



Understanding dimensions of religious freedom and persecution dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa

Christof Sauer, Frans Visscher and Dennis P. Petri

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research@od.org

www.theanalytical.org

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Introduction

Africa made the headlines recently, with two very high-profile incidents of persecution of Christians. One was the case of the Sudanese Meriam Yahia Ibrahim who was sentenced to death for alleged apostasy (leaving Islam) and 100 lashes for alleged adultery.¹ She was brought up as a Christian by her Ethiopian Orthodox mother. Her Sudanese Muslim father left the family when she was six. She testified to being a lifelong Christian. Her marriage certificate classifies her as a Christian, but the judge considered her a Muslim and judged her according to

¹ “Sudanese woman facing death for apostasy gives birth”, *BBC News*, 27 May 2014.

Sudan's Penal Code (Articles 146 and 126).² After considerable international pressure on the government of Sudan, Meriam has in the meantime been released,³ and is now a refugee in the United States.

The other incident that received substantial media coverage was the kidnapping of approximately 276 female students from the Government Secondary School in the primarily Christian town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria, on the night of 14–15 April 2014.⁴ The kidnappings were claimed by Boko Haram, an Islamic Jihadist and Takfiri terrorist organisation based in northeast Nigeria.⁵ This has been the largest single kidnapping incident so far, but Boko Haram has been blamed for nearly 4,000 deaths in 2014, of which the majority involved Christians.⁶

Moving to Africa as a whole, there are numerous countries where religious freedom is seriously restricted. Looking at Christians specifically, this map (**Figure 1**) illustrates where persecution is strongest.

Figure 1. Countries on the World Watch List 2014⁷

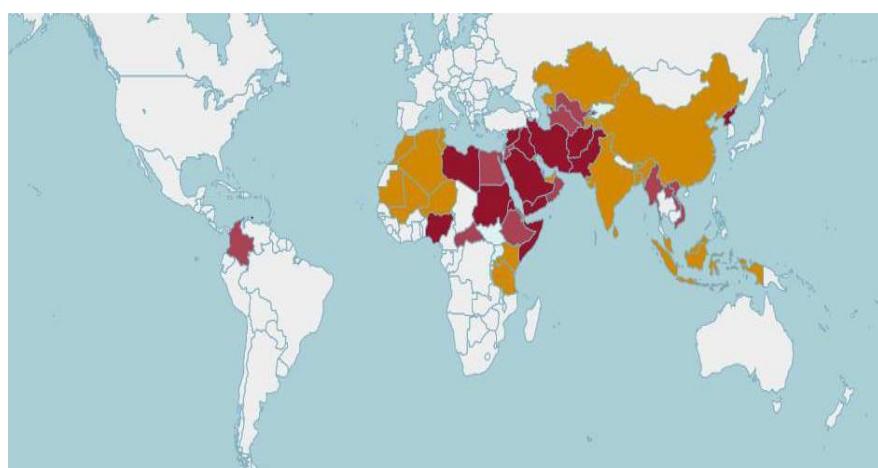


Figure 2 is part of the table produced by the Christian advocacy agency, Open Doors International, based on the annual World Watch List about persecution of Christians, globally

² "Sudan apostasy case: Meriam Ibrahim's marriage certificate shown to disprove adultery charges", *The Telegraph* (UK), 31 May 2014.

³ "Meriam Ibrahim: Sudan 'apostasy' woman freed again", *BBC News*, 27 June 2014.

⁴ "Nigeria churches urge global prayer for 187 missing girls", *World Watch Monitor*, 28 April 2014.

⁵ Zenn, Jacob, "Exposing and Defeating Boko Haram. Why the West must unite to help Nigeria defeat terrorism.", The Bow Group, 22 July 2014. Online at: <http://www.bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Jacob%20Zenn%20Bow%20Group%20Report%20for%202014.pdf> [Accessed: 25 March 2015].

⁶ Between 1 November 2012 and 31 March 2014, 2073 Christians were killed in Nigeria. Cf. "Nigeria Tops Christian Persecution Violence List: New Open Doors Report", Open Doors USA, 3 June 2014. Online at: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/newsroom/tag-news-post/nigeria-tops-christian-persecution-violence-list> [Accessed: 25 March 2015]

⁷ Open Doors USA (www.worldwatchlist.us).

Figure 2. Countries on the World Watch List 2014⁸

RANK WWL 2014	Country	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence	TOTAL (2014)	ROUNDED TOTAL (2014)
1	North Korea	16.667	16.667	16.667	16.667	14.496	8.519	89.683	90
2	Somalia	15.436	14.360	15.365	13.322	15.234	6.296	80.013	80
3	Syria	12.405	12.798	12.695	11.294	13.238	16.112	78.542	79
4	Iraq	12.216	13.170	12.435	11.897	12.891	15.556	78.165	78
5	Afghanistan	15.720	15.923	15.104	13.816	15.799	1.667	78.029	78
6	Saudi Arabia	14.678	14.807	13.802	14.035	16.146	4.259	77.727	78
7	Maldives	16.099	14.881	13.151	16.228	15.885	0.926	77.170	77
8	Pakistan	12.689	12.798	13.412	12.994	9.505	15.741	77.139	77
9	Iran	12.595	13.095	13.021	14.035	15.061	8.889	76.696	77
10	Yemen	13.826	15.030	13.672	13.816	14.149	3.519	74.012	74
11	Sudan	12.216	13.393	12.630	11.787	11.979	10.741	72.746	73
12	Eritrea	13.826	8.408	10.873	11.458	12.630	15.186	72.381	72
13	Libya	14.489	13.467	12.240	12.390	13.802	4.259	70.648	71
14	Nigeria	9.849	9.970	12.305	11.349	11.458	15.556	70.487	70
15	Uzbekistan	15.152	10.417	10.742	12.116	15.495	3.704	67.626	68
16	Central African Republic	7.386	6.548	11.849	11.787	12.760	16.667	66.998	67
17	Ethiopia	12.112	10.782	11.257	9.995	11.315	9.259	64.720	65
18	Vietnam	11.932	8.036	12.044	14.638	15.017	2.963	64.630	65
19	Qatar	12.879	12.723	11.654	12.445	13.759	0	63.460	63
20	Turkmenistan	13.731	9.301	11.133	12.007	14.670	1.296	62.138	62
21	Laos	11.553	11.086	11.003	11.623	14.627	1.667	61.559	62
22	Egypt	10.133	8.557	10.287	10.033	6.228	15.741	60.979	61
23	Myanmar	6.155	7.887	8.984	9.704	11.111	15.556	59.397	59
24	Brunei	14.489	12.946	10.026	7.127	12.804	0	57.392	57
25	Colombia	8.750	7.768	8.750	7.193	8.613	15.371	56.445	56
26	Jordan	11.648	11.458	9.766	9.594	10.807	2.963	56.236	56
27	Oman	10.511	11.756	10.807	12.116	10.807	0.000	55.998	56
28	India	8.712	9.821	8.854	9.649	8.550	9.815	55.401	55
29	Sri Lanka	8.807	7.366	11.393	9.485	10.243	7.593	54.887	55
30	Tunisia	11.364	11.682	10.156	7.456	10.937	2.963	54.558	55
31	Bhutan	9.849	9.449	10.807	9.649	13.325	1.111	54.190	54
32	Algeria	12.784	12.574	9.310	10.197	7.986	1.296	54.148	54

⁸ Open Doors USA (www.worldwatchlist.us).

RANK WWL 2014	Country	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence	TOTAL (2014)	ROUNDED TOTAL (2014)
33	Mali	10.511	10.417	11.133	9.814	11.762	0.185	53.822	54
34	Palestinian Territories	10.322	11.905	9.245	8.553	11.762	1.482	53.269	53
35	United Arab Emirates	10.810	9.821	9.793	10.063	10.085	0.926	51.498	51
36	Mauritania	9.659	10.938	9.505	9.923	10.981	0.370	51.377	51
37	China	8.580	6.124	6.471	7.593	13.086	8.889	50.743	51
38	Kuwait	10.649	9.109	8.999	9.253	11.467	0.370	49.847	50
39	Kazakhstan	11.174	7.143	7.162	9.594	12.196	2.037	49.306	49
40	Malaysia	10.985	11.458	8.659	8.333	9.201	0.556	49.192	49
41	Bahrain	11.112	8.113	8.866	9.716	10.643	0	48.450	48
42	Comoros	8.902	10.119	8.984	9.923	9.722	0.370	48.020	48
43	Kenya	8.049	8.110	8.399	6.195	8.811	7.963	47.527	48
44	Morocco	10.133	9.449	7.031	8.608	11.675	0.556	47.452	47
45	Tajikistan	11.553	7.589	7.487	7.456	11.588	1.482	47.155	47
46	Djibouti	8.239	8.780	7.878	8.827	10.807	1.667	46.198	46
47	Indonesia	7.386	10.119	7.096	8.059	6.076	7.408	46.144	46
48	Bangladesh	8.144	8.557	9.050	8.443	4.731	6.852	45.777	46
49	Tanzania	8.996	6.222	10.482	7.621	9.288	3.148	45.757	46
50	Niger	8.902	10.119	10.612	4.989	5.599	4.445	44.665	45

This paper discusses dimensions of religious freedom and persecution dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa. After a brief overview of the theoretical and methodological framework , the persecution dynamics of five African countries will be examined – Sudan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan – mainly using empirical data provided by the World Watch Research unit of Open Doors International. Both the legal dimension of religious freedom as well as the de facto pattern will also be introduced. The paper concludes with a few comments on the multidimensionality of religious freedom.

Theoretical and methodological framework

Open Doors has been monitoring persecution of Christians worldwide since the 1970s. One of the main tools of Open Doors to track and measure the extent of persecution in the world is the World Watch List (WWL). Most of the data in this paper is based on the research done for the World Watch List 2014, which was published in January. In this section, a short overview of the main elements of the methodology will be given.⁹

⁹ This section is based on the Methodology of the World Watch List of Open Doors International. To obtain a copy of the full methodological framework of the World Watch List, please visit

Definitions of “Christian” and “persecution”

The WWL methodology uses definitions for “Christian” and “persecution (of Christians)” to clarify which people it monitors and what sort of situations or incidents involving those people it takes into consideration. This way, the methodology can fulfill its goal, which is to monitor persecution of Christians and their communities.

The WWL methodology defines “Christian” as “anyone who self-identifies as a Christian and/or someone belonging to a Christian community as defined by the church’s historic creeds”.¹⁰ This definition is part theological and part sociological. It includes all people who self-identify as Christians, also those that do not belong to any specific denomination such as the Roman Catholics, Orthodox or Protestants. These latter groups define themselves according to the theological creeds of church history. The WWL methodology opts for this broad definition, following other instruments that report on worldwide Christianity.

WWL defines “persecution” as “any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”.¹¹ Here the WWL methodology has opted for a theological rather than a sociological definition. While the definition has its challenges because of its inclusiveness, it seems it best covers the full range of hostility that is experienced by Christians as a result of their Christian walk, rather than limiting the term persecution to more purely deliberate persecution or extreme forms of suffering. This is justified by the fact that it is very difficult in practice to say what is, actually, extreme. Often losing a job can be far worse in its effects than a beating in prison. Or being shunned by one’s parents can be more psychologically scarring than being part of a skirmish on the street. Also, to say that persecution has to be deliberate underestimates the implicit and indirect power of culture which has built up over decades a society or situation that freezes Christians out of normal life.

Complex reality: brokenness – impulses – persecution engines – drivers

A persecution situation presents a complex reality. It is not always clear if and to which extent pressure felt by Christians or even violence against them is directly related to their being Christian. Sometimes, just living in a chaotic world creates substantial amounts of suffering for Christians and others alike. Other times, suffering results from antipathy or hatred, or it could simply be due to the “double vulnerability” of Christians in a problematic context that rises to the level of persecution. The latter is what the WWL methodology tries to monitor and capture.

<http://www.worldwatchlist.us/about/ranking-methodology/> or send an email to the authors. For a critical discussion of the methodology of the World Watch List, cf. Sauer, C. 2012. “Measuring persecution. The new questionnaire design of the World Watch List”, *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 5(2):21-36.

¹⁰ Open Doors International, “World Watch List Methodology”. Online at:

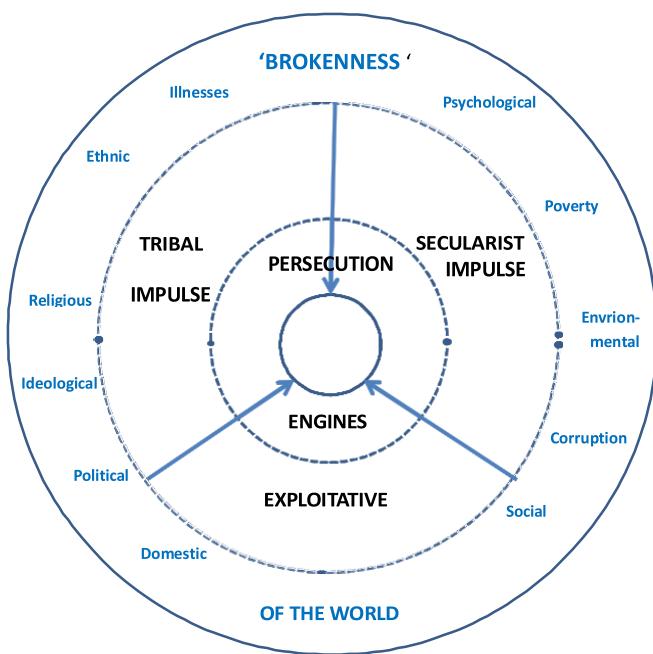
https://www.opendoors.org.za/eng/persecuted_christians/dp_wwl_methodology [Accessed: 31 March 2015].

¹¹ Open Doors International, “World Watch List Methodology”.

The WWL methodology sees Christians and their communities living in a world that is often far from perfect. To a greater or lesser extent, they live in problematic circumstances, as all other inhabitants of the same areas do. The WWL methodology calls this a situation of “brokenness” of the world, which includes many issues affect human’s well-being and well-fare. (See 1.2.2.) Although these issues can cause Christians to feel pressured or violated, the WWL methodology deals with “brokenness” in situations in which Christians and their communities also suffer from specific persecution dynamics.

Persecution occurs when Christians and their communities experience specific pressure and/or violence in this situation of ‘brokenness’ that are related to persecution dynamics prevalent in their environments and are forcing them to comply with the drivers of these dynamics. The WWL methodology regroups these dynamics in three different impulses, fuelling eight different persecution engines and being driven by specific actors or drivers of persecution. The diagram shows the relation between impulses, persecution engines and the drive for exclusive power.

Figure 3. Brokenness of the world and persecution¹²



The WWL methodology takes into account the ‘brokenness of the world’ insofar as it operates as background to the persecution of Christians. Persecution often takes place in disturbed, difficult and de-stabilised contexts. These could include war, ethnic tensions, religious tensions, ideological tensions, political conflicts, social conflicts, corruption, environmental degradation and natural disasters, poverty, (severe) psychological problems, illness and domestic violence. This adds to the vulnerability and suffering of Christians when they are also targeted by the drivers of one or more persecution engines. The research into the interaction between background suffering ('brokenness of the world') and suffering through active

¹² World Watch Research Unit, Open Doors International.

persecution engines is still in the first stages. Therefore, this element of interaction is currently not integrated in the WWL Questionnaire scoring system. However, the meaning of this phenomenon will be taken into account in a country's background analysis.

Persecution is related to religions, ideologies or corrupted mind-sets, i.e. impulses. The WWL methodology considers these impulses as the 'power sources' of different persecution engines. There are three impulses, which are all fuelling specific persecution engines: the *tribal impulse*, *secularist impulse* and *exploitative impulse*. The table below presents the different impulses with the persecution engines emanating from them.

Figure 4. Impulses and persecution engines¹³

Underlying impulse	Persecution engine
Tribal impulse	Islamic extremism
	Other religious militancy
	Tribal antagonism
	Ecclesiastical arrogance
Secularist impulse	Communist oppression
	Aggressive secularism
Exploitative impulse	Totalitarian paranoia
	Organised corruption

The *tribal impulse* has to do with very exclusive group formation. The "other" who is not part of one's own group, is considered to be an inferior human being or infidel. It is considered permissible to deal with such a person in bizarre, amoral ways that would never be allowed in one's own group without compromising one's own moral standards. The tribal impulse is always related to a strong religious presence. The *secularist impulse* relates to suffocating people or groups that do not adhere to the dominant ideology which is always somehow anti-religious or skeptical of organised religion. The emphasis of the ideologies that are inspiring the secularist impulse can be rather diverse: from the "revolutionary potential of the working class" to the launch of a very liberal sexual agenda. Humans are the sole source of norms and values, without divine inspiration or guidance. The *exploitative impulse* relates to plain greed: getting as many resources as possible for oneself and one's small, favourite social environment, legally or illegally. Everything is allowed. Power in the context of the exploitative impulse is more a means than a goal. While in the context of the tribal and secularist impulses power is actively sought as token of the supremacy of one's religion or ideology, the exploitative impulse needs power to safeguard its interests.

¹³This graph and all other illustrations and tables emanate from the World Watch Research Unit of Open Doors International.

Persecution engines

The persecution engines are the basic elements for scoring the WWL questionnaires, and for the analysis of the persecution of Christians and their communities. The WWL methodology has defined eight different persecution engines:

Figure 5. Persecution engines

Persecution engine	Description
Islamic extremism	Tries to bring the country or the world under the 'House of Islam' through violent or non-violent actions.
Other religious militancy	Tries to conquer the nation for one's religion. Mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, but also orthodox Judaism or other religions. Please note that 'Islamic extremism' is a separate category due to its prevalence.
Tribal antagonism	Tries to enforce the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in tribal context. Often comes in the form of traditional religion or something similar.
Ecclesiastical arrogance	Tries to maintain one's Christian denomination as the only legitimate or dominant expression of Christianity in the country. In most cases this Christian denomination is the majority Christian denomination.
Communist oppression	Tries to maintain communism as a prescriptive national ideology.
Aggressive secularism	Tries to eradicate religion from the public domain, if possible even out of the hearts of people.
Totalitarian paranoia	Does everything to maintain power, not specifically focused on realizing a vision.
Organised corruption	Tries to create a climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption as a means for self-enrichment.

In many countries, more than one persecution engine is prevalent. However, one specific persecution engine is generally more prevalent than others. Often, this persecution engine creates a vacuum for other engines to flourish as well. A clear example is the advancing of organised corruption by criminal groups in contexts of violent radical Islamic expressions. In such a context, there normally exists a high degree of impunity regarding violence against Christians. Islamist rulers won't be bothered by criminal groups trafficking Christians girls and women, as long as they get their share.

Drivers of persecution

The drivers of persecution engines are people and/or groups embodying the three main impulses. The WWL methodology studies who they are, and which are involved in hostilities

against Christians in a particular country. The WWL methodology distinguishes the following drivers of persecution:

Figure 6. Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution	
Government	Government officials at any level from local to national
Society	Ethnic group leaders
	Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national
	Religious leaders of other churches at any level from local to national
	Fanatical movements
	Normal citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
	Extended family
	Political parties at any level from local to national
	Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
	Organised crime cartels or networks
	Multilateral organisations

Often more than one driver is active in and around one or more persecution engines.

Even though the drivers of persecution cannot always be clearly distinguished, World Watch Research deems the mentioned categories clear enough to come up with a good analysis. Especially dividing the broad category “society” or “social” into ten distinctive categories, WWR considers this to be of added value to the methodology.

Pressure and plain violence

World Watch Research distinguishes two main expressions of persecution: the pressure Christians experience in all areas of life (*squeeze*) and plain violence (*smash*). Nevertheless, while it would seem that *violence* is the most prevalent and invasive expression of persecution, it is often the *pressure* that is most prevalent and invasive. The WWL methodology, therefore, negates the idea that *the more violence there is against Christians, the more persecution there must be*. An example of *squeeze* is the situation of Christians on the Maldives. From every side, they are facing massive pressure from friends, neighbors, family, and the government, which means they can hardly express their faith at all. Due to the enormous amount of pressure and control, Christians are virtually unable to express their faith in any way. They are being squeezed to death by their persecutors. However, if someone were looking for a list of

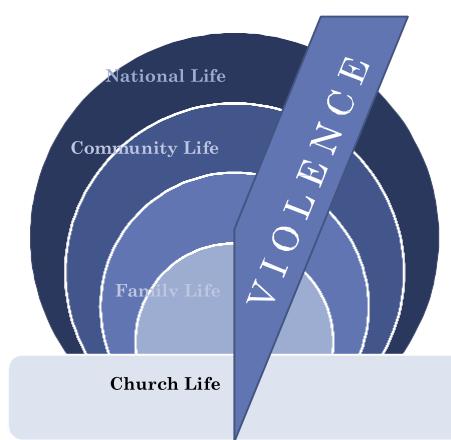
incidents where Christians were beaten, put in jail, deported, there would be very few. In other words, the degree of persecution can be so intense, and so all-pervasive, it actually results in fewer incidents of persecution, since acts of public witness and defiance are so rare. So while there is no evidence of smashing the church through violence and arrests, the pressure is what is killing the church. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that many persecutors prefer to squeeze the church, rather than smash it, in the belief that it is a more successful form of persecution.

The WWL methodology also seeks to negate another assumption, which is that *the most violent persecutors of the church are its main persecutors*. An example of this is the situation of Christians in Northern Nigeria. Their most violent persecutor in recent years has been the Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram, which has bombed churches and killed pastors. It's an unsubtle attempt to smash the church. But in fact, for most Christians the greatest threat comes from a creeping cultural Islamisation which has been stealthily progressing since the 1980's, until Christians suddenly realise they are second-class citizens in a once hospitable but now hostile culture. While *plain violence* can be measured and tracked through incidents of violence, *pressure* needs to be tracked otherwise. It needs to be tracked by discerning how the act of Christian life and witness itself is being squeezed in all the different areas of life.

Spheres of life and violence

The WWL methodology has designed the “five spheres concept” to track the expressions of persecution in different areas of life. These five spheres express the pressure in each sphere of life. A sixth building block expresses the plain violence. The sixth block potentially cuts across all five spheres of life.

Figure 7. Spheres of life



Private life is defined as the inner life of a Christian, the *forum internum*, the freedom of thought and conscience. The guiding WWL question asked is: “How free has a Christian been to relate to God one-on-one in his/her own space?” This is not limited to the private home, but

can also apply to prison, for example, or a walk in the woods. This is irrespective of who the agent challenging this freedom might be. The questions deal with conversion, private worship, possession of religious material, freedom of expression, e.g. in spoken word and writing, through images and symbols, access to information and media, privately sharing a belief with others, freedom of private assembly, freedom of private communication, and freedom of movement.

Family life is defined as pertaining to the nuclear and extended family of a Christian.

The guiding WWL question asked is: "How free has a Christian been to live his/her Christian convictions within the circle of the family, and how free have Christian families been to conduct their family life in a Christian way?" It also asks: "How much have Christians been discriminated against, harassed or in any other way persecuted by their own families?" The questions deal with the forced allocation of religious identity, registration of civil affairs, weddings, baptisms, burials, adoptions, child rearing, indoctrination of children, harassment of or discrimination against children, separation of families, isolation of converts, pressure to divorce, custody of children, and inheritance rights.

Community life is defined as the interaction of Christians with their respective local communities beyond the family level and below any supra-local level. This community life includes the workplace, business, health care, education, and local public life and civic order. A mobile person can have several local communities regarding different aspects of community life, e.g. origin or residence in one place and education or work in another.

The guiding WWL question asked is: "How free have Christians been individually and collectively to live their Christian convictions within the local community (beyond church life), and how much pressure has the community put on Christians by acts of discrimination, harassment or any other form of persecution?" The questions deal with threat or obstruction to daily life, dress codes, monitoring of Christians, abduction and forced marriage, access to community resources, community ceremonies, participation in communal institutions and forums, pressure to renounce faith, access to health care, access to and disadvantages in education, discrimination in employment and obstruction in business, policing issues (fines, interrogations, forced reporting), and other ways of marginalisation of Christians.

National life is defined as the interaction between Christians and the nation they live in. This includes rights and laws, the justice system, national public administration and public life. The guiding WWL question asked is: "How free have Christians been individually and collectively to live their Christian convictions beyond their local community, and how much pressure has the legal system put on Christians, and how much pressure have agents of supra-local national life put on Christians by acts of misinformation, discrimination, harassment or any other form of persecution?" The questions deal with national ideology, constitution, registration of religion in IDs, conscientious objection, travel within a country and abroad, discrimination by authorities, barring from public office or professional progress, policy interference with businesses, expression of opinion in public, Christian civil society organisations and political parties, reporting about religious or social conflicts, smear campaigns, toleration of public disrespect, religious symbols, blasphemy accusations, impunity, equal treatment in court, monitoring of trials.

Church life is defined as the collective exercise by Christians of freedom of thought and conscience, particularly as regards uniting with fellow Christians in worship, life, service and public expression of their faith without undue interference. It also pertains to properties held or used by Christians for these purposes. The guiding WWL question asked is: "How have restrictions, discrimination, harassment or other forms of persecution infringed upon these rights and this collective life of Christian churches, organisations and institutions?"

The questions deal with the hindrances to the gathering of Christians, registration of churches, monitoring or closing of unregistered churches, church building and renovation, expropriation and non-return, disturbance or disruption of services, prevention of activities inside or outside churches or among youth, acceptance of converts, monitoring of preaching and published materials, election and training of leaders, harassment of leaders or their families, Bibles and other religious materials and their printing, importing, selling or dissemination, and confiscation, broadcasting and Internet use, interference with ethical convictions (regarding family and marriage) and personnel policy of Christian institutions, Christian civil society organisations and social activities, foreign Christian workers, and the denouncing of government persecution.

Plain violence is defined as the deprivation of physical freedom or as serious bodily harm to Christians or serious damage to their property. The guiding WWL question asked is: "How many cases of such violence have there been?" The questions deal with the killing of Christians, serious damage to communal Christian buildings, detention without trial, jailing, abduction, rape and sexual harassment, forced marriage, other physical or mental harm, serious damage to the homes and businesses of Christians, and eviction and flight.

Persecution dynamics in Africa

Legal protection of religious freedom

Most national constitutions guarantee freedom of religion or belief for all, such as the Interim National Constitution (Bill of Rights) of the Republic of the Sudan (2005): "Every person shall have the right to the freedom of religious creed and worship, and to declare his/her religion or creed and manifest the same, by way of worship, education, practice or performance of rites or ceremonies, subject to requirements of law and public order; no person shall be coerced to adopt such faith, that he/she does not believe in, nor to practice rites or services to which he/she does not voluntarily consent" (Art. 38).¹⁴ Sudan has also signed or ratified a number of international human rights treaties.¹⁵ However, as the case of Dr. Meriam Ibrahim illustrates, this does not guarantee that all is well in Sudan regarding religious freedom.

Generally speaking, legal protection of religious freedom is included in constitutional and legal norms in the African countries studied (**Figure 8**), both in Christian majority countries (Nigeria,

¹⁴ The Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, 2005. Online at: http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=241714 [Accessed: 24 March 2015].

¹⁵ "Human Rights in Sudan", Wikipedia. Online at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_Sudan [Accessed: 25 March 2015]

Ethiopia, Kenya) and in Muslim majority countries (Sudan, Niger). In practice, however, specific policies (preferential treatment of Orthodox Christianity in Ethiopia) or the existence of Sharia rule in Nigeria's Northern States severely limit religious freedom. Moreover, specific persecution engines, different in each country, explain why religious freedom is not always respected, as is argued in the next section.

Figure 8. Legal protection of religious freedom¹⁶

	Constitution Religious Freedom clause	Separation of Church and State Policies	Regional
Sudan	Art. 38		
Nigeria	Art. 38	Two state religions: Christianity and Islam	Sharia States severely limit religious freedom
Ethiopia	1994, Art. 27	Art. 11	Inconsistencies; preferential treatment
Kenya	2010, Ch.5, Sec. 78		
Niger	2010, Art. 30		

Persecution engines

In the methodological section of this paper, the concept of persecution engine was explained. As stated above, the presence of persecution engines varies in each country, as well as the way these engines express themselves. The interaction between these persecution engines produces a particular *persecution pattern*, which explains the situation of religious freedom in a country better than a mere legal-based approach. Indeed, it takes into account the *de facto* pressure Christians experience in different spheres of life, and describes the drivers (actors) which are responsible for this pressure. **Figure 9** presents the prevalent persecution engines in each of the countries under study. The next section discusses the persecution patterns more in-depth.

¹⁶ Authors' elaboration.

Figure 9. Persecution Pattern in Countries Under Study

Country (score)	Islamic extremism	Tribal antagonism	Organised corruption	Ecclesiastical arrogance	Totalitarian paranoia	Aggressive secularism
Sudan (73)	X				X	
Nigeria (70)	X	X	X			
Ethiopia (65)	X	X		X	X	
Kenya (48)	X	(X)	(X)			(X)
Niger (45)	X					

Comparison of persecution patterns

Sudan¹⁷

Sudan is a poverty stricken Muslim country. In the recent past, South Sudan became independent from the North. With a score of 73 points Sudan ranks 11 on the World Watch List 2014. In 2013, Sudan ranked 12 with a score of 70 points. The deterioration of the position of Christians can be attributed to a) the secession of Christian-oriented South Sudan from Sudan, b) efforts of the current regime to maintain its leading role and c) an increase of Islamic extremist tendencies within Sudan's society.

The main persecution engines in Sudan are Islamic extremism and Totalitarian paranoia. However, there is a fine line between these two engines. The regime's leaders are mainly radical Islamist and the ruling National Congress Party is considered a means to further an Islamic agenda. This implies that the persecution of Christians is not primarily driven by totalitarian tendencies, but radical Islamist sympathies. Next to a tiny expatriate Christian community, all other Christians affected by persecution belong to historical Christian communities, non-traditional protestant background communities, and Muslim Background Believers (MBB). The latter suffer severely in all spheres of life (**Figure 10**).

¹⁷ This section is based on the Sudan persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International. Online at: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/sudan> [Accessed: 25 March 2015].

Figure 10. Persecution pattern Sudan

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	12,216	13,393	12,630	11,787	11,979	
Pressure (average)	12,401	12,401	12,401	12,401	12,401	
Violence						10,926

Compared with 2013, violence has reduced. However, the picture is still bleak compared with most other countries on the WWL. A variety of incidents are reported, such as faith related killings, damaging Christian properties, detention and forced marriage. Christians fled the country for faith based reasons as well. The current regime will likely continue to persecute Christians, as part of an attempt to maintain their power-base. Within this context an Open Doors source in the country expects that the position of the church in Sudan will worsen, in part due to diminished presence of the international community.

Nigeria¹⁸

The situation for Christians in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern provinces, has deteriorated a little with respect to 2013. With 70 points on the World Watch List 2014 (2 more points than in 2013), Nigeria remains a country to be watched. In Nigeria, the main persecution engine is Islamic extremism. Although Boko Haram is most often associated with persecution of Christians in Northern Nigerian, the pattern of persecution is much more complex than only the killing or wounding of Christians – as well as moderate Muslims – by an Islamic terrorist group (Figure 11). This is especially so in the 12 Northern Sharia states where local government and social groups leave hardly any space for Christians to live their own lives. Persecution is most pronounced in the Sharia states, but also partly extended into neighboring states, and played heavily upon Christians in their family and community spheres of life.

Figure 11. Persecution pattern Nigeria

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	9,849	9,970	12,305	11,349	11,458	
Pressure (average)	10,98614	10,98614	10,98614	10,98614	10,986138	
Violence						15,556

¹⁸ This section is based on the Nigeria persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International. Online at: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria> [Accessed: 25 March 2015].

Persecution, however, is not only focused on Believers of Muslim Background but on all types of Christians in many of the Northern States. Levels of violence in Nigeria remained extremely high. Based on media research by the World Watch Unit, 612 Nigerian Christians were killed during this reporting period, hundreds of cases of physical aggression were recorded and nearly 300 churches were destroyed. The current situation in Nigeria casts dark clouds ahead, notwithstanding good news about spiritual revitalisation of the church under the yoke of persecution. The emerging links between al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and Boko Haram, and other Islamist terrorist groups in the region, make it likely that the church will suffer more violent persecution in the near future.

Ethiopia¹⁹

With a score of 65 points, Ethiopia ranks 17th on the World Watch List 2014. Compared with 2013, the position of Christians appears to have slightly deteriorated. This does not only apply to the situation of Believers of Muslim Background. It seems that the pressure on members of the other church types has slightly increased as well.

In Ethiopia, Christians of various kinds are affected by four persecution engines being Islamic extremism, Ecclesiastical arrogance, Totalitarian paranoia and Tribal antagonism (**Figure 12**).

Figure 12. Persecution pattern Ethiopia (integration of all persecution engines)

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	12,112	10,782	11,257	9,995	11,315	
Pressure (average)	11,0922	11,0922	11,0922	11,0922	11,0922	
Violence						9,259

Although only 34% of the population is Muslim, Christians feel the increasing prominence of Islam on local, regional and national level. Moreover, for many years, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) has been seriously persecuting believers who left their ranks to join (mostly) non-traditional Protestant churches, or believers who joined the renewal movements within the EOC. Next, it appears that the government is ideologically developing towards a Chinese governance model, thereby creating a new persecution dynamic. Lastly, a traditional belief system called *Wakefeta* is becoming more prominent in certain parts of Ethiopia causing some Christians to distance themselves of Christianity, while former *Wakefeta* believers turning to Christ become actively isolated and marginalised from social activities within tribal communities. Drivers behind the mix of persecution engines are, for example, non-Christian

¹⁹ This section is based on the Ethiopia persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International. Online at: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/ethiopia> [Accessed: 25 March 2015].

religious leaders, government officials, the extended family and the public at large and tribal leaders.

A field report indicates the existence of a covert struggle between the government and Muslim leaders, which seems to intensify. This process could backfire on the Ethiopian church including the MBB community. New laws to ban religious messages in the public domain could be very well only made applicable to non-traditional churches. It needs to be seen how the church in Ethiopia is able to respond in a fruitful way. The four persecution patterns that make up the integrated persecution pattern are as follows (**Figures 13-16**):

Figure 13. Persecution pattern Ethiopia (Ecclesiastical arrogance)

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	10,038	8,705	8,073	6,14	8,116	
Pressure (average)	8,2144	8,2144	8,2144	8,2144	8,2144	
Violence						4,445

Figure 14. Persecution pattern Ethiopia (Islamic extremism)

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	9,186	8,929	9,31	8,169	9,245	
Pressure (average)	8,9678	8,9678	8,9678	8,9678	8,9678	
Violence						4,815

Figure 15. Persecution pattern Ethiopia (Totalitarian paranoia)

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	4,83	2,604	5,729	6,36	6,684	
Pressure (average)	5,2414	5,2414	5,2414	5,2414	5,2414	
Violence						2,222

Figure 16. Persecution pattern Ethiopia (Tribal antagonism)

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	6,724	7,217	5,664		5,757	5,903
Pressure (average)	6,253	6,253	6,253		6,253	6,253
Violence						2,222

Kenya²⁰

With a score of 48 points, Kenya ranks 43 on the World Watch List 2014. In 2013, Kenya ranked 40 with a score of 47 points. The minimal increase misrepresents the actual increase in the level of persecution. Faith-related violence reduced firmly, while pressure in the different spheres of Christian life intensified (**Figure 17**).

Figure 17. Persecution pattern Kenya

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	8,049	8,110	8,399		6,195	8,811
Pressure (average)	7,9128	7,9128	7,9128		7,9128	7,9128
Violence						7,963

The main persecution engine in Kenya is “Islamic extremism”. However, forms of “Tribal antagonism”, “Organised corruption” and “Aggressive secularism” appear to impact Kenyan church life, as well. The minority of Kenyans are Muslim. Recently, the Kadhi courts system has been introduced, which is currently reserved for those who are Muslim and voluntarily submit to its jurisdiction. However, in part induced by perceived discrimination, lack of development, and extreme levels of unemployment among Muslim youth, and inspired by Islamic extremism spilling over from Somalia, the Muslim population, primarily located in the coastal areas of Kenya, has begun to respond to perceived disenfranchisement in Kenyan society. Moreover, Muslim politicians, representing Muslim dominated constituencies have an agenda to eliminate the church from these areas.

The future of the Kenyan church appears precarious. On the one hand, the church faces intensifying levels of persecution. The government posture against religious institutions is not positive. Moreover, Muslim attitudes and targeted violence against Christians are not positive either. Also, Christians have a negative view of Muslims. This negative view escalated after the

²⁰ This section is based on the Kenya persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International. Online at: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/kenya> [Accessed: 25 March 2015].

recent attack on a shopping centre in Nairobi, by the Muslim extremist group al-Shabaab. Additionally, there is a complicated relationship between the leaders of the Christian and Muslim community. On the other hand, the willingness to cooperate amongst the churches is high. Therefore, it remains to be seen how the church will engage constructively with the pressure it faces.

Niger²¹

Niger scored 35 points on the World Watch List in 2013, and 45 points on the 2014 list. The increase in points is mainly explained by the growing influence of Islamism in the country. The main persecution dynamic in Niger is Islamic extremism (**Figure 18**).

Figure 18. Persecution pattern Niger

	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence
Pressure (absolute)	8,902	10,119	10,612	4,989	5,599	
Pressure (average)	8,044152	8,044152	8,044152	8,044152	8,0441515	
Violence						4,445

In recent years the country has been gradually shaking off the characteristics of the typical West African state with a (mostly) moderate Islam, constitutionally secular state. Now, there are indications that the government functioning in a secular state does not keep enough distance from Islamic religious leaders. Since 1991, dozens of Islamic associations have emerged, including Wahhabi groups. These organisations have been mostly concerned with the perceived erosion of Niger's religious identity by the secular democratic state. The country has three types of Christianity (Catholics, Believers of Muslim Background (BMBs), Evangelicals and others). Sometimes the pressure on Christians only affects MBBs, sometimes all three types of Christianity prevalent are affected. The pressure on the spheres of private and church life is lower than on the spheres of family and community life. In many ways, Christians are being obstructed in the community sphere. Violent incidents continued during this reporting period. At least seven churches were attacked in Zinder (2), Niamey (2) and Maradi (3). Christians also face death threats and threats of abduction. The future for the Church in Niger seems worrying. The dynamic described in this persecution profile seems to point to a potential increase of pressure and plain violence. A considerable part of the Southern third of the country seems prone to persistent Islamic hostilities.

²¹ This section is based on the Niger persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International.

Conclusion

Often, the analysis of religious freedom is limited to the legal aspects of it or to the degree of freedom in the church sphere. Assessing and interpreting religious persecution is complex as many religious conflicts involve numerous variables. As was stated, a persecution situation presents a complex reality. Indeed, religious freedom is a multidimensional phenomenon which requires an analytical framework that accounts for this multidimensionality. Limiting the assessment of religious freedom to describing the legal protection of religious freedom only is insufficient to portray the actual persecution dynamics.

The methodology of the World Watch List, which was used in this paper and illustrated by the cases of five African countries, offers a multidimensional framework for the assessment of religious freedom. This framework looks at the degree of freedom for religious expression in each sphere of life, identifies the persecution engines and drivers of persecution that are relevant to each national context, as well as the types of Christianity that are affected by the persecution situation.