than Islam to Muslims (or persons having no religion) that was not requested by the person, is liable to be sentenced to up to 6 months imprisonment and/or receive a fine of up to \$2,000 BND. Churches are allowed to sell Christian materials to members of their congregations privately. No Christian activities are allowed in public. Using mass media to present one's faith is forbidden in Brunei as this is an offence under "Propagating a religion other than Islam" and is punishable by imprisonment of maximum five years and a fine up to \$20,000 BND.

## 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 WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

| Brunei: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire   | WWL<br>2025 | WWL<br>2024 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?   | 0           | 0           |
| 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? | 1           | 1           |
| 6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?   | 0           | 0           |
| 6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?   | 0           | 0           |
| 6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?   | 0           | 0           |
| 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           |



| Brunei: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire   | WWL 2025 | WWL 2024 |
|---|----------|----------|
| 6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?   | 0        | 1        |
| 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? | 0        | 0        |
| 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?  | 0        | 0        |
| 6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?   | 0        | 10 *     |

After tripling in the previous year the violence score fell from 1.3 points in WWL 2024 to just 0.6 of a point. Persecution has never been particularly violent in Brunei. However, overall levels of persecution remain very high, leading to significant self-censorship and forcing converts to go into hiding.

## 5 Year trends

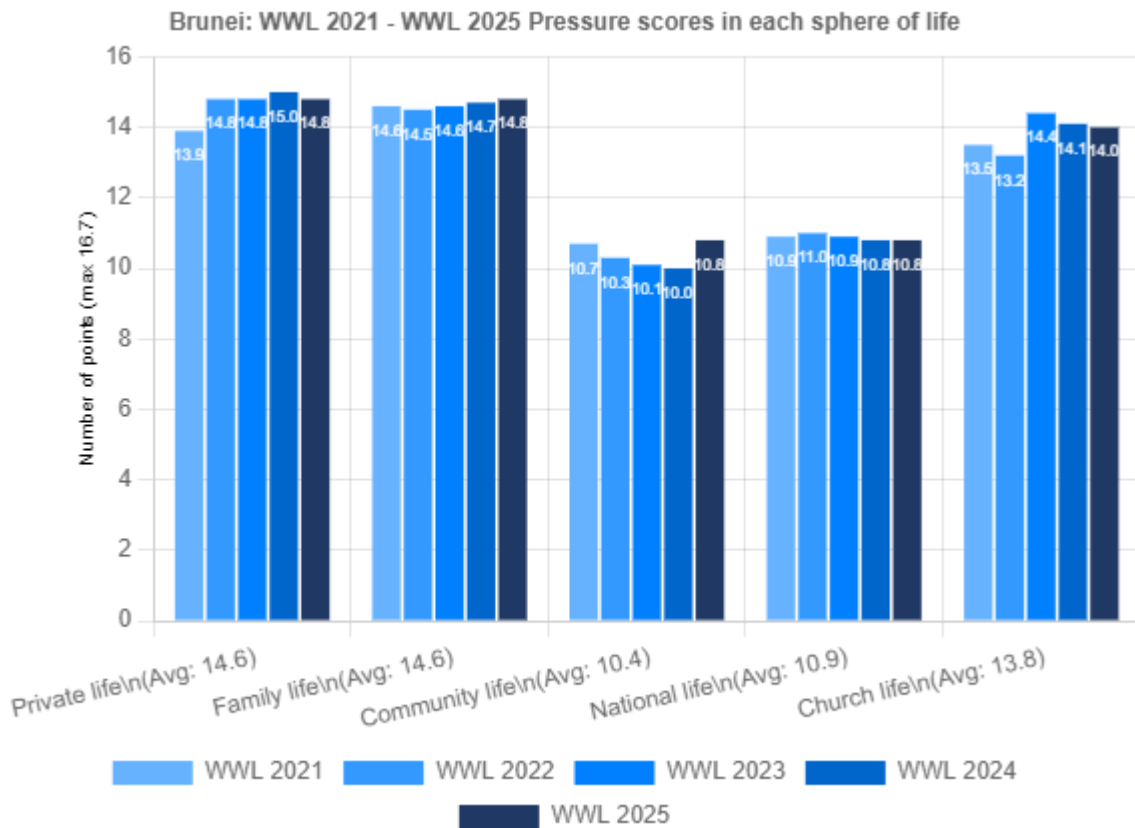
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

| Brunei: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 2025                        | 13.1                                    |
| 2024                        | 12.9                                    |
| 2023                        | 13.0                                    |
| 2022                        | 12.7                                    |
| 2021                        | 12.7                                    |

The score for average pressure has continually been at a very high level and this year passed the 13 point mark to 13.1. One of the primary reasons for this increase is the introduction of new educational reforms that mandate Islamic education for all students in government, private, and international institutions.

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



The chart shows that the levels of pressure in the *Private and Family spheres of life* have been extremely high in the last 5 WWL reporting periods. The scores in *Church life* have also been repeatedly at the top end of very high and joined the other extremely high spheres since WWL 2023.

### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows a consistently low/very low violence score for Brunei. This reflects both the fact that persecution has never been particularly violent against Christians in Brunei and the fact that researchers experience challenges in obtaining reports concerning - above all - the treatment of converts. There is also a considerable level of self-censorship amongst Christians in Brunei.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Brunei | Female Pressure Points<br>Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024                                |
|--------|--|
|        | Denied custody of children<br>Enforced religious dress code<br>Forced marriage<br>Violence – psychological |

Although Brunei is a signatory to international conventions on the rights of women, such as CEDAW, Human Rights Watch reported in May 2019 about the [threat](#) the Sharia Penal Code poses to minority groups such as women and religious minorities (HRW, 22 May 2019). Despite international condemnation, rights and freedom continue to be restricted, and Brunei’s human rights record has come under harsh [criticism](#) (The Diplomat, 29 October 2021).

Male and female converts to Christianity face the most pressure for their faith. Due to the ever-stricter implementation of Islamic laws, women are forced to wear a hijab and are punished by the religious authorities when they refuse to wear one. Within schools, universities and workplaces they particularly risk discrimination if unveiled. This generally does not apply to known Christian families, but to converts (although all women need to wear a veil if in government positions).

Similar to the experience of male converts, women and girls are usually disowned by the family when their conversion becomes known. The family often isolates them, can put them under house arrest, and Imams can be called to make them recant. They may also be forced to attend Islamic spiritual rehabilitation programs. For unmarried women, sometimes their families also threaten them with forced marriage to Muslim men they know. Married converts to Christianity risk having their children taken away from them in order to ensure they are raised as Muslims. Custody decisions are not gender-specific, but the law bans surrendering the custody of a minor to a Muslim convert.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Brunei | Male Pressure Points<br>Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024  |
|--------|--|
|        | Forced out of home – expulsion<br>Violence – physical<br>Violence – Verbal |

As previously mentioned, male and female converts to Christianity face the strongest levels of pressure for their faith. Some men and boys are disowned by the family when they convert and are forced to leave the family home. Students also risk discrimination and verbal abuse within educational settings. Male converts may further face beatings, humiliation and harsher treatment when persecuted by religious authorities. If men and boys are identified by the security department, they are put under pressure to recant their Christian faith, including being threatened with imprisonment. This affects their wider family and brings shame to the community.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Brunei](#)):

- "The government permitted members of non-Muslim religious minorities to practice their faiths but continued to ban religious groups it considered 'deviant', including the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Baha'i Faith, and Jehovah's Witnesses."  
"As in past years, the government limited traditional Chinese Lunar New Year lion dance performances to a three-day period and restricted them to the country's sole Chinese Buddhist temple, Chinese school halls, and private residences of Chinese Association members (comprising the members of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and several other Chinese business associations). Members of the royal family publicly attended Lunar New Year celebrations and lion dance performances during the allowed period, with extensive coverage in state-influenced media."
- "Members of non-Sunni religious groups continued to report that some individuals seeking to convert to another religion feared social retribution, such as ostracism by friends, family, and their community. When parents converted to Islam, there was often family and official pressure for the children to do the same if not automatically converted with their parents (if under age 14 years and seven months). Some non-Muslims said they experienced pressure in the workplace or in social groups to convert to Islam. While the SPC outlined harsh punishments for Muslims converting to another religion, there were no cases reported during the year in which the government applied or carried out those penalties. Non-Muslim groups reported government officials monitored their religious services and events to ensure that no Muslims attended and that there was no anti-Islamic content."

Atheism is not allowed and any activities that could be construed as promoting non-religious or secular beliefs are forbidden.

The activities of Hindus have also been restricted: The only Hindu temple in the country is located in the British military barracks of the Gurkha regiment. Sikh and Buddhist communities also visit the temple to pray, highlighting the lack of dedicated religious space for non-Muslim groups.

The indigenous Iban community, many of whom adhere to animist beliefs, are frequent targets of *dakwah* (Islamic missionary efforts). This reflects the broader trend of pressuring religious minorities to convert to Islam. Social retribution, such as ostracism by friends and family, is a common fear among individuals considering conversion to another religion.

In 2019, in what was considered a landmark case, a non-Muslim was [charged under Sharia law](#) for theft (Borneo Bulletin, 15 October 2019). This sparked widespread shock on social media, as it was the first publicly known instance of Sharia law being applied to a non-Muslim, raising concerns about its broader implications for religious minorities.

## Trends Summary

### 1) Churches are facing continued restrictions

Out of fear that Muslims could be led astray, public Christmas celebrations have been banned since 2015 in the whole of Brunei, with the exception of church buildings. The ban includes the use of religious symbols such as crosses, lighting candles, putting up Christmas trees, singing religious songs in public and sending Christmas greetings. Punishment for violation is potentially a five-year prison sentence. Such limitations make it clear to churches that especially the younger generation needs to grow up with a strong Christian faith.

### 2) The leadership is drawing its inspiration from Islam, but not in a radical way

Brunei displays a penchant for "Dictatorial paranoia" which became visible to the outside world in its dealing with the Myanmar crisis, when it interpreted the ASEAN non-interference rule in a very strict way, even recognizing the military take-over (in the role of ASEAN presidency). However, it seems to be increasingly the question of where exactly the leadership draws its inspiration from. Apart from a certain (economic) reliance on China - although Brunei is generally trying to [keep a balance](#) between the USA (or the broader "West") and China (USIP, 26 October 2023) -, both the Sultan and the government are trying to push the people towards a deeper connection with the origins of Islam. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the state TV station announced the airing of its first drama series in the [Arab language](#), co-produced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Borneo Bulletin, 1 May 2021). Citizens are also frequently reminded of the necessity of adhering to Islamic values as expressed by MIB. Changes to the curriculum - announced in 2023 - are another example of this. At the same time, the appointment in 2022 of the first female minister in a Bruneian cabinet since 1958 may point to developing an understanding of Islam similar to that in neighboring Malaysia.

### 3) Children are a particular target for Islamization

Children in Brunei are increasingly being targeted for Islamization, particularly through the education system. The government has intensified its focus on Islamic teachings in schools as part of its commitment to maintaining Brunei's identity as a Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB). Changes to the national curriculum emphasize Islamic values, with mandatory religious education for all Muslim students and encouragement for non-Muslim students to participate in activities promoting Islamic culture.

## 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/>.

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: Borneo Bulletin, 16 October 2024 - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/teachers-complete-programme-to-boost-islamic-education/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 'The integration of Religious Subjects into the General Education System' - <https://www.moe.gov.bn/SitePages/NewsArticle.aspx?AID=1202>
- Persecution engines description: IRFR 2023 Brunei - [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/547499\\_BRUNEI-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/547499_BRUNEI-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf)
- Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (4.00 points): IRFR 2023 - [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/547499\\_BRUNEI-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/547499_BRUNEI-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf)
- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points): Educational reforms - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/teachers-complete-programme-to-boost-islamic-education/>
- Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (4.00 points): Borneo Bulletin, 2024 - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/?s=converts>
- Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.75 points): (US Department of State, IRFR 2021) - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/brunei/>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: IRFR 2022 - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/BRUNEI-2022-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: threat - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/22/bruneis-pernicious-new-penal-code>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: criticism - <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/asean-summit-should-draw-attention-to-bruneis-appalling-human-rights-record/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Brunei - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/brunei/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: charged under Sharia law - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/man-stole-mothers-gas-cylinder-behind-bars/%20>
- Trends Summary: keep a balance - <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/why-brunei-hedging-between-us-and-china>
- Trends Summary: Arab language - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/new-drama-series-inculcate-love-arabic-language/>