

WORLD WATCH LIST 2024

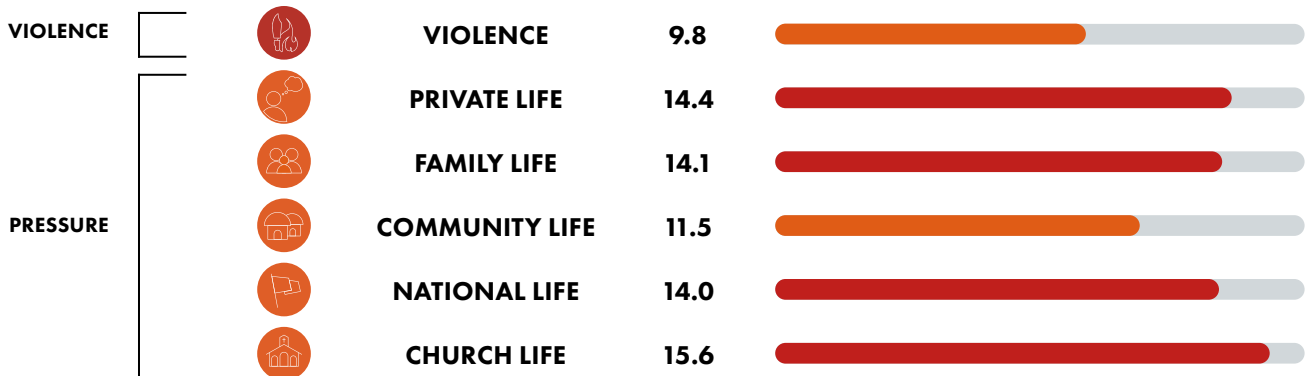
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

ALGERIA

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
15



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

In recent years, state officials at various levels of the administrative hierarchy have increasingly exerted pressure on Christians to renounce their faith and restricted their freedom. There are laws that regulate non-Muslim worship, including a prohibition on anything that would ‘shake the faith of a Muslim’ or be used as a ‘means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim to another religion’. During the WWL 2024 reporting period, state pressure against Protestant Christians increased to a level not seen in past decades. Previously closed church buildings remained closed, while other churches were ordered to close. However, instead of officially sealing church buildings as in recent years, the government started threatening church leaders with prosecution if their churches did not cease meeting. Of the 46 churches under the umbrella of the Evangelical Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) only four remain open. Other (independent) churches also ceased meeting, fearing government measures. In addition to the church closures, at least 18 Christians received (suspended) prison sentences. Algerian Christians, most of whom are converts from Islam, face opposition from their family members and wider community, who try to force converts to adhere to Islamic norms and follow Islamic rites. The pressure and danger faced by Christians is particularly high in the Arab, rural and religiously more conservative parts of the country. In the 1990s, these regions acted as a stronghold for Islamist insurgents in the fight against the government.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune

POPULATION

46,053,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

144,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	144,000	0.3
Muslims	45,238,000	98.2
Agnostics	636,000	1.4
Others	14,600	0.0

Source²

Algeria is rated as [authoritarian](#) and [not free](#) since it is *de facto* led by its powerful army and a group of businessmen and politicians known as “Le Pouvoir” (the Power). The Constitution bans non-Muslims from holding high-level government positions.

Historically, Algeria is an ethnic mix of peoples of both Arab and Berber descent, with the dominant ethnic identity in the country being Arabic. Ethnicity and language is a sensitive issue after many years of government marginalization of Berber culture. Despite the conservative Islamic context, Algeria has one of the biggest communities of converts from Islam to Christianity in the wider Middle East. Most of these converts belong to the Berber community in the Kabyle region. In-country sources show that converts outside the Kabyle region experience higher levels of pressure from society and family.

The Roman Catholic Church has four dioceses in the country (in Algiers, Oran, Constantine and Hippone and Laghouat-Ghardaïa).

Ordinance 06-03, passed in March 2006, regulates religions other than Islam and severely limits non-Muslim worship. The government has not registered any new churches since its enforcement, so Christians meet in private homes or business properties. This is forbidden, with a maximum sentence of three years in prison and a fine of 300,000 DA (3,000 Euros). At least thirty-seven churches affiliated to the EPA remained closed, were additionally closed or ceased meeting because of the increasing pressure in the WWL 2024 reporting period.

The EPA was officially recognized by the government in 1974. Its member churches are required to obtain their own registration. None of them succeeded in doing this because the government has not approved any of the applications. In 2013, the EPA had to re-apply for recognition after a new NGO law was introduced. However, the government has still not responded to this application, leaving the EPA in legal limbo.

Pressure on Christians rose in 2023, with several Christians being prosecuted and sentenced on charges of proselytizing and conducting religious services without permission.

¹ Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

² Others include Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian. Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

How the situation varies by region

Most Christians live in the northern Kabyle region and belong to a Berber ethnic group. The Kabyles were discriminated against and neglected by the government for many years, which created an environment for the Christian community to develop. In the Arab part of the country, especially the south, circumstances are difficult for Christians and there are very few churches. Violent Islamic militants do not have a wide support base among the people, but Islam holds a firm grip over the country, also due to the growth of the Salafist movement.

Who is affected?

Communities of expatriate Christians

This group includes sub-Saharan migrant Christians and some western expatriate Christians. Sub-

Saharan African Christian students sometimes face discrimination at universities and in day-to-day life in the cities.

Historical Christian communities

The Roman Catholic Church faces restrictions outside places of worship, but churches are allowed to exist where registered. Catholic churches (including the cathedral in Algiers, the seat of the Archbishop) can conduct services without government interference.

Converts to Christianity

The majority of Christians are converts from a Muslim background, and they face discrimination and pressure from the state and family members. Since the law prohibits non-Muslim worship, except in registered churches, these converts usually congregate in private homes.

Non-traditional Christian communities

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Islamic oppression

Islamist groups exert pressure on a government that cannot risk losing popularity by deviating from the Islamic convictions held by its citizens. Although the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) is banned, Islamists are present and they monitor the activities of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities (such as the small Jewish and Bahai communities). In addition, some government officials are Islamists themselves.

Dictatorial paranoia

The government is autocratic in nature and imposes restrictions on Christians such as church closures and prosecutions of Christians on charges such as proselytizing. Furthermore, the anti-colonial, revolutionary roots of the ruling party, which has been in power since independence, make it suspicious of Christian missionary activities. This is especially the case when activities are allied to churches and Christian groups in the West.

Clan oppression

Islamic oppression forms the root cause of family and community pressure on converts to Christianity. In the Arab part of the country

particularly, notions like the protection of family honor play a vital role too. With the support of village elders, pressure is exerted on the convert to abandon the Christian faith. In urban areas, the influence of elders is waning, but family pressure often remains high.

Ethno-religious hostility

Most Algerian Christians are found in the northern Kabyle region and are from a Berber background. Since independence, there has been political tension between this region and the central (Arab) government over issues of ethnic identity, culture and language. Ethnic tension bleeds into religious tension.



How are men and women differently affected?

Women

Algerian women are generally disadvantaged in law and society, compounding the pressures that Christian women experience for their faith. They face harassment at work or school, sexual assault and death threats (particularly if unveiled). Female converts face severe violations from family, including beatings, threats, house arrest and possibly forced marriage or divorce. In addition to restricting women's access to meaningful community, families also prevent converts from accessing Christian radio or television channels. Considering this pressure and violence, many female converts opt to hide their faith and live as secret believers.

Female typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

Men

Algerian Christian men regularly experience community and economic pressure, facing harassment in workplaces and communal spaces. As men are the main providers in Algerian families, losing work can have a crippling effect on the whole family, creating fear and a sense of helplessness. Men are also more likely to be detained, also affecting their ability to work. Families are often the source of additional violations, such as physical beatings and threats. They suffer ostracism and rejection not just from their families, but from the wider community too.

Male typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2024	15	79
2023	19	73
2022	22	71
2021	24	70
2020	17	73

The overall score for Algeria has risen 6 points, clearly indicating a deteriorating situation for Christians. Increases in pressure were most notable in the national and church Spheres of Life. However, it was the rise in violence score that had the most influence on the overall rise in points: The violence score went up from 4.8 points in WWL 2023 to 9.8 points, mainly caused by an increased number of churches being closed or forced to cease all activity. At the same time, a greater number of houses and businesses of Christians were raided, with the increased pressure forcing many to relocate both inside and outside the country.



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Examples of violence in the reporting period

- Several other churches were told to cease activities, in addition to the ones already closed or forced to cease activities in previous years. Only a few of the more than 50 churches in the country remain open. It is feared they will be forced to stop too.
- More than 20 Christians were arrested and prosecuted on different charges ranging from “proselytism”, to “practicing worship without prior approval” and “holding worship in a building not permitted for worship”. The overall majority of charges are based upon the Ordinance to Regulate non-Muslim Worship, enacted in 2006.
- At least 30 Christians faced physical and mental abuse from their family members, as well as from the government. Several Christians had to relocate because of these pressures.

WWL Year	Christians imprisoned or punished by the government	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians forced to flee their countries	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed
2024	18	30	14	12
2023	19	10*	4	4

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - for full results see the violence section of the Full Country Dossier. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher.*

Private life

Conversion to Christianity is strictly forbidden and Christians who share their faith on social media risk being prosecuted on charges of proselytism or blasphemy and face reprisals from their communities. Christians are careful not to display symbols such as crosses, as hostility towards Christians is common. Algeria’s anti-proselytism and blasphemy laws affect the freedom of Christians to share their beliefs, even with family members. Under Ordinance 06-03, proselytizing is a criminal act that carries a prison sentence of between one and three years.

Family life

Religious education, based on Islamic principles, is mandatory in all public schools. In many cases, the Muslim husband or wife of a convert will want a divorce or will be forced into it by family members. Children will be kept away from the convert. Adoption is only permitted for Muslims. If a child’s father is a Muslim, the government considers the child Muslim. Converts are still considered Muslim by the government and their children too.

Community life

Monitoring of individuals, especially Christians, occurs regularly. Those in leadership positions are likely to have their phones tapped and e-mails read.

Gathering outside of church buildings as Christians is illegal, though this pressure is less intense in the Kabyle region. Christian school children living in more conservative Islamic areas must hide their faith, or they face discrimination from teachers and restricted access to universities. This is especially true for children of known converts. Similarly, converts will hide their faith or face discrimination when applying for a job. Christians, whether converts or not, do not have access to senior positions in government..

National life

Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities, especially if the Christian is a convert or an immigrant from sub-Saharan Africa. Converts from Islam to Christianity can suffer violations from family members, who carry them out with impunity, since the government regards domestic abuse as a family issue. The Taliban is known for their notoriously strict and frequent searches done through raids.

Church life

Churches are not allowed to organize activities among Muslim youth, and minors are not allowed to attend church unaccompanied. Printing Christian materials is forbidden under Ordinance 06-03. It is difficult for foreign Christians to obtain a visa and visit Algerian churches due to constant monitoring.

International obligations & rights violated

Algeria has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:

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

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

- Christian leaders are monitored and their activities actively watched (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Churches are arbitrarily closed by the Government (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 20)
- Christian women and girls are raped and sexually abused because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christians cannot discuss their faith with non-Christians or proselytize (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christians cannot adopt children or serve as foster parents (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians are falsely accused and charged of blasphemy (ICCPR Art. 19)

Situation of other religious minorities

Algerian Jews, Ahmadiyya and Shia Muslims face varying levels of pressure and violence. The Ahmadiyya face more severe violations, including criminal charges for ‘denigrating the dogma or precepts of Islam’. They face hostility from public officials and are denied their right to form [associations](#). In addition, atheists and those who openly question Sunni Islamic doctrine are likely to face hostilities in Algeria.



Open Doors in Algeria

Open Doors raises prayer support for believers in Algeria.



About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the Full Country Dossier produced annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2024 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the more detailed Full Country Dossiers and the latest update of [WWL Methodology](#). These are also available at the [Open Doors Analytical](#) website (password: freedom).

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
