



IRAQ: Country Dossier

April 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.

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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.

IRAQ		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	86	8
WWL 2017	86	7
WWL 2016	90	2
WWL 2015	86	3
WWL 2014	78	4

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 IRAQ

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14542954>

Recent country history

Until the end of World War I, Iraq was part of the Ottoman Empire. Britain occupied the territory in 1917. In 1932 Iraq became an independent kingdom and finally a republic in 1958, but was led by several authoritarian leaders. Its last strongman, Saddam Hussein, was toppled by a US-led military campaign in 2003. In the power vacuum that ensued, sectarian violence flared up particularly between Sunni and Shiite Muslims; Christians were caught in this crossfire.

After the Gulf war (1990-1991) and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, anti-Western and radical Islamic sentiments increased, which contributed to the persecution of Iraqi Christians. A stream of refugees started leaving the country, which was further escalated by the advent of the Islamic State group (IS) and the establishment of its self-proclaimed caliphate in June 2014. After large parts of IS territory were reconquered in 2016, Christians started to return to the liberated and previously majority Christian towns close to Mosul, like Qaraqosh.

The religious landscape

Iraq is an ethnically diverse nation with a Muslim population of over 98%. Of the Arab population, Shite Muslims form the majority. The Kurds in the north are mainly Sunni. It was only after the League of Nations decision in 1920 that these three groups were first brought together into a modern state system. The different leaders that came to power since then have fueled mistrust and conflict between the three groups according to the principle of 'divide and rule'. The current sectarian violence in Iraq is rooted mainly in the competition for power and prominence in the post-Saddam Hussein Iraq.

In general, Iraqi society is becoming Islamized. Alcohol is restricted and in some areas banned. Shops where alcohol is sold are regular targets for bombings, and several owners have been killed. During Ramadan all such shops are closed throughout the whole of Iraq. There is an increase in the social control of women, the wearing of the headscarf and observance of Ramadan. Even Christian women in Baghdad are under pressure to veil themselves in order to move safely outside of their homes.⁴ The situation is even worse in the area where IS has declared a caliphate. Here, all women are obliged to cover themselves fully by wearing a *niqab*.

⁴ Open Doors contacts say women feel afraid they will be harassed if they do not cover up. Also, in 2015 posters appeared on government offices and even on a church/churches encouraging Christian women to veil themselves 'as this is what Mary did'.

The political landscape

An article in Al-Jazeera from April 2016 gives an overview: “To inaugurate a break from Saddam Hussein’s Arab Sunni-minority rule of Iraq, a political system developed under US tutelage where after each Iraqi election the new government would be ‘inclusive’ of all of the nation’s communities. This notion of inclusivity led to a quasi-mathematical equation where each new Iraq cabinet allocated a proportional percentage of positions to the nation’s Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, and other minorities, such as Christians, Turkmens, and Yazidis.”⁵ The political representation of Christians is very low (1-3%) and as they are scattered over 10 parties their significance is often irrelevant.

Prohibited under Saddam Hussein, Islamist political parties – both Shiite and Sunni - have made their entry into Iraqi politics and even constitute the majority in parliament. Sectarian conflicts are being fought both in parliament by political representatives and in the streets by militias. Several Shiite parties have warm relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and consequently Iran’s influence is strong. Iran’s support in the battle against IS is another important factor. As a result, Iraq is turning more Islamic and is even putting pressure on the Kurdish government to act likewise. Christians, in particular those with a Muslim background, have reported that they are being monitored by Iranian secret services.

The socio-economic landscape

Iraq is divided into two parts, a semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north, officially governed by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) based in Erbil, and a large Arab part, controlled by the Iraqi Government in Baghdad. Kurds and Arabs have their own languages and culture. Apart from oil fields in Basra (in the south close to Kuwait and Iran), most of Iraq’s oil resources are found near Kirkuk and Mosul, the border areas between the Kurdish region and Arab Iraq, which are amongst the most violent places in Iraq.

Corruption is epidemic in all levels of government and society. The weak and divided government only strengthens widespread impunity which leads to a vicious cycle that is hard to escape. The most vulnerable victims are Christians and other minorities. There is major social dissatisfaction as a result of a chronic lack of social services (water, electricity) and massive unemployment. Corruption is one of the major factors that is hampering the country’s progress and the process of democracy.

Moreover, almost every individual in Iraq is traumatized after years of suffering under Saddam Hussein’s regime, the Iran-Iraq war, Gulf wars, sanctions, the US-led invasion and the succeeding sectarian violence (including atrocities committed by IS). The impact of this on the population - and especially on children - is disastrous with many children having learning disorders and being in a permanent state of fear. The question is how this will work out for Iraq’s future. Several analysts have established that trauma is one of the factors for radicalization. This does not bode well for Iraq’s large youth bulge.

⁵ Sadr’s challenge to Iraq’s sectarian politics, [Al Jazeera](#), 22 April 2016.

Concluding remarks

Iraq was only given national status early in the 20th century. The ethnically and religiously diverse nation is therefore still young. It is suffering from sectarian violence and corruption which are the main factors hampering progress and the process of democracy. Closely related is the problem of impunity, which greatly affects the position of Iraq's Christians, and the rise of radical Islamic groups which do not tolerate any other religion than a strict and violent form of Islam. Although the general situation in Iraq remains far from stable, there are hopeful developments as the military campaign by coalition forces against IS in the Mosul region is looking successful at the time of writing (June 2017), allowing Christians to return to a number of villages. However experts warn that after the defeat of IS, war could erupt between Shiite forces and the Kurds.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
38,654,000	258,000	0.7

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

Christians have been living in the region since the earliest days of the Christian Church. According to tradition, the Christian faith was brought to Mesopotamia by the Apostle Thomas on his way to India. Nestorians became the main Christian influence from the 5th century on until the Islamic invasions (beginning in 7th/8th century) crippled Church life.

Roman Catholics came in the early 14th century, when Rome sent Dominican and Franciscan friars to proselytize the Chaldeans, Eastern Orthodox and Muslims. Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, did not arrive until the 19th century. Missionary societies embracing the principles of William Carey first came to the country in 1815 (starting with the Anglican Church Missionary Society).

By the beginning of the 20th century, Christians made up no less than 30% of the population. However, by the end of the 1st World War, the Turkish regime had murdered over 250,000 Christians in Iraq, which meant that in some areas one-third of the Christian community had perished. Under the League of Nations, the Mesopotamian region became a mandate of Great Britain, which successfully united the three dominate regions (Mosul, Basra and Baghdad) into a single nation, known today as Iraq. Shortly after Britain granted Iraq its independence in

1932, the Christian population fell to less than 8%.⁶ The Church in Iraq now consists mainly of three distinct groups: the Chaldeans (the largest group), the Catholics (Western and Eastern), and the Protestants (mostly Anglican and Reformed).

What church networks exist today? ⁷

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
93,200	146,000	16,300	77,200	12,300	-86,200	25,300	61,500

Source: WCD, May 2017

Historical churches make up 95% of all churches in Iraq, most of these belonging to the Chaldean Catholic, Syrian Catholic or Assyrian Church of the East. There is also an Armenian church in Iraq. The first Evangelical church in the Middle East was established more than 100 years ago in the city of Nineveh (Mosul) and many different Evangelical churches were built in Baghdad and Basra too.

Due to the sectarian civil war which followed in the wake of the US led invasion in 2003, large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) arrived in the north. As a consequence, several Evangelical denominations opened churches in the north and are growing in number. The Kurdish Church was officially recognized by the Kurdish Regional Authority in 2004 and there are several small groups and home fellowships in the north among Kurdish Christians with a Muslim background. In the south, the pressure is very high on Arab-speaking Christians with a Muslim background and they have to live as secret believers. They are estimated to be only a few hundred in number.

As a result of the civil war, Christians have been on the move to escape the fighting. Baghdad historically had a large population of Christians. As a result of severe anti-Christian violence, (e.g. church attacks, kidnappings, killings, robberies, rapes and threats by Islamic militants) large numbers have either fled abroad or the north. The main influx of Christians has been into the Nineveh Plain or into the Kurdish autonomous region. In the desperate search for security and safety, many families have moved several times already. Christians in the Kurdish region have also grown nervous with Islamic State (IS) forces being so close to its borders and large numbers are looking to emigrate. However, they are also encouraged by the recapture of several Christian towns close to Mosul by the Iraqi army in October 2016. The ultimate target is to liberate Mosul, an endeavor that is expected to be completed in 2017.

⁶ The source for the information above is: <http://www.leben.us/volume-2-volume-2-issue-1/182-the-mission-to-iraq>, last accessed 31 October 2016.

⁷ **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.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁸
258,000	38,038,000	4,600	340	-	23	2,000	342,700

Also to note: Sikh 7,600

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD statistics over 98% of the population are Muslim. Of all Muslims, 55-60% are Shiites and 40% are Sunnis, whereas less than 1% are Yazidis, according to the CIA World Factbook. The majority of the population is composed of Arabs (75-80%), ethnic minorities are Kurdish (15-20%), Turkmen, Assyrian, Shabak and other (5%)⁹.

Notes on the current situation

Most Christians are living in the northern Kurdish region, but in 2017 many Christian and other IDPs have been forced to start returning to their original homes: The Iraqi government in Baghdad has told its employees that if they do not return to their former jobs (teachers, municipality workers, hospital staff etc.), their salaries will be cut. The majority of the IDPs in Mosul/Nineveh are Baghdad government employees. Also, IDP families in Kurdistan were officially informed that there will be no more access for them to the local primary and/or secondary schools after summer 2017, thus forcing them to leave Kurdistan. In addition, the rent for the accommodation of many IDP families was paid for by churches and many of these have indicated that they are unable to pay the rent after September 2017. Christians fear they will therefore be forced out of their IDP homes by their landlords or supporting churches. Finally, in the USA, the US government has been rounding up dozens of Assyrian Christians to deport them back to Baghdad. Although this deportation was blocked¹⁰, there is a growing feeling among Christians in Iraq that they are a forgotten minority, not worth the help of Western governments.

⁸ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

⁹ CIA World Fact book, Iraq Country Profile, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>, last accessed 6 July 2017.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-iraqis-idUSKBN19G00G> and <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/judge-michigan-blocks-deportation-100-iraqis-170623002441541.html>, last accessed 31 July 2017.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 86 / Position: 8

WWL 2017 Points: 86 / Position: 7

WWL 2016 Points: 90 / Position: 2

Where persecution comes from

Fanatical movements such as the Islamic State group (IS) and other radical militants are known for targeting Christians and other religious minorities through kidnappings and killings. Although IS has almost completely lost its territory in Iraq, its ideology is not dead and has influenced the local population. The idea that Christians are infidels and 'not clean' has spread widely. Also, an estimated 3,000 IS militants from Mosul have reportedly 'disappeared' into the general population. Although some Christian families have returned to their homes, the emigration of Christians is continuing due to fear and lack of hope for a good future. For Christians in the north, the aftermath of the referendum on Kurdish independence has also played a role in this desire to leave. Further persecution occurs through Islamic leaders at any level, mostly in the form of hate speech in mosques. Government officials at all levels are reported to threaten Christians and 'encourage' them to emigrate. Clan leaders, extended family and 'normal citizens' put serious pressure on Christians with a Muslim background to get them to return to Islam, and sometimes include efforts to kill the convert. By failing to promote a pluralistic society political parties also contribute to the persecution of Christians. The kidnapping of Christians often comes in the form of organized crime, having both financial and religious motives. On a lower level of persecution, leaders of Historic churches have sometimes thwarted the official recognition of new Christian denominations.

How Christians are suffering

Christians with a Muslim background experience most pressure from (extended) family and often keep their faith secret as they risk being threatened by family members, clan leaders and society around them. Converts risk losing inheritance rights and the right or means to marry. To openly leave Islam leads to difficult situations throughout the country and was especially dangerous in IS held territory, but can also be risky in the less radical northern region governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In the center and the south of the country, besides facing oppression from extended family, converts also experience pressure from the government in Baghdad as Iraqi legislation is based on Sharia Law which stipulates that converts from Islam should be killed. The Assyrian Church of the East, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Armenian Orthodox Church are all seriously affected by persecution, especially from fanatical Islamic movements and non-Christian leaders. They also face discrimination from government authorities. In central and southern Iraq, Christians often do not publicly display Christian symbols (such as a cross) as this can lead to harassment or discrimination at check-points, universities, work

places and government buildings. Even Christians in the IKR have reportedly removed the cross from their cars not to attract unwanted attention. Several years ago, the Catholic seminary was no longer able to operate in Baghdad as a result of threats of kidnapping and attacks by Islamic militants and was forced to move further north to the KRG governed region. Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal churches in Bagdad and Basra are also seriously affected by persecution from fanatical Islamic movements and non-Christian leaders, and regularly experience discrimination from the authorities. Outspoken Christians have regularly become targets in central and southern Iraq. Blasphemy laws can be used against them too if they are suspected of outreach among Muslims.

Finally, changing church affiliation (e.g. by moving from an Orthodox church to worship with an Evangelical congregation) is often punished by refusing rights, including losing jobs. Leaders of Orthodox and Catholic churches have been known to refuse to perform marriages for members attending Evangelical churches.

Examples

- At least three Christians were killed and two wounded in an attack on two shops selling alcohol close to Baghdad on 23 December 2016. Local Christians see this as deliberately targeting Christians, especially considering the timing directly before Christmas and the fact that only Christians sell alcohol in Iraq.
- Atrocities committed during or before the liberation of majority Christian towns like Qaraqosh became known last January 2017, when eight bodies - most probably belonging to Christians - were found. Some were killed over a year ago, others more recently. It is clear proof of how violent IS acted during and before the liberation of the Nineveh Plain in October and November 2016, but since it is uncertain if the killings occurred in the WWL 2018 reporting period, they have not been included in the WWL 2018 score for violence.
- At least two Christians, a widow and her teenage son, were officially detained by IS in prison and forced to become Muslims in Mosul in November 2016. They were able to flee the city. At least 58 Christians were held by IS in Mosul during the WWL 2018 reporting period and are currently still missing. It is unknown whether they were killed or abducted.
- During the WWL 2018 reporting period, there were several incidents of Christians with a Muslim background being physically attacked, tortured or kidnapped by their families as a result of their conversion.
- Thousands of Christians continued to seek a safe place to live either inside or outside the country.
- Finally, a large number of Christian owned houses and property were damaged or looted during or before the liberations.
- A glaring example of hate speech was reported by Middle East Monitor on 17 May 2017¹¹: One of Iraq's most [senior Shiite government clerics](#) publicly stated that Christians, Jews and other religious minorities must convert to Islam, pay the religious tax (*jizya*) or be killed. Sheikh Alaa Al-Mousawi also called Christians "infidels" and "polytheists" and stressed the need of *jihad* against them. In reaction, almost 200 Iraqi Christian families filed a lawsuit accusing him of inciting sectarian violence against Christians.

¹¹ See: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170517-shia-cleric-iraq-christians-infidels-who-must-convert-or-be-killed/>.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 86 / Position: 8

WWL 2017 Points: 86 / Position: 7

WWL 2016 Points: 90 / Position: 2

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

In WWL 2018 Iraq has the same score as in WWL 2017: 86 points. However, its position is one lower than last year: Rank 8 instead of 7. This situation is explained by a rise in the scores of other countries. Iraq's score for pressure decreased slightly and the score for violence increased. The slightly lower score for pressure is mostly explained by the Islamic State group (IS) losing territory in Iraq. However, its ideology is not dead and has influenced the local population. Although some Christian families have returned to their homes, the emigration of Christians is continuing due to fear and lack of hope for a good future. For Christians in the north, the aftermath of the referendum on Kurdish independence has also played a role in this desire to leave. Acts of violence against 'mainstream' Christians were mostly committed by radical Islamic militant groups or individuals, whereas converts from Islam mostly faced violence from their (extended) families.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Iraq ¹²	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Strong
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Strong

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Radical Islamic groups desire a religious cleansing of Iraq and aim to make the country purely Islamic. Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the situation has continuously been deteriorating, with anti-Western (and as such, anti-Christian) sentiments causing considerable levels of violence by Islamic militants and insurgent groups. This situation is aggravated by government impunity and lawlessness. Moreover, radical Islamic groups have increased in number in northern and western regions, under the influence of the civil war in Syria.

In June 2014 IS proclaimed a caliphate in large parts of north and west Iraq including the region under its control in Syria. It implemented strict Islamic rules and was responsible for most of the violence against Christians in Iraq. By the end of 2017, most of the areas held by IS were dismantled and atrocities committed by IS were revealed. Large numbers of IS militants are said to have ‘disappeared’ in the population, posing a threat to religious minorities. New radical Islamist groups have emerged, like ‘Khorazan’, a group allegedly composed of former members of al-Qaeda. Under the influence of Islamic militant groups, Islamic awareness has become a new factor in the country, including the KRG (Kurdish Regional Government) zone. In the Iraqi and Kurdish governments the role of Islam is increasing due to regional developments. Several Shiite parties have warm relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and consequently Iran’s influence in Iraq is increasing. Christians, in particular Christian converts with a Muslim background, have been reporting for some time that they are being monitored by Iranian secret services in areas close to the Iranian border. In general, Iraqi society seems to be turning more Islamic. There is an ongoing increase in the social control of women, the wearing of the headscarf and the observance of Ramadan. Even Christian women in Baghdad and Basra, have been forced to veil themselves in order to move safely outside of their homes. In areas controlled by IS, all women are forced to wear the full veil which covers the face.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Iraqi society is still very tribal. Belonging to a tribe is very often more important than obeying government law. Age-old norms and values exert a controlling influence on tribal society.

¹² 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.

Where this tribalism is mixed with Islam, it will especially affect Christians with a Muslim background. If a convert's tribal background is known, it may cause difficulties for any other Christians and deter them from helping him/her. Tribal groups have influence within and/or over government authorities in some areas.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong):

Corruption plays an important role in the persecution of Christians in Iraq as can be seen in the ransoms demanded when Christians are abducted and in the illegal taking of Christian-owned houses and land. According to the NGO, Bagdad Beituna (Baghdad Our Home), there have been more than “[7,000 violations](#) against properties belonging to Iraqi Christians in Baghdad”¹³ since 2003, especially properties belonging to Christians who left the country. One Bagdad official stated that almost 70% of Baghdad's Christian homes have been illegally taken. The vulnerable position of religious minorities like Christians is being exploited. Corruption is deeply rooted in Iraqi society, right up to the highest levels. Also, it is especially people in (or close to) political power - including Muslim militia backed by Iran - who are occupying not just Christian-owned homes but also churches and monasteries.

Denominational protectionism (Strong):

In the south and Center of Iraq, Christians who have moved from a Historical church to join a non-traditional Christian group can face threats and opposition from family members, tribal leaders and society around them. These threats include the risk of losing jobs, inheritances or the means to marry. Bishops of Historical churches have also be known to refuse to hold weddings for members who have been visiting Evangelical churches. Families and community often disassociate themselves from such cross-denominational converts.

Drivers of persecution

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

¹³ See: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/baghdad.70.per.cent.of.christian.homes.illegally.seized/55902.htm>, last accessed 14 December 2016.

Violent religious groups such as IS and other radical militants are known for targeting Christians and other religious minorities through kidnappings and killings. Another source of persecution are Islamic leaders at any level, mostly in the form of hate-speech in mosques. Government officials at all levels are reported to threaten Christians and “encourage” them to emigrate. Also, normal citizens in the north have reportedly made remarks in public, questioning why Christians are still in Iraq. Clan leaders, extended family and normal citizens put serious pressure on Christians with a Muslim background to get them to return to Islam, and this sometimes includes attempts at killing the convert. By failing to promote a pluralistic society, political parties also contribute to the persecution of Christians. The kidnapping of Christians often comes in the form of organized crime, having both financial and religious motives. On a lower level of persecution, leaders of Historic churches have sometimes thwarted the official recognition of new Christian denominations. Finally, multilateral organizations such as UN/UNHCR or large(r) international NGOs are reported to sometimes ignore helping Christian refugee camps and do not approve of other agencies focusing specifically on helping Christian IDPs.

Context

Christians have a long history in Iraq. Iraq’s second biggest city Mosul – since mid-2017 liberated from IS militants - is the current name of the former city Nineveh, from the biblical book of Jonah. There was a long tradition of Christians living in Iraqi cities like Baghdad, Mosul and Basra. Before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq was home to one of the largest Christian communities of the Middle East. Christians have lived here for two millennia but are currently on the verge of extinction. Over the last years, Iraq has suffered from structural uncertainty, conflict and instability. One of the all-time lows was when large areas of north and west Iraq became part of IS’s self-proclaimed caliphate in June 2014. The Iraqi government is incapable of enforcing the rule of law and of providing a minimum of security. Corruption levels are soaring and sectarian violence does not seem to stop.

Iraq is divided into two parts, the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north, officially governed by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) based in Erbil, and the large remaining Arab part, mostly controlled by the Iraqi Government in Baghdad. Kurds and Arabs have their own separate languages and culture. Most of Iraq’s oil resources are found near Kirkuk and Mosul, the border areas between the Kurdish region and Arab Iraq, and these have long been among the most violent places in Iraq. Christians are caught here in the crossfire of two different battles - one for a Kurdish autonomous country and one for a religious cleansing of Iraq by Islamic terrorist groups (including IS) who wish to make the country purely Islamic. On the other hand, there have also been glimmers of hope: By the end of 2017, most of the areas that had been under IS control were now back under government control and and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the war against IS to be over. Also, cooperation between pastors with a Muslim background in some places in the north has been increasing. Historical Christian communities and organizations have been reaching out to refugees from IS controlled areas in Iraq and Syria by distributing blankets and toys. Churches in Erbil and Dohuk were also able to bring full-scale humanitarian aid to thousands of IDP families.

Other religious minorities facing persecution in Iraq are Yazidis, Kakai and Sabaeen Mandaean. They mostly face discrimination and exclusion for being non-Muslims. Especially Yazidis are known to have suffered atrocities under IS, especially women and girls who were taken as sex slaves. More than 3,500 Yezidi women and girls are currently missing and possibly still in the hands of IS.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians have not been counted as a separate category according to WWL-Methodology as they do not usually function as a separate group in Iraq.

Historical Christian communities:

Churches such as the Assyrian Orthodox Church, the Chaldean Catholic or Syrian Catholic Church and the Armenian Church are all seriously affected by persecution from fanatical Islamic movements and non-Christian leaders. They also face discrimination from government authorities. In central and southern Iraq, Christians often do not publicly display Christian symbols like a cross as this can lead to harassment or discrimination at check-points, university, work-place or government buildings. Even Christians in the KRG region have reportedly removed the cross from their cars so as not to attract unwanted attention. (Several years ago, the Catholic seminary was no longer able to operate in Baghdad as a result of kidnapping threats and attacks by Islamic militants, and was forced to move to the KRG.)

Communities of converts to Christianity:

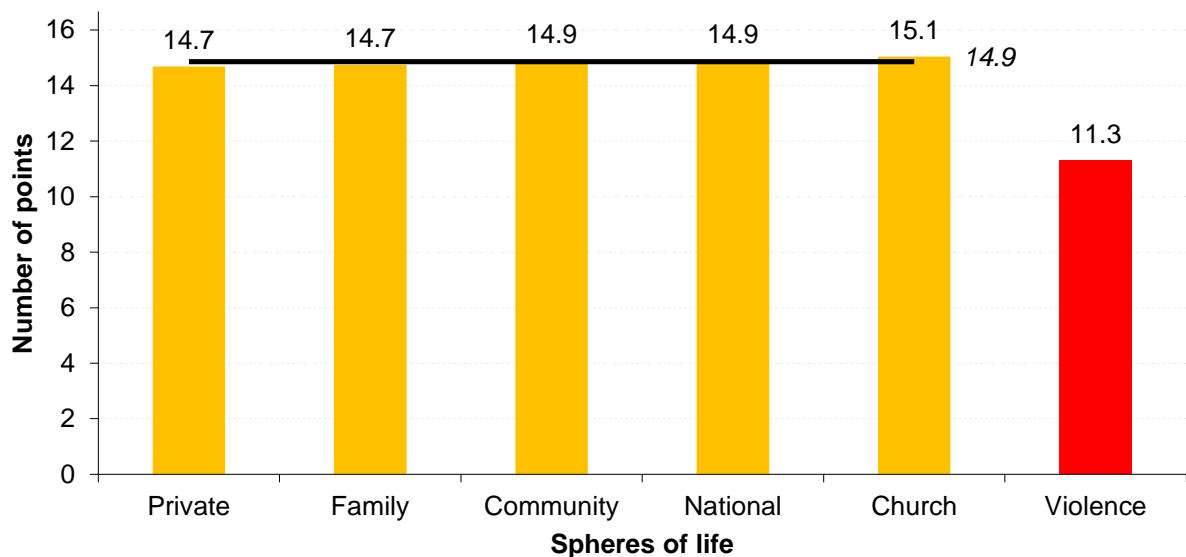
This concerns Christians from a Muslim or a Historical Christian community background who now join in worship with non-traditional Christian communities. Converts from Islam experience most pressure from (extended) family and often keep their new faith a secret as they risk being threatened by their family members, tribal leaders and society around them. They risk losing inheritance rights and the right or means to marry. To openly leave Islam leads to difficult situations in the entire country and is especially dangerous in IS-held territory. In the south and center of the country, converts are also put under pressure by government authorities. Changing church (e.g. from an Orthodox to an Evangelical congregation) is also often punished by refusing rights, such as losing jobs. A bishop refused to perform marriages for members of his Orthodox church who had been attending Evangelical churches.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal churches in Bagdad and Basra, are also seriously affected by persecution from fanatical Islamic movements and non-Christian leaders, including discrimination from the authorities. To some extent Evangelical Christians are also affected by opposition from (extended) family. Outspoken Christians have regularly become targets in central and southern Iraq. Blasphemy laws can be used against them too if they are suspected of outreach among Muslims. For Evangelicals there is no legal framework for setting up a Bible school or for recruiting and registering organizations from the outside to support them in this.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Iraq



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The persecution pattern for Iraq shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Iraq is at an extreme level (14.9), decreasing from 15.2 in the WWL 2017 reporting period.
- Extreme levels of pressure are recorded in every *Sphere of life*. This is typical for a situation in which there are many different persecution engines acting:
 - Pressure from *Islamic oppression* affects all five *Spheres of life* especially for converts.
 - *Ethnic antagonism* (blended with *Islamic oppression*) is most prevalent in the *Family* and *Private spheres of life*.
 - *Organized corruption and crime* is mostly expressed in the *Community* and *National spheres of life*.
 - *Denominational protectionism* particularly affects the *church, family and private sphere of life*.
- The level of violence against Christians is very high (11.3 points), rising from 10.4 in WWL 2017. The increase is explained by three Christians being killed, two Christians being detained (in IS territory) and a Christian sentenced to death (in IS-held territory) and around 60 Christians being kidnapped or missing in the WWL 2018 reporting period. See below under “Violence” for details.
- The overall persecution situation in Iraq in the WWL 2018 reporting period was characterized by impunity, the threat of attacks by Islamic militants and second class treatment by the authorities.

Private sphere:

Of all Christians, it is converts who are the most restricted in their personal practice of faith. Often, they cannot publicly share their new faith or possess Christian materials. Pressure was high especially in areas held by IS but also in central and southern Iraq. This is true to a lesser extent in the KRG region. Although - as the WWL 2018 reporting period progressed - there were fewer Christians being held in IS-controlled areas, all categories of Christians were seriously restricted in their personal worship of God, e.g. they cannot sing out loud.

Family sphere:

Converts from Islam often have to hide their Christian faith from their Islamic families due to the shame this brings to the family. They run the risk of being threatened and abandoned. For all types of Christianity, life for Christian families was severely restricted in IS-controlled areas. But also in the rest of Iraq, Christian parents are careful what they share about their faith with their children. If the children would for instance talk about their faith in school – especially during Islamic classes - the family risks blasphemy accusations.

Community sphere:

Also in their community, it is too risky for converts from Islam to be open about their faith. If their faith is known, they will – in the best of circumstances - face discrimination. This is even worse in IS-held areas, where all types of Christians have to be silent about their religion. Being a convert from Islam to Christianity is like a death warrant in IS-controlled territory but also in the central and southern regions. All women in IS areas are forced to fully veil themselves. But also in Baghdad and Basra Christian women are put under pressure to wear a veil. Even in the north of the country (Dohuk, Zakho and some areas of Erbil) there is a growing social pressure on Christian women to wear a head scarf. In the KRG region, Christians are increasingly under pressure from the local Muslim population who accuse them of taking their jobs.

National sphere:

Sharia is the primary source of law, which forbids the conversion of Muslims to other religions. As such, Christians with a Muslim background will be discriminated against in their interaction at a national level if their new faith is known. It is not possible to have their religion changed on their ID cards and their children are also automatically registered as Muslims. The ongoing Islamization of society in the entire country, including in the KRG region, could also be seen in the implementation of laws on religious registration in 2015, and in the ban on the sale of alcohol in October 2016. The latter was followed by an attack on two Christian owned shops selling alcohol just before Christmas 2016, in which at least three Christians died and two were injured.

The registration law forces non-Muslim children to become Muslim if the male parent converts to Islam or if their mother marries a Muslim. The law was passed in spite of protests by religious minorities. A few days after the ban on the sale of alcohol was imposed, a Christian owner of a restaurant and store where alcohol could be purchased was killed in front of his business. In the Kurdish region in north Iraq, there are attempts to “kurdicize” society by land being sold to Kurdish Muslims or Yazidis in some predominantly Christian areas and towns.

This “demographic reversal process” has been going on for years in several majority Christian areas in the Kurdish region. In a more recent development, Shiites are also trying to change the demographics in Nineveh plain. As such, a school, donated by Iran and named “Emma Khomainy”, after the Islamic Republic’s first spiritual leader, was opened in Bartella sub-district.

Church sphere:

In areas under the control of IS, churches and monasteries were either demolished or used for other purposes (jails, Islamic centers, stables). It was practically impossible to have any kind of church life in IS-held areas since public gatherings not organized by IS were forbidden. Most Christians had fled from those areas, though a handful remained, some in hiding and others in captivity. Most were forced to convert to Islam and attend Islamic prayers. Refusal was punished by beatings. A disturbing development in central and southern Iraq is the lack of priests or church members in some churches – due to emigration as a result of a lack of safety for church leaders. This has led to some church buildings being put up for sale. Though not a nationwide phenomenon, Church leaders like pastors and priests are still being targeted and killed by Islamic militants to set an example and scare others, especially in Baghdad.

Violence:

Acts of violence against ‘mainstream’ Christians were mostly committed by radical Islamic militant groups or individuals, whereas Christians with a Muslim background mostly faced violence from their (extended) families.

- At least three Christians were killed and two wounded in an attack on two shops selling alcohol close to Baghdad on 23 December 2016. Local Christians interpret this to be a deliberate act against Christians, especially considering the timing directly before Christmas and Christians being the only ones who sell alcohol in Iraq.
- Atrocities committed during or before the liberation of majority Christian towns like Qaraqosh became known last January 2017, when eight bodies - most probably belonging to Christians - were found. Some were killed over a year ago, others more recently. It is clear proof of how violent IS acted during and before the liberation of the Nineveh Plain in October and November 2016, but since it is uncertain if the killings occurred in the WWL 2018 reporting period, they have not been scored.
- At least two Christians, a widow and her teenage son, were officially detained by IS in prison and forced to become Muslims in Mosul in November 2016. They were able to flee the city. At least 58 Christians were held by IS in Mosul during the WWL 2018 reporting period and are currently still missing. It is unknown whether they were killed or abducted.
- During the WWL 2018 reporting period, there were several incidents of Christians with a Muslim background being physically attacked, tortured or kidnapped by their families as a result of their conversion.
- A glaring example of hate speech was reported by Middle East Monitor on 17 May 2017¹⁴: One of Iraq's most [senior Shiite government clerics](#) publicly stated that Christians, Jews and other religious minorities must convert to Islam, pay the religious tax (*jizya*) or be killed. Sheikh Alaa Al-Mousawi also called Christians “infidels” and “polytheists” and stressed the

¹⁴ See: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170517-shia-cleric-iraq-christians-infidels-who-must-convert-or-be-killed/> .

need of *jihad* against them. In reaction, almost 200 Iraqi Christian families filed a lawsuit accusing him of inciting sectarian violence against Christians.

- Thousands of Christians continued to seek a safe place to live either inside or outside the country. This happened under influence of different political developments inside the country including being trapped between different warring parties like the clashes between Iraqi and Kurdish forces after the Kurdish independence referendum. For the scoring we only included cases that were demonstrable directly related to persecution.
- Finally, a large number of Christian owned houses and property were damaged, taken or looted during or before the liberations of IS held areas in the Nineveh plain in the last quarter of 2017. However, taking over of Christian owned properties has been going on for years in Baghdad and cities in the south like Al Basrah, Al Nasiriyah, Al Emara, Babylon and Al Kut. According to the representative of Christians at the Iraqi parliament, Joseph Slewa, “approximately thirty thousand seizures of land and properties belonging to Syriac and Chaldean Christians in Baghdad and other provinces”¹⁵ which have been taken over by militias that belong to some political parties in Iraq. According to Slewa, the culprits are “groups in power who exploit their authority to seize property. Some groups are taking advantage of their work and authority at the governmental offices” to produce falsified documents. Other groups (mafia) work through real estate offices and engage in fraud to seize properties owned by Christians.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Of all WWL categories of Christian communities, female converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to persecution for their faith. However, other Christian females also face inequality, e.g. if their husbands convert to Islam. In the case of female converts, pressure comes most often from the side of the (wider) family. When she still lives with her family, a convert risks abuse in the form of house-arrest, sexual harassment, rape and even death, if her faith is revealed. Female converts from Islam cannot officially marry male Christians, as the Iraqi state still considers them Muslims and Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslims. When married to a Muslim husband, a female convert risks abuse and death threats from her husband or his family which cause some to flee. They are also faced with travel restrictions. Travel bans can be imposed by the authorities but also by family, for instance to prevent the female convert from leaving the country. If this ban is violated, a court case can be started for “travelling without permission”. Female converts are also under the threat of forced divorce. The attitude of the spouse’s family is crucial in this issue.

IS is known for its inferior treatment of women, especially those from religious minorities. Since establishing its so-called caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria in June 2014, IS abducted and forced large numbers of Yazidi but also several Christian women into marriages with IS-fighters. They suffered sexual enslavement and sex trafficking. Though their numbers have decreased, Yazidi and Christian women who are still missing could very well continue to be facing sexual abuse at present. Furthermore, IS has reportedly killed women for not wearing a

¹⁵ See: <http://www.ishtartv.com/viewarticle,76682.html>, last accessed 10 December 2017.

scarf, forcing non-Muslims to veil themselves as well. Also outside of IS-held territory, Christian women and girls are now wearing veils for their own safety. Unveiled women in Baghdad and Basra are likely to be harassed, pelted with stones, kidnapped or killed.

On the whole, Iraqi society is characterized by widespread lawlessness. For Christian women this is compounded by the fact there is general impunity for violations against Christians, be it stealing property, kidnapping, sexual abuse or corruption. The higher connections and higher status of the Muslim perpetrator means they will always win the case, especially under the tribal justice system which can override national justice. On a community level, in state schools, Christian girls are seen as weaker and often ridiculed for their faith, according to one country researcher. They are reportedly under pressure to convert to Islam and their grades can be impacted if they openly challenge concepts which contradict their Christian faith. In conclusion, Christian women – especially converts from Islam - suffer from unequal treatment in all sectors of society.

Male:

Christian men reportedly face discrimination at work and education in Iraq. Job discrimination affects men belonging to all WWL categories of Christian communities, especially those working in the public sector. Christians in central and south Iraq have been put under pressure to leave their jobs, especially if they are working for foreign organizations or are employed at higher levels of society (e.g. government companies). In the north, Christians report to struggle to get employment and allegedly feel vulnerable and prone to be exploited at their jobs, according to one country researcher. In the mostly traditional and tribal Iraqi society, men are often the primary breadwinners for their families and losing their jobs can have a considerable effect on Christian families. This problem affects Christians with a Muslim background in all sectors of society; if their faith is known they will face serious problems finding and keeping employment.

Male converts with a Muslim background can face persecution from their families, including violent death. Also men from a non-Muslim Christian background risk being killed for their faith, the perpetrators being mostly radical Islamic militants. The consequences of this can be far-reaching for their families, who apart from being left without income, often face emotional trauma if the man flees or is killed. A convert's family could face also mockery and pressure from the husband's Muslim family. The loss of Christian men not only affects their direct families, but also the local church which consequently finds itself confronted with a lack of potential leadership. As such, Christian men - particular former Muslims - are in a very vulnerable position to sustain their families.

Future outlook

The Economist Intelligence Unit summarizes the main recent developments and its expectations for Iraq as follows: "Iraqi forces have made significant progress against Islamic State (IS) in 2017, with the jihadi group likely to be territorially defeated around end-2017. This, along with the swift retaking of disputed territories from the Kurds, following the late

September independence referendum, place prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, in a strong position to win re-election in 2018. However, he will remain under some pressure owing to the impact of low oil prices and huge reconstruction costs on the budget.”¹⁶

In spite of the imminent defeat of Islamic State in Iraq, the threat of persecution engine *Islamic oppression* is not expected to diminish considerably in the short run. IS may have lost territory but its ideology is still very much alive and not limited to physical land. In an effort to prove they are still relevant, IS continues to execute and inspire attacks in the West and in the Middle East. Meanwhile, thousands of fleeing IS militants have “disappeared”, absorbed into the civilian population of the Nineveh plains – adding to feelings of insecurity of religious minorities such as Christians. Also, IS is not the only driver of this persecution engine. There are al-Qaeda remnants, Shiite militias and other militant Islamic groups emerging, such as the Khorazan group which is composed of former al-Qaeda members and said to be even crueler than IS. Pressure also comes from Shiite leaders and government officials, making offensive public statements against Christians. Meanwhile in the KRG-governed region in the north, Islamic awareness is reportedly awakening. Consequently, *Islamic oppression* is expected to continue to be a threat to Iraq’s Christians, leading to high levels of fear and encouraging them to emigrate.

The loss of a common enemy, the subsequent power vacuum and the aftermath of the Kurdish independence referendum are likely to increase divisions between tribal and sectarian groups, which can strengthen the persecution engine *Ethnic antagonism*. Pressure will especially increase on Christians from a Muslim background, who suffer most from this engine, but also on other Christians.

Amidst these increased tensions between different population groups, Christians face the risk of being caught between clashing parties, leading to Christians relocating to safer areas. They could also be pulled along or used in this political power-struggle, a development which will increase *Dictatorial paranoia*. Moreover, there is a serious threat that the next war after the defeat of IS will be between Shiite forces and the Kurds. This persecution engine, *Dictatorial paranoia*, is also active in the central Iraqi government and leads to the failure to support a pluralistic society where religious minorities such as Christians would be truly welcome. In the event of a wide-scale power-struggle another important persecution engine in Iraq, *Organized corruption and crime*, is likely to flourish. Growing levels of corruption are already observed among both KRG and Baghdad governments. Drivers of this engine are specifically disadvantaging Christians in the areas of finding jobs and registering Christian companies but are also taking properties belonging to Christians.

Finally, it is hard to say how the persecution engine *Denominational protectionism* will develop. On the one hand, in situations of pressure there is a need for Christians to work together, which could soften the influence of this engine. According to short term expectations, this need will continue to exist, though increased fragmentations along tribal lines and survival sentiments could also work out in the opposite direction.

See: ¹⁶ <http://country.eiu.com/Iraq>, last accessed 10 December 2017.

Policy considerations

Open Doors suggests the following recommendations:

- The KRG and Iraqi government should ensure future legal frameworks in the countries fully promote and protect the equal and inalienable rights of all their citizens, irrespective of race, religion or other status. Thereby:
 - Endorsing by law the creation of a National Accountability Mechanism to monitor instances of discrimination based on religious or ethnic belonging, and to ensure accountability for violations.
 - Fully applying Article 14 of the Iraqi Constitution which recognizes and upholds the equal rights and status of people of all religions before the law without discrimination.
- The international community and local governments should ensure the dignified and continued improvement of living conditions for all citizens, but especially for the refugees and internally displaced – including the provision of adequate housing, education and jobs. Thereby:
 - Instigate and encouraging flexible funding opportunities to allow a variety of well-coordinated, non-partisan, in-country Faith and Community Based Organizations (FBOs/CBOs), such as churches and mosques, to provide access to food, safe drinking water and essential medical supplies; regain normality by initiating a variety of locally-appropriate psycho-social care, reconciliation and community-building projects amongst the displaced; and initiate rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, such as housing repair and income-generating projects. EU delegations and large NGO consortia managing local calls for proposals and funding should include faith-based organizations and religious leaders in their increased engagement with local CBOs and minority aid organizations.
 - Ensuring that the government discourse and education curricula in Iraq affirms religiously pluralistic society which promotes tolerance, respect and peaceful coexistence between people of all religions and ethnicities.
 - All donors, the EU and its Member States ensuring they fulfil commitments to deliver humanitarian assistance swiftly, and with the express inclusion of local civil society and faith-based groups and aid organizations.
- The international community along with the KRG and Iraqi governments should identify and equip religious leaders and faith-based organizations to play a constructive and central role in reconciling and rebuilding Iraqi society, thereby:
 - Supporting the establishment of a grass-roots Peace Programme, with projects run by faith-based organisations and other active civil society organisations. The programme should support and equip existing peacebuilding and

reconciliation initiatives in Syria and Iraq, and promote the valuable role of civil society in restoring peace to both countries.

- The EU and Iraqi government should uphold the human rights focus of their Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, ensuring that religious freedom as a fundamental human right is protected in all strategies to combat terrorism and boost security.
- The EU and Iraqi government should ensure that the humanitarian law and refugee law instruments mainstreamed in the EU-Iraq Partnership Cooperation Agreement are fully implemented in refugee and IDP policies.
- The international community should ensure follow-up reporting on EU Member State responses to the call of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and European Parliament to undertake a stronger commitment to finding protection for refugees fleeing due to persecution on religious or ethnic grounds through resettlement, humanitarian admission schemes, simplified family reunification or more flexible visa regulations.
- The European Parliament and UN should continually monitor and report on atrocities committed against Christians and Yazidis.¹⁷
- The EU External Action Service (EEAS), EU Member States and European Commission should respond urgently to the European Parliament Resolution calling for a repatriation plan for religious groups.

WWR in-depth reports

In-depth reports are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

- [Iraq and Syria – The enduring relevance of the church in the Middle East: December 2017](#)
23 page report: This paper seeks to clarify the relevance Christian communities currently have in political and social life. It also considers the immediate regarding post-conflict reconstruction including services and including services, infrastructure and longer-term questions of governance and social cohesion.
- [Understanding the recent movements of Christians leaving Syria and Iraq. Hope for the Middle East: June 2017](#)
24 page report: Christians have been internally displaced and left Syria and Iraq in large numbers. This report covers four main areas: numbers, factors for leaving, options for leaving, and destination countries.

¹⁷ On 21 September 2017 the UN Security Council voted unanimously to create an investigative team to collect evidence of genocide and war crimes committed against civilians by IS members. See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>, last accessed 22 September 2017.

- [The role and contribution of Christians in Syria and Iraq – Summary report – April 2016](#)
17 page report summarizing the three reports below on the historical, current and future contribution of Christians in Syria and Iraq.
- [Future role and contribution of Christians in Syria and Iraq – April 2016](#)
14 page report: Building on key findings and trends identified in two previous studies on the current and historical contributions of Middle Eastern Christians, this report outlines some possible future contributions that Christians may offer in Syrian and Iraqi society, as well as key challenges they may face. The report identifies trends in demographics, social engagement, intellectual and cultural activity, economic contributions, politics and spirituality.
- [Historic Relevance of the Church in Syria and Iraq – March 2016](#)
21 page report: Christians in the Middle East have long existed in various different denominations and interacted with their evolving society in a variety of ways. Perhaps most consistently, throughout the course of history, Christians have been known for their intellectual and scholarly activity, contributing to knowledge creation and translation of ideas, and encouraging philosophic and academic ties between different parts of the world.
- [Current Relevance of the Church in Syria and Iraq – February 2016](#)
26 page report: Christians in Syria and Iraq continue to contribute to their societies in a variety of ways, including education, culture and arts, social affairs, politics, economics, humanitarian assistance and religious activities. This paper outlines some of the prominent, influential and charitable roles which Christians have played, and continue to play, in Syrian and Iraqi societies.

[Open Doors article\(s\) from the region](#)

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Iraq 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/iraq/>

- [Iraq's Assyrian Christians: persecution and resurgence](#)
4 April 2018
Samir Gedhya never wanted to leave his home in Qaraqosh for the unknown, even when the Islamic State group was almost at his doorstep. As the menace to Qaraqosh loomed, his eldest son Faraj, then 16, decided to flee to France.

- [Easter in Qaraqosh – for many their first since returning home](#)
3 April 2018
With the help of local churches and other organisations, people in the country’s largest Christian city, Qaraqosh (also known as Baghdida), have restored their homes and are now attempting to recover the lives they lost.
- [Palm Sunday celebrations mark revival of life in Qaraqosh](#)
26 March 2018
For many Christian families in Qaraqosh, this Easter is particularly special, as they will be celebrating it at home for the first time since fleeing the city in 2014.
- [Iraq: Christian family stabbed to death in Baghdad](#)
12 March 2018
An Assyrian Christian family of three were murdered in their home in a predominantly Shia neighbourhood in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, on 8 March 2018.
- [Iraq archbishop invites Muslim nations to rebuild Christian villages destroyed by IS](#)
20 February 2018
The Archbishop of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan has called for Muslim nations to help rebuild the Christian and Yazidi villages destroyed by Islamic State (IS). Archbishop Bashar Warda said: “It is not enough to say ‘ISIS does not represent Islam’”.
- [Mosul Christmas Mass hailed a ‘victory over IS’ as Sunni youth install giant Christmas tree](#)
5 January 2018
The celebration of a Christmas Eve Mass in Mosul after the city’s devastating three-year occupation by Islamic State (IS) marked “a kind of victory” over the extremists, a church leader there said.
- [Iraq bishop recalls his abduction from Baghdad in new book](#)
13 December 2017
Saad Hanna vividly relates the 27 days of his kidnap and torture at the hands of Sunni armed men in a book, ‘Abducted in Iraq: a priest in Baghdad’.
- [Universal Children’s Day: Kidnapped Christina receives letter from German namesake](#)
20 November 2017
When German teenager Christina learned that a three-year-old girl with the same name from Qaraqosh, Iraq, had been abducted by Islamic State militants in August 2014, she started praying. A few months ago she heard the news of Christina’s release and decided to write a letter.

- [Nineveh Christians still talk of emigration, despite Iraqi-Kurd peace agreement](#)
3 November 2017
Christians in Kirkuk and other parts of northern Iraq continue to worry about insecurity in the Nineveh Plains despite the recent peace agreement between Kurdish and Iraqi forces.
- [Christians who fled IS displaced again as Iraqi and Kurdish forces clash](#)
25 October 2017
Fighting has erupted between Iraqi and Kurdish forces in a predominantly Christian town in northern Iraq, causing residents to flee.
- [Christians on alert as Iraqi forces take over Nineveh Plains](#)
18 October 2017
Christians who have returned to the Nineveh Plains in northern Iraq, three years after fleeing Islamic State militants, are on high alert now Iraqi forces have retaken some of the disputed region from Kurdish forces.
- [Iraqi-Kurdish violence could push Christians who survived IS 'to flee for good'](#)
17 October 2017
Fresh large-scale fighting in the disputed territory between Iraq and its Kurdish region could further drain the region of Christians – only months after the military defeat of Islamic State persuaded some to return to their homes, experts have warned.
- [Christians returning to former IS-occupied Karamles 'increasing day to day'](#)
12 October 2017
It has been a year since Karamles was liberated from Islamic State group (IS) militants. It was one of the Nineveh Plains towns east of Mosul that fell to IS as it advanced across northern Iraq in August 2014.
- [Nineveh Christians rebuild their homes, but threats remain in Iraq](#)
7 September 2017
With towns and cities such as Qaraqosh and Bashiqa in Iraq's Nineveh Plains now liberated from Islamic State (IS) forces and their original inhabitants beginning to return, there is confidence among some local Christian leaders that life is slowly beginning to get back to normal.
- [Iraqi Christians fear Kurdish agenda behind removal of mayor](#)
28 July 2017
Iraqi Christians are increasingly fearful that the recent ousting of a Christian mayor by a pro-Kurdish council is evidence of a Kurdish agenda to usurp control of northern Christian-majority towns.

- [Iraq: Karamles residents face fears as they begin rebuilding](#)
19 June 2017
As Iraqi government forces drive Islamic State militants from their last stronghold in the city of Mosul, the residents of Karamles, a town 30km to the east which was liberated six months ago, are returning to rebuild their homes.
- [Iraqi senior cleric shown calling for Christians to ‘convert, pay tax or be killed’](#)
14 June 2017
A video showing a call for jihad from a senior Iraqi Shiite cleric has caused anger among Iraqi Christians. The undated footage shows Sheikh Alaa Al-Mousawi, head of the Shia Endowment, a government body that looks after Iraq’s Shia holy sites, describing Christians as “infidels”.
- [Iraq Christians returning home face many hurdles](#)
14 June 2017
Three years since the northern Iraqi city of Mosul was taken by Islamic State militants, Iraqi government forces have been able to reclaim a large part of the city, allowing Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Baghdad Louis Raphael Sako to visit several churches and monasteries.
- [Abducted Christina reunited with her parents after 3 years](#)
9 June 2017
After almost three years in captivity, an Iraqi Christian girl abducted by the Islamic State in August 2014 has finally been reunited with her parents.
- [Iraqi bishops seek \\$262m for post-IS ‘Marshall Plan’](#)
20 May 2017
Church leaders in northern Iraq are launching an ambitious US\$262 million “Marshall Plan” for the reconstruction of Christian-majority villages devastated by the occupation of Islamic State (IS) jihadists – but knowing they could be subjected to attacks while they implement it.
- [Returning Christian families urged to put down roots in northern Iraq](#)
18 May 2017
An ambitious plan to facilitate the return of Christians eager to rebuild their homes has begun.
- [Displaced Iraqi Christians open sweet factory in Erbil](#)
25 April 2017
Rabeea, 38, opened a sweet factory in March to provide a living to families like his own, who sought refuge in Erbil in August 2014 when Islamic State forced many Christians to flee their towns in the Nineveh plains.

- [Between limbo and hope: celebrating Easter with the exiles of northern Iraq](#)
13 April 2017
For the Christians of northern Iraq, this Easter is their third separated from their homes. But for some, it could mark the beginning of the end of their displacement, following military victories against Islamic State.
- [New Erbil university offers fresh hope for young lives disrupted by IS](#)
30 March 2017
The Catholic University of Erbil (CUE) opened in October 2016. Displaced young Iraqis whose education was halted by Islamic State’s violent seizure of territory are receiving a vital opportunity to catch up and train for professional life.
- [Opposition to Iraqi enclave for non-Muslims voiced by Erbil diocese](#)
30 March 2017
The Catholic Church in northern Iraq has voiced its opposition to suggestions that an enclave should be created to safeguard non-Muslims fearful of returning to live among their Muslim neighbours.
- [‘Six weeks’ medicine and two months’ food for displaced Iraqi Christians’](#)
24 March 2017
The supplies sustaining displaced Christians in northern Iraq will run out “within weeks” but UN agencies, accused of ignoring them, have pledged to do better.
- [Marbles in the midst of ashes: Iraqi boy returns home ‘post ISIS’](#)
23 March 2017
While the Iraqi military forces are pushing fighters of self-proclaimed Islamic State out of Mosul, their last stronghold, Foreign Ministers from 68 countries met yesterday in Washington to discuss next steps in defeating the militant group.
- [Iraqi families urged to return and rebuild homes in Nineveh Plains](#)
3 March 2017
As the offensive against IS in western Mosul drives civilians out of the jihadists’ last Iraqi stronghold, residents of towns already liberated are returning home with their expectations high – possibly too high.
- [Iraqi Christian refugees protest against UNHCR resettlement delays](#)
15 February 2017
Dozens of Iraqi Christians in Lebanon protested in central Beirut this week, demanding the UN to grant them quicker resettlement abroad. Between 150 and 200 demonstrators gathered outside a UN building, carrying placards.

- [Iraqi Christian couple despair at sight of house IS destroyed](#)
14 February 2017
Hathem and Almas are hoping to be among the first people to return to Karamles, a now-deserted town in the Nineveh Plains of northern Iraq.
- [Devastated northern Iraq needs ‘new Marshall Plan’ for reconstruction](#)
3 February 2017
The Archbishop of Erbil in northern Iraq, who is overseeing the care of thousands of displaced Christians who fled Islamic State jihadists, has announced ambitious plans for the Church and charities to reconstruct their towns and villages.
- [Cleaning up towns freed from IS ‘erases evidence of their crimes’](#)
2 February 2017
Efforts to clear villages liberated from Islamic State are undermining the possibility of recording the atrocities to people and heritage committed there, according to a leading Iraqi aid worker.
- [‘Many years’ before Mosul stable enough for Christians to return](#)
30 January 2017
Christians and other non-Sunni Muslims from Mosul, northern Iraq, waiting to return after their city’s liberation from Islamic State is completed, may have many years to wait, and their chances of doing so depend on the actions of the Iraqi Government, a leading researcher has warned.
- [Christians ‘excluded’ from Iraq’s reconstruction plans](#)
27 January 2017
Christians are being excluded from the reconstruction plans for northern Iraq, further eroding the likelihood of their return once Islamic State has been militarily defeated there, an alliance of UK-based charities has warned.
- [Iraqi Christian: ‘IS made me spit on a Cross and convert to Islam’](#)
18 January 2017
Zarefa, an elderly Iraqi Christian woman, was captured by Islamic State in 2014. “They forced me to spit on the Cross,” Zarefa recalls.
- [Devastation of liberated Iraqi Christian towns makes return home seem further away than ever](#)
15 December 2016
Islamic State fighters dealt one final, vicious blow to the Christian population before surrendering its occupied towns: by systematically setting fire to their homes, thousands have become practically uninhabitable.

- [Iraqi ambassador criticises country's conversion law](#)
2 December 2016
A “detrimental” law passed in the Iraqi parliament that forces children of parents who convert to Islam to automatically become Muslim will probably not be implemented, an Iraqi ambassador says.
- [Celebration for thousands of displaced Iraqis ahead of bittersweet homecoming](#)
24 November 2016
Thousands of displaced Iraqi Christians celebrated a “Return Festival” as the military advance against Islamic State (IS) in and around the city of Mosul raised their hopes of returning home after two years in exile.
- [Iraqi Christians ask: Where were our Kurdish protectors when IS came?](#)
22 November 2016
Kurdish Peshmerga forces had taken over positions abandoned by Iraqi army forces who had retreated in June 2014 as IS approached Mosul. However in early August 2014, when jihadists reached the villages and towns around Mosul and began forcing all non-Sunnis from them, Christians reported that the Peshmerga they depended on had disappeared.
- [Under the shadow of IS: Iraqi Christians tell of crucifixions, torture, sex slavery](#)
21 November 2016
When IS seized control of Iraqi territory in the summer of 2014, they gave Christians, as “People of the Book”, four options: leave, convert to Islam, pay a protection tax (*jiyza*) or be killed. The vast majority fled – an estimated 120,000 in a few short weeks that summer. But those left behind were subjected to torture, forced conversion, sexual slavery and even crucifixion, according to testimonies collected from Iraqi refugees in Jordan by the religious freedom charity ADF International.

Recent country developments

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

- [Iraq: New mass grave gives further confirmation of IS cruelty](#)
12 April 2018
Many more Christian civilians were killed in Iraq by the Islamic State group (IS) than previously suspected.

- [Iraq: Senior cleric uses radical Islamic rhetoric against Christians](#)
18 June 2017
One of Iraq’s most senior Shiite government clerics, Sheikh Alaa Al-Mousawi, has publicly stated that Christians are “infidels” and “polytheists” and stressed the need of *jihad* against them. In reaction, almost 200 Iraqi Christian families have filed a lawsuit against him.
- [Iraq: Gunmen kill Christian in front of own restaurant](#)
9 November 2016
Nizar Elias Musa was shot by gunmen on a passing motorcycle in Basrah province in southern Baghdad.
- [Iraq: Christians already worshipping again in recaptured church](#)
8 November 2016
Syriac Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, Butrus Moshe, and dozens of Christians celebrated the first Sunday mass in the charred ruins of the Grand Immaculate Church in Qaraqosh since it was recaptured from Islamic State (IS) only days before.

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