



LEBANON: Country Dossier

June 2018



Open Doors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

June 2018 / 2

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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.

LEBANON		
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 LEBANON

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14647308>

Recent country history

Before 1920, Lebanon was made up of Mount Lebanon which was mainly populated by Christian Maronites (80%) and Muslim Druze (20%). After the League of Nations gave the mandate for Lebanon and Syria to France, it established “Greater Lebanon” by adding the Bekaa valley and the north and south provinces to Mount Lebanon In 1920. This happened after Maronite Patriarch Elias Peter Hoavek requested France to re-establish the entity of the Principality of Lebanon (1515 AD – 1840 AD). The Maronites found themselves sharing power with the Muslims, but in the founding of the state of Lebanon “Lebanism” was chosen as the dominant cultural philosophy, which placed emphasis on Lebanon’s Mediterranean and Phoenician heritage. Through an unwritten gentlemen’s agreement, Lebanon was set up as a multi-religious state with the stipulation that the President of the Lebanese state will always be a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of Parliament a Shia Muslim. This pact still influences the Lebanese political system today.

As Christians formed a majority of 51% in the 1932 census, apart from control of the presidency, they were also given command of the armed forces and a majority in parliament. However, the relatively poorer Muslim population increased faster than the richer Christian community, who were also emigrating in large numbers. Soon it became evident that Christians held a disproportionately high measure of power. Tensions and dissatisfaction arose as years passed without a new census being carried out. Eventually this sparked the Lebanese Civil War which took place from 1975 to 1990. In 1989 the Taif Agreement was concluded which included an equal division of Parliamentary seats between Christians and Muslims (50:50), decreased the power of the Maronite president and enhanced the influence of the Sunni Prime Minister. Today Christians make up an estimated 34.1% of the total population. Muslim groups have demanded a new census, which could lead to demands for a new power-sharing arrangement.

The start of the 21st century was marked by political instability and tension between Lebanon and neighboring Syria and Israel, including a 34-day war with Israel in 2006 due to a conflict with Hezbollah. The political affiliate of the Shiite militant group backed by Iran has considerable influence in the Lebanese government. Overspill of the civil war in Syria has further incited religious tensions and led to deadly clashes between Sunni Muslims and Alawites and also Lebanese government forces. Proxy wars are being fought in the country between Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria and Israel, adding to the country’s political instability.

The religious landscape

According to WCD statistics, 59.7% of the population is Muslim and 34.1% Christian. Muslims are almost evenly divided between Sunnis and Shiites, including smaller percentages of Alawites and Ismailis⁴. According to the US State Department, around 5.6% is Druze.⁵ The total population includes approximately 1.4 million refugees from Syria and Iraq as well as Palestinian refugees who have lived in Lebanon for almost 60 years.⁶ Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees are mostly Sunni but Syrian and Iraqi refugees also include Christians and Shiites. Among the Christian refugee community there are also Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan.⁷

The political landscape

Lebanon is a parliamentary republic and its Constitution determines that there “shall be absolute freedom of conscience and guarantees the free exercise of religious rites for all religious groups provided the public order is not disturbed”.⁸ The unicameral National Assembly has 128 seats which are distributed on a sectarian basis and equally divided between Muslims and Christians. The President of the Lebanese state will always be a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of Parliament a Shia Muslim.

Lebanon’s political parties are also organized on a sectarian basis. There are two major political blocs: the March 14th and the March 8th alliances. The first is led by the Future Movement (Sunni) and includes the Lebanese Forces (Christian), the Progressive Socialist Party (Druze) and the Phalange (Christian). The second political bloc is composed of militant group Hezbollah (Shiite), Amal (Shiite) and the Free Patriotic Movement (Christian).⁹ The aim of Lebanon’s complex electoral system is to maintain peace between the country’s diverse religious communities who have fought several civil wars since its independence from France in 1943.

The socio-economic landscape

Large numbers of the Lebanese population have been displaced during wars, the most recent being the civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 and involved neighboring Syria and Israel. Many have lost loved ones, homes and jobs, leading to a large number of traumatized people. Many Christians have left Lebanon for economic and security reasons. As a result of the civil war in Syria, there is a huge influx of Syrian refugees who account for approximately 25% of the current Lebanese population. There are also large numbers of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, approximately 10% of the population. Palestinian refugee camps function as self-governed communities whose security and militia forces are not under the control of

⁴ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 25 February 2018.

⁵ idem

⁶ idem

⁷ idem

⁸ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 26 February 2018.

⁹ See:

<http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1765720960&Country=Lebanon&topic=Summary&subtopic=Politics+structure>, last accessed 26 February 2018.

government officials.¹⁰ The large number of refugees are a heavy burden for Lebanon's economy, which already faces a number of challenges with a public debt equal to 148% of its GDP¹¹. The Syrian civil war has resulted in further growing tensions between religious communities in Lebanon. On the more positive side, there are still many chances for Christian ministry in the relatively free country and there are many converts from Islam.

Concluding remarks

- Lebanon holds a unique position in the Arab world: It is the only Arab state which is not officially Muslim and its citizens are legally free to change their religion. For centuries, it has served as a place of refuge for minorities in the region.
- Hezbollah maintains considerable influence over parts of the country. The government has not made concrete progress in disarming and dismantling armed militia groups, including Hezbollah. Hezbollah's intervention to drive out armed groups from the Lebanese-Syrian border region in the summer of 2017 increased support – including that of Christians – to the militant group.
- There has been a general movement among Lebanese youth to adopt atheism and secularism. As yet, there are no indications that this has affected Christian youth.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
6,039,000	2,059,000	34.1

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

Christianity in Lebanon has a long history. According to the Bible, Jesus visited Tyre in southern Lebanon and the apostle Paul (and possibly Peter) evangelized the Phoenicians in Antioch during the 1st century AD. The spread of Christianity in Lebanon progressed slowly due to strong paganism in the mountainous areas. It was not until the 4th century that Christianity gained ground as a result of the efforts of Saint Maron. The founder of the Maronite church had a Greek/Eastern/Antiochian Orthodox background and started a community of monks near Homs (Syria) who preached the gospel in the surrounding area. Throughout the centuries, Maronite Christians found refuge in the mountains while empires fought wars over the control of the Middle East. The Western world was unaware of the existence of the Maronite church until the time of the Crusades. In the 16th century the Maronites became affiliated with the

¹⁰ See: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/lebanon/politics.htm>, last accessed on 26 February 2018

¹¹ See: <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/lebanon>, last accessed on 26 February 2018

Roman Catholic Church. They played an important role in France's founding of the State of Lebanon.

What church networks exist today? ¹²

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
352,000	1,663,000	20,400	31,200	6,100	-13,400	21,300	62,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to the World Christian Database (WCD), the main denominations in Lebanon are the Roman Catholic Church (including Maronites), followed by the various Orthodox Church traditions.

Historical Christian communities: The majority of Christians in Lebanon belong either to the Maronite or the Greek Orthodox communities. The largest Christian group is the Maronite community which, while maintaining its centuries' long affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church, has its own patriarch, liturgy and ecclesiastical traditions.¹³ The Greek Orthodox community is the second largest Christian group. Other Historical Christian communities include Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites), Syriac Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts and Latins (Roman Catholics). These historical Christian communities constitute half of the political setup of Lebanon and persecution towards them is almost non-existent.

Communities of converts to Christianity: These are either converts to Christianity from a Muslim background or cross-denominational converts (i.e. Christians who have changed denominational affiliation). Where families are conservative, they can face persecution. Since around 2013, Lebanese churches have experienced an influx of Muslim Syrian refugees who have accepted Christ. A number of these refugees face persecution, for instance: Their families abroad might stop sending them money, husbands leave their wives, or simply they experience social scorn. In general, Lebanon is a diverse country with many strictly Christian areas, which means that converts from Islam rarely face death or extreme persecution. An exception is the Bekaa valley where converts from Islam and those who minister among them can face violent persecution. Most members of evangelical churches are cross-denominational converts from

¹² **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.

¹³ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed on 21 February 2018.

Historical Christian communities. They sometimes face pressure from their families, such as social scorn and familial discord.

Non-traditional Christian communities: These communities are mostly composed of evangelical Protestants, including Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists. Evangelical Protestants are frowned upon by Historical Christian communities as they often do not have a big church building, their services are not liturgical and they do not emphasize the roles of the saints or the Virgin Mary. In practice, they experience few difficulties apart from some limits on acquiring authority to conduct marriages, but few appear to regard that as persecution. Inside Beirut, they do experience persecution in the form of social scorn and accusations of belonging to heretical sects. Outside Beirut, particularly in the Christian area between Beirut and Byblos, it is very hard to get a license to build an official non-traditional church. A number of non-traditional Christian communities are active in ministering to converts from Islam in the Bekaa valley, which can lead to violent persecution.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ¹⁴
2,059,000	3,608,000	9,000	113,000	5,200	3,100	4,200	237,300

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD statistics, 59.7% of the population is Muslim and 34.1% is Christian. Muslims are almost evenly divided between between Sunnis and Shiites, including smaller percentages of Alawites and Ismailis¹⁵. According to the US State Department, around 5.6% is Druze.¹⁶

Notes on the current situation

- Christians are found throughout the entire country, to the east of Beirut and its suburbs, the northern part of the mountains, northern areas of the country, in the city of Zahle in the Bekaa valley and in Jezzine in the south. Of all Christian denominations, the Maronites remain the most influential.
- Growth in the numbers of Christians is mainly visible among Syrian refugees. It is unsure if converts can remain in their communities or will need to relocate, which is already happening in individual cases.
- Generally, there is not a high level of fear among Christians in Lebanon. However, many Christians in Lebanon are concerned regarding possible political and economic instability and for the risk of overspill of the Syria war. Since the defeat of the Islamic State group (IS) in most areas of Syria and Iraq, this fear has reduced to some extent.

¹⁴ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

¹⁵ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 25 February 2018.

¹⁶ idem

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

Where persecution comes from

Lebanon holds a unique position in the Middle East. It is the only Arab state which is not officially Muslim and its citizens are legally free to change their religion. However, converts from Islam to Christianity can face opposition in majority Islamic rural areas. Also, non-traditional Christians can face opposition in areas dominated by traditional Christian churches. In each case, it is mainly ordinary people from the general public, family, ethnic group leaders and to some extent religious leaders, who are the source of persecution.

How Christians are suffering

In general, Christians are not suffering from serious levels of persecution in Lebanon. They can meet opposition which can range from verbal to – rarely - physical abuse. When an individual from a traditional Christian family decides to become an Evangelical, this can lead to pressure from the family and Christian religious leaders. Christians from an Islamic background may be denied access to family property or inheritance and are more likely to face resistance, including (rare) physical violence. Especially Syrian refugees who have converted to Christ have experienced hostility from their families and stigmatization and exclusion from the local community. There have been incidents where the family of Syrian converts have informed militant Islamic groups (e.g. Hezbollah) to put converts under pressure to recant using violent methods. In a reaction to the wave of evangelism among refugees, Muslim Sunni clerics have been speaking openly against Evangelical Christians influencing the Muslim population. However, this is currently not a strong threat and only happens occasionally.

Examples

Most of the violence is directed against converts and those who minister to them, especially in the Bekaa valley. One Christian was reportedly killed for faith related reasons, 35 Christians were physically or mentally abused (death threats) and six Christians raped or otherwise sexually harassed. Six Christians were abducted and two arrested and taken to Sharia court for their conversion. Three house-churches could no longer continue at the same location for security reasons. Eight Christians had to leave their homes and relocate within the country. A Christian family of four had to leave the country for their safety.

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.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Lebanon ¹⁷	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Medium
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Medium
Denominational protectionism	Medium
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):

Islamic oppression mostly affects converts from Islam to Christianity. The Lebanese context is a complex mixture of religion, tribalism, patronage (especially in seeking powerful foreign supporters) and maintenance of power, privilege and prestige. The Christian and Muslim communities tend to live in their own separate areas. Hence, there is not much room or points

¹⁷ 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.

of contact for a Muslim person to convert Christians or vice versa. However, if a Muslim does decide to follow Jesus, then (depending upon whether his/her family is progressive or conservative) that person will face persecution and pressure to return to Islam. As a persecution engine, Islamic oppression is most intense among Syrian refugees who have converted from Islam to Christianity, especially in the Bekaa valley. In the rest of the country, Lebanon's democratic system and power-sharing formula prevents Islamic oppression from developing further.

Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

This engine describes situations where Christians are being forced to adhere to indigenous customs established by ethnic groups. In the case of Lebanon, *Ethnic antagonism* is blended with *Islamic oppression* and mostly affects Christians with a Muslim background. This engine is particularly active in the cities outside of Beirut with strong tribal identities such as in Tripoli in the north, in the Bekaa valley and in southern regions. For example, Muslim clerics opposed a progressive law that would give more protection to wives from domestic abuse. (Familial issues are resolved by religious courts in Lebanon, so in fact this law would give greater power to religious leaders, both Muslims and Christians.)

Denominational protectionism (Medium):

Especially outside of Beirut, it is currently hard for Evangelicals to start new churches. The dominant Maronite church (over 40% of the Christian population in Lebanon) tends to look down upon Evangelicals as (sheep-stealing) newcomers who have only been active in Lebanon for a century or less. Hence, Evangelical churches outside of Beirut will face opposition. They might be accused of being a dangerous sect, denied permits to build a church, and even physically accosted. Maronite and Orthodox churches will seek to prevent their members from becoming Evangelicals. While this problem does exist, it is not a major issue and there are churches of Evangelical and Historical Christian communities who have been able to build up good relationships.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Lebanon	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Not at all
Ethnic group leaders	Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Weak
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very 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	Medium
Political parties at any level from local to national	Very weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Very weak

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Drivers of *Islamic oppression* are normal citizens, family and to some extent Muslim clerics, especially affecting converts from Islam to Christianity in majority Islamic or conservative rural areas in particular. This could range from verbal to physical abuse. Family members might also deny the convert access to family property and inheritance. Especially Syrian refugees who have converted to Christ have experienced hostility from their families and stigmatization and exclusion from the local community. There have been incidents where the family of Syrian converts have informed militant Islamic groups (e.g. Hezbollah) to put converts under pressure to recant using violent methods. In a reaction to waves of evangelism among refugees, Muslim Sunni clerics have been speaking openly against Evangelical Christians influencing Muslim populations. However, this is currently not a strong threat and only happens occasionally.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism are ethnic group leaders and family. As this persecution engine is blended with Islamic oppression, the groups most under pressure are converts from Islam.

Drivers of Denominational protectionism:

Drivers of Denominational protectionism are family and leaders of Historical Christian communities at any level, from local to national. If a Maronite or Greek Orthodox Christian, for instance, decides to become a Protestant, this might lead to pressure from the family and church leaders.

Context

Lebanon holds a unique position in the Arab world: It is the only Arab state which is not officially Muslim and its citizens are legally free to change their religion. For centuries, it has served as a place of refuge for minorities in the region. There are many different religious creeds of which 18 are recognized. The largest religious groups are Muslims (Shiites and Sunnis) and Christians. Their numbers are closely connected to the number of representatives in parliament, making this a very delicate topic. The president is traditionally a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament a Shiite Muslim. The last census dates from 1932 when the percentage of Christians was still 52%. Meanwhile according to the World Christian Database, the Christian population is estimated to be 34.1% and the Muslim population 59.7%. Muslim groups are demanding a new census to prove that they are a majority in the country now.

More than 80% of the Lebanese population has experienced some form of displacement during conflicts, the most recent being the civil war of 1975 - 1990 and involved neighboring Syria and Israel. Many have lost loved ones, homes and jobs, leading to a large number of traumatized people. Many Christians have left Lebanon for economic and security reasons. As a result of the civil war in Syria, there has been a huge influx of Syrian refugees, accounting for approximately 25% of the current Lebanese population. There are also large numbers of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, making up approximately 10% of the population. These refugees are a heavy burden for Lebanon's economy, which already faces a public debt equal

to 142% of its GDP. The Syrian civil war results in growing tensions between religious communities in Lebanon. On the more positive side, there are still many chances for ministry in the relatively free country and there are many converts from Islam.

Persecution of religious minorities: While no religious groups have been specifically persecuted in Lebanon, groups such as Jehovah Witnesses are not legally recognized as a religious community. According to the World Jewish Congress, Jews in Lebanon are unable to openly practice their faith due to the current political situation.¹⁸ There have been continued acts of vandalism against a Jewish cemetery in Beirut in 2016 without the security forces taking action. On land belonging to the Jewish cemetery in Tripoli, a parking lot, gas station and shops were built without consultation.¹⁹

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated in Lebanon and are therefore not included as a separate category for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

The majority of Christians in Lebanon belong either to the Maronite or the Greek Orthodox communities. The largest Christian group is the Maronite community which, while maintaining affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church for centuries, has its own patriarch, liturgy and ecclesiastical traditions.²⁰ The Greek Orthodox community is the second largest Christian group. Other Historical Christian communities include Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites), Syriac Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts and Latins (Roman Catholics). Half of Lebanon's parliament is composed of Christians belonging to historical Christian communities and therefore persecution towards them is almost non-existent.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Communities of converts to Christianity are mostly composed of believers from a Muslim background and Christians who have changed denominational affiliation. In some cases, when their families are conservative, converts might face persecution. From about 2013 onwards, Lebanese churches have experienced an influx of Muslim Syrian refugees who have accepted Christ. A number of these refugees face persecution. Their families abroad might stop sending them money, husbands leave their wives, or they simply experience social scorn. In general, Lebanon is a diverse country with many Christian-dominated areas and converts to Christianity rarely face death or extreme persecution. An exception is the Bekaa valley where converts from Islam and those who minister among them can face violent persecution. Most worshippers at Evangelical churches are converts from churches belonging to Historical

¹⁸ See: <http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/LB>, last accessed on 28 February 2018

¹⁹ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed on 28 February 2018

²⁰ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed on 21 February 2018.

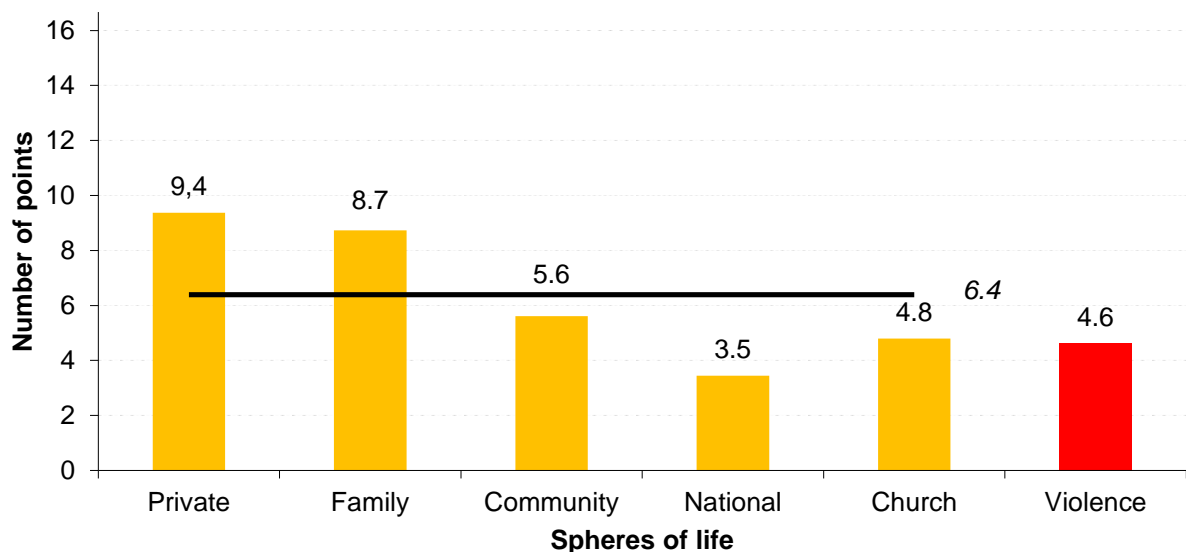
Christian communities. They sometimes face difficulties from their families in the form of social scorn or family discord.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category is made up of evangelical Protestants, including Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists. Evangelical Protestants are often looked down upon by churches belonging to Historical Christian communities, as they often do not have a big church building, their service is not liturgical and they do not pray to (or appear to respect) Church saints or the Virgin Mary. In practice, there are very few real issues apart from some limits on acquiring authority to conduct marriages but few appear to regard that as persecution. Inside Beirut, Evangelicals experience scorn and are sometimes accused of belonging to a group like Jehovah's Witnesses. Outside Beirut, particularly in the Christian area between Beirut and Byblos, it is very hard to get a license to build a church belonging to the non-traditional Christian community. A number of non-traditional Christian communities are active in ministering to converts from Islam in the Bekaa valley, which can lead to violent persecution.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Lebanon



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Lebanon shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Lebanon is 6.4 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*, which particularly reflects the difficulties converts experience.
- The score for violence is 4.6 - a relatively high score for a country like Lebanon. Reports of incidents especially involved Syrian refugees facing persecution in the Bekaa valley.

Private sphere:

In this *sphere of life* converts from Islam and “cross-denominational converts” with a traditional Christian background are affected. The intensity of persecution varies – for instance, non-immediate family members may not be as understanding as immediate ones. Immediate family members who are open-minded may accept the transition. In general, persecution is usually at a social and psychological level and rarely becomes physical or life-threatening. In majority Christian areas, “cross-denominational converts” from traditional Christian backgrounds face opposition mainly from their families. For converts from Islam, disclosing the change of faith to extremely conservative family members or friends could result in moderate persecution, especially in majority Islamic areas. Initial disclosure can be risky, though the typical pattern is that immediate family come to accept the conversion over time. However, converts from Islam in the Bekaa valley can face violent reactions in response to their conversion.

Family sphere:

In Lebanon, a person’s identity is determined by his family identity. Religion is part of this and any attempt to change it will be met with resistance from the entire family. Thus, Muslim communities and traditional Christian communities put pressure on converts to return to the faith of the family. This pressure is usually not physical persecution, except in some rare cases where the family is conservative and living in rural villages. Christians from Historical Christian communities may disapprove of adult baptism and put pressure on non-traditional Christian family members to baptize their babies. Some Muslim families will try to hinder the baptism of one of their members as it denotes that s/he has finally left Islam. Although it is common for Muslims to put their children in Christian schools, the wider family of converts from Islam may put pressure on a convert couple to take their children to a Muslim school and participate in Muslim religious festivals. Some children of converts must attend Islamic classes in state schools.

Community sphere:

In general, Christians have a lot of freedom in the public sphere in Lebanon. However, there is some pressure on non-traditional Christians in traditional Christian areas to adjust to local customs and habits, just as there is for converts from Islam to Christianity in majority Islamic areas. This is true particularly outside the big cities. Lebanon as a whole observes major religious festivals. Hence, a Christian with a Muslim background living in a Muslim rural area would be frowned upon for refusing to participate in Ramadan or other Muslim festivals. Similarly, a non-traditional Christian living in a traditional Christian village would be frowned upon for refusing to participate in church festivities surrounding certain saints. Also, refusing to put the statue of the Virgin Mary beside one’s house (in majority traditional Christian areas), or not to wear the hijab for a woman (in majority Islamic areas) could incite social harassment. Nevertheless, generally in Lebanon, people are free to abstain from participation with few serious consequences. As public employment is sectarian, converts from Islam who are known to be Christian are very likely to be discriminated against, especially in majority Islamic rural areas. Hezbollah controls and monitors certain areas in the country and will not allow any evangelistic activities.

National sphere:

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Lebanon's Constitution, which declares that "the state will respect all religious groups and denominations as well as the personal status and religious interests of persons of every religious group. The constitution guarantees free exercise of religious rites provided public order is not disturbed and declares the equality of rights and duties for all citizens without discrimination or preference."²¹ By law, Lebanese converts from Islam to Christianity can change their religious registration if a local senior official of the Christian group he wants to join approves of his choice. Syrians (and others) experience more problems, but those are to do with nationality and Syrian laws, not religious freedom in Lebanon. The law does not mention the freedom to evangelize. In general proselytizing is frowned upon and considered a threat to the delicate religious balance. "Blaspheming God publicly" is penalized by a maximum prison term of one year, though there is no explanation what this entails. Lebanon officially recognizes 18 faith groups (mostly Christian or Muslim) who are all represented in parliament and the public sector. The judicial system is made up of Christian and Muslim judges. In cases other than familial issues, which are dealt with in the court of each religious group, religion does not play a role in court and citizens are generally treated equally.

Church sphere:

In general, churches in Lebanon enjoy a high level of religious freedom. Christian organizations operate in Christian areas, and Muslim ones in Muslim areas. Attempting to open an Evangelical church outside of the big cities is very difficult and the local Historical Christian community is likely to hinder the process. Efforts to open a church in a Muslim area is almost impossible. Converts from Islam meet in house-churches, which may be monitored by the local community, especially in majority Islamic areas. The same is true for non-traditional Christian activities in majority traditional Christian areas outside the big cities and for Christian activities like Bible distribution (or other Christian material) in Muslim areas. Though not forbidden by law and mostly not physically persecuted, they will be frowned upon for promoting - from the community perspective - religious hatred in the country. In some cases a church would refrain from integrating converts from Islam into a church for the sake of safety.

Violence:

For one of the most liberal countries in the Middle East, Lebanon has a relatively high score for persecution-related violence against Christians. Most of the violence is directed against converts and those who minister to them. Violent incidents particularly took place in the Bekaa valley, but also occurred in Beirut, and in northern and southern areas of the country. One Christian was reportedly killed for faith related reasons, 35 Christians were physically or mentally abused (death threats) and six Christians raped or otherwise sexually harassed. Sexual related violence is most likely to be underreported. Six Christians were abducted and two were arrested and taken to Sharia court due to their conversion. Three house-churches could no longer continue at the same location on security grounds. Eight Christians had to leave their homes and relocate within the country. A Christian family of four had to leave the country for their safety.

²¹ See: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, last accessed 22 February 2018.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Christian women and girls with a Muslim background are particularly vulnerable to persecution for their faith. This can include social harassment, confinement to the home, forced marriage, disinheritance and shaming – all in an effort to correct their behavior. Female Syrian refugees also run the risk of sexual harassment and domestic violence.

The Lebanese law states that children follow the religion of the father. So, if a mother is Christian and her husband is Muslim, then their children will be registered as Muslim. In some instances, where the Muslim mother converts to Christianity and the father does not, the father might take the children away from the mother to raise them separately. For this reason, some convert mothers have had to flee from their Muslim husbands with the children.

Male:

The forms of persecution Christian men and boys with a Muslim background are particularly subject to are social harassment, disinheritance and shaming. In some cases, there is a risk of physical assault either by relatives or militant Islamic groups like Hezbollah in the areas that they dominate. Losing the family's inheritance would affect a Muslim man's ability to raise his family properly.

Future outlook

In their forecast for the next few years, the Economist Intelligence Unit expects Lebanon to “struggle with the repercussions on the sectarian balance, its security and economy of the Syrian civil war and Iran-Saudi tensions. There will be a short-lived calm following the retraction of the resignation of the Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, but tensions will reignite and policymaking will stall as a result. The economy will perform weakly with large fiscal and current-account deficits. Security concerns and economic rivalry will take precedence over economic or political reform.”²²

The sectarian balance is very delicate in Lebanon and with the wave of evangelism among Syrian refugees, Muslim Sunni clerics have been speaking openly against Evangelical Christians influencing the Muslim population. At the moment, this is not a strong threat but over time and if the evangelization of Muslim refugees continues, the engine of *Islamic oppression* could grow to more serious levels.

Policy considerations

Currently under consideration.

²² See: <http://country.eiu.com/lebanon>, last accessed 22 February 2018.

WWR in-depth reports

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

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Lebanon 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/lebanon/>

- [Christmas for refugees in Lebanon: far from home and reduced to handouts](#)
30 December 2017
Lebanon has now absorbed more than a million refugees from conflicts in nearby Syria and Iraq. How do Christians under pressure for their faith celebrate Christmas? A Lebanese Catholic who helps look after refugees in Beirut reports.
- [‘My daughters have no future in the Middle East’](#)
10 November 2017
Some changes forced by the conflict have the potential to empower women: If their husbands have died or are still in Syria, they may have to make decisions for their families for the first time. Others, whose husbands are with them in Lebanon, have taken the role as breadwinner for pragmatic reasons.
- [Lives in limbo – Iraqi Christians’ long wait for asylum in Lebanon](#)
8 November 2017
Petros and his wife left the Iraqi capital in 2010 as increasing violence made life there too perilous. “In 2014 the couple moved to Lebanon. Eleven months ago Petros was diagnosed with cancer, and the couple’s focus turned to Petros’ health.

Recent country developments

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

- Lebanon: Christian president elected – a new era begins?

11 November 2016

Traditionally Lebanon's president is a Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament, a Shiite Muslim. However, what is surprising is that Saudi-backed political rival and billionaire, Hariri, has come to some agreement with Michel Aoun, whose Free Patriotic Movement has been allied with Iranian-backed Hezbollah since 2006 and supports Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

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