
World Watch Research

Mauritania: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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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

Mauritania: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
4,994,000	11,000	0.2

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

Mauritania: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	11,000	0.2
Muslim	4,956,000	99.2
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	20,700	0.4
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	510	0.0
Atheist	340	0.0
Agnostic	5,100	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<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

Mauritania:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Violent religious groups, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders, Government officials
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Violent religious groups
Ethno-religious hostility	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Violent religious groups
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks
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

Mauritania is staunchly Islamic and the restrictive environment makes it very difficult for Christians (and impossible for converts from Islam) to openly meet and conduct services for collective worship. Any expression of faith by non-Mauritanian Christians (e.g., migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa or aid-workers) also carries the risk of being understood as attempted proselytization of Muslims and can lead to prosecution.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Mauritians who convert to Christianity face imprisonment and inhumane treatment while detained (ICCPR Arts. 7, 9 and 18)
- Female Christian converts might forcibly be married to Muslim men, even before they become of age, to pressure them renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

- Christian children must attend Islamic religious classes at school and face discrimination and pressure because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christian converts are excluded from accessing communal resources and their businesses boycotted (ICCPR Art. 26 and ICESCR Art. 11)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

Several incidents took place affecting both indigenous and foreign Christians in the country. However, few details can be provided due to security concerns.

- Baptisms can only be carried out in secret and many converts from Islam are reluctant to be baptized fearing discovery and charges of apostasy being brought against them. In December 2023, it was reported that fifteen Mauritanian Christian leaders, as well as their family members, had been arrested after a baptism video was shared on social media ([Morning Star News, 22 December 2023](#)). They were released the same month, but the incident and the threatening responses by radical Muslims, society and the government, shocked the small Christian community in the country ([Barnabas Aid, 3 January 2024](#)).
- Converts that are discovered by their families often feel pressured into leaving the country.
- Sub-Saharan African Christians residing in the country regularly experience faith-based discrimination, including losing employment, receiving inadequate or no medical care or being hindered in attending church activities.
- The Roman Catholic Church (being the dominant denomination among Christian expatriates) is allowed to renovate the interior of churches. However, the renovation of the exterior of Catholic churches and the construction of churches belonging to other denominations is prohibited.
- All churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have to operate carefully in order to avoid accusations of proselytism.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Roman Catholic expatriates from Sub-Saharan Africa make up the largest group, followed by Protestants and Evangelicals also from countries to the south of Mauritania. There is also a small Western Christian presence, but they are a very small percentage of the Christian population in the country. Ethnic African migrant Christians lead a precarious existence in the country due to the prevalence of ethnic prejudices and also the pressure that comes from the surrounding, very conservative, Islamic society.

Historical Christian communities: This category of Christians (non-expatriate) does not exist in Mauritania.

Converts to Christianity: Christian converts from a Muslim background are most exposed to targeted pressure and violence. They face great pressure from their immediate and extended family. In this nomadic society where communal interdependence and the extended family are necessary for one's survival, converts face a huge challenge to keep their Christian faith hidden from view. The hatred and false stereotypes that are propagated against Christians by Islamic groups affect most converts; they will lose their status in the community if their conversion becomes public knowledge.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category of Christians (non-expatriate) does not exist in Mauritania.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Tribal and family ties are especially strict in rural parts of the country, but even in the capital and largest city, Nouakchott, the pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity can be very high. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) are particularly active in the eastern border regions of the country, posing a threat to Christians.

Position on the World Watch List

Mauritania: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	74	23
WWL 2024	72	23
WWL 2023	72	20
WWL 2022	70	23
WWL 2021	71	20

Due to a major incident the score for Mauritania increased by two points in WWL 2025, mainly caused by an increase in the score for violence, which nevertheless remained relatively low at 2.8 points. Despite the rise in overall score, Mauritania remained at #23 in the ranking. Average pressure is extreme at 14.2 points; the extremely high level of pressure in all *spheres of life* is indicative of the pressure local Mauritanian convert Christians face from family, community and the government. Likewise, expatriate Christians from Sub-Saharan Africa face severe levels of discrimination from the Mauritanian community and the government, with their faith making them extra vulnerable on top of racial discrimination.

Persecution engines

Mauritania: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Strong
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all

(table continues below)

Mauritania: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

This is the primary Persecution engine operating in Mauritania. Mauritania is a self-proclaimed Islamic Republic and Islamism is the dominant political ideology in the country. Non-Muslims experience intimidation and persecution particularly at the hands of Islamic groups. Large numbers of Mauritians joined violent Islamic militant groups both in the northern African region and in Syria and Iraq. While the government tries to fight Islamic militancy on one side, at the same time it provides funding for Wahhabi and other radical Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Converts from Islam to Christianity bear the brunt of persecution, as their new faith is not tolerated by their families and society.

Clan oppression (Strong) / Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

Tribal and racial tensions are intertwined in this very conservative and traditional country in which urbanization is a relatively modern phenomenon. When a Muslim becomes a Christian, he or she is not only worried about family and government pressure, but also about the shame felt by the whole tribe or ethnic group - leading to wider persecution. The issue of slavery in the country, which is linked to ethnicity, has also contributed to persecution since proponents of slavery argue that it is sanctioned by Islam. The campaign against slavery has triggered a hostile reaction from Islamists in the country. Christian Sub-Saharan Africans residing in the country face a mixture of both religious and racial discrimination.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

Tribal affiliation, religious and personal relationships are very important in Mauritanian society. Nepotism, clientelism and other forms of corruption are widespread, also within the government. Anti-corruption campaigns have only been focusing on minor figures. Journalists investigating specific cases of corruption involving state authorities or state-owned companies have been intimidated, detained and accused of defamation. Powerful people with connections to the army and presidency can enrich themselves and act with impunity.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The current government is quite paranoid about its hold on power, and this can lead to extra persecution if any "Christianizing" influence seems to either threaten or shame the government powers. In addition, it tries to shore up its legitimacy among Islamic groups by suppressing Christianity. This has been ongoing particularly since the 2019 presidential elections. Christianity is often equated with Westernization and is thus seen as a (foreign) threat by the government.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

- **Family (Very strong):** Mauritanian families are in general conservative and strictly Islamic. This attitude does not leave much space for differing views. Converts are very likely to face severe pressure.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The authorities at all levels are a principal driver since the state embraces Islam as its basic ideology.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Radical imams and Islamic teachers fuel prejudice and hatred towards Christians.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Tribalism is still strong in Mauritania and tribal leaders will not allow any converts among their groups.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Influenced by the teaching of conservative imams, Mauritanian society does not allow fellow citizens to convert from Islam to Christianity.

- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Islamic militants such as AQIM are particularly active in the eastern part of the country and form a threat to all Christians. In addition, groups like the Muslim Brotherhood have a growing influence, especially among the poor and younger generation in the south of the country.

Drivers of Clan oppression / Ethno-religious hostility

- **Family (Strong):** Family ties are very strong and the conversion from Islam to Christianity of a family member will be seen as a matter of immense shame for the family honor. Thus, family members will expel converts from their home or force them to recant their new faith.
- **Government officials (Strong):** There is a strong feeling among Mauritians to preserve their own ethnic groups. Government officials are part of this tendency and will try to protect their groups from Western/Christian influences.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** In the context of slavery and the prevalence of a caste system in Mauritania, the current situation is reinforced by and fused with religion. Conservative clan leaders are intent on preserving ethnic hierarchy and social order.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Tribal and Islamic practices are blended. Islamic preachers support the caste system and their ethnic groups are determined to keep their groups Islamic.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Tribal and ethnic group ties are seen as very important by Mauritanian society. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is seen as a breach of these ties and is thus opposed by society.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** These groups are often organized along tribal lines. They will try to maintain the Islamic and ethnic purity of the tribe, not allowing any space for converts from Islam to Christianity.

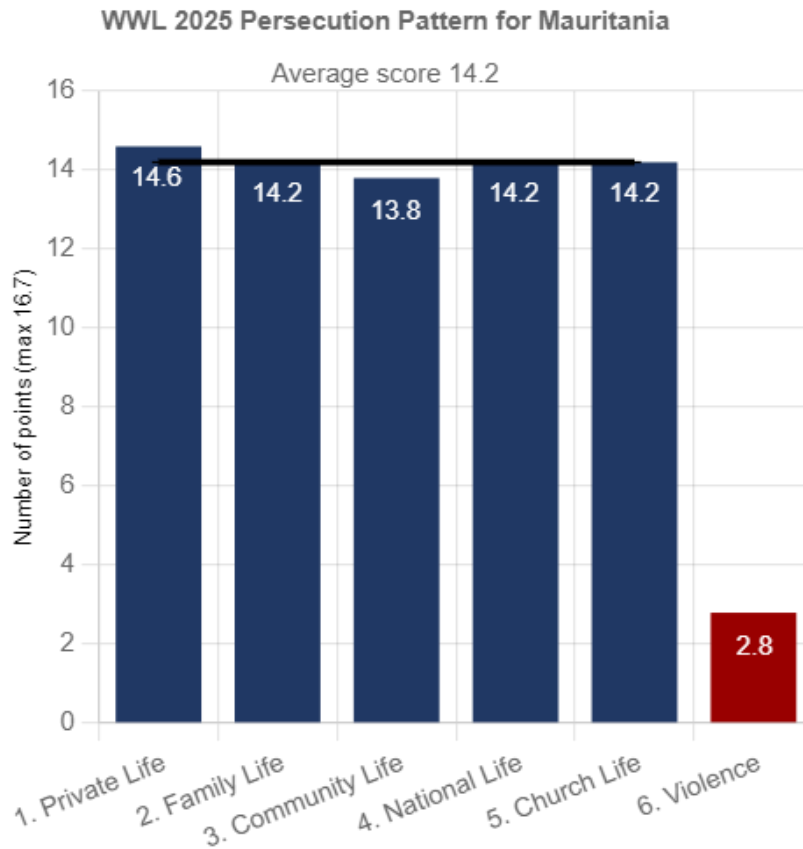
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The government tries to maintain power at all costs, even if that means appeasing Islamic radicals by persecuting Christians. The tightened apostasy law is a clear example of this mechanism.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Medium):** The authorities and those in power use the system for self-enrichment.
- **Organized crime networks (Medium):** Criminal networks and the role of the government are sometimes hard to distinguish, but they control most of the economy and permeate the country with a sense of hopelessness and maintain high levels of poverty. This poverty and endemic corruption contribute to persecution in that the rule of law is not followed, and Christians have little hope of obtaining stable employment and of earning an honest income.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** Radical Islamic groups gather financial support through carrying out criminal activities such as human trafficking and the smuggling of weapons. Christians, especially foreign Christians, are an easy target for kidnapping.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Mauritania shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at an extremely high level (14.2 points), remaining at the same level as in WWL 2024.
- All spheres of life show extreme levels of pressure. In Mauritania's tribal culture, leaving Islam is not only religious betrayal, but also betrayal of the tribe and family. There is no room to publicly speak about Christianity, nor is their official recognition of converts from Islam to Christianity.
- The score for violence increased to 2.8 in WWL 2025 due to a major incident in December 2023 (see above: *Examples of violations of rights*). The still rather low score may well be due in part to a lack of reports on incidents getting out of the country.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 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 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (4.00 points)

Displaying a cross or other symbol is highly risky for converts from Islam to Christianity, as it will be understood as a clear sign of apostasy. Expatriate Christians, especially those from a Sub-Saharan background, are likely to face discrimination and abuse if publicly identifiable as Christian.

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.). (3.75 points)

Expatriate Christians have more freedom in this regard than converts, but revealing your faith can lead to persecution for both categories of Christians.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.75 points)

Discussing Christian faith in wider society is dangerous for all Christians. Converts are likely to be accused of apostasy, while expatriate Christians will be accused of proselytism. Christian expatriates can only discuss their faith with other Christian expatriates at home or in a church gathering.

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

Conversion from Islam is legally proscribed and any views perceived to be critical of Islam could legally entail the death-penalty. While this law has largely been regarded as symbolic, it still remains a significant threat to Christians from a Muslim background.

Block 1 - Additional information

For non-Mauritanian Christians who have a Christian background, there is a certain amount of freedom for private worship. However, converts from Islam risk significant pressure and persecution if their conversion is revealed through acts of private worship. The possession of Christian materials and any expression of their Christian faith could trigger a hostile reaction from members of their immediate family as well as from the local community. This is particularly the case for converts located outside the capital.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)

Baptism of converts has to take place in absolute secrecy as baptism is a very clear sign of both conversion and proselytism.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

Children of Christian parents have to attend Islamic classes at school. Converts also find it very difficult to mark major milestones in their life with Christian ceremonies and are often pressured into participating in Islamic rites.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Children of Christian parents are likely to face discrimination and harassment from their peers. The various forms of harassment often have a racial and ethnic side to them.

Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (3.25 points)

In Mauritania, men commonly divorce their wives and conversion from Islam to Christianity is more than enough reason to divorce a wife. It is likely that family members will force the husband to divorce his wife if he converts to Christianity. However, because conversions are kept secret, it does not occur often.

Block 2 - Additional information

Christian parents find it difficult to raise their children in accordance with their religious beliefs. This is a problem for both Mauritanian converts and foreign Christians, especially those from Sub-Saharan African countries. Unlike converts, expatriate Christians have relative freedom to conduct marriages, baptisms and funerals with Christian rites.

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)

There is a high level of social hostility towards both converts as well as expatriate Sub-Saharan African Christians. However, this harassment is also related to ethnicity and racism, as can be seen by the fact that Western Christians are generally treated well.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.50 points)

Converts from Islam to Christianity often have to live their faith in secrecy and are hence obliged to take part in Islamic or local religious practices (e.g., observing Ramadan).

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)

If the faith of a convert is known, it is highly likely that he or she will be ostracized by the surrounding community if they do not recant.

Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.50 points)

Known converts would most probably be heavily discriminated against and be unable to run a business, especially since Mauritanian society is steeped in corruption and clientelism. Expatriate Christians from a Sub-Saharan background are both discriminated against because of the color of their skin as well as their faith.

Block 3 - Additional information

Christians with a Muslim background are frequently excluded from the benefits of communal living, which are key to survival in Mauritania, especially in rural areas. Converts are at times denied the assistance and cooperation of the community and also face exclusion from accessing communal resources and forums. This situation is exacerbated when it is linked with racial and ethnic discrimination which is deeply rooted in the country. Children of migrant workers are the most affected in this regard since they are denied admission to some schools. Furthermore, as most local schooling is Islamic, children from Christian converts are inherently at a disadvantage if they let their faith be known. Both converts and migrant Christians also suffer from discrimination in the job market and in the work place.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere**Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)**

Mauritania is an Islamic republic, and even though it is party to major international human rights treaties that enshrine freedom of religion, it still has a criminal law that sanctions capital punishment for "apostasy".

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (4.00 points)

Only the Roman Catholic Church has visible church buildings and only some of them display a cross on the outside. Churches and Christian organizations have to operate carefully and will try to prevent drawing any negative attention.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)

Christians have to operate carefully in Mauritanian society. Criticism of the government or Islam is impossible without punishment.

Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.75 points)

Blasphemy is a very sensitive subject, with the blasphemy law only recently being tightened even further. Although the death penalty is largely symbolic, the blasphemy law is regularly used against

those allegedly being opposed to Islam or having insulted Islam's prophet, Muhammad. In addition, an accusation of blasphemy can easily lead to mob violence against the accused. The possible accusation of blasphemy is hence creating additional pressure and fear among Mauritanian and expatriate Christians alike.

Block 4 - Additional information

Anyone working for the government is required to profess Islam and participate in state religious events. Expatriate Christians, especially those from a Sub-Saharan African background, frequently face overt discrimination. In recent times there has been a strong anti-immigrant campaign. These racist and xenophobic attacks often take on anti-Christian themes as well. The overall environment at the national level is such that many converts are forced to keep their faith a secret. It is virtually impossible for anyone to be visibly Christian and participate in the affairs of the nation openly.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (4.00 points)

Only the Roman Catholic Church has visible church buildings. Some other denominations are allowed to meet in one of the Roman Catholic church buildings; others meet in a house or hall. Building new church buildings is more or less impossible.

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

Due to the legacy of French colonial rule, only the Roman Catholic Church has legal status. All other forms of Christianity are not allowed any legal status, but the Catholic Church does allow Evangelicals to use a back room within the main church compound for worship in the diocese of Nouakchott.

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

With the exception of a very few events such as an Easter sunrise service outside the city, there are no known church functions outside their walls. For everything else, all Christians know that no public Christian activities are allowed outside the very confined church locations. The Church in Mauritania is basically forced to be out of sight and operate in the shadows.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

As proselytism is strictly forbidden, expatriate churches are not allowed to welcome a Muslim inside a church building, let alone integrate a convert from Islam to Christianity in their communities.

Block 5 - Additional information

Christians from a Muslim background gather in secret, fearing that they may be being watched. Foreign Christians are only allowed to meet in authorized places of worship - although there are frequent home-meetings that are not hindered unless the music and preaching is too loud.

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

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

3. The use of symbolic numbers:

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

4. The symbol “x” in the table:

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

Mauritania: 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)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	2
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	10 *
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?	1	1
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?	2	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	15	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10	1

The score for violence against Christians increased in WWL 2025 due to a major incident in December 2023, in which more than fifteen Mauritanian leaders and Christians were arrested following the posting of a baptism video on social media (see also above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*). Some Mauritanian Christians were questioned and intimidated, and some had to relocate outside the country following incidents.

The violence level usually remains (very) low; there are two reasons for this: Firstly, all converts know the consequences if their faith is discovered, and so do other Christians if they do not operate carefully

(e.g., abstaining from overt evangelism). Thus, by keeping a low profile, Christians avoid provoking violent reactions. Secondly, it is difficult to get confirmed reports of incidents out of the country; incidents are not always verifiable when converts from Islam to Christianity in Mauritania face violent persecution at the hands of their (extended) family members, neighbors and society at large.

5 Year trends

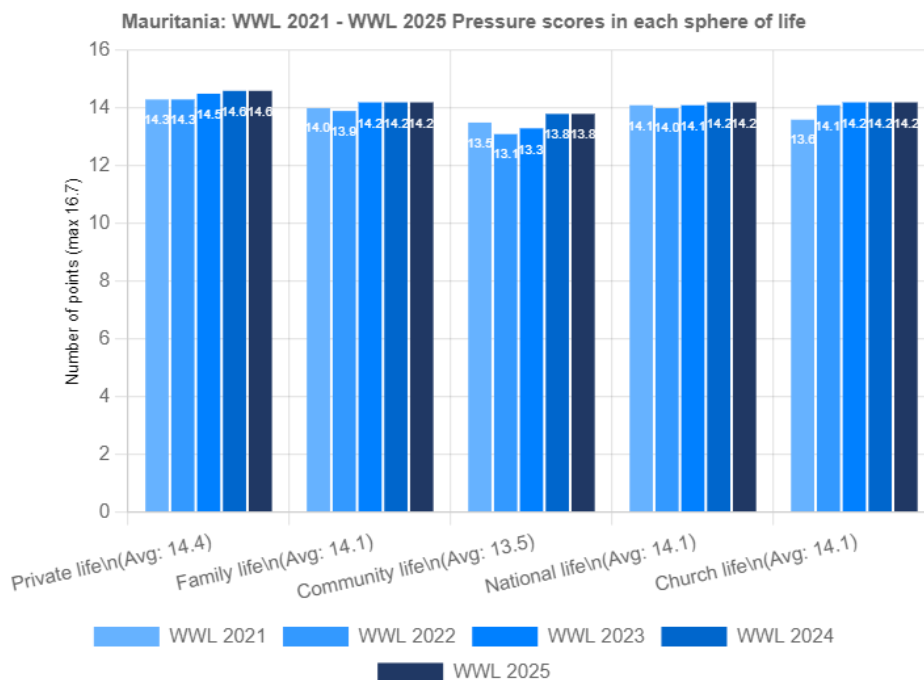
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Mauritania: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	14.2
2024	14.2
2023	14.0
2022	13.9
2021	13.9

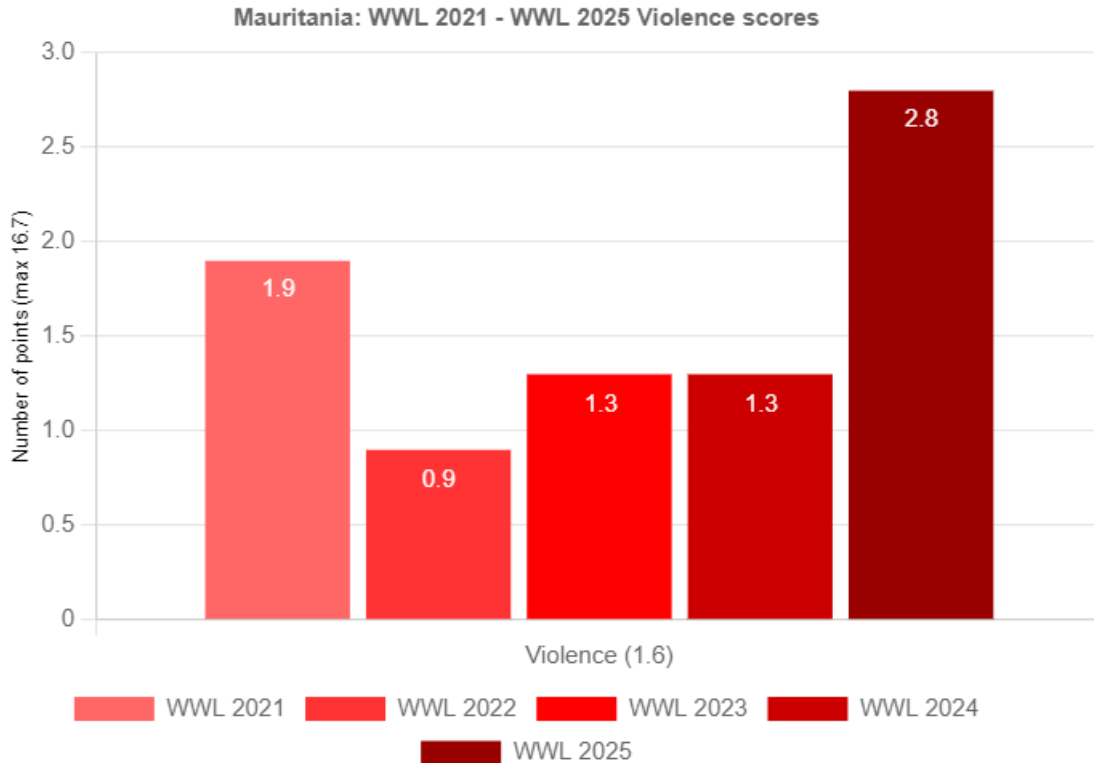
The table above shows a gradual increase in average pressure from 13.9 points in WWL 2021 to 14.2 points in WWL 2024/2025. At first, it seemed that the average pressure on Christians was leveling off at the extreme level of 13.9/14.0 points. However, the levelling-off point has since risen to 14.2 points.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The consistently very high and extremely high levels of pressure in all *spheres of life* are indicative of the pressure local Mauritanian convert Christians face from both family and the government.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows that - except for WWL 2025 - the scores for violence against Christians have remained more or less stable below the 2 point mark. However, the low scoring may well be due in part to a lack of reports on incidents getting out of the country.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Mauritania	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Forced divorce Forced marriage Incarceration by family/house arrest Violence - sexual

Within Mauritania's tribal society, women are subject to the authority of their fathers and husbands. As such, the most vulnerable Christian females are those who have converted from Islam, the majority religion. Leaving Islam means disregarding a father or a husband and bringing shame upon the family. This can have severe consequences, especially since most women and girls are (financially) totally dependent on their families. When it is discovered that a woman or girl is Christian, she may be attacked, deprived of food, bullied, and put under house arrest in order to keep her isolated.

Traditional marriage practices place converts in a particularly vulnerable position. In Mauritania, one’s first spouse is generally chosen by the parents, and this selection often happens before a girl comes of age. As such, unmarried female converts might find themselves forced into a marriage with a Muslim man to keep them under the influence of Islamic family life. In general, most women do not have a choice in marriage. Should she refuse, she risks being shunned by her family and friendship circle. A regional expert summarizes: “Christian girls are sometimes forced into marriage to Muslims in order to force them to renounce their Christian faith.”

In this culture, a girl typically stays in the family home and does not leave her family until she is married; otherwise, she may be labeled a prostitute. Married female converts can easily be divorced and end up with no means to survive. In general, women can be easily divorced, and polygamy is still practiced. Making it additionally challenging, Muslim women (also Christians from a Muslim background) cannot legally marry a Christian man.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Mauritania	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Economic harassment via business/job/work access Forced to flee town/country Imprisonment by government Violence - physical Violence – psychological

Male converts to Christianity bring shame upon their (extended) family. As a result, they are most likely to be ostracized, thus losing respect and status in society and among their friends. In many cases, converts are expelled from their homes, or physically abused. Sometimes, converts feel forced to flee their town or country to avoid being forced to perform Muslim rites; if it is confirmed that they have converted, charges of apostasy can be brought in a religious court. If their faith becomes known, converts are likely to have to flee their village or city to escape serious consequences.

Christian men, especially those involved in church leadership or any form of missionary activity, are at risk of imprisonment, including long prison sentences and high fines. Church leaders may also be subjected to extra surveillance.

By excluding ethnic Africans from finding work or by forcing migrant workers to pay high fees for staying in the country, Christian men among them can be easily put under pressure to leave Mauritania. This is all part of a strong “Arabization” movement and many Sub-Saharan African Christians do leave as a result of this, or live very difficult lives.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Apart from the Christian minority, there is also a very small but growing Shia Muslim minority in Mauritania. While the government has good ties with Iran and did not target this community in the past, Sunni religious leaders have been denouncing this minority group and calling for restrictive measures to be taken against Shia Muslims. As a result, a Shia religious center was closed down in 2018.

Not only non-Sunni religious minorities, but also those striving for (secular) change are facing strong (societal) opposition. Several incidents involving blasphemy accusations have taken place in recent years. According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Mauritania](#), p.1):

"On July 18 [2023], police in the town of Atar arrested a 19-year-old female student accused of writing blasphemous text directed at the Prophet Muhammad in answers on her end-of-year baccalaureate exam in violation of a 2018 amendment to the blasphemy provision of the country's penal code. A teacher posted the exam answers on social media and was subsequently arrested and charged with publishing insults against the Prophet Muhammad on a social network. In August [2023], the teacher was sentenced to six months in prison and another six months of judicial supervision. On November 27, judicial authorities released the teacher from prison. At year's end, the student remained in custody pending prosecution. Religious groups advocating a strict interpretation of Islam placed intense public pressure on the government to severely punish the student, including imposing the death penalty."

Earlier on, the US State Department reported:

- [IRFR 2022 Mauritania, p.6](#): The case of Mauritanian blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed M'khaitir in 2019 clearly showed that even criticism of Islam, while striving for racial equality can lead to years of imprisonment. Next to atheists or non-Sunni religious groups, there is also no place in Mauritanian society for the LGBTQIA+ community. In May 2022, the police arrested six young persons for performing "unnatural acts"; however, they were quickly released and no charges were brought against them.
- [IRFR 2021 Mauritania, p.5](#): "On April 21 [2021], many on social media criticized and threatened four persons who participated in a video program called Al-Matrush (a local expression meaning 'the intrusive'). During the program, a young woman challenged existing religious norms and talked openly about premarital sex, what women should look for in a partner, and why it was wrong to objectify women. Many in the public called for the four participants to be arrested and tried under the country's Sharia-based criminal code. Authorities detained the four participants on April 24, but the prosecutor decided not to file charges, and the four were released on April 27. Program organizers halted production in response to police warnings and societal pressure and the program had not restarted by the end of the year."

Trends Summary

1) The influence of radical Islam remains present in the country

The overall, political, economic and social situation in Mauritania makes the country conducive for the influence of radical Islam. The Mauritanian state has failed to tackle the practice of slavery, improve the economic situation of the majority of its citizens and establish a more responsive and accountable system of governance. This has created an environment conducive for the propagation of religious intolerance. Despite the government's collaboration and international reputation as a close ally of the West in the fight against terrorism and violent Islamic militancy, the situation in the country is complex and makes Mauritania a dangerous country in which to live as a Mauritanian Christian and difficult as a foreign Christian.

2) Political instability and poverty continue to be major issues

The lack of any strong institutions and democratic culture that respects the rights of citizens means that the chances for any improvement in the situation for Christians are very slim. The turbulence and political instability that characterizes the country's history does not bode well for the future, although the last transition of power went smoothly. The poverty of the country as well as the growing divisions over the issue of slavery could also exacerbate the situation. The instability in the region (especially in neighboring countries like Mali) which is fueled by the rise of Islamic militant groups like AQIM, also gives cause for concern about the future for Christians in Mauritania.

3) The number of Christians remains small

Overall, the signs are that Christians will keep facing pressure in the future: The situation for converts is not likely to improve, and Sub-Saharan migrants might well be forced out of the country due to the Arabization of the workforce. The number of Christians will most probably remain small for the next few years.

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 against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Morning Star News, 22 December 2023 - <https://evangelicalfocus.com/world/24787/15-christians-arrested-in-response-to-muslims-outrage-in-mauritania>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Barnabas Aid, 3 January 2024 - <https://www.barnabasaid.org/gb/news/updates-on-the-persecuted-church-3-january-2024/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Mauritania - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mauritania/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2022 Mauritania, p.6 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mauritania>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2021 Mauritania, p.5 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mauritania/>