



## LIBYA: Country Dossier

April 2018



**Open Doors**

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 Countries<sup>1</sup>

		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

<sup>1</sup> 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 \(WWL\)](#)<sup>1</sup> including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))<sup>2</sup>. Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)<sup>3</sup> and WWR staff.

LIBYA		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	86	7
WWL 2017	78	11
WWL 2016	79	10
WWL 2015	76	13
WWL 2014	71	13

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

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

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

# WWL 2018: Keys to understanding LIBYA

## Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13754897>

## Recent country history

Colonel Gaddafi's regime was overthrown in 2011 by popular protests and NATO support. The civil war caused the death of at least 30,000 Libyans according to estimates by National Transitional Council of Libya.<sup>4</sup> The National Transitional Council (NTC) took over government in February 2011 and on 7 July 2012 Libyans voted in their first parliamentary elections since the end of Gaddafi's rule. The new assembly was given the task of drafting a new Libyan constitution to be approved in a general referendum.

Although these developments were considered to be notable democratic advances, due to escalating conflicts between the various forces that fought against Gaddafi, the country has since descended into a state of civil war. Broadly speaking the war pits a coalition of armed tribal and nationalist groups based in the east of the country against militant radical Islamic groups and an amalgam of tribal and regional militants based in the western part of the country.

- On one side of the civil war there are the forces in the east who launched a military campaign called "Operation Dignity" (which is also serving as a popular designation for the eastern based forces) and are led by General Khalifa Haftar. This military campaign is sanctioned by the House of Representatives which was elected in 2014. Although the House of Representatives enjoyed the recognition of the UN and most of the international community since 2014, it was pushed out of the capital by rival factions and forced to take refuge in eastern Libya in the city of Tobruk. Operation Dignity gets substantial material and diplomatic support from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates which all consider the rising forces of militant Islamism in Libya as a threat to the stability of the region.
- On the other side of the civil war, the coalition of forces that is largely made up of radical Islamic militants of various degree of extremism operates under the name "Libyan Dawn". Many of these militants walked out of the transitional and legal democratic process due to frustration with their poor performance in the parliamentary elections of June 2014. They have set up their own rival parliament (from the remnants of the General National Congress of Libya which had taken over power from the National Transitional Council for the years 2012-2014) and their own rival government in Tripoli. The Libyan Dawn forces enjoy the support of Qatar and Turkey. Elements of this coalition have sworn allegiance to the Islamic State group (IS)

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/26/libya-war-saving-lives-catastrophic-failure>, last accessed on 27 July 2017.

and have perpetrated the most despicable attacks against foreign Christians in Libya through beheadings.

- A third government that has appeared on the scene since 2016 is the so-called Government of National Accord (GNA). At the beginning of 2016 the UN facilitated a negotiation process that led to the formation of this new unity government. It took this new government a few months to even arrive in Tripoli and take control of the capital city. The GNA has yet to secure the approval of the parliament that is based in Tobruk, but it has had considerable success in its military campaign against IS. Forces loyal to the GNA retook the town of Sirte in 2016, which had been the stronghold of IS militants in Libya.

## The religious landscape

Under Gaddafi's rule, the government security service was effective in preventing the emergence of armed Islamic militias, but with the current state of civil war, even the most extreme version of militant Islamism in the form of IS have found a foothold in Libya. The situation is dire for Christians in Libya, many of whom are illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan Saharan Africa trying to make their way to Europe. Although in military terms IS forces seem to be defeated in Libya and have lost their stronghold in Sirte, it is still too early to conclude that the group is finished in Libya and no longer a threat to Christians in the country. Furthermore, there are several other radical Islamic groups that are active especially in the western part of the country.

## The political landscape

Libya is currently in a state of anarchy. The ongoing civil war in Libya between several militant groups allied with three rival governments means that the country will remain a safe haven for Islamist militant groups such as IS that are working to destabilize the whole region. The continued state of anarchy makes it probable that Christians will continue to be persecuted in Libya and it also provides a base of operations for militant groups to attack Christians in neighboring countries. Unfortunately, there seems to be no end in sight for the civil war and the instability that has engulfed Libya since the Arab Spring uprisings. Although Fayeze al-Sarraj (leader of the UN-backed GNA based in Tripoli) and General Khalifa Haftar (leader of the armed forces loyal to the parliament based in Tobruk) have met to discuss peace-deals on a number of occasions (e.g. on [25 July 2017](#)) observers have always been doubtful whether any such deals can be implemented.

## The socio-economic landscape

According to the UNDP Human Development Index<sup>5</sup> Libya is ranked 102 out of 188 countries. Although Libya used to be one of the African countries that performed relatively well in this

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<sup>5</sup> The [Human Development Index](#) (HDI) is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income per capita indicators. A country scores higher HDI when the life expectancy at birth is longer, the education period is longer,

assessment of the UNDP, since the Arab Spring its overall performance in the ranking has steadily declined as a result of - among other things - a decline in the accessibility and quality of health care and education. The ongoing civil war has resulted in the disruption of oil exports and the provision of social services that were state-subsidized before the conflict erupted. Huge amounts of money are being spent on armaments by the various sides in the conflict and the violence has caused widespread destruction which will take years to rebuild. The reigning anarchy has also made life easy for human traffickers, with Libya being one of the main routes for thousands of migrants making their way across the Mediterranean to Europe.

## Concluding remarks

Libya has become a classic failed state and, more than half a decade since the initial Arab Spring uprisings, its dreams of becoming an open and democratic country have been replaced with a nightmarish scenario in which a patchwork of militant groups control different parts of the country and vie for supremacy. The situation has not shown any sign of improvement over the years and it is difficult to see how the conflict will be resolved any time soon. In the meantime, the war and anarchy has increased the vulnerability of Christians in the country.

## WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

Source: WCD, May 2017

### How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
6,409,000	41,700	0.7

Source: WCD, May 2017

### How did Christians get there?

Christianity has existed in Libya ever since the times of the New Testament. With the emergence of Islam the Church was almost obliterated between the 7th and 12th centuries. Between the 12th and 17th centuries the activities of Christians were very limited.

The Roman Catholic Church was reintroduced in the 15th century, but was not active in mission work. Other denominations arrived later towards the end of the 19th century. At the

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and the income per capita is higher. It is used to distinguish whether the country is a developed, a developing or an underdeveloped country.

outbreak of WWII all non-Catholic missionaries were expelled from the country and were not able to return until 1946.

## What church networks exist today? <sup>6</sup>

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
24,200	10,600	3,300	1,300	2,200	0	1,900	2,700

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD data, most Christians in Libya are Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics. The small Christian communities consist almost exclusively of sub-Saharan migrants and miniscule numbers of American and European expatriate workers. There is also a small group of Asians (mainly Indians). Between one and two hundred Anglicans, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, attend weekly Sunday services in Tripoli. An estimated 80 Orthodox Christians, including members of the Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Russian communities, attend weekly Friday services in Tripoli. Hundreds of African migrant Protestants and hundreds of Catholics also attend services in Tripoli. Open Doors estimates around 500,000 foreigners are currently in the country, mostly from neighboring Arab countries and sub-Saharan Africa, with smaller numbers from South and Southeast Asia.

## Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others <sup>7</sup>
41,700	6,335,000	5,800	17,500	490	130	660	3,460

Also to note: Sikh 2,400 Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD 98.8% of Libyans are Muslim, with virtually all belonging to Sunni Islam. The dominance of Islam is given explicit constitutional recognition while the ancient roots of Christianity in Libya have been almost completely erased. In the civil war following the overthrow of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, militant Islamic groups are still fighting to gain the upper hand.

## Notes on the current situation

Christians in Libya face serious challenges in the following areas:

- The level of brutality against Christians by Islamic militants is high.

<sup>6</sup> **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.

<sup>7</sup> This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

- The complete breakdown of law and order makes Christians particularly vulnerable.
- Even the internationally recognized government does not have enough policy protection for Christians.

## WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018 Points: 86 / Position: 8**

WWL 2017 Points: 78 / Position: 11

WWL 2016 Points: 79 / Position: 10

### Where persecution comes from

Islamic militant groups and organized crime are the two main causes of Christian persecution in Libya. Libya is a country in which Christians are a very small minority, mostly made up of foreigners in search of work or a means of reaching Europe by crossing the Mediterranean. Christian migrants from sub-Saharan African countries face not only intolerance from the general population but also racial prejudice. Islamic militant groups that have proliferated since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 are an additional source of danger for Christians in Libya. Societal pressure and persecution from immediate and extended family members is also a problem that converts with a Muslim background face in the country. The state of anarchy and civil war has also made the situation worse for Christians by creating an environment of impunity in which organized criminal groups engage in human trafficking and Islamist militant groups can attack Christians without any fear of consequences.

### How Christians are suffering

Libyan Christians with a Muslim background face very violent and intense pressure from their family and the wider community to renounce their faith. Foreigners from other parts of the continent are also targeted by various Islamic militant groups and organized criminal groups. These groups kidnap Christians and there have also been instances in which Christians have been killed in a very brutal and shocking manner. Even when they do not face such a fate, Christians from sub-Saharan Africa are harassed, often held in detention centers and subjected to threats from radical Islamists. Christians who publicly express their faith and try to share the Gospel with others also face the risk of arrest and violence. The absence of a single central government to impose law and order in the county has made the situation for Christians precarious. The level of violence against Christians in Libya is very high and Christians are subjected to very violent, inhumane and degrading treatment.

### Examples

- Several Coptic Christians who were trying to go back to Egypt were detained in a prison in Tripoli's airport for two weeks were flogged twice a day during while in



detention. At least one of them had already been in captivity as a hostage for more than two weeks in Benghazi until his family paid [a ransom](#)<sup>8</sup>.

- In November 2016, two Egyptian Christians were executed in Libya by a group called Ansar al-Sharia due to their [faith](#).
- Although not covering the WWL 2018 reporting period, a [report](#)<sup>9</sup> by Amnesty International gives a clear indication of what Christians are currently going through: A 26-year-old from Eritrea who was held in a detention center in al-Zawiya, is quoted as saying: “They hate Christians. If you’re a Christian, all I can say is God help you if they find out...If they see a cross or a [religious] tattoo they beat you a lot more”. Another former detainee (from Nigeria) said that guards in the detention center in Misratah would separate the men according to religion and flog those who were Christians. A 22-year-old man from Eritrea who was beaten in detention after his boat was intercepted, stated: “They beat me, took my money and threw away my Bible and the cross I had on my neck...First they check whether one has money in the pockets, then they take an electrical cable and they whip you.”

## WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018 Points: 86 / Position: 8**

WWL 2017 Points: 78 / Position: 11

WWL 2016 Points: 79 / Position: 10

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<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/coptic-christians-migrating-to-libya-to-find-work-face-severe-torture-we-know-well-likely-die-197738/>.

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/eu-risks-fuelling-horrific-abuse-of-refugees-and-migrants-in-libya>.

## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

Libya rises 8 points to a score of 86 at rank 7 in the WWL 2018. The rise is directly attributable to the increase in violence against Christians, particularly in relation to transient migrants who are generally treated very badly and among whom Christians are singled out for even worse treatment. More information concerning this was available for WWL 2018. The overall state of anarchy has also continued and this contributes to the deplorable condition in which Christians in Libya are forced to exist.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Libya <sup>10</sup>	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	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Medium

### Islamic oppression (Very strong):

This engine manifests itself in different ways. Libya has a deeply Islamic culture in which converts from Islam to Christianity face huge pressure from their family members and community. Following Gaddafi's downfall, a variety of radical Islamic groups have a free hand in the country and have gained more influence and control over society.

### Organized corruption and crime (Medium):

This is a secondary persecution engine in Libya. The fact that corruption is so rife also contributes to perpetuating the lack of rule of law and impunity in the country. This engine is blended with *Islamic oppression* since some of the Islamic militant groups work with or act as organized criminal groups by engaging in human trafficking and other criminal activities.

## Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Libya	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	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	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Very strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong

<sup>10</sup> 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.

Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Very strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	Medium
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

#### **Drivers of Islamic oppression:**

In Libya there are several drivers of persecution. Ordinary people who subscribe to intolerant and extreme interpretations of Islam contribute to the persecution of Christians especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life*. The persecution of Christians by such people is exacerbated by a plethora of Islamist militant groups that control a considerable part of Libyan territory. Such groups are responsible for the most violent forms of persecution and act with absolute impunity due to the absence of a single government to impose any semblance of law and order in the country. Behind both drivers of persecution the teaching and influence of radical Wahhabi imams is present and hence these teachers could also be considered as drivers of persecution.

#### **Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:**

Criminal groups engaged in human trafficking and kidnapping for ransom are the most notable drivers of persecution when it comes to *Organized corruption and crime*. These groups engage in all sorts of predatory behavior against immigrants who are trying to make their way through Libya to Europe. In addition to being held hostage for ransom, many are sold into slavery and many women are subjected to sexual assault and rape.

## Context

Libya is currently in a state of anarchy with at least three competing governments. The ongoing civil war in Libya between several militant groups allied with three rival governments means that the country will remain a safe haven for Islamist militant groups that are working to destabilize the whole region. The continued state of anarchy makes it probable that Christians will continue to be persecuted in Libya and it also provides a base of operations for militant groups to attack Christians in neighboring countries. Unfortunately, there seems to be no end in sight for the civil war and the instability that has engulfed Libya since the Arab Spring of 2011. Although Fayeze al-Sarraj (leader of the UN-backed Government of National Accord based in Tripoli) and General Khalifa Haftar (leader of the armed forces loyal to the parliament based in eastern Libya in the city of Tobruk) have agreed on an outline of a peace deal facilitated by Italy, UAE and Egypt, there is a lot of doubt as to whether or not this deal could actually be implemented.<sup>11</sup>

According to the UNDP Human Development Index which ranks countries based on their socio-economic status, Libya is ranked 102 out of 188 countries. Although Libya used to be one of the African countries that performed relatively better, since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 its overall performance in the ranking has steadily fallen as a result of a decline in the accessibility and quality of health care and education, amongst other factors. The ongoing civil

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/05/haftar-serraj-meeting-libya-170511110810139.html>, last accessed 27 September 2017.

war has resulted in the disruption of oil exports and the provision of social services that were state-subsidized before the conflict erupted. Huge amounts of money are being spent on armaments by the various sides in the conflict and the violence has caused widespread destruction which will take years to rebuild.

Libya has become a classic failed state and, more than half a decade since the Arab Spring, its dreams of becoming an open and democratic country have been replaced with a nightmarish scenario in which a patchwork of militant groups control different parts of the country and vie for supremacy. The situation has not shown any sign of improvement over the years and it will be difficult to see how the conflict will be resolved any time soon. In the meantime, the conflict has increased the vulnerability of Christians in the country.

Migrants intercepted attempting to reach Europe are held in 24 detention centres across Libya run by the Department to Combat Irregular Migration (DCIM) which nominally falls under the control of Libya's Ministry of Interior, but in practice many are run by members of armed groups, at whose hands people of all faiths suffer. Violence, virtual slavery and sexual abuse is rife. Those detained are without protection given the lack of any national asylum law or system in Libya.<sup>12</sup> In the strongly Islamized context of Libya Christian migrants are particularly vulnerable.

Ibadi Muslims in Libya who do not belong to the Sunni or Shia Islamic traditions face persecution in the form of violent attacks by groups like IS and other militant Sunni groups. (Children of these radical groups are also taught using text books influenced by Wahhabism.)

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### **Communities of expatriate Christians:**

Christian migrant workers (most of them coming from sub-Saharan Africa and some from Egypt) are allowed to have their own churches, but Libyans are not allowed to attend. Under the despotic rule of Muammar Gaddafi, the situation for Christians in Libya was already extremely harsh. Expatriate or migrant Christians enjoy some freedom, but indigenous non-Arab Africans face double persecution - based on race and religion.

### **Historical Christian communities:**

This category does not exist in Libya as defined by WWL methodology.

### **Communities of converts to Christianity:**

The very small group of Libyan nationals who are Christians keep their faith secret. Libyans are forbidden to attend worship in official churches. The number of Libyan Christians from a Muslim background is very low, but with the appearance of Christian programs on satellite TV and Christian websites in Arabic, the interest in the Christian faith has been increasing. As in most Muslim countries, converting from Islam brings massive social pressure and converts are

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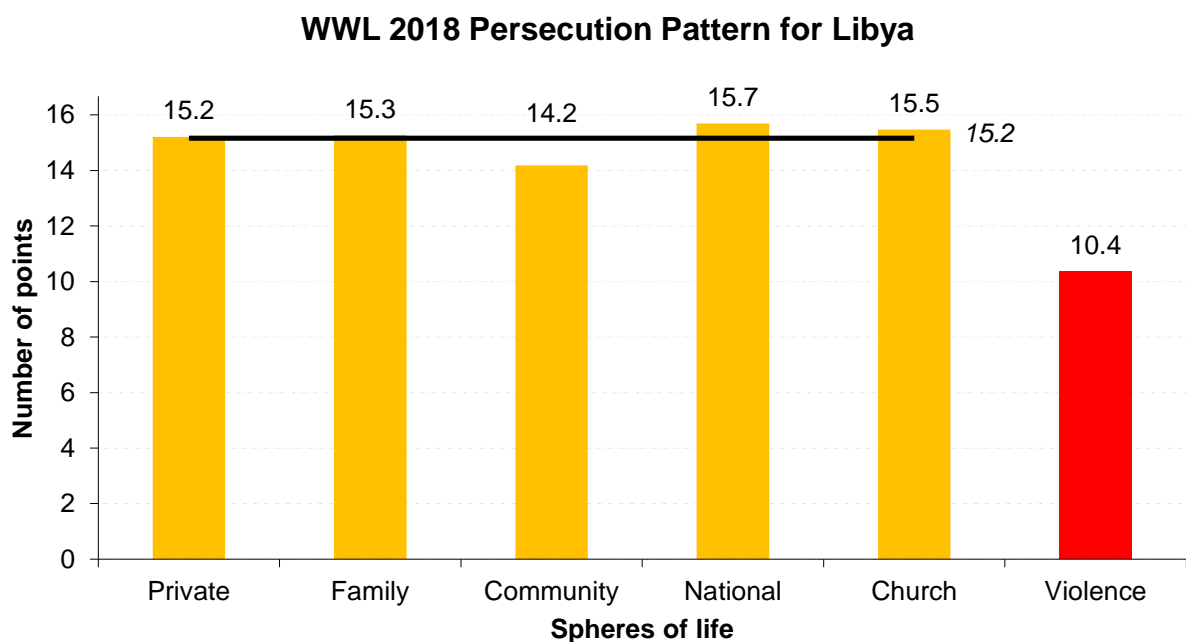
<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/eu-risks-fuelling-horrific-abuse-of-refugees-and-migrants-in-libya>, last accessed 9 December 2017.

always at risk from their families. Most Libyan Christians are afraid to meet with other believers, as any kind of religious gathering (other than Islamic) is forbidden for Libyans.

#### Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Libya as defined by WWL methodology.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Libya shows:

- The pressure on Christians in Libya is at an extreme level in all *Spheres of life*. The average pressure rose from 14.6 in WWL 2017 to 15.2. This shows that the longer anarchy and instability persists in Libya, the worse the situation for Christians becomes.
- Pressure is particularly strong in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This is because Islamist militant groups are in control of a considerable part of the country and act as public authorities. This causes churches and Christians (especially those with a Muslim background) to face enormous pressure and they are under a constant threat of violence.
- The score for violence rose from 5.4 in WWL 2017 to 10.4. As stated already, this increase is partly due to more information being available about violence to transient migrants who are generally treated very badly and among whom Christians are singled out for even worse treatment.

#### Private sphere:

Converts with a Muslim background experience rejection by family members in this very conservative society. Because of the oppression caused by the intolerance of society and relatives, Libyan Christians hardly dare to inform others about their faith. Many of them are forced to consider fleeing their homeland.

**Family sphere:**

One of the problems converts face is how to find a partner to marry. The country adheres to traditional Islamic law which states that a non-Muslim man must convert to marry a Muslim woman. Islamists in Libya have become so radical, that even Sufis are being persecuted.

**Community sphere:**

Christians in contemporary Libya face such a high degree of insecurity that their continued existence in Libya has become questionable. Commenting on this matter, one UK country expert has even gone to the extent of asserting: “We have lost the Christian presence in Libya” due to the “daily pressures of religious tensions” as well as violence against [Christianity](#).<sup>13</sup> Unless Christians conceal their religious beliefs, taking part in communal life is quite risky in contemporary Libya since they face a high risk of violence.

**National sphere:**

During Gaddafi's reign the main source of persecution was the government and its secret services. Now, radical Islamic movements (such as the Islamic State group) are responsible for most of the pressure and violence against Christians, in a country with an impotent central government and where rule of law is absent. To some extent, criminal gangs are also responsible for pressure on Christians.

**Church sphere:**

Normal church life is hardly possible for Libyan nationals. Migrant workers can gather in churches, but are also faced with important security risks. To bring in Christian literature and Bibles in Arabic remains strictly forbidden. This is another factor that suppresses the growth of the indigenous Church. The proselytizing of Muslims and missionary activity is officially prohibited in the country.

**Violence:**

The level of violence against Christians in Libya is very high. Due to the political instability and absence of law and order in the country, Christians are subjected to very violent, inhumane and degrading treatment. Although just outside the WWL 2018 reporting period, a [report](#)<sup>14</sup> by Amnesty International gives a clear indication of what Christians are still going through today: A 26-year-old from Eritrea who was held in a detention center in al-Zawiya, is quoted as saying: “They hate Christians. If you’re a Christian, all I can say is God help you if they find out...If they see a cross or a [religious] tattoo they beat you a lot more.” Another former detainee (from Nigeria) said that guards in the detention center in Misratah would separate the men according to religion and flog those who were Christians. A 22-year-old man from Eritrea who was beaten in detention after his boat was intercepted, stated: “They beat me,

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2017/04/20/expert-we-have-lost-the-christian-presence-in-libya/>, last accessed 27 September 2017.

<sup>14</sup> See: <https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/eu-risks-fuelling-horrific-abuse-of-refugees-and-migrants-in-libya>.

took my money and threw away my Bible and the cross I had on my neck...First they check whether one has money in the pockets, then they take an electrical cable and they whip you.”

- Several Coptic Christians who were trying to go back to Egypt were detained in a prison in Tripoli’s airport for two weeks were flogged twice a day during while in detention. At least one of them had already been in captivity as a hostage for more than two weeks in Benghazi until his family paid [a ransom](#)<sup>15</sup>.
- In November 2016, two Egyptian Christians were executed in Libya by a group called Ansar al-Sharia due to their [faith](#).

## Gender profile of persecution

### Female:

The form of persecution that occurs particularly to Christian women and girls is sexual assault and rape. In addition to the physical pain and injury that such attack causes on the victims, the trauma and emotional hardship it causes to their family, friends and fellow Christians is very high.

### Male:

Forced labor and forms of slavery are widespread forms of abuse and persecution experienced by Christian men. Beatings, torture and degrading treatment are also ways through which Christian men suffer from persecution.

## Future outlook

Due to the continuing prominence of local militias, including radical Islamic militants, and the absence of a single government with effective authority across the country, Christians cannot expect their situation to improve substantially in the foreseeable future. Widespread impunity for crimes committed against Christians is likely to continue. Even if the prominence and military might of IS has diminished in the WWL 2018 reporting period, the influence of radical Islamic groups in Libya will persist. The existence of rival governments in eastern and western Libya, the prevalence of tribalism and the fact that the country is awash with all kinds of weapons mean that the future of Libya as well as that of Christians in Libya is bleak.

Any hope for an improvement of the situation in Libya is contingent upon an improvement in the political and security condition within the country. Hopefully, the Government of National Accord will be able to assert more authority and restore law and order in the country. If this was to happen (even though it would not necessarily guarantee freedom of religion for Christians in Libya), such a state of affairs could mean that they would become less vulnerable from the most egregious forms of persecution. However, in the long run, the nature of the permanent political and constitutional order that would emerge from the current peace and

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<sup>15</sup> See: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/coptic-christians-migrating-to-libya-to-find-work-face-severe-torture-we-know-well-likely-die-197738/>.

transition process will be the most decisive factor for the freedom of religion of Christians in Libya.

## Policy considerations

Taking into account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors suggests the following policy recommendations:

- Strengthening state institutions is essential for rebuilding the country and ensuring fundamental rights including the freedom of religion. Therefore, the international community should redouble its efforts to strengthen state institutions and bring an end to the state of anarchy in Libya. Efforts at strengthening the state and resolving the conflict should also be accompanied by requirements concerning guarantees of the protection of the rights of minorities, including Christians.
- The international community should ensure that the UN-backed government in Tripoli (as well as other actors in Libya which are exercising state powers) fights impunity for the gross human rights violations and upholds the rights of minorities, including Christians.
- The UN and international community should monitor the activities of militia groups which seek to attack or reduce the freedom of religion or belief, and hold accountable those who are responsible for gross violations of human rights including freedom of religion.

## WWR in-depth reports

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

- [North Africa – Freedom of religion since the Arab Spring – 2016](#)<sup>16</sup>  
1 July 2016  
This research paper focusses on five North African countries, namely Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco and seeks to assess how the Arab Spring has affected Christians in these countries.
- [Libya – Freedom of religion in the land of anarchy – 2016](#)<sup>17</sup>  
15 May 2016  
This paper shows how the anarchic political and security condition in contemporary Libya has created a environment conducive for radical Islamic groups to persecute Christians blatantly and violently with absolute impunity.

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/North-Africa-Freedom-of-religion-since-the-Arab-Spring-WWR.pdf> (password: freedom).

<sup>17</sup> Available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Libya-Freedom-of-religion-in-the-land-of-anarchy-2016.pdf> (password: freedom).



## Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Libya 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/libya/>

- [Beheaded Copts' remains to be returned to families after three-year wait](#)  
8 March 2018  
The bodies of the 20 Egyptian Copts and one Ghanaian Christian, beheaded by the Islamic State group on the Libyan coast in February 2015, are due to be returned to their families within the next two weeks.
- [Libya: bodies of beheaded Copts found](#)  
9 October 2017  
The bodies of the 20 Egyptians and one Ghanaian have been found close to where they were executed on a beach in the coastal city of Sirte, according to the Egyptian public prosecutor's office. The men still had their hands tied behind their backs and were still wearing the orange jumpsuits they wore when they were executed.
- [Libyan Christian arrested for proselytising](#)  
8 November 2016  
A Libyan man who converted to Christianity has been arrested in the eastern city of Benghazi, accused of "proselytising on social media and denigrating Islam.

## Recent country developments

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

- [Libya: Clashes resume between rival governments](#)  
19 June 2017  
According to Al-Jazeera reporting on 27 May 2017, the National Salvation Government (NSG) launched a pre-Ramadan attack in an attempt to wrest back control of Tripoli from the UN-backed Government of National Accord.

- [Libya: On the verge of a future peace deal?](#)  
25 May 2017  
Fayez al-Sarraj, who leads the UN-backed Government of National Accord based in Tripoli, and General Khalifa Haftar, who is the leader of armed forces loyal to the rival parliament based in eastern Libya in the city of Tobruk, have agreed on a framework for a peace deal in UAE.
- [Libya: IOM report exposes African migrant slave-markets](#)  
8 May 2017  
A report by the International Organization of Migration (IOM) published on 11 April 2017, highlights the fate of sub-Saharan migrants being sold as slaves in southern Libya by smugglers and militant groups.
- [Libya: Oil crescent lost and regained](#)  
2 April 2017  
The elected National Parliament of Libya (based in Tobruk, eastern Libya, led by General Khalifa Haftar) has regained control of key oil port and refineries in the coastal area of al-Sidra and Ras Lanuf. They had been captured earlier in the month by Benghazi Islamic militants armed with high-tech weaponry.
- [Libya: IS remnants regrouping southeast of Tripoli](#)  
24 February 2017  
According to Reuters on 10 February 2017, Islamic State (IS) militants have relocated to the desert valleys and inland hills southeast of Tripoli after being pushed out of their last stronghold in Libya, the coastal town of Sirte.

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