

World
Watch
Research

South Sudan: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

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

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

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / South Sudan

Brief country details

South Sudan: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
11,891,000	7,272,000	61.2

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

Map of country



South Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	46	74
WWL 2023	46	72
WWL 2022	43	74
WWL 2021	43	69
WWL 2020	44	65

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

South Sudan:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials
Clan oppression	Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

In South Sudan, persecution stems from both violence and pressure, with these two elements being deeply interlinked. This situation is worsened by ethnic tensions, rivalries within religious denominations, and strained relationships between churches and factions like state authorities, rebel groups and tribal leaders. Despite constitutional safeguards, the reality is grim. The ongoing conflict fosters organized crime and violence, often targeting Christians, leading to church burnings and attacks on church leaders. Fear is rampant among Christian communities, exacerbated by acts of retaliation for speaking against corruption. Amidst this volatility, churches and church-run institutions strive to maintain stability, support peace initiatives and provide aid, highlighting their crucial role in a country beset by turmoil.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **Churches are regularly being destroyed:** Churches in South Sudan are increasingly coming under attack. For instance, in October 2022, a Seventh-day Adventist church was deliberately burned down. As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2022 South Sudan): "In October [2022], a member of the TNLA [Transitional National Legislative Assembly] ordered local youth to burn a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church in Gogrial East County, Warrap State. The TNLA member stated SDA doctrine was destroying traditional and cultural norms within the community. Following the incident, the parliamentarian made public statements in the press justifying his actions and calling the SDA church a 'house of prostitution', claiming the church was abducting women and girls from the community."
- **Churches are regularly being occupied by military groups:** Military and paramilitary forces are often making use of churches for their operations, thereby disrupting religious activities. One notable case involved the South Sudan People's Defense Force (SSPDF) occupying a church in Central Equatoria State. The occupation was ostensibly linked to the arrest of the church's pastor, adding an additional layer of state interference in religious affairs.
- **Christians killed:** At least ten Christians were killed for their faith in the WWL 2024 reporting period.

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / South Sudan

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 South Sudan report	AI South Sudan 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/south-sudan/report-south-sudan/	19 September 2023
BBC News South Sudan profile - updated 18 April 2023	BBC South Sudan profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14069082	19 September 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 South Sudan report	BTI South Sudan Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SSD	19 September 2023
Crisis24 South Sudan report (Garda World)	Crisis24 South Sudan report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/south-sudan	19 September 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit 2023 country summaries - South Sudan not included	EIU 2023	http://country.eiu.com/allcountries.aspx	19 September 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – South Sudan	FSI 2023 South Sudan	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	19 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries (South Sudan not included)	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – South Sudan	Global Freedom Index 2023 South Sudan	https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-sudan/freedom-world/2023	19 September 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries (South Sudan not included)	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 South Sudan	GIWPS 2021 South Sudan	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/south-sudan/	19 September 2023
Girls Not Brides South Sudan report	Girls Not Brides South Sudan	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/south-sudan/	19 September 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 South Sudan country chapter	HRW 2023 South Sudan country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/south-sudan	19 September 2023
Internet World Stats 2023 South Sudan	IWS 2023 South Sudan	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ss	19 September 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – South Sudan	World Press Freedom 2023 South Sudan	https://rsf.org/en/south-sudan	19 September 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – South Sudan	CPI 2022 South Sudan	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/ssd	19 September 2023
UNDP Human Development Report South Sudan - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR South Sudan	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/SSD	19 September 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report South Sudan	IRFR 2022 South Sudan	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/south-sudan/	19 September 2023
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL (South Sudan not included)	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook South Sudan - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 South Sudan	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssd.pdf	19 September 2023
World Bank South Sudan data – 2021	World Bank South Sudan data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=SSD	19 September 2023
World Bank South Sudan overview – updated 20 March 2023	World Bank South Sudan overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview	19 September 2023
World Factbook South Sudan - updated 11 September 2023	World Factbook South Sudan	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/	19 September 2023

Recent history

The Republic of South Sudan is a land-locked country in east-central Africa that is part of the United Nations sub-region of Eastern Africa. Its current capital is Juba, which is also its largest city, but there are plans to move it to the more centrally located Ramciel in the future. South Sudan is bordered by Ethiopia to the east, Kenya to the southeast, Uganda to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the southwest, the Central African Republic to the west and the Republic of Sudan to the north. It includes the vast swamp region of the Sudd, formed by the White Nile and known locally as the Bahr al-Jabal.

South Sudan became an independent state on 9 July 2011, following a referendum that passed with 98.83% of the vote. It is a United Nations member state, a member state of the African Union, and a member state of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. In July 2012, South Sudan signed the Geneva Conventions.

South Sudan has an estimated population of just under 12 million and the economy is predominantly rural, relying chiefly on subsistence farming. Around 2005, the economy began a transition from this rural dominance, and urban areas within South Sudan have seen extensive development. However, the region is still suffering from the effects of two long-lasting civil wars: The First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972) in which the Sudanese government fought the Anyanya rebel army; the Second Sudanese Civil War (1985-2005) during which the Sudanese

government fought the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). Unlike the civil strife of the 1960s and 1970s, the insurgency in the 1980s and the 1990s took on a more religiously confrontational character. Due to the many years of war, the country suffered serious neglect, a lack of infrastructural development, and major destruction and displacement.

Following independence in 2011, the conflict between the two independence leaders, President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar, led to the outbreak of civil war in 2013. The two leaders were supported by the two major ethnic groups in the country, the Dinka and Nuer respectively. This South Sudan civil war has led to a major socio-economic disaster and to the deaths of nearly 40,000 people. On [12 September 2018](#), the two factions signed an agreement to end the civil war (BBC News, 13 September 2018). However, there were multiple unresolved issues following the accord and there were some areas in the country where fighting continued. Many other agreements were signed (see below: *Political and legal landscape*) but were not honored by the parties involved. Eventually, in [February 2020](#), a unity government was formed and an end to the civil war (2013-2019) was declared (Lemon Wire, 22 February 2020). It was hoped this would end all hostilities between the Nuer and Dinka.

The agreement that led to the formation of the unity government in February 2020 brought high hopes for peace both in the country and in the international community. However, certain armed groups were left out of the peace agreement and in April 2021 [UN experts](#) warned: “[P]olitical, military and ethnic divisions in South Sudan are widening, leading to multiple violent incidents between the main signatories to last year’s cease-fire, the possibility of renewed war, and nearly 100,000 people facing 'famine-like conditions'” (AP News, 27 April 2021).

Intra-group fighting and growing intergroup violence threatened to derail the peace agreement, even as South Sudan celebrated 10 years of independence with [President Salva Kiir pledging not to return the country to war](#) (Al-Jazeera, 9 July 2021). In early August 2021, rival military leaders announced that South Sudan’s Vice President Riek Machar, who played a major role in pushing his partner President Salva Kiir to the 2018 peace deal, was deposed as head of his party and its armed forces, a claim he later disputed by claiming that [‘peace-spoilers’ had been removed from his party](#) (Al-Jazeera, 5 August 2021). Unfortunately, this was followed a few days later by deadly fighting between rival factions of Vice President Riek Machar’s SPLA-IO, forcing regional African trade body IGAD [to urge](#) the two rival military factions to enter into dialogue to ease the tension (Al-Jazeera, 10 August 2021).

In 2022, after weeks of escalating conflict, President Kiir and Vice President Machar agreed to resume talks about integrating their rival forces under a unified command as part of implementation of the 2018 peace deal. In mid-April 2022, this resulted in President Kiir ordering military officers loyal to Vice President Machar to be [officially integrated into a unified command of the army](#), with the announcement touted as being a central pillar of the peace process (Al-Jazeera, 13 April 2022).

As reported by AP News on 5 July 2023, President Salva Kiir announced that the [long-delayed elections](#) in the country would take place in December 2024 and that he would run as a candidate. His party endorsed his candidacy at a large event in Wau Stadium in Bahr el Ghazal. Kiir is expected to face his long-standing rival, First Vice President Riek Machar, who has not yet

confirmed his candidacy. Meanwhile, opposition groups have accused the government of lacking the political will to actually hold the elections.

Political and legal landscape

South Sudan faced one of the gravest situations regarding human rights, democracy, and human security in 2022/2023. Freedom House gave the country a dismal rating of 'Not Free' with a score of just 1 out of 100, reflecting the dire state of affairs in the nation (Global Freedom Index 2023 South Sudan).

Under the [2011 Transitional Constitution](#), South Sudan is a republic with executive power vested in the president and vice president, who was appointed by the president (Britannica, accessed 19 September 2023). Hence, in July 2011, Salva Kiir Mayardit became president of the new independent state of South Sudan. However, seven years of civil war erupted when President Kiir sacked his cabinet and accused Vice President Riek Machar of attempting a failed coup. In September 2018, a power-sharing agreement was signed by President Kiir and opposition groups in a bid to end the brutal conflict. As a first step, the accord called for all armed groups to withdraw from all cities and civilian areas such as schools and refugee camps in the run-up to the country entering into a three-year-long political transition.

In January 2020, the [UN Human Rights Council](#) (UNHRC, 21 January 2020) expressed its 'grave concern' about the sustained lack of political will to end the fighting in the country and reported:

- "Beyond the fragile peace at the national level, localized and often ethnically-based tensions intensified, leading to an increase of nearly 200 percent in the number of civilian casualties over 2018. Between late February and May 2019, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan recorded some 531 deaths and 317 injuries in 152 incidents of localized violence. Of grave concern, brutal attacks, often premised on cattle raiding, involved members of the State apparatus or the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (pro-Riek Machar) (SPLA-IO (RM)) and drove displacement at alarming rates, including in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Unity and Jonglei States."

This meant that even if the peace treaty was honored, there were issues of human rights abuses and atrocities that still had to be resolved.

In February 2020, the rival leaders [succeeded](#) in forming a coalition government: A day after President Salva Kiir dissolved the previous government, opposition leader Riek Machar was sworn in as his deputy (Lemon Wire, 22 February 2020). As a first step towards durable peace and a transition to civil rule, on 22 February 2020, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) was formed in accordance with the 2018 "Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan" ([R-ARCSS](#), 12 September 2018), marking the start of a 36-month transitional period. So far, the parties have made progress in certain key areas such as defining the number of states and boundaries in South Sudan, and the process of unification of the armed forces.

In October 2021, a UN-appointed independent body of experts reported that prevention of dissent by ['overzealous' security forces](#) was causing dramatic erosion of civic space and undermined South Sudan peace (UN News, 20 October 2021). In February 2022, UN-appointed

fact-finding human rights experts revealed [increasing political violence](#) and polarization between communities (UN News, 11 February 2022), with widespread outbreaks of fighting between the SPLA-IO and armed gangs of youths. In 2022, even a [UN convoy carrying food and humanitarian assistance](#) was attacked in an ambush by gunmen (UN News, 1 March 2022). Human rights organizations also reported a [surge in attacks against aid workers](#) in South Sudan (Human Rights Watch, 4 March 2022). In 2022, violence against civilians remained unacceptably high, even though it [had decreased in comparison to previous years](#) (UN News, 17 February 2022).

As outlined by Human Rights Watch (HRW 2023 South Sudan country chapter), Generals Johnson Olony and Simon Gatwech Duel led a faction of the SPLM/A-IO in February 2022, known as 'Kitgwang', which secured amnesty and integration into the national army. However, tension escalated in July when Kitgwang, backed by government forces, clashed with the SPLA/IO in Upper Nile State, triggering a humanitarian crisis. Further internal conflict within Kitgwang and battles against SPLA/IO in August and September 2022 resulted in severe human rights violations and displaced thousands.

In 2022, South Sudan also faced its worst humanitarian crisis since independence, with at least 7.7 million people food insecure and over 4.5 million people displaced either internally or as refugees. Due to the challenging circumstances, the transitional period set by the 2018 Revitalized Agreement has been extended by 24 months from February 2023, which is when it should have concluded, to February 2025.

Religious landscape

South Sudan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	7,272,000	61.2
Muslim	820,000	6.9
Hindu	270	0.0
Buddhist	330	0.0
Ethno-religionist	3,735,000	31.4
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	870	0.0
Atheist	6,000	0.1
Agnostic	55,400	0.5
Other	630	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

When South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011, the demography changed from being a Muslim-majority country (when it was part of Sudan) to being a Christian-majority one. A substantial part of the population in isolated areas adheres to Traditional African religions (ATR, over 31% of the population) or combines Christian and indigenous practices. Although Christians have become a majority and no longer face the persecution they experienced under a conservative Islamic Sudanese government, their socio-economic conditions have not significantly improved to date.

Christianity is most prevalent among the peoples of Al Istiwai state, namely the Madi, Moru, Azande and Bari.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 South Sudan):

- "The transitional constitution stipulates the separation of religion and state. It prohibits religious discrimination, even if the President declares a state of emergency. It states that all religions are to be treated equally and that religion should not be used for divisive purposes."

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 South Sudan (D2):

- "The interim constitution guarantees religious freedom, but houses of worship - used as places of refuge for civilians - have been attacked by gunmen seeking members of rival ethnic groups."

Economic landscape

The Republic of South Sudan became the world's newest nation and Africa's 55th country on 9 July 2011. The renewed conflicts in December 2013 and July 2016 undermined the development gains achieved since independence and worsened the humanitarian situation. Close to 400,000 people have been [killed since 2013](#), and 4.5 million people have been displaced both internally and to neighboring countries (New Humanitarian, 21 March 2019). Much of the population is dependent on subsistence agriculture and humanitarian assistance. Property rights are insecure and price signals are weak because markets are not well-organized.

According to World Bank's 2023 Macro Poverty Outlook South Sudan:

- **Economic growth:** Economic activity in South Sudan remains suppressed, hindered by a series of challenges including a fourth consecutive year of flooding, sporadic violence, increased food inflation linked to the war in Ukraine, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Oil production, a major economic driver, dropped by 7.6% in the fiscal year 2022 due to flooding and insufficient investment in the oil fields. The agriculture sector also faces grim prospects, with reduced yields attributed to widespread flooding and extended dry periods. These adverse conditions have eroded households' purchasing power and exacerbated the country's already severe food insecurity. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by an estimated 2.3% in FY22, following a 5.1% decline in the previous year.

- **Projections:** GDP growth in South Sudan is anticipated to stay negative in FY23 due to the persistent impact of flooding on both agricultural and oil sectors. Oil production alone is projected to decline by 3.7%. However, increased government spending and expanding domestic credit could bolster a recovery in the non-oil sector. As floods recede, agricultural output is also expected to improve. Over the medium term, GDP growth could rise to above 2% as both oil and non-oil sectors recover. This positive outlook depends on prudent fiscal and monetary policies, progress in governance and structural reforms, and steady implementation of the peace agreement. Financial pressure on the current account balance is expected to escalate due to increased debt service obligations, declining oil prices, and reduced international aid, particularly in light of the Ukraine war fallout. Poverty rates are expected to remain stagnant at about 70% in the medium term.
- **Inflation:** In the first half of the financial year 2023, urban inflation experienced an uptick. This increase can be attributed to the pass-through effects from earlier depreciation of the currency.
- **Poverty:** The poverty situation in South Sudan is critical, with 7 out of 10 people living in extreme poverty. Furthermore, severe food insecurity is a pressing issue affecting approximately 8.9 million people, or 78% of the country's population. This crisis is exacerbated by rising global food prices and recurring domestic flooding events. In addition to these challenges, the country also has a high number of internally displaced persons, totaling 2.2 million, of which 55% are women and girls. Another 2.3 million South Sudanese are refugees in neighboring countries.

According to the [Africa Development Bank](#) (accessed 19 September 2023):

- GDP is projected to contract 0.4% 2022/23 and recover to 4.6% growth in 2023/24, driven by increased domestic oil production and higher global oil prices. The oil sector is projected to drive growth on the supply side, and private consumption and investment are projected to do so on the demand side. Headwinds include disruptions to the peace process. Inflation is projected to increase to 16.5% in 2022/23 and 10.9% in 2023/24, reflecting higher food prices.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook South Sudan and UNDP Human Development Report South Sudan:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Dinka (Jieng) 35.8%, Nuer (Naath) 15.6%, Shilluk (Chollo), Azande, Bari, Kakwa, Kuku, Murle, Mandari, Didinga, Ndogo, Bviri, Lndi, Anuak, Bongo, Lango, Dungotona, Acholi, Baka, Fertit (2011 est.)
- **Main languages:** English (official), Arabic (includes Juba and Sudanese variants), regional languages include Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Zande, Shiluk
- **Median age:** 18.6 years (2020 est.)
- **Urban population:** 20.8% (2022 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 5.3 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (ages 15 and older):** 34.5%
- **Employment to population ratio (ages 15 and older):** 63.5%
- **Unemployment, total:** 12.2% of labor force

- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 18.8%
- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** South Sudan ranked 185th out of 189 countries with a human development value of 0.433
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 59.6 years (2022 est.)
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.842
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** No data

According to the World Bank country overview i) South Sudan; ii) [Sudan](#) (updated 25 September 2023):

- **Refugees/IDPs:**
 - South Sudan:** "South Sudan remains in a serious humanitarian crisis. Some 9.4 million people, 76% of the population, are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023, an increase by half a million people compared to 2022. Women and children continue to be the most affected. The humanitarian crisis has been further exacerbated by the recent conflict in neighboring Sudan, which has led to an inflow of refugees and returnees into South Sudan. As of September 2023, 262,298 individuals have arrived in South Sudan, 91% of whom are South Sudanese returnees."
 - Sudan:** "The high incidence of conflict, particularly past fighting that led to South Sudan's secession, has led to a large population of refugees and internally displaced persons. Sudan is now a source, destination, and transit country for irregular migration, including refugees and asylum-seekers using the East African North-bound migratory route through Libya to Europe. The country hosts an estimated 800,000 South Sudanese refugees and 330,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea, Syria, Ethiopia, CAR, Chad, and Yemen."

In general, the new nation has been facing multiple challenges, all exacerbated by the 2013-2019 civil war. According to the World Factbook South Sudan:

- Educational attainment is extremely poor due to the lack of schools, qualified teachers and materials.
- Teachers and students are also struggling with the switch from Arabic to English as the language of instruction.
- Many adults missed out on schooling because of warfare and displacement.

According to Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index, South Sudan ranked as one of the most corrupt nations in the world ranking 177/180 with a score of 13/100. This is an improvement compared to the 2021 report which had put South Sudan 180/180.

- With a score of just 13, South Sudan is significantly below the regional average score of 32 out of 100 on the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index for Sub-Saharan Africa ([Transparency International news, 31 January 2023](#)). The region as a whole faces a year of stagnation in terms of corruption, with 44 out of 49 assessed countries scoring below 50. While a few countries have made gains, these are outweighed by substantial declines in others, including South Sudan, which remains an outlier well below the regional average.

Technological landscape

South Sudan has little infrastructure - about 10,000 kilometers of roads, but just 2% of them paved. Electricity is produced mostly by costly diesel generators, with less than 2% of the population having access to electricity. Indoor plumbing and potable water are scarce. About 90% of consumed goods, capital and services are imported from neighboring countries (mainly Uganda, Kenya and Sudan).

Different sources vary in the numbers reported:

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 South Sudan):

- **Internet usage:** 7.9% penetration rate (survey date: December 2021)
- **Facebook usage:** 4.7% penetration rate (survey date: January 2022)

These figures show that digital access and social media usage are low, indicating limited connectivity and technological outreach within the population.

As per [Data Reportal, Digital 2024: South Sudan](#) (23 February 2024):

- **Internet usage:** January 2024 - Internet penetration stood at 12.1% percent
- **Social media usage:** January 2024 - 6.6% of the total population.
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** January 2024 - 35.5% of the total population.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (Publication date: March 2024):

"South Sudan has one of the lowest mobile penetration rates in Africa. Growth in the sector in coming years is premised on a resolution to the political crisis and a recovery of the country's economy. The virtually untapped internet and broadband market also depends to a large extent on the country gaining access to international fibre cables and on a national backbone network being in place. Sophisticated infrastructure solutions are needed to reach the 80% of the population that live outside of the main urban centres. With a negligible rate of bank account ownership, mobile payment and banking solutions also have a strong potential once a reliable mobile infrastructure is built."

"The limits to growth are currently defined by widespread poverty and a low literacy rate, but the government recognises the positive feedback loop on development that access to ICT can have and is providing a range of investment incentives. The international community has provided billions of dollars in aid to strengthen governance and institutions in the young nation."

"Some improvement has followed from the cable link completed by Liquid Telecom in February 2020 which connects Juba directly to the company's submarine landing station at Mombasa. The cable was South Sudan's first direct international fibre link, and has helped drive down the price of retail internet services for residential and business customers. A second cable linking to the border with Kenya was completed in December 2021."

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2023 South Sudan):

- In South Sudan, the freedom of the press is severely compromised, as journalists face constant threats and censorship. Radio is the most widespread medium, with over 40 stations in operation. However, even major outlets like Miara, Eye Radio, and Catholic Radio Network experience intimidation and censorship. The country has two state-owned TV broadcasters and six newspapers, but only two English-language newspapers are independent of government influence.
- Politically, the media landscape is under heavy pressure from South Sudan's leaders to conform to their agendas. National TV and radio lack independence and are subject to sanctions for non-compliance with government viewpoints. Although the establishment of the Media Authority in 2017 led to fewer media shutdowns, censorship still persists. National Security Service officials have been known to raid media outlets and printing plants to censor content, as seen with the deletion of several articles from the Al-Mouqif newspaper in 2019.

Security situation

The security situation in South Sudan is highly precarious, posing extreme risks to various groups of people including humanitarian workers, civilians and religious leaders. Armed conflicts, violence between rival factions, and ongoing persecution contribute to a dangerous environment that severely compromises personal safety. Humanitarian efforts are often hampered due to the volatile conditions, making it exceedingly risky for aid workers to provide necessary services. Civilians face threats from multiple fronts—ranging from organized banditry to ethnic clashes—while religious leaders who speak out against corruption and injustices are also at great risk. The unpredictable and dangerous landscape complicates efforts to improve the human rights situation and provide basic services, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity and vulnerability for all residents.

Numerous killings have occurred. As reported by the [Human Rights Watch](#):

- "From January to March 2023, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) [documented](#) 920 incidents of violence against civilians, during which 405 civilians were killed, 235 injured, 266 abducted, and 14 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence."
- "Between April and June 2023, it also [documented](#) 222 incidents of violence affecting 871 civilians (including 128 children), during which 395 were killed, 281 injured, 166 abducted, and 29 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence."
- "As of August, 22 aid workers were killed as South Sudan remains one of the [most dangerous places](#) for aid workers."

According to Global Conflict Tracker, [Instability in South Sudan](#), 8 August 2023):

- Since the formation of a unity government in 2020 between President Salva Kiir and former opposition leader Riek Machar, progress on the 2018 peace agreement has been slow. Despite UN efforts to protect civilians through peacekeeping missions and camps, the situation remains dire, with the worst food crisis the country has ever faced affecting more than 7.7 million people in 2023 [N.B. The World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 South

Sudan uses the figure 8.9 million]. The recent conflict in neighboring Sudan has further strained South Sudan's resources and diverted focus from peace deal implementation. Long-delayed national elections are planned for December 2024, but the persistent tension between Kiir and Machar raises concerns of renewed violence. Security reforms are stalled due to mistrust among parties. Adding to the volatility, an armed insurgency led by Thomas Cirillo's National Salvation Front poses another severe threat to both civilians and the peace process. The UN has extended sanctions on South Sudan through 2024 due to human rights violations.

Gender perspective

According to a report by UN-appointed rights experts, the widespread rape and sexual violence perpetrated on women and girls by all armed groups across the country amounted to a '[hellish existence](#)' for the victims (UN News, 21 March 2022).

Trends analysis

1) Human rights violations and a culture of impunity have continued

Despite the formation of a unity government in February 2020, the record of human rights violations and impunity remains deplorable. Although the end of the civil war was declared with the formation of this government, the decade-long pattern of neglecting human rights continues. South Sudan's unique challenge lies in uniting its diverse and often conflicting 60+ tribes, a task made more difficult by the dictatorial nature of the existing regime.

Adding to this complex landscape are environmental factors such as drought and ongoing conflicts that render farming impossible in many regions. Consequently, South Sudan is experiencing its worst food crisis ever, affecting 8.9 million people as per World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2023. While the end of the civil war theoretically opens avenues for improved conditions for all citizens, including Christians, the frequent disregarding of human rights and the underlying culture of impunity is unlikely to change in the short-term. It would require a profound cultural and political shift, something that the government has shown little will to undertake.

2) Armed groups pose a perpetual threat

Multiple armed groups have ramped up their activities in South Sudan over the years, making the security situation increasingly precarious. These groups have been responsible for widespread atrocities, including the killing, kidnapping and rape of civilians, as well as the destruction of property. Humanitarian workers have been especially targeted, and in some instances, the attacks have been directed at Christians.

Complicating the situation further is the difficulty in identifying these armed factions, which makes accountability nearly impossible. The presence of these armed groups significantly endangers the peace process and creates an environment of perpetual insecurity. Despite the UN's efforts to impose sanctions on South Sudan through 2024, and the presence of peace-keeping missions designed to protect civilians, these threats show little sign of abating in the near term.

Both of these issues are reflective of a broader systemic crisis that includes political instability, a deeply fractured society and a faltering economy. As South Sudan approaches its long-delayed national elections in December 2024, the rift between the major civil war factions—represented by President Kiir and Riek Machar—continues to fester, adding another layer of instability to an already precarious situation.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: 12 September 2018 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45511352>
- Recent history: February 2020 - <https://lemonwire.com/2020/02/22/south-sudans-rivals-form-unity-government-meant-to-end-war/>
- Recent history: UN experts - <https://apnews.com/article/famine-sudan-africa-middle-east-south-sudan-9704f524380e58a623f76bc648d68bf7>
- Recent history: President Salva Kiir pledging not to return the country to war - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/9/kiir-pledges-peace-as-south-sudan-marks-decade-of-independence>
- Recent history: ‘peace-spoilers’ had been removed from his party - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/5/south-sudans-machar-says-peace-spoilers-backed-his-removal-as>
- Recent history: to urge - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/10/regional-states-urge-dialogue-to-ease-south-sudan-tensions>
- Recent history: officially integrated into a unified command of the army - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/13/south-sudan-president-kiir-integrates-rivals-officers-into-army>
- Recent history: long-delayed elections - <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-elections-salva-kiir-7e23e85e8b4ff6073ca06eaf85814ea1>
- Political and legal landscape: 2011 Transitional Constitution - <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Sudan/Government-and-society#ref300747>
- Political and legal landscape: UN Human Rights Council - https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_43_56.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: succeeded - <https://lemonwire.com/2020/02/22/south-sudans-rivals-form-unity-government-meant-to-end-war/>
- Political and legal landscape: R-ARCSS - <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/02/South-Sudan-Peace-Agreement-September-2018.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: ‘overzealous’ security forces - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103512>
- Political and legal landscape: increasing political violence - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111752>
- Political and legal landscape: UN convoy carrying food and humanitarian assistance - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113012>
- Political and legal landscape: surge in attacks against aid workers - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/04/surge-attacks-aid-workers-south-sudan>
- Political and legal landscape: had decreased in comparison to previous years - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112172>
- Economic landscape: killed since 2013 - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/in-depth/south-sudan-humanitarian-toll-half-decade-war>
- Economic landscape: Africa Development Bank - <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-outlook>
- Social and cultural landscape: Sudan - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sudan/overview>
- Social and cultural landscape: Transparency International news, 31 January 2023 - <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2022-sub-saharan-africa-corruption-compounding-multiple-crises>
- Technological landscape: Data Reportal, Digital 2024: South Sudan - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-south-sudan>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/South-Sudan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/south-sudan#>

- Security situation: documented - <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/press-release-civilians-continue-bear-brunt-violence-south-sudan-according-latest-unmiss-human>
- Security situation: documented - <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/press-release-civilians-continue-bear-brunt-violence-south-sudan-according-latest-unmiss-human>
- Security situation: most dangerous places - <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-tops-list-most-dangerous-countries-aid-workers-world-and-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-amid-mounting-needs-access-constraints-and-lack-funding>
- Security situation: Instability in South Sudan - <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan#>
- Security situation: hellish existence - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114312>

WWL 2024: Church information / South Sudan

Christian origins

Christianity was very influential in the Sudan region from the 4th century onwards; for nearly a millennium the majority of the population was Christian. Christians suffered when invading Arabs brought Islam and gradually Islamized the northern part of Sudan by the 15th century. Following the defeat of the self-proclaimed Islamic Mahdi and his supporters by the British in 1898, many Christian groups entered the country. Roman Catholics, Anglicans (via the Church Missionary Society) and American Presbyterians also came from their base in Egypt. The Anglican Sudan United Mission, the Africa Inland Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission all followed. Several African-initiated churches have also become established.

Church spectrum today

South Sudan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	3,000	0.0
Catholic	6,052,000	83.2
Protestant	3,464,000	47.6
Independent	186,000	2.6
Unaffiliated	47,900	0.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-2,481,000	-34.1
Total	7,271,900	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,773,000	24.4
Renewalist movement	1,037,000	14.3

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

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangel-**

ical 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.

Christianity is predominantly Roman Catholic in South Sudan and is most prevalent among the peoples of Al Istiwai state, namely the Madi, Moru, Azande and Bari.

Other principal Christian denominations are Episcopal, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Sudan Interior, Presbyterian Evangelical, and African Inland Churches. There are also smaller populations of Eritrean Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox (Source: IRFR 2022 South Sudan).

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no particular hotspots.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not isolated from other Christian communities and so are not included as a separate category in WWL scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities: This category is made up of the Roman Catholic Church and traditional Protestant churches, to which the majority of Christians belong. Church life has been seriously affected by the civil war and Christians continue to suffer persecution arising from ethnic divisions.

Converts: This category mainly includes those who have converted from Islam or traditional African religions. Converts from Islam are the most persecuted Christian group, especially in the northern part of the country where the Muslim population is dominant.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Church groups in this category have been exposed to violence from the civil conflict and have also faced pressure from some Historical Christian communities.

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / South Sudan

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

South Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	46	74
WWL 2023	46	72
WWL 2022	43	74
WWL 2021	43	69
WWL 2020	44	65

Since World Watch List (WWL) began closely monitoring and documenting Christian persecution in South Sudan, the level of persecution has consistently scored over 41 points. The country remains unstable, with anarchy being a common occurrence. Christians have faced unjustified killings, and churches have been attacked. While the score in WWL 2023 increased by 3 points compared to WWL 2022, it remained steady at the level of 46 points in WWL 2024. This high score is largely driven by the ongoing violence in the country.

Persecution engines

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

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

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

South Sudan suffers from pervasive corruption, with a Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score significantly below the already low regional average for Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite being rich in natural resources like oil, gold and livestock, as well as having access to the Nile River, these resources have been exploited to fuel conflict rather than development. High-ranking officials amass wealth for themselves, often at the expense of the general populace, leading to severe food shortages affecting millions. This culture of corruption also offers a free pass to those who wish to persecute Christians—or any other groups—since there is virtually no system in place to hold anyone accountable. The consequences are dire, as highlighted by the high numbers of people facing severe food insecurity: 8.9 million people according to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2023.

Clan oppression (Strong)

In South Sudan, ethnic tensions run high, notably between the two largest groups, the Dinka and the Nuer, which have been represented by the political and military leaders President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, respectively. Between 2013 and 2019, these two groups were embroiled in an armed conflict that deeply fractured the nation along ethnic lines. The situation complicates the religious landscape as well, since around 32% of the population practices traditional religions

primarily concentrated in rural areas. While these traditional beliefs are not explicitly anti-Christian, they come with their own set of cultural and religious rituals that often conflict with Christian values. New Christian converts are therefore often caught in a difficult position, facing significant pressure from their ethnic groups to participate in traditional rituals and clan-based activities. The unwillingness to comply often exposes these converts to ostracization or worse within their communities.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The authoritarian rule of President Salva Kiir has fostered a climate of oppression and fear. While not directly targeted at Christians, the regime's oppressive actions have a broad impact on the majority-Christian population. Kiir's efforts to consolidate power have often involved stirring ethnic strife and suspending or purging anyone within the government who opposes him. This calculated approach led to the destructive civil war from 2013 to 2019, during which regime supporters either directly persecuted Christians or tacitly allowed persecution to occur. The national unity government established in 2020 has done little to ameliorate this situation, with President Kiir declaring his intention to run for re-election in 2024, thereby prolonging the cycle of instability.

Drivers of persecution

South Sudan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
				STRONG				MEDIUM	STRONG
Government officials								Medium	Medium
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
One's own (extended) family				Medium					
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups				Medium					
Organized crime cartels or networks									Strong

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

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- Organized crime cartels and networks in conjunction with Revolutionary or paramilitary groups (Strong):** Organized crime syndicates and paramilitary groups often work hand-in-hand in South Sudan. They fuel a cycle of lawlessness and anarchy that significantly impacts Christians and other religious communities. The inability to enforce the rule of law due to these strong, illicit networks results in numerous incidents of church looting and property destruction, with zero legal repercussions for the perpetrators.

- **Government officials (Medium):** The corruption at the highest levels of government is intricately tied with these networks of organized crime. This unfortunate linkage effectively renders the government unable or unwilling to provide protection for Christians and other vulnerable groups. The confluence of these elements creates a complex web of organized corruption and crime, making it exceedingly difficult for any positive change to take hold.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Revolutionary or Paramilitary groups (Medium):** The civil war in the period 2013-2019 was essentially an ethnic battle, marked by gruesome acts of torture, abductions and killings. Armed paramilitary groups representing different ethnic factions were responsible for these human rights violations. Many of these groups did not hesitate to target vulnerable populations, including aid workers and Christians, in their quest for dominance. Churches were often targeted and destroyed, demonstrating the volatile relationship between these armed groups and religious communities.
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Community leaders often exert strong social control through informal local rules. These rules can sometimes be aimed explicitly against Christians, especially those who are active in evangelizing in remote areas. The power and influence of these leaders in their communities mean that these rules can be very effective in marginalizing and oppressing Christian converts.
- **One's own (extended) family (Medium):** Within Ancestral Traditional Religion (ATR) communities, family plays a significant role in the spiritual life of individuals. A family member who converts to Christianity often faces extreme pressure to revert to ancestral practices and beliefs.

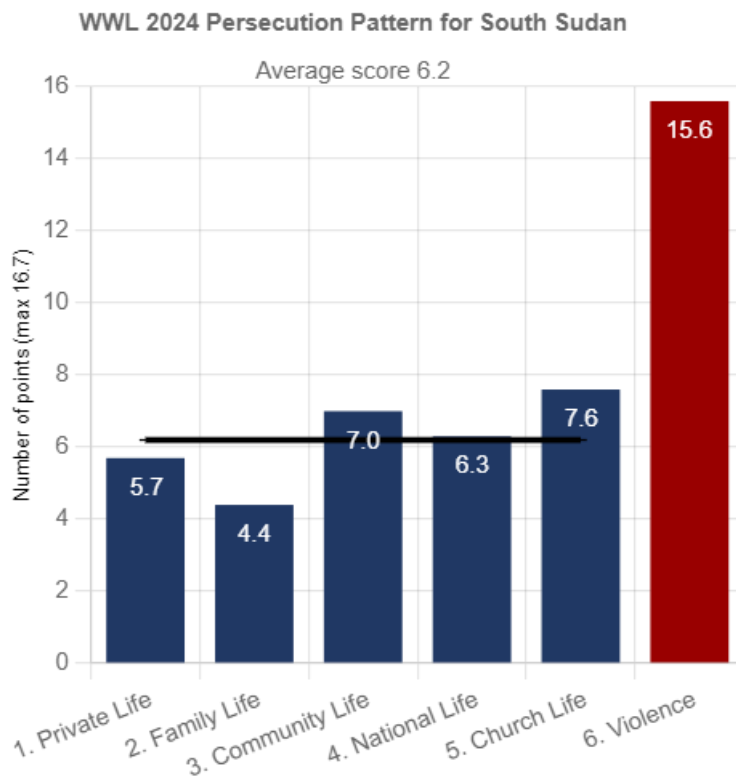
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The pervasive culture of impunity and silence is perpetuated by government officials and their affiliates. These officials enable and often turn a blind eye to the atrocities committed throughout the country, thus adding another layer of oppression. This culture of silence effectively muzzles Christians and other activists who try to speak out against the injustices and human rights violations.

The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for South Sudan shows (see chart below):

- The average pressure on Christians over all *spheres of life* was 6.2 points, similar to WWL 2023.
- Pressure was highest in the *Church sphere* (7.6 points) followed by the *Community sphere of life* with 7.0 points.
- Violence is at an extreme level, reaching 15.6 points.



Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.00 points)

In many areas, particularly where the ATR (African Traditional Religion) is prevalent, Christians face significant risks in meeting with each other. The threat of fatal attacks in these regions has made gatherings for Christians exceedingly dangerous, presenting a serious challenge to their community interactions.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.25 points)

In certain communities, especially where ATR are the majority, it has been risky for Christians to engage in acts of worship individually, such as prayer and Bible reading. The risk factors are influenced by factors such as locality and ethnicity.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (2.00 points)

In families adhering to ATR (African Traditional Religion), those who convert to Christianity and are found possessing Christian materials can face serious repercussions. Such actions may lead to severe societal punishments, including expulsion.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.00 points)

In areas dominated by African Traditional Religion (ATR), the private ownership or possession of Christian materials has become particularly dangerous. Individuals found with such items in these regions often face severe repercussions, as their actions can be viewed as a breach of local religious customs and norms. This heightened risk highlights the significant challenges Christians encounter in practicing their faith and maintaining their beliefs within ATR-dominated communities

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

In ATR-dominated areas, this situation is particularly intense for women. Female spouses of converts to Christianity frequently encounter heightened pressure from community members to pursue divorce.

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

In regions dominated by African Traditional Religion, Christians attempting to celebrate Christian weddings often encounter severe hindrances. These obstacles can range from being attacked to facing expulsion from their communities.

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.50 points)

In areas dominated by African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have often been subject to enforced separation. This includes instances where Christians are forcibly chased away or their children are taken from them, demonstrating the extreme challenges they face. This is particularly true in ATR-dominated areas, where adhering to Christian beliefs can lead to severe social and familial repercussions.

Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.50 points)

Christian spouses, when married to non-Christians, often encounter denial of custody rights in divorce cases. This issue is especially pronounced in communities where African Traditional Religion (ATR) prevails.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.00 points)

Christians in some regions are subjected to intense monitoring by local communities and can result in expulsion from the community, denial of access to communal resources, or, in extreme cases, being killed. These severe outcomes are particularly prevalent in areas dominated by African Traditional Religion (ATR) and where armed groups are active.

Block 3.4: Christians have been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.00 points)

In South Sudan, particularly in areas where African Traditional Religion (ATR) is dominant, Christians face serious discrimination in sharing community resources. They often encounter restrictions on common resources like grazing lands, effectively excluding them from being integral parts of their communities. This discrimination frequently forces them to flee from their communities.

Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Just as Christians encounter obstacles in sharing communal resources, they also face restrictions in participating in local community institutions. This is particularly challenging in areas dominated by African Traditional Religion (ATR), where communal institutions are often stronger and more influential than government structures. For Christians in these regions, navigating these societal barriers can be exceptionally difficult.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (2.75 points)

Abduction and forced marriage are prevalent issues in South Sudan, especially in areas where African Traditional Religion (ATR) dominates. It is not uncommon for Christians, particularly those who have converted, to be forcibly married to someone else in these regions. Additionally, in areas with active armed groups, the risk of abduction is significantly higher.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.00 points)

This issue significantly affects Christians in various ways, particularly in areas dominated by African Traditional Religion (ATR). In these regions, Christians are sometimes forced to participate in rituals that contradict their faith. In governmental contexts, they often find themselves compelled to comply with practices they deem unjust, as speaking out could lead to greater difficulties. For example, a Christian stated to a country expert: "If I said, I do not sign this paper because it means corruption, I would be fired or even something bad could happen to me."

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Travel restrictions for faith-related purposes have posed significant challenges for Christians. Documented instances in South Sudan reveal the dangers faced by aid workers, many of whom are Christians seeking to assist displaced people, as they navigate unsafe conditions. Moreover, in areas where ATR) is prevalent, Christians who travel to carry out preaching are often met with severe obstacles, including mob attacks and other forms of violence.

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)

This discrimination primarily stems from two sources: At the national level, government officials often intertwine ethnicity and religion, leading to the marginalization of Christians who do not support government policies. Locally, many officials are also community leaders, and in these roles, they may discriminate against Christians.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.00 points)

In South Sudan, Christians face considerable limitations regarding their freedom of expression, influenced by various factors. The government is notably repressive, and its record on freedom of expression ranks low, as extensively documented by international human rights organizations. Beyond governmental control, ethnic and clan leaders also impose restrictions on the freedom of Christians. Armed groups within the country further limit Christian expression. In this context, it becomes exceedingly difficult for Christians to openly express their faith-based opinions, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the constraints they face.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.00 points)

Impunity is a serious issue in South Sudan, particularly concerning the persecution of Christians. Perpetrators, whether they are government officials, community leaders or members of armed groups, often act without facing consequences. This lack of accountability is largely due to the government's unwillingness, and at times incapacity, to hold these individuals responsible for their actions. This environment of impunity has a profound impact on the safety and well-being of Christians in the country.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

In South Sudan, organizing Christian gatherings outside church buildings is a complex and risky endeavor. Documented attacks have occurred during church services, highlighting the dangers Christians face in these settings. Further, there are numerous incidents illustrating the severe limitations Christians encounter when attempting to organize church activities outside traditional church premises. Firstly, obtaining permission for such events is often a challenging process. Secondly, these gatherings are particularly vulnerable to attacks, especially in areas

with active armed groups or where ATR is dominant. These factors collectively contribute to the substantial challenges faced by churches in extending their activities beyond their buildings.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.25 points)

Churches face considerable obstacles in their efforts to establish and maintain schools or other institutions. First, the government frequently interferes with the activities of Christian organizations, creating bureaucratic and operational hurdles. Secondly, these organizations are often targeted by armed groups, which adds a significant risk to their day-to-day operations. In areas dominated by ATR, Christian organizations must be extremely cautious as their activities are sometimes perceived as attempts to convert locals, leading to hostility and even attacks. These challenges combine to create a complex and often hostile environment for Christian institutions in South Sudan, hindering their ability to provide vital services and support.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.00 points)

In South Sudan, the challenges faced by Christian communities extend to the construction and renovation of church buildings. The interference by the government, similar to the obstructions faced by Christian organizations in their operations, also impacts these construction and renovation projects. Moreover, the threat from armed groups, who target Christian establishments, adds a layer of risk to building or renovating church structures. In regions where ATR is dominant, the endeavor to construct religious sites is fraught with additional challenges, as these actions can be met with hostility or resistance from the local communities.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

In South Sudan, pastors, other Christian leaders, and their family members frequently find themselves as specific targets of harassment due to their faith. This harassment can take various forms, from verbal threats to physical violence, and often stems from multiple sources. The government's interference in Christian activities extends to individual leaders, subjecting them to close scrutiny and intimidation. Armed groups also pose a significant threat, specifically targeting these individuals to instill fear or disrupt Christian activities. Additionally, in areas where ATR is prevalent, Christian leaders and their families face heightened risks as their roles in the community can draw particular hostility or resentment.

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

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

3. The use of symbolic numbers

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

South Sudan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10 *	10 *
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	10 *
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 *	100 *
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 *	10
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 *	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	0

5 Year trends

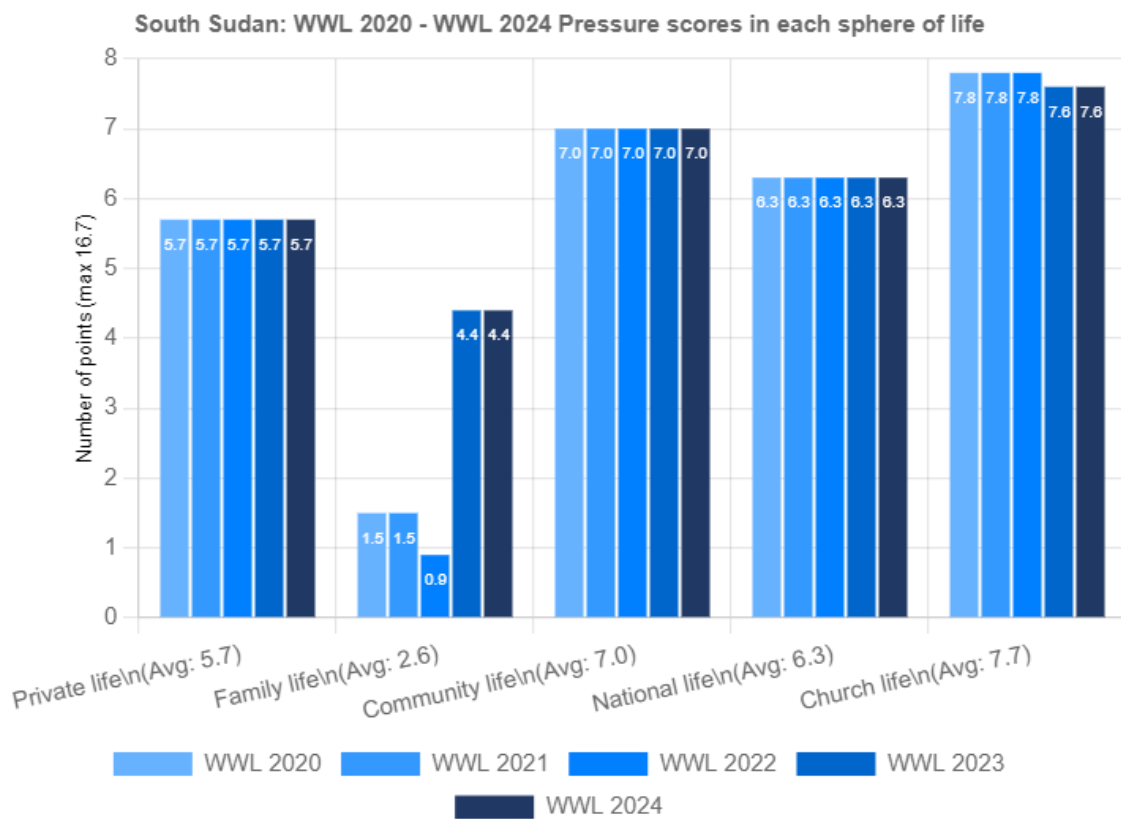
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

South Sudan: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	6.2
2023	6.2
2022	5.5
2021	5.7
2020	5.7

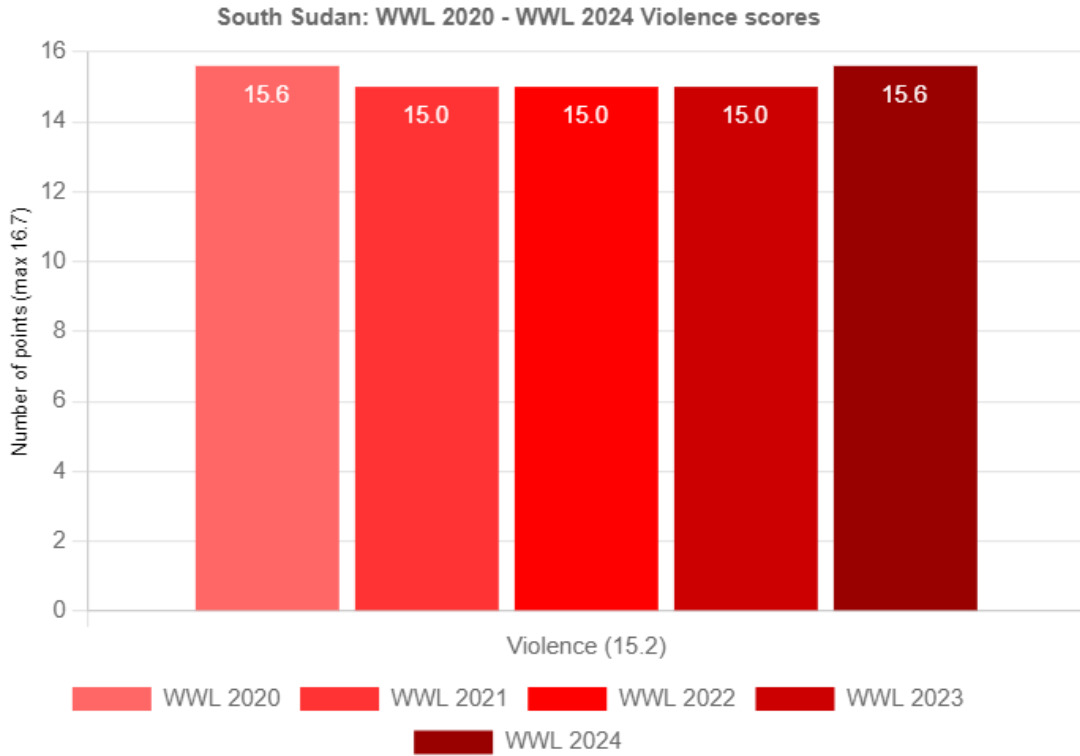
The data presented in the table shows that the average pressure on Christians in South Sudan has remained stable within the range of 5.5 to 6.2 points over the past five reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the highest levels of pressure have consistently been in *Church life* and *Community life* (7.7 AND 7.0 respectively). The *Family sphere* has the lowest five year average (2.6 points).

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Violence against Christians in South Sudan has been stable at an extreme level in the past five WWL reporting periods. Churches have been attacked, Christians have been unable to deliver humanitarian services and church leaders were targeted. The highest violence score was recorded during the WWL 2020 and WWL 2024 reporting periods. If the pressure in South Sudan scored higher, the total score for the country would rank among the highest in the World Watch List countries.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In South Sudan, the prolonged civil war has been a major instigating factor for the [increase in sexual violence](#) against women (HRW 2022 South Sudan country chapter). According to a [report](#) from the Secretary-General to the Security Council (UN, 3 June 2020, pp.27-28), sexual violence in Sudan has reached "appalling levels of brutality" and is "often committed with political and ethnic undertones". The South Sudanese authorities have failed to ensure accountability for grave violations and impunity continues to fuel violence, with civilians bearing the brunt of widespread attacks, systematic sexual violence and the ongoing presence of children in fighting forces.

Against this backdrop of complex ethnic and political tensions, it is difficult to discern the exact motivations behind the violence experienced by Christian women and girls. It is clear, however, that the use of rape as a weapon in armed conflict makes women and girls more susceptible to religious persecution by those opposed to their Christian faith, which mimics the war practices in the country. Regional experts indicate that rape and [gender-based violence](#) is the most common form of persecution affecting Christian women and girls (HRW, 14 December 2022). A country expert explains: "Sexual violence is an issue in South Sudan. Sexual slavery, rape, abductions and forced marriages are among the types of sexual violence suffered by South Sudanese [women]." The trauma experienced prevents many of these women from forming stable relationships.

Furthermore, South Sudan is one of six countries in the world which has not specified a minimum age for marriage hence leaving a loophole for early and forced marriages. It has the [eighth highest rate](#) of child marriage in the world, with 52% of girls marrying by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides South Sudan). The prevalence of this practice, most often carried out because of extreme poverty and to secure much-needed assets for families, (including cattle, money and other gifts via the payment of a bride price), creates an obvious avenue of repression and control of young female converts. Elders and ethnic leaders have reportedly forced young girls to marry people that they have never met. Within these marriages, women and girls are exposed to domestic and sexual violence.

Women are also impacted by the killing of men and forceful conscription of boys as child soldiers, as are left without any way to fend for themselves while mourning the loss of their husbands and sons (see below).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

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

South Sudan continues to face a dire human rights and humanitarian crisis. Conflict between government, opposing forces and their respective allied militias, as well as inter-communal violence causes death, injuries and displacement. South Sudan grapples with Africa's largest refugee crisis, with over 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees hosted in neighboring countries ([UNOCHA, 2024](#)). The South Sudanese civil war that lasted for almost seven years contributed to the mass recruitment of men, particularly of boys who were halted in their education and targeted instead to become [child soldiers](#) (FP, 8 January 2022). Within a context of ongoing fragility and insecurity, recruitment as a means of repression and control has become the most common form of persecution affecting men and boys (UN News, 23 June 2020). Whilst exact figures are lacking, thousands of children are believed to have been recruited into armed forces and groups by both sides of the conflict since 2013, with aid organizations fighting for their release ([UNICEF, 18 November 2021](#); [World Vision, 6 May 2022](#)).

Instability continues as the South Sudanese government has failed to meet critical milestones set out by the [peace deal](#), including legislative and institutional reforms ahead of the general elections set out for December 2024 ([HRW 2024 South Sudan country chapter](#)).

Men run the risk of being killed by government forces upon suspicion of being part of rebel forces. Reports indicate that religious leaders and Christian workers are particularly in danger. As a regional expert writes: "Religious leaders have been singled out for criticism by both the government and the opposition, using media reports and social media accounts. In certain circumstances, this has resulted in interrogations, security intelligence summonses, and even incarceration. As a result, freedom of expression has been restricted, and public debate has been silenced."

The killing of men and forceful conscription of boys as child soldiers has a catastrophic impact on families and communities. As a country expert explained: "Women are left without any way to fend for themselves while mourning the loss of their husbands and sons. The resultant anguish greatly weakens their capacity to do anything either economic or development related."

Persecution of other religious minorities

Non-Christians in South Sudan include Muslims (located particularly in the northern part of the country) and followers of traditional African religions in remote areas. Both groups have been affected by the ongoing fighting and the repression caused by the dictatorial regime.

According to the US State Department [IRFR 2021](#) South Sudan (there were no similar reports in IRFR 2022):

- "In June [2021], the former mayor of Juba, Kalisto Lado, destroyed shrines associated with indigenous religious practices."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians in South Sudan viewed through the lens of the Persecution engines in operation:

Organized corruption and crime

A grim reality persists in South Sudan, characterized by lawlessness, rampant corruption, and organized criminal networks. These elements contribute to a culture of impunity, where the persecution of Christians occurs without any legal consequences. Despite the so-called end of the civil war, the deep-seated corruption and collusion with paramilitary groups mean that eradicating these criminal elements will be an uphill battle that could take years, if not decades.

Clan oppression

The stronghold of clan-based hierarchies and deeply rooted ATR in South Sudan will likely continue to make life very difficult for Christians, especially in remote regions. Ethnic factions that played roles in perpetuating the recently "ended" civil war have not dissolved, and their power dynamics continue to influence local politics and social structures. In such a hostile environment, Christians will continue to be targets of both official and unofficial forms of persecution, especially as they often refuse to participate in clan-based rituals and conflicts.

Dictatorial paranoia

While the formation of the unity government in February 2020 offered a glimmer of hope for improved governance, the undercurrents of *Dictatorial paranoia* persist. The government's authoritarian tendencies have been historically erratic, making the safety and freedom of Christians uncertain. The postponement of elections to 2024 not only stirs tension but also offers a potential flashpoint that could unravel any progress made. With elections on the horizon, the government could clamp down further on civil liberties and may even utilize religious divisions for political gain.

Expectations for South Sudan over the next years

While the Church and Christian influence are growing due to humanitarian efforts, this growth could possibly make Christians more conspicuous targets. The fragile peace agreement and unity government are shaky constructs at best, threatened by the plethora of armed groups that remain active. As UN experts have warned, the threat of a renewed civil war looms large, exacerbated by delayed elections and rising divisions. The election itself in 2024 presents a dangerous pivot point; its outcome will inevitably stir tensions, and it is highly likely that the losing side will not accept the results, potentially plunging the country back into chaos.

The future, particularly for Christians, appears precarious. Any eruption of civil conflict will exponentially elevate the level of fear and danger they face, making their religious identity a potential death sentence in a country already fraught with instability.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: increase in sexual violence - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/south-sudan#9554c6>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: report - <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/report/conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general/2019-SG-Report.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: gender-based violence - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/12/1131712>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: eighth highest rate - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/south-sudan/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: (UNOCHA, 2024). - <https://www.unocha.org/south-sudan>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: child soldiers - <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/08/south-sudan-child-soldiers-riek-machar/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: UNICEF, 18 November 2021; - <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/press-releases/unicef-welcomes-release>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: World Vision, 6 May 2022 - https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/WVSS-Child%20soldier%20report%202022-update_FINAL.pdf
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: peace deal - <https://southsudan.igad.int/index.php/agreements/345-signed-revitalized-agreement-on-the-resolution-of-the-conflict-in-south-sudan>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: (HRW 2024 South Sudan country chapter). - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/south-sudan#>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2021 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/south-sudan/>

Further useful reports

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

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

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

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