



BRUNEI: Country Dossier

May 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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World Watch List 2018

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3	16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6	16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0	13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1	15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7	15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8	16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7	12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5	16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8	16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1	12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5	14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1	16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2	13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8	15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9	14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9	13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8	12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4	11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5	12.4	4.6	64		(not in WWL)		
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2	13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3	14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2	13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9	10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7	12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7	9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9	11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4	13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9	12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9	8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5	12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1	9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0	9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7	9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4	11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6	7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4	12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7	13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3	10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4	12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2	11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6	8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9	11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries¹

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.4	13.9	0.4	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	11.7	9.5	10.0	8.1	11.6	2.8	54
53	Tanzania	10.1	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.0	3.9	53
54	Russian Federation	11.1	8.4	10.1	8.9	10.7	2.0	51
55	Morocco	10.4	11.5	7.6	8.8	12.0	0.6	51
56	Cuba	8.5	4.9	10.7	10.4	12.2	2.4	49
57	Uganda	10.9	8.7	9.5	8.7	4.8	3.9	46
58	Niger	9.9	9.7	9.0	7.0	7.1	2.6	45

¹ These countries reached a score of 41 points or more but did not receive enough points to be included in the WWL Top 50.

BRUNEI – Country Dossier (May 2018)

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)¹ including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))². Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)³ and WWR staff.

BRUNEI		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	64	26
WWL 2017	64	25
WWL 2016	61	25
WWL 2015	58	27
WWL 2014	57	24

¹ See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

² WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

³ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

WWL 2018: Keys to understanding BRUNEI

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-12990058>

Recent country history

Brunei was a British protectorate from 1888 to 1984 and is now the only politically independent sultanate in the world. The ruling Sultan is the 29th, the royal line reaching back as far as 1363.

The religious landscape

The ruling Sultan is head of religion: What he wants, becomes law and if he decides that Islam will continue on a more conservative path, the churches have to accept that. Christians are free to worship, but they have been warned not to do so "excessively and openly".

There are no militant groups active in Brunei and unlike in neighboring South East Asian states, Bruneian Muslims seem not to have joined the Islamic State group to fight in countries like Syria and Iraq. However, Islam is becoming increasingly conservative, limiting the space for non-Muslim Bruneian citizens. Therefore, the lack of militant groups does not mean Christians are not under pressure.

The political landscape

The Sultan is ruling as absolute monarch, being chief of state, but also concurrently prime minister, finance minister, minister of the interior as well as of defence and head of religion. Hence, all power is concentrated in his hands. Brunei people deeply respect the Sultan.

The Sultan introduced obligatory Islamic religious studies for all schools. But more importantly, he announced the [successive introduction](#) of Sharia in criminal law, the so called "Hudud" law, in October 2013. In 2014, Brunei enacted the new Sharia Penal Code, which is to apply also for non-Muslims, and which includes offences carrying the death penalty. The 2nd phase was supposed to be implemented in 2015 but was delayed. The government plans to enforce the 2nd phase of this Islamic law in 2017.

The socio-economic landscape

Despite a recovery in GDP at the end of the first quarter of 2016, Brunei's road to economic diversification remains a challenging one. At the end of the first quarter of 2016, the country's GDP at constant prices recorded a growth of 3.2% in comparison to the year before where the economy shrunk by 5.2%. However at the same time, other areas in the industrial sector had posted negative growth, possibly due to cuts in government spending. Although a development plan "Vision Brunei 2035" aiming to build-up various economic sectors has been published, there is little to show for it so far. Rather than focus on efforts to strengthen sectors outside the oil and gas industry, Brunei has chosen to produce even more oil. With an

estimated 70-80% of the country's citizens employed by the government or government-linked institutions (as reported by FT Confidential Research), there is limited hope for an internally-driven economic expansion. This downturn of the economy is the main reason for the younger generation looking increasingly for opportunities abroad.

More and more restrictions are gradually being implemented covering the whole population. For instance, during Ramadan all restaurants (including non-Muslim establishments) must close. Also, all restaurants (including inside hotels) must close every Friday from 12 noon to 2pm during Friday prayers. Additionally, every day at 5pm the whole country is comes to a standstill. Muslims and non-Muslims alike must stop whatever they are doing to allow time for the Islamic prayer ritual.

Concluding remarks

Out of fear that Muslims could be led astray, Christmas celebrations were banned in 2015 and 2016 in the whole of Brunei. The ban included the use of religious symbols such as crosses, lighting candles, putting up Christmas trees, singing religious songs in public and sending Christmas greetings. Punishment for violation was a five-year jail sentence. The growing limitations make it clear to churches that especially the young generation need to grow up with a strong Christian faith.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
434,000	54,800	12.6

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

Random missionary activities by Portuguese traders in the 16th century largely failed and it was as late as 1846 that the "Borneo Church Mission" was founded and set up an Anglican church congregation. The Roman Catholic Church has been present in the country for more than a century; independent Protestant churches came later.

What church networks exist today? ⁴

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
-	23,800	12,900	16,800	1,300	-	7,600	9,300

Source: WCD, May 2017

Three Roman Catholic and two Anglican churches are officially recognized. Several unrecognized Protestant congregations exist. The process of registration is very difficult and even for existing churches it is next to impossible to get permission for building extensions. Other denominations include the Borneo Evangelical Church, the Methodist Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁵
54,800	251,000	3,800	42,600	43,700	-	210	5,330

Also to note: Chinese folk: 23,200; Confucianist: 8,400

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to the World Christian Database, Muslims (mostly Sunni) make up 57.8% of the population. The population is ethnically homogenous but, like neighboring Malaysia, it also has a sizeable Chinese and a smaller Indian community.

Notes on the current situation

- Sultan Hassanal holds ultimate executive authority as he is also the country's prime minister, minister of finance, and minister of defense. There are no popular elections and the Legislative Council functions in a purely consultative capacity.
- In the increasingly hostile environment towards Christians, more and more of the Christian youth are contemplating a future abroad.

⁴ **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:** Believers 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. **Evangelicals:** 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. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.

⁵ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 64 / Position: 26

WWL 2017 Points: 64 / Position: 25

WWL 2016 Points: 61 / Position: 25

Where persecution comes from

Policies that favor Muslims over other religions are legally executed and enforced by all government officers in all sectors of the country. Muslim and ethnic group leaders are able to put pressure on the Christian minority by exercising their significant influence on the sultan, who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam. Family members and neighbors can easily bring converts and churches into trouble by simply reporting them to the official security department. The authorities monitor and place restrictions on all churches (including registered ones).

How Christians are suffering

Converts from Islam suffer persecution as conversion is considered illegal and everything will be done to bring them back to their original faith. Non-traditional Christian communities cannot be registered as churches, but have to be registered as companies, societies, or family centers. As such, they are treated as secular organizations and are required to submit their financial and operational reports to the government every year. The whole of society (Christians included) is affected by the continuing introduction of Sharia laws as well as by the tightening economic situation, which prevents the authorities from being so generous with payouts to quell dissatisfaction.

Examples

- As conversion from Islam is strictly opposed by Bruneian laws, converts to Christianity will be separated from their spouse and children and their spouse will be forced to divorce their partner. If converts are identified as such by the security department, they are threatened to make them recant their faith.
- Some Christians and members of other minority groups are not allowed official citizenship. This leads to a large group of stateless residents who are disadvantaged in many aspects.
- Especially young people are leaving the country as they lack perspectives for the future. This affects churches as well and potential next generation leadership is becoming scarce.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 64 / Position: 26

WWL 2017 Points: 64 / Position: 25

WWL 2016 Points: 61 / Position: 25

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

The WWL 2018 score for Brunei of 64 points is virtually unchanged in comparison to WWL 2017, reflecting a stable, but still difficult situation for Christians in the country. The average pressure is very high but the score for violence is very low. Controlling, watching and spying upon Christians is deemed more important than exerting force. The pending implementation of the Sharia Penal Code illustrates that ruling by threat is seen as being more effective than ruling by actual violence.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Brunei ⁶	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Brunei is an Islamic nation, based on an ideology called “Malay Islamic Monarchy” or MIB (Melayu Islam Beraja). This form of government is claimed to be the fairest for all people in the country, whether they are Muslims or not. The Sultan has favored Brunei government democratization (although Brunei is still far from any real democratization) and declared himself prime minister and president. Brunei wants to be a center of Islamic excellence: Sharia law was fully implemented in civil and religious affairs for all Muslims even before the country’s independence in 1984 and the government follows a plan of Islamization among the partly Christian, partly animist tribal people in supporting the so-called *dawah* movement (Islamic evangelism). By decree, the import of Bibles and the public celebration of Christmas are banned. Christian pastors and workers are facing a multitude of limitations due to Islamization and the prevailing MIB ideology and both native and foreign Christians have been targets of aggressive Islamization. The government, which aims to convert 2,000 people a year, promises an incentive of BND 2,000 (USD 1,450) and other fringe benefits (e.g. homes, facilities, and decent jobs) to those who convert. According to Islamic Dawah Centre statistics, 235 people embraced Islam nationwide in the first half of 2017.

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

The sultans have held absolute power in the country for over 600 years. All important positions are held by the Sultan himself, be it prime minister, finance minister, minister of the interior, minister of foreign affairs and trade, defense minister or head of religion. People deeply revere and respect him and any criticism is unthinkable and indeed not very likely as citizens value him highly and do not blame the economic tough situation on him. His rule has not implied any danger to Christians so far, but his Islamic conservatism was shown in 2016 when he criticized authorities for their failure to implement the second phase of Sharia law, which are the criminal rules. Therefore, conservative Islam seems to serve as state ideology backed by the ruler as well as a means to control people, leaving Christians insecure about their future and as second-class citizens in the best case.

⁶ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Brunei	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very weak
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Weak
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

Since all MIB policies (which favor Muslims over other religions) are legally executed and enforced by government authorities in all sectors of the country, government officials are the main drivers of persecution. Religious (i.e. Islamic) and Malay leaders exercise great influence on the Sultan, who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam, and thereby put pressure on the Christian minority. Family members and neighbors can easily bring converts to Christianity and churches into trouble by simply reporting them to the security department KDN, which is frequently happening.

Context

On 1 May 2014 Sultan Hassanal introduced the first of three phases in the adoption of a penal code based on Islamic law, or *Sharia*. The first set of regulations allows fines and prison sentences for “crimes” such as pregnancies outside of wedlock, propagating religions other than Islam, and not attending mandatory Friday prayers. The second phase, which will introduce harsher punishments such as floggings and amputations for property offenses, was supposed to be introduced in May 2015 but has been delayed, causing Sultan Hassanal to call this delay “unacceptable” at a meeting with the Brunei Islamic Religious Council. The Sharia Criminal Procedure Code is now being drafted and was scheduled to be introduced in June 2017, but this still did not take place in the WWL 2018 reporting period, despite the Sultan's expressed displeasure. Two potential explanations are offered for this: Either the administration is overwhelmed by the costs of implementation and ran out of money due to a lower oil price; or the threat of implementation is strong enough to create fear among non-Muslim citizens and keep them under control.

In 1929, when huge reserves of oil and natural gas were discovered in Brunei, the Sultan used that enormous income to make his tiny sultanate one of the world's most economically prosperous and socially secure societies. Its citizens are given free medical service, free education, housing benefits, low interest housing and are exempt from personal income tax. Nearly 96% of Brunei's exports are oil, gas and related products. At its current pace of

extraction, Brunei has enough oil left for only 22 years, others expect an end even as early as 2025. Even if reserves last longer, the costs for exploration are increasing. Brunei is currently the only country in SEA facing economic decline. In an effort towards diversification, in 2008 the Sultan unveiled Vision Brunei 2035, which aims to reduce its reliance on oil and gas and increase private-sector employment. The sultanate has started making attempts to diversify its economy with a string of major international trade agreements, but so far with mixed results at best. Brunei also appears well-cushioned by substantial fiscal and current account surpluses. Vision Brunei 2035 plans to transform the nation into an “Islamic Singapore,” where the accomplishments of Brunei’s well-educated and highly skilled citizens will receive international recognition. However, since parts of Sharia law will also apply to non-Muslims (who account for roughly 33% of Brunei’s population), it is feared that many better-educated Bruneians will opt to migrate. And anyway, since places like Dubai already exist, there would seem to be hardly need for another “Islamic Singapore”.

Muslim groups seen as deviant - such as Shiite and Ahmadis - are banned and persecuted as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Since expatriate Christians join local churches, they are not treated as a separate category of Christianity for the WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

These communities, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, are increasingly facing hostility and have to exercise more and more caution as they are strictly monitored, though they are still less affected by persecution than the newer forms of Protestant church and convert communities.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

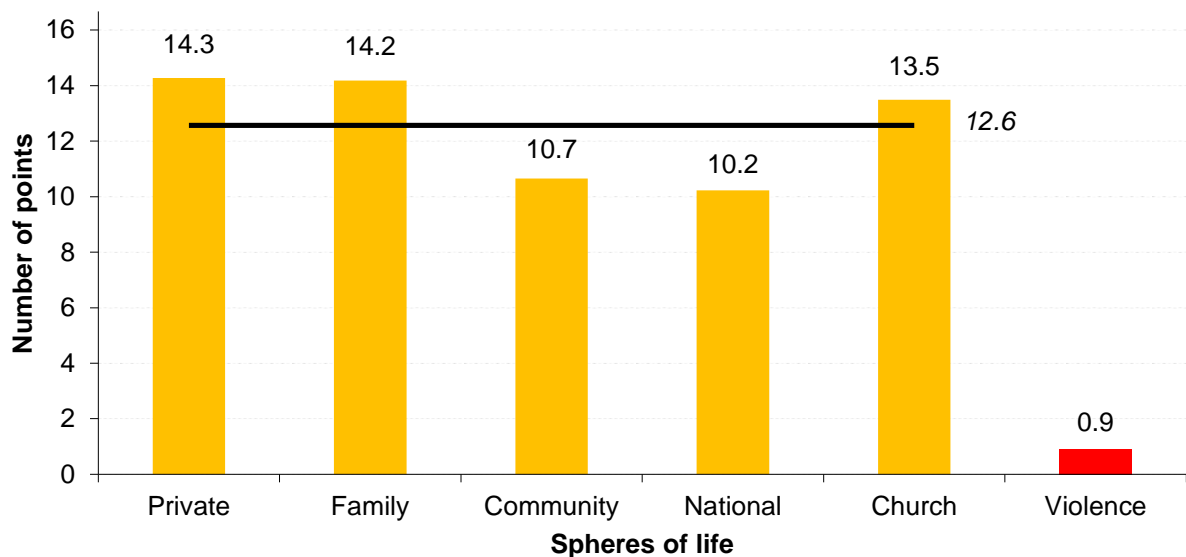
Converts from a Muslim background suffer strong pressure from family and friends as conversion is considered illegal.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

These Evangelical and Pentecostal communities have to be cautious in living their faith and in meetings both in their private and church life.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Brunei



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Brunei shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Brunei remained at a very high level, rising from 12.5 in WWL 2017 to 12.6.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private, Family and Church spheres of life*. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private and Family spheres* (both at extreme levels), while all Christians face a growing pressure in the *National and Church spheres*. This pressure is fuelled by the implementation of Sharia law and threat of implementing the Penal law phase.
- The score for violence against Christians decreased from 1.1 in WWL 2017 to 0.9 points; the persecution of Christians never has been very violent in Brunei.

Private sphere:

Bruneian laws do not allow Malay Muslims to leave Islam. Strict punishments are imposed on those who do so. Section 112(1) of the Sharia Penal Code of Brunei stipulates that a Muslim who turns away from Islam is punishable with death, or with imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty years and corporal punishment, depending on the type of evidence. If a Sharia court is satisfied that the accused has repented, the court must order an acquittal. Any private statement about Christianity can be construed as proselytizing for the Christian faith, so even wearing a cross is done with much more caution than in previous years. It is very risky for a convert from Islam to own any Christian materials as it could expose their Christian identity. In these circumstances meeting with other Christians is particularly difficult for Christians with a Muslim background, (but also difficult for other Christians as they are monitored), as on the one hand it is dangerous for the converts themselves and on the other hand it may disclose or

endanger a Christian meeting. Spreading Christian “propaganda” to followers of other faiths or to members of the tribal groups, who are often following ethnic religions, is prohibited. Christians, especially their leaders, are under permanent surveillance by the authorities. It is also important to note that there is a law in Brunei that prohibits the unauthorized gathering of more than 5 people.

Family sphere:

Convert parents find themselves in a dilemma as they do not dare to raise their children according to their faith as their children could accidentally expose the family’s belief in Christ. No school, whether private or public, is allowed to teach Christian subjects and all students in primary and secondary schools are required by law to study Islam (or, more accurately, the national MIB philosophy). One pastor commented that some Christian students can recite the MIB principles better than the 10 commandments. If Christians with a Muslim background are discovered, they will be isolated and put under pressure to recant their faith. If married, a convert will be separated from his or her spouse, who in turn will be forced to divorce.

Community sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background are always under strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to give up their Christian faith. Especially the Malay speaking churches are under serious threat and are always monitored, resulting in a high level of fear among the church leaders. Everyone is aware of the monitoring and surveillance that is being done. Sometimes even in the churches there will be informers (sometimes other Christians) sent by the authorities. The authorities extract information from local citizens about church activities. Furthermore, Christians are discriminated against in their business lives. With Sharia law in place, the government is gradually implementing more rules and restrictions. Since 2014, public Christmas celebrations are banned. One report stated that a mother had to prevent her son from singing Christmas songs too loudly in a shopping mall, revealing the growing level of fear. There are also strict regulations and penalties during Ramadan concerning the observance of Muslim prayer times both for Muslims and non-Muslims.

Around 50% of conversion cases happen among expatriates, e.g. Catholic Filipinos convert to Islam in exchange for work permits; Indian blue collar workers are asked to embrace Islam in exchange for work permits and other fringe benefits.

National sphere:

As mentioned above, Brunei introduced Sharia penal law in May 2014. This not only regulates crimes like murder and theft, but also affects the public display of Christian symbols. Implementation was scheduled for 2017, but the introduction of the second phase of Sharia Law seems to be quietly postponed, maybe reflecting the fact that it is more convenient for the ruler to leave citizens and especially religious minorities uncertain about the rules. Registering a conversion is out of the question. Christians are often subjected to discriminatory treatment when dealing with the authorities. In many cases, when permanent residents with a Chinese, Christian or Buddhist background applied for citizenship, they face rejection or delay, but no official reason is given by the officials. The country’s Islamization activities, especially among Christians, are strongly publicized and the conversion of Christians to Islam is highly

praised in the media. Underground churches, of course, never display religious symbols, but even Christians from recognized churches are careful not to put up anything in public, since this may be regarded as propagating the Christian faith with the intent to convert Muslims, which violates the new Sharia laws. Thus, Christians are also afraid of wearing anything that publicly expresses their faith, like a cross on a necklace.

Church sphere:

All church activities are being monitored, but registered churches are particularly affected by spies sent by the government. These informers are sometimes Christians themselves, who are offered bribes. Those churches which have been registered in the Constitution during the colonial era, still have legal status today. However, the government does not allow any further churches to be registered. And even registered churches face problems. In the capital Bandar Seri Begawan, the government implements zoning restrictions on Sundays and all roads leading to the Catholic and Anglican churches are closed for "recreational" purposes from 6 am to 1 pm. Only those with valid permits are allowed to enter the area near the two main churches. There is a *fatwa* that bans non-Muslim worship buildings from being renovated or built, tacitly endorsed by the Sultan. Consequently, church buildings deteriorate further and further, but some churches have renovated their buildings without permission. Despite these challenges, churches stand firm in their Christian faith, although one challenge is that many young Christians are leaving the country and hence, there is a gap in leadership. Convert fellowships and non-traditional churches cannot register and their meetings have sometimes been disturbed by the police. However, in the WWL 2018 reporting period even historical churches have experienced difficulties in getting permits extended. No Christian activities are allowed in public. In December 2014, the government warned all Christian communities not to hold public Christmas celebrations. This ban on Christmas celebrations is still in force. Sunday services are monitored closely by government officials and pastors (especially Bahasa Malay pastors) are very careful not to offend the government or the royal family in their weekly sermon. Published materials are also subject to scrutiny and importing Christian materials is not allowed. The movements and activities of church leaders in particular are monitored and it is difficult to train church members or to provide theological studies.

Violence:

The score for violence is at a very low level, reflecting the fact that persecution has never been very violent in Brunei. However, it is enough to cause some Christians to leave the country and for converts to go into hiding.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/ Male: No data available.

Future outlook

The government of Brunei needs to make some difficult choices. The comfortable days with the Sultan caring for all his subjects will soon be over. Until now, his government provides free

medical services and subsidizes goods such as rice and housing. There are no school fees for state schools, and citizens of Brunei do not have to pay income tax. But since the oil and gas reserves may only last for just one more generation or shorter, the government needs to start thinking about alternatives. Until now, it has [not been particularly successful](#)⁷ as it seems that the world does not need an “Islamic Singapore” (or already has one in Dubai or Doha?). The growing economic pressure may lead to increased insecurity and even unrest, especially as the government is not hiring any more staff, and it seems that by pushing for the introduction of Sharia law and by issuing a ban on public Christian celebrations, the Sultan is relying on a conservative brand of Islam - certainly out of conviction - but also as a means of keeping his people in check. This will lead to an increase in the country’s main persecution engine *Islamic oppression*. The fact that the Sultan decided to [close down](#)⁸ the popular English-language Brunei Times in November 2016 shows that he is trying (and succeeding) to control media and public reporting more tightly, thus *Dictatorial paranoia* will continue to be a persecution engine as well. This is challenging for Christians who are anyway facing a changing church situation with young Christians leaving the country in large numbers. Additionally, the country’s mindset may be best reflected in what one professor [said](#) in September 2016: “Educational institutions in a country should be led entirely by religion in order to maintain peace in the future”. Whereas this is meant to curb extremist influence, it does not bode well for the religious minorities in Brunei.

Policy considerations

- The government of Brunei should lift the decree that bans the importation of Bibles and the public celebration of Christmas.
- The international community should urge the government of Brunei to end the policy of “Islamic evangelism” which is forcing people to change their faith and convert to Islam for financial and material benefits.
- The international community should urgently call for the government of Brunei to repeal the first phase of the Sharia penal law introduced in 2014 and the next phase (which was due in June 2017). The rights of non-Muslims are severely restricted under penal law.
- The European Union (as it prepares the EU-Brunei Partnership Agreement) and countries entering into major trade agreements with Brunei under Vision Brunei 2035, should make trade agreements conditional to compliance with repealing the Sharia penal law which violates the fundamental right to Freedom of Religion or Belief.

WWR in-depth reports

There are currently no in-depth reports on Brunei available at:
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

⁷ See: <http://www.atimes.com/article/wells-run-dry-brunei/>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

⁸ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brunei-media/bruneis-second-largest-daily-newspaper-shuts-down-abruptly-idUSKBN1320YF>, last accessed 20 September 2017.

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Brunei available at:
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/brunei/>

- Brunei takes another step towards full implementation of Sharia
21 March 2018
Brunei's Sultan and his Islamic Religious Council have approved a draft Criminal Code that brings the country another step closer to the full implementation of Sharia (Islamic law).

Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Brunei> (password: freedom).

- Brunei: Implementation of Sharia gets go-ahead
3 May 2018
The government has finally announced the implementation of the second phase of Sharia penal law.

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