

World
Watch
Research

Malaysia: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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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 1 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 / Malaysia

Brief country details

Malaysia: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
33,181,000	3,054,000	9.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Malaysia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	43
WWL 2022	63	50
WWL 2021	63	46
WWL 2020	62	40
WWL 2019	60	42

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Malaysia: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Ideological pressure groups
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties
Ethno-religious hostility	Government officials, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ideological pressure groups

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Converts from Islam to Christianity experience most pressure and hostility as every ethnic Malay is expected to be Muslim. Whoever deviates from this is not just going against the Constitution, but also against society at large and of course against family and neighborhood. Roman Catholics, Methodists and NGOs are watched by the authorities, but non-traditional Protestant groups are more often targeted for interference as these tend to be more active in testifying about their faith. The tumultuous times in Malaysian politics since 2020 have made all Malay parties lean towards a stronger emphasis on Islam and have emboldened Islamist parties like the PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), which is leading several states in the federation and emerged as the largest single party in the snap general election held on 19 November 2022. PAS members frequently make statements opposing religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christian female converts run the risk of being forcibly married to Muslim men (CEDAW Art. 16)
- Christian parents cannot raise their children according to their religious values (CRC Art. 14)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

April 2022: The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) [declared](#) in a 90 page report that there is no evidence to suggest there was any state involvement in the disappearance of Christians Joshua Hilmy and Ruth Sitepu in November 2016. While this is a very different result than from the report SUHAKAM published three years ago about the abduction of Pastor Raymond Koh. it should not be read as clearing the authorities from all blame: At a press conference on 15 April 2022, the SUHAKAM commissioner stated that "the highly unsatisfactory conduct and shortcomings of the Royal Malaysia Police in investigating the disappearances of Joshua Hilmy and Ruth Sitepu had contributed to the acquiescence of the state in the abduction of the couple".

Specific examples of positive developments

February 2022: In a decision about the question whether Sharia law or civil law should have precedence in case of conflict, a nine-member bench of the Federal Court of Malaysia decided that according to the Constitution, Sharia courts do not have the right to exercise [judicial reviews](#) (Malay Mail, 21 February 2022).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: declared - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/enforced-disappearance-04152022145124.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: judicial reviews - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/02/21/after-federal-courts-decision-shariah-lawyers-want-federal-constitution-cha/2042958>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Malaysia

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 242-244)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	23 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-15356257	23 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/MYS	23 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/malaysia/	23 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/malaysia	23 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.40)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	23 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	28 July 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Malaysia not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/malaysia/freedom-world/2022	23 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/malaysia/freedom-net/2022	19 January 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/malaysia	23 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#my	23 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/malaysia	23 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/mys	23 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/MYS	23 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/malaysia/	23 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022%20Malaysia.pdf	23 June 2022
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malaysia/overview	23 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=MYS	23 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 14-15)	https://rheodocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/c6aceb75bed03729ef4ff9404dd7f125-0500012021/related/mpo-eap.pdf	23 June 2022

Recent history

Since the November 2022 elections, the new government coalition of Pakatan Harapan (PH) and right-wing Barisan Nasional (BN), has come to an agreement on a governing formula, with the support of the Sarawak Parties Alliance (GPS) to create a parliament majority. The king had urged that a government of national unity should be formed. It remains to be seen if this government is able to end the recent tumultuous course of Malaysian politics, which is described below.

It all started with a ground-breaking election on 9 May 2018, where the ruling UMNO party, which had been in charge of the country since independence in 1957, was defeated by the voters who overwhelmingly chose opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH). When the PH government collapsed in February 2020 (see below: *Political and legal landscape*) a new Perikatan Nasional (PN) government took over with a very thin majority. Race, ethnicity and religion became again important topics to win over voters and to distract them from the economic fallout following the COVID-19 crisis and the hardships it has brought (see also below: *Trends analysis*).

After 2020 proved to be a turbulent year for politics in Malaysia, 2021 was both tumultuous and 'peaceful' in one. The government of Perikatan Nasional managed to survive until the end of August 2021, when a [new government](#) led by Ismail Sabri Yaakob was sworn in, which did not have deputy prime ministers (Coconuts, 27 August 2021). The COVID-19 state of emergency (SOE) started in January 2021 which meant banning all meetings of the national as well as the state assemblies, so that they were effectively suspended from meeting since December 2020.

Malaysia's king has a largely ceremonial role, but he has the authority to entrust any politician in parliament whom he thinks is commanding the majority with building the government. He had originally agreed not just to the new government being installed, but also for the SOE to be declared, after the government had urged him to it. However, political pressure grew when it was found that the SOE was not leading to a lowering of COVID infections. After consulting with political leaders from all parties and his fellow sultans (the Council of Rulers), the king stated publicly that he was in favor of ending the SOE when it expired on 1 August 2021 and wished to call back parliament as soon as possible. In fact, the last two governments had not been elected; their prime ministers were nominated by the king.

In the November 2022 snap elections, PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), which has a ruling majority in several states in the federation, emerged as the largest single party. It won [49 seats](#), representing 22% of the parliamentary seats, more than doubling its 18 seats won in 2018 (The Star, 19 November 2022). The situation of a hung parliament was totally new to Malaysia and the country's king finally named reformist opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim as the country's 10th Prime Minister, ending days of uncertainty. With many parties uncertain about Anwar's view on the Malay supremacy, he reassured the public that he would uphold Islam as the religion of the federation and protect Malay and Bumiputera rights as enshrined in the Federal Constitution. He also pledged to safeguard the rights of Malaysians, regardless of race or religion. Malay supremacy will be upheld by Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, UMNO's president, who has been appointed as one of the two Prime Minister deputies as announced on 9th December 2022. Zahid has been known to make racist comments and frequently warned the Malays against threats of their Malay rights as he assured that authorities would not hesitate to use the Sedition Act on those who would question the inherent rights and privileges of the Malays. Therefore, one thing seems certain: in one way or another, the policy of Malay supremacy is here to stay.

In summary:

- The PH government under PM Mahathir Mohamad was in power in the period May 2018 - February 2020.
- The PN government under PM Muhyiddin Yassin was in power in the period February 2020 - August 2021.
- The UMNO-led government under PM Ismail Saabri Yaakob was in power in the period August 2021 - November 2022.
- Elections took place on 19 November 2022 and a new government under Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was formed. It proved its [parliamentary majority](#) on 19 December 2022 (Channel News Asia, 19 December 2022).

Political and legal landscape

UMNO and ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak

As stated above, the tumultuous phase in Malay politics began with the general elections of 2018. Malay-majority party UMNO hit an all-time low in their popularity polls in 2016, which may have served as an early warning signal but the administration wanted to remain in power, despite Najib Razak being entangled in one of the largest cases of corruption worldwide. He was sentenced in July 2020 to [twelve years in prison](#) on seven counts, among them corruption (Malay Mail, 28 July 2020). The sentence was upheld in the Court of Appeal, where the judge called the whole issue a "[national embarrassment](#)" (Reuters, 8 December 2021). On 23 August 2022, the Federal Court of Malaysia [upheld](#) the 12-year-sentence of former Prime Minister Najib Razak on corruption-related charges, ending proceedings that had continued for more than four years (Reuters, 23 August 2022). Rosmah Mansor, Najib Razak's wife, was [sentenced to 10 years](#) in prison on charges of bribery (Malay Mail, 1 September 2022).

Razak is the son of Malaysia's second prime minister and a member of the political elite in the country, which has been largely untouchable. Just a week before the initial sentencing, on 22 July 2020, another court ruled that he had to pay [400 million USD](#) in outstanding taxes, showing that the days of being untouchable may well have ended (SCMP, 22 July 2020). The sight of seeing Najib Razak going to prison and his limited ability to campaign from there may have helped in swinging additional votes away from UMNO.

Ismail Sabri Yaacob, who had been [sworn in](#) as prime minister on 21 August 2021 without a vote in parliament, belongs to the UMNO establishment (ABC News, 21 August 2021). But all the political bickering over the previous two years led to a view becoming more widespread - especially among the younger generation - that Malaysia needed something different and a fresh start away from the corruption-tinged UMNO. Whether this will mean politics serving Malay and non-Malay alike or including ethnic and religious minorities in government policies, remains to be seen, but seems doubtful, when the strong outcome for PAS in November 2022 is taken into account.

PAS and the Islamizing of politics

The hardline Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) was already successful in the 2018 elections and managed to regain government control over a further federal state (Terengganu), bringing the number of states it governs to three (Terengganu, Kedah and Kelantan). It is also in a coalition government in Pahang, Perak and Perlis. It has been in federal government since 2020 and most of the swing votes from people fed up with UMNO decided to vote for PAS, who for the first time ever became the single largest party in parliament. It aligned itself with PN, which sought to position itself as an alternative to UMNO - giving PAS a fresh appeal. Extensive [campaigning experience](#) and active social media engagement, including TikTok, were the electoral tactics to win young and indecisive voters (South China Morning Post, 27 November 2022). Additionally, its grassroots work in influencing teaching in countless rural schools paid off, as the voting age for the first time was lowered to 18, adding six million fresh voters, of whom a big part voted for PAS.

One sign of an Islamizing of politics is the growing role of PAS. PAS had already made headlines when a PAS functionary congratulated the Taliban on their successful take-over of power in Kabul on 15 August 2021. The government's special envoy for the Middle East, PAS leader Abdul Hadi Awang, then caused confusion when he [met with a Taliban envoy](#) in Doha (Benar News, 8 February 2022). A few days later, the Deputy Minister for women, family and community development came under fire from opposition lawmakers and civil society when she claimed that men are allowed to use a '[gentle but firm physical touch](#)' against recalcitrant wives (Benar News, 14 February 2022). In both instances, the government remained silent, showing the growing leeway PAS enjoys. Kelantan [amended](#) its Sharia Criminal Code and made, among other things, proselytization and conversion from Islam to another religion punishable by law (The Star MY, 2 November 2021). A PAS member of parliament publicly called the Bible "a [distorted book](#)" in August 2020 and refused to retract this statement or apologize for it (Malay Mail, 3 September 2020).

All non-Malay citizens face explicit disadvantages in employment and other areas

Malaysian politics has been fraught with underlying issues of race and religion for a long time already. A large-scale [demonstration](#) just two days ahead of the international human rights day in December 2018, involving around 55,000 protesters and organized by Malay-Muslim parties PAS and UMNO to protest against the country's planned accession to ICERD (the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination), was an illustration of the challenges the (now defunct) PH government faced (Malay Mail, 8 December 2018). Calls for the [special protection of Malay privileges](#) are nothing new and are in fact in line with Malaysia's Constitution (Benar News, 3 December 2018). This topic remained central and seemed to be used as a rallying point for all economic and social fears, which have multiplied in the course of the COVID-19 crisis, at the expense of ethnic and religious minorities, like Christians.

The age-old practice of discriminating against non-Malay ethnic minorities continues unabated by giving priority to the Bumiputra - i.e. the Malay population or literally: "People of the soil". With policies continuing to favor Bumiputra, all non-Malay citizens face explicit disadvantages in employment and other areas. This is particularly the case in: i) public offices (i.e. state ministries and administration right down to the local level), ii) state bureaucracy, iii) state-owned enterprises (such as large oil companies) and iv) the armed forces. But even with these affirmative action policies, many Malay people also struggled to make ends meet as the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown. Calling for the protection of the Malay majority is often just a simple call for power and a means of self-enrichment; Najib Razak is just one example of this, even if the most blatant.

In a surprising turn concerning foreign politics, Malaysia has made contact with Myanmar's [opposition National Unity Government](#) (NUG) in exile and called upon other countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to follow suit (Benar News, 25 April 2022). It has become the first ASEAN member state to do so.

The monarchy rotates among nine regional sultans

It should be noted that Malaysia is a unique parliamentary monarchy: The monarchy is not based on one royal person but is an office which rotates every five years among nine regional sultans. These Islamic rulers hold a powerful position. In principle they are to abide by electoral bodies' decisions, but in fact they can influence all decision-making, since in questions concerning Islam they also have veto power. So far, they have chosen a moderate position in most cases and have opposed demands for more Islamization. But they are coming increasingly under pressure from Islamic groups and parties like PAS (see below: *Trends analysis*).

Gender perspective

The Malaysian legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. Whilst it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995, it maintained a reservation to Article 16 ([Suhakam, 2016, p.3](#)), which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage. Christians from a Muslim background are particularly vulnerable, as the legal rights of Muslim women and girls are undermined by provisions that make exceptions for Sharia law, which restricts their rights in relation to marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody. According to a [December 2021 USCIRF](#) report, Malay-Muslims are particularly vulnerable.

According to [OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index, 2019](#), family law matters are governed by a combination of civil law, Islamic laws and customary laws. Under Islamic law, Muslim women need the authority of their male guardian (*wali*) to marry and whereas a husband can divorce his wife by *talaq*, she must file for divorce through the courts. Whilst there is legislation prohibiting domestic violence (the Domestic Violence Act, 1994), it fails to comprehensively define all forms of domestic violence. The Penal Code criminalizes rape, although marital rape is not considered a criminal offence. There is no publicly available data on child marriage rates, making it difficult to establish the scale of this issue in Malaysia.

The Malaysian government is also seeking to overturn a ruling by the High Court that would grant automatic citizenship to children born abroad to Malaysian mothers and foreign fathers – children born abroad to Malaysian fathers are entitled to citizenship by law (HRW 2022 country chapter).

Religious landscape

Malaysia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	3,054,000	9.2
Muslim	18,640,000	56.2
Hindu	2,090,000	6.3
Buddhist	1,777,000	5.4

Ethno-religionist	1,080,000	3.3
Jewish	100	0.0
Bahai	78,300	0.2
Atheist	39,300	0.1
Agnostic	131,000	0.4
Other	6,291,700	19.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

The [Malaysian Constitution](#) defines “Malay” as a follower of Islam. Every citizen of Malay ethnicity is, therefore, understood to be a Muslim.

The Islamization of society is increasing, although that does not necessarily mean that this is being directly transferred into the political arena as well. The elections in 2018 showed that voters were more interested in economic improvement and were disgusted with the levels of corruption within UMNO circles. However, the developments afterwards showed that the fear of Malay Muslims losing privileges continues to be an excellent platform to rally people and run politics on. In everyday life, however, there is a mindset of restricting everything seen as un-Islamic, which affects non-Muslims. One example of this mindset is the Oktoberfest, which has been held in Kuala Lumpur for many years. The religious affairs minister warned that such an event could compromise the "[safety of the community](#)", if it is open to the public (Malay Mail, 28 July 2022). At the same time, there are frequent warnings from Muslim-Malay organizations and politicians against a supposed agenda of Christianization. An [e-book](#) with the title “Exposing the Christian Agenda” was published in Malaysia in 2021 (UCA News, 4 May 2021) and as it was originally published in paper format back in 2014, one may suspect that the time seemed opportune to shore up sentiments against the Christian minority again. The text simply repeats the old accusations that Christians have a hidden missionary agenda. According to this book, which was published under the auspices of the Selangor Islamic Religious Council, Christians should never be befriended because they are "enemies of Islam who always have malicious intentions and are the bearers of lies". The Christian church is portrayed as a highly cunning and organized movement. At the same time as this e-book was published, the archbishop of Kuala Lumpur and a Christian politician were accused of "Christianization".

While there is a federal department tasked with promoting religious harmony and protecting the rights of religious minorities, a comparison of the different budgets is telling. As the US State Department states on page 14 of IRFR 2021:

- "Many faith-based organizations, however, continued to state they believed that no entity had the power and influence of those that regulated Islamic affairs, and they cited the large footprint and budget for JAKIM [the Department of Islamic Development in Malaysia] compared to the more limited funding for the Department of National Unity and Integration. The latter department’s annual budget was approximately 343 million ringgit

(\$82.16 million), while 1.5 billion ringgit (\$359.28 million) was designated for the development of Islam under JAKIM."

The department's budget increased despite the health crisis.

One point of contention for religious minorities is the question of claiming custody in divorce cases in religiously mixed marriages. In order to claim custody successfully, the partner most likely to lose custody (almost always the husband) can quickly convert to Islam and file an application with the Sharia courts, which then grant custody to the Muslim spouse. In theory the civil courts are above Sharia courts, but in practice divorce cases are frequently not decided by the civil courts but by Sharia courts (if one parent converts to Islam) since the police prefer the easier implementation of a Sharia decision. The PH government promised to find a solution to this problem but failed to deliver. Court cases on the question of custody are continuing. As the US State Department states on page 1 of IRFR 2021:

- "The relationship between sharia and civil law remains unresolved in the legal system, with state governments having responsibility for sharia law. Individuals diverging from the official interpretation of Islam continued to face adverse government action, including mandatory 'rehabilitation' in centers that taught and enforced government-approved Islamic practices."

Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI profile:

- **Gross National Income:** 27,534 USD (2017 USD PPP)
- **Rate of multidimensional poverty:** No data are available, except for an estimated 0.4% of people living below the national poverty line. This led to heated discussion in the WWL 2022 reporting period (see below: *Social and cultural landscape*)
- **Remittances:** 0.45% of the total GDP.

According to the World Bank:

- Malaysia is classified as an upper middle-income economy and is still on track to become a high income economy in 2024 despite the COVID-19 crisis.
- **GDP per capita (PPP, constant 2017 international USD):** 26,959
- **GDP per capita growth rate:** 3.1%
- **Poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP):** 0.6% (2015).

In terms of the economy, Malaysia has been known as one of the "Asian Tigers" and was a fast growing and modernizing state. It still is one of the economically and politically most stable countries in Southeast Asia, but the COVID-19 crisis stopped much of the progress and brought major challenges. The large 6.8% fall in GDP in 2020 testifies to this. However, the economic recovery seems to have started after the country weathered the pandemic comparably well. The [Finance Ministry](#) claimed Malaysia's GDP is on track to surpass pre-pandemic growth in 2022, with exceptional economic achievement during the third quarter (Q3) of 2022 (New Straits Times, 11 November 2022).

The World Bank states in its country overview:

- "Malaysia is one of the most open economies in the world with a trade to GDP ratio averaging over 130% since 2010. Openness to trade and investment has been instrumental in employment creation and income growth, with about 40% of jobs in Malaysia linked to export activities. After the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, Malaysia's economy has been on an upward trajectory, averaging growth of 5.4% since 2010, and is expected to achieve its transition from an upper middle-income economy to a high-income economy by 2024. However, the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has had a major economic impact on Malaysia, particularly on vulnerable households. Having revised its national poverty line in July 2020, 5.6% of Malaysian households are currently living in absolute poverty. The Government is focused on addressing the well-being of the poorest 40% of the population ("the bottom 40"). This low-income group remains particularly vulnerable to economic shocks as well as increases in the cost of living and mounting financial obligations."

At the same time, this development comes at a price. In its overview, the World Bank warns:

- "Income inequality in Malaysia remains high relative to other East Asian countries but is gradually declining. While income growth for the bottom 40 has outpaced the top 60 over much of the last decade, the absolute gap across income groups has increased, contributing to widespread perceptions of the poor being left behind. Following the removal of broad-based subsidies, the Government has gradually moved toward more targeted measures to support the poor and vulnerable, mainly in the form of cash transfers to low-income households."

It should be noted that Malaysia has been producing and exporting some of the most important products for dealing with COVID-19. According to a June 2020 World Bank update entitled [Malaysia Economic Monitor \(June 2020\)](#), Malaysia meets about 57% of the global demand for sterile medical gloves and about 53% of the demand for non-sterile gloves for examination. Although this only makes up 1.3% of the total pre-crisis exports (and therefore will not be enough to counter the downturn), it is an important reminder that Malaysia's products are sought after. But even this does not come without challenges and forced labor is such a major problem in the industry that the US State Department [downgraded Malaysia](#) to the lowest level in its Trafficking in Persons report, leading to immediate reviews and pledges for improvement (Channel News Asia, 5 July 2021). A year later, the [Malaysia Economic Monitor \(June 2021\)](#) showed that 64% of all companies, particularly small and medium enterprises, were hard hit by the country's (Enhanced) Movement Control Orders.

Malaysia has vast resources which include rubber and oil. Significant oil and gas reserves have been found in the waters around East Malaysia, especially Sarawak, and it remains to be seen how the revenue will be shared out. As a first step, Malaysia's state oil company Petronas agreed to give a [larger revenue share](#) to Sarawak State (Nasdaq, 6 December 2020). Sarawak is the only state with a Christian majority population. Another commodity Sarawak and Sabah States are exporting is timber, a business riddled with corruption, environmental devastation and harm to indigenous people. After Indonesia, Malaysia is the world's second largest exporter of palm oil and has been significantly challenged by European efforts to reduce and potentially ban the

commodity's use because of environmental issues. This dispute is due to be [reviewed by the World Trade Organization](#) (The Diplomat, 8 June 2021).

Malaysia has a '[political economy](#)', as one observer termed it (New Mandala, 6 March 2020). Such an economy promotes the Malay majority and, in the face of economic crisis, strongly felt by the Malay middle class as well, this policy will become even more pronounced. Religion has its place in economic thinking as well as can be seen by the use of [Islamic banking](#) as an ethno-political tool (Hideki Kitamura, Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, Volume 40, Issue 2, August 2021, pp. 245-265). This is bad news for Malaysia's ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, as it means that all the reform efforts to include minorities made by the PH government after 2018 are now brushed aside.

Another challenge to deal with, apart from the external headwinds caused by the Russia/Ukraine war, is the regionally very unequal economic growth and recovery. As the World Bank writes in its [Economic Monitor published in June 2022](#), there are Malaysian states lagging behind, such as Kedah, Perlis, Sabah and Sarawak.

The seemingly never-ending corruption scandal surrounding the 1MDB development fund (initiated by news portal Sarawak Report and a July 2015 article in the Washington Post) took on a very personal dimension. It is not just that around 700 million USD had been [transferred](#) to the prime minister's private account on behalf of the 1MDB state fund accused of corruption (Reuters, 3 July 2015), Najib Razak also managed to effectively end all domestic investigations. Nevertheless, international investigations in Switzerland and other countries continued and the now defunct PH government decided to take up the case again and within a few weeks brought a case together against Najib Razak and his wife. Valuables worth approximately [273 million USD](#) were found at various properties belonging to Razak, when they were searched for evidence in June 2018 (OCCRP, 28 June 2018). Najib Razak was found guilty of all seven charges in the so called SRC trial, on 28 July 2020. This court case was widely seen as a (high level) litmus test of how seriously Malaysia is fighting corruption. The political fallout is still unfolding, with UMNO thoroughly reduced in numbers in the last elections. Progress has been delayed by the COVID-19 crisis, which slowed down the court system considerably. A harbinger of things to come could be a court ruling that ordered the government to [return the properties](#) seized in June 2018, as the government could not prove they were purchased with illegal money (Benar News, 8 November 2021). The High Court hearing Najib Razak's 1MDB trial was told that an individual known as "Prince Saud Abdulaziz Al-Saud" wanted to give the former prime minister a sum of US\$800 million in 2013 to [promote moderate Islam](#) (Free Malaysia Today, 3 October 2022).

Gender perspective

Women are, in general, more economically vulnerable than men. Whilst Malaysia has achieved gender parity in regard to education access, men remain the primary breadwinners; 55.7% of women are in the labor force, compared to 77.1% of men ([UNDP](#), 2020, p. 362). Many women and girls are regularly deprived of their inheritance rights too. This occurs typically after the demise of their parents and when the Sharia law is neglected at the individual/family level ([Hague et al, 2020](#)). Under Sharia rules of inheritance, daughters inherit half that of a son ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP's HDI profile and the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Bumiputera 62.5% (Malays and indigenous peoples, including Orang Asli, Dayak, Anak Negeri), Chinese 20.6%, Indian 6.2%, other 0.9%, non-citizens 9.8% (2019 est.)
- **Main languages:** Bahasa Malaysia (official), English, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow), Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Panjabi, Thai
- **Urbanization rate:** 78.2%
- **Literacy rate:** 95% (of all adults age 15 and higher)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 10.4 years
- **Health and education indicators:** Malaysia has 15.4 physicians and 19 hospital beds per 10,000 people, the pupil teacher ratio in elementary school is 12:1. The rate of child malnutrition and stunting (% under the age of 5) is 20.7%, a rate surprising for such a high developed country.

In 1969, the country lived through serious ethnic clashes against the Chinese minority, which are still vividly remembered. Most ethnic Malays are Muslim and - together with the indigenous people (who often lack education and live in East Malaysia) - they benefit from the government's "affirmative action policy" which gives ethnic Malay advantages in decisions concerning quotas, grants, loans and tax benefits. Indigenous people are also found in Peninsula Malaysia where they are known as Orang Asli.

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Population/Age:** 23.4% of the population are 14 years old or younger, 7.4% are 65 or above
- **Education:** the completion rate of primary school students is 104.9%
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 4.6%; the rate of vulnerable employment is 23.8% (2019; modeled ILO estimate)
- **IDPs/Refugees:** According to the UN's [IOM](#), drawing on numbers from the Ministry of Home Affairs, as of 2021 Malaysia is the largest target country for working migrants in Southeast Asia, drawing between 1.4 and 2 million registered (and an estimated 1.2 to 3.5 million unregistered) migrant workers to the country, mainly from South and Southeast Asia, but also from the Middle East and Africa. Additionally, there are more than 180,000 refugees registered with the UNHCR, 86% from Myanmar.

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.810, Malaysia ranks 62nd of 189 countries, in the range of "Very high human development". The country's progress has been impressive, but has slowed down in recent years and has stagnated at a high level.
- **Life expectancy:** The life expectancy is 76.2 years.
- **Median age:** 30.3
- **GINI coefficient:** 41.0
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.253, Malaysia ranks 59th of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index

- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 3.3%, the vulnerable employment rate is 21.8%, youth (between 15 and 24) not in employment or school are 12.1%
- **Poverty:** The statistics surrounding the issue of poverty in Malaysia are a matter of debate. There was a [dispute](#) in August 2019 when the UN Special Rapporteur stated that the poverty level was closer to 16-20% rather than 0.4% as claimed by the government (Benar News, 23 August 2019). Almost a year after that, the (outgoing) Special Rapporteur [re-emphasized](#) his criticism by stating that, according to revised government figures, a family of four would still need to survive on 8 USD a day, which is virtually impossible, especially in the cities (Benar News, 6 July 2020). This serves as a reminder how much statistics depend upon definitions and can be easily politicized. In reaction to this, the government [adapted](#) its criteria (and thus raised the poverty rate from 0.4% to 5.6%) shortly afterwards (Malay Mail, 11 July 2020). For 2020, and under the influence of the COVID-19 crisis, the government announced that the [rate had increased](#) to 8.4% (Free Malaysia Today, 17 June 2021).

It should also be noted that parts of the COVID-19 support and recovery programs to alleviate poverty consisted of allowing people to [withdraw money](#) from their Employee's Providence fund. Millions did so and all in all more than 24 billion USD were withdrawn, meaning that the problem has simply been shifted to the future, when citizens reach retirement age (Channel News Asia, 17 February 2022).

If anything, COVID-19 increased the level of poverty. It should also be noted that poverty is more concentrated in the indigenous regions of East Malaysia than on the Peninsula, although the economic downturn is strongly felt there as well.

It is not surprising that Malaysia has the third-highest GINI coefficient (measuring the inequality of income) after the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, according to World Bank data. There is also a surprisingly high rate of malnourished and stunted children. By far the majority of them are ethnic *Bumiputera* living in East Malaysia.

The World Bank country overview concludes:

- "To fully realize its human potential and fulfil the country's aspiration of achieving the high-income and developed country status, Malaysia will need to advance further in education, health and nutrition, and social protection outcomes. Key priority areas include enhancing the quality of schooling to improve learning outcomes, rethinking nutritional interventions to reduce childhood stunting, and providing adequate social welfare protection for household investments in human capital formation."

In maybe one of the best illustrations of what the COVID-19 crisis and lockdowns have done to many people, a social media [movement](#) started in June 2021, called "Raising the White Flag" (Channel News Asia, 4 July 2021). It proposed that people in need should put a white flag in a visible place where they live and called upon others to help those people. Subsequently, hundreds and thousands of flags were raised and countless stories of lost jobs, depleted savings and shortcomings of official help emerged. While this movement has been criticized by government politicians as being politicized and bad practice, it seems to have been initiated by

civil society and had nothing to do with political parties or the opposition. In terms of COVID-19, Malaysia was one of the [hardest hit countries](#) in Southeast Asia (CNBC, 9 August 2021), despite its strict counter-measures.

Although the state is secular per definition, Islam has a strong influence on everyday life. Malaysia's legal system and its political institutions are strongly influenced by Islam and this influence is growing, much to the disadvantage of the large non-Muslim minority. The nobility are Muslim and are expected to take up the role of protecting Islam. They have had a moderating influence against radical Islamic voices and have defended the country's multi-ethnicity and religiosity. All Malay children in state-run nurseries are required to attend Islamic education. In state schools, only Muslim pupils are required to attend Islamic classes. But even for "neutral" subjects the influence of Islam is strongly felt. For example, the history lessons in Year 11 (Secondary school form 4) are mainly about Islamic history, which takes up 80% of the syllabus. At the university level, there is a compulsory subject for all students called "Islamic and Asian Civilization" which is felt by many to be a government instrument for furthering Islamization.

Gender perspective

Within Malaysia's patriarchal society, men and women are expected to assume traditional gender roles. Under civil and Sharia laws, a husband is legally bound to maintain his wife and lead the household. Women on the other hand are expected to assume responsibility for child-raising and domestic duties ([OECD, 2019](#)). Temporarily altering traditional duties, only men were initially allowed to do the shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, as the 'head of the household' ([BBC News, 26 March 2020](#)). Also making headlines, Malaysia's government came under criticism for circulating posters asking for women to help in the crisis by 'not nagging their husbands' ([NPR, 1 April 2020](#)). These examples exemplify the lower status of women in Malaysian society. Most concerning, the COVID-19 measures have also been linked to an increase in domestic violence levels ([Center for Global Development, 12 April 2021](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 93.8% penetration - survey date: January 2022
According to [Statista](#) (5 October 2022), there is a small gender gap in relation to Internet access. As of August 2020, 45.7% of users were female compared to 54.3% male users.
- **Facebook usage:** 93.8% penetration – survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 135

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report:

- "Internet freedom remained restricted in Malaysia during the coverage period. Though there are few formalized restraints on online media outlets, the government blocks websites and orders content removed over political or religious sensitivities. Criminal prosecutions and investigations for social media posts and other forms of online expres-

- sion also continued to pose threats to internet freedom. Users, particularly those from the LGBT+ community, continue to face online and offline harassment for their online posts."
- "There were no reported cases of government-imposed restrictions on internet access during this coverage period. The last major reported incident of authorities restricting access occurred in 2012. However, a partly state-owned company continues to dominate the network infrastructure."
- Malaysia is rated as "partly free" and saw an improvement of one point compared to the preceding reporting period. According to government statistics, quoted by Freedom House in its 2022 report, the Internet Penetration Rate and average connection speeds continued to increase during the coverage period. According to the Department of Statistics, household internet access increased from 91.7 percent in 2020 to 95.5 percent in 2021. - with the rate in Sabah and Sarawak standing at only 43.3% and 51.8% respectively (2017). In general, 70% of all Internet users in Malaysia are living in urban areas.
- As an illustration of this situation, Freedom House gave an example: "COVID-19 highlighted the issue of affordability and accessibility of electronic devices to access the internet. Students in rural areas have reported that poor internet access affected their studies. In February 2022, a student in Sarawak trekked for two hours to attend his online university interview due to poor internet speed in his community."

Apart from the wide gap between East and West Malaysia, which is also an issue in many other aspects of economic and social life, the urban-rural gap has to be kept in mind, too. Especially in the east, there are remote areas with vast stretches of land and little infrastructure, but even in West Malaysia remote areas can also be found. As many Christians are living in East Malaysia, particularly in the state of Sarawak, their access to the Internet can be more limited or it may simply not be available at all. As an illustration, the story of an 18 year-old [high school student](#) in Sabah went viral: She climbed a tree to have better internet connection for taking an exam in 2020 (Soya Cincau, 25 July 2020).

Malaysiakini, one of the largest online news providers in Malaysia, has been [fined](#) for contempt of court over readers' comments (Malay Mail, 19 February 2021). The fine was paid by supporters via crowdfunding in less than a day. The anti-fake news act was accompanied by a state-run fact checking website; research has shown that this website has not been used to spread propaganda, as had been feared (Schuldt, "[Official Truths in a war on fake news: government fact-checking in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand](#)", Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, Volume 40, Issue 2, August 2021, pp. 340-371).

Security situation

Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines: Weak monitoring from any one country has the potential to endanger all three countries

The grenade attack on a café in the State of Selangor in June 2016 has been the only successful attack by violent Islamic militants in the country so far. It showed the very real danger of the Islamic State group (IS) making inroads into Malaysia. Already in 2016, the country announced

that it would take up joint patrols with Indonesia and the Philippines to counter the threat of Islamic militancy in the tri-border island region. The capture of the city of Marawi/Philippines by radical Islamic militants in May 2017, and the fact that Islamic militants were able to hold it for five months, shows the very real danger as well as the urgent need for cooperation in this region. As the whole region consists of islands and law enforcement often lacks local knowledge, it is hard to monitor the triangle between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines and reportedly, IS stepped up [recruiting](#) there (Benar News, 23 September 2020). Weak monitoring from any one country has the potential to endanger all three countries. What may be complicating the situation is that the Philippines and Malaysia have now taken their [dispute over Sabah](#) in East Malaysia (on the island of Borneo) to the United Nations, even though the row may have been initiated for domestic political reasons in the first place (Benar News, 3 September 2020). This dispute took a surprising turn in the reporting period, when heirs of the Sultan of Sulu (in the Philippines) managed to get an [arbitration award](#) of around 14 billion USD from a French court and tried to arrest assets held by state-owned oil company Petronas in Luxemburg (The Diplomat, 29 July 2022). Although the Philippines is not involved in the legal proceedings, this award has the potential to turn into another headache for the government (see Murray Hunter's Blog, 27 July 2022, for a [legal analysis](#) by the former Malaysian AG Tommy Thomas) and may even become a security risk.

The most concrete threat comes from the Abu Sayyaf group

After the successful attack against the cathedral in Makassar in March 2021 in Indonesia, IS called [Malaysian and Indonesian supporters](#) to carry out further attacks (Malay Mail, 31 March 2021). Given the close monitoring by security services, executing such plans is, however, far from easy. By far most concrete threat comes from the Abu Sayyaf group, which has its main base in the Philippines, but continues to kidnap ship crews in the waters between the three countries and off the coast of Sabah. In May 2021, the Malaysian police killed [five members](#) of Abu Sayyaf in a raid in Sabah (Reuters, 18 May 2021). Although Christians do not have a history of being specifically targeted, this could happen, given the ideology IS is aggressively promoting.

Malaysia's security situation remains complex and involves a variety of actors. For a comprehensive overview see: [Murray Hunter Blog](#), 23 March 2022.

Gender perspective

In a [2018 report](#), the CEDAW concluded that whilst Malaysia had introduced positive policies to improve women's safety, several gaps remained. The report highlighted trafficking as a particular issue of concern, noting that it is 'a destination country for trafficking of women and girls, including asylum-seeking and refugee women and girls, for purposes of sexual exploitation, begging, forced labor or forced marriage.' ([CEDAW, 2018, p.18](#)). The 2022 Trafficking in Persons report revealed that traffickers target vulnerable women and young girls primarily from Southeast Asia — more recently from West Africa — and smuggle them into the country by the agency of corrupt government and immigration officials who profit from bribes and extortionary means ([United States Department of State](#), 2022).

Trends analysis

1) Muslim Malay-centric politics are here to stay

According to a report by East Asia Forum, a survey carried out in recent years showed that 84.3% of Malaysians feel that the relationship between the government and people is similar to that between a parent and a child. It is therefore by no means certain that Malay citizens want to vote for a growing openness instead of paternalism. However, a more recent survey has shown that 51% of respondents were [undecided](#) about who to vote for in a future federal election (East Asia Forum, 3 June 2021), which reflects feelings of insecurity and disenfranchisement. At the same time, the desire to be protected and safe is still strong. The Malay middle class has been particularly affected by the COVID crisis and the economic fallout. One observer even said that the middle class in Malaysia had [collapsed](#), despite its privileged position in the New Economic Policy (The Diplomat, 1 August 2021).

The state elections which took place in the WWL 2023 reporting period (In Malacca, Sarawak and Johor) brought easy victories for the ruling UMNO and parties allied with it and a crushing defeat for parties from the old Pakatan Harapan coalition. The outcome of the national elections in November 2022 tell a different story, but even so, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim [reassured](#) the public that he will be upholding Islam as the religion of the federation and protect Malay and Bumiputera rights as enshrined in the Federal Constitution. He also pledged to safeguard the rights of Malaysians, regardless of race or religion (Free Malaysia Today, 24 November 2022). With Zahid becoming the deputy PM, Malay-centric politics is here to stay as he champions for Malays under UMNO's wings.

2) The Islamic influence is growing

One outcome of the November 2022 elections is particularly clear: The influence of political Islam is here to stay and it is growing. At the same time, there are conflicts within the Islamist movement which show that it is far from united. While PAS can be said to be [influenced](#) by the Muslim Brotherhood, there are other groups and persons (including muftis) at state level, who are influenced by the Wahhabi-Salafi ideology (Murray Hunter Blog, 4 September 2022). The fact that the PAS Ulama council challenged a decision by the Sultan of Selangor about whether it was permitted to attend a festival organized by the Japanese community in Malaysia, shows that PAS is willing to challenge the [constitutional foundations](#) of Malaysia to enforce their understanding of Islam (Eurasia Review, 14 June 2022).

From the perspective of the ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, this is a critical time. The window of opportunity for real changes for the benefit of all is closing fast and several chances have already been squandered. Whether within the limits of a coalition or outside, PAS influence can be seen to be growing, as it is the largest single party and also governs several states. Just before the November 2022 elections, ex-PM and PN chairman Muhyiddin warned that Jews and Christians in Malaysia were working together with Pakatan Harapan (PH) to "[Christianize](#)" Malaysia. Many parties slammed him for this claim and demanded action to be taken against him (The Star, 19 November 2022). Nevertheless, his claims reflect a widespread popular mindset.

3) Making sense of the November 2022 elections

The outcome of the November 2022 elections came as a surprise and ended many political careers rather unceremoniously (e.g. that of former PM Mahathir Mohamad). It seems that two factors strongly influenced the vote: Najib Razak's lost appeal and his subsequent imprisonment showed voters that the judicial system is functioning and corruption can be dealt with. The various ongoing corruption charges within UMNO certainly did not help. Another factor was that for the first time, the voting age was lowered to 18, so young people had their say. While this did not translate into the political parties all vying to appeal to them for gaining votes, it proved to give little support to UMNO. If the elections and the hung parliament resulting from it shows one thing, it is that voters were fed up with the status quo, but seem not to have realized yet that they need to be united when they aim to achieve real change. If they remain divided along racial and religious lines (as taught by political parties, leaders and society in general), they will not. With PAS being the largest party in parliament, this may be [the most likely path](#) for Malaysian politics (The Interpreter, 1 December 2022).

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WWL 2023: Church information / Malaysia

Christian origins

Nestorians and Persian traders introduced Christianity to the Malacca islands in the 7th century but Christianity only began to spread with the arrival of Portuguese Catholic missionaries in 1511. The British took over Malacca in 1795 and the London Missionary Society was based there from 1815 onwards. Churches were established mainly to serve British expatriates. By silent agreement between the British authorities and the ruling sultan, missionary work among Muslims was not allowed. Hence, mission work concentrated on animistic tribes. Due to a change in policy by the government, most missionaries had to leave the country by the late 1970s, but the Church continued to grow in numbers - especially in East Malaysia.

Church spectrum today

Malaysia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	4,700	0.2
Catholic	1,537,000	50.3
Protestant	1,209,000	39.6
Independent	241,000	7.9
Unaffiliated	87,600	2.9
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-24,900	-0.8
Total	3,054,400	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	650,000	21.3
Renewalist movement	663,000	21.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

To better understand Christianity in Malaysia, an additional explanation is required at this point. For Malaysia, it can be helpful to make distinctions according to geographical distribution and origin. The majority of Christians come from a *Bumiputra* background, which literally means "sons of the soil", meaning that they belong to the country and come from the indigenous tribal population. From the government's perspective, they qualify for "affirmative action" benefits such as subsidized housing, scholarships etc., but in practice this only applies as long as the *Bumiputra* are not Christians. If they become Christians, their privileges are quickly withdrawn. Non-Bumiputra Christians come mainly from the Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities and are divided up into a plethora of different Christian denominations, ranging in size from small house-churches to mega-churches.

The geographical distribution is important as well. Most *Bumiputra* Christians reside in the states of Sabah and Sarawak; the latter still has a Christian majority. These states make up East Malaysia and are situated on the island of Borneo (which is shared with Brunei and Indonesia). To complicate the situation, many *Bumiputra* are migrating to West Malaysia for educational or economic reasons where it is especially hard for them to stay true to their Christian faith.

Converts from a Muslim-Malay background complete the picture of the Malaysian Church. These Christians face a high level of persecution as they have not only left their Islamic faith; their conversion is seen as acting against their very ethnicity and nation as well.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no hotspots of persecution for Christians in Malaysia. However, the Islamic missionary work among Christians (*dawah*) - especially among the *Bumiputra* - focuses on communities in East Malaysia, but is not limited to that region as a [report](#) from the Western Malaysian state of Pahang shows (Cilisos, 10 May 2021). State-supported plans for conversion to Islam have been published. Helped by the number of migrating Muslims, the religious affiliation in Sabah State already ceased to be Christian-majority several years ago, and Sarawak is now only a Christian majority state on paper.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: There are many nationalities who have their own Christian fellowships and are self-supporting (e.g. Korean and Japanese churches). They struggle to obtain legal status at times, but are basically free to live their faith as long as they stay within their walls. Nepalese and Vietnamese Christians in most cases join the Historical Christian communities. Hence, communities of expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated and are not considered for the purposes of the WWL.

Historical Christian communities: Examples are churches belonging to Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans and the Protestant Church in Sabah. These are all less affected by persecution than Non-traditional Christian communities or converts, but they do suffer from discrimination and *dawah* efforts to convert them to Islam.

Converts to Christianity: By law, In Malaysia, apostasy is punishable by death. Malaysia is one out of only 11 countries in the world to have apostasy technically punishable by death, although this has not been implemented. Depending on where they are in the country, Christian converts from a Muslim background are able to meet. But all are facing opposition to varying degrees, namely from family, friends, neighbors and the authorities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Examples are Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations, Assemblies of God, Salvation Army, Sabah Injil Borneo and others. They often face monitoring, discrimination, intimidation and harassment.

External Links - Church information

- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: report - <https://cilisos.my/are-malaysias-orang-asli-being-pressured-to-convert-to-islam-we-investigate/>

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Malaysia

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Malaysia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	43
WWL 2022	63	50
WWL 2021	63	46
WWL 2020	62	40
WWL 2019	60	42

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

Both the score for average pressure and violence rose in the WWL 2023 reporting period. The strongest increase in pressure was in the *National and Church spheres*. This was due to reported cases of Christian NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) being discriminated against and of churches being hindered in establishing schools. Christians continued to be marginalized and disadvantaged by a Malay-first policy and this does not seem likely to change in the foreseeable future. The violence score is at a fairly high level (3.9 points).

Persecution engines

Malaysia: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Medium
Clan oppression	CO	Very weak
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	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

Islamic oppression (Strong), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Medium)

For a long time, Malaysia carried the image of probably being the world's best role model for a liberal and tolerant Islamic country. However, this image has been fading over the last years. One example of this can be seen in the government's continued attempt to introduce Sharia penal law (hudud) in the state of Kelantan. The conservative Muslim PAS party in power in Kelantan immediately called for Sharia penal law after the elections in May 2018 and also took over power in Terengganu. It also emerged as the strongest single party from the November 2022 general election.

According to the Constitution, Sharia law is not on an equal footing with civil law, but in practice this regulation is not so clear. This can especially be seen in cases of divorce and custody: Civil courts frequently decide in favor of the child's non-Muslim mother, which is why fathers sometimes decide to convert to Islam. The claim for custody can then be brought before Sharia courts, who will grant custody to the Muslim father. The police prefer to implement the latter's decisions as this causes less trouble for them. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, the Federal Court decided that Sharia courts do not have the right to legal reviews (see above: Positive developments). Consequently, Sharia lawyers began to push for a [change](#) in the Constitution (Malay Mail, 21 February 2022).

The ban on using the standard vocabulary "Allah" for God in Bahasa Malay, implemented against a Catholic newspaper, which was sanctioned by the High Court in January 2015, is being followed by more court cases, e.g. in the state of Sabah. This case is [highly sensitive](#) and political (Ecumenical News, 16 June 2020); as a result - a court decision is still pending .

Politics and society are driven by one particular ethnic impulse, namely the preservation and superiority of the Malay ethnic group. While the Persecution engine *Ethno-religious hostility* is clearly blended with and dominated by religious motives, as every Malay has to be a Muslim, it has to be mentioned since it clearly plays out in the missionary *dawah* movement which has been offering poverty-stricken native communities in East Malaysia lucrative incentives and benefits if they convert to Islam.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

Although Dictatorial paranoia is certainly only a subsidiary Persecution engine in Malaysia, it is relevant for understanding the country’s situation. UMNO managed to translate its defeat in the November 2022 elections into being part of a coalition government and will try to regain old strength, so *Dictatorial paranoia* will remain a constant companion of Malaysian politics. UMNO and others chose to re-emphasize its policy of preferential treatment for Malay people (instead of following a policy of equality) and has increasingly played religious and racial cards.

Drivers of persecution

Malaysia: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG		MEDIUM					STRONG	
Government officials	Strong		Strong					Strong	
Ethnic group leaders	Strong		Medium					Weak	
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong		Medium						
Ideological pressure groups	Medium		Medium					Weak	
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak								
One's own (extended) family	Strong		Strong						
Political parties	Strong		Strong					Strong	

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression (Strong), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Medium)

- **Non-Christian religious and ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Various Muslim NGOs see themselves as “champions of Islam” and have enjoyed government support. At times they stir up racial disharmony and religious discrimination with their statements and actions. They keep reminding citizens that being a Malay means being a Muslim and sometimes warn against alleged Christian mission and conversion efforts. At the same time, leaders of ethnic minority groups (such as the Iban, among others) can compromise their rights for the sake of getting material benefits, and ethnic majority group leaders will emphasize and strengthen their group's domination as much as possible.

- **Extended family (Strong):** For converts, family members continue to be the strongest drivers of persecution, as leaving their original faith is seen as a disgrace, putting them outside the ethnic and religious community. Social pressure on the family to bring the convert back into the fold is also high. This can also mean handing the converts over to the authorities for ideological treatment.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The Constitution prohibits Malays from converting to other religions and limits the propagation of non-Muslim religions. Government officials hence strive to maintain and increase Islamic standards, to the detriment of non-Muslim minorities. The government announced to keep up the preferential treatment of the Malay and Bumiputera population. The economic challenges Malaysia is facing will serve as another incentive to benefit Malays first.
- **Political parties (Strong):** One of the main points on the agenda of political parties like UMNO and PAS is to uphold and protect Islam and the dominance of the ethnic Malay group. It was PAS, for example, who proposed the introduction of Hudud Law in Kelantan. They also announced efforts to harmonize Shariah law with civil law under the Act 355. UMNO and PAS are sowing discord and hatred towards Christians and are using religion to rally support from the Malays.
- **Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** Most pressure groups focus on preserving the ethnic dominance of the Malay people. But Islamic groups like ISMA are very active in calling for the protection of Islam as well, for instance in protecting a once [converted child](#) from an inter-religious marriage (ISMA, 2 August 2022).

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

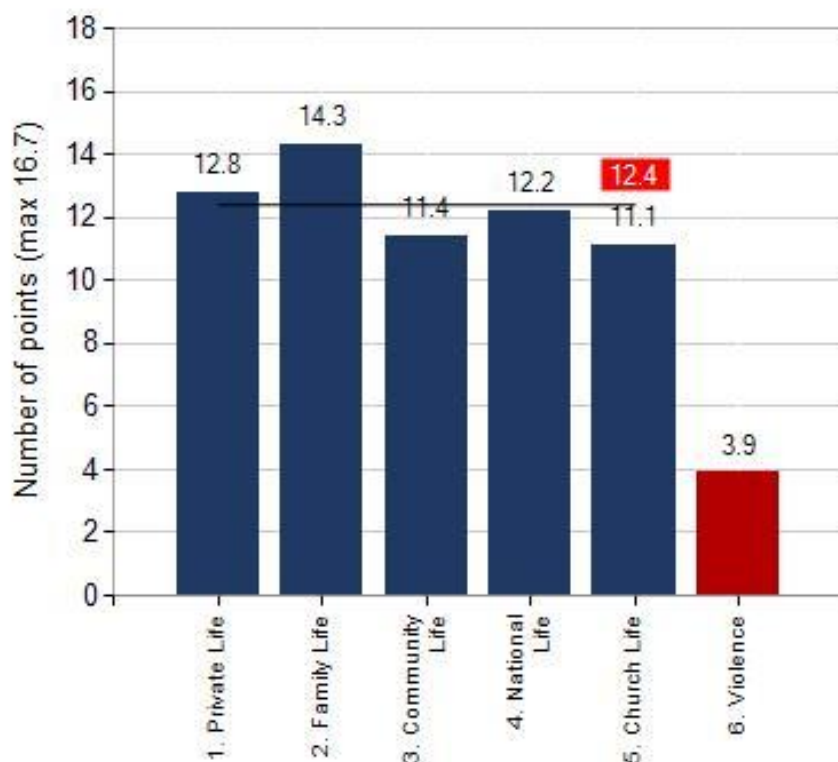
- **Government officials (Medium):** The Islamist party PAS holds a majority in three states in Malaysia and is back in the federal government after more than four decades. Additionally, civil servants in the administration do not change their thinking quickly. This is especially true for the administration of religious affairs.
- **Political parties (Strong):** What has been stated above for drivers of *Islamic oppression* is applicable here as well.

The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Malaysia shows (see chart below):

- The average pressure on Christians in Malaysia increased from 12.0 points in WWL 2022 to 12.4 points in WWL 2023. (The average was 12.2 points in WWL 2021).
- Pressure is extremely high and strongest in the *Family sphere of life*. Next highest pressure occurs in the *Private and National spheres of life*. The pressure in the *Family, Community and Private spheres* points to problems faced by converts from Islam and other religions, driven as well by the country's Islamization policy. Pressure resulting from the persecution engine *Islamic oppression* is present in all spheres. Conservative Islamic groups and parties have increased in strength and influence in Malaysia.
- The score for violence against Christians was 3.9 points, higher than in WWL 2022 (3.3 points). Apart from the abduction of certain Christians in recent years, persecution has rarely been violent in Malaysia.

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Malaysia



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. (3.50 points)

By law, Malay Muslims are not allowed to convert from Islam in any state except Sarawak, but even here, the process is long and tedious. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) wants the penalty for apostasy to be death at the federal law level, but so far those efforts have not succeeded. Penalties differ by states, but in Perak, Melaka, Sabah and Pahang, apostasy is a criminal offense punishable by fine and imprisonment. A court ruled that apostasy cases can only be heard by Sharia courts, not civil courts, adding to the almost impossible situation converts find themselves in.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.50 points)

Converts have faced abuse and pressure to renounce Christianity after families found their Bibles and other Christian materials. Most of them have been ostracized and driven out of their homes. Even reading the Bible or other Christian materials in digital form comes at a risk and converts have to ensure that they are truly alone and their homes or surroundings are free from anyone watching. Some converts reported that Bibles can be used as evidence of apostasy or blasphemy.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)

As a country expert explained: "Converts reported that this is considered very risky and dangerous. They prefer to use pseudo identities if they have to, but most would not even risk that. They are hyper-vigilant when it comes to leaving any trace or trails of written or published posts on Christianity. The reason behind that is that such behavior easily fulfils the Sedition Act which prohibits the sharing of sensitive topics on race and religion, mainly Islam." There are other repercussions if a convert reveals his/her faith in a blog or on Facebook as well: The family is usually the first to act by cutting all family ties. Sometimes religious officials take the convert away for relocation and re-education. Therefore converts exert a high level of self-restriction and if they dare to share about their new faith, they use another account with a different name in social media.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

As no Malay is allowed to leave Islam, every discussion about faith is fraught with the risk of being perceived as proselytizing. It is also possible that Christians - or atheists - are accused of "insulting Islam" because of such a topic. While Article 11 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia states that every individual has the right to profess, practice and preach his religion or belief, Article 11(4) of the Federal Constitution also states that the propagation of non-Islamic religions among Muslims is forbidden. Therefore, sharing faith with a Muslim is considered illegal and punishable by law. For converts, discussions about faith come naturally with a much higher risk, as they can lead to one's conversion being discovered.

Block 1 - Additional information

Christians from a Muslim background cannot attend any public church activities (except in East Malaysia, although even there it is not without risk. A rule of thumb is: The more rural the village, the higher the risk). If they do, they risk being caught by the authorities and the church attended will face serious consequences for welcoming them. Therefore, converts gather secretly in homes for all their Christian activities, away from the prying eyes of government, community and the registered churches. Even attending online meetings is not without certain risks.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.75 points)

As the registration department also issues death certificates, burials are a problem for converts and also for many Christians from the indigenous people (see below: 2.1). If records show that the person who died is registered as Muslim, the authorities will inform the Islamic religious authority. If the burial rites are not celebrated according to Islam, this Islamic authority has the right to take the body away from the non-Muslim family so that they can perform Islamic rites for the deceased.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)

It is very common for state high schools to teach compulsory subjects such as 'Tamadun Islam' (Islamic civilization), 'Sejarah Islam' (History of Islam) and 'Sastera Melayu' (Malay literature). For example, the history lessons in Year 11 (Secondary school form 4) are mainly about Islamic history and take up 80% of the syllabus. Non-Muslim children must take these subjects since attendance is compulsory. The content of these lessons led one educator to call for teaching an [undistorted version](#) of history (Free Malaysia Today, 14 April 2021). It is also common for children of the indigenous tribes in Malaysia (Orang Asli) to be pressured into attending religious/Arabic classes.

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

Children of converts have to attend Islamic education in schools and there are reports that Christian children are put under pressure to convert to Islam in an effort to bolster *dawah*. Sometimes, parents who have converted to Christianity have to take their children out of school as they may unintentionally talk about their parents' faith. Children of Christians are frequently harassed and discriminated against because of their parents' faith. Derogatory comments by peers are common and even teachers have shamed Christian students for what is often a mix of religious and ethnic reasons. One country expert shared: "Everyone has to attend Islamic seminars and take exams for Islamic studies. If you fail the Islamic exams, that's something which is frowned upon. You have to wear a headscarf to school, you have to go for prayers - it's all mandatory especially in government schools." This is not only true for converts, it has been reported that this kind of pressure was put on indigenous children of Christian faith and on Iban Christians as well.

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)

According to the current law, children born to couples where one parent is a Muslim (either by birth or conversion) are automatically registered as Muslims. Since converts cannot officially change their religion to Christianity, their children will be registered as Muslims. The problem surrounding registering children is an ongoing problem for *Bumiputras* (Malays and indigenous

people). As for the law concerning the unilateral conversion of children, the Federal Court has now ruled that it is unlawful, and therefore both parents' consent are needed for the conversion of children. The official practice is that the religion of the child is registered in the Birth Certificate, MyKID (identity card below 12 years old), and MyKAD (identity card 12 years old and above). However, there are cases of malpractice where the registrar has put the child's religion as Islam - especially for Orang Asli (indigenous population). Natives in Sabah and Sarawak have the affixes 'bin' (son of) or 'binti' (daughter of) in their names even though they are not Muslims, which leads officers to believe they are Muslims and put Islam as their religion in the MyKADs (Identity Card). The National Human Rights Commission SUHAKAM has officially complained about this practice of '[forced conversion](#)' in Sarawak (MalayMail, 21 January 2021), but so far their complaints have been ignored.

This has also been one of the problems the Bumiputra Christians have been facing. However, some of them do not bother to 'fight' over it as the process is long and arduous with very few successful results. With a growing number being converted to Islam, either willfully or through deceit, the parents' children will automatically follow the 'new' religious identity, which is Islam. As the 'religion' is not shown in the physical identity card but in the digital information accessed only via card reader, it is easy for the government to register children of indigenous people groups and native/tribal groups under Islam without the parents knowing it or checking it.

Block 2 - Additional information

Malaysia seems to be the only country in the world where religious conversion changes ethnicity as well. There are reported cases where children of converted natives suddenly 'professed' to be Muslim Malays when their real ethnicity was Iban. When asked why they answered that way, they said: "Because our (Muslim) teachers told us so!" Some Christians from indigenous tribes, especially in Sabah, are converted to Islam by trickery. To accept financial help from the government, some of them handed in their identity card and signed a form not knowing that this was a declaration to convert to Islam. When they got their card back, they realized that their religion has been changed to Islam. When they tried to reverse this, they were told by the Federal Registration Department that their religious status can only be changed if approval is given by the Sharia courts, which is impossible to obtain.

The challenge of registration reaches into the next generation. Often, converts do not want to register their children's births as they will automatically be entered as Muslim. So, most children of converts are unregistered and grow up without enjoying privileges such as access to public education, which depend on registration. However, if converts decide to have their children registered, they have to be registered as Muslims.

Christians with a Muslim background can also be forced to divorce (if married) and lose their inheritance rights, once discovered. Organizing a baptism, Christian wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible. Converts can be kept isolated by their families, or expelled from the family home, or even sent to Islamic purification (i.e. re-education) camps, although this rarely happens. There has been a report that such camps have been re-named and function or double as Islamic schools.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 points)

This pressure is acute for the indigenous people in East Malaysia, but also affects the [Orang Asli](#) in West Malaysia (Cilisos, 10 May 2021). The state-driven and financed Muslim missionary activity (*dawah*) often uses the economic and social difficulties experienced by Christian and animist natives to entice them to convert to Islam with financial benefits. Friends often persuade them to speak the Islamic meal prayers and invite them to celebrate Muslim festivals. Such and even stronger pressure is exerted against Christian converts from a Muslim background, as they face stints in re-education camps. Converts from other religious backgrounds can face physical abuse, depending on the family.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.75 points)

What one country expert called the "racial micro-aggression in the Malaysian School System" has continued and is inextricably linked with religious motives. For non-Malay students, access to several universities is limited. Public universities are still adopting the quota system whereby *Bumiputra* students (Malays and indigenous people) have a higher quota while non-Bumiputra students have less access to courses at state universities. This applies to state universities' intake and government scholarships. In order to qualify for higher education and scholarships, Christians - as non-Malay in general - need to overcome far higher hurdles than Muslims due to the "affirmative action policy" in favor of Malays. There were also reports that non-Malays and non-Muslims converted to Islam, just to get their student loans, which were then approved without further background checks.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

There has always been discrimination against non-Malays and preference for Malays in public employment, even though on paper the preferential policy applies to *Bumiputra* as well. As for private businesses (for example owned by Chinese Christians, but also in general to all non-Malay business owners), to get government contracts it is required by law that the owners must have *Bumiputra* partners. To get round this, some companies are known to have 'Bumiputra partners' on paper only. On the other hand, there are private businesses with a "Muslim only" hiring policy.

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.25 points)

Converts always have to be cautious in their activities and are "always on the lookout", as one convert said - especially concerning the people they visit or receive into their homes. They are watched by neighbors and can be easily reported to the village authorities who will question them. Churches, like other religious entities, are being monitored by the Special Branch of the

police. Even online meetings are monitored, which is done less noticeably. Aside from the state authorities and local Muslim communities, Malay Islamic rights groups (e.g. Perkasa and ISMA) are known to monitor Christian activities.

Block 3 - Additional information

In remote areas in Sabah and Sarawak, Malay communities have access to water and electricity, but some native communities known to be Christian are denied such access. Although in general, indigenous and Orang Asli communities are deliberately neglected (for example, they have less access to infrastructure), being a Christian among such communities makes them even more prone to discrimination. Converts face strong pressure from family, friends and neighbors to recant their Christian faith. Christians in Malaysia are often harassed and threatened for faith-related reasons. The discrimination often takes places because of dress codes. In states like Kelantan, ruled by the PAS, there have been raids focusing on the proper Islamic dress for women. This puts pressure on Christians as well. One country expert explained the background: "Although wearing a headscarf is not mandatory, the hijab issue has always been around. There is tremendous pressure on Malay and Muslim women to wear the hijab for fear of being deemed less devout, un-Islamic or showing apostasy tendencies. Muslim men and media have been reported to scorn and ridicule Muslim women who do not wear the hijab."

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

Officials refuse to recognize an individual's right to convert, especially when it is stated in the documents that they are Muslim, be they Malay or non-Malay. Muslims desiring to renounce Islam have to go through a long and painful legal process, and are often charged with apostasy. It is virtually impossible for ethnic Malays to legally convert to Christian faith, since even the Constitution stands against it. In general, the religion entered on the identity card is taken as authoritative and it is an uphill battle to have it removed should someone wish to leave Islam. As a result, many *Bumiputra* are wrongly categorized as Muslims on their ID cards. The authorities provide financial aid to those who want to convert to Islam.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

Religious freedom is enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution; Article 11 provides the right to profess and to practice religion for every person, and (subject to applicable laws restricting the propagation of other religions to Muslims) to propagate it. The Constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslims. That is why Malays do not have the religious liberty to leave Islam and embrace another religion. As already stated above, the Federal Court ruled that jurisdiction on the validity of a conversion lies with the Sharia courts, not the civil courts, leaving converts effectively without legal representation for the time-being. The Constitution also prohibits adherents of other religions from propagating their religion among Malay Muslims. Yet it allows Muslims to propagate Islam all over the country. Furthermore, Sharia law is in place in conjunc-

tion with civil law. As one country expert explained: "Malaysia's Islamists and conservatives, led by PAS, are challenging the country's legal system, calling for the 'desecularization' of Malaysian law in cases involving religious conversions."

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

Religion is part of every sphere of life in Malaysia. Discrimination against Christians (and all non-Malay and non-Muslims) takes place at all levels of society, including local administration and government. The authorities give special treatment to Malays and, for example, non-Malay owned companies are required to have at least one Malay as board member.

In the WWL 2023 reporting period, Orang Asli groups complained that the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) did not provide any support to those who had converted to Christianity. JAKOA also refused to entertain their request for a proper road, water pipeline and sewage system, while Muslim Orang Asli groups in the same settlement were provided with a proper tar road and water system.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.50 points)

On websites run by Malay Islamic rights groups and in government-owned media, Christians are frequently slandered, for example by spreading rumors that Christians and Jews want to take over Malaysia. The most prominent case concerned PAS President Abdul Hadi Awang who has not been detained despite the reports lodged against him. He claimed publicly over non-Muslims and non-Bumiputras that they are the root of corruption in Malaysia. While the case supposedly is still under investigation, Hadi boldly challenged the public claiming that he will answer all questions and [justify his remarks](#), should he summoned by the court (Free Malaysia Today, 3 September 2022). Another lawsuit against Hadi (because he had accused "Christian missionaries of [preying](#) on poor Malaysians by paying them off for conversion") failed (UCA News, 18 August 2022). There have been other such examples in the WWL 2023 reporting period.

Block 4 - Additional information

The country's harsh sedition laws have drawn much condemnation from international observers. Although the law bans any action, speech or publication that brings contempt against the government or Malaysia's nine royal sultans and prohibits people from inciting hatred between different races and religions, it is used one-sidedly, as could be seen in the cases quoted above. Those who instigate hatred and stoke racial and religious sentiments against Christians are rarely charged for sedition. Questioning the special position of the ethnic Malay majority and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak falls under sedition as well. Those who have spoken out against the government have mostly had to face sedition charges too. Indigenous people face aggressive, deliberate attempts to convert them to Islam, especially those who migrate to West Malaysia as it is easy to take advantage of their social uprooting and their economic vulnerability. In the long term, the Christian population may shrink because of this, especially in East Malaysia.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Most churches - even the large and well-established ones - are very cautious when it comes to welcoming converts as it is very risky for them to integrate Muslim background Christians. As a result, converts usually meet in secret groups, separate from other Christians, because churches will otherwise run into trouble with the authorities. At times, churches have even turned away converts and even reported them to the authorities, as they did not want to get into trouble. The risk of converts being caught going to church is much higher in West Malaysia, but even in East Malaysia converts require great caution.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.50 points)

Article 11(3) of the Constitution states: "Every religious group has the right to: manage its own religious affairs; establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with the law." However, a country expert states: "Generally, it is difficult for a newly established church to register or obtain legal status for operating as a church. Churches often register as societies or clubs to make it easier (or even possible) to open a bank account, as well as to acquire and manage assets." This comes with the duty to report to the authorities. Non-traditional churches face more challenges compared to historical churches.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Pastors and church leaders have been natural targets for hostility from religious or ethnic groups, especially when they or their church have been perceived as engaging in acts of evangelism, and even more so, when this happens among Muslims. There are also, for instance, reports of unknown men attending church services taking photos.

The abduction of Pastor Raymond Koh in broad daylight in February 2017 sent shockwaves through the Christian community and leadership which are still felt today. It is particularly unnerving that his whereabouts almost five years after the incident are still unknown, the perpetrators have not been found (let alone punished), and that findings point to the involvement of the Special Branch of the police.

Block 5.16: Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (e.g. via local or national radio, TV, Internet, social media, cell phones). (3.50 points)

Malaysia has a Christian radio station but, apart from that, churches refrain from using mass media for a variety of reasons, including the risk of being accused of unethical conversion. Also, access to such programs is not possible on a nationwide scale.

Block 5 - Additional information

All printing of Christian materials requires permission from the government. Restrictions are imposed on importing Bahasa Malaysia materials and the Bible and Christian Malay books from Indonesia are banned. In 2015, the government issued a SOP (standard operating procedure) according to which [all imported Christian publications](#) (including the Malay Bible) are to be controlled by the Quranic Division of the Home Ministry (Malaysiakini, 17 June 2015). Despite objections from church leaders, the government went ahead with its implementation. Moreover, the use of the word "Allah" for God is practically banned for Christians, after the High Court banned the Christian usage in a Catholic newspaper (notwithstanding the fact that this term has been used for hundreds of years in Bibles and other Christian publications and is used in the Bahasa Indonesia Bible without any problem). A proposal made during the Jill Ireland case in November 2017 requested that the country's (Islamic) language institute issue a [new Bible translation](#) without the word "Allah" (Malay Mail, 20 November 2017). It also revealed the Islamic authorities mindset when they proposed getting the state authorities to do the translation of the Bible - instead of Christians. The High Court made headlines by issuing a detailed decision on the Ireland case in March 2021, explaining why Christians are [allowed to use](#) the word "Allah" (Malay Mail, 24 March 2021). Not surprisingly, the government and several State Islamic authorities declared they would appeal the decision.

In early September 2021, a deputy minister announced that the federal government had drafted four new laws to strengthen Sharia law in Malaysia, among them a law to [control](#) the development of non-Muslim religions (Malay Mail, 9 September 2021). Although the Law Minister said that no such proposal had been submitted in the final draft, churches and members of other religious minorities were [alarmed](#) and claimed that such a law would contradict the constitutional provisions of Malaysia (UCA News, 13 September 2021). Even though the draft was not accepted this time, it is a sign that religious minorities in Malaysia are facing ever more organized opposition and limitations. With PAS as the largest single party in parliament, it likely that more such attempts will be made in the future.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

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

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

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

Malaysia: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2	How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	2	1
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	3
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	100 *	100 *

6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	32	1000 *
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	18	1
6.10	How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	33	6
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *

For security reasons, no further details above can be provided.

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.

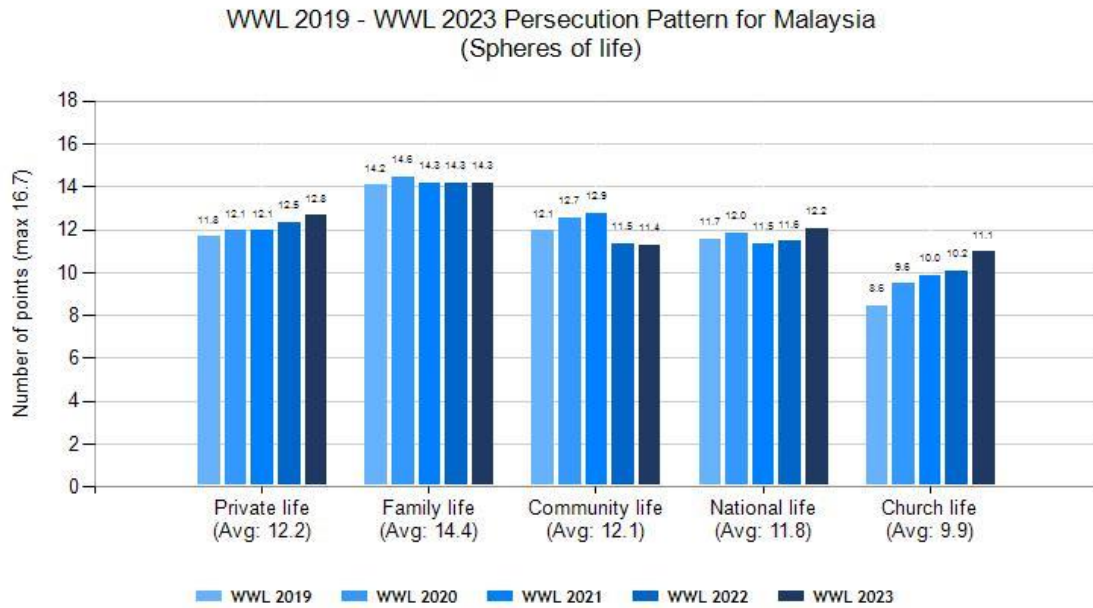
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Malaysia: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	12.4
2022	12.0
2021	12.2
2020	12.2
2019	11.7

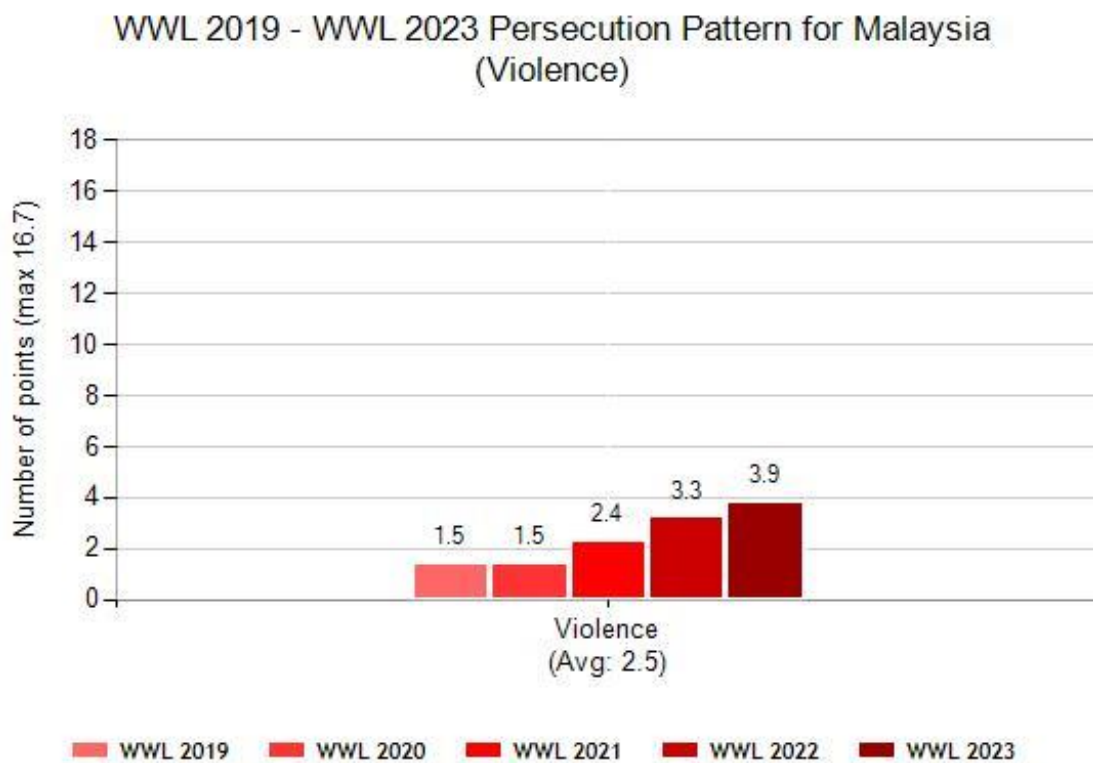
The score for average pressure on Christians is at a very high, level within the range 11.7 and 12.4. The political turmoil and the changes of government did not yet result in immediate changes in the situation for Christians and other religious minorities. Changes may become apparent, however, in the coming years.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the chart below, pressure has always been highest (at an extreme level) in the *Family sphere of life*. The level of pressure in *Church life* has always been the lowest compared to the rest of the *spheres of life*, but has also shown a steady increase in each reporting period. Pressure in *Community life* is currently at its lowest level in all 5 reporting periods presented.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The violence score continues to rise slowly due an increased number of reports on physical attacks and other violence. In WWL 2022 and 2023 the score has reached the category 'fairly high'.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Targeted Seduction; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

With four prime ministers since 2018, political instability is an ongoing challenge for Malaysia ([The Independent](#), 24 November 2022). Rights have long been restricted for Muslim women and girls who are governed by Sharia law, which restricts their rights in relation to marriage, divorce and child guardianship.

In light of this, female converts from Islam to Christianity are vulnerable to a wide spectrum of pressure, the most prevalent being the threat of sexual violence and/or forced marriage to a Muslim. Since the minimum legal age for marriage in the Islamic family laws (16 for females) can be lowered with the consent of a Sharia judge, it is possible for girls to be married as teenagers ([Girls Not Brides, accessed 6 December 2022](#)). This can make girls who convert to Christianity much more vulnerable. Such cases are rarely reported, however, as they are seen as shameful for the family (in the sense that it is deemed shameful for marriage to be necessitated to pressure a convert daughter into rejecting her new-found faith).

Peer pressure within schools has reportedly increased for girls, particularly in relation to dress code. While schools in Malaysia have been prohibited from compelling students to wear the *tudong* (a traditional headscarf) for nearly three decades, social pressure leads to them wearing it anyway ([Free Malaysia Today, 9 February 2021](#)).

The COVID-19 crisis reportedly caused a [42% increase](#) in domestic violence, which is likely to have impacted Christian female converts (Ova, 17 March 2022). On rare occasions, Christian women are also vulnerable to being detained and interrogated by the authorities about Christian networks and leaders, although this remains a greater source of pressure for men.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Following a period of political instability, the government is a point of concern for male Christians in Malaysia. While there had been previous pledges to sign the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, conserva-

tive Muslim groups strongly oppose this as they fear it will encourage apostasy and proselytism of Muslims. Men and boys are often the targets of these groups. The persecution typically impacting Christian men also comes in the form of bullying by vigilante groups and monitoring by the religious authorities.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021, pages 12-13):

- "Federal and state governments continued to forbid religious assembly and worship for groups considered to be 'deviant' Islamic groups, including Shia, Ahmadiyya, and al-Arqam. While Ahmadi Muslims in the country reported generally being able to maintain a worship center, government religious authorities did not allow them to hold Friday prayers, as these could only be performed in an officially registered mosque."
- In January [2021], the High Court said it would decide in March whether 39 Ahmadi Muslims should be considered Muslim following an appeal by the Religious Affairs Department (JAIS) against a 2018 High Court decision stating that the sharia court had no jurisdiction over the Ahmadi community, since JAIS refused to recognize them as adherents of Islam. The High Court did not announce a decision in March and there were no follow-up reports by year's end."
- "In July [2021], Inspector General of Police Acryl Sani Abdullah Sani said police were tracking down a group known as Perjalanan Mimpi Yang Terakhir (PMYT), believed to be spreading 'deviant' teachings, including that the group's leader, Sittah Annur, could communicate directly with Allah, the angels, and the Prophet Muhammad, and that PMYT was revealed to her to guide the people. In September, police arrested Annur and detained her for investigation under the section of the penal code that covers causing disharmony, disunity, feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will, or prejudicing the maintenance of harmony or unity on the grounds of religion, as well as under the communications law covering improper use of network facilities or network services. Police subsequently released her on bail."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

While PAS has been elected the strongest single party in parliament in the elections in November 2022, their group of parties (called Perikatan Nasional, PN) does not have the majority. The same has to be said of the largest coalition, Pakatan Harapan (PH). Both groups need a coalition partner and thus, the strongly decimated UMNO became the kingmaker. As significant elements within UMNO are openly wooing conservative Muslims and cooperate with conservative Muslim PAS, trying to exploit the already big ethnic and religious divide, which the country is suffering from, it is very possible that an UMNO, while ruling in a PH-led government, will at least partly feel closer to opposition PAS, where swathes of former UMNO voters found a new political home.

A shift towards more rigid and political Islamic practice is taking place with an influx of radical Islamic scholars returning from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Many of these Malay scholars have joined the government as members of the Department of Islamic Advancement of Malaysia to preach in mosques and spread their radicalized views on Islam. Islamization of native Christians from Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) is happening at a fast rate. Sarawak still enjoys a greater degree of religious freedom compared to West Malaysia and is the only place where Islam is not the state religion. But once the population demography tilts towards Islam, more Islamic laws will undoubtedly be set in place.

A potential wildcard in the future of Malaysian politics may be the states of Sabah and Sarawak. They aim for more autonomy (termed '[state nationalism](#)' in an article in The Diplomat, published on 25 May 2021) and all policy made in Putrajaya will necessarily affect these two states with the largest Christian population in the country. Politicians in Sarawak announced before the elections that they will not cooperate with the PAS. Consequently, the situation in Malaysia will remain volatile, as drivers of the main persecution engine *Islamic oppression* have become more active than before, leading to ongoing challenges and threats for the Christian minority.

Dictatorial paranoia

Given the volatility of Malaysian politics and that the new government will possibly not have a large majority, *Dictatorial paranoia* may climb to new heights. As shown throughout this country dossier, Christians have always been a useful scapegoat; they are regularly blamed for the country's woes and Malay Muslim majority fears. This is even more the case in an economic situation made difficult and unpredictable by world events on top of the recent political volatility.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: change - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/02/21/after-federal-courts-decision-shariah-lawyers-want-federal-constitution-cha/2042958>
- Persecution engines description: highly sensitive - <https://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/ban-on-churches-in-malaysia-using-allah-for-god-arises-again/60738.htm>
- Drivers of persecution description: converted child - <https://isma.org.my/kenyataan-media-tetap-pertahan-keislaman-anak-anak-loh/>
- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points): undistorted version - <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2021/04/14/tell-the-true-story-in-history-textbooks-says-educationist/>
- Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points): forced conversion' - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/01/21/suhakam-reports-forced-conversion-of-sarawakian-native-children-over-mykad/1942696>
- Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 points): Orang Asli - <https://cilisos.my/are-malaysias-orang-asli-being-pressured-to-convert-to-islam-we-investigate/>
- Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.50 points): justify his remarks - <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/09/03/hadi-says-will-answer-corruption-claim-in-court/>
- Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.50 points): preying - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/christian-lawsuit-against-malaysian-politician-fails/98430>

- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: all imported Christian publications - <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/302177>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: new Bible translation - <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/citing-sacred-patrimony-churches-reject-unauthorised-dbp-translation-of-bib>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: allowed to use - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/03/24/explainer-high-courts-96-page-judgment-on-why-malysias-1986-allah-ban-was/1960449>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: control - <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/09/09/deputy-ministers-claim-of-bill-to-control-non-muslim-faith-concerning-says/2004186>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: alarmed - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/churches-oppose-anti-minorities-bill-in-malaysia/94116>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Independent - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/anwar-ibrahim-ap-malaysia-mahathir-mohamad-kuala-lumpur-b2231972.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Girls Not Brides, accessed 6 December 2022 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/malaysia>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Free Malaysia Today, 9 February 2021 - <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2021/02/09/peer-pressure-makes-tudungs-the-norm-in-schools/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 42% increase - <https://ova.galencentre.org/malaysia-domestic-violence-cases-rose-42-during-pandemic/>
- Future outlook: state nationalism - <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/james-chin-on-ma63-and-the-return-of-state-nationalism-in-malaysia/>

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=Malaysia>