



CAMEROON: Country Dossier

June 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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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.

CAMEROON		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	No published details	-
WWL 2017	No published details	-
WWL 2016	No published details	-
WWL 2015	No published details	-
WWL 2014	No published details	-

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 CAMEROON

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13146029>

Recent country history

Cameroon is a West African country sharing borders with Gabon, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria. The country has more than 200 ethnic groups and it is referred to as "Africa in miniature" due to its diversity.⁴ French and English are the official languages. Europeans made contact with Cameroon when the Portuguese explorer, Fernando Po, led an expedition up the Wouri River in 1472. In 1520 the Portuguese established a sugar plantation which was later taken over by the French in the 1600s.⁵ In 1884, the agreement between Germany and local chiefs put the country under German domination. At the end of World War 1, the country was taken away from Germany and divided into two with France getting a mandate over 80% of the area, and Britain getting a mandate over the remaining 20%. The French colony became independent in 1960. The area that was ruled by the British gained independence in 1961. The same year, part of the area ruled by the British voted to join Nigeria and the other part the Republic of Cameroon.

Over the last years, northern Cameroon has come under a series of attacks orchestrated by the Islamist group Boko Haram. A report released by Amnesty International in September 2015 states: "Boko Haram has slaughtered nearly 400 civilians in northern Cameroon ... As Boko Haram has brought its violence to Cameroon, civilians have come increasingly under fire. By killing indiscriminately, destroying civilian property, abducting people and using children as suicide bombers, they have committed war crimes and caused untold fear and suffering to the civilian population."⁶ In November 2015 the Guardian also reported that civilians in northern Cameroon had been victim to suicide bombers.⁷ The attacks by Boko Haram, especially in northern Nigeria has forced the international community into action. The African Union voted to send more than 7000 troops. If the governments in the region do not design social and economic policies that help to neutralize some of the recruiting tools of Boko Haram, it will be difficult to expect prosperity and peace to return to the region. The far northern territory of Cameroon is one of the remaining strongholds of Boko Haram and the group is still active, especially in the northern part of the country.

⁴ See BBC country profile.

⁵ See BBC country profile.

⁶ See: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/cameroon-hundreds-slaughtered-by-boko-haram-and-abused-by-security-forces/>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

⁷ See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/22/eight-dead-after-suspected-boko-haram-attack-in-cameroon>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

Currently, the country is also facing a crisis due the insurgency by Anglophone Cameroonians who feel that they are being mistreated by the president and his administration.⁸ This growing tension will have an impact on Christians at least indirectly - Boko Haram will get more opportunities to attack Christians as the focus of the country is shifting toward the issue of Anglophone Cameroonians.

The religious landscape

Cameroon is a majority Christian nation. According to World Christian Database (2017), 59.8% of the population is Christian, 20.2% Muslim and 18.9% Ethno-religionist. There are clear differences here to the US State Department's 2010 estimate, which states: "69.2 percent of the population is Christian, 20.9 percent Muslim, 5.6 percent animist, 1.0 percent other religions, and 3.2 percent report no religious affiliation. Of Christians, approximately 38.4 percent are Roman Catholic, 26.3 percent Protestant, 4.5 percent other Christian denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses, and less than 1 percent Orthodox. There are growing numbers of Christian revivalist churches."⁹ According to Pew Research, Christians constitute 70.3%, Muslim 18.3%, folk religion 3.3%.¹⁰

The political landscape

Cameroon is a unitary republic with a president as head of state. Since the country has had experience with German, French and British occupation, the country's legal system is based on a mixture of English common law and the Napoleonic Code. The parliament is bicameral: the National Assembly (the lower house) has 180 members and the Senate (the upper house) has 100 members.¹¹

The country was rated "not free" by Freedom House in 2017.¹² The report states that the country's long- serving president has failed to create a state where rule of law is respected, pluralism flourishes, and freedom of expression and assembly are observed. Bertelsmann Index (BTI) also states: "The legislative and judicial branches have little control over the executive. The judiciary is plagued by corruption, lacks independence and adequate resources".¹³ Reporters Without Borders also states that Biya's regime has curtailed freedom of expression, the press and other fundamental rights that the citizens of the country should enjoy.¹⁴

Paul Biya, one of the longest-serving presidents in Africa, came to power in 1982 after the country's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, resigned from his post. There was a failed coup in

⁸ See <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/250-camerouns-anglophone-crisis-crossroads>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

⁹ See <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

¹⁰ See

http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/cameroon/#?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2015, last accessed 2 March 2018.

¹¹ See <http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/cameroon/constitution-politics>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

¹² See <https://freedomhouse.org/country/cameroon>

¹³ See <http://www.bti-project.org/reports/country-reports/wca/cmr/index.nc>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

¹⁴ For details about freedom of the press and Cameroon please visit, http://en.rsf.org/cameroon-journalist-to-be-tried-for-27-10-2015_48486.html, last accessed 2 March 2018.

1983, which many believed was orchestrated by Ahmadou Ahidjo. As a result, Ahmadou Ahidjo was forced into exile. In 1984, there was another unsuccessful coup attempt and more than 1000 people, mainly soldiers, were arrested. 30 of them were put to death.¹⁵ Biya's regime has created an environment of corruption, nepotism and impunity. In 1990 he introduced a multiparty system and won the first presidential election held in 1992. However, many believe that the opposition leader John Fru Ndi won the most votes.¹⁶ Discontent erupted and Biya introduced a state of emergency. Amnesty International reported in 1997: "Fundamental human rights are persistently violated in Cameroon."¹⁷ In 2008, the parliament, which was/is controlled by the president's party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (RDPC), passed a constitutional amendment that allowed Biya to run for the presidency again in 2011. He won the election to serve as president for another seven years even though the result was rejected by the opposition party. After 34 years in power, Paul Biya is still in a strong position and – apart from his advanced age - there is nothing to stop him trying to run for a further term. According to International Crisis Group, the lack of reform in the country might lead to a situation whereby Cameroon could become a "fragile state".

The socio-economic landscape

The discovery and exploitation of oil in the Gulf of Guinea since the 1970s has affected society which had previously been mainly agrarian.¹⁸ Heritage Foundation considers the country's economy to be "mostly unfree", ranking it 149th globally and 32nd regionally in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁹ According to Heritage Foundation: "Trade is significant for Cameroon's economy; the combined value of exports and imports equals 51 percent of GDP. The average applied tariff rate is 15.8 percent. Nontariff barriers impede trade. The prevalence of state-owned enterprises limits foreign investment. The financial sector is dominated by multiservice banks. Access to credit remains limited in rural areas, and the cost of long-term financing is high."²⁰ According to the World Bank, the growth of population and the economy are not matching: "As population growth outpaces poverty reduction, the number of poor increased between 2007 and 2014 by 12 percent to 8.1 million people. Poverty is increasingly concentrated in Cameroon's northern regions with an estimated 56 percent of the poor living in the North and Far North regions alone. This poverty trend was observed even before conflict began destabilizing the region."²¹ The socio-economic situation in the country does not have unique impact on Christians. But due to the current conflict and the challenges posed by Boko Haram, the crisis does have social impact on Christians.

Concluding remarks

A significant part of West Africa has become a battleground between government and militant forces.²² Coupled with the fact that the Cameroon government is not respecting or protecting

¹⁵ David Lea (editor), *A Political Chronology of Africa*, (Europa Publications Limited 2001), p.61

¹⁶ See: http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Paul_Biya.aspx, last accessed 2 March 2018.

¹⁷ See: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a98818.html>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

¹⁸ See: <http://www.bti-project.org/reports/country-reports/wca/cmr/index.nc>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/cameroon>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

²⁰ See: <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/cameroon>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

²¹ See: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview>, last accessed 2 March 2018.

²² Boko Haram is active in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger.

the rights of its citizens, the future of the country does not look bright. In the northern part of the country where radicalization and militancy is taking pace, the life of Christians is even harder. As it stands, even if Boko Haram is defeated, social harmony is unlikely to result since Islamist ideology has already deeply affected Muslim youth in the region. It seems that the threat by Boko Haram and the growing radicalization of Muslims have also led to the rise of a Christian revivalist group, referred to as “Born Again”. According to a report in September 2015 by International Crisis Group (ICG), this could create further conflict and a more comprehensive response is needed. The report pinpoints “improving populations’ awareness” and the “promotion of socio-economic development” as areas to be addressed.²³ If things continue as they are, there might be sectarian violence on a scale of what happened in Central African Republic (CAR) in the last years. What is happening in the country as a result of a protest by Anglophone Cameroonians and the government’s response could lead to a full-blown civil war if not handled wisely.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
24,514,000	14,652,000	59.8

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

The Portuguese brought Christianity to the country in 1429. However, the Roman Catholic Church only officially started establishing congregations in the country towards the end of the 19th century. The London Baptist Missionary Society (LBMS) sent missionaries in 1845 who were part of a wider influx of European merchants and explorers looking for business opportunities and raw materials. The first LBMS missionaries were led by Alfred Saker along with a group of West Indian Baptist preachers mainly from Jamaica. US Presbyterians came in 1879.

When Germany began colonizing the region in 1880, the Protestant effort was taken over by the German Baptists and the German Basel missionaries. German Catholic missionaries opened the first successful Catholic mission in 1890.²⁴

²³ See <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/cameroon/229-cameroon-the-threat-of-religious-radicalism.aspx>

²⁴ See: Sundkler B. and Steed C., A History of the Church in Africa, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 750-756.

What church networks exist today? ²⁵

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
1,200	6,190,000	5,016,000	1,968,000	1,553,000	-76,600	1,429,000	2,572,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to the US State Department 2016 Religious Freedom Report: Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The two Anglophone regions are largely Protestant, and the five southern Francophone regions are mostly Catholic.²⁶ Some denominations are members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) including the African Protestant Church, the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the Native Baptist Church of Cameroon, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, and the Union of Baptist Churches in Cameroon.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ²⁷
14,652,000	4,951,000	0	480	4,641,000	63	62,900	205,700

Source: WCD, May 2017

Notes on the current situation

- Challenges faced by Christians face include Boko Haram violence in the region and the dictatorial nature of Paul Biya's regime (which is one of the most corrupt regimes in Africa) and the absence of rule of law in the country.
- The government is known to target specific Christian denominations. In 2013, the government closed down around 100 Pentecostal churches.
- Some Christian organizations have experienced difficulties in getting registered. According to the According to the US State Department 2016 Religious Freedom Report, "the Cameroon Bible Fellowship, has been seeking government recognition since 2002".²⁸

²⁵ **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.

²⁶ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 16 February 2018.

²⁷ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

²⁸ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 16 February 2018.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Where persecution comes from

Islamic oppression primarily affects Christians with a Muslim background who are persecuted by their family and is particularly present in the north, in Adamawa, and also in some eastern regions. The Boko Haram Islamic insurgency also poses a constant threat to the life and security of Christians and has caused the displacement of many Christians from Adamawa, the north and the extreme northern regions. In remote areas in these regions, some Muslim leaders believe that Islam should be the only religion present. Although Cameroon is generally a country where there is religious tolerance, the memories and legacies of Fulani-led *jihad* in the northern regions lingers on: It was through *jihad* that the indigenous population was forcibly converted to Islam in past centuries. The violence and activity of Boko Haram has brought these memories alive and is undermining the history of peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims in modern-day Cameroon.

How Christians are suffering

Muslims are severely hindered if they want to convert to Christianity, and in predominantly Muslim parts of the country there has been a process of radicalization. Converts from Islam are threatened when Bibles or other Christian literature is found in their possession. Converts are not free to express their faith or Christian opinions, be it to immediate family members or others since doing so exposes them to grave risk. Christians with a Muslim background in the northern part of the country face difficulties, for instance there have been a few cases of Christian children in the north who have been put under pressure by non-Christian relatives to attend Islamic education. Many Christians with Muslim background face problems with local communities in remote areas in the northern regions. Female converts are coerced into marriage with non-Christians and face the danger of abduction by Boko Haram. Church activities have been hindered or disturbed in areas where Boko Haram has been active. Due to the displacement of people, churches have not been able to function normally in those parts of the country. In other areas, security injunctions have set heavy demands on church activities.

Examples

- Eight Christian children and a church elder were killed in the far north as a result of suicide attacks carried out by Boko Haram.
- Six Christian children were abducted by suspected Boko Haram militants in Moskota, after their father was killed in early August 2017.
- At least 2 houses belonging to Christians were burnt down and looted by suspected Boko Haram insurgents in Moskota.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

Score and rank are not available for publication.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Cameroon ²⁹	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Weak
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Weak
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

Islamic oppression (Strong):

This is particularly present in the north, in Adamawa, and also in some eastern regions. *Islamic oppression* affects primarily Christians with a Muslim background who are persecuted by their family. The Boko Haram Islamic insurgency also poses a constant threat to the life and security of Christians. The violence of Boko Haram has also caused the displacement of many Christians from Adamawa, the north and the extreme northern regions. In remote areas in these regions,

²⁹ 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.

some Muslim leaders believe that Islam should be the only religion present. Although Cameroon is generally a country where there is religious tolerance, the memories and legacies of Fulani-led *jihad* in the northern regions lingers on: It was through *jihad* that the indigenous population was forcibly converted to Islam. The violence and activity of Boko Haram has brought these memories alive and is undermining the history of peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims in modern day Cameroon.

Drivers of persecution

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

The main drivers of *Islamic oppression* in Cameroon are fanatical and militant groups like Boko Haram who engage in violent attacks targeting both Christians and those Muslims not adhering to the same interpretation of Islam as them. In addition to these groups, government officials at the local level who sympathize with such groups also contribute to the persecution of Christians. Family members and neighbors of converts from Islam also act as drivers of *Islamic oppression*. Some Islamic preachers also encourage such persecution of converts in their teaching.

Context

Cameroon is a West African state with a population of just over 24.5 million and was formed (gaining independence) as an amalgamation of adjacent French and British colonies in 1960. As a result, both French and English are official languages. Cameroon is a unitary republic with a president as head of state. Since the country has had experience with German, French and British occupation, the country's legal system is based on a mixture of English common law and Napoleonic Code. Customary law also plays a major role in the country. The Anglophone-Francophone division is a major issue in the country and contributes to unrest and political tension. Anglophone Cameroonians feel that they are being discriminated against and marginalized by the politically dominant francophone Cameroonians.

The current president of Cameroon, Paul Biya, is one of the longest-serving presidents in Africa and came to power in 1982 after the country's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, resigned from

his post. Biya's regime has created an environment of corruption, nepotism and impunity. In 1990 he introduced a multiparty system and won the first presidential election held in 1992. Over the last years, northern Cameroon has come under a series of attacks orchestrated by the Islamist group Boko Haram. A report released by Amnesty International in September 2015 states: "Boko Haram has slaughtered nearly 400 civilians in northern Cameroon ... As Boko Haram has brought its violence to Cameroon, civilians have come increasingly under fire. By killing indiscriminately, destroying civilian property, abducting people and using children as suicide bombers, they have committed war crimes and caused untold fear and suffering to the civilian population."³⁰

A significant part of West Africa has become a battleground between governments and Islamic militant groups. The situation in Cameroon is made worse by the government being unwilling to respect the rights of citizens. The discontent and protest of Anglophone Cameroonians is growing more intense and has even led to violence and the rise of militant secessionist groups claiming to have formed a new state called "Ambazonia". Rampant corruption, misrule and oppression are fueling the protest and yet the government seems unwilling to provide meaningful concessions and undertake necessary reforms.

According to the 2016 annual International Religious Freedom [Report](#)³¹, issued by the US State Department, Muslim Cameroonians have occasionally faced discrimination and have been stigmatized by society for allegedly supporting Boko Haram.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Communities of expatriate Christians do not exist as a separate WWL category in Cameroon.

Historical Christian communities:

According to World Christian Database statistics, Roman Catholics make up over 42% of the Christians population. However, there are also several Protestant denominations (e.g. Presbyterians) who can also be considered as belonging to this category. They do not suffer as much persecution as convert communities, but nevertheless, some congregations have been affected by Boko Haram violence and the *Dictatorial paranoia* of the government also undermines the autonomy of these Christian communities.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Converts from Islam to Christianity are the most persecuted Christian group in the country, whether they meet in secret or riskily share fellowship with other Christians. Convert Christians in Protestant churches, are often persecuted by family and community in northern regions, Adamawa and eastern and western regions. Some converts were reportedly threatened during Boko Haram attacks to reconvert to Islam. Therefore, this community of Christians faces the risk of pressure, ostracism and violence. This often leads to forced displacement to safer parts of the country. Those who convert from ethnic religious beliefs to

³⁰ See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/cameroon-hundreds-slaughtered-by-boko-haram-and-abused-by-security-forces/>, last accessed 23 February 2018.

³¹ See: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/268872.pdf>, last accessed 23 February 2018.

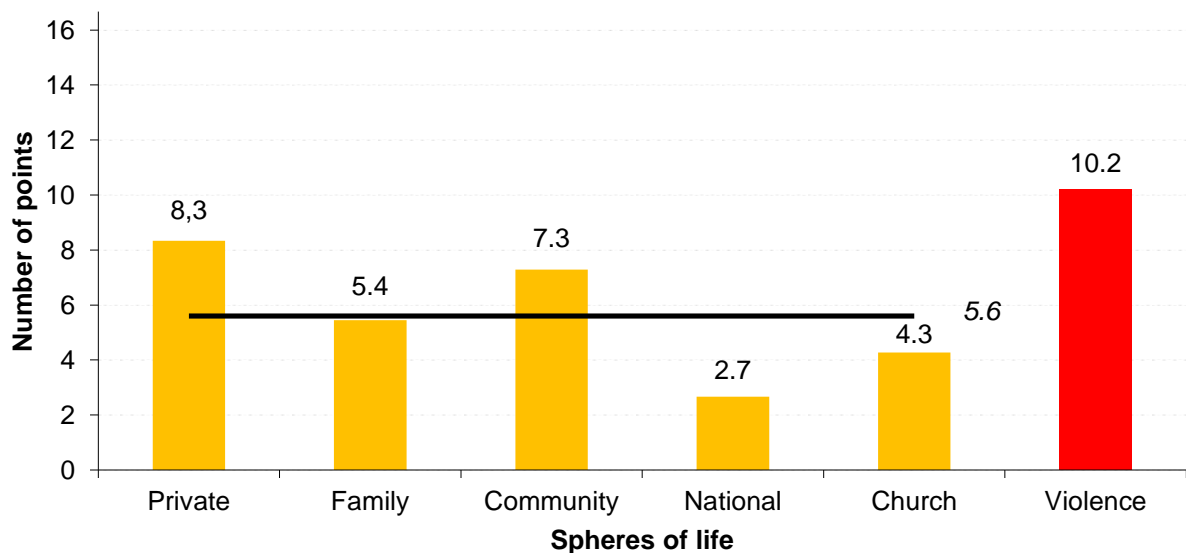
Christianity face pressure from their community and families to renounce Christianity, but the pressure is less intensive.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This is a growing category in Cameroon; Baptist and Pentecostal groups are examples. While some Pentecostal churches have criticized the government and have faced threats of closure, others have tried to align themselves with the government, campaigning and mobilizing funds for the ruling party during election. The pressure from the government undermines the freedom of such churches. These churches also face threats and violence from groups like Boko Haram in the north. *Islamic oppression* in the north has also made the evangelistic efforts of such groups (as well as integration of Christians with a Muslim background) risky.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Cameroon



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Cameroon shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Cameroon is fairly high at 5.6 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private sphere* which is mainly due to the restrictions and risks faced by Christians with a Muslim background.
- The score for violence is very high (10.2), which is only marginally lower than in the WWL 2017 reporting period.

Private sphere:

Muslims are severely hindered if they want to convert to Christianity, and in predominantly Muslim parts of the country there has been a process of radicalization. Converts are threatened when Bibles or other Christian literature is found in their possession. Converts are not free to express their faith or Christian opinions, be it to immediate family members or

others since doing so exposes them to grave risk. In some cases, especially in North Cameroon where these extended family members are Muslim, Christians have faced harassment when they proclaim their faith to these extended family members. Therefore, especially those converts living with their Muslim family have to be discreet and careful in their acts of private worship.

Family sphere:

For most Christians in the country, there is little or no persecution in this sphere. However, Christians with a Muslim background in the northern part of the country face difficulties. There have been a few cases of Christian children in the north who have been put under pressure by non-Christian relatives to attend Islamic education. Converts have been put under pressure to break contact with other Christians. In some parts of the country - especially in northern Cameroon (e.g. Touboro) - Christian spouses have been refused custody over children by non-Christian spouses.

Community sphere:

Christians in the Edea region have been hindered in sharing communal land, access to mountains and other sites regarded by ethnic religions as being sacred. Many Christians with Muslim background face problems with local communities in remote areas of the northern regions. Female converts are coerced into marriage with non-Christians and face the danger of abduction by Boko Haram. Educational opportunities for Christians are also restricted and this is something that particularly affects converts from Islam in the northern parts of the country (e.g. in Touboro). Many Christian headteachers have been compelled to close their schools in the Bamenda region, fearing attacks by Boko Haram.

National sphere:

Muslims dominate the governmental structure in most of the northern provinces. At times in these provinces, Christians have been discriminated against in interaction with government authorities and agencies. The discrimination against Christians is more pronounced for converts from Islam - they face discrimination in promotion possibilities and in securing employment. Furthermore, certain pastors, churches and missionary groups are sometimes under watch by government intelligence agencies since they are perceived to be critical of the government. The dictatorial orientation of the government makes it very sensitive and hostile to actual or perceived criticism. Therefore, churches and Christians are forced to tread carefully when expressing their opinion about public matters from the perspective of their faith.

Church sphere:

Church activities have been hindered or disturbed in areas where Boko Haram has been active. Due to the displacement of people, the church has not been able to function normally in those parts of the country. In other areas, security injunctions have set heavy demands on church activities. Government instructions have restricted the manner and timing and place of Christian gatherings. There are also considerable delays in registering churches. Although most churches operate without registration and are rarely punished for this, the lack of registration can always be used to threaten a church with closure whenever the government feels the

churches in question have not sided with it politically. In some instances, Christian teaching and published materials have been monitored by the state due to *Dictatorial paranoia*.

Violence:

The main instigator of violent persecution in Cameroon is Boko Haram. The government has not been able to neutralize the influence of this militant group which still continues to attack and be a threat to Cameroonians in the northern parts of the country, particularly to Christians and churches. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, the violent attacks by Boko Haram continued unabated. For example:

- Eight Christian children and a church elder were killed in the far north as a result of suicide attacks carried out by Boko Haram.
- Six Christian children were abducted by suspected Boko Haram militants in Moskota, after their father was killed in early August 2017.
- At least 2 houses belonging to Christians were burnt down and looted by suspected Boko Haram insurgents in Moskota.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male: No data currently available.

Future outlook

The future looks stormy for Christians in Cameroon. As the protests against the government escalate due to the grievances of Anglophone Cameroonians, the government is likely to get more and more repressive. This could mean that persecution due to *Dictatorial paranoia* will get worse in the country. Furthermore, as the government focuses more and more on suppressing political dissent and opposition, it will be distracted from its fight against Boko Haram. This could provide Boko Haram greater operational leeway for staging attacks with impunity. Thus, the prospect of more repression, violence and greater political crises in the country means that the situation for the persecuted Church is unlikely to get better in Cameroon in the foreseeable future.

Policy considerations

Taking into account the above persecution dynamics, Open Doors International makes the following recommendations:

- Development partners and the international community should urge the government of Cameroon to provide more freedoms to its citizens including freedom of religion and worship in accordance with its international human rights commitments.
- In particular, the government of Cameroon should refrain from interfering with and undermining the autonomy of churches for political purposes and delaying and manipulating the process of church registration.

- The international community should also work with the government of Cameroon to diffuse political tensions arising between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians.
- The international community should also assist the government of Cameroon to fight and defeat Boko Haram.

WWR in-depth reports

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

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Cameroon 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/cameroon/>

- UNHCR to Cameroon: Stop deporting Nigerian refugees
26 April 2018
The UN refugee agency has repeated its call to Cameroon to stop forcing Nigerian refugees to return to unsafe Borno State in neighbouring Nigeria. Since the beginning of 2018 Cameroon has deported 385 Nigerians, the majority of them in April.
- Thousands of churches closed in Rwanda, as Cameroon considers following suit
6 April 2018
The call to shut down some of Cameroon's Pentecostal churches follows reports of gross misconduct by a number of pastors.
- Death and destruction as Boko Haram launches fresh attacks in Cameroon
1 March 2018
The 23 February attack on Virkaza and nearby Tchebechebe was the fourth time Boko Haram has raided villages in Cameroon this year.

- [Boko Haram strikes again in northern Cameroon, killing pregnant woman and setting church on fire](#)
20 February 2018
On 4 February 2018, six people – five Christians and one follower of a tribal religion – lost their lives in an attack in Gitawa, near Tourou, in the Mayo-Tsanaga department.
- [Boko Haram sets churches on fire in latest attack on Cameroon’s Far North](#)
29 January 2018
Residents of Roum village in the Far North region of Cameroon woke up to two churches and many houses ablaze on the night of 15 January 2018. The fire was claimed by Boko Haram militants, who had stormed the village late at night. Four people were killed.
- [Cameroon: 6 siblings kidnapped by Boko Haram escape to safety](#)
31 October 2017
Six siblings between the ages of 3 and 15, who were kidnapped from Moskota in the Far North region of Cameroon on 17 August 2017, have been found near the border with Nigeria by a group of vigilantes.
- [Boko Haram: 381 killed in Nigeria and Cameroon since April](#)
5 September 2017
An upsurge in Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria and Cameroon have claimed the lives of at least 381 civilians in the five months since the start of April 2017.
- [Boko Haram in Cameroon: 8 children killed by boy suicide bomber, 6 others kidnapped](#)
25 August, 2017
On 6 August 2017, eight children were killed in a suicide attack in Amchide. The suicide bomber, a young child, met the children while they played outside in the evening – then detonated his bombs. All eight children had attended Sunday school in Amchide, as part of the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEEC).
- [Thousands of Nigerian refugees forced back home to looming famine](#)
30 June 2017
Thousands of Nigerians who fled Boko Haram’s insurgency, and sought refuge in neighbouring Cameroon, have been forced back home. According to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), some 887 Nigerians, most of them children, were repatriated against their will on 27 June 2017 alone.

- [Unicef: Boko Haram increasing use of child suicide bombers](#)
13 April 2017
One of every five suicide bombers deployed by Boko Haram in the past two years has been a child, usually a girl, according to a new report released by Unicef. Boko Haram used 44 children in suicide attacks in 2016, compared with only four in 2014. The youngest bomber so far was thought to be eight years old.
- [Boko Haram causing ‘untold misery’ in northern Cameroon](#)
9 December 2016
According to the UNHCR, the Boko Haram insurgency has caused nearly 170,000 people in the Far North Region to flee their homes, while the area has received at least 73,000 Nigerian refugees escaping the jihadists’ attacks at home. A great number of the displaced are Christians.

Recent country developments

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

- [Cameroon: Africa’s next civil war looming?](#)
11 June 2018
An uprising in the country’s two English-speaking regions has been met with brutal government repression. The government has been accused of authorizing targeted killings and thousands of people have fled, many of them across the border into Nigeria.
- [Cameroon/Nigeria: Cameroonian forces enter Nigeria seeking separatist rebels](#)
13 February 2018
Cameroonian security forces briefly crossed the border into Nigeria’s Cross River State to crack down on armed separatists among the over 3000 Cameroonian refugees in the Nigerian town of Danare.
- [Cameroon/Nigeria: Boko Haram killings continue](#)
19 November 2017
According to a report by News 24 on 31 October 2017, at least 11 people were killed in a night raid in Cameroon and a further 5 in a mosque suicide attack in Borno State, Nigeria.

- [Cameroon: Independence activists killed as divisions deepen](#)

30 October 2017

Government soldiers in Cameroon have killed at least eight demonstrators and wounded several others in the volatile English-speaking regions amid a crackdown on activists who wish to secede from the country and set up an independent republic called Ambazonia.

- [Cameroon: Church in Cameroon in legal fight over pilgrimage site](#)

12 October 2017

Leaders of indigenous peoples in Cameroon are taking a local Catholic bishop to court in an attempt to stop Catholics going on pilgrimage to a mountain-top area considered sacred to their ethnic-animist religion.

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