

World
Watch
Research

Democratic Republic of the Congo:
Full Country Dossier
February 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2024	3
Copyright note	4
Sources and definitions	4
WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Democratic Republic of the Congo	5
Brief country details	5
Map of country	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Specific examples of positive developments	7
External Links - Situation in brief	7
WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Democratic Republic of the Congo	8
Links for general background information	8
Recent history	8
Political and legal landscape	9
Religious landscape	12
Economic landscape	12
Social and cultural landscape	14
Technological landscape	15
Security situation	15

Trends analysis	17
External Links - Keys to understanding	18
WWL 2024: Church information / Democratic Republic of the Congo	20
Christian origins.....	20
Church spectrum today	20
Areas where Christians face most difficulties	21
Christian communities and how they are affected	21
WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Democratic Republic of the Congo	22
Reporting period	22
Position on the World Watch List	22
Persecution engines	22
Drivers of persecution	24
The Persecution pattern.....	26
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	26
Violence.....	31
5 Year trends	32
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	34
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	36
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	37
Future outlook.....	37
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	38
Further useful reports.....	38
External Links - Further useful reports.....	38

Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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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 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

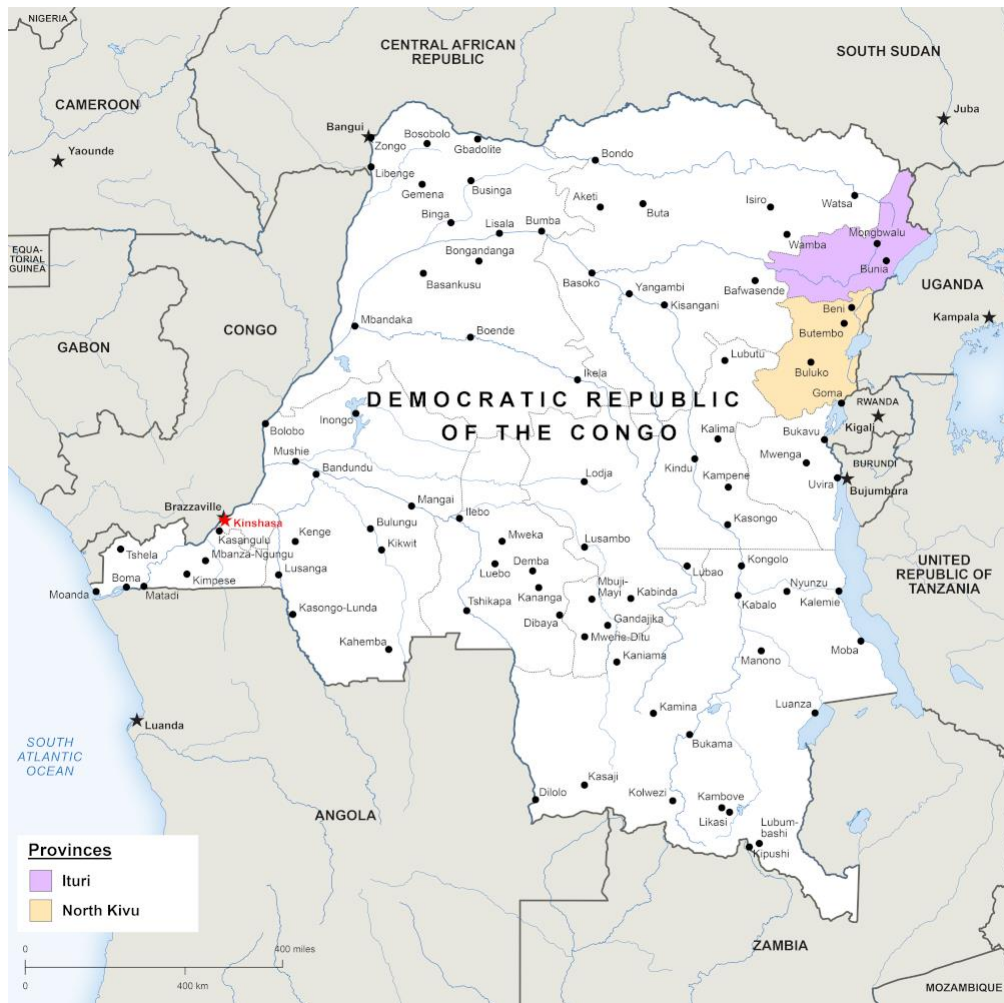
WWL 2024 Situation in brief / DRC

Brief country details

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
98,152,000	93,396,000	95.2

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

Map of country



DRC: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	67	41
WWL 2023	67	37
WWL 2022	66	40
WWL 2021	64	40
WWL 2020	56	57

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

DRC:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups
Organized corruption and crime	Violent religious groups, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders
Ethno-religious hostility	Ethnic group leaders

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

In the eastern part of the country, particularly in North Kivu, Christians face significant challenges due to the presence of the radical Islamic group "Alliance for Democratic Forces" (ADF-NALU), responsible for targeting Christians and churches through attacks. Additionally, the region is home to over a hundred armed groups, further complicating the lives of Christians. Speaking out against these armed groups and their atrocities can result in severe reprisals, making it extremely difficult for Christians to raise their voices and advocate for peace and safety.

Within families and communities, converts from Islam or indigenous religions encounter pressure to participate in non-Christian religious activities and ceremonies. Furthermore, representatives of the Catholic Church, who have publicly urged the government to adhere to constitutionally mandated electoral deadlines, have reported instances of verbal harassment and interference as a consequence of their advocacy.

The complex security situation in eastern DRC, with the presence of multiple armed groups, makes the environment highly volatile and poses a grave risk to the safety and well-being of Christians and other religious communities.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and threatened with divorce and loss of inheritance (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christian children can be forced to learn Islamic scriptures (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- [March 2023](#): The Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for the killing of 35 Christians in Mukondi village in North Kivu province (AP News, 11 March 2023).
- [January 2023](#): IS claimed responsibility for detonating an explosive device inside the Pentecostal church in Kasindi while people were praying. Congolese authorities put the toll at 14 dead and at least 63 wounded (VOA, 16 January 2023).
- Numerous churches have been destroyed.
- Thousands of Christians have been forced out of their homes and communities.

Specific examples of positive developments

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: March 2023 - <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-congo-jihadis-8a0dc8ddd9ead188c4733fc87b509f2>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: January 2023: - <https://www.voanews.com/a/islamic-state-claims-responsibility-for-dr-congo-church-bombing-/6920938.html>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / DRC

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 DRC report	AI DRC 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/report-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/	4 July 2023
BBC News DRC profile - updated 14 April 2023	BBC DRC profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13283212	4 July 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI DRC Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/COD	4 July 2023
CIA World Factbook DRC - updated 22 June 2023	World Factbook DRC	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/congo-democratic-republic-of-the/	4 July 2023
Crisis24 DRC report (Garda World)	Crisis24 DRC report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/dr-congo	4 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries	EIU Democracy Index 2022 - Sub-Saharan Africa pp.55-60	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf	4 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 DRC	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	4 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, DRC not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 DRC	https://freedomhouse.org/country/democratic-republic-congo/freedom-world/2023	4 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, DRC not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	4 July 2023
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 DRC profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/dr-congo/	4 July 2023
Girls Not Brides DRC report	Girls Not Brides DRC	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/	4 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - DRC country chapter	HRW 2023 DRC country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo	4 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 DRC	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#cd	4 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 DRC	https://rsf.org/en/democratic-republic-congo	4 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 DRC	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/cod	4 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report DRC – covering 189 countries	UNDP HDR DRC	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/COD	4 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report DRC	IRFR 2022 DRC	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/	4 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, DRC not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank DRC data – 2021	World Bank DRC data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=COD	4 July 2023
World Bank DRC overview - updated 29 March 2023	World Bank DRC overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview	4 July 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook DRC - October 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 DRC	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-cod.pdf	30 January 2024

Recent history

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was a Belgian colony, which, along with other African countries, declared independence in 1960. However, civil war followed and the secession of some provinces which led to a fragmentation of the country. The country was caught up in a [proxy war](#) between the West (headed by the USA) and the Soviet Union (Source: US State Department, Office of Historian, accessed 9 September 2020). The election of Joseph Kasavubu as president and Patrice Lumumba as prime minister did not bring peace and the latter was arrested and [killed](#) on 17 January 1961 (The Guardian, 17 January 2011).

On 24 November 1965, Mobutu seized power with the help of the CIA and created an environment where only one party could flourish, namely the Popular Revolutionary Movement. The Constitution gave him unlimited power, he accumulated great wealth and supported guerrilla fighters in neighboring countries such as Angola. The rule of Mobutu was not unchallenged. Riots, protests and guerrilla fighters supported by Angola put pressure on Mobutu.

In 1994, the World Bank declared the country bankrupt. The 1994 atrocities in Rwanda had a spillover effect. Finally, with mainly Tutsi soldiers trained by Rwanda and Uganda, Laurent Kabila overthrew Mobutu in 1997. Kabila was assassinated by his own bodyguard and was replaced by his son, Joseph Kabila, who remained in power until January 2019.

The wars in DRC returned to the spotlight in 2003 when the president of the country requested the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the [crimes](#) committed by various rebel groups (ICC Press Release, 19 April 2004). After an extensive investigation the Court indicted Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, Germain Katanga, Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui, Bosco Ntaganda, Callixte Mbarushimana, and Sylvestre Mudacumura.

The situation in DRC has been exacerbated by the continual interference of neighboring countries. According to a report by [The Guardian](#) on 18 October 2012, the United Nations officially stated that the Rwandan defense minister was the de facto leader of rebels in DRC. Later UN reports (in 2014) also implicated Uganda and Burundi.

After years of speculation, President Kabila decided to [step down](#) and not run for a third term in the presidential elections held in December 2018 (France 24, 8 August 2018). [Newly elected President](#) Felix Tshisekedi was sworn in as successor to Joseph Kabila in January 2019 in the country's first transfer of power via democratic election in 59 years of independence. The country's electoral commission declared him winner despite credible evidence of election fraud (The Guardian, 24 January 2019).

In 2022, the global community has closely observed the ideology and activities of the ADF and the UN has indicated that [links](#) exist with the Islamic State group (Bloomberg, 18 June 2022).

In 2022 and 2023, armed groups, including the M23 (Rwandan backed) and the ADF, carried out atrocities in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The government's authority in this region remains weak, allowing these groups to operate with relative impunity. Christians in particular bore the brunt of the jihadist attacks, some of which were claimed by IS. The ongoing violence and insecurity have created a dire situation for civilians, with Christians facing targeted pressure and violence.

In December 2023, President Tshisekedi won a second term in office and his Union Sacrée coalition won most of the seats in parliament. Despite Tshisekedi's [wide margin of victory](#) - over 70% - , the polls were marked by chaos and accusations of rigging. The political landscape remains deeply divided (Al-Jazeera, 31 December 2023).

Political and legal landscape

DRC is a unitary multiparty republic with two legislative houses - the Senate with 108 members and the National Assembly with 500 members. The president is the head of state and the prime minister is head of the government. With 26 justices, the Supreme Court is the highest judicial organ in the country, while the country also has a Constitutional Court with nine judges.

Although President Kabila's term in office ended in 2016, the country failed to hold elections, which caused great tension. Presidential elections did not take place until December 2018 (without President Kabila running for a third term). Under Kabila, political corruption, weak rule of law and violence remained prevalent.

According to Reporters Without Borders [2023 Freedom of the Press Index](#):

- "The Congolese media landscape is marked by the presence of politicians who own or launch media outlets intended to promote their influence and rise to power. The national

radio and TV broadcaster is a state media outlet that lacks independence. It is very common for local authorities, militiamen, religious groups, and politicians to exert pressure on the journalists and media outlets present in their province." It adds that the new law enacted in April 2023, "... tightens the conditions for access to the profession of journalist; does not explicitly abolish prison sentences for press offences, but it adds a "bad faith" requirement to the definition of the offences of false information and allegations disturbing public order; and gives journalists access to information of public interest that is not classified and does not involve state security or national defence."

A 2023 report by [Freedom House](#) lists the persistent challenges that DRC has been facing for decades:

- "The political system in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is paralyzed due the manipulation of the electoral process by political elites. Citizens are unable to freely exercise basic civil liberties, and corruption is endemic. Physical security is tenuous due to violence and human rights abuses committed by government forces, as well as armed rebel groups and militias in many areas of the country." It is also rated 'Not Free' with a very low score of 19/100.

In its [2022 Human Rights Report](#), issued in 2023, the US State Department summarized the abysmal human rights condition in the country as follows:

- "unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; forced disappearances; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in conflict, including reportedly unlawful or widespread civilian deaths or harm, enforced disappearances or abductions, torture, physical abuses or punishment, and unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by armed groups and the armed forces; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; serious government corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including but not limited to domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child, early, and forced marriage, and other forms of such violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of ethnic groups or Indigenous peoples; trafficking in persons...."

In summarizing the human rights situation in the country in 2023, [Human Rights Watch](#) stated (accessed 30 January 2024):

- "The human rights situation across the Democratic Republic of Congo remains dire, with internal conflicts and poor governance contributing to a severe food crisis and the internal displacement of 5.8 million people, more than anywhere else in Africa. Over 100 armed groups are active in eastern Congo, and the imposition of martial law in North Kivu and Ituri

provinces has facilitated abuses by government security forces. Armed groups and often abusive security forces continue to carry out massacres, abductions, rape and sexual violence, recruitment of children, and other attacks on civilians with near total impunity. The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and the media are frequently under attack. President Felix Tshisekedi's administration has yet to demonstrate that it can bring about systemic reforms and human rights improvements ahead of the 2023 elections."

In summarizing the post-Kabila situation in DRC, [International Crisis Group](#) (ICG) stated (prior to the president's re-election in December 2023):

- "The DRC saw its first peaceful transition of power since independence after the December 2018 general elections, despite widespread reports of vote rigging. Since 2020, President Félix Tshisekedi has taken steps to consolidate his authority and to diminish the influence of his predecessor Joseph Kabila, who has commanded loyalty throughout the security services and continued to control state institutions and revenue streams since stepping down. But even as he promises change, Tshisekedi has inherited a system of violent kleptocracy and risks repeating his predecessors' errors. There are already signs he may be taking a more repressive turn."

The "more repressive turn" was highlighted in June 2022, when the [International Federation for Human Rights](#) publicly stated: "Our organizations note with concern the shrinking of civic and democratic space. This is epitomized by numerous instances of administrative and judicial authorities attacking political opponents' — and human rights defenders' and journalists' — freedom of movement and the right to personal liberty."

Exacerbating the situation in DRC further is the involvement of other countries. DRC and Rwanda are at odds and many international actors accuse Rwanda of supporting the M23 rebel group. Tension between the two countries rose in early 2023 but, since November 2023, steps are being taken to [de-escalate the situation](#) which at times was on the brink of war (France24, 21 November 2023).

Gender perspective

The legal landscape of the DRC is restrictive towards women and girls in several regards; in particular, many harmful practices relating to marriage remain pervasive. These include child marriage, polygamy and levirate marriages. As highlighted in an [ACHPR report \(2015\)](#), men are often pressured into practicing polygamy to demonstrate their power. Child marriage is high - in spite of the legal age of marriage being set at 18 (Law 2016-008, Art. 352, 2016) - with 37% of girls and 6% of boys marrying by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides DRC). Whilst sexual violence and rape are outlawed, there is insufficient legislation addressing domestic violence. Men and women have equal rights in relation to divorce and child guardianship, although in the event of a divorce, a woman must repay the dowry she received at the point of marriage (Family Code, 1987).

Religious landscape

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	93,396,000	95.2
Muslim	1,427,000	1.5
Hindu	144,000	0.1
Buddhist	5,600	0.0
Ethno-religionist	2,341,000	2.4
Jewish	400	0.0
Bahai	406,000	0.4
Atheist	19,800	0.0
Agnostic	404,000	0.4
Other	9,000	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

DRC is a Christian-majority country. A significant number of people mix Christianity with elements of ethno-religionist belief systems. Some Evangelical groups reject this practice, which can cause tension as a result. Geographically, there are no specific areas where religious affiliation is concentrated.

Economic landscape

DRC is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of minerals and natural resources. It has vast deposits of industrial diamonds, cobalt and copper. The country also has one of the largest forest reserves in Africa. In the Congo River - the biggest river in Africa - it has half of the hydroelectric potential of the continent. The country has been struggling with inflation and decelerating economic growth. This was mainly due to declining prices and shrinking global demand for raw materials such as copper and cobalt which account for 80% of DRC's export revenue. The national currency is expected to continue its decline against the dollar as the rate of inflation increases.

According to the World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook October 2023 DRC:

- **Economic growth:** "Despite an impressive growth over the past two decades (averaging 5.6 percent a year) and a significant return to macroeconomic stability, ... [g]rowth in DRC is expected to slow down in 2023 as terms-of-trade continue to deteriorate. ... After peaking at 8.9 percent in 2022, real GDP growth in DRC is expected at 6.8 percent in 2023. The mining sector remains the main driver of growth. However, given downwards trends for cobalt prices and production, mining output growth is projected to slow to 11.7 percent in

2023 (from 22.6 percent in 2022). Growth in non-mining sectors (particularly services) is expected at 4.2 percent in 2023 (2022: 2.7 percent). ... Growth is projected to moderate at 6.4 percent on average in 2024-25, as mining growth slows down while the non-mining sector catches up."

- **Poverty:** "Poverty remains widespread in the country despite some improvements in the past decades, with the bulk of the poor living in extreme poverty. While there are significant geographical disparities between provinces, with most of the poor living along two densely populated corridors running from West to East, and North to South, poverty exceeds 50 percent even in the wealthier provinces. ... The latest World Bank estimations put extreme poverty at 61.9 percent in 2022, a 2.2 percentage points decrease compared to 2021, and further down to 60.7 in 2023. This decrease is due to strong economic growth, despite the negative effects of the rising inflation. ... Extreme poverty is projected to decrease by 1.8 percentage points by 2025 given continued though lower economic growth. The pace of poverty reduction will however remain too slow to reduce the number of people in poverty given high population growth."
- **Inflation:** "Amidst elevated cost of imports and a depreciating currency, inflation is surging and eroding households' purchasing power, especially among the poor. ... Exchange rate pass-through coupled with rising cost of imports led to inflation rising at a faster pace by July 2023, and expected to average about 20.7 percent in 2023. In response, the Central bank has tightened its policy rate from 8.25 percent in late 2022 to 25.0 percent in August 2023."

According to Heritage Foundation's [2023 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- The Democratic Republic of the Congo has an economic freedom score of 47.9, ranking it 157th among freest economies in the 2023 Index. While the score has slightly improved by 0.3 points compared to last year, it still lags far behind the world and regional averages. Economic development faces challenges due to instability and violence. Weak rule of law and limited enforcement of property rights have pushed many businesses and individuals into the informal sector. Additionally, poor economic management exacerbated by frequent political crises hampers the country's progress.

Gender perspective

Within the DRC, women and girls are predominately economically dependent on their families. Despite having equal inheritance rights under law, customary and traditional practices continue to deny women their due inheritance. The DRC performs poorly on Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index, which is heavily due to poor rates of financial inclusion for women, although this has improved in recent years (GIWPS 2021 DRC). Representing a positive trend however, it was in the top ten countries where financial inclusion had risen the most during the reporting period. According to UNDP HDR DRC, the female labor force participation is 60.7% (compared to 66.3% for men). Despite this relatively high participation rate for women, it is usual that men are the head of the household and in charge of financial decisions.

Social and cultural landscape

DRC is the largest country in the Great Lakes region. It was part of the old Kongo Kingdom and has more than 200 ethnic groups. It shares borders with Congo Brazzaville, Angola, Zambia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR). DRC is the fourth most populous country in Africa. Its size is equal to Western Europe.

According to the UNDP HDR DRC and World Factbook DRC:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mongo, Luba, Kongo (all Bantu), and the Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic) which make up about 45% of the total population
- **Main languages:** French (official), Lingala (a lingua franca trade language), Kingwana (a dialect of Kiswahili or Swahili), Kikongo, Tshiluba
- **Urban population:** 45% of the total population
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.33% (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 3.16 % (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 17.0 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 9.7 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 77.0%
- **Employment population ratio (15 years and older):** 60.8%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 4.2%
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 8.0%

According to [UNHCR Operational Data Portal, last updated 30 November 2023](#):

- **Refugees:** 520,573 - mainly from CAR (211,767) and Rwanda (207,505), but also South Sudan (53,337) and Burundi (46,667).
- **IDPs:** 6,298,436 - mainly situated in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces.

According to UNDP HDR DRC:

- **Human Development Index:** Between 1990 and 2021, the Human Development Index (HDI) value of the Democratic Republic of the Congo changed from 0.386 to 0.479, representing a significant increase of 24.1 percent. Yet, with a score of 0.479, DRC ranks 175th out of 191 countries
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 65.21 years
- **Gender Development index (GDI):** 0.58
- **Gender Inequality index (GII):** 0.617

Gender perspective

As highlighted in [OECD Gender Index reporting](#), daughters are often viewed as temporary members of the family unit, as they can be wedded off. This notion also continues into marriage; it is common for a deceased husband's family to take all of his wealth and property, leaving her and her children destitute. This exemplifies the underlying social and cultural norms in the DRC that discriminate against women. In light of these norms, female converts can be married off to an older Muslim with relative ease. Within such marriages, women and girls are commonly exposed to domestic violence and sexual violence; it is generally accepted by both men and wo-

men that a woman's failings in marriage (e.g. burning a meal or refusing sex) is a legitimate reason for domestic violence ([UK Home Office, 2018](#)). Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence reportedly worsened ([GNWP, 22 February 2021](#)).

Technological landscape

Different source gives different number when it comes to the extent of technology use and development in DRC.

As per the [Digital 2023 DRC report](#) published by DataReportal:

- There were 23.04 million internet users in January 2023.
- Internet penetration rate stood at 22.9 percent of the total population at the start of 2023.
- "77.57 million people in the DRC did *not* use the internet at the start of 2023, - 77.1 percent of the population remained offline at the beginning of the year."
- "The DRC was home to 4.90 million social media users in January 2023, equating to 4.9 percent of the total population.
- "A total of 48.15 million cellular mobile connections were active in the DRC in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 47.9 percent of the total population."

Statistics on internet usage and mobile phone ownership by gender are lacking. An indication of the existence of a gender gap in relation to social media access is provided by [Napoleon Cat](#) (December 2023) which revealed that 63.4% of Facebook users were men, compared to 36.6% of women.

Although DRC is one of the wealthiest countries in Africa in terms of natural resources, internal conflicts (since independence) have made progress elusive. Corporations and neighboring countries have been [fueling the \(mineral-related\) conflict](#) and Uganda and Rwanda have been sending in troops (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 29 June 2022). As a result, the country has failed to live up to its potential: Infrastructure is poor, educational facilities are not well-equipped; hospitals and clinics lack professional staff and medical equipment.

Security situation

The Democratic Republic of the Congo stands out as one of the most tumultuous and volatile countries in Africa, where the safety and security of its citizens remain precarious. The crisis in the country started more than 60 years ago and has continued into the WWL 2024 reporting period. The conflict in the eastern part of the country continues to derail the peace process. Foreign countries like Rwanda have also been interfering in the country and making the situation worse. Much of the violence in North Kivu, Kisangani and in Kasai has an ethnic dimension. DRC has great ethnic diversity, some estimating the total number of ethnic groups as being as high as 450. However, one of the most serious threats is that the eastern part of the country has become a safe haven for the radical Islamic group "Allied Democratic Forces" (ADF-NALU), which is seeking to create an Islamic State in Uganda and has been targeting churches and Christians in north-eastern DRC for several years, ever since its attempt to overthrow the Ugandan government failed.

According to the United Nations, security in eastern DRC has continued to worsen, despite a coalition of forces from Uganda, Burundi and the UN (prior to its planned withdrawal) present in the country as peacekeepers. According to UN Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Martha Pobe, [more than 600 people have been killed by armed groups](#) in the past three months (UN News, 26 June 2023). CODECO, the Zairean militia, M23 rebels and Islamist ADF are reported as being the main perpetrators. An estimated 6.3 million people have been displaced within the country and, since March 2022, more than 2.8 million have fled their homes in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces due to the extreme levels of insecurity. An example of the [spiralling cycle of intercommunal violence](#) was reported by Human Rights Watch on 29 June 2023: An armed group (calling themselves “Mobondo” after mystical amulets) ambushed a truck carrying mostly Teke traders, killing twenty. Since June 2022 hundreds have been killed in a dispute over land and customary royalties.

Civilians in eastern DRC are being [targeted](#) on a regular basis, as reported by the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect on 31 May 2023. On 3 June 2023, the North Kivu Security Tracker reported that suspected ADF militants (who are affiliated with the Islamic State group) [killed](#) at least nine villagers in Museya Kanyamutsutsa village in Beni territory, and International Christian Concern reported on 5 June 2023, that another ten Christians had been [targeted and killed](#) by ADF militants. Earlier in May 2023, at least 20 civilians were [discovered killed](#) by suspected ADF militants in Ndoma village in Kivu (Africa News, 9 May 2023).

On the evening of 11 June 2023, CODECO militants claimed responsibility for an [attack on an IDP camp](#) at Lala displacement site in Djugu territory, which killed at least 45 civilians, 23 of whom were children (Al-Jazeera, 12 June 2023). According to a report by the Kivu Security Tracker on 13 June 2023, the massacre may have been a [reprisal](#) for acts of violence by other armed groups. A day later, on 12 June 2023, ADF militants attacked Kasindi town on the border to Uganda in eastern DRC, as reported by VOA on 14 June 2023. At least 10 people were killed and many others fled across the border to Uganda for refuge. In these attacks, the weapons used have reportedly often been hammers and machetes to avoid being heard. Earlier in the year, in January, at least [12 Christians were killed](#) and 50 injured when ADF militants detonated a bomb at a church in Kasindi where hundreds of Christians had gathered for a Sunday church service (CNN, 16 January 2023).

According to HRW 2023 DRC country chapter, the human rights and security conditions deteriorated in 2022, especially in eastern provinces, despite promises of reform from President Félix Tshisekedi's administration. Military rule in North Kivu and Ituri failed to stem violence by various armed groups, resulting in over 2,000 civilian deaths between January and October [2022]. The resurgent M23 rebels, supported by Rwanda, intensified conflict by seizing territory in North Kivu. This conflict exacerbated the already dire humanitarian crisis, displacing millions. Additionally, an East African military force entered eastern Congo amid regional tensions, while the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, faced criticism for failing to protect civilians and experiencing violence against its bases.

Gender perspective

Within this context of insecurity, women and girls remain especially vulnerable to incidences of sexual and gender-based violence at the hands of armed groups ([UNHR, 2020](#); also Georgetown,

GIPWS 2021). As recognized in a [2020 Institute for Development Studies report](#), the justice system is fragile (K4D, 21 December 2020). Women who report sexual violence encounter major obstacles in attaining justice and high levels of impunity: “[T]his reinforces the pre-existing norms and patterns of discrimination against women, both inside and outside of the conflict.”

Efforts have been made to engage more women in the peace-building process, in recognition of the positive role that they could play ([OCHA, 17 May 2019](#); [International Alert, March 2018](#)). Men and boys are vulnerable to forced recruitment into militias, as well as abductions and killings. Pastors in particular are targeted by jihadists.

Trends analysis

1) Post-Kabila government has not progressed as expected

Reports indicate that former President Kabila continues to maintain support within the security and army sectors, creating challenges for the current incumbent in implementing reforms. Similar to his predecessors, the current president has faced difficulties in governing the country effectively. Under the Kabila government, citizens' fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, press, and association, were denied. Although a new president and government came into power in December 2018 (and was re-elected in December 2023), substantial changes have not been realized. The lack of rule of law, security concerns, and widespread corruption persist, contributing to a precarious overall situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

2) The fact that the country is very rich in minerals is negatively impacting the country's stability

The Democratic Republic of the Congo faces a significant challenge as its vast natural resources become its worst enemy. The issue of illegal mineral exploitation by armed groups adds to the complexity of an already volatile situation. International corporations' involvement and the role of neighboring countries further exacerbate the conflict.

The [exploitation of minerals by armed groups](#) has become a lucrative source of financing for their ongoing wars, perpetuating instability and violence in the region (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 29 June 2022). The vast reserves of minerals, including gold, diamonds, cobalt, and coltan, have attracted the attention of international corporations, indirectly contributing to the conflict through their supply chains. Despite some efforts to implement responsible sourcing initiatives, the illegal trade persists, sustaining armed groups and undermining peacebuilding efforts. Governments, international organizations, corporations, and local communities need to work together to dislodge the financial networks of armed groups and promote responsible and transparent mineral extraction practices.

3) The fragility of the security and political situation could expose Christians to increasing levels of violent persecution and provide the ADF-NALU with an opportunity to expand

The security situation in eastern DRC poses significant challenges, with a complex web of armed groups vying for control and resources in the region. The area has been plagued by violence and

instability for decades, leading to the displacement of millions of civilians and hindering economic and social development. One of the key actors contributing to the insecurity is the radical Islamic Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is known for its brutal attacks on civilians, kidnappings, and recruitment of child soldiers, further exacerbating the region's vulnerability. The presence of numerous armed groups, each with its own objectives and alliances, creates a fragmented and unpredictable security landscape. Clashes between rival groups and confrontations with security forces result in civilian casualties and human rights abuses, undermining the prospects for peace and stability. Moreover, the vast and remote terrain of eastern DRC facilitates the movement of armed groups and enables them to exploit the region's natural resources, providing them with the means to sustain their activities.

4) The presence of Rwandan forces in DRC

In 2023, the security challenges in eastern DRC intensified when Rwandan forces [fired a missile at a DRC fighter jet](#) in the region (Al-Jazeera, 25 January 2023). This incident added to the existing tensions and highlighted the complex and sensitive nature of the conflict. Many experts, including from the UN, have raised concerns about Rwanda's involvement in the region, stating that Rwandan troops have been fighting alongside the M23 rebel group and providing them with weapons and support. Amnesty International has also long been expressing alarm about the military escalation between DRC and Rwanda, emphasizing the [devastating impact on civilians](#) caught in the crossfire (AI, 21 June 2022). Despite these allegations, Rwandan President Kagame has so far [refused to directly comment on](#) Rwanda's support for the M23 and has instead highlighted the complexities of the situation in DRC (KT Press, 2 March 2023).

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: proxy war - <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/congo-decolonization>
- Recent history: killed - <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jan/17/patrice-lumumba-50th-anniversary-assassination>
- Recent history: crimes - https://www.icc-cpi.int/en_menus/icc/press%20and%20media/press%20releases/2004/Pages/prosecutor%20receives%20referral%20of%20the%20situation%20in%20the%20democratic%20republic%20of%20congo.aspx
- Recent history: The Guardian - <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/17/rwanda-minister-leader-congo-rebels-kabarebe>
- Recent history: step down - <https://www.france24.com/en/eye-africa/20180808-2018-08-08-2146-eye-africa>
- Recent history: Newly elected President - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/24/tshisekedi-calls-for-a-congo-for-all-after-disputed-election>
- Recent history: links - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-18/un-experts-warn-of-islamic-state-tie-to-islamist-rebels-in-congo#xj4y7vzkg>
- Recent history: wide margin of victory - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/31/felix-tshisekedi-re-elected-dr-congo-president-election-commission-says>
- Political and legal landscape: 2023 Freedom of the Press Index - <https://rsf.org/en/index>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom House - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/democratic-republic-congo/freedom-world/2023>
- Political and legal landscape: 2022 Human Rights Report, - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>
- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/africa/democratic-republic-congo>
- Political and legal landscape: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo>
- Political and legal landscape: International Federation for Human Rights - <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/democratic-republic-of-congo/drc-human-rights-concerns-tshisekedi>

- Political and legal landscape: de-escalate the situation - <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231121-us-says-rwanda-dr-congo-leaders-agree-on-steps-to-de-escalate>
- Political and legal landscape: ACHPR report (2015) - <https://www.achpr.org/states/detail?id=14>
- Economic landscape: 2023 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/democraticrepubliccongo>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Operational Data Portal, last updated 30 November 2023 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/cod>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD Gender Index reporting - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/CD.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UK Home Office, 2018 - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742590/DRC_GBV_2018.v2_ext_003_.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: GNWP, 22 February 2021 - <https://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/DRC-COVID-19-Profile.pdf>
- Technological landscape: Digital 2023 DRC report - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-democratic-republic-of-the-congo>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-dr-congo/2023/12/>
- Technological landscape: fueling the (mineral-related) conflict - <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/rwanda-drc-risk-of-war-new-m23-rebellion-emerges-explainer/>
- Security situation: more than 600 people have been killed by armed groups - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138107>
- Security situation: spiralling cycle of intercommunal violence - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/29/intercommunal-violence-western-congo-kills-scores>
- Security situation: targeted - <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>
- Security situation: killed - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2023/06/03/dr-congo-rebel-attack/>
- Security situation: targeted and killed - <https://www.persecution.org/2023/06/05/ten-murdered-in-drc/>
- Security situation: discovered killed - <https://www.africanews.com/2023/05/09/drc-remains-of-at-least-20-people-found-in-former-rebel-held-villages-in-north-kivu/>
- Security situation: attack on an IDP camp - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/12/dozens-killed-in-idp-camp-attack-in-dr-congo>
- Security situation: reprisal - <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/13/africa/drc-militia-kill-46-intl/index.html#:~:text=The%20massacre%20may%20have%20been%20a%20reprisal%20for%20acts%20of%20violence%20by%20other%20armed%20milita%20groups>
- Security situation: 12 Christians were killed - <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/16/africa/drc-church-attack-deaths-intl/index.html>
- Security situation: UNHR, 2020 - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25928&LangID=E>
- Security situation: 2020 Institute for Development Studies report - https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15887/931_Supporting_Survivors_of_Sexual_Violence.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Security situation: OCHA, 17 May 2019; - <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/amplifying-drc-women-s-leadership-peace-processes>
- Security situation: International Alert, March 2018 - <https://www.international-alert.org/projects/women-citizenship-and-peacebuilding-drc>
- Trends analysis: exploitation of minerals by armed groups - <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/rwanda-drc-risk-of-war-new-m23-rebellion-emerges-explainer/>
- Trends analysis: fired a missile at a DRC fighter jet - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/25/rwanda-shoots-at-dr-congo-army-jet-says-violated-its-air-space>
- Trends analysis: devastating impact on civilians - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/drc-military-escalation-with-rwanda-devastating-for-civilians/>
- Trends analysis: refused to directly comment on - <https://www.ktpress.rw/2023/03/rwanda-a-shortcut-for-drcs-problems-president-kagame/>

WWL 2024: Church information / DRC

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in DRC and can be traced back to 1491 when Roman Catholic priests arrived after Portuguese merchants had discovered the Congo River in 1482. However, as the main focus was the slave trade, Christian mission did not go deep inside the country. Not until the 19th century could Christianity become properly established.

- Catholic missionaries arrived in 1865. King Leopold II of Belgium was keen on establishing Belgium as a colonial power and helped missionaries by giving them land grants.
- Protestants entered the country in 1878 when British Baptists built their own mission stations along the Congo River.
- In 1891, Presbyterians came from the USA.
- In 1915 Pentecostals arrived from the UK. These were followed by Mennonites, Seventh-day Adventists and other denominations.

Church spectrum today

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	32,400	0.0
Catholic	53,684,000	57.5
Protestant	18,216,000	19.5
Independent	26,238,000	28.1
Unaffiliated	501,000	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-5,275,000	-5.6
Total	93,396,400	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	6,669,000	7.1
Renewalist movement	30,619,000	32.8

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

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.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians face difficulties from Islamic militants who are particularly active in North Kivu, in the eastern part of the country.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in DRC are not forced into isolation from other Christians. This category is therefore not included in the WWL analysis for scoring.

Historical Christian communities: This category includes Roman Catholic churches and various Protestant denominations. They are present throughout the country and are exposed to persecution from armed groups. During times of political unrest, attacks on church properties and intimidation of church leaders is common. From Kinshasa, the capital, to the central Kasai Province and, more recently, the eastern North Kivu Province, churches, convents and Catholic schools have been vandalized and looted by armed groups of youths or militiamen. The Islamist ADF-NALU have targeted Christians in the north-eastern region for several years, ever since their attempt to overthrow the Ugandan government failed.

Converts to Christianity: Converts to Christianity (especially from Islam) can be found throughout the North Kivu province in particular. Although there are Christians with a Muslim background in other parts of the country too, the latter are relatively less exposed to persecution and pressure from family and community in comparison. To a lesser extent, converts from African traditional religions to Christianity also face pressure.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Baptists, Pentecostal churches and similar groups have faced persecution principally from the Islamist ADF-NALU. Although these non-traditional Christian groups are in the minority they are growing rapidly compared to other Christian denominations. They face discrimination and persecution from members of the dominant historical Christian groups and Islamist groups in the Muslim-dominated part of the country. The ongoing conflict also affects this group of Christians as it does for all citizens in the country.

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Democratic Republic of the Congo

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Democratic Republic of the Congo: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	67	41
WWL 2023	67	37
WWL 2022	66	40
WWL 2021	64	40
WWL 2020	56	57

The overall score remained the same as in WWL 2023 (67 points) although there was a minor increase in the already extremely high violence score. Christians encountered significant challenges, particularly due to the activities of Islamic militants in the eastern region, resulting in repeated attacks on churches. The presence of organized crime not only intensified the difficulties faced by Christians but also posed severe obstacles in community life. However, the impact remains concentrated in the eastern part. If such adversities were to spread across the entire country, the DRC could potentially score among the highest in Africa, reflecting the gravity of the situation faced by Christians nationwide.

Persecution engines

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

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

This Persecution engine is particularly present in North Kivu and it is seen mainly in the activities of militant Islamic groups, especially ADF-NALU. The ideological influence of this group is affecting society and ordinary people not only in DRC, but also in neighboring Uganda. This further increases the likelihood of Christians being persecuted, especially converts. It is important to note that this affects only a small portion of the DRC and in most parts of the country *Islamic oppression* is not a Persecution engine that has any significant presence. T

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong)

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI 2022) puts the country at rank 162 (out of 180 countries) with a score of 20 out of 100. Corruption (and impunity for corrupt activities) is rampant in both the public and private sectors. It particularly affects the Christian community which opposes it since it is a form of injustice and contradicts Christian principles of faith. This engine is strengthened by unscrupulous businesses.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

DRC has suffered enormously under different regimes. Joseph Kabila postponed elections for two years without legal grounds. His supporters and security apparatus targeted Christians who voiced their discontent with his rule. The incumbent president, Felix Tshisekedi, came to power in December 2018 with a promise of cleaning up the mess and taking the country forward. Despite being re-elected in December 2023, there have been no tangible reforms taking place that can significantly protect the population from rebel group attacks in the country and reduce the level of persecution targeting Christians. Corruption remains rampant and the security apparatus remains unaccountable for their actions.

Clan oppression (Medium) blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Medium)

Much of the violence in North Kivu, Kisangani and in Kasai also bears an ethnic dimension. This was particularly evident in the WWL 2018 reporting period when the Bana Mura militia carried out well-planned attacks (at times led by national army officers) aimed at eliminating the Luba and Lula populations. Some of the attacks targeted churches. This has continued in all following WWL reporting periods, including WWL 2024.

Drivers of persecution

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

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** The main drivers of *Islamic oppression* in the DRC are violent religious groups as well as ordinary people who are influenced by radical Islamic ideology. The ADF-NALU is responsible for the persecution of Christians in North Kivu, in the eastern part of the country. This group has violently attacked Christians and churches. Ordinary people influenced by militant brands of Islam especially persecute Christians with a Muslim background (i.e. converts).

Drivers of organized corruption and crime

Since DRC is one of the most corrupt nations in Africa, this Persecution engine has a lot of strong drivers:

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Militant Islamic groups also participate in illegal mining. Research carried out by the [Institute for Security Studies \(ISS\)](#) in 2016 states: "The smuggling of DRC's natural resources is linked to the conflict in the region, warning that al-Shabaab remains sufficiently resourced to fund its activities despite efforts by African Union Mission in Somalia and the United Nations to cut off its channels of funding" (The East

African, 25 March 2016).

- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** One of the wealthiest nations in Africa with massive natural resources, DRC has seen numerous violent clashes and violations of human rights. Organized crime networks have become adept at smuggling minerals out of the country via a variety of routes. The crime and corruption related to the [mining industry](#), for instance, are profound (Raconteur, 4 June 2019). See also the report by [NPR, 1 February 2023](#).
- **Paramilitary groups (Strong):** DRC has numerous paramilitary and rebel groups that show disregard for civilian lives. These include M27, Mai-Mai, National Forces of Liberation, RUD-Urunana, Nyatura, FDLR, Mai Mai Sheka, Mai Mai Yakutumba, Raia Mutomboki, FNI, FRPI, FPJC, Mai-Mai Simba, UPC, Forces for Renewal, Mai Mai Kata Katanga, Mai Mai Gédéon, CORAK and CPK. These and other groups are creating an environment of lawlessness; they are illegally smuggling mining produce and they are merciless to those who oppose them. Christians in DRC who speak out against this practice experience severe reprisals.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government representatives often embezzle public money and do not protect civilians from persecution. Those who attack Christians often enjoy impunity due to corruption.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

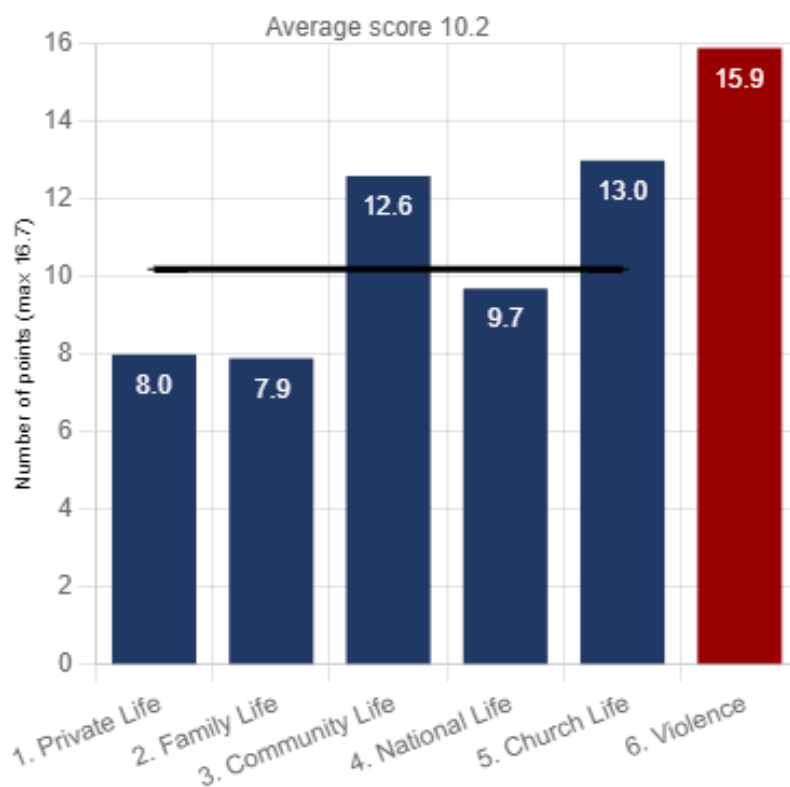
- **Government officials (Medium):** There are several drivers of *Dictatorial paranoia* in the DRC. Chief among these drivers is (now ex-)President Kabila and his allies who were determined to stay in power at all costs, but also includes supporters, political parties and militant groups affiliated with Kabila directly or indirectly. Due to the role that the Roman Catholic Church has tried to play in resolving the political and constitutional crises (caused by the ex-president delaying presidential elections), some have perceived Christians as being allied with the opposition. As a result, churches have faced pressure from the supporters and allies of the (ex-)president.

Drivers of Clan oppression blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Medium)

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In conflicts that pit ethnic groups against one another and in which ethnically and regionally based armed groups are active, Christians are targeted for various reasons. For instance, some ethnic and militant leaders belong to cults or adhere to indigenous traditional belief systems that generate hostility towards Christians (especially converts to Christianity).

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Democratic Republic of the Congo



The WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for DRC shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in DRC was high at 10.2 points, the same as in WWL 2023.
- As far as pressure is concerned, the *Church sphere* scored highest with 13.0 points, followed by the *Community sphere* (12.6 points). This reflects the fact that the main challenges faced by Christians are the problems that Islamic militants pose especially in the eastern part of the country, where churches have been under repeated attack, as well as the influence of criminal groups and corruption that make church and community life extremely difficult for Christians.
- The score for violence was extremely high with 15.9 points, rising from 15.6 points in WWL 2023. This was largely due to killings and attacks on the church by the various Islamic and other militant groups.

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 2024 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 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.00 points)

Revealing one's Christian faith through written forms of personal expression such as blogs or social media platforms like Facebook is fraught with risk, particularly in areas controlled by armed groups. Christians find it risky to openly criticize violence or engage in discussions that reveal their religious identity, as these actions can draw negative attention, harassment, or even threats of violence from extremist groups or other hostile actors.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.50 points)

The act of displaying Christian images or symbols can carry significant risk, particularly in regions where converting from Islam or ATR to Christianity is opposed and/or met with open hostility. In such contexts, displaying Christian symbols can result in social stigmatization, physical harassment or violent attacks.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.25 points)

Discussing one's Christian faith with individuals outside the immediate family — such as extended family or acquaintances from different religious backgrounds — carries a heightened level of risk. Particularly in communities where conversion is already a contentious issue, conversations about Christianity can trigger hostile reactions, especially if they involve non-Christians. This can lead to social ostracization, discrimination, or even acts of violence.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.25 points)

For Christians residing in areas under the control of armed groups, gathering with fellow believers poses severe risks, including the dangers of abduction or even lethal violence. Such meetings are scrutinized intensely and can result in immediate reprisals from these groups, who view Christian gatherings as threats to their ideological and political objectives. The act of meeting for worship or fellowship becomes a high-risk endeavor that places participants in direct harm's way, with consequences ranging from forced disappearance to extrajudicial killings.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.75 points)

Children of Christians have, in some instances, experienced harassment and discrimination due to their parents' faith. The diverse religious landscape of the DRC, which includes various Christian denominations and other religious groups, can give rise to tensions and instances of bias based on religious affiliation. Children from Christian families have faced challenges in educational settings, social interactions, and even in their communities where differing religious beliefs intersect. Additionally, there can be inter-denominational tensions within Christianity it-

self. Some Christian denominations have been reported to discriminate against or even persecute followers of other Christian denominations, particularly non-Catholic Christians.

Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (2.75 points)

Converts to Christianity have, in some cases, experienced divorce initiated by their spouses as a result of their conversion. The decision to convert to a different faith can bring about significant challenges, particularly in societies where religious identity is deeply ingrained in family and community life. The act of conversion might be perceived as a departure from traditional beliefs and values, leading to tensions within marriages and families. Spouses who view the conversion as a threat to the religious cohesion of the family might resort to divorce in an attempt to uphold their religious identity and affiliations.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (2.50 points)

There have been instances where Christians have faced hindrances in celebrating Christian weddings for faith-related reasons, particularly in regions affected by the presence of jihadists in the eastern part of the country. In these areas, the volatile security situation and the activities of extremist groups have created an environment where practicing any form of Christianity publicly can pose significant dangers to individuals and communities. As a result, celebrating Christian weddings or engaging in religious activities has at times been curtailed or restricted due to concerns for personal safety and security.

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.25 points)

Particularly in areas controlled by armed groups, such as the ADF (Allied Democratic Forces), families have been subjected to forced displacement and separation as a result of religiously motivated persecution. The volatile security situation and activities of violent militant groups in these regions have led to families being displaced from their homes, causing them to endure prolonged periods of separation as they seek safety.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.50 points)

The complex combination of factors in eastern DRC, including the presence of numerous armed groups and a dangerous Islamic radical group, has contributed to a challenging environment for Christians. The presence of armed groups can lead to situations where Christians are targeted or face difficulties due to their religious beliefs, as these groups may seek to impose their ideologies on the population.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.25 points)

Christians, particularly in the eastern part of the country, have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage due to their religious beliefs. The complex security environment in this region, characterized by the presence of numerous armed groups, including radical Islamic ADF, has contributed to an atmosphere of insecurity for Christians. In such situations, individuals, including Christians, can become targets of abduction by armed groups, and women and girls can also be at risk of forced marriage as a form of exploitation or control.

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

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, various dynamics impact Christians, particularly those who speak out about injustice in the country. Individuals expressing their convictions, especially in public services, often face discrimination when seeking employment. Consequently, Christians frequently engage in self-censorship to navigate the challenges associated with discrimination in public or private employment.

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.). (3.00 points)

The complex security situation in eastern DRC, with the presence of radical Islamic ADF and numerous other armed groups, has created an environment where individuals' religious activities are at times closely scrutinized. In an atmosphere of heightened security concerns, individuals, including Christians, may face monitoring, surveillance, or even reporting to local authorities or security agencies. Additionally, the dynamics of *Christian denominational protectionism* and the competition that has emerged between major Christian denominations contribute to monitoring and surveillance within the community.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.75 points)

Christians in DRC often find themselves as victims of harm, while the perpetrators often escape justice. The absence of effective institutions to hold these wrongdoers accountable further complicates the situation for Christians, leading to fear, intimidation, and a sense of insecurity. Acts such as death and the destruction of property occur with impunity, exacerbating the challenges faced by the Christian community.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.50 points)

There are numerous instances where Christians were compelled to act against their convictions, specifically in tolerating corruption. Speaking out against injustice, a critical element of Christian values, is exceedingly risky in the country.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)

The complex landscape of an authoritarian government, organized crime and corruption impact the freedom of Christians to openly express their views or opinions in public spaces, particularly where these are perceived as not aligning with the government's interests.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

Operating in the DRC as a civil society organization, especially one with a Christian focus on values and life, is extremely risky. Organizations trying to protect youth from involvement in criminal group activities or trying to preventing their recruitment by various militias, thus allowing youth to focus on education, face significant opposition and hostility. Moreover, organizations working on human rights often encounter serious limitations imposed by the government.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

The presence of armed groups and security concerns in eastern DRC has led to instances where churches have been subjected to monitoring and attack, impacting the ability of Christians to practice their faith freely and openly.

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

Churches seeking official recognition have faced challenges due to the difficult environment in the eastern part of the country, which is characterized by the presence of numerous armed groups and security threats. The complexities of the security situation, combined with government loyalty considerations and bureaucratic challenges, have contributed to the difficulties in the registration process, impacting the ability of churches to operate officially.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points)

There are churches that have been attacked and destroyed in the eastern part of the country. In some places, there were instances where churches were taken by armed groups and used for different purposes. Any attempt to ask to reclaim them is very risky, and any effort to renovate or rebuild buildings that have been attacked can provoke new attacks.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)

The situation is marked by complex dynamics, with Christians being targets on various fronts. *Dictatorial paranoia* restricts freedom of speech; if pastors and priests publicly speak about the

state of the nation in a critical manner, they are likely to face intense surveillance and intimidation. Christian leaders who speak out against atrocities in the western part of the country or rampant corruption also face serious risks from various quarters.

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

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

3. The use of symbolic numbers

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

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	261	100 *
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?	45	100 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	6	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	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	100 *	100 *
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100
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)?	1000 *	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?	1000 *	100 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000

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.

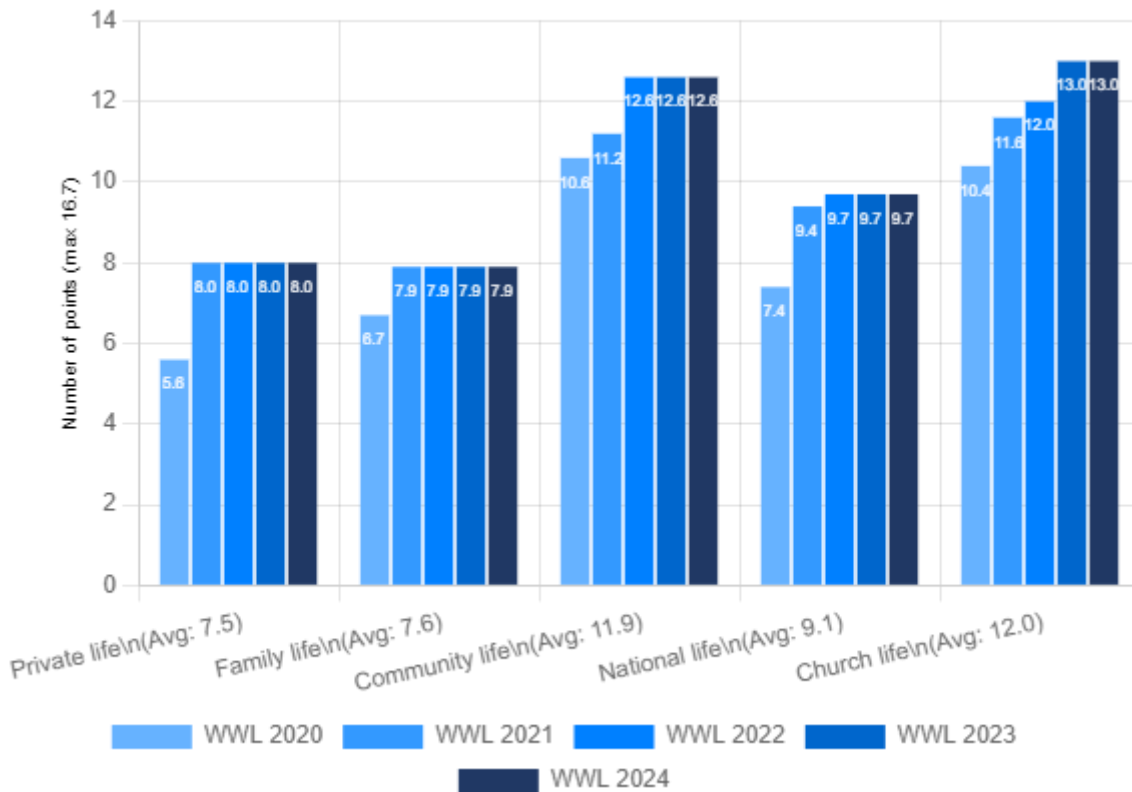
5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows that over the last 5 WWL reporting periods the level of average pressure has increased from 8.1 points in WWL 2020 and has now plateaued at around the 10.0/10.2 point mark.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.2
2023	10.2
2022	10.0
2021	9.6
2020	8.1

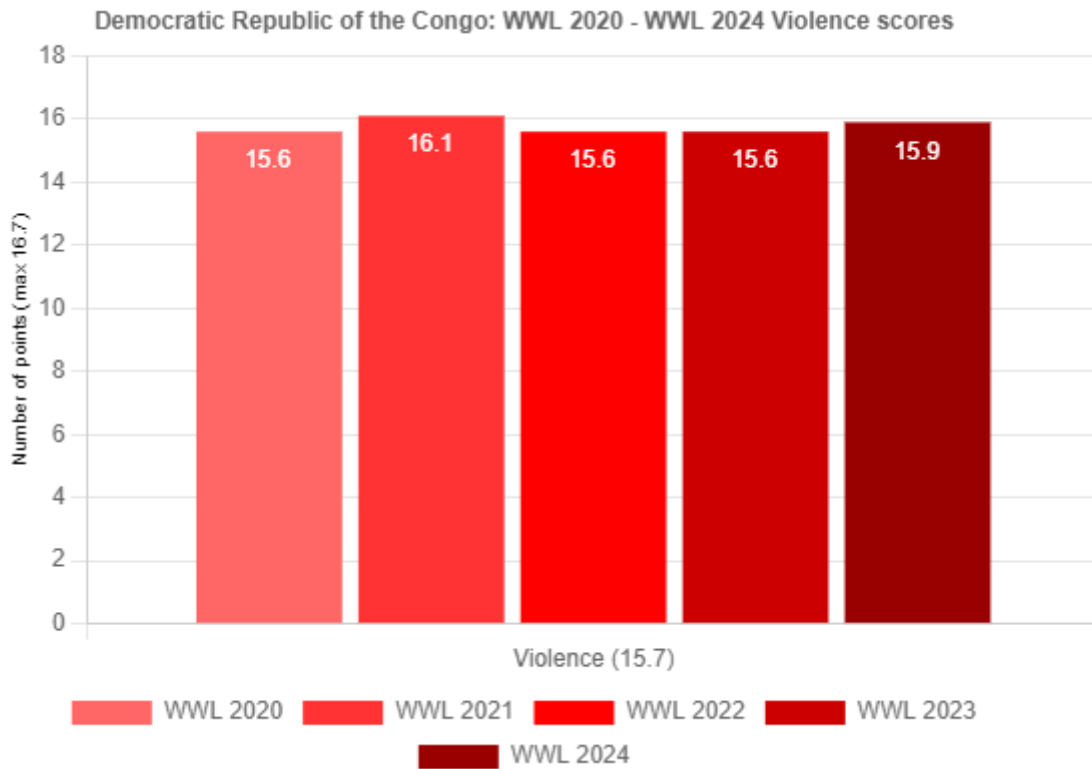
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

Democratic Republic of the Congo: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024 Pressure scores in each sphere of life



The above chart highlights the highest pressure in the *Church* and *Community* spheres, indicative of the intense strain experienced by Christians and religious institutions. This heightened pressure primarily stems from the confrontations faced by churches and believers orchestrated by armed groups and Islamic militants concentrated in the eastern region. Additionally, government actions contribute to the escalating pressure within the church sphere. The five-year average scores reveal the church at 12.0 and the community at 11.9, reflecting the highest levels of pressure, while the private and family sectors maintain lower averages at 7.5 and 7.6, respectively.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The above graph reveals a consistent and alarming trend in violence scores, consistently registering at an extreme level of 15.6 points or higher across all five World Watch List reporting periods. This unrelenting high level underscores the severe and enduring violence targeting Christians, particularly in the eastern region of the country. The five-year average score of 15.7 substantiates the gravity and persistence of this violence, painting a bleak picture of the enduring challenges faced by Christians in this area.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The Democratic Republic of Congo has a complex political, socio-economic and cultural landscape. Women across several areas of DRC, particularly those dominated by Islam, are commonly treated as inferior. This has an impact on their experience of much of life for girls. For married women, this can play out in Christians being denied access to their children, or commonly - if widowed - being denied access to their inheritance.

Practices such as forced marriages make Christian women vulnerable to persecution. Girls as young as 12 are forcefully married off by their parents. They are forced to sleep with their "new" partners and also forced to get pregnant at an early age. There are no specific laws contributing to the vulnerability of Christian women and girls to persecution. However, customary practices make them susceptible to domestic violence and forced marriages. Traditional beliefs and practices, such as child and forced marriages, are identified as factors that render women more vulnerable to abuse, extending beyond religious dimensions. The general societal discrimination against women and girls places them in a second-class status, leading to challenges in areas like land rights and succession.

In addition to this discrimination, Congolese Christian women are vulnerable to abduction, rape, trafficking, and sexual slavery, especially by the Islamist group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Sexual violence in eastern DRC has become "catastrophic" in scale over the past month. More than 670 girls and women were treated for sexual violence in displacement camps between April 17 and 30 2023 ([The Telegraph, 2023](#)). An expert summarizes, "Women and girls are raped, forced to marry ADF soldiers and others are trafficked. Sometimes these women and girls are killed." Many Christian women who are spared are reportedly kept as a kind of "trophy." Christian women, particularly converts may be forcibly married, forcibly impregnated or forcibly divorced. These forced marriages are often early marriages, as sources report that elderly Muslim men often prefer young Christian girls. Child marriage rates are high in the DRC, with some [37% of girls](#) marrying before they turn 18– among the top 20 countries in the world with the highest rates of child marriage (Girls Not Brides, accessed 22 December 2023).

Kidnappings and instances of rape most commonly occur at the hands of armed groups in the north-eastern regions, causing extreme psychological distress and trauma for the victims. According to experts, women are sometimes raped next to male hostages, who are bound. Certain terrorist groups seek Islamization through violent means, forcibly marrying abducted women to militia leaders and subjecting others to a life of sexual slavery. Women and girls have also been known to be used as human shields during violent confrontations with government forces. "The persecutors sometimes put women (sometimes pregnant) and small girls in front, knowing that they cannot be easily shot," an expert revealed.

Reports indicate that government soldiers have also been complicit in the widespread [sexual violence](#) against women in conflict zones (HRW, 18 October 2022). Due to the shame of sexual violence, Christian women and girls may face isolation and rejection from their families and communities following an attack. Rape can "[socially destroy](#)" communities and victims, due to stigma and the fear of disease linked to rape (van Wieringen, K., 2020). Speaking on the impact on the victims and the multiplier effect in the community, a country expert observed: "Women and girls who are persecuted through discrimination and sexual violence often get traumatized and develop very low self-esteem. As a result, they do not see themselves as capable adults who have important roles to play in society." In more extreme cases, an attack may cost a girl her life.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In a context of the endemic violence and impunity, Congolese Christian men face violent and extreme forms of persecution, including maiming, abduction, forced recruitment into militia groups, forced labor, sexual mutilation, disemboweling and brutal killings. While women and girls face the highest rates of rape, an expert highlights that “men and boys also face conflict-related sexual violence.”

Indeed, escalating violence in the eastern DRC displaced nearly one million people from January to June 2023. The surge in violence and attacks by armed groups have meant that huge numbers of civilians have been killed or forced to flee their homes.

In Eastern Congo, men and boys face an increased risk of abduction, killing, and conscription into paramilitary groups and ISIS. The persecution extends to forced recruitment into militia groups, targeted kidnappings, and killings, as well as torture and forced labor, especially for Christian men and boys. Joining the army in the DRC is voluntary but militia groups such as the ADF will force young men to join their ranks.

To escape their kidnapers, men may be forced to pay large ransoms; these fines paralyze already impoverished families, sentencing them to live out the next few years in even more desperate poverty. Even without punitive ransoms, Christian men reportedly face discrimination in the workplace and in some cases, are denied the opportunity to work.

Further, pastors, Christian leaders and their families have been specifically targeted because of their faith, particularly within the complex and changing environment of the eastern part of the country. The presence of numerous armed groups, security threats, and considerations related to government loyalty and denominational dynamics has led to situations where pastors, who are usually men, have been singled out for harassment.

The targeting of Christian men in these ways also serves to weaken their families as well as the wider Church. Church leaders are also targeted, especially if they have publicly denounced violence. “Churches that attempt to criticize the government risk being shut down and having their leaders arrested. Furthermore, churches that try to speak against the actions of the ADF expose themselves to suffering more violent attacks,” an expert shares.

The persecution of men and boys particularly affects Christian families and communities. As men are traditionally considered the heads of families and are responsible for protection and provision, their persecution destabilises families, leaving them vulnerable to further persecution.

Persecution of other religious minorities

The number of religious minorities in the DRC, including Muslims, is often a subject of dispute. The High Islamic Council of Congo estimates that Muslims make up approximately 14% of the country's population. However, this figure has been contested by some, leading to ongoing disagreements. Muslims in the country have voiced complaints about not receiving the same privileges and treatment as Christians.

Future outlook

Engines of persecution in DRC, deeply rooted and multifaceted, suggest a grim and enduring reality for Christians in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where immediate resolutions seem elusive against these formidable challenges. In a nutshell, the following is the outlook:

Islamic oppression

The country has struggled to deal with ADF for many years and there is no plan of action to put a stop to the violent attacks. Thus, it is expected that ADF will remain a potent driver of persecution in the country for some years to come. The group was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the [US State Department](#) in March 2021. A [UN report](#) released in July 2020 has suggested that ADF might have committed crimes against humanity (Reliefweb, 6 July 2020). As long as the general turmoil in DRC remains unresolved, *Islamic oppression* will remain active in the country.

what has been observed in the past suggests that Islamic oppression persists as the ADF, known for its violent attacks, remains a significant threat. Despite international designations and reports pointing to crimes against humanity, the lack of resolution in the country's turmoil ensures that Islamic oppression continues unabated.

Dictatorial paranoia

Dictatorial paranoia, although slightly alleviated with the change in presidency, still grips the nation. Hopes for positive reforms have largely remained unmet, sustaining an environment of impunity, corruption, and human rights abuses—a persistent challenge for Christians and churches extending beyond WWL 2024.

Organized corruption and crime

This is probably the toughest Persecution engine to eliminate. It is very complex due to multiple actors being involved at domestic, regional and international levels. Even neighboring countries are believed to be involved in smuggling minerals out of DRC. There is also an involvement of unscrupulous businesses. Thus, this engine will remain potent and destructive in the country and Christians and churches will remain vulnerable to its effects. Thus, Organized corruption and crime pose an intricate and deeply entrenched threat, involving multiple actors at various levels,

both domestic and international. This complexity ensures its enduring and destructive presence, leaving Christians and churches vulnerable to its adverse impacts. This will likely continue.

Clan oppression blended with Ethno-religious hostility

Clan oppression entwined with ethno-religious hostility remains a challenging dynamic. While there might be potential for its long-term decline, short-term projections indicate a possible escalation. The active evangelization efforts of Christians might intensify reactions, elevating tensions in the near future.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: Institute for Security Studies - <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Illegal-minerals-from-DR-Congo-fund-terrorist-groups/2560-3134040-rpdwnpz/index.html>
- Drivers of persecution description: mining industry - <https://www.raconteur.net/business-innovation/cobalt-mining-human-rights>
- Drivers of persecution description: NPR, 1 February 2023 - <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/02/01/1152893248/red-cobalt-congo-drc-mining-siddharth-kara>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (The Telegraph, 2023) - <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/sexual-violence-on-a-catastrophic-scale-48-victims-a-day-report-attacks-in-drc/ar-AA1b0gIC?ocid=winp1taskbar&cid=99501d6c2b5b440da3654dd4f9b7b9b2&ei=19>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 37% of girls - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: sexual violence - <https://humanglemedia.com/55-sexual-violence-cases-reported-in-dr-congo-within-a-month/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: “socially destroy” - <https://jhumanitarianaction.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41018-020-00074-4>
- Future outlook: US State Department - <https://www.state.gov/state-department-terrorist-designations-of-isis-affiliates-and-leaders-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-mozambique/>
- Future outlook: UN report - <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/report-violations-human-rights-and-international-humanitarian-law>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Democratic+republic+of+Congo>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- [DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO – Mapping the conflict – 2018.](#)

External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO – Mapping the conflict – 2018 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DRC-Mapping-the-conflict-WWR-2018.pdf>