



NIGER: 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				
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	
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	
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		51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57				
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		50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54		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.

NIGER – 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.

NIGER		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	45	58
WWL 2017	47	-
WWL 2016	53	49
WWL 2015	-	-
WWL 2014	45	50

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 NIGER

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13943662>

Recent country history

Niger declared its independence from France in 1960. Since then the country has seen numerous ups and downs, including at least four military coups. Despite the improvements since Mahamadou Issoufou came to power in 2011, there have been concerns about the “securitization” of Niger’s foreign policy and domestic politics. The country is battling against various terrorist groups: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) on its northern western border with Mali, and Boko Haram on its southern border with Nigeria. In May 2013, AQIM and MUJWA claimed responsibility for suicide operations in Arlit and Agadez, northern Niger, where the country has a historically militant Tuareg population. Within days of those attacks, militants attacked a prison in Niamey and freed a longtime AQIM member and attempted to free several other Boko Haram members. This led to speculation that Boko Haram and MUJWA orchestrated the prison attack.

Islamists are by their very ideology opposed to the secular nature of the government. Most imams give *khoutbas* (sermons) opposing Boko Haram and other militant groups, especially the Shiite imams who are in the minority. These imams do not want to see what has been happening in Nigeria take place in Niger and they support the US fight against terrorism. However, in recent years there has been an increasing adherence to stricter religious practice in Niger’s cities, especially in places like Zinder, Maradi and Diffa, which have communities that have long been connected to the Islamic communities in northern Nigeria. There is therefore concern about the spread of more militant Islamic groups like Boko Haram. Because of the close proximity of cities like Zinder, Diffa and Maradi to Boko Haram’s chief area of operations in northern Nigeria, some local religious leaders have been compelled to take a public stance against the group, while other religious leaders have feared the potential backlash from doing so. While no radical Islamic movement within Niger has yet emerged to challenge the government, the possibility of this happening in the near future cannot be discounted, especially given the external pressure on imams and vulnerable local leaders exerted by Boko Haram and other groups like MUJWA.

The religious landscape

Niger is a Muslim majority nation - according to WCD statistics, 95.9% of the population in Niger are Muslims, of whom about 5% are Shiites, and 0.3% are Christian. According to the US State Department’s 2016 Religious Freedom report: “Roman Catholic and Protestant groups account for less than 2 percent of the population. There are a few thousand Bahais, who reside primarily in Niamey and in communities on the west side of the Niger River. A very small percentage of the population adheres primarily to indigenous religious beliefs. Some

individuals adhere to syncretic religious beliefs that combine traditional indigenous practices with Islam.”⁴

The political landscape

Politics, tribe and militancy are intertwined in Niger’s political landscape. Although the country’s official language is French, each tribe and ethnic group has its own language and culture. Eight of the nine presidents since independence in 1960 have been of Hausa or Zarma descent. These two tribes dominate the country and therefore it should not be surprising that Tuaregs have engaged in two major rebellions since the 1990s and early 2000s and that the Songhai tribes were the main targets for recruiting by the Islamist group MUJWA. MUJWA, for example, used Songhai traditional symbolism in its recruiting videos. Niger’s most fertile areas are also in the Zarma region south of Niamey, and therefore the Zarmas are the wealthiest tribe in the country. The Hausas are descended from the Hausa states that formerly occupied the region in the *jihads* of the 19th century, so they have a tradition of being in power. The Tuaregs of northern Niger live in the most arid region of the country and are the poorest of the major tribes. While education is not guaranteed in any part of the country, the levels are particularly low in the Tuareg region, especially for women.

In recent years there has been an improvement in civil liberties and political rights in Niger. The turning point occurred in 2009-2010, when the president in office, Tandja, announced his intention to alter the constitution of Niger’s Fifth Republic via a referendum, which included extending his presidential term by three years. However, the major opposition groups opposed and boycotted the referendum. In February 2010, amid pressure from the international community, the military overthrew the government in a coup. In the fall of 2010, a new constitution was passed through a national referendum, and on 31 January 2011 Mahamadou Issoufou of the Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) won a run-off presidential election against former Prime Minister Seyni Oumarou (National Movement for a Developing Society-MNSD - Nassara). President Issoufou’s new government assumed power in April 2011. Since then, political and civil groups have been able to assemble peacefully, the situation for journalists and the freedom of the press has improved, and Niger is on the way to forming a multi-party democracy. This development is of major importance to Christians in the country, especially since the region is otherwise so influenced by Boko Haram and AQIM activity.

The socio-economic landscape

Niger is one of the poorest countries in Africa. As a landlocked and mostly desert country that is plagued by drought and famine, Niger consistently ranks near the bottom of the UN’s Human Development Index. The country’s only major export is unrefined uranium. With the exception of an oil refinery in Zinder that opened in November 2011, Niger is otherwise an entirely resource-dependent country. Power lines for electricity and Internet come from Niger’s southern neighbors, Nigeria (electricity) and Benin (internet cable), along with the majority of oil, agricultural produce and other commercial products. The agricultural sector contributes about 40% of the GDP and provides livelihood for approximately 80% of the

⁴ See: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/268924.pdf>, last accessed 5 March 2018.

population. There are plans in the international development community to move Niger towards solar power and other innovative energy sources that rely on indigenous solutions. 60% of Niger's economy comes from international aid and for the foreseeable future this is likely to continue, especially because the international community fears that if Niger's economy fails, it will allow Islamists to exploit the situation and become more powerful.

Concluding remarks

In 2017, the human rights situation in the country has seemed to be deteriorating due to security concerns over Boko Haram activity. The government has been known to declare a state of emergency in some parts of the country and even arrested several journalists in connection with the Boko Haram threat. Instability in the country and the region will affect Christians seriously. As it stands, it seems that the country is moving away from the internal political divisions that led to the 2010 coup, but the presence of Boko Haram and AQIM remain a constant threat both to the state and to Christians in the country and region.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
21,564,000	70,500	0.3

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

Christianity did not enter Niger until the 20th century:

- In 1923, The Sudan Interior Mission sent its representatives to the country.
- In 1929, Evangelical Baptist Missions started working in Niger.
- In 1931, the Roman Catholic Church came to Niger from their base in Dahomey (now Benin), and have since set up two dioceses.

What church networks exist today? ⁵

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
0	22,400	24,800	22,900	360	0	22,800	34,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

Most of the Christians in the country either converted in recent years or have ancestors who converted during colonial times (i.e. before the country gained independence from France in 1960). Christians do not have such an overt presence in Niger as in Nigeria due to pressure from Islamists as well as from the broader Muslim community. Christian activities are not practiced openly.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁶
70,500	20,678,000	0	12,500	790,000	0	7,400	12,710

Source: WCD, May 2017

According to WCD statistics, 95.9% of the population in Niger are Muslims, of whom about 5% are Shiites. Most Muslims in Niger are members of either the Tijaniya or Qadiriya Sufi orders, although Islamists seek to disassociate the population from Sufism and encourage Salafism. Additionally, there are smaller Islamic groups in Niger, including the Kalikato, who have a belief system like Boko Haram in rejecting everything from the West. Indeed, the influence of Boko Haram seems to be spreading from northern Nigeria into Niger.

Notes on the current situation

- Niger is home to several ethnic and linguistic groups: Hausa, Zarma-, Songhai, Fulani, Tuaregs, Kanuri, Tubu, Arabs and Gurmanche. Hausa and Zerma make up the majority of the population. Although the country's official language is French, each tribe and ethnic group has its own language and culture. Society in Niger thus functions more as a conglomeration of self-interested tribal communities, rather than as a cohesive entity.
- The existence of Islamic militant groups in the region (both AQIM and Boko Haram) has always made the situation for Christians dangerous.

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 This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

- Christians with a Muslim background face discrimination and hostility from family members as well as from the general community.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 45 / Position: 58

WWL 2017 Points: 47 / Position: -

WWL 2016 Points: 53 / Position: 49

Where persecution comes from

Religion is understood to be a private matter and is not politicized by the State; indeed, the State tries to maintain the separation of State and religion, but this separation is increasingly under pressure. Muslim clerics of the Izala group (a radical Islamic group originating in northern Nigeria) are active in Niger and threatening the freedom of Christians. Other Islamic pressure groups like the Tariqa (“the way” in Arabic – the Sufi way of approaching Allah) are active in certain parts of the country (e.g. Maradi, Niamey). Izala and Tariqa create pressure on minority religions and on Muslims they consider to be deviating from Islam.

How Christians are suffering

Performing acts of worship is risky for converts to Christianity. Family members and the community persecute converts at this private level since conversion is demonized. Other Christians do not face this form of persecution and are generally allowed to practice their faith in private. The extended family, relatives and immediate family of converts from Islam try to make them renounce Christianity by threats or use of force. Christians have been hindered in celebrating Christian weddings in areas of the border region under Islamist control. Communal worship and meetings of Christians have to be conducted with caution in such areas due to the threat of violence from militant groups. Christians are not treated equally in their dealings with the public sector, are rarely able to secure employment within local government services and are frequently denied promotion. Christians have occasionally been hindered from gathering for meetings and the legal process for the registration of churches is very long and difficult. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain permits for new churches and to buy land to build new churches and Christian schools.

Examples

- In Diffa, a Christian family was attacked by Boko Haram militants, killing two.
- In Kablewa, in July 2017, several Christian women were kidnapped by Boko Haram.
- In Maradi, three Christians with a Muslim background were forcibly detained by their family in order to isolate them and deny them the opportunity to contact other Christians.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 45 / Position: 58

WWL 2017 Points: 47 / Position: -

WWL 2016 Points: 53 / Position: 49

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 45 points Niger is ranked 58 in WWL 2018 and belongs to the Persecution Watch Countries (countries scoring 41 and over but not in the Top 50). The decline in the influence of Boko Haram is the main reason for the decrease in Niger’s total score.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Niger⁷	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	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	Weak

⁷ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

In Niger, the population is made up of a very high percentage of Muslims (95.9% according to WCD statistics). Despite this, religion is understood to be a private matter and is not politicized by the State; indeed, the State tries to maintain the separation of State and religion, but this separation is increasingly under pressure. Muslim clerics of the Izala group, a radical Islamic group originating in northern Nigeria, are active in Niger and threatening the freedom of Christians in Niger. Other Islamic pressure groups like the Tariqa (“the way” in Arabic – the Sufi way of approaching Allah) are active in certain parts of the country (e.g. Maradi, Niamey). Izala and Tariqa create pressure on minority religions and on Muslims they consider to be deviating from Islam. Niger has a history of good relations between the majority Muslim believers and the much smaller minority faiths. Nonetheless, Niger’s battle against Boko Haram has stoked local intercommunal tensions and undermined the security and freedom of Christians in the country.

Drivers of persecution

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Many of Niger's government officials are Muslim and some would like to pursue policies and agendas that are discriminatory against Christians and would exclude them from public life. President Issoufou promised to counter the expansion of radical Islamic teaching promoting violence in his February 2016 re-election campaign. However, his administration has yet to take concrete measures. The rise of Wahhabism by radical imams threatens to marginalize Christians in Niger from communal and public life completely. Ethnic leaders among such groups as the Fulani are trying to enhance the ancient Islamic pedigree of their ethnic group by cleansing their communities of Christians. At Tunga, in Dosso State, no Christian presence is tolerated by the religious and tribal leaders who have enormous influence in these areas. Non-Christian religious leaders such as Islamists and violent militant groups like Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa have all combined to threaten, intimidate and persecute Christians in Niger. The Wahhabis, a radical branch of Islam originating from Saudi Arabia, are regularly preaching opposition to Christianity in public and via mass media (radio and television). Radical Islamic movements have been a serious source

of persecution for Christians. They regard Christians as infidels and Christianity is often depicted as being a Western intrusion into Niger's culture. Radical groups such as Boko Haram therefore attack Westerners, Western-aligned institutions and tourists, soldiers and peace keepers. Broader society and citizen-mobs have been a major source of persecution for Christians. Country researchers have confirmed that Christians are being ridiculed, their beliefs and forms of worship made fun of, and sometimes they are denied access to public space for worship in Yebbi, Bosso and Niamey. In villages and communities where Christians live side by side with Muslims, some family members experience rejection on the basis of their Christian faith.

Context

As a landlocked and mostly desert country that is plagued by drought and famine, Niger consistently ranks near the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index. The country's only major export is unrefined uranium. With the exception of an oil refinery in Zinder that opened in November 2011, Niger is otherwise an entirely resource-dependent country. Power lines for electricity and Internet originate from Niger's southern neighbors, Nigeria (electricity) and Benin (internet cable), along with the majority of oil, agricultural produce and other commercial products consumed. The agricultural sector contributes about 40 percent of the GDP and provides livelihood for approximately 80% of the population. There are plans in the international development community to move Niger towards solar power and other innovative energy solutions that rely on indigenous solutions, but for the foreseeable future the 60% of Niger's economy that comes from international aid will likely continue, especially because the international community fears that if Niger's economy falls, it will allow Islamists to exploit the situation and create unrest.

Although the country's official language is French, each tribe and ethnic group has its own language and culture. Of Niger's nine presidents since independence in 1960, all but one has been of Hausa or Zarma descent. These two tribes are the dominant tribes, and therefore it should not be surprising that Tuaregs have engaged in two major rebellions since the 1990s and early 2000s and that the Songhai tribes were the main targets for recruiting by the Islamist group MUJWA.

Most imams give *khoutbas* (sermons) against Boko Haram and other radical groups, especially the Shiite imams who are in the minority. These imams do not want to see what is happening in Nigeria take place in Niger. However, in recent years there has been an increasing adherence to stricter religious practice in Niger's cities, especially in places like Zinder, Maradi and Diffa, which have communities that have long been connected to the Islamic communities in northern Nigeria. Therefore, there has been concern in recent years about the spread of more militant groups associated with Salafist-Jihadism, like Boko Haram. Because of the close proximity of cities like Zinder, Diffa and Maradi to Boko Haram's chief area of operations in northern Nigeria, some local religious leaders have been compelled to take a public stance against the group, while other religious leaders have feared the potential backlash from doing so. While militants in Niger are yet to challenge the government, the possibility of this happening in the near future cannot be discounted, especially given the external pressure on imams from Boko Haram and other groups like MUJWA.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahai are also present in Niger - mostly in major urban centers. These religious groups exist under the threat of violence by radical Islamic groups and have to tread carefully not to attract too much attention or provoke persecution.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

This WWL category does not exist in the country.

Historical Christian communities:

Both Protestant and Catholic churches belong to this category and were mainly established by American mission groups. They can be found in all seven departments of Niger: Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri, Zinder and Niamey (the capital). These churches suffer from the rise in Islamic militancy in Niger and, in the past few years, there have been attacks by armed groups such as Boko Haram in the Departments of Diffa, near the border to Nigeria. Pastors and church leaders from such villages have been forced to flee to larger cities fearing for their safety. Such incidents have also been observed in the department of Tillabéri. Many historical Christian communities in areas close to Nigeria live under fear of violent attack.

Communities of Christian converts:

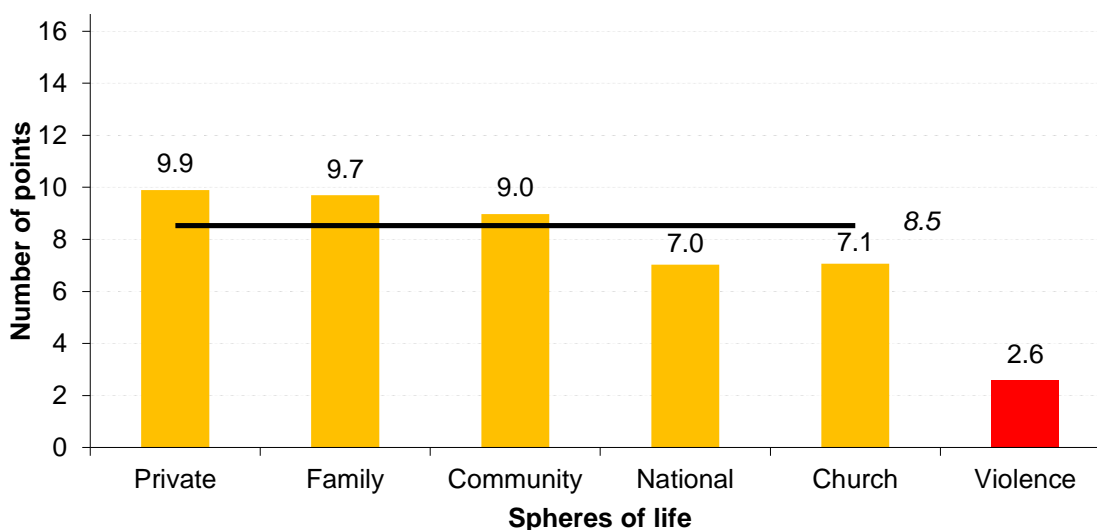
In some cases, the pressure on converts from Islam is particularly pronounced, especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life* (see below). Parents and relatives may oppose a family member's conversion to Christianity more than the government. Radical Islamic imams and teachers teach ordinary people to attack and chase converts away - and any Christians found ministering to converts. Therefore, outside of the bigger cities and in areas closer to the southern border of the country, Christians with a Muslim background are treated as outcasts by the community and at times face violent attacks.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are present in Niger and facing pressure. Several independent non-denominational churches originating from Nigeria can also be found - especially in the capital Niamey and in the departments of Maradi and Zinder. This category faces more or less the same kind of pressure as historical Christian communities and is less vulnerable to societal pressure compared to Communities of Christian converts.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Niger



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Niger shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Morocco is at an average of 8.5 points which is very close to the score in WWL 2017, showing the fact that the situation has not changed significantly in this reporting period.
- Pressure is highest in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*. This reflects the plight of converts who face a hostile reaction from their family and relatives whenever their conversions becomes known and have to try and keep it a secret as long as possible.
- The score for violence stands at 2.6 points and is explained by the killings and abductions described in more detail below. This score is similar to Niger’s score for violence in the WWL 2017 reporting period.

Private sphere:

Performing acts of worship is risky for converts to Christianity. Family members and the community persecute converts at this private level since conversion is demonized. Other Christians do not face this form of persecution and are generally allowed to practice their faith in private. Converts usually go underground, refuse to be identified and live their new faith in secret. Some converts also decide to leave the country. It is dangerous to own and keep Christian materials for Christians with a Muslim background. This is particularly dangerous in communities in the border areas.

Family sphere:

The extended family, relatives and immediate family of converts from Islam try to pressure them into renouncing Christianity by threats or use of force. The extended family consider the children of converts to be Muslims and, in case of divorce or death, claim the children as Muslims. The registration of births, deaths or weddings has been very difficult for all Christians in areas under Islamist control, and areas that lack government security. This is because for

years now the Boko Haram conflict has made it difficult for the government institutions to carry out their duties.

Community sphere:

Hostility towards Christians comes more from society - i.e. (extended) family and local chiefs - than from the government. Also, the whole Christian community in Niger is monitored by individuals and radical groups working for Arab NGOs who seem to be aiming to establish an Islamic state in Niger. Christians have been hindered in celebrating Christian weddings in areas of the border region under Islamist control. Communal worship and meetings of Christians have to be conducted with caution in such areas due to the threat of violence from militant groups.

National sphere:

Niger's constitution and laws respect freedom of religion in theory, but in practice proselytism is nevertheless restricted and dangerous. Genuine pluralism and civil society are virtually unknown concepts in Niger and there are no Christian civil society groups. Preferential treatment is accorded to Muslims for professional positions of employment. Christians are not treated equally in their dealing with the public sector, are rarely able to secure employment within local government services and are frequently denied promotion. Christians have been subject to smear campaigns, hate speech and ridicule from Islamist groups in the WWL 2018 reporting period. This is particularly the case with followers of Boko Haram whose area of influence spans the Lake Chad border region. Christianity in Niger is seen as a foreign religion of "infidels" and radical Islamic clerics freely promote hatred and intolerance. Many Christians who have escaped the conflict are living in IDP camps in Bosso, Yebbi, Maiduguri and Yola.

Church sphere:

Christians have occasionally been hindered from gathering for meetings and the legal process for the registration of churches is very long and difficult. It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain permits for new churches and to buy land to build new churches and Christian schools. Churches are always advised to go to the outskirts of the cities and towns. The hindrance for building new Christian institutions is in the levels of bureaucracy: Many regulations are placed along the way, and because some of those that work in government offices where the process is carried out are fanatical Muslims, they make it difficult for churches to obtain permits for new buildings. The government also monitors all religious expression it views as potentially threatening to public order or national unity. Pastors and Christian leaders have been targets of attack and harassment particularly around Diffa and the border with Nigeria.

Violence:

There has not been a dramatic change in the score for violence in Niger compared to the WWL 2017 reporting period, although there is an increase. The main source of violent persecution in Niger still remains to be militant Islamic groups and individuals and segments of society influenced by the teaching of radical imams. Militants often target churches, pastors and Christians with a Muslim background for violent attack.

Examples:

- In Diffa, a Christian family was attacked by Boko Haram militants, killing two members.
- In Kablewa, in July 2017, several Christian women were kidnapped by Boko Haram.
- In Maradi, three Christians with a Muslim background were forcibly detained by their family in order to isolate them and deny them the opportunity to contact other Christians.

Gender profile of persecution

Female/Male:

No information currently available.

Future outlook

A considerable part of the southern third of the country seems prone to persistent Islamic hostilities. The proximity of hardline Islamic groups in the upper north of Nigeria and northern Mali is far from reassuring. The level of resilience of the churches in Niger is also a matter of concern: They are concentrated in the political capital, have limited outreach programs and some see each other as rivals. The churches do not seem prepared for higher pressure from radical Islam.

There is a likelihood that the violence of militant Islamic groups from northern Nigeria as well as Mali could in the long run affect Niger. The economic and political instability of the country could also offer radical groups like Boko Haram an opportunity to expand their influence and presence.

Policy considerations

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

- Development partners and Western nations that have close economic and security cooperation with Niger should promote the capacity of the government of Niger to fight groups like Boko Haram and counter the influence of radical Islamic groups within society, especially among the youth, employing comprehensive and pro-active strategies.
- The international community should encourage the government of Niger to strengthen its commitment to freedom of religion and safeguard the security and liberty of religious minorities.

WWR in-depth reports

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

- [THE SAHEL – Rising-islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-christians-in-the-region – 2016](#)

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Niger 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/niger/>

- [US missionary, captive for 20 months, is alive, reports Niger’s president](#)
7 June 2018
A US missionary kidnapped in Niger in October 2016 is alive, according to the West African nation’s president.
- [Niger’s churches rebuilt, but West African nation ‘no longer tolerant’](#)
24 January 2018
In Niger new buildings have emerged from the rubble of churches destroyed three years ago in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.
- [Niger: pastor’s daughter kidnapped by suspected Boko Haram militants](#)
17 October 2017
The teenage daughter of a pastor was kidnapped on 16 October in Diffa, south-eastern Niger, in what appears to be the first targeted kidnapping of a Christian by Boko Haram-affiliated militants in the West African nation.
- [US hostage’s wife asks his African captors to contact her](#)
11 July 2017
The wife of a pioneering American missionary abducted nine months ago in Africa’s Sahel region has put out a video pleading for his safe return.

- [Four months on, no word on US missionary kidnapped in Niger](#)

27 February 2017

Jeff Woodke, who worked for Jeunesse en Mission Entraide et Developpement, a branch of the US-based Youth With a Mission, was abducted by unknown assailants late in the evening of Friday 14 Oct. from the town of Abalak in northern Niger.

Recent country developments

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

- [Niger: Islamic militants attack US-Niger forces on patrol](#)

8 November 2017

A joint patrol made up of US and Niger armed forces had come under hostile fire in southwest Niger from militants probably belonging to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Four soldiers were killed, three from a US special forces unit.

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