

World
Watch
Research

Somalia: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



OpenDoors

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Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2023

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Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2023	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Somalia	5
Brief country details	5
Map of country.....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Specific examples of positive developments	7
External Links - Situation in brief	7
WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Somalia	8
Links for general background information.....	8
Recent history	8
Political and legal landscape	10
Religious landscape	12
Economic landscape.....	13
Social and cultural landscape	14
Technological landscape	16
Security situation	17
Trends analysis	18
External Links - Keys to understanding	19
WWL 2023: Church information / Somalia	22
Christian origins.....	22
Church spectrum today.....	23
Areas where Christians face most difficulties	23
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	23
External Links - Church information.....	23
WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Somalia	24
Reporting period	24
Position on the World Watch List	24

Persecution engines 24

Drivers of persecution 26

The Persecution pattern..... 28

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life 28

Violence 33

5 Year trends 33

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female 35

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male 36

Persecution of other religious minorities..... 37

Future outlook..... 37

External Links - Persecution Dynamics..... 39

Further useful reports.....39



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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes 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 conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Somalia

Brief country details

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

Somalia: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
16,842,000	Hundreds	OD estimate

Map of country



Somalia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	92	2
WWL 2022	91	3
WWL 2021	92	3
WWL 2020	92	3
WWL 2019	91	3

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

The only Christian community in the country that is considered for WWL analysis is the category for Christians with a Muslim background. They are regarded as a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives and have often been killed on the spot when discovered. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, which subscribes to the doctrine of Wahhabism, advocates Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia. This group has repeatedly expressed its desire to eradicate Christians from the country. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country, but *Islamic oppression* is not limited to militants only. Christians also face serious violations of their religious freedom from family, extended family members and the community at large. In Federal Somalia any conversion to Christianity is regarded as a betrayal of the Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them. In every sphere of life – private, family, community, and national – being exposed as a convert to Christianity means life-threatening danger, often leading to im-

mediate execution. 'Church life' simply is not possible. This persecution pattern is exceptional and puts Somalia high up in the category of extreme persecution.

Over the last years, the situation appears to have worsened. Islamic militants intensified their hunt for people who are Christian and in a position of leadership. An attempt to re-open a church in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in [August 2017](#) also failed as the government was forced to shut it down due to pressure from the local Islamic population (World Watch Monitor, 4 August 2017). Over the past years, many attempts to open or reopen churches in Somaliland was met with fierce resistance by the government of Somaliland by arresting some locals accusing them of apostasy.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Somalia 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 Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

**Somalia has a reservation on CRC Art.14 protecting children's freedom of religion or belief.*

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

- Christian converts are killed on the spot if their conversion is discovered or merely suspected (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian parents cannot raise their children according to their religious values (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- All Somali are assumed to be Muslim and forbidden to leave Islam (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Women converts are forcibly married and pressured to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

No details about specific incidents of violations of rights can be published since doing so could potentially endanger the life of converts from Islam to Christianity in the country.

Specific examples of positive developments

The election of the president was finally carried out in May 2022 and power was peacefully transferred. Pressure had been mounting beforehand and there had been fear that a major conflict in the country could erupt.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: August 2017 - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/somaliland-closes-catholic-church-due-public-pressure-re-opened-week-ago-30-years/>

- 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 Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Somalia

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report - 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 - pp.329-332	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	17 May 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094503	17 May 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 - 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/SOM	17 May 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/somalia/	17 May 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World)	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/somalia	17 May 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 - 187 countries, Somalia not included	EIU 2021 Somalia	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	17 May 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 - 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	3 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index - 29 countries, Somalia is not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index - 210 countries	Global Freedom 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/somalia/freedom-world/2022	17 May 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report - 70 countries, Somalia not included	Freedom on the Net 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) - 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/somalia	17 May 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022 Somalia	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#so	17 May 2022
Middle East Concern country profile	MEC country profile	https://meconcern.org/countries/somalia/	3 August 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index - 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/somalia	17 May 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index - 180 countries	CPI 2021 Somalia	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/somalia	17 May 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries, Somalia not included	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights/#franks	8 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/somalia/	6 June 2022
USCIRF 2021 country reports 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Somalia not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview - 178 countries	World Bank 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/somalia	17 May 2022
World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 - 147 countries	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-som.pdf	17 May 2022

Recent history

Somalia declared independence in 1960 when the British protectorate and Italian colony merged. In 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's military government came to power and introduced 'Scientific Socialism' into the country. During this process, property owned by Christian missionary organizations and churches, including schools and clinics, were seized and Christians were expelled from the country. In 1974 a new law was introduced giving women the same inheritance rights as men. Islamic leaders preaching against this new law were imprisoned or executed. The secular and reformist nature of the government undermined the Islamic identity of the Somali people. This resulted in a revival of radical Islamic influence and the growth of Muslim clan-based militant organizations. They aimed to turn Somalia into an Islamic state. Siad Barre's regime and Islamic militants shared an enemy – Christians, whose presence became visible before the early 1990s. During Barre's rule, radical Muslims used their influence to encourage the government to ban the printing, importing, distributing or selling of Christian literature in the country. Moreover, the National Security Services (NSS) threatened, arrested, tortured and murdered many Somali Christians. Other Christians lost their jobs and businesses.

Relations between Somalia and its neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, had been soured by the Somalian government's claim that all territories where Somalis live belong to Somalia. As a result of this agenda to form a 'Greater Somalia', the country waged a major war with Ethiopia in 1977.

After decades of ruling the country with a mixture of terror and guile, Siad Barre's regime finally collapsed in 1991. The country was left without an effective government. War between the clans and drought threatened the lives of millions. The United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) sought to end the crisis. In 1992, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 751 by which a UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) was established. UNOSOM I sent in a US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF). As the situation spun out of control, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 755 to establish a second UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II). Following the unsuccessful attempts to help Somalis create a central government, the USA withdrew its forces in 1994. The UN then decided to withdraw all its forces from Somalia (Security Council Resolution 954). For the following two decades Somalia became a lawless state where Islamists, local militias and warlords continued to fight each other. The country became a hub for militant Islamic activity.

In the meantime, even though not recognized by the international community, Somaliland declared unilateral independence from Somalia by citing the colonial boundaries between British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Puntland also declared its autonomy without severing its ties from the rest of Somalia.

After several attempts at mediation by the international community, a federal government was eventually formed in 2012. The government only controls cities and towns; many parts of rural Somalia still remain in the hands of al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has been consistently propagating anti-Christian ideology and regarding all foreign forces in Somalia as Christians intent on conquering Islam. In 2016, parliamentary elections were held and in February 2017, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed was elected president. This was [greeted enthusiastically](#) by many Somalis and the international community (New York Times, 8 February 2017). It has been seen as a big step forward for Somalia.

In 2017 and in 2018, al-Shabaab remained potent enough to conduct deadly attacks in the country. AMISOM soldiers (deployed in Somalia by the African Union since 2007) were targeted on numerous occasions. For example, in [April 2018](#), up to 46 Ugandan peacekeepers were killed in a double suicide car bomb attack by Islamic militants (The Guardian, 1 April 2018). In May 2019, the Security Council extended the mandate of AMISOM and authorized a troop reduction, unanimously adopting Resolution 2472 (2019) at its 8537th meeting. In 2018 and 2019, the government continued to fight al-Shabaab with the help of African Union Forces. Al-Shabaab conducted a bombing in the capital city in July 2019 and wounded the Mayor of Mogadishu, who later [died](#) of his injuries (New York Times, 1 August 2019).

In 2020, there were border clashes between Kenyan and Somalian government soldiers and there were rumors that Kenya might seek to annex some Somalian territory. Deutsche Welle reported on 13 March 2020 that the Somali government [requested](#) Kenya to "halt its ongoing violations of Somalia's sovereignty and encroachment in the border areas. In a long-drawn legal

battle involving maritime boundary dispute against Kenya, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) recently ruled [largely in favor of Somalia in setting a new maritime border](#) in an area of the Indian Ocean believed to be rich in oil and gas, although [Kenya rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction](#) days before the Court announced its decision. The situation in the area remains precarious as Jubbaland forces are regrouping for possible fresh clashes, despite efforts to ease the hostility.”

It was also reported that Somalia participated in the ongoing Tigray conflict by siding with the Ethiopian government. On 15 May 2022, former President Hassan Sheikh Mahmud was elected president for the second time (see below: *Political and legal landscape*).

Political and legal landscape

The [Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia](#) was adopted on 1 August 2012 and affirms the absolute predominance of a strict interpretation of Sharia law. According to Article 2 of the Constitution, “Islam is the religion of the State; no religion other than Islam can be propagated in the country; and no law which is not compliant with the general principles and objectives of Sharia can be enacted.” Furthermore, the Constitution categorically declares that Sharia law is supreme. Since the Constitution took a step back from securing freedom of religion by prohibiting apostasy, it can be expected that a better functioning federal government will not lead to a cessation of the regular violation of rights of Christians. Likewise, as stated in the Constitution, the province of Puntland has declared that only Islam may be propagated: “Islam shall be the only religion of the Regional Puntland State of Somalia. With the exception of Islam, no other religion can be spread in the Puntland State; the laws and culture of the people shall be based on the Islamic religion.” The Constitution of Somaliland also states: “Islam is the religion of the Somaliland state, and the promotion of any religion in the territory of Somaliland, other than Islam, is prohibited.”

The political situation in the country has created a hostile environment for Christians, especially for those coming from a Muslim background. As a result, the religious freedom violations against Christians in Somalia nearly always involves a very high level of violence. The new Ethiopian prime minister, who took up office in April 2018, has brought fresh hope to the region: Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia are committed to solving current regional issues.

In 2020, the president of Somalia [signed a landmark federal law](#), paving the way for the country to hold its first popular election in half a century (The Guardian, 24 February 2020). The president and the leaders of Somalia’s five semi-autonomous federal states had reached an agreement in September 2020 to prepare for indirect parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2020 and early 2021. As part of the agreement, the election planning was set to commence on 1 November 2020. But the deal fell apart in the face of squabbles over how to conduct the vote, while talks in February 2021 between Farmaajo and the leaders of the country’s federal states [failed to break the deadlock](#) (Al-Jazeera, 10 February 2021). In April 2021, parliament voted to extend the president’s term for another two years to let the country prepare for direct elections. This move came amid growing pressure to end the political stalemate and was heavily criticized by the international community. Following clashes in the capital, Mogadishu, between factions of the security forces (which were divided over the issue), Somali lawmakers [voted unanimously to cancel](#) the two-year presidential term extension (France 24, 2 May 2021).

The cancelling of the extension gave Somalia's political leaders the impetus to agree on [new dates](#) for holding the postponed elections: The indirect presidential election was to be held on 10 October 2021, following the election of members to the Upper House in July and members of the Lower House in the period 10 August - 10 September 2021 (Al-Jazeera, 29 June 2021). However, in September 2021, Somalia's top two most powerful leaders – the President and Prime Minister – became [locked in a deepening political confrontation](#) after they named different men to head the country's intelligence service, causing fears of instability and further throwing the ongoing electoral process into doubt (Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2021). This was followed by the president [suspending](#) the prime minister's power to appoint and dismiss officials (Al-Jazeera, 16 September 2021), leading [regional leaders](#) and [international community](#) to de-escalate the standoff and commit to the elections (Al-Jazeera, 17 and 18 September 2021). The feud between the president and prime minister halted the complicated, indirect election process. Although it seemed they had come to an agreement in October 2021, in December the president [suspended](#) the powers of the prime minister amid the ongoing power-struggle between the two leaders, raising concerns of political violence possibly erupting (CNN, 27 December 2021). Heavily armed factions took up position in parts of the capital, Mogadishu.

In January 2022, Somali officials announced that they had [struck a deal](#) to carry out the delayed parliamentary elections by 25 February 2022 (Africanews, 10 January 2022). When the February date was also postponed with no new date in view, the USA imposed [sanctions on Somali officials](#) for undermining the democratic process in Somalia (Al-Jazeera, 26 February 2022), with the IMF also giving a [warning](#) that funding programs were a stake if elections were not held within the next few months (Africanews, 23 February 2022). After months of repeated postponements, Somalia finally [inaugurated 290 new lawmakers](#) in mid-April 2022 bringing the country a step closer to completing a prolonged electoral process, and [elected a new Speaker](#) at the end of April 2022, paving the way for the presidential vote (Africanews, 28 April 2022). After a record number of candidates ran in Somalia's presidential election, including the incumbent President Farmaajo, who announced candidacy for a second term, the Somali parliament set 15 May 2022 as the date for holding the presidential election. Former President [Hassan Sheikh Mahmud](#) was elected president for the second time (CNN, 16 May 2022).

Gender perspective

The legal landscape facing women and girls is additionally restrictive, in particular making marriage a place of enacting violent repression of female converts. Somalia is one of just six UN states not to have [ratified](#) the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Within marriages, women are vulnerable from a lack of legislation addressing [domestic violence or marital rape](#) (UNDP, 2019). Divorce laws also prevent women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. A man has the right to divorce his wife by [talaq](#), whereas women must apply through the courts (OECD, 2019).

In this religiously conservative society that suppresses women, finding a [female Somali police general](#) fighting al-Shabaab and the patriarchy is a rare yet pioneering sight (Al-Jazeera features, 25 February 2022). Zakia is one of many women fighting for [gender equality](#) in the security sector and the inclusion of women at all levels on matters regarding national peace and security (Medium, 22 October 2020). Women also occupy 54 of the 247 [parliamentary seats](#) (IDEA Soma-

lia country data, 1 August 2022 update) but cite discrimination by leaders of federal states based on “deeply ingrained traditional prejudices” for their inability to meet the established [30% gender quota](#) (Deutsche Welle, 4 May 2022).

In August, outrage was sparked as the long-awaited Sexual Offences Bill (aimed at protecting women and girls from sexual abuse, rape and child marriage, and heralded as a progressive step) was [overturned](#) by parliament (Reuters, 11 August 2020). Instead of outlawing them, the replacement bill permits child and early marriage to continue. According to [UN Women](#), 45% of women are married before 18 years of age (UN Global Database on Violence Against Women: Somalia). Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical Muslim as a corrective measure.

Religious landscape

Somalia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	Hundreds	-

According to OD-estimate

The population of Somalia is overwhelmingly Muslim, 99% being Sunni Muslims. The small Christian community is under constant threat of attack, since Christians are seen as a foreign element that is in the country to damage both the culture and Islam. Open Doors estimates the number of Christians in the country to be “hundreds”. However, in the past, the country was home to one of the largest Catholic cathedrals in the region and the Christian community was much larger.

The years of chaos following the overthrow of President Siad Barre’s military regime in 1991 has culminated in the rise of Sharia courts and of radical Islamic groups like al-Shabaab. They all pursue a clear Islamic identity against the background of a strong tribal identity. Changing religion – i.e. to Christianity – not only means a betrayal of Islam and the Muslim community but also a break with the norms and values of the clan as well. In tribal societies, this is a very serious offense. According to many Somalis, a “Somali is born Muslim and dies Muslim”. Therefore, even if al-Shabaab's influence were to decline, it does not mean that the threat to Christians would diminish. An example is Somaliland which declared independence in 1991 (but which is still unrecognized): It would seem to be a region free of Islamic militant activity, but Christians are just as much persecuted there because anti-Christian sentiment is rooted in the country's religion and culture.

Gender perspective

Within this context, Christian male converts face extremely [hostile treatment](#) as they are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; for instance, they are responsible for determining the faith of the family and therefore more is expected from them (World Watch Monitor, 2019). They can be blamed if a sister or wife converts, or killed. Suspected female converts, too, face extreme pressure from their families and local communities; they are commonly raped, publicly humiliated, or forcibly married to a radical sheikh.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 for Sub-Saharan Africa (Spring Meetings 2022, pp. 80-81):

- **Economic growth and outlook:** The economy made a modest recovery in 2021, growing by an estimated 2.2 percent following a contraction of 0.3 percent in 2020. “The economy is projected to grow over the medium-term, but risks remain significant. Real GDP growth is estimated at 3.0 percent in 2022 and is projected to reach 3.5 percent in 2023. The outlook assumes sustained growth in remittances which will boost investment and consumption; continued social protection measures to cushion household incomes, especially among the vulnerable; as well as elections dividends which will support improved business confidence and unlock donor flows.”
- **Poverty rate:** “The international poverty rate is projected to remain at around 70 percent between 2022 and 2024. Accelerating the pace of poverty reduction will require policy interventions and public investments that raise productivity, create jobs, and expand pro-poor programs which focus on women and youth.” Poverty levels are high and widespread. The international poverty rate (using the US\$1.90/person/day poverty line) was estimated at 69 percent in 2017. Although remittance inflows support household consumption, most Somalis will remain poor without growth in per capita income.
- **Food insecurity:** “External shocks such as climatic disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a loss of livelihoods, increased food insecurity and contributed to forced displacement.”
- **Inflation:** Inflation has remained below 5 percent due to de facto dollarization. However, the worsening drought and the Ukraine/Russia crisis are pushing up prices.
- **Remittances:** Stable external flows including remittances and grants refinance Somalia's high trade balance (at – 69.4% of GDP in 2021 and projected at -73.8 in 2022). Remittances in 2021 were 28.7% and expected to reach 32.3% of GDP by 2022.

According to the CIA Factbook:

- Somalia's economy is based mainly on agriculture with animal farming contributing about 40% of GDP and accounts for almost 50% of export revenue. Real GDP growth in 2017 was an estimated 2.3%.
- An estimated 4.15 million people faced severe food insecurity between February and March 2022, “mainly as a result of consecutive poor rainy seasons since late 2020, which severely affected crop and livestock production, and due to heightened conflict since early 2021.”

According to the World Bank's country overview:

- “Somalia has several opportunities – rapid urbanization, growing use of digital technologies, planned investments in sectors such as energy, ports, education and health – that can support economic growth and job creation. Following a prolonged drought, growth was estimated at 2.9% in 2019. A projected growth rate of 3.2% in 2020 was interrupted by a triple crisis of COVID-19, locust infestation and floods which caused the economy to contract by 1.5%. An economic rebound is underway, supported by higher credit to the private sector and resilient inflows of remittances.”

According to Heritage Foundation's [2022 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- "Somalia is not graded in the 2022 Index because of the lack of sufficiently available credible data. Throughout the 28-year history of the Index of Economic Freedom, it has been possible to score Somalia only five times, from 1996 through 2000. Political instability and the lack of a countrywide central authority have led to inconsistent and fragmented governance in Somalia with different militias, authorities, and tribes applying varying legal frameworks. Although the current government has pursued reforms to establish the rule of law in the areas that it controls, the challenges to successful development of more modern economic markets remain enormous."

The conclusion of the long-awaited elections in 2022 (see above: Political and legal landscape) has led to the [IMF extending the duration of its aid program](#) in the country (Africanews, 20 May 2022). Under this aid program (which was set to expire automatically on 17 May if elections were not held), Somalia's debt can possibly be reduced to \$557 million – about 6% of estimated GDP, and this debt reduction could then allow Mogadishu to attract more funds from international partners to develop its private sector. Somalia also set up a [national payments system](#) in August 2021 as part of plans to develop the financial industry (Al-Jazeera, 10 August 2021).

Gender perspective

Women are, in general, the most economically vulnerable within Somalia. This is in part due to low education rates for girls; only 35% of girls of school age were [enrolled](#) in school in 2020 (UN OCHA, 2020). The widespread practice of FGM results in thousands of girls [withdrawing](#) from school due to debilitating scarring and infections (Somali Magazine, January 2022). Early marriages also result in girls ending their education earlier than their male counterparts. Women and girls regularly lose their inheritance rights, too. Whilst under the 1975 Family Code (Article 158) women have equal rights to men, Sharia rules of inheritance are applied, and daughters receive half the share that sons receive.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (Including 30,000 Arabs)
- **Main languages:** Somali (official, according to the 2012 Transitional Federal Charter), Arabic (official, according to the 2012 Federal Transitional Charter), Italian, English
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 55.72 years (2022 est.)
- **Median age:** 18.5 years (2020 est.)
- **Urban population:** 47.3% (2022 est.)

As stated in the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) (Section: Somalia/People, last accessed 6 January 2023):

- "In culture, language, and way of life, the people of Somalia, north-eastern Kenya, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, and the southern part of Djibouti are largely one homogeneous group."

- "The Somali people make up the overwhelming majority of Somalia's population. They are divided into numerous clans, which are groups that trace their common ancestry back to a single father. These clans, which in turn are subdivided into numerous sub-clans, combine at a higher level to form clan families. The clan families inhabiting the interfluvial area of southern Somalia are the Rahanwayn and the Digil, which together are known as the Sab. Mainly farmers and agro-pastoralists, the Sab include both original inhabitants and numerous Somali groups that have immigrated into this climatically favorable area. Other clan families are the Daarood of north-eastern Somalia, the Ogaden, and the border region between Somalia and Kenya; the Hawiye, chiefly inhabiting the area on both sides of the middle Shabelle and south-central Somalia; and the Isaaq, who live in the central and western parts of northern Somalia. In addition, there are the Dir, living in the northwestern corner of the country but also dispersed throughout southern Somalia, and the Tunni, occupying the stretch of coast between Marca and Kismaayo. Toward the Kenyan border, the narrow coastal strip and offshore islands are inhabited by the Bagiunis, a Swahili fishing people."

Refugees/IDPs

In the past three decades, conflict and famine in the country have led to hundreds of thousands fleeing the country. The insecure situation has also been compounded by millions continuing to be seriously affected by [drought and famine](#) (Reliefweb, last accessed 6 January 2023).

According to the UNHCR in September 2022, there were [33,847 refugees and asylum seekers](#) in the country. In the timeframe January-September 2022 there were [1,405,000 newly displaced IDPs](#), of which 467,000 were due to conflict/insecurity. In comparison, in the timeframe January-December 2021 there were 874,000 IDPs of which 544,000 were due to conflict/insecurity.

According to the [UNHCR](#) report "Somalia Refugee Crisis Explained" (19 October 2022):

- "At the end of 2021, there were 836,300 Somali refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, most of them – almost 80 percent – are living in neighboring countries like Kenya (279,200), Ethiopia (250,719), Yemen (69,940) and Uganda (61,853)."
- "The drought in the Horn of Africa is impacting more than 20 million people—including those in Somalia. ... The drought is severely affecting millions of refugees, IDPs and their host communities, primarily in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya."
- "Refugees from Somalia have been living in refugee camps for nearly 30 years. Many have lived most or all of their lives in these camps. This is called a protracted refugee situation."

Gender perspective

Gender inequality in Somalia is reinforced by its patriarchal norms, Islamic religious landscape and long history of gender discrimination. Women are widely viewed as subservient, and many continue to remain restricted to the domestic sphere. There are signs that these dynamics are slowly changing, with increasing numbers of women going to [university](#) to become working professionals (East Africa Monitor, 2 September 2020). According to the [Association of Somali Universities](#), the enrolment rate of female students in tertiary institutions increased by 17% in the last five years (University World News, 2022). Inequality remains deeply entrenched how-

ever, and women and children have reportedly experienced higher rates of [gender-based violence](#) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, June 2020). Campaigners are pushing for the overturned [Sexual Offences Bill](#), which sought to provide greater protection to victims of gender-based violence, to be reintroduced (Reuters, 11 August 2020).

Technological landscape

Despite the fact that there is no strong central government, the country has made progress in telecommunication technology.

According to Internet World Stats 2022 (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 14.5% of the population – survey date: December 2021 (most recent survey date at time of writing)
- **Facebook usage:** 14.5 % of the population – survey date: January 2022 (most recent survey date at time of writing)
According to [Napoleon Cat](#) (December 2022), there were 2,152,100 Facebook users in the country: 56.4% were male, compared to 43.6% female.

According to World Bank's country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 55.6 per 100 people

According to an OECD report, women in Africa are on average [34%](#) less likely to own a smartphone than their male counterparts (OECD 2018, p.13). This restricts their access to both information and community networks. The 2022 [GSMA Mobile Gender Gap](#) report also indicates that only 37% of the female population in Sub-Saharan African countries use mobile internet (GSMA, 2022, p. 39).

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (publication date: January 2023):

- "Somalia's economic difficulties in recent years have made it difficult for telcos and the government to sustain investment in infrastructure. The government has also had to contend with militant groups which continue on occasion to force the closure of internet services in many areas of the country."
- "Given the poor condition of fixed-line infrastructure, operators have concentrated on mobile connectivity. Their investment plans have involved the development of LTE services to provide mobile data and broadband services."
- "Despite the many inherent difficulties faced in the country, the telecom market has flourished. Tariffs are among the lowest in Africa, and new cable systems coming on stream in the next few years (providing additional connectivity to Asia and Europe), as well as planned investments from local operators to bolster the country's national fibre backbone, will lead to downward pressure on retail pricing."
- "On the consumer side, spending on telecoms services and devices is under pressure from the financial effect of large-scale job losses and the consequent restriction on disposable incomes as the remnants of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic remain and as global events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, continue to play out. However, the market is continuing a positive growth trajectory, supported by a slow economic rebound in the country."

As the number of Internet users increases, it is likely that citizens (converts from Islam in particular) will have more access to online Christian resources.

Security situation

Somalia is viewed as being a classic example of a modern failed state. For more than 25 years, the country has been a safe haven for Islamic militants who constantly target Christians both in Somalia and in neighboring countries. The country has now become a patchwork of competing clans, clan-based militias and Islamic groups. Thus, it has been difficult to have a central government or any sort of government in the country.

Al-Shabaab has conducted numerous attacks in the WWL 2023 reporting period. The list below is not exhaustive:

- [January 2022](#): Somalia's government spokesman Mohamed Ibrahim Moalimuu was wounded by a suicide bomber (CNN, 16 January 2022).
- [February 2022](#): The blast of a suicide bomb near a security checkpoint leading to the president's residence in Mogadishu, left six people dead and at least ten wounded (Africanews, 10 February 2022).
- [May 2022](#): Al-Shabaab militants killed several people in an attack on a Burundian military base of the African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia (Reuters, 3 May 2022).
- [October 2022](#): Two car bombs in the capital city claimed the lives of more than 120 people, injuring over 300 others.

According to the [UN Security Council](#) report of 13 May 2022:

- "The security situation remained volatile, with a monthly average of 236 incidents recorded since the beginning of 2022. Most incidents continued to be perpetrated by Al-Shabaab. Banaadir, Shabelle Hoose and Bay Regions were the most affected by Al-Shabaab activity."

On 31 May 2021, the United Nations Security Council [extended the mandate](#) of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) for a further year (until May 2022). The authorization of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been [extended](#) to the end of March 2022. On 15 November 2021, the Security Council's Somalia [sanctions](#) were extended for another year. Again, in May 2022, [the UN Security Council](#) extended the Somalia Mission until October 31st, 2022. The Council also requested: "the Secretary-General, following consultations with the Federal Government of Somalia, carry out a strategic review of UNSOM to include recommendations for clearly defined, measurable and realistic benchmarks to track the Mission's timely execution and achievement of its mandate, and to report by 30 September 2022."

On 1 April 2022, the [UN Security Council voted unanimously](#) to authorize the creation of a new African Union-led peacekeeping force in Somalia, called the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), in place of the current mission AMISOM of nearly 20,000 military, police and civilians that will be gradually reduced to zero by the end of 2024. The purpose of the new mission is to focus on the fight against al-Shabaab militant activity (Al-Jazeera, 1 April 2022).

On 17 May 2022, the USA decided to re-establish of an [American troop presence](#) in Somalia to help local authorities combat the Al-Shabaab militant group, reversing the policy of the previous US administration (Africanews, 17 May 2022).

In addition to al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate, there is an IS affiliate in Somalia operating in Puntland. In a recent [recruitment campaign](#) by IS's Somalia province, Christians were blamed for the alleged historic suffering and persecution of Muslims (Terrorism Info, 4 August 2022).

Gender perspective

In the context of this fragile state, the proliferation of jihadists and impunity, Christians are regarded as 'a high-value-target' by al-Shabaab and other radical groups. Against this backdrop of [extreme hostility](#) towards Christians, daily life is a challenge for both men and women (The Critic, 23 June 2022). If identified, Christian men are likely to be threatened, tortured or brutally killed. Women and girls also face the threat of death, in addition to sexual violence and/or forced marriages.

Trends analysis

1) Somalia is known for being hostile to Christians

The country has been on the World Watch List since 1993 and will no doubt continue to be listed high up. Violations of religious freedom are particularly severe for Christians with a Muslim background who commonly face beheading if discovered. It is clear that al-Shabaab will continue targeting converts to Christianity and none of the severely damaged church buildings will be re-opened within the next few years.

2) Somalia is a failed state

Somalia is a failed state. The international community and the African Union (AU) tried to establish different governments on more than two occasions. The current federal government is supported by AU forces and is backed by the UN Security Council. Despite this, al-Shabaab remains powerful enough to conduct deadly attacks even in Mogadishu - the seat of the federal government. The USA has been conducting [airstrikes against al-Shabaab](#) but these have failed to produce the desired effects, as reports have indicated (e.g. The Guardian, 11 November 2018). Nevertheless, it seems that the Somali Federal Government is heading towards becoming a functioning government. Yet al-Shabaab is still conducting some serious attacks registering over 200 incidents per month since the beginning of 2022, according to the May 2022 [UN Security Council](#) report. After some serious delays, a new president was elected. But the election exposed the deep divide in the Somali political culture and dynamic. The COVID-19 crisis served only to exacerbate this situation. Added to that is the war in Ukraine which is impacting many African countries especially countries like Somalia that depend on foreign aid for food.

3) The government of Somalia remains weak

Despite the dubious election procedure, the presidential election in February 2017 had been a sign of hope for many Somalis and the international community. However, the government was weak and only managed to survive the years 2018-2021 with the help of troops from the African Union, backed by the UN. The UN has extended the mandates of UNSOM and AMISOM into Oc-

tober 2022. In 2020-2021, the president was trying to extend his term office by two years. However, due to pressure from the clans, parties and pressure from the international community, the president was forced to back down and a new president was elected and assumed office in May 2022. There are many other incidents that that happened in the context of socio-political developments that indicate the lack of a state with a coercive power. These incidents and what surrounded the election show that the government of Somalia and its institutional capacity remains weak.

4) Al-Shabaab continues to pose a significant threat

It is a well-known fact that Somalia is home for one of the most radical and deadly jihadist groups in the world. Jihadism in the Horn of Africa/East Africa is not new. There were even groups that were formed in the early 20th century to establish an Islamic state in the modern-day Somalia. In 1984 Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) was formed from the merger of two Salafi organizations - Al Jama'a Al Islamiya and Wahdat Al Shabaab Al Islam. This group was believed to be supported by the then Sudanese government. The Ethiopian military conducted numerous military campaigns against the AIAI and finally defeated them. In 1996, it was rumored that the militant group had transitioned into a political group. It was the leadership of the AIAI who also played a bigger role in establishing the Islamic Courts Union in 2000 (dissolved in 2007). After the defeat of the Islamic Courts Union by the Ethiopian army in 2007, al-Shabaab was formed. In order to weaken and eventually defeat this newly formed group, the international community backed the Somalia Transitional government (now Federal Government) by sending peacekeepers. Yet, al-Shabaab remains very potent and conducts serious, organized attacks in the country including the capital city where hundreds of people were killed and injured in the WWL 2023 reporting period. In 2022, the US government [added additional bounty](#) for receiving information leading to the whereabouts of al-Shabaab leaders such as Ahmed Diriye, Mahad Karate and Jihad Mostafa (US Embassy in Kenya, 14 November 2022). On the other hand, some are suggesting that engaging with al-Shabaab might be the best way of solving a crisis which has no end in sight.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: greeted enthusiastically - https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/world/africa/somalia-farmajo-mohamed-abdullahi-mohamed.html?_r=0
- Recent history: April 2018 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/al-shabaab-attack-kills-ugandan-soldiers-in-somalia>
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- Recent history: requested - <https://www.dw.com/en/could-kenya-annex-chunks-of-somalia/a-52725856>
- Recent history: largely in favor of Somalia in setting a new maritime border - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/12/un-court-icj-somalia-kenya-maritime-border-dispute-ruling>
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- Political and legal landscape: Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia - <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: signed a landmark federal law - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/24/somalia-edges-closer-to-first-democratic-election-in-half-a-century>
- Political and legal landscape: failed to break the deadlock - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/10/what-is-delaying-somalias-election>
- Political and legal landscape: voted unanimously to cancel - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210502-somalia-s-parliament-unanimously-votes-to-cancel-presidential-extension>

- Political and legal landscape: new dates - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/29/somalia-to-hold-presidential-election-october-10>
- Political and legal landscape: locked in a deepening political confrontation - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/8/somalia-on-edge-as-president-pm-clash-over-intelligence-chief>
- Political and legal landscape: suspending - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/16/somalia-crisis-deepens-as-president-withdraws-pms-powers>
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WWL 2023: Church information / Somalia

Christian origins

[Arab sources](#) from 10th-12th century describe the port of Seylac (Zeila), near the border with Djibouti, as a majority Christian city (Aram, B I, Somalia's Judaeo-Christian heritage, in: Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology 22.2, 2003). However by the end of the 15th century the Christian presence had died out. Jesuits visiting the island Soqotra in 1542 were amazed to find that the inhabitants were clearly Christian, although illiterate. It had to wait until 1881 before Christianity was introduced again into Somalia. Christian faith spread in the following years, especially after the Italians took control of the southern coast, including Mogadishu. However, the colonial powers in both British and Italian territories at times opposed the work of missionaries among Somalis for fear of instability. *For further information see: Melton J & Baumann M (Editors), Religions of the World (2nd Edition), 2010, p.2664f.*

In 1886 a French Roman Catholic mission agency and the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Mission set up bases in the port town of Berbera (in the then British protectorate of Somaliland), in Mogadishu and Kismayo. The church grew rapidly. Lutheran missionaries from the Church of Sweden came to Somalia in 1898 and opened educational and medical facilities. They also engaged in evangelistic outreach and had their greatest success among a group of Bantu-speaking former slaves. The mission was disrupted when the Italian authorities expelled the missionaries in 1935. The work was revived after World War II and during the 1950s further Christian missions participated. The Swedish Lutheran Mission, Mennonite mission and Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in particular left their mark but in 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's Socialist government came to power and all property owned by Christian missions and churches (including schools and clinics) was confiscated.

In 1972 the government nationalized all of the Roman Catholic Church's property. However, in spite of the changes in the Catholic Church's status and the resultant departure of much of its personnel, a [Diocese of Mogadishu](#) was created in 1975 (Living Word, accessed 20 August 2020). By 1976 all foreign missionaries had left the country. Two groups of Somali nationals, one formerly associated with the Mennonites and one with SIM, continued to meet after the missionaries left. In the 1980s, a few Mennonites were able to return.

Before the early 1990s, the presence of Christians in Somalia was visible. According to an article in Aleteia published on 15 July 2019, when the [Catholic cathedral](#) in Mogadishu "opened in 1928, it was the largest cathedral in Africa. Built in three years and designed in a Norman Gothic style by architect Antonio Vandone di Cortemilia, the church was heavily influenced by the Cefalù Cathedral in Sicily." In July 1989, Bishop Colombo was gunned down in the middle of a church

service. The cathedral was looted and damaged and, after that, Islamic militants in the country and from other parts of the world began to target Christians and Christian symbols.

Church spectrum today

No details can be published.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

No area is safe for Christians in the country. However, the harshest places are the areas under the control of al-Shabaab. These are particularly in the southern and south-western region and include areas around Kismayo, Jamaamee, Marka, El Hur and many other places. Christians are not safe even in relatively peaceful and stable places like Puntland and Somaliland.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Since this group is restricted to chaplaincies for soldiers (e.g. among officers of the African Union Mission – AMISOM), foreign workers in Mogadishu and some refugees in Hargeisa (Somaliland), it is not treated as a separate category for WWL analysis and scoring.

Historical Christian communities: These do not exist in the country. One of the biggest Roman Catholic cathedrals in Africa was built in 1928 in Mogadishu. However, this building has been a ruin since 2008.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background face the most severe violations of their fundamental rights and are considered a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives. In the country's very recent history, converts - or those accused of being converts - have often been killed on the spot when discovered.

Non-traditional Christian communities: These do not exist in the country.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Arab sources - https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/22-2_003.pdf
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WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Somalia

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Somalia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	92	2
WWL 2022	91	3
WWL 2021	92	3
WWL 2020	92	3
WWL 2019	91	3

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Somalia scored 92 points and ranked 2nd in WWL 2023. The overall WWL score has remained more or less stable at an extreme level, although there was a slight increase in the violence score from 8.5 in WWL 2022 to 8.7 in WWL 2023. Christians in the country risk being killed by Islamic militants, and clan leaders, elders and family members monitor the movements of any suspected Christian convert. The country is mired in ceaseless civil war, social fragmentation, tribalism and violent Islamic militancy. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, the political landscape also deteriorated as a result of disagreement between tribal leaders, the government in power, opposition leaders and even the international community on holding elections. This has resulted in boosting the morale of the jihadist groups as did the take-over of power in Afghanistan by the Taliban. Even though the presidential election could finally be held in May 2022 and power was transferred peacefully, Somalia's political framework remains on shaky ground. The government is unable to protect the citizens of the country even in the capital city, Mogadishu; this became clear when al-Shabaab conducted multiple attacks that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians and injury to hundreds more.

Persecution engines

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

Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very strong

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

Somalia is a majority Muslim nation and society expects all Somalis to be Muslim. Imams in mosques and madrassas (as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab) state publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians and churches in Somalia. The country's Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, targets and kills Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country. However, *Islamic oppression* is not limited to militants only. Christian converts also face serious violations of religious freedom from family, extended family members and the community at large. To be Christian, especially a convert from Islam, is a huge challenge and can lead to brutal death at the hands of radical groups.

Clan oppression (Very strong)

The clan is a major factor in Somali society and orders the way daily life is run and how one community is related to another. This clan structure also has a profound impact on how the federal government is structured and how elections are conducted, as was evident in the 2017 Somali election: The president was elected by a parliament that was itself elected by 14,025 clan elder-appointed delegates. Al-Shabaab is also relying on the same clan-based structure to gather intelligence, recruit members and advance its ideology. It uses this structure to force sheiks and imams to teach jihad or face expulsion or death. According to many Somalis and clan leaders, Somalis are Muslims and therefore conversion to Christianity is a betrayal of the Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong)

In the current fragile and lawless situation, crime and corruption is rampant in Somalia. The federal government controls only some cities and towns and leaves the majority of rural Somalia to be controlled by al-Shabaab. Militants collect taxes and fund their operations through illegal trade. This situation has made life for Christians very delicate as they have no protection whatsoever. The organized nature of this engine means that, at times, militants have networks in government positions as well.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

Christians in the country also face pressure from the government. It is the government that sets the laws that limit Christians' rights in the country. The government in all Somalia (Puntland, Somaliland and Somalia) are denying Christians their rights. In the WWL 2023 reporting period,

both in Somaliland and Somalia, the government agencies remain active in silencing Christians either through denying basic rights via legal means and/or creating a hostile environment. (An example from a previous reporting period occurred on 5 October 2020, when the authorities in Somaliland arrested a married couple for Christian proselytizing. The arrest prompted calls from some Somali religious leaders for the two, who were converts from Islam to Christianity, to be charged with apostasy under Sharia. On 5 November 2020, the couple was 'deported' to Mogadishu upon the order of a Somaliland court.) In WWL 2023 a new president was elected (who had served as president before). This new government will almost certainly not change its attitude towards Christians and Christian faith as it comes to power with the backing of the powerful clan leaders.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Islamic militants operate freely in many regions. Al-Shabaab militants kill Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. This driver is so potent and dangerous that it even drives violence and violations of religious freedom outside Somalia, particularly in Kenya where the group has been responsible for the death of hundreds of Christians in the last years. Al-Shabaab is considered a threat to the peace and security of the whole region and is a designated terrorist organization globally.

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Muslim religious leaders state publicly that there is no room for Christianity.
- **Family and ordinary citizens (Very strong):** Society in general and family members are against any thought of conversion to Christianity and will treat converts harshly.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (very Strong):** This driver is closely linked to violent religious groups as well. It is this driver that is helping the jihadists finance their oppression.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials have shown their anti-Christian attitude on many occasions. For example, any form of Christmas celebration has been prohibited by the government.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Political parties (Medium):** Political parties are ethnically based and at the same time subscribe to the idea that Somalia is for Somalis – and being Somali means being Muslim.
- **Clan leaders (Very strong):** Clan leaders do not want to see any conversions to Christianity. They do not want to see Christian symbols in the country.
- **Family and ordinary citizens (Strong):** Family and ordinary citizens serve as drivers where a family/community member is suspected of being a convert to the Christian faith.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** For jihadists, any person who leaves Islam is seen as a threat. Groups like al-Shabaab also use the clan system to recruit.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

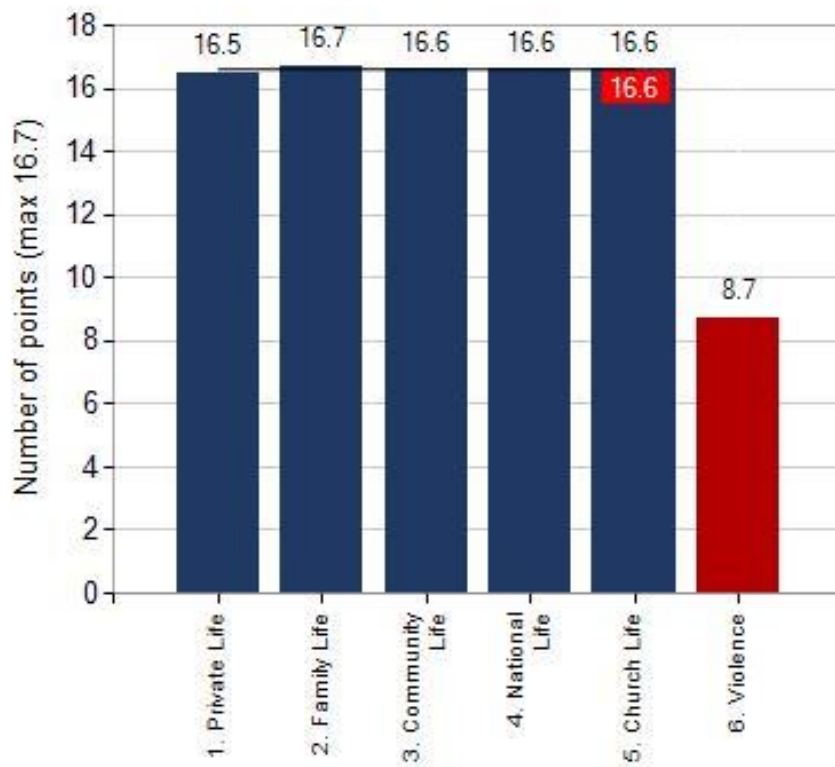
- **Criminal cartels (Very strong):** Criminal networks profit from the lawlessness in Somalia. They work with a network of illegal trade routes. These cartels have a strong connection to al-Shabaab or they are being operated by al-Shabaab itself. The money that these cartels generate buy weapons that are used to kill Christians and other civilians.
- **Violent religious groups (very Strong):** Al-Shabaab engages in illegal trade and taxation as a means of income for financing operations against Christians in Somalia and in neighboring countries.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** Some government officials are those who enforce restrictive laws in the country. In addition, some of the members of the government also harbor anti-Christians sentiment. They believe that Somalia should only be a home for Muslims.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Somalia



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Somalia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Somalia is 16.6 points, similar to WWL 2022. The overall pressure on Christians in the country remains at an extremely high (and almost maximum) level.
- The pressure is at an extreme level in all spheres of life, with the highest scores in the *Family sphere* (with maximum 16.7 points) and *Community, Church and National spheres* (16.6 points), reflecting the immense pressure exerted on converts by family and neighborhood and the national situation of the church.
- The score for violence is very high with 8.7 points, up from 8.5 points in WWL 2022.

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 2023 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://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

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. (4.00 points)

Somalia has an ultra-conservative society where conversion or leaving Islam is unthinkable. Thus, Somalia is a very hostile country to non-Muslims. It is a country where Communism, colonialism and other forms of government failed to detach the community from its very conservative Islamic thinking. Conversion carries a severe consequence in Somalia. Converts have to hide their conversion to Christianity not only from their extended family and clan members but also from their own closest family members. The family will not only be unsympathetic towards Christianity, family members will also fear being suspected of being converts too. In this overall hostile environment, those who convert often face the prospect of fleeing their homes or their country since the consequences of being discovered would bring unimaginable suffering to them and their loved ones.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (4.00 points)

Life in Somalia involves individuals, family and community members. So the problem of conducting an act of worship is linked to how the community controls its members. Culturally, society is communal and also follows a pastoral lifestyle in many areas. There is no privacy, which means that individual Christians face severe difficulties in trying to live according to their faith. They have to pray in secret and change their place of worship regularly to avoid detection.

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

Anything that indicates or suggests that someone is a Christian, especially a Somali Christian, is extremely dangerous. Owning or carrying Christian materials or symbols would be seen as evidence of Christian faith, should they be caught. The mere suspicion of being a Christian is generally a death sentence, except in very rare cases where the person is found with 'soft copies' of Christian material on their phone. In such cases they receive a beating and are warned to desist from befriending Christians or being interested in Christian materials. However, if found in possession of a Bible or other printed Christian material, the person is executed with the blessing of their immediate family members, relatives, neighbors and even friends. According to one country researcher, Christians hardly dare to express their faith in any form. Even liking a Christian message on social media can be fatal.

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

Talking about religion in Somalia - except about Islam in its most conservative understanding - is extremely risky. Talking to any ordinary citizen in Somalia about a conversion or leaving Islam can be deadly. Religion is not up for discussion or debate. As a result, converts (or any other person for that matter) avoid talking about non-Islamic faith with others. The laws and the practices in the country do not allow Christians to thrive in the country. They are designed to

favor Muslims at the expense of others. The militant groups in the country do all it takes to make sure that Christians in their private life face the worst of scenarios - namely, death.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (4.00 points)

Somalia would like to present the country as being 100% Muslim. The understanding in society is that any Somali is a Muslim by virtue of being born a Somali. There is no room for the existence of any other faith. Thus, a baby born from a Somali parent is considered Muslim and any attempt to challenge this would mean inviting a problem that would cost lives.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

A Christian wedding (or any explicitly Christian activity) brings dangerous attention to those who participate or celebrate such events. For this reason, celebrating weddings according to Christian faith or celebrating Christian festivals in a family is unthinkable. This a country where 'there is no room for Christians'. Family members and community vigilantes are always on the alert concerning Christian influence in the country. Thus, any Christian celebration could turn into a deadly situation.

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

It is a well-established principle under international human rights laws when it comes to freedom of religion that parents have the right to raise their children according to their own faith. However, in Somalia this is not the case, since Christianity is seen as a threat to the country. Values in the country must be Islamic values. Thus, Christians cannot raise children as Christians; this is particularly true of the very young who are likely to sing, recite a Bible verse or pray in the name of Jesus and thus reveal the faith of their parents and family. Parents are limited in what they can do. Relatives and the community ensure that children are raised with Islamic beliefs.

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

Any Christian in the country is obliged to participate in Islamic teaching. Everybody is expected to attend Islamic school, and in areas controlled by al-Shabaab (which is geographically large) all children, women and even men must attend madrassa teaching and other Islamic lessons. In government-controlled areas, Islamic religious education is a mandatory subject in formal education. This means that Christian children have no option but to attend. Somali children have to participate in mandatory Islamic classes and Christian parents often find it too dangerous to teach their children about their Christian faith.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

It is well established that Christians in Somalia are seen as a threat to the tradition and clan system of the community. Thus, it is not practically possible to live a free life as a Christian person in Somalia, particularly in areas controlled by al-Shabaab. In general, the Somali community is very conservative and adheres to a strict dress code. Christians have to adhere to this too. In the community, anyone who is deemed not to be a good Muslim faces suspicion and serious opposition.

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)

Local monitoring by various groups or elders is common. All foreign individuals - especially Christians and suspected Christians - are monitored in Somalia by one way or another. It is even worse for converts. Through monitoring, the local chiefs or elders can judge who is not behaving in accordance with strict Islamic faith. Those who are suspected of being converts are sent intimidating messages via phone calls from 'concerned' community members or even from al-Shabaab personnel who would tell them they have heard rumors of their conversion or have observed some behavior contrary to the Quran. To survive such threats and other similar problems, Somali Christians have to hide their faith in order to get access to basic social services and education.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (4.00 points)

Al-Shabaab is known for abducting people in the Horn of Africa. Culturally, in Somalia forced marriage/arranged marriage is prevalent. It is even worse for Christians, especially converts. Some Somali Christians have fled their homes and are in hiding because of threats to their lives. One country expert states: "Forced marriage is the best option because they could otherwise be killed." Another states: "This seems to be the 'easiest solution' for parents who notice that their daughters are behaving in non-Muslim ways." Abduction not only affects Christians in Somalia but also in neighboring countries.

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

If a person (particularly a Somali) is even merely suspected of being a Christian, it can be very dangerous. A country expert states: "It is not mandatory that one has to be a proven Christian. Any suspicion is enough for a person to face serious persecution." Communal pressure is one of the primary avenues of violence, intolerance, and discrimination for those suspected of being converts to Christianity. Somali society is made up of a mixture of very close interaction and

suspicion. Anything seen as deviating from acceptable good Islamic behavior is responded to with intense pressure to conform. Each Somali considers themselves responsible for ensuring their 'brothers' remain 'good Muslims'.

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)

Most of the fundamentals of freedom of religion under Article 18 of the UDHR are missing from Somalian laws. Policies and laws that emanate from the national or regional level set the tone for how things are implemented at the local level. The Constitution has set it out loud and clear that Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the source for all legislation. There are no provisions exempting non-Muslims from the application of Sharia law. Officials at the federal and local level enforce laws that limit a Christian's freedom severely, which has left Christians with no option but to live out their faith in secret. It is also important to note that Somali governments believe that there are no Somali Christians.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (4.00 points)

Part of the problem with Somalian law is that citizens cannot leave Islam. In Article 2, the Somali Constitution expressly forbids conversion from Islam to any other religion. Article 2 on State and Religion states: (1) Islam is the religion of the State. (2) No religion other than Islam can be propagated in the country. This means that no Somali national can declare conversion from Islam. In this environment, it is not possible for Christians to have official documents that reflect their Christians faith.

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

There are many angles to this issue. First, any faith-related views that do not correspond to the Wahhabist version of Islam are restricted. Secondly, freedom of expression is generally restricted. Sheikhs and other religious leaders in the country have repeatedly said that there is no room for Christians in the country. For Christians to express their views and opinions in public is therefore a very dangerous thing to do. This is also supported by the government of the country - it does not allow Christians to even celebrate Christmas in any visible way.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)

Somalia is a country where drought, conflict and swarms of locusts have been creating social crisis. In this environment it is logical to have and allow many NGOs to operate in the country. However, this is not the case in Somalia. Christian NGOs struggle to operate as they are a prized target for al-Shabaab. Most of the NGOs that risk operating in the country are from the Middle East. For Christian NGOs, it is extremely dangerous. There is no room for individual Christians in the country, let alone for Christian political parties.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

It is the popular belief that Christians do not belong in Somalia. Al-Shabaab is against any Christian presence in the country. Similarly, the government authorities have no intention of giving a license for non-Islamic purposes. Hence there is no mechanism for applying for church registration. If the government did allow that, it is feared that al-Shabaab would use that as propaganda to gain increased support from the Somali population.

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)

There is no official church building in the country. An attempt in the past to reopen a Catholic church in Mogadishu was not successful. In 2017, another attempt to reopen a Catholic church in Hargeisa was met with public outcry and hostility. Unofficial house-churches are targeted, if found.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)

Public church activities are unthinkable in Somalia. First of all, there are no recognizable churches in the country. Let alone outside activities, Christians cannot even organize activities indoors safely. There is no opportunity for Christians to run and maintain a place of worship. Militant groups such as al-Shabaab or other Salafists have declared publicly that there is no room for Christians in the country.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)

One of the major narratives of jihadists, conservative imams and other powerful people in Somalia is to 'get rid of Christians and Christianity from Somalia'. This creates a real risk for Christians to meet up. Thus, Christians do not meet in recognizable church buildings in Somalia. There is constant monitoring to see if there are informal places of Christian worship operating in the country.

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).

For security reasons, no details about violent incidents can be published.

5 Year trends

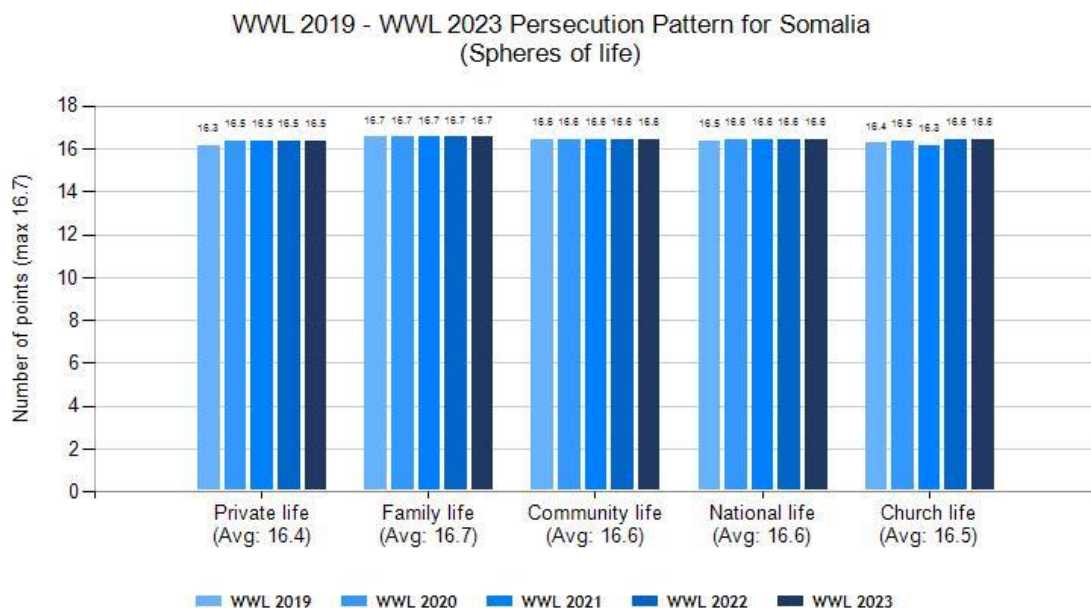
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Somalia: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	16.6
2022	16.6
2021	16.5
2020	16.6
2019	16.5

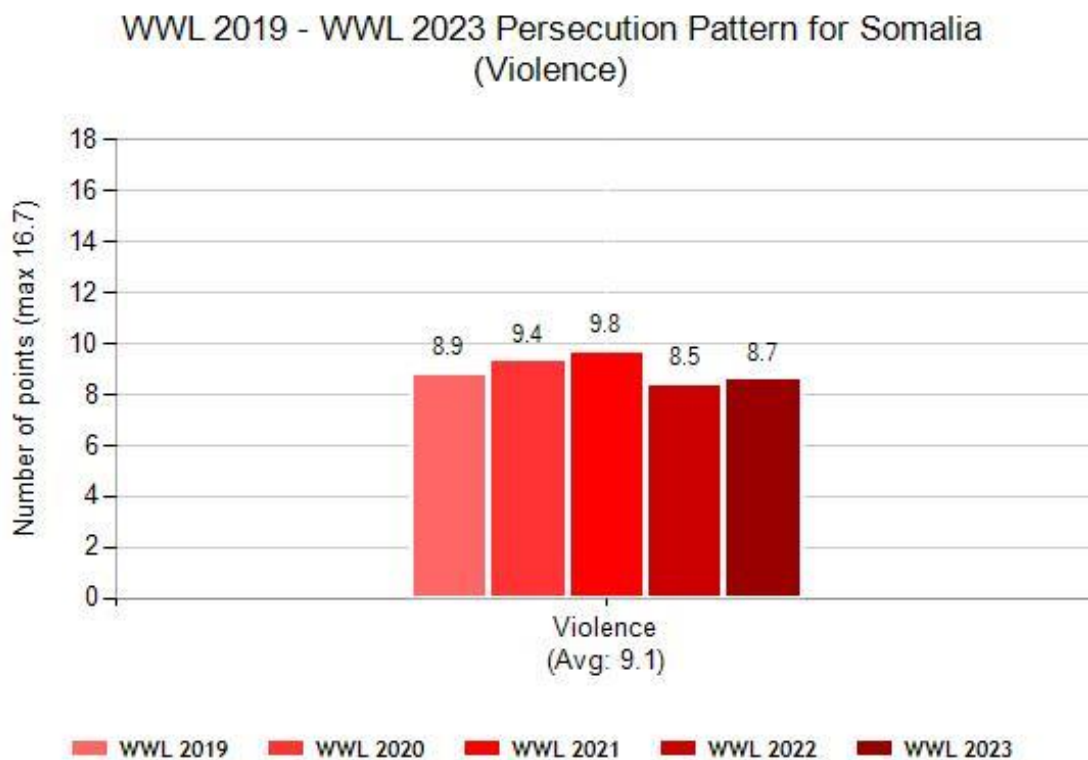
Over the last five WWL reporting periods extreme levels have been recorded for the average pressure, where 16.5 has been the minimum. It is extremely difficult to live in the country as a Christian. A mere suspicion can lead to killing. Any 'abnormal' behavior can be construed as abandoning Islam and can lead to serious problems. Christian life is lived under a constant shadow: If discovered by al-Shabaab, one's conversion is a death sentence. In places like Somaliland, the locals will be arrested and charged with anti-conversion laws.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the extreme levels of pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* are more or less stable, all averaging 16.4 points or above. The highest average score (16.7 points) is found in the *Family sphere*, closely followed by the *Community* and *National spheres* (16.6 points). This reflects the fact that persecution in Somalia is everywhere and a national phenomenon; Christians lack meaningful space in society and protection by the government.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The average violence score for the past five years is 9.1 points. Compared to the charts for pressure, the scores for violence are lower. This is probably also due to the inaccessibility of the country and difficulties in reporting. The scores have nevertheless consistently reached the category "very high". Had Somalia scored higher in violence, it would be a challenger for the No.1 position on the WWL.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In Somalia, the social life is primarily clan-based, and almost exclusively Muslim. As a result, women in Somalia mostly lead prescribed lives with little leeway for personal belief or expression. A woman does not have a voice in her community and is dependent on men. Young female converts to Christianity remain one of the most vulnerable populations. Commonly, a woman suspected of Christianity will be humiliated in public, kept under strict house arrest, raped, abducted, forcibly married to a radical sheikh or killed. For example, when a female convert to Christianity was this year discovered by her family, “arrested in her room and tied on her bed with a chain for six months” until another believer was able to come to the rescue. If already married, she will likely be divorced and have her children taken away to ensure that they are raised in an Islamic way.

Forced and early marriages are commonplace (and legally permissible) in Somalia. As such, forced marriage – often to much older men – is easily accessible as a means of coercion to restore converts back to Islam. Some are pressured by families, whilst others are abducted by radical Muslims for the purpose of forced conversion, marriage and sexual slavery. Insecurity in the country due to Al-Shabaab and clan militias has seen a concerning [80% rise in sexual violence](#), primarily against girls (Forbes, 2021). Furthermore, FGM remains rife across the country with more than [76%](#) of women in support of the perpetuation of the practice (28TooMany, 2022). As one country expert explains, “In Somalia, over 90% or more of girls and women have been subjected to FGM despite it having dire consequences, including excruciating pain, permanent disability, bleeding and even death. Talks on ending this practice remains forbidden.”

[Education](#) is often brief for girls, with only 5% making it to high school enrolment (No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project, accessed 3 November 2022). In education, Christian girls can be pressured into attending Islamic Duksi classes and dressing in al-Shabaab compliant burkas. In combination with discriminatory inheritance practices, this can exacerbate women’s economic vulnerability, which is often exploited. Christian women also suffer when their husbands are imprisoned or killed; widows tend to be forced to marry Muslim men, property is confiscated, and the widow is left at the mercy of the man's family. Many are taken advantage of by male relatives and young daughters married off. The family often ends up impoverished.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	False charges; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

A Somali first identifies himself as a Muslim then a Somali.” This common understanding of male identity means that within the tight social controls of the patriarchal clan society, men and boys merely suspected of conversion to Christianity face extreme violations of their fundamental rights. They are at risk of being physically assaulted, imprisoned, heavily threatened, tortured, abducted, or killed in abhorrent ways. These are no idle threats and fear is a constant companion for Somali Christian men and boys.

Men face more hostile treatment because they are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; expected to lead their family in religious matters, they can consequently be blamed if a family member converts. Leadership positions are removed and they lose their wives and children. For those suspected of conversion themselves, pressure is applied on them to conform by their local community. For instance, they may be deliberately selected to lead the Mosque prayers and be expected to grow a beard, marry more than one wife or perform Islamic rituals in public. These are means of testing suspected converts.

Additionally, boys are expected to own and operate weapons, and many are abducted and indoctrinated by al-Shabaab. Families forcefully send their young men, including converts, to Islamic rehabilitation centers to be trained as al-Shabaab militia, and consequently, “forced into radicalism” as one expert shared. If exposed within this context as Christians, they face further dangers; as one country expert notes, “the family unit is usually the first point of attack or persecution of Christians especially converts.”

If discovered, Christian men are also denied their inheritance and boys are denied education. In Christian families, the whole family and community is affected if the husband is killed or compromised, for men tend to be the financial providers. When the men are killed, their family is often left unprotected, labeled ‘kaffirs’ and seen as a stain on the community. The underground church also suffers greatly when the men are persecuted or killed because most of the other men opt to go deeper underground, leading to leadership crises.

Persecution of other religious minorities

No religious groups other than Sunni Islam have any meaningful rights in Somalia. In areas controlled by al-Shabaab, the situation has become so extreme that even Shia Muslims keep a very low profile. Moderate Sunnis are also targeted. As stated above, laws in Somalia prohibit the propagation of any religion other than Islam and prohibit Muslims from converting. The Constitution also states that all laws must comply with the general principles of Sharia. In this context, any other religion except (Sunni) Islam will experience severe challenges.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Islamic oppression is embedded in society and government and looks set to remain the main challenge for religious minorities in Somalia and neighboring countries. The COVID-19 crisis also served to strengthen the militant groups and weaken the government. In summary:

- Al-Shabaab will continue targeting converts to Christianity;

- It is unlikely that any of the severely damaged church buildings can ever be re-opened;
- If AU troops were to leave the country or are reduced in strength following the expiration of the current term, al-Shabaab would be emboldened again and might pose an even greater threat to Christians in the country and beyond.
- Although a new president has been elected, the election-process showed that the institutions and culture in Somalia are not ready for periodic elections where democracy can flourish. It is more likely that background issues will lead to major division among those who are part of the government.

Clan oppression

Somali society is structured in clans. A government cannot make decisions without clan support. As outlined by Reuters back in December 2007, this is because: "[The clans control districts and businesses](#) and are the arbiters of most aspects of Somali life. Decisions are made collectively within the clans and their complex sub-divisions." What is also important to underline in the case of Somalia is that the clan structure has become a serious threat to democracy and stability in the country. It is difficult to see this situation change in the near future. It must be emphasized that if there is any Persecution engine that is here to stay in Somalia, it is this engine. It survived colonialism, socialism, dictatorship and absolute chaos and lack of government for over 20 years. In fact, it is so deep-rooted that it controls both private and public political space. Even those who are believed to be powerful can only become powerful and remain so with the support of clan leaders. What makes it even more complicated and so dangerous is that this engine is intertwined with Islamic faith. Those who are clan leaders are also religious leaders. The extent of their power can be seen in the role they play in the country's election. To put it simply, any violations of religious freedom that emanate from this engine are likely to remain.

Organized corruption and crime

According to Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perception Index (CPI 2021):

- "Somalia ranks among the world's most corrupt countries ranking 178th out of 180 countries. Insecurity is also a major issue; the ongoing instability greatly restricts business. Corrupt government officials tolerate illegal activities in return for bribes. Dysfunctional institutions facilitate an environment of lawlessness, and the absence of any form of regulatory framework hinders prospects of economic competitiveness."

It seems that there is no appetite to fight this problem and al-Shabaab is using such rampant corruption to infiltrate the government. It also uses corruption to finance its operations. This issue will likely continue, and as long as al-Shabaab and its supporters flourish in the country, the chance for the Church to grow is very slim.

Dictatorial paranoia

The government in power in Somalia is not democratic. Human rights and other fundamental rights are not respected. For Christians, it is particularly challenging. At this moment, the government is not in its strongest position as it has been in conflict with al-Shabaab. Once it consolidates its power, however, it is likely to take act with increased hostility towards

Christians. In fact, the government shows such anti-Christian sentiment in order to bolster its image in the very conservative Muslim society that it governs.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 80% rise in sexual violence - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2021/10/09/sexual-violence-in-somalia-on-the-rise/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 76% - <https://www.28toomany.org/country/somalia/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Education - http://www.noceilings.org/child-marriage/?utm_source=CeilingBreakers&utm_medium=Web&utm_campaign=NoCeilings%22%20%5C%20%22SOM%22%20%5Ch%20HYPERLINK%20%22http://www.noceilings.org/child-marriage/?utm_source=CeilingBreakers&utm_medium=Web&utm_campaign=NoCeilings%22%20%5C%20%22SOM%22%20%5C#SOM
- Future outlook: The clans control districts and businesses - <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL05364051>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Somalia>