



TUNISIA: Country Dossier

May 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.

TUNISIA – Country Dossier (May 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.

TUNISIA		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	62	30
WWL 2017	61	29
WWL 2016	58	32
WWL 2015	55	36
WWL 2014	55	30

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 TUNISIA

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14107241>

Recent country history

Tunisia used to be a province of the Ottoman Empire before it became a French protectorate in 1883. Tunisia gained its independence from France in 1956. After dominating the political scene in Tunisia from 1956 to 1987, President Bourguiba was ousted from power as a result of a series of economic and political crises as well as concerns about his mental health. President Ben Ali ruled Tunisia from 1987 till 2011, until he was ousted from power through the Arab Spring uprisings. An interim government took over and a new constitution was approved on 26 January 2014. Presidential and parliamentary elections were then held in December 2014, marking the end of the period of transition. Despite security and economic challenges, Tunisia remains the only country in which the Arab Spring uprising led to the emergence of a more democratic and legitimate government in which secularist and Islamist parties have been able to govern on the basis of consensus and compromise.

The religious landscape

99% of Tunisians identify themselves as Sunni Muslim. Despite the French legacy of *laïcité* or French secularism among the urban and educated elites, Islam is very influential and the Constitution recognizes Islam as state religion. Christianity and Judaism are the most significant minority religions. Christians with a Muslim background are growing in number in Tunisia. This gradual growth of the Church has become noticeable since the 1990s.

The political landscape

After President Ben Ali's removal from office in 2011, presidential and parliamentary elections were not conducted until December 2014, when Beji Caid Essebsi was declared winner. While some have cautioned that Essebsi's victory posed a danger of a return to the authoritarian past of Ben Ali, Essebsi has presented himself as an experienced technocrat capable of bringing about stability and a much needed economic turnaround.⁴

Essebsi's moderate and secularist party, Nidaa Tunis, won the largest number of seats in the parliament. Ennadha, the moderate Islamic party that had won the elections in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 revolution and which had led the transitional government for a while, won the second largest number of seats. Since President Essebsi came to power, there have been many political ups and downs in Tunisia leading to the formation of a series of unity governments led by various prime ministers. The key challenges are the activities of militant Islamic groups in the region and the economic crisis - especially the decline of tourism which

⁴ "Beji Essebsi, former government minister, wins Tunisia election", Associated Press, 22 December 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/m/news/world/beji-essebsi-former-government-minister-wins-tunisia-election-1.2881231>.

has been one of the mainstays of the Tunisian economy. Currently, Prime Minister Youssef Chahed is leading a unity government formed by a coalition of secular, Islamist and leftist parties.

The socio-economic landscape

By the standards of the region, Tunisia is a relatively prosperous country, with tourism being a key sector of the economy. Although Tunisia's economy had performed relatively well until the eve of the Arab Spring revolution in 2011, there is now a high unemployment rate, especially among the younger generation - even for those with university degrees. With the completion of the political transition in Tunisia, the successive governments that have assumed power have all faced the daunting task of revitalizing the economy and addressing the socio-economic grievances that ousted the former Tunisian dictator Ben Ali.

Concluding remarks

Tunisia is a country that is more advanced than most northern African countries both in terms of socio-economic development, civil liberties and democratic governance. The country has the potential to be an example to other Arab countries due to its peaceful and consensus-driven transition to democracy. However, regional instability, the rise of Islamic militancy as well as a high unemployment rate and difficulties in implementing economic reforms needed to bring about much needed economic growth means that Tunisian democracy is still in a fragile state. Unless Tunisia manages to consolidate its economy, tackle the threat of Islamic insurgency and revitalize its economy, Christians in the country could face a very difficult situation and increasing levels of persecution.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
11,495,000	23,800	0.2

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

Tunisia has a very rich Christian history. Some of the early Church Fathers (e.g. Augustine and Tertullian) lived in this country and it was also one of the places where the Donatist controversy erupted in the 4th century concerning the appointment of leaders who had previously betrayed their Christian faith during persecution. As in other countries in North Africa, the arrival of Islam significantly affected Church development, but Christianity managed to survive in Tunisia until the 11th century despite the imposition of Islam. Christianity did not

succeed in getting established again until the 19th century when many French and other expatriate Christians came to the country. The Roman Catholic witness grew considerably and an archbishop of Carthage was named in 1884. Various other Christian groups also began work: Anglicans in 1829, the North African Mission in 1881, the Seventh-day Advents in 1905, Methodists in 1908 (from America), and in 1911 Pentecostals from the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee).

What church networks exist today? ⁵

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
230	19,600	1,000	2,400	530	-	680	2,200

Source: WCD, May 2017

Currently, there are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Russian Orthodox, French Reformist, Anglican, Seventh-day Adventist and Greek Orthodox congregations in the country, according to the International Religious Freedom Report for 2014.⁶ A small community of Christians with a Muslim background is also present in the country.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁷
23,800	11,436,000	-	86	-	1,900	2,300	30,800

Source: WCD, May 2017

Approximately 99.5% of the population are Muslim and virtually all are adherents of Sunni Islam, with most following the [Maliki tradition](#).⁸ There is also a very small Jewish minority in Tunisia.

⁵ **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.

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

⁷ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

⁸ One of the largest groups of Sunni Muslims. A major historical center of Maliki teaching, from the 9th to 11th centuries, was in the Mosque of Uqba of Tunisia. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maliki>, last accessed 15 November 2017.

Notes on the current situation

- The government's legal system is not robust enough to protect the freedom of Christians.
- The rise of Islamic militancy in the region is a threat to Christians.
- Tunisian nationals form one of the largest contingents of radical Islamic fighters in Syria and many of them are returning to Tunisia. This, coupled with the conflict and state collapse in Libya, is contributing to serious security challenges in Tunisia.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 62 / Position: 30

WWL 2017 Points: 61 / Position: 29

WWL 2016 Points: 58 / Position: 32

Where persecution comes from

Persecution in Tunisia is caused mainly by the general hostility towards Christians evident in Islamic society. Even though, relatively speaking, the state has become more tolerant of Christians since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, there is a noticeable growing influence of radical Islamic teachings. Foreigners in Tunisia enjoy a good deal of freedom of religion but are restricted from engaging in openly evangelistic activities. The small community of Tunisian converts experience persecution from family members, relatives and the community at large and face difficulties with the state authorities in having their conversion to Christianity officially recognized.

How Christians are suffering

A journalist who has investigated the situation of Tunisians Christians in depth states:

"Tunisian Christians face [discrimination](#) and targeting that is often obscure and hidden to the public eye. It affects their day-to-day lives. Because of their Christian identities, many experience job insecurity, abandonment from family, friends and even fiancés; they are victims of verbal, mental and physical abuse, and are not given equal opportunities under the law to identify themselves as Christians and marry whoever they want."⁹

Due to the factors mentioned above, most Tunisian Christians choose to hide their faith and cannot openly worship and live their lives as Christians. The hostility and pressure they face from society at large makes it dangerous to share their faith with their family members, relatives, neighbors, friends or colleagues. Tunisian Christians also find it difficult to gather for worship and fellowship due to the risks any possible exposure would entail.

⁹ Hwang, P., The plight of a religious minority in a Muslim society, April 2016, available at: <http://underground.priscillahwang.com/>, last accessed 14 August 2017.

Examples

- Church facilities and buildings are monitored, ostensibly for security reasons but also for the purpose of surveillance.
- During the WWL 2018 reporting period, more than a dozen Christians were detained and questioned by the authorities for faith related reasons.
- In February 2017, it was reported that a Christian cemetery in the town of [Sfax](#) had been vandalized. It is believed that the incident was religiously motivated.¹⁰

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 62 / Position: 30

WWL 2017 Points: 61 / Position: 29

WWL 2016 Points: 58 / Position: 32

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 61 points in WWL 2018 Tunisia rises one point in comparison to WWL 2017. Although there has been a decline in the pressure experienced by Christians in Tunisia in some *Spheres of life* (for instance, due to a legislative reform concerning marriage), a rise in violence had the effect of offsetting this decline in pressure.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=30750>, last accessed November 2017.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Tunisia ¹¹	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Very weak
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

This persecution engine operates at different levels: At the family level, converts from Islam to Christianity are often not supported by family members in their decision to convert. There are cases of converts being locked up in their houses by their own families. At the social level, radical Islamic militants spread fear throughout the country. At the political level, Islamist political parties are still influential. The links between some Islamist movements and organized crime should not be underestimated. They create a lot of unrest in Tunisian society and contribute to the increase of the already high levels of fear among Christians. The prime minister has recently emphasized the [link between terrorism and organized crime](#)¹² and corruption by asserting: “We are persuaded there is a link between smuggling, terrorism financing, cross-border activities and also capital flight.”

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Tunisia	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Very weak
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Strong
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Weak
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

¹¹ 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.

¹² See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/25/world/africa/corruption-crackdown-intensifies-in-tunisia-and-the-people-cheer.html>, last accessed 5 October 2017.

The main drivers of persecution in Tunisia are violent religious groups, in particular militant Islamic groups. Despite the country's reputation as being the most celebrated success story of the Arab Spring uprisings, radical Islamic teaching and militancy is widespread, especially among the youth. Such radical groups (whose ranks are swelling with returnees from fighting in Syria and Iraq) are among the major drivers of persecution. Ordinary people such as neighbors and family members are also sources of persecution especially for Christian Tunisians who have converted from Islam. This is particularly the case outside the major urban centers. The government and state apparatus also could be regarded as drivers of persecution since they deny registration and official recognition to congregations of Christians with a Muslim background.

Context

There had been a lot of social, economic and political discontent in Tunisia leading up to the Jasmine revolution (Arab Spring). On 14 January 2011, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his inner circle fled the country to Saudi Arabia. The regime fell and an interim government was established. The political landscape in Tunisia has since been transformed. A new constitution was approved on 26 January 2014. Subsequently, Tunisia conducted presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2014, marking the end of the period of transition. The presidential election went into a second round and in this run-off election, Beji Caid Essebsi was declared to be the winner.

Due to the fact that no single party has been able to win a majority in parliament and due to the difficulties in reviving the Tunisian economy, there seems to be a constant change of prime ministers and governments in Tunisia since the 2014 parliamentary election. The key challenges that these successive national unity governments have been tasked to deal with are: i) the growing threat of militant Islamic groups in the region, and ii) the economic crises caused especially by the decline of tourism which had been one of the mainstays of the Tunisian economy. In the WWL 2018 reporting period so far, Youssef Chahed is leading a unity government formed by a coalition of secular, Islamist and leftist parties, with the support of independents and a trade union.

Despite the security and economic challenges it is facing, Tunisia remains the only country in which the Arab Spring has led to the emergence of a more democratic and legitimate government in which secularist and Islamist parties have been able to govern on the basis of consensus and compromise with one another. An interesting development in relation to this is the fact that Ennadha, which was the largest and most prominent Islamist political party in Tunisia, has officially become a secular party. At the same time, there are radical Islamic parties such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir which the Tunisian government is trying to ban as a threat to public order. Tunisia has also emerged as the number one country of origin of foreign fighters in Syria, many of whom are returning to Tunisia after being radicalized by IS.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians experience a relative amount of freedom, although public evangelism is not tolerated. Foreign Christians worshipping at the few international churches hardly encounter any problems; native Christians face the brunt of persecution.

Historical Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by the WWL Methodology.

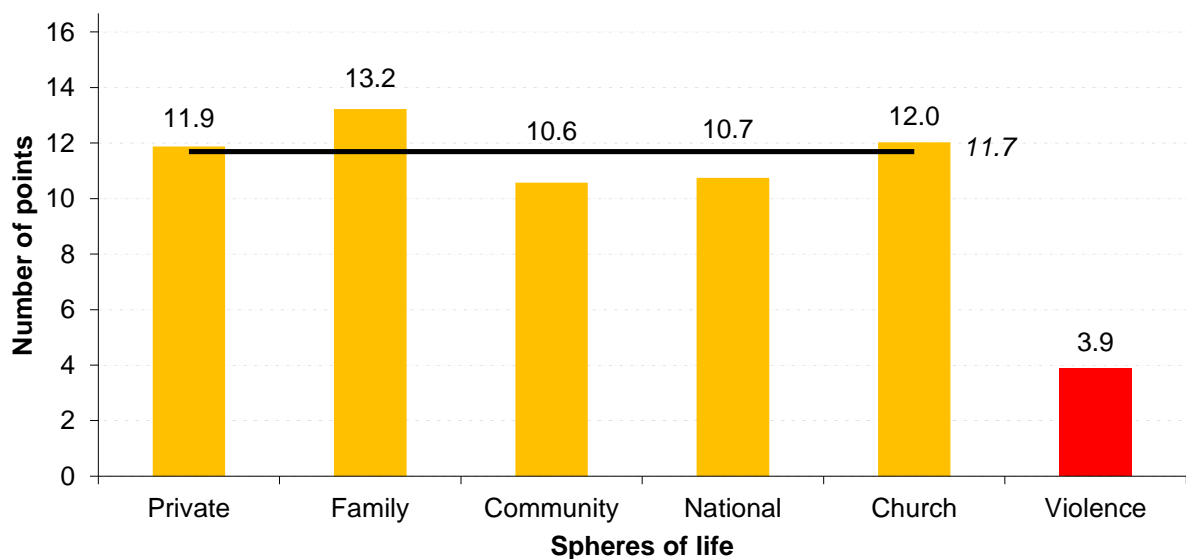
Communities of converts to Christianity: Converts with a Muslim background face various forms of persecution, e.g. from their family members. However, they (and others) are more or less free to seek and receive information about the Christian faith, particularly content posted online.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by the WWL Methodology.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Tunisia



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Tunisia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Tunisia has remained at 11.7 as in WWL 2017, although there are slight differences in pressure scores for the *Spheres of life*.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Family sphere*. This is because the country is overwhelmingly dominated by Islam in terms of its religious demographics and,

despite the government's effort to project an image of a liberal, open and democratic country, most Tunisians, especially those outside of the major metropolis, are influenced by less tolerant versions of Islam. In this context, believers with a Muslim background face a great deal of pressure from their family members to renounce their faith.

- The score for violence in Tunisia for the reporting period is 3.9, rising from 3.0 in WWL 2017. This rise in the number of violent incidents can partly be explained by the return of Tunisian fighters, who had joined up with the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. They have been further radicalized and [battle hardened](#).¹³

Private sphere:

Particularly converts from Islam experience pressure when their conversion is known at the private level, though there are notable differences between the countryside and the country's capital, Tunis, where the situation is comparatively better. Most converts (especially young people) experience some sort of opposition, rejection and/or persecution because of changing their faith. Especially for young converts it is difficult to read the Bible regularly and find a place for prayer in the open by themselves since this could expose them to harassment and pressure.

Family sphere:

In the family sphere, the freedom of Christian families to conduct their family life in a Christian way is limited. Every Tunisian is automatically registered as a Muslim. Expatriates have no trouble if their children keep their foreign nationality. Converts have to accept that official documents will state that they are Muslim. If they seek to change this, it proves impossible and causes repercussions.

Community sphere:

Converts receive threats from their families or the society around them when their conversion is known. Especially in rural parts of the country young female converts are scared of being forced into marrying Muslims. There are also cases known of converts being expelled from their university, or not able to go to school, because of being turned out of their homes. Sometimes customers are told not to buy from shops run by a Christian.

National sphere:

When dealing with the authorities, Christians are usually in a disadvantaged position. There are hardly any Christian high profile politicians or government officials in Tunisia. Church registration is impossible for indigenous Christians. Expatriate churches are the only ones allowed to display Christian symbols.

Church sphere: Although the constitution of Tunisia currently respects freedom of religion and conversion from Islam is not prohibited, in practice representatives of the government often act very differently. The importation of Christian books in Arabic is obstructed by the authorities. Tunisian converts cannot register their churches and no new church has been

¹³ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/europe/isis-tunisia.html> last accessed 15 December 2018.

granted official registration since Tunisia's independence in 1956. This stands in stark contrast to the law that regulates mosques. Registered churches are allowed to operate freely but face practical difficulties, particularly relating to their properties, hiring of staff, and permission to publish and distribute Christian texts in Arabic.

Violence:

Violent persecution against Christians seems to have been on the rise in the WWL 2018 reporting period, even though the score for violence is not as high as for other countries in the region like Egypt and Libya.

Examples:

- A 29 year old Tunisian who converted to Christianity from Islam was expelled from the house he had built with his own money on land that was owned by his father. His family evicted him from the house and they were not willing to give him the money he had invested on building the house. He was also severely injured when he was beaten up by youngsters belonging to a radical Islamic group called Ansar al-Shariah. He has also been arrested a few times by the police on various pretexts due to his Christian [faith](#)¹⁴.
- A Christian cemetery in the town of Sfax had been vandalized in an attack that is believed to have been religiously [motivated](#).¹⁵
- During the WWL 2018 reporting period, more than a dozen believers have been detained and questioned by the authorities for faith related reasons.
- A 23 year old Christian who converted from Islam had been unable to marry her Christian fiancé (who has German nationality) since she is still considered a Muslim under Tunisian law and thus prohibited from marrying a non-[Muslim](#).¹⁶

Gender profile of persecution

Female/ Male: No data available.

Future outlook

Although the political situation in Tunisia seems to have stabilized, this does not mean that the pressure on Christians can be expected to decrease. In fact, society and culture, particularly in rural areas, remains anti-Christian and this is not influenced by political changes. Tunisia's constitution may seem a positive step forward, but the wording is general enough to make restrictive interpretations possible. It will strongly depend on the kind of government that is in power and its attitude towards religious minorities.

¹⁴ See: <http://underground.priscillahwang.com/>, last accessed 15 December 2017.

¹⁵ See: <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=30750>, last accessed 15 December 2017.

¹⁶ A recent reform of the relevant law would allow the girl in question to marry her fiancé. See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/21/why-tunisia-just-passed-controversial-laws-on-corruption-and-womens-right-to-marry/?utm_term=.46a79ace4c77, last accessed 15 December 2017.

Tunisia faces a real threat of instability and conflict as a result of the rise in the activity of radical Islamic groups in the country. The situation is getting even more disconcerting now that many Tunisian Islamic fighters who have been fighting alongside Islamic State (IS) in Libya are now returning home with the apparent demise of IS in Libya. If groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir gain more influence in Tunisia, the situation for Christians in the country will get much worse than it is and the persecution of Christians could become much more intense and violent.

Policy considerations

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

- The international community should work with the Tunisian government to clarify Article 6 of the Constitution to comply fully with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of ICCPR and leave no room for interpretation. Open Doors recommends that a plan for implementation, including full protection for those who convert from Islam be developed.
- The government of Tunisia should put in place effective legal measures to prevent, investigate and finally bring justice for violations of freedom of religion, particularly involving those of Muslim background who converted to Christianity.
- The EU should mainstream Freedom of Religion or Belief into its major investment programs aimed at bringing security and stability in Tunisia, and so ensure the protection of Christians vulnerable to radical Islamic groups and the creation of a culture of peaceful interfaith participation in politics, business and education.

WWR in-depth reports

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

- [NORTH AFRICA – Freedom of religion since the Arab Spring – 2016](#)
July 2016
16 page assessment - country by country - of the effects of the Arab Spring uprisings which started in Tunisia in December 2010/January 2011 and spread like wildfire throughout the region.

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Tunisia 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/tunisia/>

- [Tunisia’s religious freedom curbed by societal pressure – UN Rapporteur](#)
23 April 2018
Old laws and societal pressure pose the greatest challenges to religious freedom in Tunisia, concluded the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, after a ten-day visit.
- [UN religious-freedom rapporteur to assess Tunisia](#)
10 April 2018
The UN’s Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief will assess whether security measures to combat terrorism in Tunisia are limiting freedom of religion.
- [Women in Tunisia now free to marry spouse of choice](#)
15 September 2017
Women in Tunisia can now marry whomever they wish, even if their spouse is a non-Muslim. The announcement today was made by the spokeswoman for President Beji Caïd Essebsi.

Recent country developments

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

- [Tunisia: Reform enables Muslim women to marry non-Muslims](#)
13 October 2017
Tunisia has undertaken a legislative reform that is intended to bring the country’s family and inheritance laws in line with its 2014 Constitution: Tunisian women can now marry non-Muslims even if the bride is officially a Muslim.
- [Tunisia: Prime minister sets up “war cabinet”](#)
29 September 2017
Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed has reshuffled his cabinet and appointed 13 new ministers. The prime minister has dubbed the new cabinet a “war cabinet” to indicate that the government’s priority will be on tackling terrorism, corruption, unemployment and inequality.

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