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World Watch Research

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# Cameroon: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



**Open Doors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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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

Cameroon: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
29,394,000	17,128,000	58.3

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

Cameroon: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	17,128,000	58.3
Muslim	6,335,000	21.6
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	610	0.0
Ethnic religionist	5,609,000	19.1
Jewish	76	0.0
Bahai	72,400	0.2
Atheist	58,600	0.2
Agnostic	172,000	0.6
Other	18,200	0.1
<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

Cameroon:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Organized crime cartels or networks
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Different dynamics interplay in the persecution of Christians in Cameroon. These dynamics have created extremely difficult conditions, making it highly risky to be a Christian in some areas. The process of radicalization has been accelerating, notably in regions with a significant Muslim population. Conversion from Islam to Christianity has become fraught with danger. New converts are often forced to practice their faith in secrecy. Owning Bibles or any Christian literature can lead to threats and acts of aggression. Revealing their new-found faith to family members or the community can expose them to significant risk. This is especially true in the remote northern regions.

Church activities have been severely disrupted in areas with a strong Boko Haram/ISWAP presence. Boko Haram and ISWAP have continued to launch attacks, particularly in the Far North Region, in an attempt to impose their religious and political beliefs. The constant displacement of people due to escalating violence has impeded the normal functioning of churches. Heavy restrictions have been imposed on church activities in certain areas due to security concerns. The government further burdens Christians by exerting significant pressure on those who publicly denounce the perceived injustice and limitations on religious freedom.

Additional challenges are imposed on children and women who convert to Christianity. There are reported instances of Christian children being forced by non-Christian relatives to attend Islamic classes. Coercive marriages for female converts to non-Christians are also common, amplifying their vulnerability. Attacks by Boko Haram further enhance the dangers faced by Christian women, including potential abductions.

In the Anglophone Crisis, separatist groups and government forces alike have attacked churches, accusing them of harboring opposing factions or simply being caught in the crossfire. Churches have been burned, pastors kidnapped, and congregations threatened, making it extremely dangerous for Christians to gather for worship in the North West and South West regions.



The crisis in neighboring Central African Republic has created an enduring state of upheaval and distress in the whole region. Many Christians from there have been displaced from their homes and have sought refuge in Cameroon. As reported by [Reliefweb, Cameroon - A journey to a renewed identity](#) (4 December 2023):

- "Cameroon hosts the largest refugee population from the Central African Republic (CAR), with over 350,000 refugees who barely have access to basic services, including civil documentation for their children. ... Over 70 per cent of CAR refugees in Cameroon live in local communities in the East, Adamawa and North regions, putting significant pressure on the already limited resources and services in these areas. Tensions between refugees and communities arise over access to drinking water, and basic social services such as education and healthcare."

New displacements are recorded every month, indicating a state of ongoing conflict and the dire state of affairs in the region.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian converts face coercion, violence, and harassment, including the loss of a job or opportunities for further education unless they renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- Christian peaceful religious gatherings are restricted by Boko Haram, security restrictions, and denial of registrations or meeting permits (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 21)
- Christians face discrimination in the public and private work force (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- For a fear of reprisals due to a lack of security, Christians are denied their right to freedom of expression (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian women are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23 and CEDAW Art. 16)

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

- **Targeting of churches in Anglophone conflict:** The ongoing conflict between English-speaking and French-speaking populations, known as the Anglophone Crisis, has led to increased targeting of Christian churches. As stated above, both separatist groups and government forces have attacked churches, accusing them of harboring opposing factions or simply being caught in the crossfire. Churches have been burned, pastors kidnapped, and congregations threatened, making it extremely dangerous for Christians to gather for worship in these regions. As noted by the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Cameroon](#)), "a significant portion of abuses involving religious freedom continued to occur in the predominantly English-speaking Northwest and Southwest Regions (NOSO), where violence associated with a separatist crisis continued. Because religion, ethnicity, and political ideology are closely linked, it was often difficult to determine whether incidents were predominantly motivated by religion."
- **Impact of man-made humanitarian crisis in the Northeast:** In the northeastern regions, the humanitarian crisis fueled by Boko Haram's insurgency has severely affected Christian communities. Boko Haram's attacks have displaced thousands of Christians, leading to a lack of basic necessities such as food, water and medical care. Many Christians have fled their homes and are living in precarious conditions in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The constant threat of violence, combined with inadequate humanitarian aid, has left these communities in a state of perpetual crisis.
- **Pressure from Dictatorial paranoia:** Christians in Cameroon also face persecution from the government's *Dictatorial paranoia*. The regime's fear of dissent has led to the suppression of religious freedom, making it difficult for Christians to express their faith openly. Churches are closely monitored, and any criticism of the government from religious leaders is met with severe repercussions. This environment of fear stifles the church's ability to function normally, as members are wary of government informants and potential crackdowns.
- **Abductions by jihadists:** Abductions by jihadist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP are a significant threat to Christians in Cameroon. These groups frequently kidnap Christians to use as leverage for ransom or to force conversions to Islam. Abducted individuals, including women and children, often face brutal conditions, with women particularly at risk of forced marriages and sexual slavery. These kidnappings create a climate of fear and insecurity, disrupting the lives of entire communities.
- **Forced marriages and sexual violence:** In regions plagued by jihadist activity, Christian women and girls are at high risk of being forcibly married to militants. These forced marriages are a form of control and subjugation, aiming to break the spirit of Christian communities. Women who resist are often subjected to sexual violence and other forms of abuse. This practice not only violates the victims' rights but also serves to terrorize the broader Christian population, reinforcing the power and reach of the jihadist groups.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Communities of expatriate Christians do not exist as a separate category for WWL analysis, since expatriates are free to interact with other Christian groups.

**Historical Christian communities:** According to World Christian Database statistics, Roman Catholics make up 45.6% of the Christian population (WCD, accessed May 2024). However, there are also several

Protestant denominations (e.g. Presbyterians) who can also be considered as belonging to this category. They do not suffer as much persecution as convert communities, but nevertheless, some congregations have been affected by Boko Haram violence; also, the *Dictatorial paranoia* of the government undermines the autonomy of Historical Christian communities.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts from Islam to Christianity are the most persecuted Christian group in the country, whether they meet in secret or riskily share fellowship with other Christians. Convert Christians in Protestant churches, are often persecuted by family and community in the northern regions, Adamawa and in the Eastern and Western regions. Some converts were reportedly threatened during Boko Haram attacks to reconvert to Islam. Therefore, this community of Christians faces the risk of pressure, ostracism and violence. This often leads to forced displacement to safer parts of the country. Those who convert from ethnic religious beliefs to Christianity also face pressure from their community and families to renounce Christianity, but the pressure is less intensive.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This is a growing category in Cameroon; Baptist and Pentecostal groups are examples. Some Pentecostal churches have criticized the government and have faced threats of closure. Pressure exerted by the government undermines the freedom of such churches. These churches also face threats and violence from groups like Boko Haram in the north. *Islamic oppression* in the North has also made the evangelistic efforts of such groups risky (as well as integration of Christians with a Muslim background).

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Governance and security in Cameroon are major problems, with the country facing violence in three regions: 1) Far North - where Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to mount attacks; 2) North West and 3) South West, which are both areas where the Anglophone insurgency is based.

## Position on the World Watch List

Cameroon: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	67	43
WWL 2024	66	43
WWL 2023	65	45
WWL 2022	65	44
WWL 2021	64	42

In WWL 2025, Cameroon ranked 43, with the score of 67, marking a 1-point increase. The overall pressure on Christians averaged 10.1 points across the five spheres of life, with the most significant challenges appearing in the *Church and Community spheres*. Violence levels remained extremely high, with a slight increase to 16.1 points from 15.9 in WWL 2024. For the past five WWL reporting periods, Cameroon has consistently scored 64 points or above, reflecting sustained pressure and violence against Christian communities. Persistent Boko Haram activity in the North continued to pose a severe threat, while civil conflict in the West forced churches to pay “protection money” to separatists, who

also restricted any criticism of their actions. Governmental restrictions further compounded these difficulties, with authorities prohibiting Christian leaders from speaking out against human rights abuses and corruption. Widespread corruption weakened security and the rule of law across many areas. Additionally, established church denominations persecuted other Christian groups, seeing the growth of non-traditional Christian communities as a potential threat. These combined pressures create a complex and challenging environment for Christians across Cameroon.

## Persecution engines

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

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

### Islamic oppression (Very Strong)

This persecution engine is particularly evident in the north, in Adamawa, and also in some eastern regions. *Islamic oppression* affects primarily Christians with a Muslim background who are persecuted by their family. The Boko Haram Islamic insurgency also poses a constant threat to the life and security of Christians and has caused the displacement of many Christians from Adamawa, the north and the extreme northern regions. In remote areas in these regions, some Muslim leaders believe that Islam should be the only religion present. Although Cameroon has generally been a country showing religious tolerance, the memories and legacies of Fulani-led *jihad* in previous centuries in the northern regions lingers on: It was through *jihad* that the indigenous population was forcibly converted to Islam. The violence and activity of Boko Haram have brought these memories alive and is undermining the history of peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims in modern-day Cameroon.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

During the past three decades of Paul Biya's rule, the regime has been responsible for a whole series of political arrests, killings and persecution of Christians. The Anglophone region of the country has been particularly affected by this due to the independence movement active in the area.

**Organized corruption and crime (Strong)**

Cameroon is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. The dictatorial regime of Paul Biya is responsible for the rampant corruption that weakens the country's political structure. Although the country has oil resources, it still lags behind most African countries in economic development. Corrupt officials in the northern part of the country have been responsible for the persecution of Christians by not taking appropriate action to protect Christians under attack by radical Islamic groups. Corrupt officials have also been responsible for persecuting Christians who have views opposing the government.

**Clan oppression (Medium)**

A significant number of the population adhere to traditional belief systems - and there are also Christians who mix traditional beliefs with Christianity. In areas where Christians oppose such practices, they will face persecution.

**Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)**

Well-established denominations do not welcome the activities of new church groups in the country. For example, [in 2018](#), Cameroon's Protestant, Baptist, and Catholic churches called on the government to shut down a number of Pentecostal churches (DW, 21 March 2018).

**Drivers of persecution**

Cameroon: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	<b>VERY STRONG</b>			<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>			<b>STRONG</b>	<b>STRONG</b>
Government officials								Strong	Strong
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Medium				

*(table continues below)*

Cameroon: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	MEDIUM			STRONG	STRONG
Violent religious groups	Very strong								Strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium								
One's own (extended) family	Medium								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Medium								Strong

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** The main drivers are militant groups like Boko Haram who engage in violent attacks targeting both Christians and Muslims who do not adhere to the same interpretation of Islam as them. In addition to these groups, government officials at the local level who sympathize with such groups also contribute to the persecution of Christians.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Some Islamic preachers encourage the persecution of converts in their teaching. Such teaching supports the activities of Boko Haram.
- **Family members (Medium):** Family members and neighbors will put pressure on converts to return to Islam.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** People from wider society also put pressure on converts in the northern part of the country.
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (Medium):** Organized crime cartels and criminal networks have also played a major role in making Boko Haram more potent in the country. These networks are not limited to Cameroon itself; it is a regional issue.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** Paul Biya’s dictatorial regime has been ruling the country since 1982. Recently there has been a growing opposition movement throughout the country against

his regime. Most opponents are Christians since Cameroon is a Christian majority country. Several Christian leaders have been arrested, tortured and killed by government officials because they oppose the government's inhuman treatment of political opponents.

### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Strong):** Paul Biya's regime supports corrupt officials in order to maintain its grip on power. Corrupt officials have taken part in the persecution of Christians in the Muslim-dominated parts of the country. There are also numerous cases where corrupt officials have arrested and killed Christian political opponents of the government.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Boko Haram engages with criminal networks to bribe officials and to traffic people and arms.
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (Strong):** Government officials also participate in organized crime networks, which have made rule of law a luxury. Violent religious groups and other groups have benefited from this.

### Drivers Clan oppression

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In this category of drivers are ethnic leaders, adherents of traditional belief systems, family members, and even some Christians who are mixing traditional beliefs with Christianity.

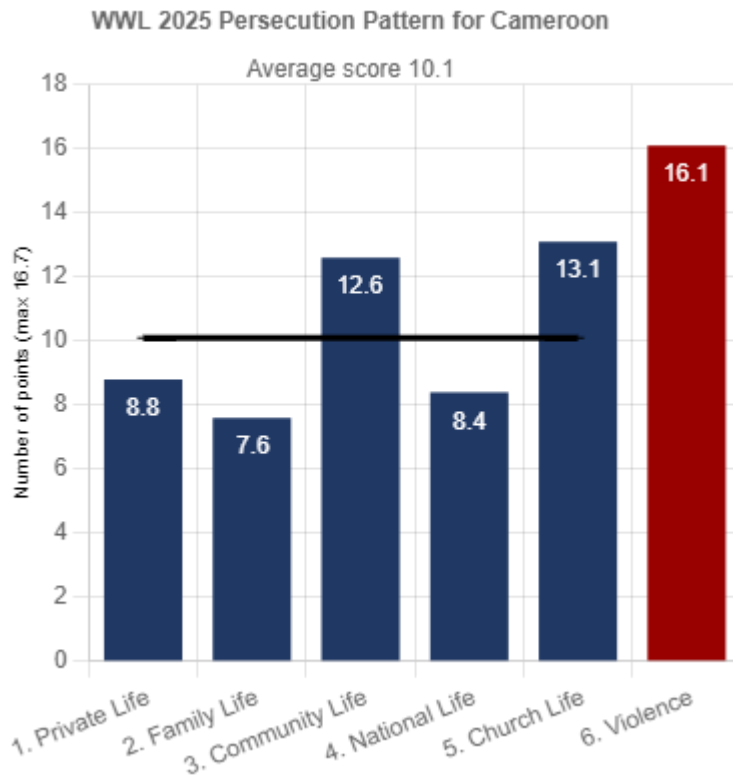
### Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Christian religious leaders (Medium):** The leaders of well-established church denominations sometimes influence the authorities to crack down on smaller church groups in the country.

## The Persecution pattern

In the chart below, the WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Cameroon shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is high at 10.1 points, a very slight increase from WWL 2024 (10.0 points).
- Concerning pressure, the *Church sphere* score is the highest with 13.1 points, followed by the *Community sphere* score at 12.6 points. These very high scores both reflect the ongoing challenges faced by churches and Christians in their communities.
- The score for violence is extremely high at 16.1 points, showing a slight increase from the 15.9 points registered during WWL 2024.



## 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. (2.75 points)***

In the northern and north-eastern regions of Cameroon, the possession of Christian materials, such as Bibles and religious literature, poses significant risks due to threats from Boko Haram. This extremist group has created an environment where engaging in religious practices, even in private, is fraught with danger. The situation is particularly challenging for converts to Christianity whose families are non-Christian. These individuals face external threats alongside familial and social pressures, creating additional complexities in their ability to practice their faith.

***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.75 points)***

In the northern and north-eastern regions of Cameroon, discussing the Christian faith, sharing the gospel, or engaging in conversations about religion can be dangerous. Boko Haram's pervasive presence has created an environment where public expressions or discussions of Christianity can draw unwanted attention, putting individuals at significant risk. Converts to Christianity face even greater challenges, particularly when their communities and extended families adhere to different religious



traditions, as they contend with not only external threats but also familial tensions. The combination of radical Islamic threats and social pressure severely restricts the ability of Christians to share or practice their faith openly in these regions.

***Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.75 points)***

The combination of Islamic extremism, political unrest and targeted violence has made Christian interaction extremely unsafe in northern, north-eastern, and even in south-western parts of Cameroon. In the Far North, threats from Boko Haram and other extremist groups have made such interaction highly dangerous, with risks of abduction, sexual violence, forced displacement and physical harm. In the south-western regions, political instability and conflicts between government forces and rebel groups have exacerbated the situation. Some rebel factions have specifically targeted Christians, creating further obstacles for individuals seeking to meet up.

***Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.25 points)***

Personal expression in the context of Christian faith is very risky in the northern and north-eastern regions of Cameroon. Sharing beliefs through blogs or social media platforms like Facebook exposes individuals to significant danger due to the pervasive influence of Boko Haram. Digital platforms, often regarded as channels for free expression, have become risky for Christians to use without self-censorship. Fear and intimidation dominate, suppressing any virtual expressions of faith. This situation severely undermines religious freedom and basic human rights, as extremist ideologies expand into the digital realm.

**Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere**

***Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.75 points)***

Custody of children is another critical issue that Christians face in Cameroon, particularly in the northern and north-eastern regions. Christian spouses of non-Christian partners struggle to secure custody rights in divorce cases, a challenge often rooted in religious biases within legal systems or upheld through communal customs. Cultural norms in these regions frequently tie religion to community identity, further complicating custody disputes. Conversion to Christianity is often perceived as a departure from accepted cultural or religious practices, which can heavily influence judicial and communal decisions.

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

Inheritance rights are another significant challenge for Christians in northern and north-eastern Cameroon. Conversion to Christianity (or even just switching to another Christian denomination) often results in the loss of inheritance rights, used as a punitive measure tied to cultural and religious norms. Family and legal systems in these regions frequently intertwine religion with community identity, reinforcing biases that exclude Christians from claims to property. This practice not only affects individual economic stability but also reflects broader social marginalization, making it even more difficult for Christians to navigate cultural and familial dynamics.

***Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.50 points)***

Christian children in the northern and north-eastern regions of Cameroon face immense pressure to attend schools that promote doctrines of the majority religion or teachings that are anti-Christian. With many Christian schools closed or destroyed, families are often left with no viable alternatives, forcing them to enroll their children in institutions that contradict their faith. In such environments, children may face indirect coercion through curricula that undermine their Christian faith. The combination of institutional discrimination and the influence of extremist groups like Boko Haram creates an atmosphere where attending school can pose both spiritual and psychological challenges for Christian families.

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

In the northern and north-eastern regions, Christian spouses and children often endure prolonged periods of separation due to religious persecution. The volatile conditions created by extremist groups like Boko Haram frequently result in forced separation through kidnappings, displacement, and other forms of violence. Families also face separation when one parent converts to Christianity, as such conversions are often met with rejection or ostracism by non-Christian family members. These challenges impose significant emotional and psychological strain on individuals while disrupting family unity and social cohesion.

**Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere**

***Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.50 points)***

In the northern and north-eastern regions, Christians face relentless challenges due to religious discrimination and systematic monitoring by extremist groups and some community members. Tools such as community surveillance, reporting mechanisms, and social ostracism are frequently employed to trace, harass, and intimidate Christians. Acts of harassment often stem from deviations from the majority religion or failure to adhere to traditional dress codes, with individuals being targeted for wearing religious symbols or practicing their faith openly. These efforts are bolstered by radical Islamic groups that actively monitor movements, enforce compliance through threats or violence, and create networks of informants within communities.

***Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)***

Many discriminatory practices target Christians in northern and north-eastern Cameroon, and employment is one of the most significant. Christians often face exclusion from job opportunities, unfair treatment, or termination in both public and private sectors due to their faith. These challenges are aggravated by conflicts involving Boko Haram and separatist movements, which create unstable conditions. Displacement to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps further limits employment options for Christians, leaving many without stable livelihoods.

***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.). (3.25 points)***

In certain regions, Christians face constant monitoring from both local communities and government authorities. Community members and extremist groups often report Christians to the authorities or track their movements as a form of intimidation and control. Meanwhile, the government employs additional intrusive measures, including surveillance by police in plainclothes and telephone tapping, targeting individuals based on their faith. The government does this where Christians are perceived as being 'non-supporters.'

***Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.25 points)***

Christians in northern, north-eastern, and south-western regions of Cameroon face various forms of violent persecution, including abduction and forced marriage by Boko Haram and armed separatist groups. These tactics are designed to instill fear, disrupt family and community bonds, and marginalize Christian populations further. In the south-western regions, armed groups specifically target Christians through violence, forced displacement, and other forms of oppression, creating additional layers of insecurity. Communities remain fragmented and constantly under threat, causing immense trauma to the families of abducted individuals.

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

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

The lack of freedom of expression in the country, driven by a government intent on controlling all forms of communication, including the press, social forums, and public discourse, has created significant challenges for Christians. Governmental restrictions hinder Christians from expressing their beliefs or opinions in public forums and prevent church leaders from addressing issues such as corruption and social injustice. The refusal to register certain churches and the risks associated with speaking out against government actions further suppress open dialogue. These measures have created an environment where censorship and suppression obstruct Christians' ability to engage in societal discussions or advocate for their rights.

***Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.25 points)***

The practice of restricting religious freedom in Cameroon fundamentally contravenes Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which guarantee the right to freedom of religion. While the Constitution does not explicitly restrict this freedom, practical challenges undermine its realization, particularly for Christians. Bureaucratic obstacles, such as difficulties in legally registering churches, expose religious institutions to arbitrary closures and harassment. The authoritarian tendencies of the government further discourage dissent, suppressing the ability of Christians and other religious groups to openly address injustices or corruption. These legal and political constraints severely limit the exercise of religious freedom as envisioned under international human rights frameworks.

***Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.25 points)***

Christians across the country face profound challenges that force them to act against their conscience and religious principles under an authoritarian regime marked by systemic corruption. In many cases, they are compelled to comply with demands from officials engaged in unethical or corrupt practices, as refusal could result in losing employment, harassment, or other severe consequences. This dynamic creates an environment where Christians are unable to live according to their faith, particularly when their work or societal roles require actions that contradict their beliefs. Speaking out against injustice, corruption, or abuses of power is equally perilous, as dissent is met with swift and punitive measures, silencing their moral and religious convictions. These pressures erode their ability to uphold the core teachings of their faith and intensify the challenges of practicing Christianity under such an oppressive system.

***Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)***

Christians in the country face pervasive discrimination when engaging with government authorities at both local and central levels. Local officials often deny or delay the registration of churches, leaving them vulnerable to arbitrary closures and harassment, while permits for religious gatherings are frequently withheld without justification. Church properties and businesses owned by Christians are similarly targeted, facing discriminatory taxation, denial of licenses, or unjustified legal actions designed to disrupt their operations. At the same time, central government policies favor those who support the government and its narratives, systematically marginalizing Christian perspectives. Church leaders who speak out against injustice or corruption are met with surveillance, intimidation or legal repercussions, silencing their voices and restricting their ability to advocate for their communities. These coordinated discriminatory practices create an environment where Christians are excluded from fair engagement with the state, undermining their religious freedoms and economic stability.

**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. (3.75 points)***

Delaying or denying church registration is one of the critical tools used by the government to suppress religious freedom. Churches seeking legal recognition face prolonged bureaucratic processes, arbitrary rejections, or demands for compliance with restrictive conditions, leaving many without formal status. This lack of registration exposes churches to the risk of closure, harassment, and even criminal penalties for operating without authorization. Beyond the registration process, the government imposes strict oversight on church activities, interfering in internal matters such as leadership elections, training programs and administrative decisions. Pervasive monitoring often accompanies these practices, fostering an atmosphere that restricts church operations and instills fear among congregants. By controlling the legal and administrative status of churches, the government effectively uses registration as a mechanism to limit Christian communities' ability to function openly and independently.

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

The government actively hinders churches from organizing Christian activities beyond the confines of their buildings, using this restriction as a tool to suppress religious freedom. Authorities often justify these actions with concerns that gatherings outside church premises might evolve into platforms for opposing the government. At other times, the government imposes restrictions to avoid offending religious groups aligned with its interests. Permits for outdoor events are frequently required, yet requests are often denied or delayed, effectively limiting the scope of church operations. These actions disrupt activities such as outdoor worship services, community outreach and public celebrations of faith, reducing the visibility and influence of Christian practices in public spaces.

***Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)***

Preaching, teaching, and Christian materials are subject to extensive monitoring as part of a broader effort to suppress religious freedom. The government prohibits churches from producing materials that address injustice, abuse of power or human rights issues in any capacity. This restriction has created significant challenges for churches that aim to speak out against injustices or human rights violations, particularly regarding the insecurity faced by Christians in the country. These constraints are closely linked to the lack of freedom of expression in the country.

***Block 5.9: Christians have experienced interference when choosing their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)***

The government's interference in the selection of church leadership has become a significant tool for controlling Christian communities. Authoritarian policies extend beyond external restrictions, intruding into internal church matters such as leadership training and the process of appointing religious leaders. This interference often involves placing pressure on churches to select leaders who align with government interests, thereby undermining the autonomy of religious institutions. The pervasive monitoring of church activities further amplifies this control, creating an atmosphere of fear and surveillance that stifles open decision-making within the church.

***Block 5.10: Christians have been hindered in training their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)***

The training of church leaders has become a contentious issue, with the government seeking to align leadership development with its own agenda and philosophy. Christians face significant obstacles in independently training their religious leaders, as the authoritarian government extends its influence over internal church activities. Leadership training programs are often subjected to strict oversight, with authorities imposing constraints designed to shape the teachings and philosophies of future leaders to align with state narratives. This intrusion has placed some church leaders in direct conflict with the government, as they resist efforts to compromise the spiritual independence of their communities.

## 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.*

Cameroon: 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)?	100 *	24
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?	100 *	53
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10	5
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)?	10 *	10 *
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- Christians killed:** At least 100 Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons amidst escalating violence in the country. These deaths are largely attributed to militant groups such as Boko Haram and its offshoots, which target Christians through attacks on villages, kidnappings and executions. In northern regions, extremists have raided churches and Christian communities, burning homes and places of worship, forcing many to flee. The insurgents often demand conversion to Islam, with refusal leading to violent retaliation. Insecurity in conflict zones exacer-



bates the situation, as government forces struggle to provide adequate protection to vulnerable populations.

- **Churches or Christian properties attacked:** At least 100 churches and Christian properties have been attacked, damaged or destroyed, reflecting the widespread targeting of Christian communities. Extremist groups, particularly Boko Haram and its affiliates, have been at the forefront of these attacks, often using violence to intimidate and displace Christians. Churches have been burned, looted, and reduced to rubble during raids on villages, while Christian schools and properties have been deliberately vandalized or occupied. These attacks have disrupted worship, education and community life, forcing many Christians to abandon their homes and places of faith in search of safety.
- **Christians abducted:** At least 10 Christians were abducted for faith-related reasons. These kidnappings are often carried out by extremist groups such as Boko Haram, targeting Christians in vulnerable areas, particularly in the northern regions. Victims are frequently taken from their homes, churches or communities during violent raids and are subjected to physical and psychological abuse. Abductions are used as a tactic to instill fear, extract ransom-money, or force religious conversion.
- **Christians raped or sexually harassed:** At least 100 Christians have been raped or sexually harassed, with women and girls being particularly vulnerable during attacks by extremist groups such as Boko Haram. Sexual violence is frequently used as a tactic during raids on villages, where victims are often abducted and subjected to prolonged abuse. Many of these incidents occur in areas with limited security presence, leaving affected communities exposed to repeated violations. Survivors face immense challenges, including stigma, trauma and a lack of access to justice or support services, compounding the difficulties faced by Christian communities in the region.

## 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.

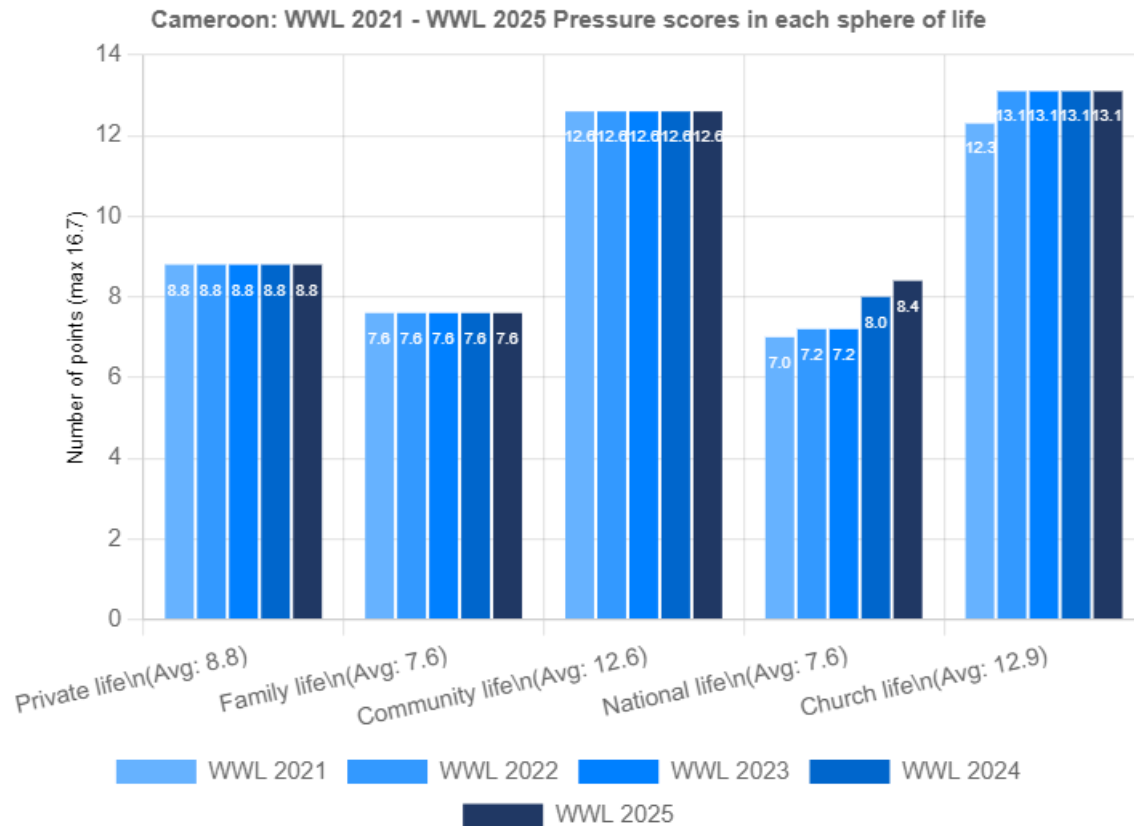
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Cameroon: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	10.1
2024	10.0
2023	9.9
2022	9.9
2021	9.7

The chart above shows that, over the five, most recent WWL reporting periods, the average pressure on Christians in Cameroon has remained between 9.7 points and 10.1 points, but also indicates a slowly rising tendency.



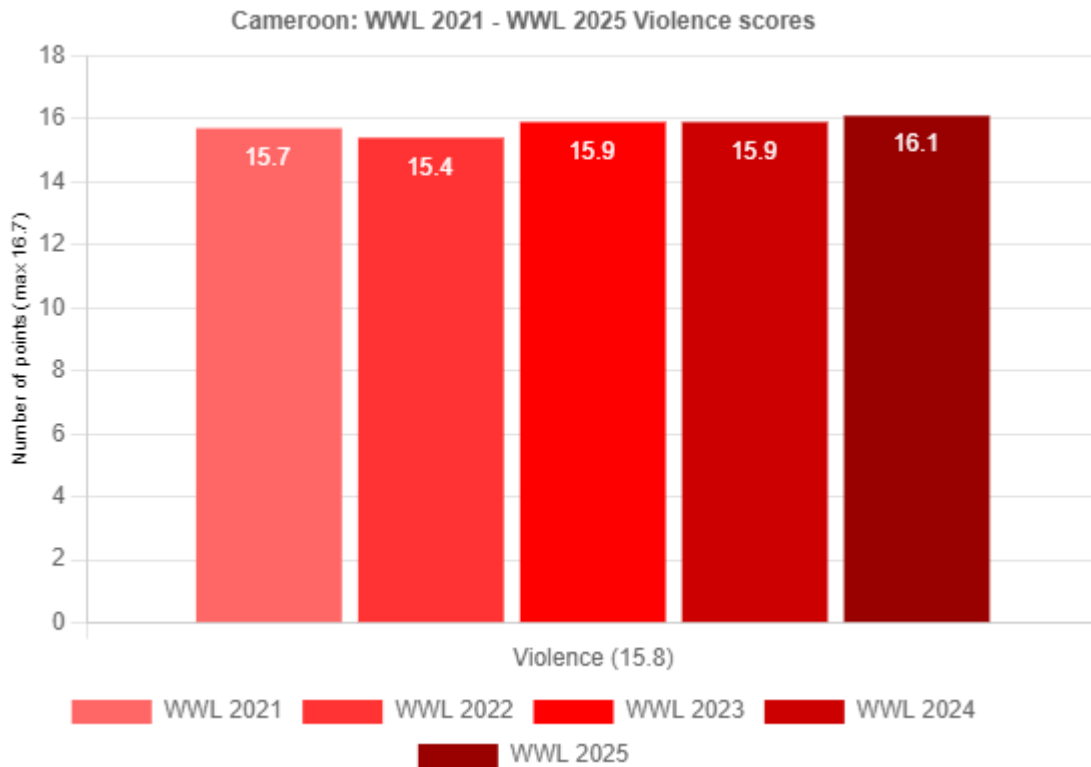
### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The scores for pressure in all spheres of life have stabilized except for the score in *National life* which has shown a clear rising tendency. Pressure within the *Private*, *Family* and *Community spheres* particularly affects converts. Over the past five WWL reporting periods, average scores have been highest in the *Church* and *Community spheres*, with 12.9 and 12.6 points respectively. In the *Church sphere*, pressure is largely driven by the persecution engines *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression*, compounded by the ongoing Anglophone crisis. Within communities, Christians often face hostility from radicals or certain community members who support these groups. The *Family* and *National spheres* have the lowest five-year average, each with a score of 7.6 points.

### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The chart below shows that violence against Christians in Cameroon remains extremely high, consistently scoring 15.4 points or more over the five, most recent WWL reporting periods. Although Cameroon is a majority-Christian country, the five-year average violence score stands at 15.8 points— one of the highest among WWL countries. Notably, during WWL 2025, the score reached a peak of 16.1 points.



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Cameroon	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abduction</li> <li>Denied access to social community/networks</li> <li>Denied custody of children</li> <li>Denied inheritance or possessions</li> <li>Discrimination/harassment via education</li> <li>Enforced religious dress code</li> <li>Forced divorce</li> <li>Forced marriage</li> <li>Forced out of home - expulsion</li> <li>Incarceration by family (house arrest)</li> <li>Violence – death</li> <li>Violence – sexual</li> </ul>

Cameroon is a secular country, yet the Far North region continues to suffer from the violent presence of Boko Haram. Christian women in northern Cameroon are subject to several forms of persecution related to their status in society. Boko Haram continues to regularly abduct women and girls, forcing them into marriage with one of their members or subjecting them to forced labor and rape. They are further put under extreme pressure to renounce their faith and embrace Islam. A country expert summarizes some of the risks: “There are reports of Christians, particularly women and girls, facing the danger of abduction and coerced marriages in specific regions of Cameroon’s northern regions

where jihadist attacks are popular ... Christian women in particular are vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage as a means of intimidation and control”. These Christians are also sometimes forced to marry Boko Haram leaders and fighters. Exemplifying just how repressive these Islamic militants are, country experts indicate that several girls have been forced to act as suicide bombers to further decimate Christian populations.

Compounding these pressures, strong governance is lacking in Cameroon. Multiple reports of sexual violence and other “pervasive” human rights violations by the military and armed separatist groups have spurred no significant government action ([Amnesty International](#), 4 July 2023).

Female converts to Christianity from a Muslim or Animist background face further pressure within family and community. Linked partly to a lack of education, women in Cameroon are dependent on their husbands or fathers; when they decide to convert to Christianity, it can be considered an act of defiance. They can be denied the opportunity to socialize with other Christians and attend church services. Unmarried converts risk being forcibly married to a non-Christian, particularly in the north of the country. Cases of house arrests and forced confinement of Christian women and girls are rarely reported but are - as a country expert states - “very prominent, especially in families of Muslim converts”. Married converts conversely face the prospect of divorce, the loss of custody of their children, disinheritance, and eviction from the home. There are several instances where female converts have to choose between their husband or their Christian faith. If a man converts, the tendency is to alienate the wife and children, or if the woman converts, they will send her out of the house. “[This] pressure to renounce faith is part of the tactics employed by the community and radical groups to teach potential converts what awaits them should they convert”, another country expert shares.

Poverty and financial dependency make Christian women and girls more vulnerable to such pressure and violence ([UN Women](#), accessed 2 January 2025). Women are also more likely to be employed in informal low-wage jobs that are highly susceptible to disruption during public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic ([World Bank](#), 25 May 2022). Displaced Christian women also face severe economic hardship in Muslim-dominated regions. A country expert disclosed: “They are given irregular and meager wages by their Muslim employers. If they try to speak against this harsh treatment or demand regular pay and better wages, they are beaten and maltreated.”

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Cameroon	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Abduction Denied inheritance or possessions Economic harassment via business/job/work access Forced to flee town/country Imprisonment by government Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence – death Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – Verbal

Boko Haram also poses a major threat to Christian men and boys living in the northern regions of Cameroon, particularly church leaders. Going to school remains risky for boys as well as men who are teachers, as evidenced by the chain of attacks on education since the [reopening of schools](#) in September 2022 (VOA, 15 September 2022). Men have been abducted by militant groups, tortured, and used for forced labor. Others have been forcibly recruited into the ranks of militias. This leaves Christian families without a family head and provider, making them vulnerable to attacks themselves. Communities have become reduced in size due to such attacks, compounded by many men leaving the locality for safer areas.

In the Northwest and Southwest regions, according to a country expert, men and boys are most at risk of threats to life because they are accused of supporting either military forces or separatist groups. A country expert summarizes:

- “The proliferation of the Islamic militants in the North poses a major source of persecution for Christians. In their bid to establish a Sharia state, Jihadist religious leaders have mainly targeted the clergy, students, political leaders and humanitarian workers to advance their course. Under the period of review, students in mission schools have been reportedly killed, archbishops and teachers affiliated to the church have been kidnapped and molested by separatist groups and Boko Haram.”

Conflict in the Anglophone region, also known as the Southern Cameroons region, has also fueled instability in the country and caused many people to flee, including Christians.

Christian men also face discrimination in the areas of job opportunities and promotion. Furthermore, they also experience hindrances from government officials when they oppose corruption and violence. Several church leaders have reportedly been arrested on false charges, tortured, and killed by government officials in response to their speaking out against the wrongdoings of the government. When a man refuses to get involved in unethical practices because of his Christian beliefs, he is taunted and called a coward. When jobs are refused due to discrimination, the family cannot thrive. Boycotts also affect Christian families economically, financially and psychologically. The lack of

economic alternatives lends fertile grounds for the recruitment of more men and boys into armed groups ([Reliefweb, 7 July 2023](#)).

Male converts to Christianity also face pressure from family and community members. They may be rejected by their nuclear families and be denied their due inheritance. A country expert comments, “Men too are also coerced into marrying Muslim girls to prevent them from staying Christians. Muslim girls are sent to seduce them and eventually get pregnant so the man will be forced to marry them.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Any religious groups that have not openly supported the government face hostility from the authorities. In areas where Christians are the majority, Muslims are sometimes ostracized because the community sees them as likely Boko Haram sympathizers.

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

- **Jehovah's Witnesses:** "As in previous years, there were reports of Jehovah's Witnesses students being expelled or sanctioned for refusing to sing the national anthem because of their religious convictions. Three court cases from previous years on this issue remained pending in the Supreme Court. The problem affected hundreds of students in the country. Teachers and school administrators refused to accommodate Jehovah's Witnesses minors who objected to singing the national anthem (and taking part in other patriotic ceremonies) in school. In some cases, students identified as Jehovah's Witnesses by their teachers were forced to stand in front of the class and sing the national anthem alone. While some schools granted accommodations, the group's representatives stated they did not obtain the type of broad relief that a policy or Ministry-level decision would provide, despite high-level meetings with the Prime Minister's office and MINAT. Jehovah's Witnesses representatives reported generally excellent relations with the government except for this issue."

## Trends Summary

The trajectory of several West African nations is shaped by numerous factors, including the erosion of the rule of law, the rise of military coups, the growing influence of Islamic jihadist groups, and geopolitical tensions between Western powers and Russia. Cameroon, while indirectly affected by some of these factors, is nonetheless influenced by the broader regional dynamics.

### 1) The battle against Boko Haram and ISWAP

West Africa is increasingly becoming a battleground, with government forces struggling against violent Islamic militants such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Particularly in the northern regions, Cameroon faces relentless attacks from these groups. In April 2023, Boko Haram militants destroyed hundreds of homes, killed at least six villagers and two soldiers, and left thousands homeless in Cameroon's northern border with Nigeria. This situation has been exacerbated by the Cameroonian government's inability to protect its citizens effectively, contributing to a bleak future outlook.

## 2) Deepening of radical Islamic ideology

In northern Cameroon, radical Islamic ideology has deeply infiltrated the population, creating a challenging environment for the Christian community. Even if groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP were defeated, societal harmony would remain elusive as extremist ideologies have entrenched themselves within the Muslim youth. The spread of jihadist ideology across West Africa, extending towards coastal areas, complicates the security situation further. In Cameroon, the coexistence of multiple conflicts has led to security vacuums, providing fertile ground for such ideologies to thrive. This situation raises the risk of escalating sectarian violence akin to that seen in the Central African Republic in recent years.

## 3) Increased government repression

What began as protests by Anglophone Cameroonians has escalated into a full-scale civil war, significantly altering the nation's social and political landscape. The government's response has become increasingly repressive, drawing accusations of severe human rights violations. The focus on suppressing political dissent and opposition has diverted critical resources from the fight against Boko Haram. Security forces have killed thousands, including civilians and Christian leaders, and arbitrary arrests have become common. In March 2024, the government banned two opposition coalitions, labeling them "clandestine movements," a move widely criticized as an effort to stifle political dissent ahead of the 2025 presidential elections ([HRW, 21 March 2024](#)).

## 4) Ongoing Anglophone Crisis

The Anglophone Crisis continues to deteriorate, proving more protracted than initially anticipated. Despite peace talks initiated in 2020, little progress has been made, and experts argue that the conflict's political and economic benefits have reduced incentives for a negotiated settlement. In 2023, Canada attempted mediation efforts, but substantial outcomes remain elusive. As 2024 progresses, the conflict enters its eighth year with no resolution in sight. Insurgents in the North West and South West regions continue to attack government soldiers and each other, with civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. Killings, abductions and sexual violence are common, and nearly half of the area's schools have ceased functioning. Pro-government militias have also emerged, spreading further chaos.

The severe security challenges in Cameroon are compounded by the intricate dynamics of local and regional conflicts. The government's repressive measures, coupled with the pervasive threat of Boko Haram and the unresolved Anglophone Crisis, have created a volatile environment that hampers development and endangers civilian lives. These multifaceted crises highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address both the root causes and immediate impacts of these conflicts. Without significant international and national efforts to restore stability and foster dialogue, Cameroon's prospects for peace and development remain uncertain.

## 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: Reliefweb, Cameroon - A journey to a renewed identity - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-journey-renewed-identity>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the 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 against Torture - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.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: IRFR 2023 Cameroon) - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: IRFR 2023 Cameroon - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/>
- Persecution engines description: n 2018 - <https://www.dw.com/en/cameroons-pentecostal-churches-under-fire/a-43070272>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (Amnesty International, 4 July 2023). - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/07/cameroon-rampant-atrocities-amid-anglophone-regions-must-be-stopped/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UN Women, accessed 2 January 2025 - <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/west-and-central-africa/cameroon>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: World Bank, 25 May 2022 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2022/05/25/assessing-the-damage-early-evidence-on-impacts-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-girls-and-women-in-africa>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: reopening of schools - <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-officials-say-rebels-attacking-schools-/6749097.html#:~:text=FILE%20%20Pupils%20stand%20in%20line,school%20year%20started%20on%20Sept.>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Reliefweb, 7 July 2023 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/caafag-assessment-report-southwest-region-may-2023>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Cameroon - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/>
- Trends Summary: HRW, 21 March 2024 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/21/cameroon-government-bans-opposition-coalitions>