



KOSOVO: Country Dossier

June 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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World Watch List 2018

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

WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries¹

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

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

KOSOVO – 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.

KOSOVO		
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 KOSOVO

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18328859>

Recent country history

In the Middle Ages, the country was conquered by the Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serbian Empires. The Battle of Kosovo of 1389 is considered to be one of the defining moments in Serbian medieval history. The country was the core of the Serbian medieval state, which has also been the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church from the 14th century, when its status was upgraded into a patriarchate.

Kosovo was part of the Ottoman Empire from the 15th to the early 20th century. In the late 19th century, Kosovo became the center of the Albanian national awakening. Following their defeat in the Balkan Wars, the Ottomans ceded Kosovo to Serbia and Montenegro. Both countries joined Yugoslavia after World War I and after World War II the Yugoslav Constitution established the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija within the Yugoslav constituent Republic of Serbia.

Tensions between Kosovo's Albanian and Serb communities were present throughout the 20th century and occasionally erupted into major violence, culminating in the Kosovo War of 1998-1999, which resulted in the withdrawal of Serbian armed forces and the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. On 17 February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia. It has since gained diplomatic recognition as a sovereign state by 111 UN member states.

Ethnic tension between the ethnic Albanian majority and the tiny ethnic Serbian minority continue today – occasionally erupting into violence. Negotiations to resolve this problem have so far been unsuccessful and as a result Kosovo has not yet been able to build up an independent position on the world political scene.

The religious landscape

Kosovo has a population of 2,096,000. According to World Christian Database 93.1% are Muslims, 5.9% Christians, and 1% other. 50.4% of Kosovo's Christians are Catholics, 45% are Serbian Orthodox (SOC), 2% Protestants and 3.6% others. It seems that WCD has based its data on the [2011 census](#).⁴ A boycott of that census by ethnic Serbs resulted in a significant undercounting of SOC members. The SOC estimates there are 120,000 Serbian Orthodox believers in Kosovo.

⁴ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dclid=268830>, last accessed 15 February 2018.

According to the [CIA World Factbook](#) (July 2017)⁵ the ethnic composition of the Kosovo population is as follows: Albanians 92.9%, Bosniaks 1.6%, Serbs 1.5%, Turks 1.1%, Ashkali 0.9%, Egyptian 0.7%, Gorani 0.6%, Romani 0.5%, other/unspecified 0.2%.

Ethnicity and religion are intimately connected in Kosovo. As a result, ethnic conflicts always tend to have a religious element, and vice versa. The overwhelming majority of the ethnic Albanians are Muslims (with a tiny fraction of Albanians being Roman Catholics). Other ethnic groups that are almost exclusively Muslim are the Bosniaks, the Gorani and the Turks. Practically all Serbs are Orthodox Christians.

Until quite recently, Islam in Kosovo had a more open, traditional character. This was the result of a high degree of secularization when the region was part of Yugoslavia. The increase of ethnic tension and violence during the 1990s also meant that many Muslims became more conservative in their faith. On top of this, there were huge financial investments in Kosovo from countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran – resulting in the construction of hundreds of mosques and religious schools. Radicalization occurred particularly among younger Muslims. This became visible when the Islamic State group (IS) created its caliphate in Syria and Iraq and hundreds of young Kosovar Muslims left Kosovo to join the ranks of IS. The Kosovo government is anticipating the return of these radicalized young people with trepidation.

The overwhelming majority of Christians in Kosovo (95.4%) belong to two historical Christian communities: The Roman Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. Even here one can see the importance of the ethnic factor. Most of the Catholics are ethnic Albanians, while all Orthodox believers are ethnic Serbs. As a result, the relations between both churches are strained.

Protestants take up most of the remaining percentage (approx. 2%) of Christians in Kosovo. Protestants have been active in Kosovo since the middle of the 19th century. Over the years they have experienced pressure from Muslims and other Christian denominations because of their efforts at evangelism.

About 1% of the people in Kosovo consider themselves to be non-religious or atheist. This is a clear indication that the secularism that dominated Yugoslav era has not caused a large proportion of the population to turn away from religion.

The political landscape

According to the [Constitution](#),⁶ Kosovo is a multi-party, democratic republic. The Assembly of Kosovo has 120 members elected for a four-year term. It includes twenty reserved seats - ten for Kosovar Serbs and ten for non-Serb minorities (e.g., Bosniak, Roma, etc.). Kosovo has a multi-party system, with numerous parties in which no one party often has a chance of gaining power alone, and parties must work with each other to form coalition governments.

⁵ See: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html>, last accessed 15 February 2018.

⁶ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dclid=268830#wrapper>, last accessed 15 February 2018.

The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion for all residents, including the right to change, express, or not express religious belief; to practice or abstain from practicing religion; and to join or refuse to join a religious community. These rights are subject to limitations for reasons of public safety and order or to protect the health or rights of others. The Constitution provides for the separation of religious communities from public institutions, including the right of religious groups to independently regulate their own organizations, activities, and ceremonies, and the right to establish religious schools and charity institutions. It guarantees equal rights for all religious communities, stipulates the country is secular and neutral with regard to religion, declares that the state shall ensure the protection and preservation of the country's religious heritage, and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The constitution stipulates the law may limit freedom of expression to prevent provocation of violence and hostility on grounds of race, nationality, ethnicity, or religion. It allows courts to ban organizations or activities that encourage racial, national, ethnic, or religious hatred.

The law stipulates there is no official religion, but it lists five "traditional" religious communities: the Kosovo Islamic Community (BIK), the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Hebrew (Jewish) community, and the Evangelical (Protestant) Church. The law provides extra protections and benefits for these five groups, such as reduced taxes and relief from water tariffs.

The government has taken steps to counter radicalization and militancy related to religion. But religious minorities say that the authorities have failed to act on requests to build churches and cemeteries, and several longstanding disputes over ownership of religious property have remained unresolved. Protestants still lack a designated burial area anywhere in the country. Protestant leaders in Pristina and Gjakove/Djakovica say they have faced restrictions on holding Protestant funeral services or burying members with crosses at the public cemetery. The Islamic community and the Catholic Church have dedicated cemetery space, but the Protestant community does not.

There are hardly any restrictions on religious freedom imposed by the government of Kosovo. Most incidents violating religious freedom are caused by individual people and are practically always related to ethnic issues. But even so, the number of violent incidents against Christians in Kosovo is very limited. Occasionally Orthodox churches are damaged. Protestants experience additional pressure especially on their evangelism activities. Converts (from both Muslim and Orthodox backgrounds) are specifically targeted by the families, friends and communities.

The socio-economic landscape

Kosovo was the poorest province of former Yugoslavia. Since the declaration of independence in 2008 Kosovo's economy has grown each year. However, it remains one of the poorest areas of Europe, with as much as 45% of the population living below the official poverty line, and 17% being extremely poor according to the World Bank.

The most important social factor in Kosovo remains the ethnic controversies. Nationalism is showing its ugly face all the time. As already mentioned, the level of distrust among different

groups (especially between Albanians and Serbs) has a religious parallel: Muslim Albanians versus Christian Serbs.

Concluding remarks

For the first time in history, the country is independent. It is a democratic country with a good reputation on the international scene. Many Western countries do not hesitate to trade with Kosovo, which is attempting to join the European Union. It already uses the Euro as its currency.

It may be expected that Serbia will have to accept the status quo and drop the claim that the region is part of Serbia. But that is not easy, since it means that Serbia will lose one of the areas that played a key role in its history.

One of the biggest problems Kosovo is facing is the growing radicalization of young Muslims. At the moment, it is hard to determine what the impact of fighters returning from the lost war in Syria and Iraq will be on the country. Time will tell if this will also have serious consequences for the Christians in Kosovo.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
2,096,000	123,000	5.9

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

Christianity has a long-standing tradition in Kosovo, dating back to the Eastern Roman period (1st-14th centuries AD). During the Middle Ages, the entire Balkan peninsula had been Christianized by both the Roman and Byzantine empires.

From 1389 until 1912, Kosovo was officially governed by the Ottoman Empire and a high level of Islamization occurred. While most ethnic Serbs remained Christians, over the centuries most ethnic Albanians converted to Islam. Only a small percentage clung to the Christian faith.

What church networks exist today? ⁷

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
55,400	62,000	2,500	2,300	410	0	1,300	4,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to the World Christian Database (WCD), 50.4% of Kosovo's Christians are Catholics, 45% are Orthodox, 2% Protestants and 3.6% belong to other churches. Kosovo has 26 Serbian Orthodox monasteries and many Serbian Orthodox churches. Dozens of churches were destroyed, and others damaged, after the end of Serbian governance in 1999, and a further 35 were damaged in the week of violence in March 2004. Vandalism of Catholic churches also occurred during the Kosovo war (1998-1999).

Communities of expatriate Christians:

There are no communities of expatriate Christians to be considered for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

According to WCD, the largest church is the Roman Catholic Church – they are mainly ethnic Albanians who have not converted to Islam over the centuries. The second-largest church is the Serbian Orthodox Church, the church of the ethnic minority.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

The number of converts from Islam and the number of cross-denominational converts from Orthodoxy is small, but they are under the heaviest form of persecution in Kosovo. This comes mostly from the social environment.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are a few Protestant churches. They are suspected of evangelizing among the Muslim and Orthodox population.

⁷ **Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelicals:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁸
123,000	1,951,000	0	0	0	0	0	22,300

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to the World Christian Database, 5.9% of the population are Christians and 93.1% are Muslims.

Notes on the current situation

- Historical enmity between ethnic Albanians and Serbs led to the Kosovo War in 1998-1999. Tension between the two ethnic groups have continued and led both to the declaration of sovereignty of Kosovo by the ethnic Albanian majority and to increased tensions with neighbor Serbia. Peace is fragile as the two communities continue to oppose each other.
- Large financial injections from Saudi Arabia and Iran come with strings attached that are pulling Kosovo towards more radical forms of Islam. While hundreds of mosques have been built using the available Islamic funding, hundreds of Christian sites have been damaged or destroyed since 1998.
- Serbia still refuses to recognize Kosovo's independence – and this has resulted in a diplomatic stalemate. Kosovo's future is still uncertain and the new nation has been unable to begin a rebuilding program to repair the huge amount of damage caused by the 1998-1999 war. This also affects many churches that were damaged during the war.
- Hundreds of Muslims from Kosovo joined the Islamic State group fighting in Syria and Iraq. Kosovar authorities are concerned about what will happen when these radicalized fighters return home.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Where persecution comes from

There are two main sources of persecution of Christians in Kosovo: One comes from ethnic/religious divisions in the country and the other comes from the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). The ethnic/religious divisions have been in place for centuries and are between the ethnic Albanian Muslim majority and the tiny ethnic Serbian Orthodox minority. For Serbs the true religion is Orthodox Christianity and for Albanians it is Islam. Anyone deviating from this norm will come under pressure. One could argue that this all comes down to *Religious nationalism*.

⁸ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

How Christians are suffering

There are no communities of expatriate or migrant Christians in Kosovo. All other Christian communities are experiencing some form of persecution. Serbian Orthodox churches are occasionally damaged by Albanian Muslim mobs. The number of converts from Islam and cross-denominational converts from SOC is small, but these converts are under the heaviest form of persecution in Kosovo. This comes mostly from the social environment (from family, friends and community). The non-traditional Christian communities also experience problems due to constantly being suspected of evangelizing among the Muslim and SOC population.

Examples

- Albanian Muslim protestors threw stones and bottles and prevented Serbian Orthodox pilgrims from celebrating the Feast of the Assumption on 28 August 2016 in the ruins of the SOC Holy Trinity monastery in the village of Mushutishte/Musutiste in the Suhareka/Suva Reka Municipality. (Source: [US State Department 2016 IRF report⁹](#))
- Protestants claim that most local authorities have not granted land for cemeteries, nor addressed most of their requests to build churches on land the community owned. The Pristina Municipal Assembly approved land for a Protestant cemetery on 2 December 2016, but the decision still requires official confirmation at central government level. The Glogovc/Glogovac Municipality also granted land to the Protestant community for a cemetery and a church, and the community was working with the municipality to implement the decision. By the beginning of 2017, still none of these municipalities had a Protestant cemetery with permission for Christians to be buried with a visible cross. (Source: US State Department 2016 IRF report¹⁰)
- Representatives of the Messiah Evangelical Church in Pristina reported that the Municipal Assembly agreed to issue a building permit in November 2016 for a house of worship, on land the church had purchased. Municipal authorities had previously denied a permit for this church for more than a decade. By the beginning of 2017, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning had still not issued a final permit. (Source: US State Department 2016 IRF report¹¹)

⁹ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268830#wrapper>, last accessed 16 February 2018.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

Scoring and rank are not available for publication. The situation in Kosovo is one of continuing tensions between ethnic Albanian Muslims and ethnic Serbian Orthodox Christians. Converts from Islam and Protestants active in evangelism experience most pressure.

Persecution engines

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

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

There is a sharp ethnic divide in Kosovo: An overwhelming majority (nearly 93%) of the population are Albanians, and a small minority are Serbs. The ethnic factor also has a strong religious element: For Serbs the true religion is Orthodox Christianity and for Albanians it is Islam. The result is that from time to time there are incidents where one group attacks the other.

¹² The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Islamic oppression (Medium):

Islam is the dominant religion in Kosovo. According to the World Christian Database (WCD), just over 93% of the population is Muslim. First of all there is the historical conflict with the Serbian Orthodox minority (see above) where Muslims from time to time attack churches and Christians. For Muslims there is the additional issue of conversion to Christianity. As a result, Christians with a Muslim background and those Christians evangelizing among Muslims are targeted.

Drivers of persecution

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

The most powerful driver of persecution affecting Christians in Kosovo is the *Extended family*. Secondary drivers are: *Ethnic group leaders*, *Non-Christian religious leaders*, and *Normal citizens*. All of them are based on the combination of the Persecution engines *Ethnic antagonism* and *Islamic oppression*. Kosovo is deeply divided along ethnic lines which are religious lines at the same time.

Context

Kosovo is the European country with the highest percentage of Muslims (more than 93% of the total population). This is the result of the Islamization of Albanians by the Ottoman Empire (15th to the early 20th century). But this alone does not explain why Christians are persecuted in Kosovo. Neither does the political scene, since Kosovo is a democratic country with a secular Constitution. The country provides freedom of conscience and religion for all residents. The answer lies in the fact that all religious persecution in the country is strictly related to ethnic factors. Tensions between Kosovo's Albanian and Serb communities existed throughout the 20th century and occasionally erupted into major violence, culminating in the Kosovo War of 1998-1999. This resulted in the withdrawal of Serbian armed forces and the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. On 17 February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia. It has since gained diplomatic recognition as a sovereign state by 111 UN member states.

All issues challenging ethnic identity will lead to problems, sometimes of a violent nature. For instance, if Hinduism would enter Kosovo and many Albanians would convert to Hinduism then there would be violence against Hindus. As it is, the only conflict in Kosovo is that between Muslims and Christians.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

There are no communities of expatriate Christians in Kosovo to be considered for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

According to WCD, the largest denomination is the Roman Catholic Church, consisting mainly of ethnic Albanians whose families have not converted to Islam over the centuries. The second-largest denomination is the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), the church of the ethnic minority. It would appear that WCD has based its data on the 2011 census which was boycotted by ethnic Serbs and resulted in a significant undercounting of SOC Christians. The SOC estimates there are 120,000 Serbian Orthodox believers in Kosovo.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

The number of converts from Islam and cross-denominational converts from the SOC is small, but they experience the heaviest form of persecution in Kosovo. This comes mostly from the social environment.

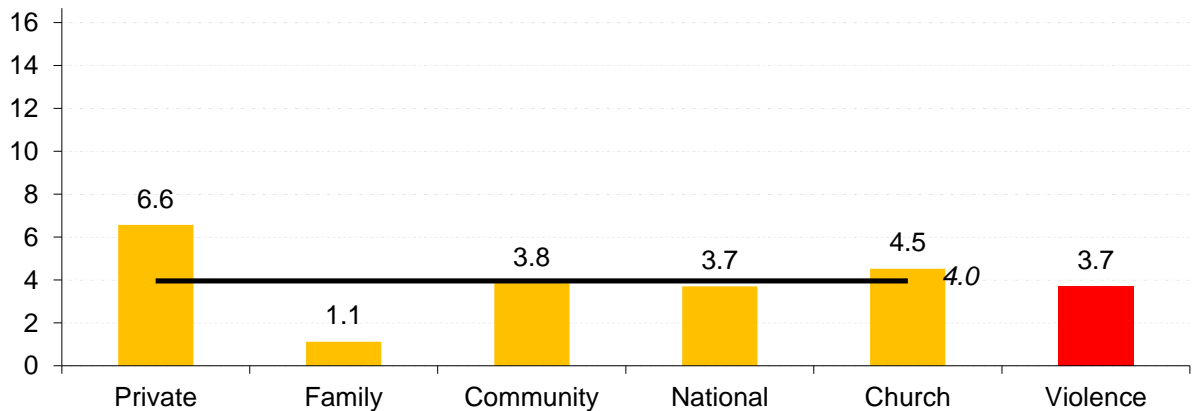
Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are a few Protestant churches and these are constantly suspected of evangelizing among the Muslim and Orthodox population.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

Diagram showing number of points scored in each Sphere of Life and Violence. The maximum score for each block is 16.7.

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Kosovo



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Kosovo shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Kosovo is at an average of 4.0 points.
- Pressure is highest in the *Private sphere of life* with a score of 6.6 points. This reflects the experience of converts (from both Muslim and Orthodox background) in the country. The second highest pressure is in the *Church sphere of life*, and this is because Christians were prevented from accessing pilgrimage sites, could not build churches or hold activities outside their premises. These restrictions were the result of a combination of *Ethnic antagonism* and *Islamic oppression*.
- The score for violence stands at 3.7 points and is explained by damage made to churches and homes of Christians.

Private sphere:

Conversion (from either Muslim or Orthodox background) is discouraged and converts are oppressed. Converts therefore will hide their new faith as much as possible – they will not display Christian symbols or other materials. Converts will refrain from sharing their faith with family members and others. They will also be careful how they access Christian media in the homes of their families.

Family sphere:

Baptisms of converts have been repeatedly hindered in villages, small towns and occasionally even in cities. This is regarded as the final step for leaving Islam or Serbian Orthodoxy. Burials of non-Orthodox Christians are a problem as many communities refuse to allow deceased

(convert) Christians to be buried in the community cemetery. Converts and their children may be harassed by families and community.

Community sphere:

Converts and non-traditional Christians are monitored by the community, which from time to time restricts access to community resources. Converts experience pressure to take part in Islamic religious ceremonies and/or community events. The community exercises pressure on converts to return to their previous faith.

National sphere:

The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. The Constitution provides for the separation of religious communities from public institutions. It guarantees equal rights for all religious communities. On several occasions, Kosovar Serbian Orthodox pilgrims have been prevented from visiting religious sites across the country. In such cases the police have had to intervene to protect the visitors from mob attacks and violent attacks. There are several occasions where the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) is engaging with government officials regarding property titles of religious sites or access to international funding to reconstruct world-heritage religious sites. In addition, there are several ongoing cases, where Protestant churches have not received permission to use a property for religious purposes, i.e. cemeteries. The SOC has reported on several occasions that media uses pejorative language when referring to their members. Local and national security officials reported several cases of vandalism or theft of Serbian Orthodox religious symbols, mostly metal and gold objects.

Church sphere:

Members of the SOC and Roman Catholic Church have been prevented from accessing pilgrimage sites. Incidents include mobs attacking the buses or blocking the roads leading to the villages or municipalities where the churches or monasteries are located.

Registration is not obligatory, but is necessary if the church wants to use a building, cemetery or other property. Church activities outside church premises cannot be held: Such activities will be seen as a provocation or as an act of evangelism. In Muslim areas, youth work will face opposition. Although the number of converts is small, churches are prevented from hosting them.

There have been a number of reports concerning intimidation and threats to persons belonging to religious minority communities, such as nuns and priests. Such cases included telephoned threats to nuns, threats to Serbian Orthodox priests. Openly selling or distributing Christian materials is opposed by the Muslim majority of Kosovo – though there are no legal restrictions on this.

Violence:

The most frequent problems for Christians are attacks on church buildings, attacks against pilgrims and other Christians and the refusal to allow burial. About 6 Orthodox churches and 2 homes of Christians were damaged during the WWL 2018 reporting period. Examples of violent incidents:

- Muslim Albanian protestors threw stones and bottles and prevented Serbian Orthodox pilgrims from celebrating the Feast of the Assumption on 28 August 2016 at the ruins of the SOC Holy Trinity Monastery in the village of Mushutishte/Musutiste in the Suhareka/Suva Reka Municipality. (Source: [State Department 2016 IRF report](#)¹³)
- According to Protestant leaders, most municipalities had not granted land for cemeteries, nor addressed most of their requests to build churches on land the community owned. The Pristina Municipal Assembly approved a Protestant cemetery on 2 December 2016; however, challenges remain at central government level. The Gllgovc/Glogovac Municipality also granted land to the Protestant community for a cemetery and a church, and the community was working with the municipality to implement the decision. However, none of these municipalities have a Protestant cemetery where Christians can be buried with a visible cross. (Source: [State Department 2016 IRF report](#)¹⁴)
- According to representatives of the Messiah Evangelical Church in Pristina, the authorities agreed to issue a building permit in November 2016 for a house of worship, on land the church had purchased. A permit for this church had been refused for more than a decade. The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, however, have not yet acted on their word. (Source: [State Department 2016 IRF report](#)¹⁵)

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male: No information currently available.

Future outlook

Ancient enmity between ethnic Albanians and Serbs led to the Kosovo War in 1998-1999. Since then the tensions between the two ethnic groups have continued and led to the declaration of sovereignty of Kosovo by the ethnic Albanian majority and increased tensions with neighbor Serbia. Peace is fragile as the two communities continue to oppose each other.

Radicalism among Muslims is on the rise. Large financial injections from Saudi Arabia and Iran come with strings attached that are pulling Kosovo towards more radical forms of Islam. While hundreds of mosques have been built using the financial means provided by Saudi Arabia and Iran, hundreds of Christian sites have been damaged or destroyed since 1998.

Policy considerations

Currently under review.

¹³ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=268830#wrapper>, last accessed 19 February 2018.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Id.

WWR in-depth reports

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

Open Doors article(s) from the region

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

World Watch Monitor news articles

At the time of publishing, there were no WWM news articles on Kosovo available.
Any recent updates will be found at : <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

At the time of publishing, there were no items on Kosovo available.
Any recent updates will be found at : <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).

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