



## COMOROS: 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 Countries<sup>1</sup>

		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

<sup>1</sup> 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 \(WWL\)](#)<sup>1</sup> including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))<sup>2</sup>. Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)<sup>3</sup> and WWR staff.

COMOROS		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	56	51
WWL 2017	56	42
WWL 2016	56	39
WWL 2015	56	32
WWL 2014	48	42

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

<sup>2</sup> WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

# WWL 2018: Keys to understanding COMOROS

## Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13229685>

## Recent country history

After years of political instability following independence from France in 1974/5, the Comoros Archipelago underwent a democratic transition in 2006. In that year Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi became president of the Union of the Comoros in an election that international observers described as generally free and fair. This was the first peaceful and democratic transfer of power in the country's history. In 2008, the Union Army of National Development launched a successful and bloodless military coup that led to the removal of the former president of Anjouan Island, Mohamed Bacar, who then fled the country. Moussa Toybou was then elected president in a generally free and fair process in 2008. In November and December 2010, elections were held to decide the new Union president on the Archipelago as well as separate governors for each of the three islands. Again, in 2016, the country passed the test of holding peaceful elections when the former coup leader Azali Assoumani won, having served previously as president from 2002–2006.

## The religious landscape

Comoros is a majority Muslim country. According to World Christian Database (WCD), only around 0.5% of the population is Christian. The government itself observes the Islamic religious holidays as national holidays, such as the Birth of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Kabir, and Islamic New Year. Although classes in Islam are not compulsory in state schools, it is combined with Arabic teaching in state education at the middle school level. Due to the poor quality of state education and the fact that private schools are often unaffordable, Islamic madrassas can fill the educational gap. Indeed, almost all children between the ages of four and seven attend Islamic schools where they learn to read and recite the Quran.

The government favors Islam; in civil society, education, and governance there is a strong presence of conservative Islam. This is reflected in Comoros' stance towards NGOs. Christian NGOs face discrimination while Islamic NGOs are welcomed. Despite Comoros' democratization of society, it appears that Islamic developments in the region – for example the Islamic revivals in Madagascar, Mauritius and the Maldives - will become stronger, taking into consideration that Western countries are far less active on the archipelago than Muslim majority countries.

## The political landscape

The Constitution of Comoros requires a "rotating" presidency of the Union of Comoros in which each of the three islands takes turn at holding a primary round of elections for presidential candidates every four years. As evidenced by the recent elections in 2016, power is vested in the government by the people and switches from island to island.

Some observers think the government might not be in a position to handle the rise of Islamic militancy in the country which is partly encouraged by the economic influence of some of the countries from the Middle East.

## The socio-economic landscape

The Comoros archipelago is overpopulated with a population density of more than 300 persons per square kilometer. One reason for this is the combination of a high birth rate and geography.

The primary revenue producers in Comoros are the country's exports, agriculture and tourism. Agriculture accounts for nearly 40% of national GDP, and, although there are a few large plantations, most agriculture is carried out on a small scale by local farmers. One of the problems Comoros experiences is that the productivity of agricultural land is decreasing due to both population growth and the slow introduction of technological improvements in farming. This is partly attributable to low education levels among most of the adult population and insufficient availability of sophisticated agricultural equipment.

Another source of revenue are the remittances transferred from abroad, for instance by relatives living in France. The Comorian government has put in place a Community Development Support Fund to carry out projects which take advantage of the tight social cohesion in the communities. Many Comorian families traditionally have matrilineal inheritance, so women are not considered to be an especially vulnerable group.

Overall, Comoros is seeking to attract greater foreign investment to facilitate its development. China in particular, is seen as a powerful ally that can provide aid and development assistance. In turn, China may view the archipelago as a useful location for furthering its strategic objectives and keeping an eye on India. India may therefore start investing more in Comoros to offset Chinese advances. In July 2013, Iran also announced it would increase "rural, scientific, technical and economic ties" between Iran and Comoros. In 2014, Comoros received direct investment from the government of Kuwait to build schools and charities in return for an arrangement made by the government of Kuwait to give its stateless residents (Bidoon)<sup>4</sup> citizenship of Comoros.

The role of civil society on the three islands is limited. Only a handful of domestic and international NGOs are reported to exist and these generally operate without government

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<sup>4</sup> For more information, see: <http://rightnow.org.au/opinion-3/being-%E2%80%9Cwithout%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-who-are-the-bidoon-of-kuwait/>, and <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/stateless-kuwait-who-are-bidoon>. Also: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/11/the-bizarre-scheme-to-transform-a-remote-island-into-new-dubai-comoros>.

restriction. For example, NGOs have been able to carry out investigations and publish their findings on human rights cases, and government officials have also been generally cooperative and responsive to their views. Several of the more recently formed NGOs have worked on sustainable development. As such, relations between the parliament and civil society are generally favorable. The exception to the government's generally positive posture towards NGOs is its discrimination against Christian NGOs, which have faced governmental restrictions in their advertising and operations. For example, the government has prohibited the distribution of religious literature, clothing and symbols of such organizations.

## Concluding remarks

Comoros is a small Island with a turbulent political history. In recent years, it has managed to hold peaceful and democratic elections. In terms of economy, the country is poor and it mainly depends on foreign aid, especially from the Middle East. Society is conservative and leaving Islam is very risky. The government puts serious restrictions on the activities of Christians and Christian NGOs.

## WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
826,000	4,200	0.5

Source: WCD, May 2017

### How did Christians get there?

The Portuguese take the credit for introducing Christianity to the island in 1517. However, this had no lasting effect and the Christian faith was reintroduced by the French when the Island of Mayotte became a French colony in 1843. Following independence in 1975, the evangelical missionary organization, Africa Inland Mission, began to expand its missionary work, but when the government started aligning itself with Muslim countries the missionaries were expelled in 1978. Also the work started by others, for example by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was terminated by the government.

## What church networks exist today? <sup>5</sup>

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
-	2,400	1,400	270	160	-	470	300

Source: WCD, May 2017

An estimated 0.5% of the population are Christian. Groups continue to meet regularly in homes to study the Bible. As in most closed Muslim countries, coming to faith in Christ brings many difficulties and dangers for the individual convert from Islam.

The International Evangelical Church was first started around 1970 in a home in the capital city. Although there are other nationalities that attend this church, it continues to be attended predominantly by individuals and families from Madagascar. This church has historically kept to itself and has not tried to reach out to the local islanders. This is primarily due to a fear of being closed down if they were to be caught sharing the Gospel with Comorians. However, within the past few years there has been a significant shift in perspective and outreach in both humanitarian and spiritual areas.

## Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others <sup>6</sup>
4,200	812,000	-	-	7,900	-	720	1,187

Source: WCD, May 2017

Comoros is a Sunni-Muslim majority country. There may also be some Shiite Muslims who studied in Iran but who do not disclose their religious beliefs, fearing pressure from the Sunni majority. Converts to Christianity face serious discrimination in society and are forced to send their children to madrassas in order to learn the Quran.

## Notes on the current situation

Christians in Comoros face many challenges. They cannot preach in public as proselytizing for any religion except Sunni Islam is illegal and hence punishable by law. Expatriate Christians will be deported if they preach to locals.

<sup>5</sup> **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.

<sup>6</sup> This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

## WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018 Points: 56 / Position: 51**

WWL 2017 Points: 56 / Position: 42

WWL 2016 Points: 56 / Position: 39

### Where persecution comes from

Comoros is a majority Sunni nation. It has adopted a Constitution that declares (Sunni) Islam to be the state religion. Government officials, Muslim leaders, community leaders and family members are the drivers of persecution. There are also some foreign-trained radicals called *Djaulas*.

### How Christians are suffering

All Christian communities in Comoros face persecution, although the level and the types of persecution may differ. Christians in the country are expected not to discuss their faith in public. If they do, they face legal consequences. In some parts of the country, radical groups intimidate Christians with violence. However, violence is not common in the country, although this might change in the future. Proselytization by any religion except Islam is illegal and converts can be prosecuted. Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background face the severest difficulties at the hands of family, community leaders and government officials. They are put under pressure not to practice their faith, leaving them little option but to live out their faith in secret.

### Examples

- In society, there is an increasing presence of radical Islamic tendencies despite a positive political trend towards furthering democratic practices. The constitution states that all public policies must be based on Islamic beliefs. Some legal provisions for religious freedom exist, but these are directed more towards foreigners than native Christians.
- Convert families are obliged to send their children to Islamic madrasas where the Quran is taught, so that the children learn Islamic teachings, as required by law.
- Radical teachers locally known as *Djaulas*, many of whom trained in Pakistan or another Muslim nation, are pushing for stricter *sharia* laws in the country.



# WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018 Points: 56 / Position: 51**

WWL 2017 Points: 56 / Position: 42

WWL 2016 Points: 56 / Position: 39

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## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

In WWL 2018, WWL 2017 and WWL 2016 Comoros has been stable with a score of 56. This shows the situation for Christians in Comoros has not changed greatly, but is also not improving, despite the country's progress in the democratic process. It should be recalled that Comoros was in the WWL Top Ten in the 1990s until 1998 and in the Top Twenty for several years in the past.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Comoros <sup>7</sup>	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Weak
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

<sup>7</sup> 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.

Two persecution engines are visible in Comoros. While the main persecution engine is *Islamic oppression*, *Dictatorial paranoia* is also present to a lesser extent.

#### **Islamic oppression (Very strong):**

*Islamic oppression* in Comoros is not new; however, its recent growth started with the adoption of a legal framework that opted for state-sanctioned religion. In 2009, a referendum was held enabling the government of Comoros to change the Constitution, which now declares that Islam is the state religion. This constitutional change severely curtails the existence of other religions. Parallel to the new Constitution, it has become visible that residents are adopting a radical view of Islam, especially on the islands of Anjouan and Moheli. The rise of radical Islamic sympathies among the population at large, government officials, religious leaders and Muslim youth groups in particular, causes anxiety among Christians.

#### **Dictatorial paranoia (Weak):**

Considering the peaceful February-May 2016 election and transition, one might say that the country has become truly democratic. However, that would be a mischaracterization and the country has a long way to go before it can be called a democratic nation. This is particularly true if one looks at the recent past. Since independence (from France) in 1975, Comoros has seen at least twenty coups or attempted coups. Thus Comoros has a history of political instability which has left the country desperately poor, and at times on the brink of disintegration. This history has also led to a paranoid state of mind among government officials. Consequently, even though the country is considered “partly free” by Freedom House, the government is not tolerant towards dissent or any form of association. There has been progress in the last decade, yet the country’s rulers still suppress freedom of association, religion, and expression - this is particularly true when it comes to restricting Christians’ freedom in all walks of life.

## Drivers of persecution

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

The machineries that drive persecution in the country are manifold. Muslim religious leaders are at the forefront. In mosques and madrassas they regularly teach anti-Christian sentiments. Government officials have their share in this as they obligate parents to send their children to madrassas. They also prohibit Christians from engaging in religious discussion in public and preaching in public outside churches. Family and community members discriminate and harass suspected converts from Islam to Christianity. They also deny worshipping space for Christians in general. An ultra-conservative group of radical scholars locally known as *Djaulas* (many of whom trained in Pakistan) is pushing the country to a more extreme view of Sharia law in the country and are against Christians.

## Context

Comoros is a tiny Island located in the Indian Ocean. The country has been on the World Watch List since WWL 1993 and for many years it was among the countries with the worst record for persecution. Several factors are relevant for understanding the background to the persecution dynamics on Comoros.

The 2009 Constitution declared Sunni Islam to be the state religion, but also respects that everyone has the right to have his/her own religion and worship. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is not allowed and foreigners who proselytize will face deportation. In the past, the Archipelago faced political instability – in part reflected by a poor human rights record and a string of coups. However, since 2006, Comoros has been going through a process of democratic transition leading to increased levels of legitimacy among the local population and a deepened capacity to deal constructively with social conflict. As a result, a 2016 report by Freedom House complimented Comoros by typifying it as an “electoral democracy” and “partly free”. Still, there is a long way to go regarding institutionalizing democracy and holding elections periodically.

In February - May 2016, Comoros held elections that attracted attention from the region as many had thought that the elections might destabilize the country. Azali Assoumani of the Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros was elected President with 41%.<sup>8</sup> Azali Assoumani was a former coup leader who deposed Tadjidine Ben Said Massoude in 1999.

There is an increasing radical Islamic influence on the islands despite a positive trend towards furthering democratic practices. Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise at rates paralleling neighboring East African countries. The Constitution reinforces this in dictating that all public policies must be based on Islamic beliefs. Some legal provisions for religious freedom exist, but these are directed more towards communities of expatriate Christians rather than native Christians. Proselytization of any religion except Islam is illegal, converts to Christianity from Islam can be prosecuted, and the converts that exist face severe discrimination from the Muslim majority and are put under pressure not to practice their Christian faith, leaving them to live out their faith effectively in secret.

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<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.africanews.com/2016/05/16/assoumani-officially-declared-president-elect-of-comoros/>, last accessed 19 December 2016.

Comoros has established strong ties with other Islamic governments in the Middle East and the Gulf. As a result, many Gulf countries have promised to help the development of the country. For example, in February 2014 the Saudi Fund for Development promised 40 million dollars toward Comorian infrastructure and health services.<sup>9</sup> These factors make radicalization and a possible move to militant Islam not only a possibility, but also a real phenomenon. In addition, the existence of the secular/liberal lifestyle on the nearby Mayotte Archipelago could be exploited by Muslim conservatives to justify a stricter implementation of Islam. For example, radical scholars, who often trained in Pakistan and are locally known as *Djaulas*, are pushing for stricter Sharia rules in the country and are against Christians.

Concerning the persecution of other groups and religious minorities: It has been well documented that Comoros' Sunni-dominated society also harasses and discriminates against non-Sunni Muslims.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

Christians in Comoros are concentrated in cities, especially the capital Moroni, and the main city of Anjouan, Mutsamudu. All Christian communities in Comoros face persecution. However, the level of persecution that Christians from a Muslim background experience is far severer than the levels other groups face.

### **Communities of expatriate Christians:**

The Christians in this group suffer many restrictions: They are not allowed to integrate converts from Islam, they are not allowed to preach in public outside their churches and if they do so, they will be deported. These communities face persecution primarily from radical Muslims and non-Christian religious leaders, and to a lesser extent from the leaders of political parties and their followers.

### **Communities of converts to Christianity:**

Christians with a Muslim background face persecution at home in the hands of their family and community. Converts from Islam always experience persecution from government officials, non-Christian religious leaders and from leaders of political parties and their followers, and radical Islamic groups such as the *Djaulas*. If their conversion becomes known, converts will be shunned and completely cut off from their families and friends.

### **Non-traditional Christian communities:**

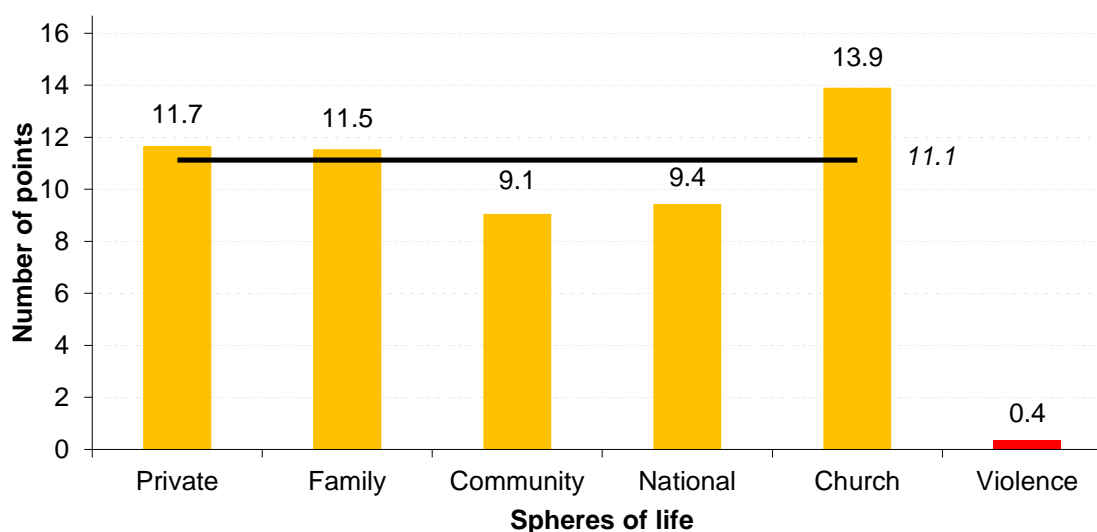
This group is known for evangelizing, which cannot be done in public in Comoros. The Penal Code declares that “whoever discloses, spreads, and teaches Muslims a religion other than Islam will be punished with imprisonment of three months to one year and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Comorian francs”. Christians from Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations thus face persecution from the government and radical Muslims.

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<sup>9</sup> See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/comoros>, last accessed 22 September 2017.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

### WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Comoros



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Comoros shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Comoros is at the very high level of 11.1 points.
- Pressure is strongest in *Church sphere*. This is mainly due to the fact that church life in the country - especially where converts are involved - is under serious restrictions in many forms.
- The score for violence is very low at 0.4 points, showing an improvement compared to 0.9 in WWL 2017.

#### Private sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background are the primary victims in this *sphere of life*. Conversion in the country is not allowed. Islam is the declared state religion and society shuns those who convert. Furthermore, acts of worship or expressing one's religion in public is very risky, as is owning Christian materials.

#### Family sphere:

All Christians in the country experience pressure in this *sphere of life*, but particularly converts. Since the children of all Comorians are expected to learn the Quran from the age of three to six, this has made life especially difficult for converts wanting to raise their children according to Christian values and faith. Finding a place for burial is also a challenge for many Christians, especially for converts who are often buried according to Islamic rites.

#### Community sphere:

It has been well documented that the Sunni-dominated community harasses, shuns and discriminates against Christians and other non-Sunni Muslims. All types of Christians face persecution in this *sphere of life*, however, it is more intense for known converts who then, for

example, experience limited access to available medical services. Furthermore, converts are put under heavy pressure to renounce their Christian faith publicly with the backing of the government.

**National sphere:**

The government stands at the pinnacle of all persecution in the country as it sets the tone for society in the various regions by explicitly declaring Islam to be the state religion. Other laws emanating from that declaration have a *Sharia* and Muslim focus.

**Church sphere:**

This *sphere of life* often has a direct link to the *National sphere*. The tone laid down by the Constitution is felt severely by the churches. Christians find it difficult to build places of worship and cannot distribute Bibles and other Christian materials in public. House-churches are always spied on by local groups. It is very dangerous for the expatriate Christian communities to allow local visitors to attend church services. A foreigner who is found doing so would be deported.

**Violence:**

Violence in the country went down by 0.5 points. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, a Christian was detained without due process of law because of his faith.

## Gender profile of persecution

**Female:**

In Comoros, the data shows that female converts from Islam experience more serious difficulties than men due to their faith: In addition to being shunned, there is a possibility that they would be forced into marrying a Muslim.

**Male:**

According to a report by a country researcher: “Male converts in the Comoros are under pressure from their families to revert back to Islam. Students were threatened with loss of academic support, married men were persecuted by their wives and in-laws plus by their families of origin. They were threatened with divorce as a means to coerce them back to Islam and in some case, denied food by their wives and in-laws. Mosque leaders also spoke against them and two brothers had attempts made on their lives.”

## Future outlook

Comoros has been on the World Watch List for many years. In the past couple of years, the country has been progressing towards stability and democracy. In contrast, however, life for Christians in Comoros is not getting better. In the past twenty years, the space for Christians has been under threat from hardliners who demand that Comoros is for Sunni Muslims only, with no room for others. Islam was made state religion under the 2009 Constitution which was ratified by referendum. That even closed any meaningful space for Shia Muslims. For the coming year(s), the following developments are likely:

- The country will continue the progress it has embarked on in terms of stability and democracy at least until the next parliamentary elections to be held in 2020.
- It is likely that radical Islam will continue to increase in the country, which will mean that pressure on Christians will continue.

The fact that elections were held in 2016 in a relatively peaceful manner will help the country strengthen the advancement of democratic values.

## Policy considerations

Research has consistently shown that Christians face serious restrictions in their right of freedom of religion in Comoros. Open Doors therefore suggests the following recommendations:

- The government of Comoros has made progress in electoral democracy and stability. The international community should nevertheless maintain support and exert pressure for further reform from the government so that the citizens' right of freedom of religion and belief is enshrined in law and society.
- The government should introduce sufficient measures to tackle anti-Christian slander and sentiment, and ensure Christians and religious minorities enjoy equal status before the law.
- In this respect, the government of Comoros should repeal the anti-conversion law and laws prohibiting proselytizing for any religion other than Islam.
- The government of Comoros successfully upholds the rights of expatriate Christians for the most part. The government should ensure that the implementation of freedom of religion applies equally to native Christians.

## WWR in-depth reports

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

## Open Doors article(s) from the region

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

## World Watch Monitor news articles

There are currently no recent news articles about Comoros. Any new articles will be made available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/comoros/>

## Recent country developments

There are currently no recent items on Comoros. Any new articles will be made available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Comoros>

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