



IVORY COAST: Country Dossier

June 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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research@od.org

www.opendoorsanalytical.org

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.

IVORY COAST – Country Dossier (June 2018)

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Introduction

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

IVORY COAST		
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 IVORY COAST

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13287216>

Recent country history

Ivory Coast is in West Africa and has more than sixty different ethnic groups, which can be reduced to “four major cultural regions--the East Atlantic (primarily Akan), West Atlantic (primarily Kru), Voltaic, and Mandé.”⁴ Due to its location, the country was very important for the transatlantic slave trade. Muslim merchants established trade routes from northern Africa to Ivory Coast in the Middle Ages, seeking gold, ivory and slaves.⁵ Kingdoms, such as the Baule and Abron, were established in different regions of the country.⁶ Today the country shares borders with Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana. After imposing a protectorate over the coastal zone in 1842, France finally made Ivory coast an official colony in 1893,⁷ making it part of French West Africa that included Mauritania, Senegal, Mali (French Sudan), French Guinea, Burkina Faso, (then Upper Volta), Benin (then Dahomey) and Niger. It became independent in 1960. Since 1983 Yamoussoukro is the official capital city but Abidjan is the commercial and administrative center. French is the official language.

On 31 October 1960, Ivory Coast’s National Assembly came up with a new constitution establishing itself as an independent republic. Felix Houphouet-Boigny became president and remained so until he died in 1993. He declared a one-party system and ruled for more than thirty years. The country became stable and the economy grew. The president was hailed as “a leader capable of maintaining ethnic unity and political stability within a diverse and historically disunited country.”⁸ Yet below the surface there were problems. The economic progress and relative stability could not mask the fact that political divisions in the country had not yet been overcome.⁹ As a result, ethnic and religious tensions increased in the 1990s and civil war broke out in 2002.¹⁰

Henri Konan Bédié succeeded Felix Houphouet-Boigny as president in 1993. The latent discontent that was surfacing during the 1980s became more overt under Bédié’s administration which was accused of corruption and bad governance and which resulted in the suspension of economic aid in 1998. Bédié tried to build his power on nationalism, introducing what he called “Ivorit ” or “Ivorian-ness.” In December 1999, soldiers conducted a bloodless coup. General Robert Guei assumed power and formed a government. The coup was not condemned by Ivorians since they were frustrated with Bédi ’s regime; yet the situation

⁴ See: <http://countrystudies.us/ivory-coast/20.htm>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁵ See: <http://www.our-africa.org/ivory-coast/history-politics>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁶ See: <http://www.our-africa.org/ivory-coast/history-politics>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁷ See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13287585>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁸ See: <http://www.insightsonconflict.org/conflicts/ivory-coast/conflict-profile/>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

⁹ See: http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_42800-544-2-30.pdf?151012165215, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹⁰ See: <http://www.our-africa.org/ivory-coast/history-politics>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

tarnished the country's reputation as a regional pillar of stability. In the year 2000 an amended constitution was introduced with the aim of eliminating Guei's political rivals. Based on Article 35 of the amended constitution, the "candidate for the presidency must.... be of Ivorian origin, born of father and mother who are also of Ivorian origin. He must never have renounced his Ivorian nationality, nor have ever claimed he was of another nationality." That provision ruled out fourteen candidates including Alassane Ouattara from running for public office. Elections were held on 22 October 2000 and early results showed that Laurent Gbagbo from the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) was leading. General Guei did not wait for the final result and he abolished the Election Commission. This caused unexpected protests and by 25 October 2000 Guei was forced to flee the country. Gbagbo declared himself the winner but Ouattara and RDR took to the street in protest. This soon turned into a conflict which split the country in two with Muslim rebels in the north and government control in the Christian south. Finally in 2010 another election was held and the Election Commission declared Ouattara to be the winner. Gbagbo refused to step down claiming election irregularities and a conflict ensued that led to the death of around 3000 people. Eventually Gbagbo was arrested and transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2011. In 2015, President Ouattara won a second five-year term with nearly 84% of the vote, in an election described as credible by US observers.

The religious landscape

According to WCD statistics, 41.6% of the population are Muslim and 35% Christian. This is in line with the estimates published by US State Department which states in its 2016 Religious Freedom report: "42 percent is Muslim, 34 percent Christian, and 4 percent adherents of indigenous religious beliefs. Many Christians and Muslims also practice some aspects of indigenous religious beliefs."¹¹ Pew Research estimates 44.1% Christians, 37.5% Muslims, 10.2% Folks Religions, 8.0% unaffiliated.¹² The Encyclopedia Britannica, however, gives estimates of 40.2% Muslim and 45.5% Christian.¹³

The political landscape

Ivory Coast is a republic with a presidential multiparty system. Like many other countries, the government has three branches: the executive, legislative, and judiciary. The country follows the presidential system and the president is elected for a five years term. The parliament is a unicameral National Assembly with 255 seats and with members elected to serve for five years. The country's legal system is based on French civil law. The country has more than one hundred registered political parties¹⁴, the major ones being Citizen's Democratic Union, Democracy and Liberty for the Republic, Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire, Ivorian Popular Front, Ivorian Worker's Party, Movement of the Future Forces, Rally of the Republicans and Union for Democracy and Peace in Cote d'Ivoire.

¹¹ See <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹² See http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/ivory-coast/#?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2015, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹³ See <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote-d'Ivoire/Languages#ref55125>, last accessed 16 February 2018.

¹⁴ See <http://www.britannica.com/place/Cote-d'Ivoire/Constitutional-framework#ref517100>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

In its 2017 report, Freedom House rated the country as “partly free”.¹⁵ The report recognized the positive changes in the country. However, it says: “Corruption remains endemic, and perpetrators seldom face prosecution or public exposure despite the government’s official ‘zero tolerance’ policy”.¹⁶ The report also indicates that even though the right to free assembly is guaranteed by the constitution, “it is often denied in practice and is subject to politicization”.¹⁷ Reporters without Borders also observes in its Freedom of the press index that “the media are very partisan and lack independence”.¹⁸ Freedom House report strongly indicates that “The judiciary is not independent, and judges are highly susceptible to external interference and bribes”.¹⁹ Transparency International also put the country at rank 107 out of 138 countries regarding corruption.²⁰

The socio-economic landscape

Ivory Coast’s economy had the 13th biggest economy on the continent in terms of its GDP in 2016.²¹ The country’s leading export commodities are: cocoa beans, special purpose ships, refined petroleum, crude petroleum and rubber.²² The World Bank sees the economic outlook for next years as positive, but also notes some social issues: “The key social challenge will be to reduce inequalities significantly by keeping the country’s economy on a strong growth path. In 2015, Côte d’Ivoire ranked 171st among 188 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). Between 1985 and 2011, the depth and severity of poverty increased considerably, moving from approximately 10 percent to 51 percent of the population.”²³

Concluding remarks

The Ivorian people elected President Alassane Ouattara for a second term in October 2015. The election was deemed free and fair. The African Union (AU) confirmed that the election was well organized and transparent.²⁴ Freedom House also said: It “was arguably the freest, fairest, and most peaceful in the country’s history, and which demonstrated the political sphere’s increasing autonomy from the military and international actors.”²⁵ This means the country has shifted away from the violence that had followed the 2000 and 2010 elections. However, it is important to note that many in the western and southern regions believe that transferring Laurent Gbagbo to the International Criminal Court was simply a political vendetta. Others also believe that the current administration is not doing enough to rectify many of the issues that

¹⁵ See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/c-te-divoire>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹⁶ id

¹⁷ id

¹⁸ See: <https://index.rsrf.org/#!/index-details/CIV>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

¹⁹ See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/c-te-divoire>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

²⁰ See: <https://www.transparency.org/country/#CIV>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

²¹ See: <https://www.cnbc.com/africa/2017/10/21/africas-economies-ranked-gdp-really-largest/>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

²² See: <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/civ/>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

²³ id

²⁴ See: <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Observers-declare-Ivorian-poll-fair/-/1066/2932336/-/133k9an/-/index.html>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

²⁵ See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/c-te-divoire>, last accessed 4 March 2018.

undermined peace and development in the past. If the regime does not address the country’s legacy of past violence, there could be a recurrence of armed conflict.

Ever since Islamic militants killed 18 people in March 2016 in an attack they carried out at the beach resort of Grand Bassam, there is a growing fear that the Islamic militant groups that are operating in the region could carry out further attacks in the country. This is the gravest threat to peace and stability in the country and has the potential of reversing the gains made in bringing about stability and a measure of economic success since the political crises violence that followed the 2010 election.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
23,816,000	8,337,000	35.0

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

French missionaries introduced Christianity in 1637, but the Church did not grow until France established its protectorate over the country, which lasted from the 1830s until 1960.

In 1911, Catholic missionary stations were established in the southern part of the country first and then in Korhogo in the north. In 1924, Protestant missionaries came with the arrival of British Methodists. Other organizations and churches such as the World Evangelism Crusade (WEC), the Seventh-day Adventists, the Free Will Baptists and the Assemblies of God entered the country in 1930s.

What church networks exist today? ²⁶

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
64,200	4,565,000	2,265,000	1,671,000	277,000	-505,000	2,065,000	2,507,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

²⁶ **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.

There are many Christian denominations in the country including Roman Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, Copts, Seventh-day Adventists and Assemblies of God.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ²⁷
8,337,000	9,901,000	1,800	10,900	5,439,000	0	34,500	91,200

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD statistics, 41.6% of the population are Muslim and 35% Christian. This is in line with the estimates published by US State Department (42% Muslim, 34% Christian).²⁸ The Encyclopedia Britannica, however, gives estimates of 40.2% Muslim and 45.5% Christian.²⁹

Notes on the current situation

- Specific challenges for Christians exist in the northern part of the country where Muslims form a majority. Christians (especially converts from Islam) face serious discrimination there.
- The civil war in the country has been interpreted by some observers as a religious war between the Christian south and the Muslim north. The current president, Alassane Quattara, is from the north and some Christians fear that Muslims are taking unfair advantage.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Where persecution comes from

Although Christians and Muslims have a good history of peaceful co-existence in Ivory Coast there have also been times when tensions on the basis of ethnic-regional divisions (which often coincide with religious divisions) have been a cause for conflict. Conflict over political power and economic resources (and hostility towards Muslim migrants from countries like Burkina Faso) has pitted Muslims against Christians in Ivory Coast. Now that a Muslim northerner is in power as president, some people fear that the influence of Islam is increasing in the country and that Muslims are taking over control of politics and the economy. Such sentiments are strengthened by the fact that the most important investment projects in the country are under the control of the Moroccan king and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Therefore, Christians fear marginalization and exclusion from involvement in the running of the country. The activity of militant Islamic groups has also added to the level

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.

²⁹ See <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote-dIvoire/Languages#ref55125>, last accessed 16 February 2018.

of influence of *Islamic oppression*. However, it should be noted that the prevalence of this Persecution engine is much milder in comparison to many other countries in the region.

How Christians are suffering

Converts living with non-Christian family members face the risk of ostracization by family members and to avoid this they often hide their conversion. It is risky for Christians with a background in traditional religions or Islam living with non-Christian family members to keep Christian literature in their house because of the fear of being discovered. Parents of a female convert from Islam would not allow their daughter to marry a Christian and would try to prevent such a marriage. Amongst Christians also, some church leaders often oppose weddings when bride and groom belong to different denominations. Parents and/or family are known to hinder the baptism of a family member. In the allocation of land or decisions concerning business opportunities, Christians are not represented at local government levels where there are Muslim majorities. In many villages, Christian minorities are marginalized and put under pressure as a result of this. Public officials in some government agencies discriminate against Christians. At times, new churches have been denied registration arbitrarily by officials at the Ministry of Interior. In some towns and villages, Christians must pay large sums of money as a fee to get permits to hold events.

Examples

In the WWL 2018 reporting period:

- Two churches were damaged by a mob when members of the church refused to participate in rituals being carried out in accordance with traditional religions of the locality.
- A convert to Christianity and his friend were violently attacked by his family and the community in his locality. They were saved from possible death by the interruption of community leaders.

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 Ivory Coast ³⁰	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Medium
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Very weak
Denominational protectionism	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Very weak
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

Islamic oppression (Medium):

Although Christians and Muslims have a good history of peaceful co-existence in Ivory Coast there have also been times when tensions on the basis of ethnic-regional divisions (which often coincide with religious divisions) have been a cause for conflict. Conflict over political power and economic resources (and hostility towards Muslim migrants from countries like Burkina Faso) has pitted Muslims against Christians in Ivory Coast. Now that a Muslim

³⁰ 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.

northerner is in power, some people fear that the influence of Islam is increasing in the country and that Muslims are controlling politics and the economy of the country. Such sentiments are strengthened by the fact that the most important investment projects in the country are under the control of the Moroccan king and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Therefore, Christians fear marginalization and exclusion from involvement in the running of the country. The activity of militant Islamic groups has also added to the level of influence of this Persecution engine. However, it should be noted that the prevalence of this engine much milder in comparison to many other countries in the region.

Drivers of persecution

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Public authorities especially at the local level in some parts of the country are drivers of persecution. For example, Christian communities such as the Assemblies of God, the Christian Missionary Alliance Church and the Evangelical Protestant Works and Missions Church have been targeted by officials for selective enforcement of noise control regulations. Churches have also been discriminated against and treated unfairly in relation to land disputes. Ordinary citizens, as well as ethnic leaders or village chiefs, in predominantly Muslim inhabited areas are known to persecute Christians with a Muslim background. Militant Islamic groups that are active in the region have also been targeting Christians in the country.

Context

Today Ivory Coast shares borders with Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana. It has more than sixty different ethnic groups and “four distinct cultural/regional zones which are the East Atlantic primarily inhabited by the Akan, the West Atlantic primarily inhabited by the Kru and the Voltaic, and Mandé regions. Due to its location in West Africa, the country was very important for the transatlantic slave trade. After imposing a protectorate over the coastal zone in 1842, France finally made Ivory Coast an official colony in 1893 until It became independent

in 1960. Since 1983, Yamoussoukro is the official capital city but Abidjan is the commercial and administrative center. French is the official language.

Ivory Coast is a republic with a presidential multiparty system. However, in 2010-11 the country was rocked by violence due to contested election results. This conflict as well the civil war of 2002-2004 were results of ethno-regional rivalry over power and resources. While ethnic identity and issues about citizenship were at the center of these conflicts, religion also played a significant role (especially in 2010-11) as an additional marker of identity. The Ivorian people elected President Alassane Ouattara for a second term in October 2015 in elections which were deemed fair by observers.

Persecution of minority groups: In the predominantly Christian southern part of the country where Muslims are in the minority, they are often discriminated against and suffer hostile treatment.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

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

Historical Christian communities:

These include the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church and Presbyterians. Compared to other Christian communities, this category is not so vulnerable to attack and enjoys a greater level of freedom of religion.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

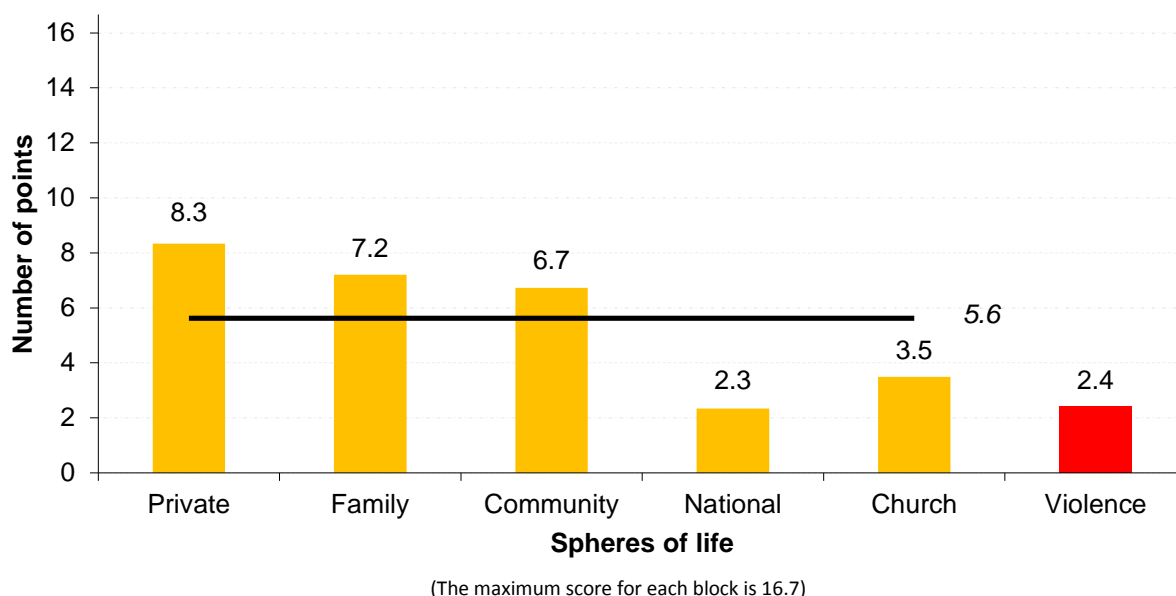
There are converts with a Muslim background and converts from indigenous or traditional religions in Ivory Coast. Especially Christians with a Muslim background are vulnerable to persecution in the northern parts of the country from their family and relatives as well as their local community. They are also more vulnerable to attacks and pressure from Islamic militants that are active the region.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are many registered and recognized Evangelical churches, but there also many new Independent and Pentecostal churches. Due to more active evangelism, these churches tend to face backlash both from Islamists and local authorities. To a limited degree, cross-denominational converts (from more established historical churches) will also face difficulties in their families and community.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Ivory Coast



The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Ivory Coast shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Ivory Coast is 5.6 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private sphere of life* with 8.3 points and *Family sphere* with 7.2 points, reflecting the difficulties converts both from Islam and ethnic religions face.
- The score for violence is low at 2.4 points and included attacks against a convert and two churches.

Private sphere:

Converts living with non-Christian family members face the risk of ostracization by family members and to avoid this they often hide their conversion. It is risky for Christians with a background in traditional religions or Islam living with non-Christian family members to keep Christian literature in their house because of the fear of being discovered. It is also risky for recent converts to present their testimony publicly. Displaying Christian images or symbols in their community could also result in the discovery of one’s conversion and entail a hostile reaction from family members and the community – especially in predominantly Muslim inhabited areas.

Family sphere:

Parents of a female convert from Islam would not allow their daughter to marry a Christian and would try to obstruct such a marriage. Amongst Christians also, some church leaders often oppose weddings when bride and groom belong to different denominations. Parents and/or family are known to hinder the baptism of a family member. Families adhering to ethnic religions have also tried to isolate converts and prevent them from meeting other Christians. All types of convert – if married – may be forced into separation from spouse and children.

Community sphere:

In the allocation of land or decisions concerning business opportunities, Christians are not represented at local government levels where there are Muslim majorities. In many villages Christian minorities are marginalized and put under pressure as a result of this. Sometimes, Christians are also pressurized into compromising their faith to fit in with the dominant culture in parts of the country where they are a minority, (especially if they are converts from Islam). Christians are discriminated against where generous scholarships are available from wealthy Arab countries for Muslim students only.

National sphere:

Public officials in some government agencies discriminate against Christians. Also, Christians in public service are also sometimes discriminated against in terms of promotion and career opportunities. While at the local level, Christians might occasionally be unfairly treated by officials in predominantly Muslim inhabited areas of the country, it should be noted that Christians otherwise enjoy substantial freedom in the *National sphere* (explaining the low score of 2.3 points in the Persecution pattern above.)

Church sphere:

At times, new churches have been denied registration arbitrarily by officials at the Ministry of Interior. In some towns and villages, Christians must pay large sums of money as a fee to get permits to hold events. In addition to churches, church affiliated ministries and organizations also face delays and obstacles in getting the necessary permits and registration. The ability of churches to work with converts is also restricted due to opposition from non-Christian religious leaders.

Violence:

The violent incidents of persecution that have been reported are non-fatal and would appear to be less serious compared to the violence which has become the norm in several other West African countries. Example of incidents occurring in the WWL 2018 reporting period:

- Two churches were damaged by a mob when members of the church refused to participate in rituals being carried out in accordance with traditional religions of the locality.
- A convert to Christianity and his friend were violently attacked by his family and the community in his locality and was saved from possible death by the interruption of community leaders.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male: No data currently available.

Future outlook

The main political coalition in the country is breaking down because of personal conflicts and clashing interests. The next presidential election which will be held in 2020 is already fueling

rivalries and intensifying competition among the various factions. If these conflicts assume an ethno-regional angle (as was the case in 2010), it could have a detrimental effect on the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the country. In general, the reconciliation efforts after 2010 do not seem to have been very successful and there is a risk that a similar conflict will erupt after the 2020 election. The continued presence and activity of Islamic militant groups in the West African region is also a cause for concern. There is a fear that such groups could attempt to instigate instability in Ivory Coast and target Christians as they have done in other countries in the region.

Policy considerations

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

- The international community should work with the Government of Ivory Coast to ensure that the elections to be held in 2020 will not lead to conflict and political instability. There should be a concerted effort to prevent the rise of religious and ethnic tension as a result of the competition among political elites hailing from different parts of the country.
- The Government of Ivory Coast should put in place mechanisms and procedures that would eliminate discrimination on religious grounds at all levels of government. The Government should in particular ensure that the registration and licensing of churches will be carried out in a reasonable, expedient and predictable manner.
- The Government should work to protect the freedom of religion in the country including the freedom to change one's religion. The international community should also urge the Government of Ivory Coast to discharge its responsibility in this regard to the fullest extent possible.

WWR in-depth reports

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

- [WEST AFRICA – Islam and Islamism in Francophone West Africa](#)
September 2017 (based on 2012 unpublished report)
Using the Islamist occupation of northern Mali as the background and starting point, this 20 page report offers an overview of the current state of Islam in eight further French-speaking countries of West Africa: Mauritania, Senegal, Republic of Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo.

Open Doors article(s) from the region

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

World Watch Monitor news articles

There are currently no recent WWM articles on Ivory Coast. Any new articles will be made available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/cote-divoire/>

Recent country developments

There are currently no recent items on Ivory Coast. Any new articles will be made available at:
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Ivory+Coast> (password: freedom).

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