

World
Watch
Research

Ethiopia: Full Country Dossier

February 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

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

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

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Ethiopia

Brief country details

Ethiopia: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
120,813,000	72,396,000	59.9

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

Map of country



Ethiopia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	39
WWL 2022	66	38
WWL 2021	65	36
WWL 2020	63	39
WWL 2019	65	28

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Ethiopia: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Clan oppression	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 Ethiopia, all three categories of Christian communities face violations of religious freedom, although some denominations are more affected than others. Non-traditional Christians face the most severe violations both from the local government and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (particularly in eastern and south-eastern parts of the country) and 'cross-denominational converts' from an Orthodox background face harsh mistreatment from their families and communities. In some areas, Christians are denied access to community resources and/or are ostracized from society. For example, in places such as Somali state and some parts of Oromia, Islamic mobs are prone to attack churches. The political violence that has been ongoing for the last three years has also left Christians increasingly vulnerable to rises in pressure and violence.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Ethiopia 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 on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
4. [Convention against Torture](#) (CAT)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and denied their right to freedom of religion or belief (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians are denied their right to freedom of expression (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian peaceful religious gatherings are restricted, in violation of the right to peaceful assembly (ICCPR Art. 21)

- Christian women are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23.3; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Christian women are denied their equality of rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution (ICCPR Art. 23.4 and CEDAW Art.16)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Conflict in various parts of the country has had a significant impact on Christians since they were more exposed to organized attacks and robberies.
- More than 20 churches and church buildings were attacked, damaged or looted. For instance: On 28 April 2022, a group of Muslims burned two Orthodox churches and three Protestant churches in Worabe, Siltie zone (SNNP). Also, a group of Muslim rioters entered the Sankura St.Gebrael church, attacked the monks and fully burnt down the church in Alem Gebeya, Siltie zone (SNNP).

Specific examples of positive developments

There was fear that the 2021 election would lead to a deterioration in security. Fortunately, the election was not followed by violence.

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 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 against Torture - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Ethiopia

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 163-165)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	17 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349398	17 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/ETH	17 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/	17 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/ethiopia	17 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (pp. 58/60)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	17 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	22 July 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Ethiopia not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom Index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2022	17 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-net/2022	1 February 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/ethiopia	17 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#et	17 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/ethiopia	17 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/eth	17 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/ETH	17 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/	17 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Ethiopia not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview#1	17 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.t.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=ETH	17 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 34-35)	https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook	17 June 2022

Recent history

For many centuries Ethiopia was part of the Aksumite Empire, which included present-day Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia but this came to an end around 940 AD. Thereafter different dynasties ruled the country. In 1974 the army deposed the last king of the Solomonic dynasty and took control of the state. The military junta led by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam followed Socialist ideology. After the ousting of the army by rebel forces in 1991, the current ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) - rebranded as the Prosperity Party after its dissolution, came to power and a constitution was finally drafted and adopted in 1995. The Eritrean–Ethiopian War took place from May 1998 to June 2000. In June 2018, the new Ethiopian prime minister, Dr Abiy Ahmed, signed a peace treaty with Eritrea formally ending that war. Both countries removed some of their armed forces from the front.

Before that, however, developments in Ethiopia had been changing thick and fast. In 2015, the then ruling party claimed to have won 100% of the contested parliamentary seats, a claim that sent a shock among human rights groups and those who work on issues of democracy and rule of law. Although the country is said to have been developing at a very good rate in terms of economic development, in November 2015 the country faced a series of violent protests. Human rights groups reported that hundreds of people had been killed by security forces and thousands put in jail. The demonstrations started peacefully in the Oromia region and expanded to the Amhara region with demands for the respect of political, civil, social, and economic rights. In response, the government imposed martial law in October 2016.

The top leadership, beleaguered by more than two years of relentless protests and political unrest, held a closed-door meeting and came out announcing in January 2018 that it acknowledged its failures and the resulting public grievances, would [release political prisoners](#) and would close the infamous torture center Maekelawi (Human Rights Watch - HRW, 3 January 2018). After releasing political prisoners in early February 2018, including prominent opposition figures and journalists, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn [tendered resignation](#) unexpectedly, saying he would continue in office in a caretaker role until the ruling coalition EPRDF elected a new leader and the country's parliament appointed that person as prime minister (CNN, 15 February 2018). After intensive behind-the-scene deliberations, Dr Abiy Ahmed was elected as chairman of the ruling party and eventually became prime minister. Since he assumed office in April 2018, he has introduced a series of reforms including the release of thousands of political prisoners and proposing the privatization of some of the companies owned by the state. Other very important diplomatic and economic reforms were also introduced.

However, during the period between the resignation of the former prime minister and swearing-in of the new prime minister, the country saw a new state of emergency declared, and its army [kill civilians](#) in a southern town, causing many to flee across the border to Kenya (Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, 12 March 2018). Then, on 10 April 2018, the US House of Representatives passed a non-binding [resolution](#) on Ethiopia, calling on the Ethiopian government led by the new prime minister to demonstrate a commitment to human rights, democracy, and rule of law and indicating future cooperation to be tied to it (HRW, 10 April 2018). In May and early June 2018, the Liyu police unit of the Somali regional state carried out [new rounds of killings](#) and the burning of houses in a neighboring regional state (Amnesty International - AI, 11 June 2018). In late June 2018, a deadly bomb blast considered an [assassination attempt](#) on the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed hit a huge rally in Addis Ababa's Meskel square which had been called in support of the prime minister (CNN, 24 June 2018).

June 2018 was also a month during which significant positive events were registered under the leadership of the new prime minister. The state of emergency imposed in February was lifted two months earlier than its official date of expiry; the country's state-controlled telecoms and state-owned airline businesses were made open to private and international investors for the first time; parliament lifted proscription on three opposition groups and their members exiled abroad; the government also publicly admitted security forces relied on [torture](#) and it committed to legal reforms of repressive laws (HRW, World Report 2019). The government announced it was fully accepting the Algiers agreement and the decision of the boundary commission to end hostilities with Eritrea and in July 2018 the [historic peace deal](#) with Eritrea was signed (HRW, 18 July 2018). In October 2018, there was a cabinet reshuffle and the appointment of the [first female head of state](#) in the country's history (Al-Jazeera, 25 October 2018). In the same month, history was made as women held 50% of cabinet positions.

However, in 2018, the country saw a rise in communal violence which resulted in the displacement of [millions](#) of people (HRW, World Report 2019). In 2019, there was allegedly an attempted coup at the regional level which led to the killing of the president of the Amhara regional state and top leadership. The army's chief of staff was also killed. Some activists accused the government of imprisoning hundreds of people using the coup attempt as a pretext. But the government claimed that the arrested individuals were engaged in criminal activities that war-

ranted their arrest. In 2020, the country saw more protests and violence - and also further human rights violations by security forces were [reported](#) (AI, 29 May 2020). In some places, Christians were targeted and attacked as well.

In November 2020, the federal government ordered its troops to conduct an operation in the northern part of the country after the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) attacked the Ethiopian National Defense Forces without any provocation or warning. The conflict in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the Horn of Africa in recent years. Massive human rights violations including rape, extra judicial killings and displacements were reported. Churches were attacked, priests were killed. However, it is important that this is seen in the correct context:

- First, this is a conflict between the federal government and the regional government after the Tigray regional state attacked the federal army.
- Secondly, there is an element of ethnic conflict: In Western Tigray in particular, it is very contested who owns a given piece of land.
- Thirdly, it is true that church and church leaders have been targeted, but that happened within the wider context, not because of their Christian faith. It is important to underline that thousands of civilians were killed. These factors mean that the situation is not one where Christians have been specifically targeted for their faith.

According to a recent report issued by [Amnesty International](#) (AI, April 2022), officials and security forces from Amhara region committed widespread atrocities constituting crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing against Tigrayan civilians in Western parts of the Tigray region. The [evidence of those crimes was being burned](#) and eliminated; mass graves were being dug up to burn hundreds of bodies and transport the remains away, according to BBC World News on 8 May 2022. Tigray forces likewise committed widespread atrocities against the local Amhara population (including [raping women and girls](#)), in the areas of the Amhara region they captured following renewed fighting that led to the withdrawal of government forces from Tigray and their southward retreat (AI 2021/22 Report, p.164).

This conflict has had a devastating impact on Tigray and Amhara regions in terms of food security: The WFP stated in January 2022 that 40% of people in Tigray were suffering “[extreme lack of food](#)” (Al-Jazeera, 28 January 2022). The USA sanctioned Ethiopian officials and [removed the country from a favorable trade program](#) due to their alleged gross human rights violations, unwillingness to de-escalate the conflict and refusal to open corridors to deliver humanitarian relief (Al-Jazeera, 2 January 2022). The fighting seems to have eased since March 2022, however, after Ethiopia’s government declared an indefinite [unilateral truce](#) (Al-Jazeera, 24 March 2022) and the TPLF rebels followed suit by agreeing to a cessation of hostilities and declaring their [withdrawal from the areas of Afar region](#) which they had held (Al-Jazeera 25 April 2022). This development opened the door for delivering humanitarian relief to the affected areas and renewed hope for political and diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

In June 2022, it [was reported](#) that the government and the TPLF had agreed to high level negotiations as a major step towards ending the almost two-year conflict (Reuters, 14 June 2022). Despite the high hopes, a full blown war erupted shortly after the June 2022 agreement. After the federal government captured several key towns, a [breakthrough agreement](#) was an-

nounced from negotiations in Pretoria (South Africa). A permanent cessation of hostility was agreed along with "a detailed program of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for the TPLF combatants" (CNN, 3 November 2022).

Political and legal landscape

The [1995 Constitution](#) established a federal form of government. The form of federal government and the ideology behind 'what sort of federal arrangement', - i.e. language and settlement pattern, was supported by the TPLF and other ethnic-based political parties. The TPLF was the main body ruling with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) until April 2018. During the armed struggle in the 1970s and 80s, they articulated a very specific role for ethnicity in Ethiopia, which they established after coming to power. Hence, ethnicity served as the primary identity marker, not religion. However, for certain ethnic groups, religion still plays an important role in their identity. For example, the Amhara and Tigray historically have close ties with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), the ethnic Somalis are Muslims. Nonetheless, it is important to note that political mobilization still takes place primarily along ethnic lines. While religious-based conflicts still do erupt, insecurity in Ethiopia mainly involves ethnic-based armed groups. These groups are motivated primarily through feeling marginalized by the Tigray-dominated society, rather than on the basis of religion.

After the TPLF lost control of the federal government (after the series of protests starting in 2015 forced the prime minister to resign) many Ethiopians believed that the new prime minister, Dr Abiy Ahmed, would successfully solve the problems the country has been facing. However, according to [International Crisis Group](#) reporting on 15 April 2020, "the prime minister has struggled to maintain order as a divided and discredited ruling coalition increasingly lost its grip on the systems it had used for decades to maintain control over a diverse and sometimes restive population. Rival regional, ethnic, and political factions clashed over ideology, power, and resources, killing thousands of people, and displacing more than three million." To revitalize the transition, in late 2019 the prime minister and his allies created a new ruling party called the Prosperity Party. The TPLF refused to join. Tensions continue to escalate between the different ethnic groups.

The International Crisis Group article of 15 April 2020 also explains how the government has come under fire from opposition parties for failing to create conditions for fair elections, which it had promised would be in place before polls took place on the constitutionally prescribed schedule. They complained that the government is resorting to tactics belonging to past authoritarian days, including the arrest and harassment of activists, and denial of permission for meetings and rallies. They also accuse the new Prosperity Party of using government resources for its own advantage.

After five years of political turmoil, the country was scheduled to hold elections in August 2020. However, due to the public health risks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, on 31 March 2020 the electoral board [suspended](#) preparations for the elections (Reuters, 1 April 2020). Consequently, on 10 April 2020, parliament approved a five-month state of emergency, giving the authorities sweeping powers to battle the COVID-19 crisis. The general election (for voting in officials to the House of Peoples' Representatives) was finally held on 21 June 2021. The ruling party won the election with what can be called a landslide victory. The government's early lifting

of the state of emergency in February 2022, the release of high-profile political prisoners (including some under house arrest) and the launching of national dialogue appeared to have opened an avenue for settling fundamental political questions facing the country through negotiation and compromise. However, views on whether the announced [national dialogue can be realized](#) were initially mixed (Al-Jazeera, 27 January 2022), reflecting the deep divide among the Ethiopian elite on the prognosis of potential political and structural issues for delivering inclusive peace.

Religious perspective

Past and present governments have attempted to mobilize support by controlling religious groups and influencing religious life in the country. For example, after coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF party replaced the patriarch of the Orthodox Church - a position that is typically held for life. This implies that the role of the government in religion is stronger than the influence of religious groups on the government. Moreover, the interference of the Ethiopian government often generates resentment among the population since religious institutions are perceived as being co-opted. In addition, a formal political organization on a religious basis is technically outlawed in Ethiopia. Within this context, Protestant churches are considered to be largely (apolitical) agents of Western ideology and interests. Various informal, politically organized religious groups do exist, especially within Ethiopia's diaspora, but the dominant narrative within Ethiopia's political system remains tied to ethnicity. Against this backdrop Muslim groups have become more active, which has led to the development of specific religious-based publications, such as YeMuslimoch Guday (Muslim Affairs) and Sewtul Islam.

Ethiopia has always had deep Christian roots, but there is also a very substantial Muslim minority of 34.3% according to WCD 2022 estimates. Salafist streams have been present since the 1930s but have been growing in influence among the Ethiopian population in all areas in recent years. There have been claims that the marginalization policy which left the Muslim community devoid of any political or economic influence in the country under previous regimes is continuing under the current administration. The government, however, refutes such allegations. The current prime minister has released all Muslim leaders who had been arrested when the previous prime minister was in office. He also mediated between the two factions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and as a result, the exiled former Patriarch also returned to Ethiopia before his [death](#) in March 2022 (Addis Zeybe, 4 March 2022).

The apolitical character of the Protestant movement, including converts from Islam and some former members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), has brought these Christians into increasing conflict with the Ethiopian government and the two main religious bodies in the country. Experts believe that the current political dynamics might improve relations between Orthodox and Protestant Christians. There are still others who believe that the main problem that emanates from the EOC is from ultra-conservative groups not from the leadership. It is unlikely that the 2018 change in the leadership of the Ethiopian government has altered the view of these ultra-conservative groups. Indeed, ultra-conservative groups in the ranks of the EOC are becoming very vocal; for instance, they are continually pushing for a tougher stance against any reformist influence in the EOC and the general Protestant movement in the country.

Gender perspective

By law, men and women have equal rights to enter marriage and must freely consent to the union (Family Code, Articles 6 and 12). Child marriage rates are on the decline, but nevertheless remain high in Ethiopia, with 40% of girls and 5% of boys marrying before the age of 18 ([Girls Not Brides, 2021](#)). The legal age for marriage (18) is rarely enforced and early marriages are particularly common in the case of religious or customary marriages. Child marriage is commonly cited as the main reason women file for divorce. Regarding custody, children under five years commonly live under the custody of the mother, and those over five are placed with their father ([OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)). Domestic violence is criminalized (under Article 564 of the Criminal Code) but is rarely reported to the police due to a lack of trust in the authorities, and the widespread societal belief that it is a private matter ([Semahegn and Mengistie, August 2015](#)).

Religious landscape

Ethiopia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	72,396,000	59.9
Muslim	41,450,000	34.3
Hindu	8,500	0.0
Buddhist	1,900	0.0
Ethno-religionist	6,804,000	5.6
Jewish	17,100	0.0
Bahai	29,400	0.0
Atheist	13,500	0.0
Agnostic	92,200	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

Historically, Ethiopia has always had deep Christian roots. The main Christian groups in Ethiopia are the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the various Protestant denominations. The latter entered the country from the 19th century onwards. According to Islamic tradition, Islam has a long history in Ethiopia dating back to the *hijrah* (flight of Muslims to Axum in northern Ethiopia in 615 AD). However, the Roman Catholic Church (introduced in the 16th century) shaped the identity of Ethiopia to a large extent. In fact, Ethiopia presents itself as a bulwark of Christianity surrounded by Islamic neighbors. Within the context of the “global war against terror”, this narrative is often employed by Ethiopians.

This does not change the fact that Ethiopia has a very substantial Muslim minority. Sufism has a long tradition, and the more conservative Salafist streams have been present since the 1930s, expanding from the 1960s onwards. These conservative streams were originally concentrated along Ethiopia's eastern fringes, but have been growing in influence among the Ethiopian population in all areas and causing deep concern for the present government. The Muslim community, especially the leadership, has become very assertive.

Relations between Orthodox and Protestant Christians are strained. Ultra-conservative groups within the EOC are constantly pushing for a tougher stance against the emerging EOC reformist movement and Protestant church activity.

Economic landscape

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 for Sub-Saharan Africa (pp. 34-35):

- **Economic growth:** "At 6.3 percent according to official figures, growth surprised on the upside in FY21, as agriculture performance in the second part of the year was better than expected. The few available high-frequency indicators suggest growth has been sluggish in the second half of 2021, as electricity generation dropped, capital imports contracted," and more than 40 million quintals of agricultural production had been lost in the Amhara region due to the conflict. "The growth figure for FY22 has been revised down on account of the intensification of the conflict during the first months of the fiscal year, the introduction of more stringent foreign exchange surrendering requirements, and the new requirement for banks to invest 1 percent of outstanding credit on Development Bank of Ethiopia bonds, which will likely hold back economic activity." The World Bank's outlook "expects some rebound in economic activity in FY23 assuming the conflict in Tigray does not reignite."
- **Inflation:** "Fast expansion of merchandise imports (24.3 percent y-o-y), driven by a larger fuel and cereal bill as international prices climb up, has resulted in a significant widening of the current account deficit in FY21. The fiscal deficit was 2.8 percent of GDP in FY20/21, unchanged from FY19/20, and is expected to widen to 4.2 percent of GDP in FY21/22. Inflation would remain elevated in FY21, while trending down in the medium term as a tighter macroeconomic stance is implemented once the pandemic abates." "Inflation has averaged above 30 percent during the first seven months of FY21/22, driven by food prices, a recent increase in fuel prices, and expectations. Despite continued nominal depreciation, high inflation has resulted in the real exchange rate remaining broadly unchanged during this period." As key macroeconomic and structural reforms are fully implemented by 2022, foreign direct investment, exports, and economic growth are expected to strengthen in the medium term."
- **Remittances:** "Remittances, which dropped by 10 percent in FY20, rebounded during the first half of FY21 (19.1 percent). Meanwhile, net foreign direct investment remains depressed, dropping by 1.7 percent during the same period." "FDI inflows during the first five months of FY22 indicate a robust rebound (26.9 percent y-o-y)."

According to the World Bank country overview:

- “Ethiopia has been experiencing the unprecedented social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While exports and foreign direct investment have rebounded in 2020/21 and jobs have been recovering, some lasting scars are likely to remain. Urban employment levels have not recovered fully, some households and firms continue to report income losses, and poverty is estimated to have increased.” “The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods are expected to be severe. Household incomes, as shown by the high-frequency phone surveys, are impacted through a reduction in aggregate demand that affects low-income households disproportionately. Results from the phone survey of firms show that Covid-19 and related containment measures have substantially impacted firms’ operations”.
- The government has launched a new 10-Year Development Plan, which will run from 2020/21 to 2029/30 and aims to sustain the remarkable growth achieved under the Growth and Transformation Plans of the previous decade, while facilitating the shift towards a more private-sector-driven economy. The plan also aims to foster efficiency and bring competition in key growth-enabling sectors, i.e. energy, logistics and telecom, improve the business climate, and address macroeconomic imbalances.

According to the [2022 Index of Economic Freedom](#) (accessed 1 February 2023):

- Ethiopia's economic freedom score is 49.6, making its economy the 150th freest in the world. While the score is lower than that of previous period, the country has improved by one rank in the 2022 Index. Ethiopia is ranked 35th among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is below the regional and world average.

Gender perspective

As far as addressing the conflict-induced displacement, violence against vulnerable communities and destruction of infrastructure is concerned, the World Bank has come to Ethiopia’s aid by approving a \$300 million International Development Association (IDA) grant for the [Response-Recovery-Resilience for Conflict-Affected Communities in Ethiopia Project](#). According to the World Bank's Press Release No. 2022/065/AFE of 12 April 2022:

- “The project will support efforts to address the immediate needs of communities, rehabilitate/recover infrastructure destroyed by conflict, and increase community resilience to the impacts of conflict in a sustainable manner. Specifically, the project will help to improve access to basic services, as well as rebuild climate-resilient infrastructure, prioritized by communities. To urgently meet the needs of conflict-affected communities, mobile units will be dispatched to provide key services including in the areas of education, health, water, and sanitation. The project will also provide GBV [gender-based violence] survivors with improved access to the services and comprehensive care needed to recover from the impacts of the violence they experienced. Furthermore, it will support prevention interventions to address the underlying norms and dynamics that perpetuate GBV.”

Within this context women are typically financially dependent on men due to gender gaps in relation to access to education and employment ([USAID, 2 December 2020](#)). Making it addition-

ally challenging for women to attain financial independence, customary and religious practices deny women their due inheritance, despite equal rights being enshrined in law ([OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

In general, Ethiopia is a country with more than 80 different ethnic groups each with its own language, culture, customs and tradition. Despite its lauded economic growth, Ethiopia still remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

According to the UNDP's Human Development Indicators (HDI profile) and the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Oromo 35.8%, Amhara (Amara) 24.1%, Somali (Somalie) 7.2%, Tigray 5.7%, Sidama 4.1%, Gamo-Goffa-Dawuro 2.8%, Gurage 2.6%, Wolaita 2.3%, Afar 2.2%, Silte 1.3%, Kefficho 1.2%, Other 10.8% (2022 est.)
- **Main languages:** Oromo (official working language in the state of Oromiya) 33.8%, Amharic (official language) 29.3%, Somali (official working language of the state of Sumale) 6.2%, Tigrigna (Tigrinya) (official working language of the state of Tigray) 5.9%, Sidamu 4%, Wolayta 2.2%, Gurage 2%, Afar (official working language of the state of Afar) 1.7%, Hadiyya 1.7%, Gamo 1.5%, Gedeo 1.3%, Opuuo 1.2%, Kafa 1.1%. other 8.1%, English (major foreign language taught in schools), Arabic (2007 est.)
- **Urban population:** 22.7% of the total population (2022)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.4% annual rate of change (2020-2025)
- **Median age:** 19.8 years (2020)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 8.8 years (Female 8.3, Male 9.3). This gender gap widens at the tertiary level. (9 years according to CIA Factbook 2022)
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 51.8% (2017)
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 77.9%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 2.1%
- **Labor force participation rate:** Female 73.4%, male 85.8%

According to [UNHCR Fact Sheet March 2022](#) (Reliefweb, 20 April 2022):

- **Refugees:** "Ethiopia is the third-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, sheltering 844,589 registered refugees and asylum-seekers as of 31 March 2022. The overwhelming majority originate from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea."

According to [UNHCR Response to Internal Displacement in Ethiopia Fact Sheet](#) (Reliefweb, 19 May 2022):

- **IDPs:** "As of March 2022, an estimated 5,582,000 persons were displaced within the country due to armed conflict and natural disasters, while some 2,848,000 IDPs, in Amhara, Afar and Tigray regions, have returned to their place of origin in the first quarter of 2022, seeking durable solutions."
- "Ethiopia continues to face a massive chronic displacement situation fused by layers of new forced population movements throughout the country due to conflict, inter-communal violence, natural hazards, and impacts of climate change notably in southeast Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali regions."

According to the UNDP's Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **Human Development index:** Ethiopia ranked 173 out of 189 countries in the world with a value of 0.485
- **Average life expectancy at birth:** 66.6 years
- **Gender development index (GDI):** 0.837
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** 0.517. This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Ethiopia ranks 125th out of 177 countries.

Gender perspective

In Ethiopia's patriarchal context, a woman's worth is commonly measured in terms of her role as a wife and mother ([Wright A: Global Majority E-Journal, Vol.11, No.1, June 2020, pp.47–60](#)). Despite legal protection aimed at providing gender inequality, social and cultural norms that place women as subordinate remain prevalent. According to [UN Women \(2021\)](#), 20% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the last 12 months. Many choose to remain in abusive marriages due to the stigma and shame attached to divorce, as well as the fear of losing property or child custody ([OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)). Improving access to justice for victims was highlighted as a key recommendation by a [2019 CEDAW committee report](#) (pp.3-4).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 17.7% of the total population – survey date: December 2021 (Most recent survey at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 6.3% of the total population – survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank data profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 38.7 (per 100 people)

According to a [2017 World Bank report](#), men are twice as likely as women to have access to a mobile phone and the internet. An article in the [British Medical Journal](#) (March 2020) further indicated a gender gap of 25% in mobile phone ownership. In light of this, it is more challenging for female Christians to access Christian resources and digital community. Indicating that this gender gap is closing, [Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20](#) highlighted Ethiopia as one of the top ten countries that reported recent gains in women's cell-phone use (p.35).

Ethiopia has poor technological infrastructure caused by communal violence, civil war repression and other man-made or natural disasters. However, the government has been investing in infrastructure in many forms (buildings, roads, technology institutes etc.): In February 2022, Ethiopia [began producing electricity](#) from its massive hydropower plant Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) (Al-Jazeera, 20 February 2022). However, its communication technology is still lagging far behind. The country has only one telecommunication provider own-

ed by the government. This company provides cell-phone, Internet and landline services.

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report (covering 1 June 2021 - 31 May 2022):

- Ethiopia was listed as 'Not free', having a low score of 27 points
- "Despite marginal gains in internet access, Ethiopia remains one of the least connected countries in the world. ... Internet penetration rates vary substantially between urban and rural areas The electricity infrastructure is somewhat unreliable, and internet access was inhibited by power outages and protracted conflict during the coverage period".
- "In May 2022, Ethio Telecom, a state-owned mobile service provider, launched fifth-generation (5G) network technology in the capital, Addis Ababa. The company's chief executive announced that it planned to build 150 5G sites over the next 12 months."
- "The communications blackout imposed by the federal government in the Tigray Region continued throughout the coverage period, impeding access to information, online communication, and humanitarian aid. Ethiopian authorities also imposed localized internet and communications blackouts in other areas where TPLF forces gained control".
- The government "continued to crack down on media outlets and journalists with an online presence, including by detaining journalists for up to three months, threatening to revoke and actually revoking their press licenses, and forcibly disappearing some prominent journalists".

Security situation

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2022 country chapter):

- Ethiopia's security situation deteriorated in 2021, "with civilians impacted by a devastating conflict in Tigray, security force abuses, attacks by armed groups, and deadly ethnic violence in other regions."
- Besides the Tigray conflict: "Extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, arbitrary detentions, and violence against civilians occurred in other regions facing unrest and insecurity." These occurred mostly in the Oromia and Amhara regions.
- "In Oromia, reports of arrests, detention, and summary executions of Oromo civilians accused of supporting the armed rebel group, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), continued."
- "In the Amhara region, an imam's killing in March {2021} triggered inter-communal violence in the North Shewa and Oromia Special zones. Hundreds of Amhara and Oromo residents were reportedly killed, over 200,000 people displaced, and large-scale property damaged."

In June 2021, the US government's Overseas Security Advisory Council [issued](#) warnings of potential intercommunal tension in such places as Somali Regional State, Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR), the East Hararge region and the Guji zone of Oromia State, Benishangul Gumuz and the western part of Oromia State and the border areas with Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea. In addition to ethnic identity-based communal violence, religious extremist violence is also adding to the inter-group conflict, as the recent [ambush and killing of Muslim worshippers](#) in the Amhara region shows (Al-Jazeera, 27

April 2022). The recent deadly inter-religious clashes between Orthodox Christians and Muslims have [alarmed the international community](#), which called for independent investigation and justice against perpetrators (Al-Jazeera, 7 May 2022).

A [UN Press Statement](#) published on 21 January 2021 highlighted the high rate of sexual violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. There have reportedly been many several instances of rape, including individuals being forced to rape their own family members under threat of violence. Abductions and sexual assault has reportedly been utilized as a weapon of war ([Foreign Policy, 27 April 2021](#)).

Trends analysis

1) The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is losing its exclusive position

Ethiopia is one of the oldest states in Africa and was one of the first countries to adopt Christianity as its state religion. In the past few decades, various Christian denominations have emerged, causing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to lose its exclusive position as the sole Christian denomination in the country (and hence also its privileges in relations with government and society). The current administration under the leadership of Dr Abiy Ahmed looks set to help defuse some of the problems faced by Protestant Christians, especially at the hands of the EOC. Within the EOC itself, the Tigray conflict caused [deep rupture](#) in the church (BBC News, 3 October 2021), with the Tigray branch going its own way. The [death of the unifying patriarch](#) in March 2022 was a setback to hopes of bringing rival synods together (Africanews, 14 March 2022).

2) Ethiopia continues to face serious communal violence

The pace at which the country has undertaken political reform has attracted global attention. However, that reform has been met by other challenges which have resulted in killings and the destruction of property. Communal violence has caused the displacement of millions. Government security forces have been involved in gross violations of human rights. It will always be difficult to navigate the complex realities of the country - the political actors have very divergent views and there are also neighboring countries that might interfere. These varying political views have already shown the tension they can create in the violence of October/November 2019 and June/July 2020, following the assassination of an Oromo activist and singer. It appears that inter-religious tension is also adding to the deteriorating security problem in some parts of the country (see above: *Security situation*). Even though the permanent cessation of hostility was agreed between the TPLF and the Ethiopian government in November 2022, there are still doubts about its successful implementation. Some point to the even more dangerous situation in Oromia region, the largest region in the country. The communal violence in this region has caused many civilian casualties.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: release political prisoners - <http://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/03/ethiopia-free-political-prisoners-close-prison>
- Recent history: tendered resignation - <https://edition-m.cnn.com/2018/02/15/africa/ethiopian-prime-minister-resigns-intl/index.html>

- Recent history: kill civilians - <https://ahrethio.org/2018/03/12/ethiopia-killings-arrests-under-new-state-of-emergency/>
- Recent history: resolution - <http://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/10/us-house-resolution-ethiopia-passes>
- Recent history: new rounds of killings - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/ethiopia-abusive-police-unit-must-be-stopped/>
- Recent history: assassination attempt - <https://edition-m.cnn.com/2018/06/24/africa/ethiopia-blast-ahmed/index.html>
- Recent history: torture - <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/ethiopia>
- Recent history: historic peace deal - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/18/eritrea-ethiopia-peace-deal-offers-hope-reform>
- Recent history: first female head of state - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/sahle-work-zewde-named-ethiopia-woman-president-181025084046138.html>
- Recent history: millions - <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/ethiopia>
- Recent history: reported - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/2358/2020/en/>
- Recent history: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/5449/2022/en/>
- Recent history: evidence of those crimes was being burned - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61335530>
- Recent history: raping women and girls - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WEBPOL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf>
- Recent history: extreme lack of food - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/15/ethiopia-parliament-votes-to-lift-state-of-emergency>
- Recent history: removed the country from a favorable trade program - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/2/us-removes-ethiopia-mali-and-guinea-from-agoa-trade-programme>
- Recent history: unilateral truce - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/24/ethiopia-declares-truce-to-allow-aid-into-tigray>
- Recent history: withdrawal from the areas of Afar region - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/25/tigray-rebels-leave-ethiopia-afar-region-officials>
- Recent history: was reported - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-abiy-says-committee-formed-negotiate-with-tigray-forces-2022-06-14/>
- Recent history: breakthrough agreement - <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/02/africa/ethiopia-cessation-hostilities-intl>
- Political and legal landscape: 1995 Constitution - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5a84.html>
- Political and legal landscape: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/managing-politics-ethiopia-covid-19-crisis>
- Political and legal landscape: suspended - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-election-idUSKBN21I2QU>
- Political and legal landscape: national dialogue can be realized - <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/1/27/ethiopia-new-national-dialogue-can-unify-a-divided-nation>
- Political and legal landscape: death - <https://addiszebe.com/ethiopia-mourns-the-death-of-its-patriarch-abune-merkorios>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2021 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/ethiopia/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/ET.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Semahegn and Mengistie, August 2015 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4553009/>
- Economic landscape: 2022 Index of Economic Freedom - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/ethiopia>
- Economic landscape: Response-Recovery-Resilience for Conflict-Affected Communities in Ethiopia Project - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/12/world-bank-supports-ethiopia-s-conflict-affected-communities-targets-over-five-million-people>
- Economic landscape: USAID, 2 December 2020 - <https://www.usaid.gov/ethiopia/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>
- Economic landscape: OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/ET.pdf>

- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Fact Sheet March 2022 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/unhcr-ethiopia-fact-sheet-march-2022>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Response to Internal Displacement in Ethiopia Fact Sheet - <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/response-internal-displacement-ethiopia-fact-sheet-january-march-2022>
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WWL 2023: Church information / Ethiopia

Christian origins

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations in Africa to accept Christianity. Christianity entered the country in the [fourth century](#) - during the Axumite period - when the royal family became Christians - and the Christian faith gradually came to dominate the land (Smithsonian Magazine, 10 December 2019). Following the acceptance of Christianity by the ruling elite, the Ethiopian church created a strong relationship with the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt. As a result, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church received its Patriarch from Alexandria, Egypt, right up until 1959. Orthodox Christianity remained the state religion until 1974. (Source: Melton J.G. & Baumann M., eds., *Religions of the world, 2010, p.1004.*)

The second form of Christianity to enter Ethiopia was the Roman Catholic Church. This was the result of the relationship between Ethiopia and the Portuguese during the 16th century. The

Portuguese tried to change the Ethiopian state religion to Catholic. This attempt caused bloodshed as the peasants reacted angrily. As a result, Catholic missionaries were expelled from the country and were not allowed to return until the 19th century. Ethiopia followed a 'closed door policy' for 150 years from 1632 onwards. Today a community of several hundred thousand Roman Catholics exists in Ethiopia and is led by the Archbishop of Addis Ababa.

The third type of Christianity to enter Ethiopia was Protestant. It managed to enter the country "through the efforts of a spectrum of Lutheran missionaries, beginning in 1866 with some from the Swedish Lutheran Mission". In the second decade of the 20th century, Swedish missionaries representing the Independent True Friends of the Bible arrived in the country. These united with the Swedish Lutheran Mission to coordinate work. Missionaries from different parts of the world continued to arrive: "German missionaries from the Hermannsburg Mission arrived in 1927. Missionaries from Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and the United States arrived through the 1940s and 1950s. Much of the Lutheran work was brought together in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. American Presbyterians arrived in 1920 and began work among the [Oromo] people. When the Italians arrived, the Presbyterian missionaries were expelled, and before leaving they organized their mission as the Bethel Evangelical Church. In the mid-1970s, it merged into the Mekane Yesus Church." (Source: *Religions of the world, p.1006.*)

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church tried to restrict the influence of the missionaries among the populace. However, attempts to remain the sole Christian witness in the country were also rendered futile by the arrival of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). SIM launched its [expansive work](#) in Ethiopia in 1927 under the direction of Dr Thomas A. Lambie (Dictionary of African Christian biography, accessed 24 August 2020).

The expulsion of Italy and the conclusion of World War II brought more Christian groups into the country. The Baptist General Conference of America entered the country in 1950 with its first organized mission in Ambo - West of Addis Ababa. (Source: *Brackney W.H., Historical Dictionary of the Baptists, p.201.*) "Pentecostalism came into the country in the post-war years, and two large indigenous churches have resulted, the Full Gospel Believers Church and Gods All Times Association. Both of these churches have been encouraged by assistance and personnel from

Scandinavian Pentecostal bodies.” (Source: *Religions of the world*, p.1006.)

Church spectrum today

Ethiopia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	49,040,000	67.7
Catholic	1,031,000	1.4
Protestant	19,704,000	27.2
Independent	2,774,000	3.8
Unaffiliated	213,000	0.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-367,000	-0.5
Total	72,395,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	22,653,000	31.3
Renewalist movement	14,951,000	20.7

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

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

Religion in Ethiopia is complex due to historical claims, competitiveness and accusations of heresy. A previous US State Department IRFR report stated ([IRFR 2019](#)): "[S]ome Protestants and Orthodox Christians accused one another of heresy and of actively working to convert adherents from one faith to the other, increasing tension between the two groups."

In terms of geographical location, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is dominant in Amhara, Tigray and Central Oromia, while Protestant Christians dominate in Western Oromia and SNNP.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The geographical distribution of violations against Christians in Ethiopia depends upon which Persecution engines are dominant.

- The hotspot of violations due to *Christian denominational protectionism* is in the Amhara region, Tigray and some parts of Oromia.
- Hotspots for *Islamic oppression* are in some parts of eastern and western Oromia, Afar and the Somali region. Gurage, Silte and Alaba are also some of the areas where violations are most severe.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Three of the four Christian communities in the country face violations of their basic rights but the sources and level of severity of violations vary.

Communities of expatriate Christians: These are not involuntarily isolated and so have not been scored as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: The EOC is a typical example of this category and has a massive presence in the country. It is one of the factors contributing to the complexity of the dynamics of religious freedom violations in Ethiopia; as well as being victim of violations itself, the EOC also plays a pivotal role as a perpetrator of violations. Historical Christian communities face violations mostly from the government and Islamic radicalism. Also in areas where tribalism is dominant, there is pressure on the EOC. Orthodox Christians are mostly concentrated in northern and central Ethiopia. Also, those Christians living in Muslim-dominated regional states (Harrari, Somalia, Afar), as well as local communities (e.g. among the Silte), face difficulties in living out their Christian faith.

Converts: This category includes i) Christians with a Muslim background, ii) cross-denominational converts – i.e. from one Christian denomination to another, and iii) converts from ethnic traditional beliefs to Christianity. Converts in the country face violations via different Persecution engines. In Muslim-dominated areas, converts from Islam face pressure and violence mainly from family, extended family, community leaders, and non-Christian religious leaders. In areas dominated by the EOC, the engine behind the violations is mainly driven by EOC followers. Converts also face violations from the government in all parts of the country. In areas with a prevalence of *Clan oppression*, converts may face violations from adherents of ethnic traditional belief systems and Muslims seeking to force their participation in various religious activities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category includes Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations which have a large presence in the country. It also attracts serious violations mainly from the government, EOC and Islamic groups. It is growing very fast compared to other types of Christianity. A country researcher states: "Many parts of southern Ethiopia, as well as parts of Oromia, are dominated by Evangelicals/Protestants. As the majority in these communities, they do not face [serious] violations. But Protestants who live in parts dominated by Muslims and Orthodox Christians face various forms of rights violations." This category of Christianity is seen as a threat by many ultra conservative Orthodox Church followers and the Muslim community as it keeps growing in number and influence. As a result, they face pressure and violence from many sides.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: fourth century - <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/church-unearthed-ethiopia-rewrites-history-christianity-africa-180973740/>
- Christian origins: expansive work - <https://dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/lambie-thomas3/>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: IRFR 2019 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ethiopia/>

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Ethiopia

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Ethiopia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	39
WWL 2022	66	38
WWL 2021	65	36
WWL 2020	63	39
WWL 2019	65	28

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

The overall score for WWL 2023 was 66 points as in WWL 2022. Average pressure remained at the same very high level of 11.2 points, with the *Community* and *Church spheres of life* showing the highest levels. The violence score increased from 9.8 to 10.6 points. The political violence that has become rampant in the country became a full-blown civil war that put the whole country at risk. The conflict has made persecution tracking extremely difficult as it is often unclear if, for example, a killing was ethnic-based or faith-based. A peace agreement was reached in November 2022.

Persecution engines

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

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

Islamic oppression (Strong)

This Persecution engine poses a real threat to Christians, especially in areas dominated by Muslim communities. One country researcher reports that radical Islam "continues to be a problem in Ethiopia. As Islamic countries have been competing to get the upper hand in Africa, they continue to pour in considerable funds that is used in spreading Islam through the establishment of schools of religious learning as well as direct aid to the needy attaching conversion to Islam as a condition." With the rise of radicalism in the region and beyond, radical (or political) Islam is growing at the local, regional and national levels. In the process, various types of Christianity have become increasingly vulnerable to pressure in almost all spheres of life. Particularly in rural areas where they are in the majority, Muslims harass Christians and often deny them access to communal resources.

Furthermore, Christians are victims of violence. Converts from Islam to Christianity will be ostracized and often denied family rights such as inheritance rights and child custody. It is also important to note that the growth in radical Islam in neighboring Somalia and Sudan is spilling over into Ethiopia. A country expert stated: "The [Persecution] engine's presence varies from one geographical area to another mainly depending on the number of Muslims in a particular region. The north-eastern part of the country [made up] of mainly Afar region, the eastern regions including Somali, Dire Dawa and Harar and certain parts of the Oromia region are mostly dominated by Muslims. Because of conflicts that resulted because of actions of [radical] Islamic groups in certain parts of the country, Christians were targeted, sustained bodily injury and were forced to flee from their homes, among other injustices suffered. In the past few years, there is a growing trend in the spread of [radical] Islamic views in the country."

Christian denominational protectionism (Strong)

One country researcher reports: "The EOC considers itself as the only 'true' Christian denomination. It is particularly opposed to Evangelical Christians, This Persecution engine is mainly driven by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) viewing them as followers of a Western religion that poses a threat to Ethiopian nationalism and culture that has long been preserved by the EOC. It is common to hear sermons and songs that strongly criticize Evangelical Christians. Priests and other teachers in the EOC openly condemn socializing with Evangelicals sometimes going as far as to ban their members from speaking to 'the heathens'. There is also growing antagonism on the part of some Evangelical churches against the EOC going into a series of hateful to-and-fro between the two sides."

The EOC has been seriously violating the rights of Christians who leave their ranks to join (mostly) Protestant churches, or who join the renewal movements within the EOC. Violations manifest themselves in various ways. For example, EOC members will sometimes attack them physically. The EOC members also use their connections in government to curtail the development of non-Orthodox churches. They also lobby the government to bring in laws that restrict the expansion of Protestant Christianity. For example, the law that governs the registration of churches exempts the Orthodox Church from this requirement. EOC also uses its powerful media to demonize Protestants and those who are supporters of the renewal movement. A country expert adds: "Again this comes from followers of the majority Christian denomination in the country, the Orthodox Christian Church. However, it is worth noting that

not all followers of the Orthodox church are of this opinion. The victims of these violations are mainly followers of Christian denominations who are relatively new to the country and are mainly Protestant. These violations are prevalent mostly in the northern and central parts of the country where the Orthodox church has the majority of the population as its followers. It is also relevant to mention here that violations against those who belong to the so-called new forms of Christianity get extremer as one goes out of the city towards the rural areas of the country."

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

In former years, the Ethiopian government had become more authoritarian and restricted rights for civil society and religious institutions. The previous Ethiopian government had shown itself to be suspicious about religion in general and Christians in particular.

- First, religious groups seem able to organize and assemble people very efficiently and effectively. This causes concern about their perceived ability to organize activities that hypothetically could bring about a regime change.
- Secondly, the previous government was suspicious that Protestants (especially non-traditional church groups) could be foreign agents seeking to bring about a regime change, although there is no evidence to support this notion.

However, even though there have been positive changes at the federal level, in terms of personnel and attitude as well as change in laws and regulations, the bureaucratic system that was built over a century remains formidable to Protestants. This is particularly true at the regional level where persecution in the hands of officials remains higher.

Clan oppression (Medium)

For the past quarter of a century, ethnic politics has dominated all areas of public life in the country. This political discourse has led to the search for "roots and identity" which has caused some individuals and groups to become hostile to Christianity. Until 1974, the EOC represented the state religion. The country was under Communist rule from 1974 to 1991, when it was overthrown (after 17 years of civil war) by a coalition of various rebel groups formed from different ethnic groups. The ethnic groups were promised respect and acknowledgment of their culture and identity during the 1991 Ethiopian Transitional Charter - a charter that was set up after the fall of the Communist regime in 1991. This was initially seen as being a politically sound move, but the government stirred up resentment towards Christianity among some ethnic groups. In regions like Afar and Somali, Islam is interconnected with ethnicity. Other tribes also demand that Christians participate in tribal clashes and they retaliate if Christians fail to do so. A country researcher also adds: "Although the majority of the population practices either of the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), in some parts of the country, traditional religions are still practiced. Individuals living in those communities are expected to comply with all the religious and cultural rites of the community, failure of which would likely result in banishment. But even among Christians and Muslims occult practices are quite widespread; practices such as dedicating a new-born child to the local magician are commonplace."

Drivers of persecution

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

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

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Muslim religious leaders have engaged in inciting violence against Christians through their sermons and tacit approval of Christian discrimination.
- **Extended family (Strong):** The families of converts do not accept the idea of a family member leaving Islam and joining Christianity. They, therefore, shun converts and harass and disown them.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** In some parts of the country where Muslims are dominant, ordinary citizens oppose Christianity and evangelization. They especially oppose conversion.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Leaders of other churches (Strong):** The main drivers are priests and ultra-conservative groups within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (who also influence family and ordinary citizens). Regarding the role of EOC leaders and members, one researcher states: "There is a clear religious demographic change in the country mainly due to the rapid expansion of new forms of Christianity, especially the Protestant Church. Such rapid expansion is not welcomed by the leaders and followers of the Orthodox Church. Resentment against the

new forms of Christianity manifests itself at various levels by acts of both EOC leaders and followers. Things are getting better in the capital city and in other major cities and areas like the southern and southwestern part of the country where the new forms of Christianity are getting strong.”

- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Ordinary citizens have also been perpetrating violations against other church groups, especially the Protestant church. A country expert summarized: "Despite a claim of peaceful co-existence among different religions in the country, the facts on the ground show a different story. For a number of reasons including but not limited to teachings by religious leaders and lack of exposure to religious diversity, it is very common for private citizens to engage in acts of violence against Christians. Attacks by teenagers on Protestant churches, refusing to lease buildings for use as a church, abusing Christians who tried to preach the gospel in public places (both verbal and physical abuse) and many other violations are perpetrated by individuals and mobs."
- **Family (Strong):** In the context of conversion or changing denomination from Orthodox to Protestant, families are known to put family members under house-arrest, shun them, disown them and exclude them from inheritance.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

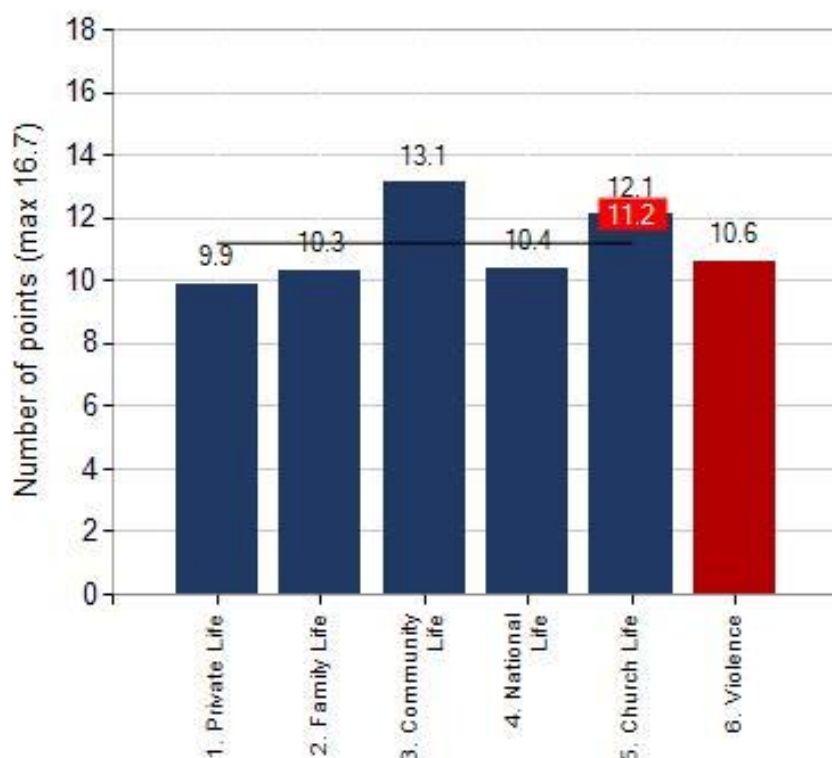
- **Government officials (Medium):** The degree of complicity in violations of religious freedom varies from region to region; mid-level and lower-level officials have especially been actively opposing the so-called new forms of Christianity. Officials at the local level have more control over the day-to-day activities and thereby perpetrate most violations including (but not limited to) the refusal to grant permits for meetings and worship.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** The drivers here are community leaders. This engine is active in some remote regions, and in some areas it is blended with *Islamic oppression*. Thus, these two Persecution engines share drivers. For example, in Afar and Somali regions, religion (i.e. being Muslim) is a part of belonging to the community. A country expert stated: "This is the case mostly in relatively remote parts of the country where ethnic group leaders will have a huge influence. In some areas wherein the majority of the population is Muslim, there are cases where the leaders of ethnic groups actively advocate hostility towards Christians in the area. This resulted in the death, injury, and displacement of Christians in such areas. The tension among different ethnic groups in various parts of the country is having - and will continue to have - an adverse impact on the lives of Christians who could be subjected to attacks just because of their ethnic and religious background."
- **Extended family (Medium):** The families of converts do not accept the idea of a family member leaving the family religion and joining Christianity. Converts are likely to be harassed and disowned.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Ethiopia



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Ethiopia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Ethiopia is at the very high level of 11.2 points, the same as in WWL 2022.
- Except for the *Private sphere of life*, there is no sphere of life where the pressure on Christians scores less than 10 points; which shows that - despite Ethiopia being a Christian majority country - Ethiopian Christians face a high level of violations of freedom of religion. Pressure in *Community life* is particularly high.
- The score for violence increased from 9.8 points in WWL 2022 to 10.6 in WWL 2023.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)

Converts are at the forefront of pressure starting at home. Family members and communities often see conversion as a betrayal of the faith or forefathers. The traditional and family-ordinated nature of the country plays an important role to understand why conversion is highly discouraged. When it comes to followers of the oldest religions in the nation, as a result of thousands of years of practice, religion and culture are very intermingled. In some cases, it is very difficult to distinguish which is which. As a result, whenever an individual renounces his religion and converts to another he/she will face immense pressure starting from his immediate family. Conversion is treated as renouncing your identity and your connection to your ancestors. Family members also want to protect their reputation within the community and do not want to be referred to as a family of a convert. This is very common in eastern, southern as well as in some western parts of the country.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.75 points)

In the context of conversion, this issue is a serious matter. For people who have left Islam, a traditional belief system or who change their church affiliation away from the EOC, the possession of Christian materials is particularly risky as they often live with their families or within their community. In some instances, if such materials are discovered they are likely to be attacked and people would refuse to rent them a house.

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.). (2.75 points)

Similar to other forms of persecution in the context of conversion, this affects those whose background was Islam or a traditional belief system. Revealing one's faith in a written form invites problems and in the context of modern social media, this has become worse. Although the increase in the number of Internet users has helped in spreading Christian teaching, online abuse against Christians expressing their religious belief is also increasing. This can also lead to acts of violence.

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

Showing Christian images (such as a cross) is not an action that can be tolerated in areas where Muslims and traditional belief system followers are the majority. Geographical areas and the background of the Christian play a key role. Displaying Christian images could be seen as an act of defiance by some. Things are unproblematic in areas of majority Christian population. However, things can get dangerous in certain remote regions dominated by Muslim communities, where there is little government protection for the Christian minority. There are reports of cars being burned, windshields smashed, houses' windows being broken and doors damaged, along with other forms of abuse against Christians, for the mere fact of displaying Christian images. Reactions tend to be more violent in rural areas.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.00 points)

Burial places in Ethiopia are owned by religious groups. Obtaining places for burial in both Muslim and EOC dominated areas is very difficult for non-EOC Christians. There are instances where followers of what are called 'new forms of Christianity' were denied burial in an EOC cemetery because of belonging to a different Christian group. Islamic hostility towards converts has also resulted in Christians having to be buried in forest areas.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

In areas where Christians are a minority, their children are exposed to harassment. Children of Protestants also face this problem in EOC-dominated areas. This emanates from the fact that faith plays a key role in social life: It determines relationships, privileges, benefits and responsibilities. In some areas, Christian children are often singled out and harassed, bullied and sometimes attacked.

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

In EOC-dominated areas Protestants face this problem. When an Orthodox background Christian leaves the EOC and joins a Protestant group (locally called *Pentay*), every social, political and economic aspect of their life fundamentally changes. A particular issue is the singing of secular music at a wedding (since most Evangelicals/Protestants in Ethiopia consider secular music a sin, this may cause trouble with members of the family.

In areas where *Islamic oppression* is an active persecution engine, any sort of Christian wedding attracts unnecessary attention and can lead to attacks. To avoid possible backlash, Christians in such circumstances tend to keep a low profile when celebrating.

Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (2.00 points)

There is often serious pressure to separate spouses, where there has been a conversion to Christianity. A country researcher comments: "Spouses of converts will be excommunicated by their relatives and community for tolerating the conversion. They will be accused of spoiling family heritage by welcoming 'new religion'. Often women will be kicked out of the house or given to another husband by the religious/tribe elders." To avoid this, it is not uncommon for the spouses to leave home and change their residence. Others comply and divorce. Not complying means facing serious consequences, including losing property, children and freedom.

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.). (3.75 points)

In a very communal society like Ethiopia, religious differences play a pivotal role in many areas of life. Many Christians face harassment, threatening behavior and obstruction of their daily lives because of *Christian denominational protectionism* and *Islamic oppression*. In EOC majority areas, Protestants and especially those who have left the EOC face harassment from their own family, community members and EOC leaders. In remote parts of the country where Muslims are a majority (including but not limited to Somali, Afar and Oromia regions), it is common for minority Christians to be subjected to acts of discrimination and harassment. The political and communal violence that has rocked the country makes things even worse.

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

Monitoring by local youth or community elders happens in the community in a continuous way. In some areas, Christians are being monitored by community members, who sometimes even send children to monitor churches and homes of some Christians. This is particularly challenging for Protestants, since mistrust towards them (for being a new form of Christianity) is still prevalent. While the means of monitoring are not sophisticated, Christian communities, especially those considered as newcomers, are still being subjected to monitoring from local community members and local leaders. This includes sending undercover monitors to spy on churches' activities especially during prayers and gathering of Christians.

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

Abduction has become a serious problem in the *Community sphere of life*. In the case of converts, this is at times done with full cooperation of members of the family concerned. Ethiopia is a country where bridal abduction and forced marriage are common. This is even more problematic where religion is an added dimension. A country expert reports: "Abduction and forced marriage is a major issue at a national level. Forced marriage of children as young as eleven was common and still takes place in rural parts of the country." This particularly affects converts both from an Orthodox Christian background and a Muslim background.

Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Religion plays an important role in defining the benefits and obligations of an individual in the community. In the context of persecution, Christians in Muslim-dominated areas or Protestants in EOC-dominated areas often face extreme exclusion not only from participation, but also from social life. As reported in past years, participation in communal institutions often has informal requirements and there are a number of challenges faced by Evangelicals and Pentecostals in

areas where the majority is Orthodox. They are not allowed to join in certain social events and associations; they have trouble finding schools where their children would be safe from discrimination and bullying; there may be obstructions to daily life such as not being accepted at the local market.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

In both national and regional institutions, religion often plays an influential role in who gets what. Discrimination while dealing with the authorities is evident, especially at the local level. In EOC-dominated areas, non-Orthodox Christians are often pushed aside. In regions where Muslims are the majority, this is also common. As noted by country experts, this issue is the case mostly at the local government level, especially in regions with a Muslim majority population, where the tendency is common for Muslim residents to be favored at the expense of Christians. The ethnic tension engulfing the country in recent times has made life difficult for Christians residing in Muslim-dominated parts of the country, such as the Somali region.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.00 points)

Christian civil society organizations face tough challenges if they want to operate in some areas due to the very restrictive laws which have forced many organizations to close. However, a draft law is now in the pipeline which will eliminate most of the restrictions under the current law. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, communal violence and war have brought the problem to another level and it has become virtually impossible to operate in some areas.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (2.75 points)

Freedom of expression has come under attack in the past three years after showing some level of progress. In addition to the national laws restricting the establishment of broadcasting services for religious purposes, within educational institutions a ban on religious activities (including worshipping in groups) was also implemented. Even though there have been recent improvements through government reforms, expressing one's opinion can still be challenging. Expressing opinion publicly is most difficult for converts and followers of minority Christian groups both in Christian and Muslim dominated parts of the country. The abuse against Christians for such public expression of opinion comes from private citizens, other religious groups and law enforcement personnel. In the new political environment, many believe that all Christian denominations (and other faiths) will be encouraged to live together with greater levels of tolerance than before.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (2.75 points)

This issue is very common in Ethiopia. Even when the country is going through major crises, smear campaigns based on religion continue. Country researchers stated: "This is common practice, especially by religious leaders. There have been teachings and videos circulating of

some Muslim preachers who engage in hate-speech against Christians. Among Christians too, it is common to hear priests of the EOC running smear campaigns against Pentecostals/Evangelicals using derogatory terms to refer to them and depicting them as people who feign religion in order to get foreign aid. Some Pentecostal preachers also make statements against the Orthodox, painting them as backward."

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

This is deliberately done to silence leaders and weaken their churches and is very common in areas dominated by *Islamic oppression* and *Christian denominational protectionism*. Others can hide their faith, but pastors cannot do that due to the nature of their work. Pastors and other religious leaders are regularly subjected to online and physical abuse at the hands of extremist groups. Even ultra-conservative Orthodox groups are known to fuel this issue as well. By targeting pastors' families, they hope that leaders of Evangelical churches will give up their evangelistic work in the communities.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)

In general, where Christian communities are dominant, religious festivals can be celebrated outside in public. But there are restrictions in many places for activities not involving a religious festival. Non-state actors, including radical Islamic groups, mobs and other churches may hinder non-traditional church activities in particular, especially where evangelism is involved.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.50 points)

Speaking out against persecution is not advisable as it can lead to further persecution. If the instigator is the government or someone that has a strong connection to the government, it is very risky to speak out against that person. Similarly, in Muslim majority areas, speaking against perpetrators can provoke reprisals and many church leaders refrain from doing this.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.00 points)

In the past, the government was the main actor in monitoring the activities of churches. Since the change in leadership at the federal level, state governments are now the ones mainly engaged in such practices. Monitoring and hindrances also come from non-state actors, including radical Islamic groups, other churches and mobs. In some places, churches have been attacked during worship services and property was destroyed.

Violence

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

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

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

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

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

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

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

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Ethiopia: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	2	1
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	22	25
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	20	1
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	1
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	215
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?	10 *	62
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?	10	34
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	350	534
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

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.

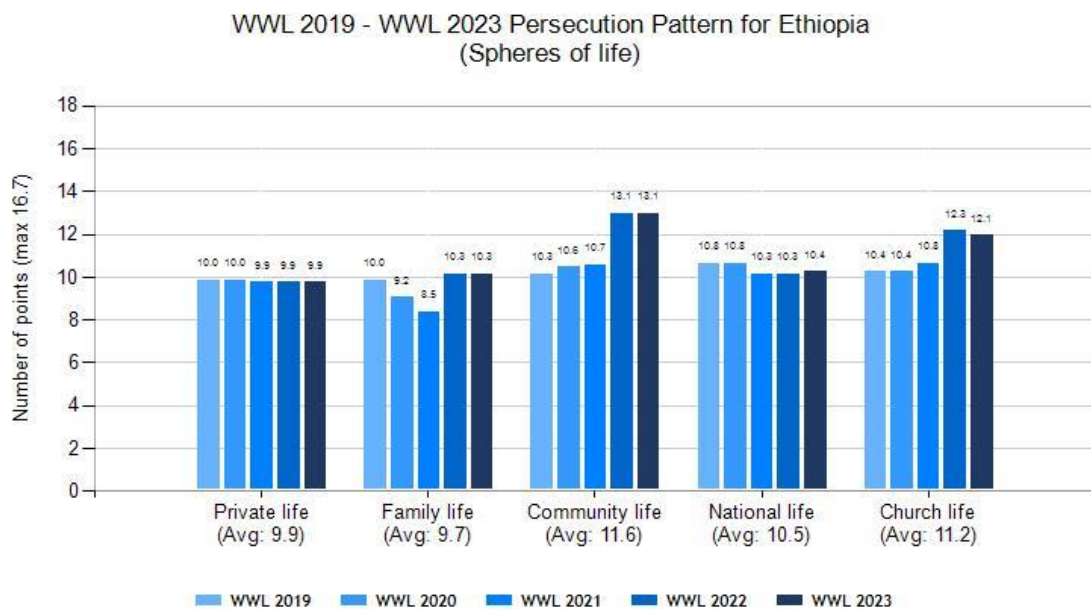
5 Year trends: Average pressure

In the table below it can be seen that the average pressure on Christians has consistently been 10.0 points or above and looks possibly to be levelling off at the 11.2 point mark.

Ethiopia: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	
	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	11.2
2022	11.2
2021	10.0
2020	10.2
2019	10.3

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

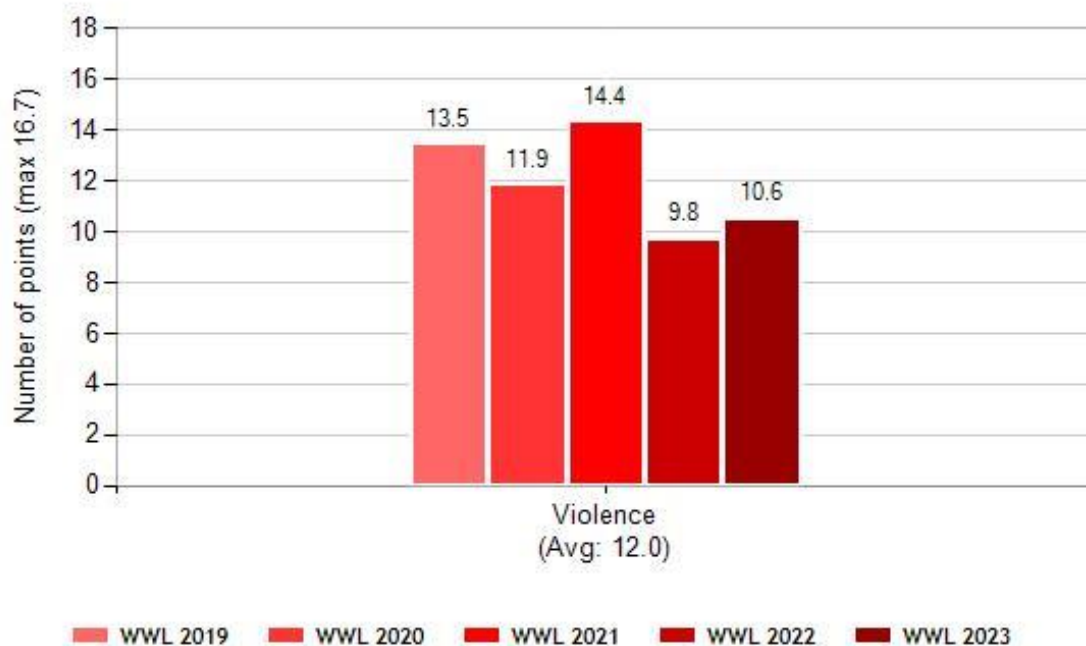
The chart below shows that the average pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* has been consistently over 9.5 points over the five WWL reporting periods. The *Community sphere* scored the highest five year average with 11.6 points, followed by the *Church sphere of life* with a five year average of 11.2 points.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The chart below shows how violence against Christians consistently has scored at a very high or extremely high level.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Ethiopia (Violence)



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite the long history of Christianity in Ethiopia, many Christian women remain vulnerable to religious persecution. Violations of basic rights against Christian women in Ethiopia often occur in the form of abduction and forced marriage to a non-Christian. This is facilitated by a general situation in which abduction and forced marriage [remain present](#) at a national level despite having been prohibited and criminalized by law (UNICEF, 13 June 2022). Country experts have explained that the rising violence in the country compounded by the severe drought has [quadrupled](#) the prevalence of child marriage in some regions (The Guardian, 30 April 2022). [40% of girls](#) are married under the age of 18 and sources reveal that early and forced marriage particularly occurs in rural parts of the country (Girls Not Brides, accessed 2 December 2022).

Female Christian teens (and converts in particular) can be forced to marry a follower of a different religion after abduction or family arranged marriage. Christian girls can also be secretly convicted on economic grounds and married by Muslim men without their parent's consent. Following her "marriage," the Christian wife is expected to take on the religion of her new husband.

Speaking on this discreet tactic of conversion and subterfuge, a country expert disclosed: "Many young Christian females with non-believer or Muslim parents get together, contact the parents, and offer them a huge sum of money in exchange for their daughter's hand in marriage. Because of their [economic] fragility, the parents embrace the perks and forcefully tell their daughter to marry someone in this manner. This has led to the conversion of many young Christian converts to Islam." Families that do not conform to these cultural norms are often threatened and ostracized. Tribal leaders also incite relatives to castigate Christian girls that object to such marriages. This leaves some girls – especially converts – no choice but to "go from one place to another [in order to] not marry an unbeliever and hide, resulting in dropout of schools and psychological damage."

Rape is also an effective means of punishing a Christian woman or girl due to the severe consequences. A country expert explained: "If a girl is raped, the community isolates her; she will not be able to marry or learn; her family will be embarrassed, and, if a woman is raped, her future will be ruined by the word of the event. The violated girl's marriage would be frowned upon by the community." There are also reports of sexual violence being used extensively in the Tigray region; while the extent to which this is religiously targeted is contested, Aid to the Church in Need has reported the rape of Catholic nuns by the military ([ACN, 28 May 2021](#)).

Female converts from Islam face the most severe violations, particularly at the hands of family members. They may be deliberately isolated from other family members and from their church community, put under house arrest in order to protect the family's honor, physically abused and forcibly married to a Muslim. "She is compelled to leave her children and house if she is a wife," an expert adds. When a Muslim wife converts to Christianity, forced divorce is the most likely outcome. Even if her spouse does not seek a divorce, his family will pressure the spouse to divorce and claim custody of the children, to protect the family name and ensure their grandchildren are given an Islamic upbringing. In areas where Christianity is a minority religion, a (de facto) divorce is most likely to take place outside courtrooms; the elders presiding over a tribal court see Christian faith as a dangerous deviation and will likely grant custody to the other spouse in order to prevent the spread of Christianity in the community.

Christians often face difficulties in procuring their inheritance after their decision to convert; it is reported that this affects mainly women. Since 78% of the population live in rural areas, inheritance is viewed as one of the main means to survive (World Bank profile). Inheritance rights are in principle handled through official state institutions where religious discrimination is minimal. However, in areas where traditional systems are still dominant, or in the many cases that do not go through the official state process, part of the exclusion for new converts includes disinheritance.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men in Ethiopia are generally more likely to suffer physical attack and displacement than women and girls, although rampant violence in the country has challenged this trend by exacerbating attacks and displacement for all. Nonetheless, given the scale of civil unrest, boys and men are particularly prone to conscription into armed and paramilitary forces. They may also be robbed of their possessions, or even killed during raids. It is deemed more strategic to attack men and boys, especially Church leaders, as they are usually the propagators of the Christian faith and providers for their families. A country expert remarked on the recent uprising: “The main target was to kill church leaders; pastors and Christian [youth] leaders.” Attacking them weakens their whole family and the Christian community in general.

The government also plays a role in violating men's religious freedom through imprisonment. Men are particularly at risk of this in Muslim-dominated areas. Reports indicate that Christians face an increased likelihood of arrests on religious grounds in the Oromia and Amhara regional states. In addition, there are numerous instances and allegations of government interference in church elections and appointments. Since the majority of church leaders are men, these violations predominantly affect Christian men. The allegations target almost all leaders of major churches in the country, accusing them of being pro-government and of receiving appointments through government influence. New reforms continue to be discussed, however, and there is some hope that in future years this will become less common.

When converts are discovered, “ministers and missionaries are hunted down by extremists,” a country expert revealed. Many converts have been forced to flee their towns and settle elsewhere to avoid attacks and harassment. Although unverified, there are claims that Christian men have been lured into marriages by non-Christian women “trained to catch Christian men”.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Religious minorities in Ethiopia are affected by the broadcasting legislation, the role of faith in education, and the civil society law. Generally, the civil society law requires an application for registration for any religious group except for Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews. In addition, the registration law requires a minimum membership of 50 persons for registration as a religious community and a minimum of 15 persons for a ministry or association

to be registered and granted permission. This has had serious impact for newer religious minorities: In some areas, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses (where their numbers are less than 50) struggle to have an official place of worship. This is particularly true where majority groups are known to be hostile towards religious minorities.

Future outlook

In 2021 and 2022, Ethiopia went through challenging times: Civil war. It started as a declaration by the Ethiopian federal government in early November 2020 that it was undertaking a law enforcement operation against the Tigray peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), a party that governs Tigray, one of the federating units. After two years of death and destruction, a peace agreement was finally reached in November 2022.

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

The challenge posed by radical elements in the Muslim community is likely to remain a danger for Christians in the future. It is also important to note that there is a great amount of interest in Ethiopia coming from Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Saudi Arabia played an [important role](#) in bringing peace to Ethiopia and Eritrea (DW, 23 September 2018) which ultimately led to the Ethiopian PM winning the Nobel Peace Prize. It has been widely reported that most of the weapons in Ethiopia come from Turkey through illegal trafficking. The war in the northern part of the country ran the risk of emboldening potential jihadists thinking that it is a case of 'now or never' for taking action. In fact, Al-Shabaab tried to infiltrate Ethiopia by sending in around 500 of its fighters in [June 2022](#) (Reuters, 29 July 2022).

Christian denominational protectionism

Ethiopia has seen continuous struggles between the different church denominations and this weakens the possibility of a unified Christian response to the religious freedom violations occurring in the country. In this regard, the EOC has been ruthlessly accusing and oppressing Protestants. According to some EOC hardliners, Protestantism is working to dismantle the EOC. Some ultra-conservative Orthodox Christians are also opposing the new prime minister because he is a Protestant. As it stands, *Christian denominational protectionism* is becoming a stronger influence, with some EOC members also politicizing religion in the country.

Dictatorial paranoia

This Persecution engine is weakening fast. The new prime minister has lifted some of the restrictions imposed on civil society and churches. At least at the national level, this engine is less evident as a result. However, at regional levels, things are not improving as fast as many had hoped. In some regional states, there have been no meaningful reforms. Furthermore, as ethnic conflict is threatening the reforms already underway, the country is in 'save Ethiopia' mode. Now that the TPLF agreed to disarm and a permanent cessation of hostilities has been made possible through the Pretoria agreement, the Ethiopian prime minister is emboldened. If things do not go the way the Ethiopian government wants, it is likely that the prime minister will react heavy-handedly, this might have a chilling effect on the freedom of religion in general.

Clan oppression

In areas where the majority of the population belongs to one ethnic group (e.g. Somali and Afar), leaving Islam also means leaving the ethnic group, its culture and values. These groups are politically powerful, so if the government does not devise a mechanism whereby it can enforce the protection of religious freedom (especially the right to preach, worship and convert), this engine will remain evident as a source for violations in the future.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: remain present - <https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/stories/i-was-forced-marry-man-twice-my-age-exchange-some-cattle>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: quadrupled - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/30/ethiopian-drought-leading-to-dramatic-increase-in-child-marriage-unicef-warns>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 40% of girls - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/ethiopia/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: ACN, 28 May 2021 - <https://acnuk.org/news/ethiopia-genocide-is-happening-in-tigray/>
- Future outlook: important role - <https://www.dw.com/en/arab-gulf-states-in-the-horn-of-africa-what-role-do-they-play/a-45602930>
- Future outlook: June 2022 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/clashes-between-ethiopian-forces-al-shabaab-leave-scores-dead-state-news-agency-2022-07-29/>

Further useful reports

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

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