



MOROCCO: Country Dossier

June 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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World Watch List 2018

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

WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries¹

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

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

MOROCCO – Country Dossier (June 2018)

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Introduction

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

MOROCCO		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	51	55
WWL 2017	-	-
WWL 2016	-	-
WWL 2015	-	-
WWL 2014	47	44

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 MOROCCO

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14121438>

Recent country history

Morocco was a French protectorate from 1912 to 1956, when it gained independence. Upon independence, Morocco was able to take control of some of the territory under Spanish protectorate. However, Morocco's claim of sovereignty over other former Spanish controlled territories was resisted by the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro" (POLISARIO) which proclaimed an independent state called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and managed to secure the recognition of some states.

The religious landscape

Over 99% of the population is Muslim (majority Sunni), with the remaining being mostly agnostic or Christian. Islam is the official state religion. Non-Muslim foreign communities can openly practice their faiths. The majority of Christians in Morocco are Roman Catholic and in relative terms (i.e. in comparison to other countries in the Arab world) Morocco could be characterized as a religiously tolerant state. Nevertheless, proselytization with the intent to convert Muslims from Islam to another religion is still considered illegal.

The political landscape

Morocco is a parliamentary monarchy in which the king is granted extensive executive powers and is both political and religious leader, being officially designated "Commander of the Faithful". He presides over the Council of Ministers and appoints the prime minister following legislative elections from the winning party. On recommendations from the prime minister, he appoints the members of government. After the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Morocco was also touched by the wind of liberty and desire for economic change. Large numbers of young people who found themselves unemployed even after getting university degrees expressed their frustration by taking to the streets. Responding to the demonstrations and calls for change, the government organized a referendum on constitutional reforms which was held on 1 July 2011. In the elections held since these constitutional reforms were put in place, the Islamist Justice and Development Party has won the largest number of seats in parliament enabling it to form coalition governments. Therefore, Morocco was able to avoid the political upheaval that engulfed North Africa. However, there are still grievances and discontent is especially strong in the Rif region which is found in the northern part of the country where the mainly ethnic Berber population feel marginalized and neglected by the government.

The socio-economic landscape

Compared with most other countries in the region, Morocco's economy is a relatively dynamic and robust. Mining, agriculture, manufacturing and tourism are important sectors of the economy. However, Morocco is ranked 123 on the UNDP Human Development Index despite steady progress over the past two decades. The average life expectancy in Morocco is 74.3, the adult literacy rate is 72.4 and the Gross national income (GNI) per capita is 7,195 USD. Moroccan companies are also becoming increasingly active and investing in other African countries, especially in West Africa and this is helping foster economic growth in the country.

Concluding remarks

Morocco has been an oasis of stability and economic progress in a region that has been fraught with political instability and economic crises. Its incremental and evolutionary approach to political reform has proved to be quite successful so far. Morocco's international image is that of a progressive, tolerant and economically dynamic country. However, there is the risk of complacency setting in and this image does not fully reflect the country's record when it comes to the rights of religious minorities. Also, unless the unrest in the Rif region is quickly addressed, the situation could allow Islamic militants to destabilize the country.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
35,241,000	32,400	0.1

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

Christianity arrived in Morocco during the Roman Empire and became very prominent in areas like Tangiers, Rabat and Fez. It was also one of the countries where Donatism and Arianism became a major theological issue in the 4th century AD. By the 7th century, Islam reached Morocco and many Christians were forced to convert. In 1220, priests of the Franciscan Order made a brave attempt to reintroduce Christianity into Morocco and a diocese was set up at Marrakesh in 1234 which was able to function until 1566. In the 19th century the country became a French colony and the Roman Catholic Church returned.

Missionaries from North Africa brought the Protestant faith to Morocco in 1884. After Morocco was declared a French protectorate (1912-1956), the Reformed Church of France formed the Evangelical Church of Morocco. The Gospel Missionary Union and Emmanuel Mission Sahara came to the country in 1894 and 1926 respectively. Other churches and

movements followed, such as Anglicans, the Assemblies of God, the Christian Brethren and the Seventh-day Adventists.

What church networks exist today? ⁴

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
580	19,900	5,400	5,000	1,500	0	4,100	4,500

Source: WCD, May 2017

There are a number of Christian communities in Morocco, but these are mainly for expatriates who live mostly in the urban areas of Casablanca, Tangier and Rabat. According to the International Religious Freedom Report for 2014⁵, church communities include the French Evangelical Church of Morocco, the Moroccan Association of Protestant Churches, Anglican churches in Casablanca and Tangier, the Russian Orthodox Church in Rabat and the Greek Orthodox church in Casablanca. According to the World Christian Database, the Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination in Morocco.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁶
32,400	35,124,000	0	0	0	2,500	35,500	46,800

Source: WCD, May 2017

With the exception of the minorities listed above, virtually all Moroccans are adherents of Sunni Islam. Islam is the official state religion and the country's king is officially designated "Commander of the Faithful".

Notes on the current situation

- Christians, especially converts from Islam, face societal discrimination, and the government prohibits proselytizing Moroccan Muslims. This is a restriction of the freedom of Christians to manifest their religion and belief in teaching and practice.
- The growth of Islamic militant movements in North Africa is a cause of concern for Christians.

⁴ **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.

⁵ See more at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

⁶ 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: 51 / Position: 55

WWL 2017 Points: 46 / Position: -

WWL 2016 Points: 48 / Position: -

Where persecution comes from

Although Muslim-majority Morocco is considered to be a relatively tolerant country, nevertheless Christians suffer persecution from both the state and society at large. Although the intensity and frequency of the persecution is less in comparison to many other countries in the region, there are still restrictions imposed by the state and radical Muslims within the general populace also put pressure on Christians. In rural areas, the pressure coming from the extended family and the community at large can also be considerable.

How Christians are suffering

Christians in Morocco face persecution in different ways. A recurrent problem for Christians who are open about their faith relates to Article 220 of the Penal Code which criminalizes shaking the faith of a Muslim. This puts many Christians who talk to others about their faith at risk of criminal prosecution and arrest. Advocates for the rights of Christians have also been targeted for violent attack by Islamic militants. Political analysts have also observed that while the law only punishes proselytization, converts to Christianity can be punished in other ways: “Converts lose their right to the custody and guardianship of their children and they can neither inherit nor bequeath their wealth to non-Muslims, which means they become civilly [non-existent](#)”.⁷ Christian converts also complain that they are unable to give their children Christian names, worship together in churches, be married and buried in Christian cemeteries in accordance with Christian [beliefs](#).⁸

Examples

- A Moroccan convert who had been a Christian secretly for twenty years found he was suddenly ostracized by close friends and family and shunned by colleagues at work when he revealed his conversion in an internet video. His children were also bullied at [school](#).⁹
- On 4 November 2016, Mohammed Saeed Zao, a well-known activist for the rights of Christians, survived an assassination attempt. He was attacked by a suspected radical

⁷ See: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2017/05/22/Are-Christians-in-Morocco-emerging-from-shadows-of-the-past.html>, last accessed 15 February 2018.

⁸ Id.

⁹ See: <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1092471/middle-east>, last accessed 15 February 2018.

Muslim with a sword in the city of Casablanca. Although Mohammed reported the incident to the police, they refused to take up the [issue](#), calling him a troublemaker.¹⁰

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 51 / Position: 55

WWL 2017 Points: 46 / Position: -

WWL 2016 Points: 48 / Position: -

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 51 points Morocco again remained outside the Top 50 just like in the past two reporting periods. While the score for violence has been more or less the same, the scores for pressure in *Family*, *National* and particularly in the *Church spheres of life* have shown an increase. Christians in Morocco are in a comparatively better situation than in other countries in the region, but the persecution faced by individual converts from Islam – particularly from family and society, especially outside of major cities - as well as the persistent restriction on most forms of evangelization account for Morocco’s rise in score.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/morocco-christian-survives-assassination-attempt/>, last accessed 15 February 2018.

Persecution engines

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

Islamic oppression (Medium):

Morocco displays a softer and more moderate version of Islamic oppression compared to other countries in the region. Restrictions imposed by the Islamic authorities include the confiscation of Christian literature in Arabic (including Bibles) if discovered, bans on cooperating with Christians from abroad - especially if evangelization is planned - and serious challenges in securing recognized places of worship for Christians with a Muslim background. Converts from Islam face pressure as a result of their new faith from family and friends and from the local community if their proclamation of faith is felt to be an attempt at proselytization.

Drivers of persecution

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Among the main drivers of Islamic oppression in Morocco are government officials and leaders of political parties. The Justice and Development Party (PJD) is, alongside the monarchy, arguably the most important political player in the country. Although it does not advocate banning Christianity, its leaders have exhibited intolerance towards Christianity and do not

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.

fully recognize the freedom of belief and worship of Christians. State officials are also unwilling to register and allow Christian converts with a Muslim background to congregate freely, gain recognition and evangelize. For instance, Abdelaziz Aftati, a controversial member of the ruling party, mocked the idea that Christians in Morocco should have rights in 2017.¹² The extended family of converts from Islam as well as society at large - especially in rural areas - also act as drivers of Islamic oppression because of the pressure they exert on converts to renounce their faith in Christ.

Context

Morocco is a former French protectorate with an overwhelming Muslim majority estimated to be about 99.7% of the total population by the World Christian Database. Politically, Morocco is a parliamentary monarchy in which the king is granted extensive executive powers and is both a political and religious leader, being officially designated “Commander of the Faithful”. Morocco’s claim of sovereignty over the former Spanish controlled territories in northern Africa is contested by the “Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro” (POLISARIO) which proclaimed an independent state called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and managed to secure the recognition of some African states.

After the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Morocco was also touched by the wind of liberty and desire for economic change. Large numbers of young people who found themselves without jobs even after getting university degrees expressed their frustration by taking to the streets. Responding to the demonstrations and calls for change, the government organized a referendum on constitutional reforms which was held on 1 July 2011. In the elections held since these constitutional reforms were put in place, the Islamist Justice and Development Party has won the largest number of seats in parliament enabling it to form coalition governments. Therefore, Morocco was able to avoid the political upheaval that engulfed North Africa. However, there are still grievances and discontent which are especially strong in the northern Rif region where the mainly ethnic Berber population feel marginalized and neglected by the government.

Islam is the official state religion. Non-Muslim foreign communities can openly practice their faith. In comparison to other countries in the Arab world, Morocco could be characterized as a religiously tolerant state. Nevertheless, the proselytization of Muslims is still considered to be illegal. Compared with most other countries in the region, Morocco’s economy is relatively dynamic and robust. Mining, agriculture, manufacturing and tourism are important sectors of the economy. Morocco has been an oasis of stability and economic progress in a region that has been fraught with political instability and economic crises. Its incremental and evolutionary approach to political reform has proved to be successful so far. Morocco’s international image is that of a progressive, tolerant and economically dynamic country. However, there is the risk of complacency setting in and this image does not fully reflect the country’s record when it comes to the rights of religious minorities. In addition to Christians, Jews, Shia Muslims, and

¹² Information obtained from field survey of electronic/broadcast media.

Bahai are religious minorities in Morocco facing restrictions that make it nearly impossible for them to engage in public acts of [worship](#).¹³

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians, many of whom are engaged in a variety of professional activities, are often under surveillance and risk deportation if they are perceived to engage in acts of evangelization. However, compared to other groups - especially to Moroccan converts to Christianity - expatriate Christians from the West enjoy relative freedom of religion. Expatriate Christians from sub-Saharan African countries, who are often Pentecostal Christians, are usually marginalized and discriminated against. Recognized churches for expatriates exist only in major cities.

Historical Christian communities:

Denominations that pre-exist independence in 1956 include the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church and the French Protestant Church. These churches own their own buildings but (except for the Anglican Church) the government owns the land. As long as the building is being regularly used for church services, the church maintains control of the building. If it falls into disuse, the government takes the building and uses it for their own purposes. Given the difficulty for these churches to get new members and the fact that it is impossible for Moroccan Christians with a Muslim background to join these churches, historical Christian communities find it challenging to remain active and present in the country.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Moroccan Christians meet in house-churches because they cannot get permission and official recognition to congregate in public. In most cases, they change the location of their meetings to avoid meeting too regularly in a particular home. They do not yet have the history or level of organization to develop into a "denomination". While the level of tolerance from the society in urban centers as well as from the public authorities towards Christian converts is better than in most other countries in the region, converts to Christianity still face pressure to renounce their faith from society at large and their family. They also tend to be under surveillance and risk persecution if they engage in evangelism.

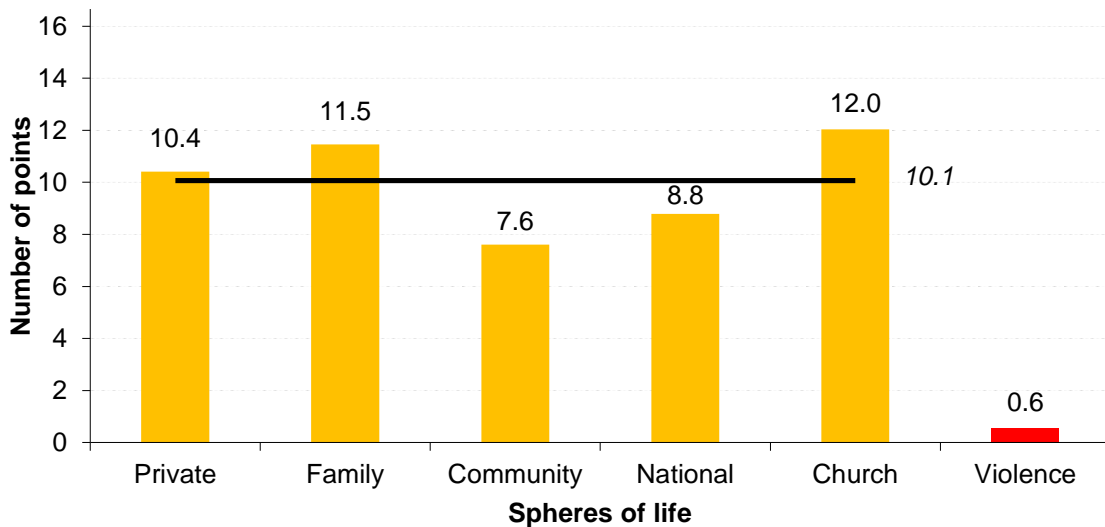
Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category does not exist in Morocco.

¹³ See: <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/08/226353/religious-minorities-persecution-morocco-us-state-department/>, last accessed 20 February 2018.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Morocco



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Morocco shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Morocco is at an average of 10.1 points. This is higher than the average score from the WWL 2017 reporting period. The rise in pressure is evenly distributed across all *Spheres of life*. It is not due to a dramatic change of the circumstances on the ground but is rather the result of more complete information being obtained in the WWL 2018 reporting period.
- Pressure is highest in the *Church and Family spheres of life*. This reflects the situation of converts from Islam and the pressure they experience from their relatives and extended family, especially in rural areas of the country.
- The score for violence stands at 0.6 points and is explained by converts being forced to relocate. This score is almost the same as for previous reporting periods.

Private sphere:

Although conversion from Islam to Christianity is punishable according to Moroccan law (and although Moroccan Islamic religious leaders have often disputed whether conversion is punishable by death), enforcement of this law is very weak and almost non-existent. Generally speaking, however, converts face pressure from relatives, family members and the community at large, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, it has been risky for some converts to reveal their faith. Acts of private worship and devotion that could reveal conversion to Christianity also entail the same risk. However, it should be noted that this risk is quite moderate compared to other countries in the region.

Family sphere:

As has been noted above, conversion to Christianity can trigger a hostile reaction from a convert's immediate and extended family. The State considers all Moroccans to be Muslims

and Moroccan Christians can be married without being asked if they are Muslims (because it is assumed they are Muslims). However, foreign Christian men wanting to marry a Moroccan woman would have to say they are Muslims because they are asked this question. All children are forced to attend Islamic classes. Some private schools allow children from Moroccan Christian homes to skip the Islamic classes, but this is not the norm. Compulsory Islamic studies in schools that officially take a very moderate line is common. These intrusions into the religious freedom and family life of Christian converts are less problematic than in other North African countries.

Community sphere:

Christian converts will face ostracization, particularly in rural areas. They also feel a great deal of societal pressure to take part in Islamic religious activities and rituals. For Christians with a Muslim background, societal pressure also makes it difficult to raise their children as Christians. Such pressure could take the form of bullying at school or Islamic instruction without parental consent. In urban areas, Christians have more freedom but expressions of Christian faith could still be perceived as an attempt at proselytization and could have negative repercussions.

National sphere:

Although we can say that there is relative freedom of religion in Morocco, there are still considerable restrictions on Christians in public. For instance, eating in public during Ramadan is considered illegal. Christian evangelism is banned and sharing Christian literature with others and proselytization is illegal. Morocco's High Religious Committee has retracted its 2012 ruling stating that apostasy is punishable by death and seems to have decided to permit Muslims to change their religion. Christians who evangelize could be accused of "shaking the faith of Islam" and this will entail criminal liability. State officials conduct surveillance on Christians and monitor their activities to enforce the ban on evangelism. Christians with a Muslim background are also denied recognition by the State.

Church sphere:

Churches of expatriate Christian communities are always monitored, to make sure that Moroccan nationals do not attend their services. Churches are hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings as these could be construed as proselytism. This will be the case both for Christians with a Muslim background and other Christians. The restriction on fellowship between expatriate Christian communities and other churches affects both communities. Apart from avoiding activities that could be construed as proselytism, officially registered historical churches and churches belonging to expatriate Christian communities can operate freely. The government has continued to permit the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish. A limited number of Arabic translations of the Bible were available for sale in a few bookshops for use in university religion courses. The authorities confiscate Bibles they believe are intended for use in proselytizing. Churches are not hindered in establishing and managing schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medial, social or cultural organizations, but these organizations must refrain from any activities that could be construed as proselytizing. Any perception of being evangelistic would lead to problems.

Therefore, although they enjoy more freedom than churches in other countries in the region, churches in Morocco operate under substantial restrictions.

Violence:

With the exception of a few Christians who had to relocate or go in to hiding for fear that they would be attacked by extended family members due to their conversion, there were no other acts of violent persecution recorded in Morocco during the WWL 2018 reporting period.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male:

No information currently available.

Future outlook

The future outlook of Christians in Morocco depends on a number of factors. These factors include the outcome of the struggle for more influence and control between the monarchy and the Islamist political party that has been leading the government for the past few years. The degree to which the economic marginalization and political discontent of some groups persist might also be a relevant factor, as they can provide an opening for Islamists to exploit. However, if its current overall trajectory continues, Morocco is likely to remain an oasis of stability and relative freedom for Christians in an unstable region. The Moroccan state also seems to be keen on maintaining its image as a tolerant and progressive modern state and is unlikely to scale up restrictions on religious freedom.

Policy considerations

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

- The international community should commend Morocco for its relatively good record in terms of religious freedom compared to neighboring countries.
- The international community should urge the Moroccan state to lift remaining restrictions on freedom of religion especially the laws that criminalize evangelistic activities.
- The Moroccan state should allow Moroccan Christians to congregate freely without fear and to associate and cooperate with the global Church freely.

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](#)
This 16 page research paper focusses on five North African countries, namely Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco and seeks to assess how the Arab Spring has affected Christians.

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Morocco 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/morocco/>

- [Moroccan Christians demand equal marriage rights](#)
12 June 2018
A Moroccan couple who converted to Christianity and recently married, ignoring threats from people in their conservative hometown, have demanded legal recognition of their union.
- [Persecution Watch countries: Beyond the Top 50](#)
10 January 2018
Beyond the top 50 on Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List, the charity lists another eight countries where the persecution of Christians is "high".
- [Religious minorities' struggles the focus of Morocco conference](#)
17 November 2017
A conference taking place in Rabat, Morocco will focus on the problems religious minorities are facing in the Muslim-majority country.
- [Morocco Christian survives assassination attempt](#)
8 November 2016
A prominent Christian activist has survived an assassination attempt in Morocco's northern city of Casablanca.

Recent country developments

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

- Morocco: Moroccan Committee for Religious Minorities to stage conference
2 December 2017
Under the title “Freedom of conscience and belief – between recognition and coexistence” Morocco’s first conference for religious minorities will be held in Rabat on 18 November 2017.
- Africa/Morocco: Conference on Freedom of Religion in Africa ends
6 June 2017
A four day annual conference on freedom of religion in Africa was held in Rabat, Morocco, ending on 17 May 2017.

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