Ethiopia:

Persecution Dynamics

January 2025

Open Doors
Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Contents

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

Ethiopia: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
129,720,000	77,509,000	59.8

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

Ethiopia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	77,509,000	59.8
Muslim	44,512,000	34.3
Hindu	10,100	0.0
Buddhist	2,200	0.0
Ethnic religionist	7,511,000	5.8
Jewish	18,000	0.0
Bahai	35,800	0.0
Atheist	16,300	0.0
Agnostic	105,000	0.1
Other	0	0.0
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

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

Map of country
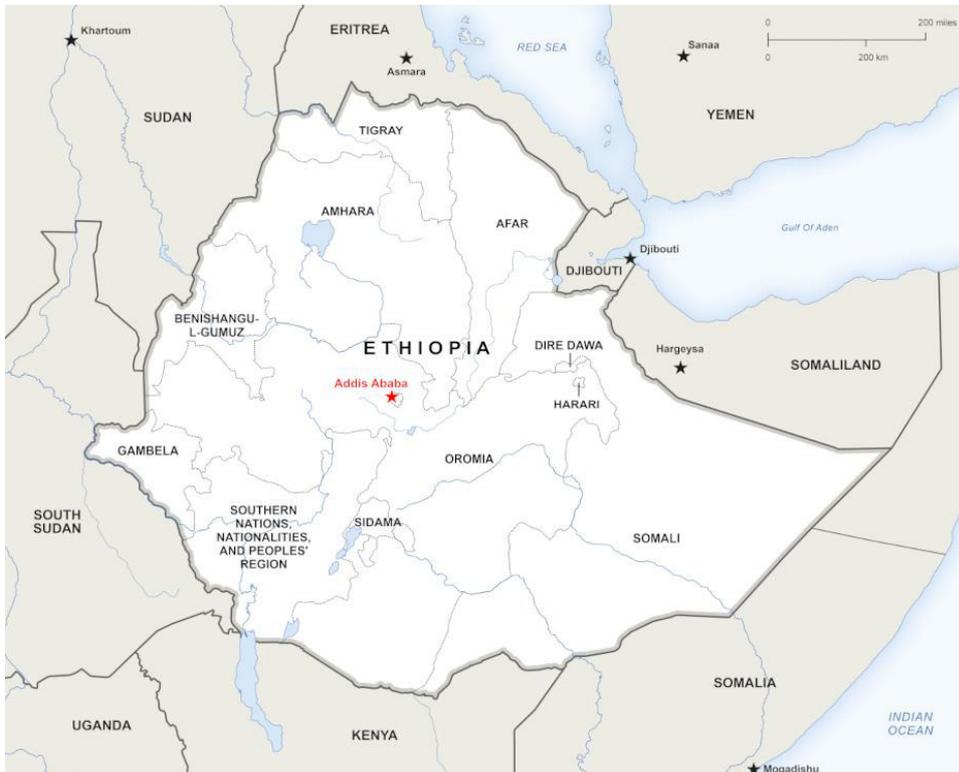
Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Ethiopia: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

In Ethiopia, all three categories of Christian communities face violations of religious freedom, with non-traditional Christians suffering the most severe mistreatment from both the local government and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background, particularly in eastern and south-eastern regions, and 'cross-denominational converts' from Orthodox backgrounds endure harsh treatment from their families and communities. Christians in areas like Somali state and parts of Oromia face attacks by Islamic mobs and are often denied access to community resources, leading to social ostracization. The ongoing political violence over the last three years, coupled with recent conflicts in Tigray, Amhara and Oromia, has left Christians increasingly vulnerable, with many churches attacked and destroyed, and even those seeking refuge in churches have not been spared from violence.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Ethiopia 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)

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and denied their right to freedom of religion or belief (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are denied their right to freedom of expression (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian peaceful religious gatherings are restricted, in violation of the right to peaceful assembly (ICCPR Art. 21)

- Christian women are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23.3; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Christian women are denied their equality of rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution (ICCPR Art. 23.4 and CEDAW Art.16)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- *House arrest and denial of resources*: Many converts to Christianity are subjected to house arrest and denied access to community resources.
- *Restrictions on private worship*: Converts also face restrictions on private worship, further limiting their ability to practice their faith.
- *Hardships for non-traditional Christians*: Non-traditional Christian communities and 'cross-denominational converts' from Orthodox backgrounds endure hardships and face rising pressure and violence.
- *Islamic mob attacks*: Attacks on churches by Islamic mobs have taken place in areas such as Somali state and parts of Oromia.
- *Militant group attacks and kidnappings*: Militant groups have attacked churches, and Christians have been kidnapped for ransom. The ransom amounts increase significantly if the kidnapped person is a pastor or priest due to their perceived value and connections. Armed groups in the Amhara and Oromia regions have targeted and killed Christians, accusing them of not supporting their cause. Christians, especially those who are not actively supporting these groups, are frequently kidnapped. These kidnapped Christians are often released only after paying ransoms ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions of Ethiopian Birr.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Three of the four Christian communities in the country face violations of their basic rights but the sources and level of severity of violations vary.

Communities of expatriate Christians: These are not involuntarily isolated and so have not been scored as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) is a typical example of this category and has a massive presence in the country. It is one of the factors contributing to the complexity of the dynamics of religious freedom violations in Ethiopia; as well as being victim of violations itself, the EOC also plays a pivotal role as a perpetrator of violations. Historical Christian communities face violations mostly from the government and Islamic radicalism. Also in areas where tribalism is dominant, there is pressure on the EOC. Orthodox Christians are mostly concentrated in northern and central Ethiopia. Also, those Christians living in Muslim-dominated regional states (Harrari, Somalia, Afar), as well as local communities (e.g., among the Silte), face difficulties in living out their Christian faith.

Converts: This category includes i) Christians with a Muslim background, ii) 'cross-denominational converts' – i.e., Christians switching from one Christian denomination to another, and iii) converts from ethnic traditional beliefs to Christianity. Converts in the country face violations via different Persecution engines. In Muslim-dominated areas, converts from Islam face pressure and violence mainly from family, extended family, community leaders, and non-Christian religious leaders. In areas

dominated by the EOC, the engine behind the violations is mainly driven by EOC followers. Converts also face violations from the government in all parts of the country. In areas with a prevalence of *Clan oppression*, converts may face violations from adherents of ethnic traditional belief systems and Muslims seeking to force their participation in various religious activities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category includes Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations which have a large presence in the country. It also attracts serious violations mainly from the government, EOC and Islamic groups. These communities are growing very fast compared to other types of Christianity. A country researcher states: "Many parts of southern Ethiopia, as well as parts of Oromia, are dominated by Evangelicals/Protestants. As the majority in these communities, they do not face [serious] violations. But Protestants who live in parts dominated by Muslims and Orthodox Christians face various forms of rights violations." This category of Christianity is seen as a threat by many ultra-conservative Orthodox Church followers and the Muslim community as it keeps growing in number and influence. As a result, they face pressure and violence from many sides.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The geographical distribution of violations against Christians in Ethiopia depends upon which Persecution engines are dominant.

- The hotspots for violations due to *Christian denominational protectionism* are to be found in the Amhara region, Tigray and some parts of Oromia.
- Hotspots for *Islamic oppression* are in some parts of eastern and western Oromia, Afar and the Somali region. Gurage, Silte and Alaba are also some of the areas where violations are most severe.

Position on the World Watch List

Ethiopia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	70	33
WWL 2024	69	32
WWL 2023	66	39
WWL 2022	66	38
WWL 2021	65	36

Ethiopia remains one of the most complex countries for Christian persecution, given its long history as one of the earliest adopters of both Christianity and Islam, the two dominant religions. The intersection of religion, ethnicity, and politics often heightens tensions, with conflicts frequently taking on religious dimensions. Protestantism, one of the fastest-growing Christian movements since the late 20th century and continuing into the first quarter of the 21st century, has added new layers to the religious landscape, creating challenges for coexistence with established Orthodox and Muslim communities. Political violence across various regions exacerbates these issues, introducing a mix of persecution engines targeting Christians. This is evident in the WWL 2025 report, which shows

Ethiopia's overall persecution score rising by one point to 70, ranking the country 33rd. The violence score increased significantly from 14.4 to 15.6 points, driven by widespread unrest, while the average pressure on Christians remained very high at 10.9 points, particularly in the *Community* and *Church spheres*. Monitoring incidents of persecution has become increasingly challenging, as distinctions between faith-based, ethnic and political violence continue to blur. Although the peace agreement of November 2022 offered some hope, new conflicts have emerged, especially in the Amhara region, where Christians in both Amhara and Oromia have been frequent targets of hostility. Persecutors operate with near impunity, further endangering Christian communities in these volatile regions.

Persecution engines

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

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 (Strong)

This Persecution engine poses a real threat to Christians in Ethiopia, especially in areas dominated by Muslim communities. One country researcher reports that radical Islam "continues to be a problem in Ethiopia. As Islamic countries have been competing to get the upper hand in Africa, they continue to pour in considerable funds that is used in spreading Islam through the establishment of schools of religious learning as well as direct aid to the needy attaching conversion to Islam as a condition." With the rise of radicalism in the region and beyond, influence of radical (or political) Islam is growing at the local, regional and national levels. In the process, various types of Christianity have become increasingly vulnerable to pressure in almost all spheres of life. Particularly in rural areas where they are in the majority, Muslims harass Christians and often deny them access to communal resources.

Furthermore, Christians are victims of violence. Converts from Islam to Christianity will be ostracized and often denied family rights such as inheritance rights and child custody. It is also important to note that the growth of radical Islam in neighboring Somalia and Sudan is spilling over into Ethiopia. A country expert stated: "The [Persecution] engine's presence varies from one geographical area to

another mainly depending on the number of Muslims in a particular region. The north-eastern part of the country [made up] of mainly Afar region, the eastern regions including Somali, Dire Dawa and Harar and certain parts of the Oromia region are mostly dominated by Muslims. Because of conflicts that resulted because of actions of [radical] Islamic groups in certain parts of the country, Christians were targeted, sustained bodily injury and were forced to flee from their homes, among other injustices suffered. In the past few years, there is a growing trend in the spread of [radical] Islamic views in the country."

Christian denominational protectionism (Strong)

One country researcher reports: "The EOC considers itself as the only 'true' Christian denomination. It is particularly opposed to Evangelical Christians, This Persecution engine is mainly driven by the EOC viewing them as followers of a Western religion that poses a threat to Ethiopian nationalism and culture that has long been preserved by the EOC. It is common to hear sermons and songs that strongly criticize Evangelical Christians. Priests and other teachers in the EOC openly condemn socializing with Evangelicals sometimes going as far as to ban their members from speaking to 'the heathens'. There is also growing antagonism on the part of some Evangelical churches against the EOC going into a series of hateful to-and-fro between the two sides."

The EOC has been seriously violating the rights of Christians who leave their ranks to join (mostly) Protestant churches, or who join the renewal movements within the EOC. Violations manifest themselves in various ways. For example, EOC members will sometimes attack them physically. The EOC members also use their connections in government to curtail the development of non-Orthodox churches. They also lobby the government to bring in laws that restrict the expansion of Protestant Christianity. For example, the law that governs the registration of churches exempts the Orthodox Church from this requirement. EOC also uses its powerful media to demonize Protestants and those who are supporters of the renewal movement. A country expert adds: "Again this comes from followers of the majority Christian denomination in the country, the Orthodox Christian Church. However, it is worth noting that not all followers of the Orthodox church are of this opinion. The victims of these violations are mainly followers of Christian denominations who are relatively new to the country and are mainly Protestant. These violations are prevalent mostly in the northern and central parts of the country where the Orthodox church has the majority of the population as its followers. It is also relevant to mention here that violations against those who belong to the so-called new forms of Christianity get extremer as one goes out of the city towards the rural areas of the country."

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

In former years, the Ethiopian government had become more authoritarian and restricted rights for civil society and religious institutions. The previous Ethiopian government had shown itself to be suspicious about religion in general and Christians in particular.

- First, religious groups seem able to organize and assemble people very efficiently and effectively. This causes concern about their perceived ability to organize activities that hypothetically could bring about a regime change.
- Secondly, the previous government was suspicious that Protestants (especially non-traditional church groups) could be foreign agents seeking to bring about a regime change, although there is no evidence to support this notion.

However, even though there have been positive changes at the federal level, in terms of personnel and attitude as well as change in laws and regulations, the bureaucratic system that was built over a century remains formidable to Protestants. This is particularly true at the regional level where persecution in the hands of officials remains higher.

Clan oppression (Medium)

For the past quarter of a century, ethnic politics has dominated all areas of public life in the country. This political discourse has led to the search for "roots and identity" which has caused some individuals and groups to become hostile to Christianity. Until 1974, the EOC represented the state religion. The country was under Communist rule from 1974 to 1991, when it was overthrown (after 17 years of civil war) by a coalition of various rebel groups formed from different ethnic groups. The ethnic groups were promised respect and acknowledgment of their culture and identity during the 1991 Ethiopian Transitional Charter - a charter that was set up after the fall of the Communist regime in 1991. This was initially seen as being a politically sound move, but the government stirred up resentment towards Christianity among some ethnic groups. In regions like Afar and Somali, Islam is interconnected with ethnicity. Other tribes also demand that Christians participate in tribal clashes and they retaliate if Christians fail to do so. A country researcher also adds: "Although the majority of the population practices either of the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), in some parts of the country, traditional religions are still practiced. Individuals living in those communities are expected to comply with all the religious and cultural rites of the community, failure of which would likely result in banishment. But even among Christians and Muslims occult practices are quite widespread; practices such as dedicating a new-born child to the local magician are commonplace."

Drivers of persecution

Ethiopia: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			MEDIUM	STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK
Government officials								Medium	
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Strong				

(table continues below)

Ethiopia: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			MEDIUM	STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong				Strong				
One's own (extended) family	Strong				Strong				
Political parties								Weak	
Organized crime cartels or networks									Very weak

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- ***Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):*** Muslim religious leaders have engaged in inciting violence against Christians through their sermons and tacit approval of Christian discrimination.
- ***Extended family (Strong):*** The families of converts do not accept the idea of a family member leaving Islam and joining Christianity. They, therefore, shun converts and harass and disown them.
- ***Ordinary citizens (Strong):*** In some parts of the country where Muslims are dominant, ordinary citizens oppose Christianity and evangelization. They especially oppose conversion.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- ***Leaders of other churches (Strong):*** The main drivers are priests and ultra-conservative groups within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (who also influence family and ordinary citizens). Regarding the role of EOC leaders and members, one researcher states: "There is a clear religious demographic change in the country mainly due to the rapid expansion of new forms of Christianity, especially the Protestant Church. Such rapid expansion is not welcomed by the leaders and followers of the Orthodox Church. Resentment against the new forms of Christianity manifests itself at various levels by acts of both EOC leaders and followers. Things are getting better in the capital city and in other major cities and areas like the southern and south-western part of the country where the new forms of Christianity are getting strong."
- ***Ordinary citizens (Strong):*** Ordinary citizens have also been perpetrating violations against other church groups, especially the Protestant church. A country expert summarized: "Despite a claim of peaceful co-existence among different religions in the country, the facts on the ground show a different story. For a number of reasons including but not limited to teachings by religious lead-

ers and lack of exposure to religious diversity, it is very common for private citizens to engage in acts of violence against Christians. Attacks by teenagers on Protestant churches, refusing to lease buildings for use as a church, abusing Christians who tried to preach the gospel in public places (both verbal and physical abuse) and many other violations are perpetrated by individuals and mobs."

- **Family (Strong):** In the context of conversion or changing denomination from Orthodox to Protestant, families are known to put family members under house-arrest, shun them, disown them and exclude them from inheritance.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The degree of complicity in violations of religious freedom varies from region to region; mid-level and lower-level officials have especially been actively opposing the so-called new forms of Christianity. Officials at the local level have more control over the day-to-day activities and thereby perpetrate most violations including (but not limited to) the refusal to grant permits for meetings and worship.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** The drivers here are community leaders. This engine is active in some remote regions, and in some areas it is blended with *Islamic oppression*. Thus, these two Persecution engines share drivers. For example, in Afar and Somali regions, religion (i.e. being Muslim) is a part of belonging to the community. A country expert stated: "This is the case mostly in relatively remote parts of the country where ethnic group leaders will have a huge influence. In some areas wherein the majority of the population is Muslim, there are cases where the leaders of ethnic groups actively advocate hostility towards Christians in the area. This resulted in the death, injury, and displacement of Christians in such areas. The tension among different ethnic groups in various parts of the country is having - and will continue to have - an adverse impact on the lives of Christians who could be subjected to attacks just because of their ethnic and religious background."

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Ethiopia

Average score 10.9
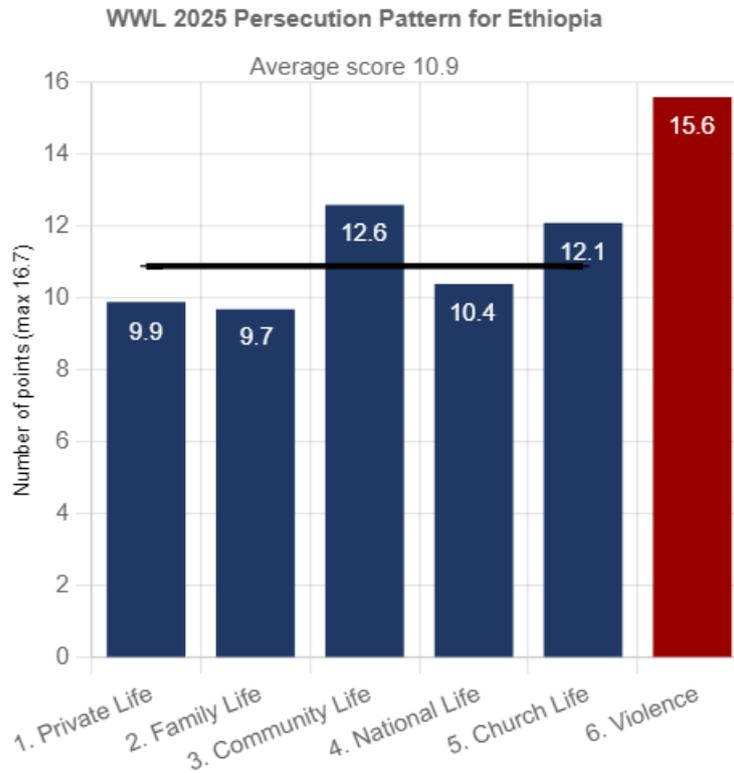
The WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Ethiopia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Ethiopia is at a very high level of 10.9 points, similar to WWL 2024.
- Except for the *Private* and *Family spheres*, every other sphere of life shows pressure on Christians scoring above 10 points. The *Community sphere* scored the highest at 12.6 points, indicating that despite Ethiopia being a Christian-majority country, violations of religious freedom remain significant. The very high pressure in *Community life* reflects ongoing challenges faced by Christians.
- The score for violence against Christians increased from 14.4 points in WWL 2024 to 15.6 points in WWL 2025, primarily due to violence in some of the most populous regions of the country, which severely impacted Christians.

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

Individuals in Ethiopia who convert from a Muslim background or indigenous belief system face profound challenges rooted in societal, familial and cultural pressures. Converts often experience severe backlash, including ostracism, threats and even acts of violence from their immediate families, communities and, in some cases, extended clan networks. Clan-based norms, which are deeply intertwined with indigenous belief systems, exert additional pressure, as these conversions are often perceived as rejections of communal identity and ancestral traditions. Similarly, individuals transitioning between Christian denominations (in particular, leaving the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) face significant difficulties. Such changes are viewed as betrayals of deeply held faith and cultural traditions, leading to social exclusion, familial disownment and, in some cases, the forfeiture of inheritance rights.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.75 points)

In the Ethiopian context, possessing Christian materials such as Bibles or teaching resources carries significant risks for converts from Islam or indigenous belief systems. Clan-based oppression and communal norms often intensify these challenges, as such conversions are seen as rejections of deeply rooted traditions and collective identity. Additionally, individuals who transition between Christian denominations, particularly from Ethiopian Orthodoxy to Protestantism, face serious repercussions. These transitions are frequently perceived as acts of betrayal, leading to social ostracism, threats, and even loss of property or inheritance. Many are forced to hide or limit access to non-Orthodox materials to protect themselves, as the open display or possession of these items can provoke severe backlash.

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.). (2.75 points)

For individuals in Ethiopia who have converted from Islam, transitioned between Orthodox and Protestant denominations, or broken away from indigenous belief systems, expressing Christian faith through social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram or Facebook entails significant risks. Converts from Islam face intense scrutiny and potential persecution due to Islamic opposition and communal surveillance, while those shifting denominations encounter backlash rooted in *Christian denominational protectionism*. Similarly, clan-based norms and indigenous traditions amplify the dangers for those rejecting established beliefs, as such actions are perceived as cultural betrayal. Publicly sharing Christian beliefs through posts, blogs or videos exposes these individuals to harassment, ostracism and threats, compelling many to adopt anonymity or self-censorship online. In

extreme cases, expressions of faith on digital platforms can lead to real-world repercussions, including violence or social exclusion.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.50 points)

For Christians in Ethiopia, particularly those who have converted from Islam, discussing their faith with individuals outside their immediate family—such as extended family relatives or acquaintances—entails considerable risk. The socio-religious context, shaped by *Christian denominational protectionism* and *Islamic oppression*, makes such conversations dangerous. Converts frequently face heightened scrutiny, surveillance and the threat of expulsion from their communities. Such pressure severely constrains their ability to openly express their beliefs or seek support beyond a limited circle.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Children of Christian converts in Ethiopia endure considerable challenges stemming from their families' religious decisions, reflecting deep-rooted issues of religious persecution and societal intolerance. These children often face harassment and discrimination in various settings, including schools, playgrounds and community spaces. Bullying, social exclusion and biased treatment are common experiences, with peers and even educators sometimes contributing to their marginalization. In rural areas, children tending to cattle or working on farms are often targeted with verbal abuse or ostracism by members of their community. The broader restrictions imposed on Christian families' ability to practice their faith openly exacerbate these challenges, subjecting children to a hostile environment that undermines their emotional well-being, sense of security and freedom of religious expression.

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

In Ethiopia, Christian burials face significant obstacles, particularly for converts and their families, highlighting the entrenched religious discrimination within the country. Burial grounds are often under the control of specific religious groups, creating barriers for Christians seeking a dignified burial for their deceased relatives. This control frequently forces Christians to navigate restrictive conditions, including adhering to burial rites imposed by other religious traditions. In more extreme cases, Christians are denied access to formal burial sites altogether and must resort to interring their loved ones in remote forests or other less suitable locations.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.75 points)

Christian children often face substantial pressure in areas dominated by Muslim communities, where they may be compelled to participate in rituals or educational programs that conflict with their faith. This is also the case for the children of non-Orthodox parents in areas dominated by EOC communities. Discrimination at school by teachers and peers further exacerbates this marginalization, leaving these children vulnerable to harassment and alienation. Christian parents struggle to shield their children from such pressure while ensuring they receive an education that respects their faith.

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)

Converts to Christianity in Ethiopia, particularly spouses, face severe challenges that extend deep into family dynamics. The intense pressure to conform to societal and religious expectations often leaves them isolated, as families disown or ostracize them. Many lose inheritance rights, custody of their children, or other fundamental entitlements due to their decision to convert. Similarly, due to *Christian denominational protectionism,* a spouse leaving the EOC to join a non-traditional Christian community may also experience such barriers.

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.). (3.25 points)

Christian converts in Ethiopia face pervasive harassment that is more pronounced in rural areas dominated by Orthodox or Muslim communities. In such settings, converts often find themselves excluded from essential communal resources like grazing land, water access, or cooperative agricultural activities, intensifying their isolation and undermining their livelihoods. This exclusion is compounded by social ostracization, where both the converts and their children are subject to verbal abuse, physical threats, and discriminatory practices in schools, marketplaces and other communal spaces. In EOC-dominated areas, converts may face additional pressure, including forced participation in traditional rituals or public denunciation for abandoning the faith. Similarly, in Muslim-majority regions, converts are often labeled as traitors to their community, resulting in heightened scrutiny and sometimes violent retribution. The hostile environment leaves Christian converts in rural areas particularly vulnerable, as they lack access to the protective mechanisms more commonly available in urban settings.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.25 points)

Christians in Ethiopia, particularly those living in Muslim-dominated and in areas where clan systems remain influential, face widespread discrimination and exclusion that affects all Christian denominations. The deeply entrenched clan structures often determine access to communal resources such as grazing land, water sources and other necessities, placing Christians at a disadvantage regardless of their specific denomination. The collective nature of these communities exacerbates the marginalization, as decisions to exclude Christians are often enforced by the entire clan. For converts, the situation is even more challenging. Exclusion from vital resources is compounded by their being rejected by both their former religious communities and the broader clan system. They are often barred from participating in communal activities or benefiting from shared assets, which severely impacts their livelihoods and isolates their families.

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

Christians in Muslim-dominated areas, particularly where clan systems remain strong, face relentless pressure to renounce their faith. Access to essential communal resources is frequently denied unless individuals conform to the dominant religious norms. Refusing to adhere can result in ostracism,

systematic exclusion, and collective sanctions designed to coerce Christians into abandoning their beliefs. Targeted children face harassment, isolation and bans on social interaction to compel their families to return to the majority religion. Explicit ultimatums often confront converts: 'Either renounce Christianity or face severe consequences'. Those who refuse may be expelled from their communities, denied access to vital resources, or subjected to violent retaliation. The threat of physical harm and social exile is pervasive, driving many converts to practice their faith in secret. These extreme measures aim to break their resolve, compelling them to abandon their beliefs due to fear and isolation.

In EOC-dominated regions, the challenges are particularly acute for those transitioning from Orthodoxy to Protestantism. Families often use coercive tactics, including placing converts under house arrest, to force them to recant their new faith. Children in these households may be closely monitored or confined to ensure adherence to Orthodox traditions. Such practices reflect a societal perception that abandoning Orthodoxy is not only a religious transgression but also a betrayal of cultural and familial identity. The combination of familial and communal pressure leaves many converts with limited options, forcing compliance through psychological and physical means.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Discrimination against Christians in Ethiopia, particularly in Muslim-dominated areas and regions where clan systems are prevalent, is pervasive in both public and private employment. Employers often prioritize individuals aligned with the majority religion or clan affiliations, effectively excluding Christians from job opportunities. In Muslim-majority areas, Christians face systemic bias, with hiring and promotion decisions, and workplace treatment often influenced by their religious identity. Those who refuse to participate in rituals or customs aligned with the dominant faith are frequently ostracized or targeted for dismissal. The situation is even more severe for converts to Christianity, who are often viewed as traitors to their communities and may be deliberately excluded from all employment possibilities. This exclusion is compounded by the broader societal ostracization, leaving converts with limited options for securing a livelihood. In EOC-dominated areas, those who leave Orthodoxy for Protestantism, may face similar discrimination in the workplace. Families and communities sometimes apply pressure on employers to dismiss such individuals or deny them opportunities.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)

Christians, particularly converts, are often left unprotected, with those who persecute them frequently escaping accountability. In Muslim-dominated areas and regions where clan systems are influential, acts of discrimination, violence, and exclusion against Christians are rarely investigated or prosecuted. This impunity is especially prevalent at the local authority level, where officials are often influenced by prevailing religious or clan dynamics, enabling perpetrators to act without fear of consequences. For Christian converts, the situation is particularly dire. They face targeted harassment, exclusion from communal resources, and threats of violence, yet local authorities frequently neglect to intervene or

address their grievances. In many instances, these authorities actively align with societal biases, further marginalizing converts.

In Orthodox-dominated regions, individuals who change denominations from Orthodoxy to Protestantism encounter similar challenges. Families or communities enforcing house arrests, public shaming, or other forms of coercion to compel converts to renounce their faith are rarely held accountable, with local officials often turning a blind eye. The systemic failures of justice institutions, particularly at the local level, to investigate and prosecute acts of religious persecution leave Christians vulnerable and isolated. This lack of accountability not only denies justice to victims but also perpetuates discriminatory practices and societal hostility.

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 Ethiopia, especially converts, face significant discrimination when engaging with authorities at all levels—local, central, and within the security apparatus. In local contexts, officials in Muslim-dominated or clan-based regions often refuse to recognize or support Christians' legitimate claims, whether related to land, water access, or community participation. Requests for assistance, permits, or redress are frequently ignored or dismissed, leaving Christian families marginalized and excluded from essential public services.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.00 points)

Christian organizations in Ethiopia, including civil society groups rooted in Christian values, face significant challenges navigating a restrictive and often hostile environment. Legal barriers, societal biases, and regional dynamics impose limitations on their activities, with discriminatory laws and policies hindering their ability to function fully. In places where Islam is dominant or where clan systems are common, these groups face more scrutiny and exclusion. In places where Orthodox Christianity is dominant, non-Orthodox Christian groups have to deal with resistance that comes from deeply rooted cultural and denominational dynamics.

Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (2.75 points)

Christian converts often face accusations of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, which can lead to severe consequences and reflect broader religious discrimination. Such accusations are frequently used to stifle religious diversity and limit the freedoms of converts. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive reforms and international engagement to ensure a fair and thorough examination of such accusations. Protecting the rights and well-being of religious minorities necessitates an environment where individuals are not unjustly persecuted for their faith or conversion.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

The persecution of Christian leaders and their families extends beyond community-level suppression, taking the form of targeted harassment, which significantly jeopardizes the peaceful exercise of religious freedom. As prominent symbols of their faith, these leaders endure intensified scrutiny and various forms of intimidation, ranging from verbal threats to more severe forms of hostility. Such actions not only jeopardize their personal safety but also erode the stability and effectiveness of their leadership. By disrupting leadership structures, these targeted efforts aim to weaken the foundation of Christian communities, leaving them more vulnerable and destabilized.

Block 5.16: Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (e.g. via local or national radio, TV, Internet, social media, cell phones). (3.75 points)

In some regions of Ethiopia, the use of mass media by Christian communities is severely restricted, particularly in areas dominated by other religions or by Orthodox Christianity. Access to platforms such as radio, television, the Internet, and social media is often curtailed, with restrictions justified under the guise of preserving cultural norms or maintaining societal harmony. In Muslim-majority regions, Christian media content may be outright banned, while in Orthodox-dominated areas, non-Orthodox Christian groups frequently face resistance when attempting to disseminate their teachings. These limitations isolate Christian organizations, reducing their visibility, hindering their outreach, and stifling their ability to educate and connect with broader audiences. While less overt than physical persecution or church closures, such restrictions have profound long-term implications for the growth, sustainability, and public perception of Christian communities.

Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.50 points)

Working with youth poses significant challenges for Christian organizations, particularly in Muslim-dominated areas and regions where clan systems remain influential. In these contexts, societal norms and communal pressures often discourage or outright prohibit engagement with youth outside the dominant religious framework. Christian organizations attempting to connect with young people frequently face suspicion, resistance and hostility from community leaders, who may view such efforts as attempts to undermine their traditions or beliefs. This makes youth-focused programs, such as education or mentorship initiatives, particularly difficult to implement.

In areas dominated by Orthodox Christianity, Protestant organizations face similar obstacles. Orthodox families and community leaders often resist efforts to engage with young people, viewing Protestant outreach as a threat to their religious and cultural identity. This resistance can result in youth being restricted from participating in programs or being pressured to avoid contact with non-Orthodox groups.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.50 points)

Publicly confronting or denouncing perpetrators of religious discrimination and violence often intensifies the risks faced by both congregants and Christian leaders. Speaking out against such acts can provoke retaliatory measures, including heightened persecution, targeted attacks, and additional restrictions on religious practices and freedoms. In many cases, efforts to seek justice or advocate for rights lead to greater vulnerability, as perpetrators use these actions as justification for escalating their oppression.

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.*

Ethiopia: 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)?	11	15
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?	25	284
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	24
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	3
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	100 *	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	1
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1000 *	252
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 *	14
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL reporting period:

- ***Christians killed:*** Eleven Christians were killed in the twelve month period, often perpetrated by armed groups. These killings were targeted acts to instill fear within Christian communities. As a result, many Christians have been forced to flee their homes, seeking safety from the escalating violence and hostility.

- ***Churches attacked or destroyed:*** At least 25 churches and other Christian properties were targeted in violent incidents. These include churches being burned, vandalized, or looted, with some attacks occurring during church services. Attacks were carried out by armed groups and by some fanatics groups both from EOC and other drivers of *Islamic oppression*.
- ***Christians forced to leave their homes:*** More than 1,000 Christians were forced to flee their homes or go into hiding due to threats of violence and hostility. This displacement often stems from coordinated attacks on Christian communities or systemic pressure. Families abandon their homes, livelihoods and possessions, seeking refuge in uncertain and precarious conditions. In some situations, family members forced Christians to flee.

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.
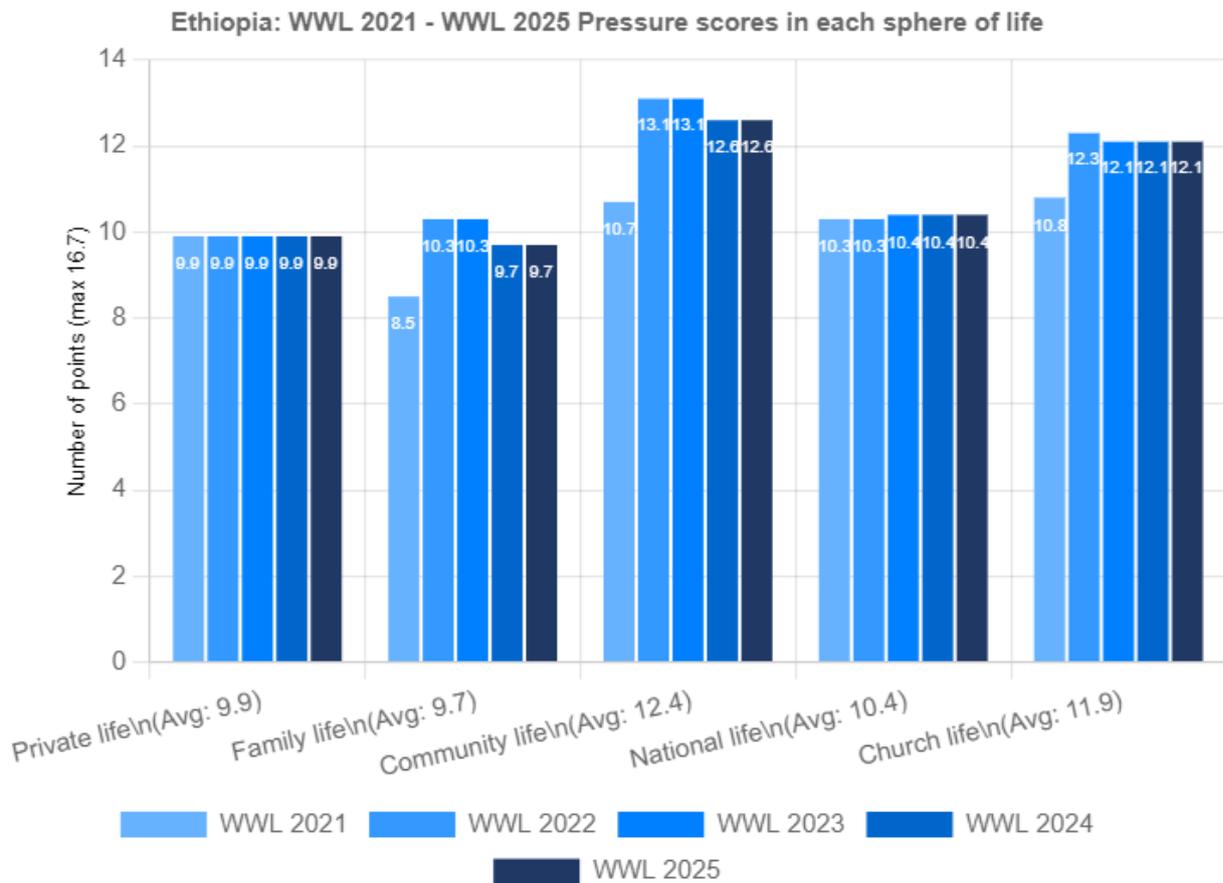
5 Year trends: Average pressure

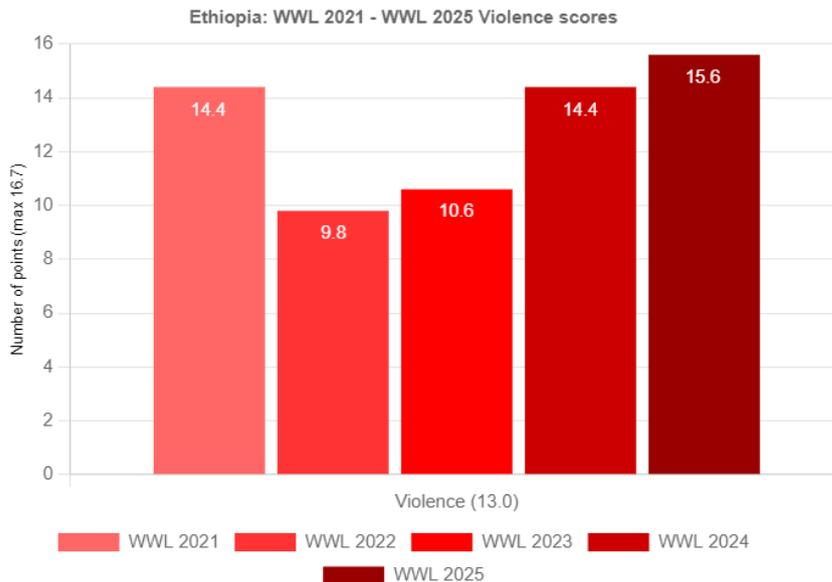| Ethiopia: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	10.9
2024	10.9
2023	11.2
2022	11.2
2021	10.0

In the table above it can be seen that the average pressure on Christians has currently stabilized in the 10.9 - 11.2 point range.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The blue chart below shows that the average pressure on Christians across all spheres of life has consistently remained above 9.0 points over the past five WWL reporting periods. The *Community sphere* recorded the highest five-year average (12.4 points), followed closely by the *Church sphere* (11.9 points).

Ethiopia: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 Pressure scores in each sphere of life

Legend: WWL 2021, WWL 2022, WWL 2023, WWL 2024, WWL 2025

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Ethiopia: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025 Violence scores

Violence (13.0)

Legend: WWL 2021, WWL 2022, WWL 2023, WWL 2024, WWL 2025

The red chart above illustrates how violence against Christians in Ethiopia has consistently remained at a very high or extremely high level, with a five-year average of 13.0 points. Despite being a Christian-majority country and having no active jihadist militant threat, since WWL 2022 the violence score has risen each WWL reporting period and reached a level higher than in WWL 2021.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Ethiopia	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
Abduction Denied access to social community/networks Denied custody of children Denied inheritance or possessions Discrimination/harassment via education Forced divorce Forced marriage Incarceration by family (house arrest) Violence – physical Violence – sexual Violence – Verbal	

Christian women and girls in Ethiopia sit at the vicious intersection between religious persecution and gender violence, exacerbated by the conflict in Tigray, food insecurity and the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted in crisis-affected regions. Access to sexual and reproductive health services, maternal care and psychosocial support for survivors of gender-based violence have been severely compromised by the extensive damage and destruction of health services (UNFPA, 24 October 2022). Where humanitarian crises develop, women and girls become increasingly vulnerable to other forms of violence, including religious persecution.

Despite the long history of Christianity in Ethiopia, many Christian women remain vulnerable to religious persecution. A country expert describes the situation facing Christian women and girls as follows:

- "Various factors contribute to the heightened vulnerability of Christian women and girls to persecution. Notably, traditional beliefs play a significant role, as evidenced by the belief that if a family curses a girl, she may face severe consequences, potentially leading to her death. Furthermore, the community's tendency to be more forgiving of domestic violence against women exacerbates the challenges faced by Christian women and girls. In Muslim-dominated areas, the conversion of Muslim children to Christianity adds another layer of vulnerability, particularly for girls, who may experience societal shame and the risk of eviction or separation from their families. Additionally, cultural practices influenced by traditional laws and beliefs often relegate women to second-class citizenship, limiting their rights, property ownership, and decision-making autonomy. This situation is further complicated by the existence of religious laws in certain areas, contributing to [their] heightened vulnerability".

Violations of basic rights against Christian women in Ethiopia often occur in the form of bridal abduction to a non-Christian. This is facilitated by a general situation in which abduction and forced marriage remain present at a national level despite having been prohibited and criminalized by law (UNICEF, 13 June 2022). Experts have explained that the levels of violence in the country

compounded by the severe drought has [quadrupled](#) the prevalence of child marriage in some regions (The Guardian, 30 April 2022). 40% of girls are married under the age of 18 and sources reveal that early and forced marriage particularly occurs in rural parts of the country ([Girls Not Brides Ethiopia](#), accessed 9 January 2025).

Christian teenage girls (and converts in particular) can be forced to marry a follower of a different religion after abduction or family arranged marriage. Christian girls can also be secretly convicted on economic grounds and married by Muslim men without their parent's consent. Following her 'marriage', the Christian wife is expected to take on the religion of her new husband. Speaking on this discreet tactic of conversion and subterfuge, a country expert disclosed that "the cases of abduction in [the northern] region is being reported day by day when a Muslim follower converts to Christianity, they […] plan on how to trap them […] and force them to turn back to Islam […] When someone converts, particularly women or girls, their families often abduct them immediately and hand them over to other Muslims, disregarding their ages [...] During the abduction, many girls lost their lives in the chaos".

Families that do not conform to these cultural norms are often threatened and ostracized. Christian women and girls face these threats, not only in the context of war or violence but also in everyday life. In Muslim majority areas, women may be forcefully married off to Muslim men if they attempt to convert from Islam. Tribal leaders also incite relatives to castigate Christian girls that object to such marriages. This leaves some girls – especially converts – no choice but to "go from one place to another [in order to] not marry an unbeliever and hide, resulting in dropout of schools and psychological damage."

Sexual violence directed at Christian women and girls is also widespread. This form of violence is weaponized to manipulate social control and destabilize communities. Rape in particular is seen as an effective means of punishing Christian women and girls due to the severe consequences for her and her community. A country expert explained: "If a girl is raped, the community isolates her; she will not be able to marry or learn; her family will be embarrassed, and, if a woman is raped, her future will be ruined by the word of the event. The violated girl's marriage would be frowned upon by the community." Women and girls face an elevated risk of sexual violence, forced and child marriage, abduction as well as physical and verbal abuse; "this persecution includes being forced and raped, taken away from their families, and compelled to wander to different places".

Female converts from Islam face the most severe violations, particularly at the hands of family members. They may be deliberately isolated from other family members and from their church community, put under house arrest in order to protect the family's honor, physically abused and forcibly married to a Muslim. "Isolation from family is normal. Arresting, whipping, beating remains. Even worse, it is common practice to house-arrest someone as though they were sick," a country expert adds. When a Muslim wife converts to Christianity, forced divorce is the most likely outcome. Even if her spouse does not seek a divorce, his family will pressure the spouse to divorce and claim custody of the children, to protect the family name and ensure their grandchildren are given an Islamic upbringing. In areas where Christianity is a minority religion, a (de facto) divorce is most likely to take place outside courtrooms; the elders presiding over a tribal court see Christian faith as a dangerous deviation and will likely grant custody to the other spouse in order to prevent the spread of Christianity in the community.

The persecution of women and girls has profound implications for Christian families and communities. One notable aspect is the psychological impact, highlighting the emotional toll experienced by women and girls who face persecution, particularly rape. A country expert emphasizes the multifaceted nature of this impact:

- "In cases of rape, the community often isolates the victim, affecting her ability to marry or pursue education. This, in turn, brings shame to the family and can harm the future prospects of the affected individuals. For married girls, the repercussions can include social disdain from the neighborhood. Additionally, considering the societal roles of women as primary caregivers and homemakers, the persecution of women leads to orphaned children, child neglect, and the overall breakdown of families. These adverse effects reverberate through the entire Christian community, impacting not only the victims but also the younger and older members of the affected families".

Christians often face difficulties in their inheritance after their decision to convert. Even though laws do not discriminate according to religious practice or belief, many deal with inheritance rights through traditional systems in the community rather than through the official state process. It is in this way that new converts may experience exclusion discrimination, leading to disinheritance.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Ethiopia	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
Denied inheritance or possessions Forced to flee town/country Imprisonment by government Violence – death Violence – physical	

Christian men and boys are subject to specific forms of religious persecution that follows trends of physical and psychological violence. A country expert describes how the persecution of men and boys significantly impacts Christian families and communities, stating that "while there is a general sentiment across various perspectives that persecution affects both genders, there are specific ways in which the targeting of men and boys exacerbates the challenges faced by Christian communities. Men, often seen as primary breadwinners and pillars of security for their families, are more frequently targeted by abusers. This targeting is driven by the understanding that by harming men, persecutors can inflict substantial harm on congregations. The repercussions extend beyond the individual, as families lose primary breadwinners or caregivers, affecting the livelihood and security of the entire family unit". Research indicates that men and boys are perhaps more frequent victims of persecution, leading to the fragmentation of families and a sense of insecurity within communities. This dynamic underscores the broader impact of persecution on Christian families, transcending individual gender lines and affecting the fabric of these communities.

In general, Christian men in Ethiopia are more likely to suffer physical attack and displacement than women and girls, although rampant violence in the country has challenged this trend by exacerbating

attacks and displacement for all. Nonetheless, given the scale of civil unrest, boys and men are particularly prone to conscription into armed and paramilitary forces. They may also be robbed of their possessions, or even killed during raids. It is deemed more strategic to attack men and boys, especially church leaders, as they are usually the propagators of the Christian faith and providers for their families; attacking them weakens their whole family and the Christian community in general.

The government also plays a role in violating men's religious freedom through imprisonment. Men are particularly at risk of this in Muslim-dominated areas. In addition, there are numerous instances and allegations of government interference in church elections and appointments. Since the majority of church leaders are men, these violations predominantly affect Christian men. The allegations target almost all leaders of major churches in the country, accusing them of being pro-government and of receiving appointments through government influence. Detention of Christians is highlighted as a common issue; a country expert stated that "pastors were detained because of their faith and churches in the Afar regional state were closed by Muslims in the community […] since [it is] an Islam-dominated region, all officials, police, and courts are Muslim, so they cannot protect Christians. The community continues attacking Christians […] the situation has brought fear, frustration and confusion". New reforms continue to be discussed, however, and there is some hope that in future years this will become less common.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Religious minorities in Ethiopia are affected by the broadcasting legislation, the role of faith in education, and the civil society law. Generally, the civil society law requires an application for registration for any religious group except for Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews. In addition, the registration law requires a minimum membership of 50 persons for registration as a religious community and a minimum of 15 persons for a ministry or association to be registered and granted permission. This has had serious impact for newer religious minorities: In some areas, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses (where their numbers are less than 50) struggle to have an official place of worship. This is particularly true where majority groups are known to be hostile towards religious minorities.

Trends Summary

1) The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is losing Its exclusive position

Ethiopia is one of Africa's oldest nations and was among the first to adopt Christianity as its state religion. In recent decades, various Christian denominations have emerged, causing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) to lose its exclusive position and privileges in relations with the government and society. Under Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed, efforts are being made to address some of the problems faced by Protestant Christians, often persecuted by the EOC. The Tigray Orthodox Church separated from the main EOC and appointed its own leadership in 2023. Despite efforts by the EOC leadership to bring about reconciliation during a visit to Tigray in July 2023, no resolution was achieved. Additionally, a group of Orthodox clergy from Oromia attempted to split off from the EOC, but Prime Minister Abiy's intervention temporarily calmed the situation.

2) Conflict within the country

Ethiopia's political reforms in the past six years have attracted global attention. Yet, conflicts have also emerged in different parts of the country. Communal violence has led to the displacement of millions, killings, and widespread property destruction. Human rights violations by government security forces further aggravate the crisis. The nation's intricate sociopolitical fabric, coupled with divergent political views and external interference, complicates efforts to achieve stability. In addition, inter-religious tensions have fueled insecurity in certain regions. For instance, despite the November 2022 cessation of hostilities between the TPLF and the Ethiopian government, questions remain about its effective implementation. Regions such as Oromia and Amhara are particularly affected by ongoing violence, resulting in extensive civilian casualties and devastation. Christians, in many cases, have borne significant hardships. Some have been caught up as collateral victims of the conflict, while in other instances, the chaotic environment has enabled targeted persecution with little accountability.

3) Regional conflicts and relationships

Regional conflicts and relations in the Horn of Africa are complex and have significant implications for Ethiopia. The ongoing conflict in Sudan, characterized by clashes among military factions and insurgent groups, poses a substantial threat to regional stability. This unrest risks spilling into South Sudan, potentially intensifying tensions and escalating into a broader conflict. For Ethiopia, this situation creates additional challenges, including managing an influx of refugees and bolstering border security. In Somalia, the persistent threat of al-Shabaab insurgents remains a key security concern for Ethiopia. As a contributor to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS, formerly AMISOM), Ethiopia plays a vital role in countering these insurgents. However, al-Shabaab's attempts to establish bases within Ethiopia's borders further heighten security risks and complicate Ethiopia's internal and external stability. Additionally, militants exploiting the volatile environment have targeted Christians, using the unrest as a cover to perpetrate violence with little accountability.

Ethiopia's regional diplomacy also faces challenges. The recent memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia on the development and use of the Berbera port highlights economic and strategic interests. This agreement, aimed at enhancing Ethiopia's trade routes and logistics capabilities, has sparked tensions with Somalia, which asserts its claim over Somaliland. Somalia views the MOU as undermining its sovereignty and territorial integrity, potentially straining Ethiopia-Somalia relations. across the region, intensifying violence against religious minorities. In Ethiopia, al-Shabaab has attempted to establish bases, particularly in border areas, further escalating security risks. In such volatile environments, these militants exploit instability to target Christians with impunity, destroying churches, displacing communities, and instilling fear among religious minorities. The persistent instability creates a breeding ground for further persecution and violence against vulnerable groups.

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/
- 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
- Church spectrum today - additional information: IRFR 2019 - https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UNFPA, 24 October 2022) - https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/news/ethiopia-conflict-climate-shocks-women-and-girls-are-disproportionately-affected
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: remain present - https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/stories/i-was-forced-marry-man-twice-my-age-exchange-some-cattle
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: quadrupled - https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/30/ethiopian-drought-leading-to-dramatic-increase-in-child-marriage-unicef-warns
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Girls Not Brides Ethiopia - https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/ethiopia/