



# Central African Republic: Country Dossier

January 2019



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Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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## World Watch List 2019

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016	Total Score WWL 2015
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.9	94	94	92	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	93	89	88	81
3	Somalia	16.3	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.4	8.9	91	91	91	87	90
4	Libya	15.3	15.0	15.1	16.0	16.3	9.6	87	86	78	79	76
5	Pakistan	14.3	14.1	13.9	15.0	13.2	16.7	87	86	88	87	79
6	Sudan	14.7	15.0	14.6	15.6	16.1	10.6	87	87	87	84	80
7	Eritrea	14.7	14.9	15.8	16.0	15.2	9.4	86	86	82	89	79
8	Yemen	16.6	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.7	3.1	86	85	85	78	73
9	Iran	14.0	14.3	14.3	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	83	80
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	14.8	13.2	15.2	83	81	73	68	62
11	Syria	13.6	14.0	13.1	13.8	14.2	13.0	82	76	86	87	83
12	Nigeria	12.3	11.8	13.4	12.9	12.9	16.7	80	77	78	78	78
13	Iraq	13.9	14.4	14.1	14.6	13.6	8.1	79	86	86	90	86
14	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.9	16.7	1.1	78	78	76	76	78
15	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.6	14.0	15.3	16.5	2.4	77	79	76	76	77
16	Egypt	11.7	13.2	10.7	13.2	11.0	15.9	76	70	65	64	61
17	Uzbekistan	15.4	12.9	13.9	12.3	15.9	3.1	74	73	71	70	69
18	Myanmar	11.4	11.8	13.3	12.1	11.8	11.1	71	65	62	62	60
19	Laos	13.0	9.1	14.2	14.7	14.9	4.6	71	67	64	58	58
20	Vietnam	12.7	8.2	12.7	13.5	14.2	9.1	70	69	71	66	68
21	Central Africa Republic	10.2	9.7	11.9	10.6	11.1	16.1	70	61	58	59	67
22	Algeria	13.1	14.2	10.1	11.8	12.7	7.6	70	58	58	56	55
23	Turkmenistan	14.6	10.8	13.8	13.3	15.1	1.3	69	68	67	66	63
24	Mali	11.4	10.1	11.5	9.2	9.9	15.4	68	59	59	55	52
25	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	12.2	13.0	13.3	0.6	67	57	55	-	50
26	Turkey	12.4	11.1	10.7	13.2	10.9	7.2	66	62	57	55	52
27	China	10.4	8.0	10.3	11.8	14.5	10.0	65	57	57	57	57
28	Ethiopia	10.0	10.0	10.3	10.8	10.4	13.5	65	62	64	67	61
29	Tajikistan	13.8	11.9	11.6	12.1	12.9	2.4	65	65	58	58	50
30	Indonesia	10.6	11.1	11.3	10.2	9.3	12.0	65	59	55	55	50
31	Jordan	13.0	13.1	11.8	11.5	12.2	3.0	65	66	63	59	56
32	Nepal	12.4	11.4	10.6	10.9	11.9	7.0	64	64	-	-	-
33	Bhutan	12.9	11.1	12.3	12.4	14.0	0.9	64	62	61	56	56
34	Kazakhstan	13.2	10.8	10.3	12.2	13.5	3.1	63	63	56	55	51
35	Morocco	12.2	13.3	9.6	12.0	14.4	1.5	63	51	49	47	47
36	Brunei	13.4	14.3	10.5	10.3	13.4	0.7	63	64	64	61	58
37	Tunisia	12.1	13.2	10.7	11.2	12.0	3.3	63	62	61	58	55
38	Qatar	13.0	12.6	10.3	11.0	14.1	1.1	62	63	66	65	64
39	Mexico	8.3	7.5	12.2	10.2	9.7	13.5	61	59	57	56	55
40	Kenya	11.7	10.6	10.1	8.3	11.5	8.3	61	62	68	68	63
41	Russian Federation	12.5	8.4	10.7	10.4	12.0	5.7	60	51	46	48	45
42	Malaysia	11.8	14.2	12.1	11.7	8.6	1.5	60	65	60	58	55
43	Kuwait	13.2	12.2	10.1	10.5	12.2	1.5	60	61	57	56	49
44	Oman	12.9	12.5	9.8	9.6	12.8	1.7	59	57	53	53	55
45	United Arab Emirates	12.8	12.0	9.1	10.5	12.2	1.9	58	58	55	55	49
46	Sri Lanka	11.0	8.3	10.5	11.5	10.0	7.0	58	57	55	-	51
47	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.8	9.4	8.5	12.6	58	56	53	55	55
48	Bangladesh	11.0	9.1	11.6	10.5	7.8	7.8	58	58	63	57	51
49	Palestinian Territories	11.4	12.3	9.0	10.6	11.8	2.4	57	60	64	62	58
50	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	-	57	50
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.4	56	-	56	56	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	12.7	9.9	10.9	9.2	11.9	1.9	56	-	-	-	-
53	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	57	58	60
54	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	9.3	7.4	10.3	16.1	55	-	-	-	-
55	Bahrain	11.9	12.2	8.6	10.2	10.2	1.5	55	57	54	54	-
56	Cameroon	9.9	7.3	10.0	7.8	7.5	11.3	54	-	-	-	-
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.8	4.8	52	-	59	57	56
58	Niger	11.5	9.7	8.1	8.1	10.0	4.8	52	-	-	53	-
59	Cuba	8.8	4.4	9.1	10.5	11.8	3.9	49	-	-	-	-
60	Chad	11.5	8.2	9.0	8.0	8.7	3.0	48	-	-	-	-
61	Burkina Faso	9.0	8.0	8.8	6.6	7.9	7.2	48	-	-	-	-
62	Uganda	11.4	8.0	7.7	6.9	9.6	3.7	47	-	-	-	-
63	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.0	46	-	-	-	-
64	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.5	5.8	8.0	15.0	44	-	-	-	-
65	Mozambique	6.7	4.3	6.0	6.9	6.0	13.3	43	-	-	-	-
66	Gambia	7.7	8.2	8.2	8.3	8.8	1.9	43	-	-	-	-
67	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.7	8.2	5.5	6.4	4.3	43	-	-	-	-
68	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	3.3	43	-	-	-	-
69	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.1	8.7	10.4	6.1	42	-	-	-	-
70	Togo	8.8	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	2.0	42	-	-	-	-
71	Venezuela	3.3	3.8	10.5	9.0	8.8	5.9	41	-	-	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	6.7	41	-	-	-	-
73	Nicaragua	2.3	3.6	6.4	8.9	7.9	11.9	41	-	-	-	-

# Central African Republic – Country Dossier January 2019

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## Introduction

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

World Watch List Central African Republic	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	70	21
WWL 2018	61	35
WWL 2017	58	34
WWL 2016	59	26
WWL 2015	67	17

*Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.*

**Please note:** The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

## WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Central African Republic

### Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13150040>

### Recent country history

The Central African Republic (CAR) used to be a French colony known as Ubangi-Shari. In 1960, Ubangi-Shari gained independence from France. After a whole series of coups, General François Bozizé seized power in 2003. After several years of intermittent fighting in which the government was challenged by various rebel groups, a militia called Séléka (widely perceived as a coalition of Muslim fighters) took control of the capital Bangui in 2013 and its leader Michel Djotodia became the first Muslim president in CAR's history. Due to intense pressure from the international community, President Djotodia resigned from office and was replaced by Catherine Samba-Panza who served as interim president from 2013-2014 until elections were held. The Interim government, after much delay, finally managed to hold an election that was supposed to be a significant milestone in the transition process in the Central African Republic. In the run-off presidential election held in February 2016 Faustin-Archange Touadera won the presidency. Although President Touadera has made peace and reconciliation his priority since taking office, there are still clashes in some parts of the country involving the mainly Muslim Séléka and the self-defence groups, called anti-Balaka. Although these are frequently referred to as Christians, they are mostly Animist in faith and churches have strongly disassociated themselves from the group. Due to the obvious religious overtones of the conflict, both Christian and Muslim civilians are victims of the violence perpetrated by the Séléka and the anti-Balaka militants. Both UN peacekeepers and the government have not been able to stop the conflict so far and the country continues to be mired in anarchy.

### The religious landscape

The Central African Republic is a Christian majority country with Christians making up 73% of the population according to World Christian Database 2018 estimates. However, most Christians also believe in traditional African religions and intermix their faith with several traditional practices like sorcery and witchcraft. Muslim communities have been a minority religious group in CAR since colonial times. They account for 14.5% of the population and have grown in influence through the rise of the Muslim rebel group called Séléka.

There were numerous Muslim slave-traders operating in the country during the 19th century coming from the northern part of the country and Chad, which led to a growth in Islam in the northern regions. Until recently, CAR's multi-religious society did not experience substantial tension. However, there has been increased instability in the country since 2013 after militant groups mobilized along religious lines. The main grievance expressed by the majority Muslim Séléka militants is the longstanding neglect and marginalization of the predominantly Muslim regions in the north.

### The political landscape

Most analysts agree that family bloodlines, local ethnic politics and rebel militancy have been key in shaping politics in CAR. Several tribes have been waging war against each other incensed by politics, the economic situation and social issues. Northern tribes are dominantly Islamic and before the coup

by Bozizé in 2003 they fought each other for power, but joined forces under the umbrella of Séléka prior to staging the 2013 coup. Across the country, relationships have been tense among the various tribes, and conflicts between them have led to considerable loss of life over the years.

CAR has been afflicted with chronic instability as a result of various rebel groups opposing the central government. Most of these rebels take up arms as a result of alleged sectarian exclusion and marginalization. The instability of CAR and the weakness of its successive governments (as well as their lack of legitimacy) has meant that the former colonial power, France, still plays a decisive role in CAR. There have been many direct military interventions by France in support of governments of the day and at times to protect its own nationals and foreigners living in CAR. While the rebels and those who lead military coups often allege that they are motivated by a desire to root out corruption or ethnic or religious discrimination, very often it seems that they are motivated by the material rewards of political power and the opportunities for patronage and corruption it offers. The recurrent patterns of conflict have turned CAR in to an archetypal failed state. According to some estimates close to 80% of the territory is controlled by various militant groups and both the government and UN peacekeepers have very little control in most parts of the [country](#). Generally speaking, the overall security situation in the country seems to be getting worse with time.

## The socio-economic landscape

Despite great natural wealth, mutinies and a history of coups have plunged the country into adverse poverty. As a result of decades of political instability, a landlocked geographical position, and the prevalence of subsistence agriculture, CAR is one of the world's least development countries. In its 2016 Human Development report, the UN Development Program (UNDP) placed CAR in the 'low human development' category, ranking it 188th out of 188 countries included in the study. In addition to being one of the lowest ranking countries in the Human development Index, the Central African Republic also has one of the shortest life expectancies in the world with an average of 51.5 years. This is partly due to the instability of the past decade which has led to deterioration in the socio-economic situation in the country.

## Concluding remarks

The Central African Republic is one of the least stable countries in the world and is facing several daunting challenges. Despite the presence of a considerable UN peacekeeping force in the country and efforts led by the UN and other international actors to initiate a peace process, peace has proved to be elusive in the country. Particularly in the predominantly Muslim northern part of the country, the situation for Christians is dire. Due to the obvious religious overtones of the conflict, Christians, Muslims and Animists are all affected by the violence. The state of anarchy in the Central African Republic has persisted for about half a decade and seems to continue unabated. There seems to be little hope that the situation will improve in the near future since the UN peacekeeping mission in the country has also failed to bring about a substantial change in the situation.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Central African Republic

1. The political landscape: country - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/rebels-in-the-central-african-republic-are-filling-the-void-of-an-absent-government/2018/03/25/3e11d960-2328-11e8-946c-9420060cb7bd\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.96ae61125241](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/rebels-in-the-central-african-republic-are-filling-the-void-of-an-absent-government/2018/03/25/3e11d960-2328-11e8-946c-9420060cb7bd_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.96ae61125241)

## WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
4,737,000	3,456,000	73.0

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

### How did Christians get there?

Like most African countries CAR society was dominated by several traditional African religions practiced by different tribes. Most traditional religions in the area were more dependent upon the animist tradition. Although these religious practices are more similar, they differ from one tribe to another. The animist African tradition was more dominant in the southern and central parts of the country. Muslim traders in the northern part of the country introduced Islam to [the region](#). Christianity became dominant in CAR after French colonists took power in the 1880s and became the religion of choice for many due to its close association with powerful and respected colonial officials. While Roman Catholic missionaries came as early as the second half of the 19th century, Protestant missionaries (for instance, sent by US Baptists) did not start operating in the country until 1921. Roman [Catholics](#) are by far the largest Christian group.

### What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Central African Republic	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	1,737,000	50.3
Protestant	826,000	23.9
Independent	952,000	27.5
Unaffiliated	694,000	20.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-753,000	-21.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,456,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,489,000	43.1
Renewalist movement	1,032,000	29.9

*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. Evangelical movement: 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. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.*

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

CAR is considered to be a majority Christian nation, but nominal Christianity is widespread. Among the various denominations, independent churches in particular are flourishing. Protestant churches in CAR are organized under the Evangelical Alliance, signifying some measure of unity. Missionary groups



currently operating in CAR include Baptists and Lutherans and various charismatic churches. A significant portion of the population is Roman Catholic and there are nine dioceses and one archdiocese in the country.

## Religious context

Religious Context: Central African Republic	Numbers	%
Christians	3,456,000	73.0
Muslim	685,000	14.5
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	549,000	11.6
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	12,000	0.3
Atheist	650	0.0
Agnostic	34,300	0.7
Other	0	0.0

*OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.*

*Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)*

According to WCD estimates, Christians constitute 73% of the population and Muslims 14.5%. Islam has shown significant growth in the last decade - rising from 5% to well over 14% - and has been strengthened by groups settling from Chad and Sudan. Dissatisfaction at the perceived marginalization of northern Muslims was one of the root causes for the coup in March 2013 that gave rise to a deadly conflict along religious and ethnic lines. Local Christians are very concerned about the Islamic inroads being established in the country and church leaders have repeatedly pointed out that the rebellion that led to the coup had a religious agenda. On the surface, relationships between Muslims and Christians had been good in previous years, but tension had been growing. In particular converts from Islam to Christianity face persecution. Christians living in Muslim-dominated areas in northern, eastern and western regions have reported persecution in the form of discrimination and other forms of social pressure.

## Notes on the current situation

- Constitutionally CAR is a secular state but in the past autocratic rulers have relied on support from religious organizations – mostly churches.
- Missionary-led education initiatives are virtually non-existent. However humanitarian assistance, delivered by faith-based organizations, has played an important role in alleviating the negative impact of the conflict over the last few years.
- The continued animosity between militant groups is a cause of instability and a grave danger to churches and the Christian and Muslim population.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

1. How did Christians get there?: the region. - <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-religious-beliefs-of-the-central-african-republic.html>
2. How did Christians get there?: Catholics - [http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/central-african-republic#/?affiliations\\_region\\_id=11&affiliations\\_year=2010&region\\_name=All%20Countries&restrictions\\_year=2016](http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/central-african-republic#/?affiliations_region_id=11&affiliations_year=2010&region_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2016)

## WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 70 points, Central African Republic ranked 21st in WWL 2019. In WWL 2018, the country scored 61 points.

### What type of persecution dominates?

- **Islamic oppression:** The armed coalition group Séléka gains most of its support from the Muslim northern tribes, where the population has been influenced to oppose Christians. The Séléka militia has divided into several factions; most of the fighters are Muslims and regularly attack churches and Christian homes. Although the Séléka rebel group claims that it is fighting because of the unfair treatment of Muslims by the government, southern Animist and Christian tribal groups claim that it is operating to increase Muslim domination and is attempting to set up a government under the 'house of Islam'. There is also the threat of attack by other Islamic militant groups operating in the region.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** Anti-Balaka groups began as armed groups set up to protect civilians (Animists and Christians) against Séléka violence. At first they claimed to protect Christians, but the Church distanced herself vehemently from them. As a result there have been many reports of attacks on churches instigated by the Anti-Balaka militias. Over time, these militias have effectively turned into criminal gangs, particularly in Bangui. The lack of stability and the geographical nature of the country (where there is dense forest for hiding) have proved ideal for criminal operations.

### Who is driving persecution?

Christians have been attacked and are threatened by both Séléka and Anti-Balaka militants. Whereas the Séléka group attacks Christians in order to gain influence and support from the Muslim community and also to Islamize the population through violence, the Anti-Balaka groups attack churches that refuse to support them. Churches and church leaders have been the main targets. In one instance in November 2018 (outside the WWL 2019 reporting period), an attack by a former Séléka allied group called the UPC (Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique) led to the death of [40 Christians](#). In addition, converts to Christianity face pressure from both family and community.

### What it results in

Christian leaders who have publicly denounced the violence have been threatened and church buildings have been burned and ransacked. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of Christians who have been forced to live in camps and lose their homes and livelihood. In addition to the insecurity and violence from which all Christians suffer from, converts to Christianity also face the persecution that comes from their immediate family members. The local community will often ostracize Christian converts and might also try to force them to renounce Christianity through violence.

### Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Central African Republic	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	146	121	10	22	4232
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	500	1400	83	157	2500

*Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.*

## Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- On 29 June 2018, a Roman Catholic priest was [killed](#) in the town of Bambari by unknown assailants who entered the church compound in an apparent attempt to rob the church.
- On 1 May 2018, an armed group staged an attack on the Notre-Dame de Fatima church in Bangui, killing 15 and wounding 99 Christians.
- On 4 January 2018, a prominent Catholic priest in Tokoyo was [stabbed](#) in an apparent assassination attempt by unknown armed men.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

1. Who is driving persecution?: 40 Christians - <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2018/11/17/more-40-killed-church-attack-central-african-republic>
2. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: killed - <https://s4c.news/en/2018/07/05/another-catholic-priest-killed-in-the-central-african-republic/>
3. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: stabbed - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/01/catholic-priest-stabbed-as-violence-continues-in-central-african-republic/>

## WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

### Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 70 points, the Central African Republic ranked 21st in WWL 2019. The reason for the increase of 9 points compared to WWL 2018 is mainly due to the intensification of the conflict between the Séléka rebel groups and the Anti-Balaka militias, with numerous splinter-groups of Séléka being particularly responsible for killing Christians. The score for violence remained at an extreme level which has now impacted pressure in all *spheres of life*. The average pressure rose by 1.7 points in WWL 2019 compared to WWL 2018.

### Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Central African Republic	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Medium
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very strong

*The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).*

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

The Séléka militia (which has divided into several factions) has been one of the main actors in the civil war that has engulfed CAR and is made up of fighters from the predominantly Muslim northern part of the country. The factions that have since emerged have a similar composition and most of their fighters are Muslims. In addition to the violence of militant groups like the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), the Patriotic Convention for the Salvation of Kodro, Union of Republican Forces, and the Alliance for the Rebirth and Rebuilding, which are all offshoots of Séléka, Islamic oppression is also the persecution engine evident in the persecution of Christians by society in predominantly Muslim parts of the country.

#### **Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):**

Organized corruption and crime is a significant persecution engine in CAR, particularly evident where Anti-Balaka militants attack churches and Christians. Anti-Balaka began as local self-protection units and vigilante groups (later becoming a major actor in the civil war) and have now effectively turned into criminal gangs. The criminal activities of these gangs result in the persecution of Christians in Bangui since they often target the church and religious leaders in addition to the violent and horrific attacks they commit against Muslims.

### Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

Ethnic antagonism in CAR is complex and has two dimensions: Animism/ATR (religious and/or cultural) and tribal struggles. According to a country researcher: “Both are prevalent in CAR, while ethnic and religious motives often go together.” Also: “There is pressure to participate in cultural religious practices, such as rites of passage, rituals and customs at milestones like birth, marriage and death, but also for protection (Anti-Balaka are known for this).” Further: “Some ethnic minority groups are specifically targeted, for instance Ba'aka pygmies, who are forcibly recruited for labor. Anti-Balaka forces are mainly Animists, and they attack Muslims, but often also Christians. Sometimes they force Christians into their ranks.”

### Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Central African Republic	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	-	-	-	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).*

### Drivers of Islamic oppression:

The most significant drivers of persecution in CAR are Muslim militant and paramilitary groups that could be considered ex-Séléka groups. Two of them are the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central African Republic (FPRC), and the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC). Although many of these groups could be categorized as violent religious groups, it is also possible to view them as political parties and paramilitary organizations. These rebel groups have inflicted multiple attacks on Christian churches and private properties. In the predominantly Muslim parts of the country ordinary people influenced by the teachings of fanatical and intolerant imams also act as

drivers of persecution. Tribal or ethnic elders also play a role in this process since they reinforce the pressure against converts to Christianity.

#### **Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:**

Some factions of the militant groups mentioned above act as organized criminal gangs and often engage in looting and frequently target churches and church-affiliated entities. In addition to militants that used to belong to the Séléka, Anti-Balaka fighters also engage in such acts. The state of lawlessness and the inability of the state to impose law and order means that Christians and the wider community have little protection from the criminal acts of these groups.

#### **Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:**

The main drivers of ethnic antagonism are ethnic leaders and some community leaders and their members. According to a country researcher: “Ethnic antagonism in the form of tribal pressure is [present in the country] especially since Muslim leaders are from certain tribes, who target Christians for persecution, for instance Peulh/Fulani and leaders of other movements and tribes.”

## Context

CAR has seen many conflicts and five coups since its independence from France in 1960. The instability and weakness of its successive governments (as well as their lack of legitimacy) have meant that [France](#), the former colonial power, still plays a decisive role. There have been many [direct French military interventions](#) in support of the governments of the day and at times to protect its own nationals and foreigners living in CAR. The country has a Christian majority and it was discontent among Muslims in the northern parts of the country which was one of the root causes for the March coup in 2013.

The conflict in CAR which began in December 2012 has claimed thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands, and caused severe destruction to property. In September 2014, the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened [a second investigation](#). Experts claim that what brought the (mainly Muslim) Séléka forces into the picture was, among other things, the failure of the government to address social problems and the lack of good governance. However, the attacks by Séléka forces on Christians has given the conflict a religious overtone. The [mostly Animist](#) Anti-Balaka forces have also targeted Muslims in the south and committed atrocities, exacerbating the conflict. In this regard it is important to note that a [declaration](#) issued by various Christian organizations in Bangui in February 2014 has reiterated: "The confrontation between Séléka and Anti-Balaka has started a cycle of reprisal in which the civilian population have fallen victim. We condemn this violence, whatever its origin. Moreover we do not accept the amalgam of labelling of Anti-Balaka as 'Christian' militia."

Although Séléka have been driven out of many parts of the country, numerous challenges remain. In Bangui, a growing group of radical Muslims continue to keep a stronghold in the so-called PK5 enclave where they instill a reign of terror. In the north-east, which is mainly populated by Muslims, many Christians are forced to flee from their villages and are denied access to farming fields. Large groups of Christians live in extremely poor conditions in IDP camps. Although the election held in 2016 had given rise to some optimism about the prospect of peace in the Central African Republic, clashes between various militant groups have continued and just within a period of three months in early 2017, [45 civilians](#) died and at least 11,000 were displaced. This spike in violence in central CAR poses a huge risk for Christians, Muslims and Animists in the country. Unless the UN peacekeeping force in the

country acts decisively to bring to an end to these clashes, there is a risk that the country could descend into the instability and conflict in which it has been mired in the past. The UN peacekeeping mission has so far been incapable of maintaining peace and stability in the country.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Since expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated in CAR, this category is not included for WWL analysis and scoring.

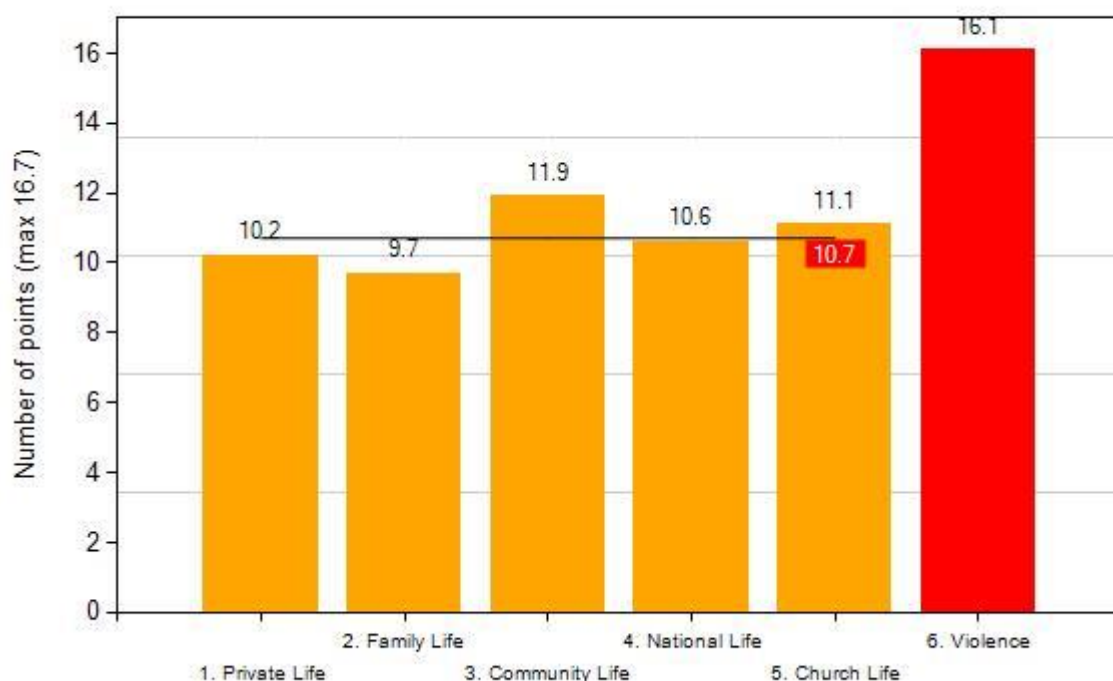
**Historical Christian communities:** This category is comprised of Roman Catholic and older Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics and schools. When the Séléka militants were in the ascendancy, cars, computers and other valuable items were looted from church-buildings and other church properties. The Catholic Church and its leadership in CAR, alongside other religious leaders, have been a strong voice for peace and reconciliation and have also provided places of refuge for civilians, both Muslim and Christian, targeted by militants. As a result, Catholic churches have often been targeted for attack.

**Converts to Christianity:** Christians with a Muslim background experience opposition and pressure from family members to renounce Christianity if their conversion becomes known. They also have very limited opportunities to have fellowship with other Christians and worship collectively. Most Christians of Muslim background do not worship in public due to the fear of attacks by Muslim agitators. This is especially the case in the northern Muslim-dominated areas of the country.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Christians belonging to Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations (as well as those belonging to historical Christian communities) have been subject to attacks by ex-Séléka militants. Recently, the number of people joining these Christian congregations has increased dramatically.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern for Central Africa Republic



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for CAR shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in CAR is borderline high/very high with a score of 10.7 points, increasing from 9.0 in WWL 2018.
- Except in the Family sphere of life, pressure throughout is above 10.0 points and highest in the Community sphere (11.9).
- The score for violence remains at an extreme level (16.1 - as in WWL 2018 also).

#### **Private sphere:**

Because CAR is a Christian majority country, Catholics and all types of Protestants enjoy relative freedom in the private sphere especially in Christian majority parts of the country. Converts from Islam, however, experience interference from their family members if their conversion becomes known. This group of Christians are the most persecuted of all. The greatest problem in CAR is the division of the country's citizens along faith lines. Therefore, sharing the Christian faith between a Christian host and Muslim guest is very risky. In the northern part of the country (which is dominated by a Muslim population and where Séléka splinter-groups are operating), a convert is likely to risk his/her life by owning Christian materials. When ex-Séléka fighters come into a house and find someone reading a Bible, they have been known to kill him/her immediately.

#### **Family sphere:**

As the situation in the country is far from being safe, it is very difficult for Christians (converts in particular) in the north-eastern provinces to register births, weddings or deaths, especially as this would attract unwanted attention. In a country where groups are targeting each other based on religion, it is also difficult to baptize. Converts almost automatically lose family inheritance rights.

#### **Community sphere:**

In villages which the former Séléka have attacked, young girls have often been abducted. In cities like Kaga Bandoro, Bambari and Bria, Christians took refuge after being forced to flee from their villages. They were often chased away by Muslim Fulani herdsman that took the Christian farmers' land for their cattle to graze on. Christians of Muslim background suffer most in such Muslim attacks. Muslim community members usually do not want to share community resources (such as healthcare) with converts to Christianity, especially in the remote northern part of the country.

#### **National sphere:**

The Constitution and laws of the land clearly state that the country is a [secular republic](#). However, Christians suffer at the hands of government officials who are sympathetic to Séléka rebel groups or other radical Islamic pressure groups. Christians have at times been fired from government offices and replaced by Muslims in some localities at the local government level. This is mainly a concern in north-eastern provinces where the former Séléka militia dominates local governments.

#### **Church sphere:**

Church life has been threatened by the ongoing conflict. Séléka groups attack churches that are found in the Muslim dominated areas of the country and especially target churches that are more involved in openly integrating converts from the Muslim community. Anti-Balaka rebel groups also attack churches and Christians who oppose their activities. Both rebel groups have involvement in criminal activities. Normal church life is very difficult as meetings of Christians are always under the threat of



attack, especially in Bangui close to the PK5 quarter and in north-eastern areas where Christians are harassed in the big cities and forced to flee.

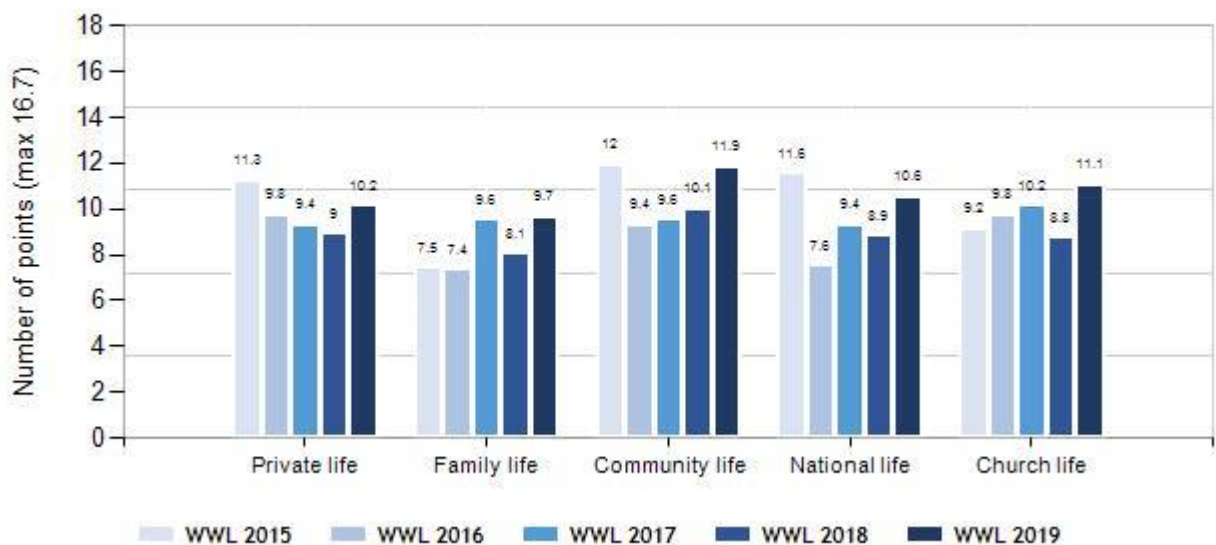
**Violence:**

In the WWL 2019 reporting period, the level of violence remained at an extreme level. Targeted killings, injury and church destruction have been very common. For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

### 5 Year trends

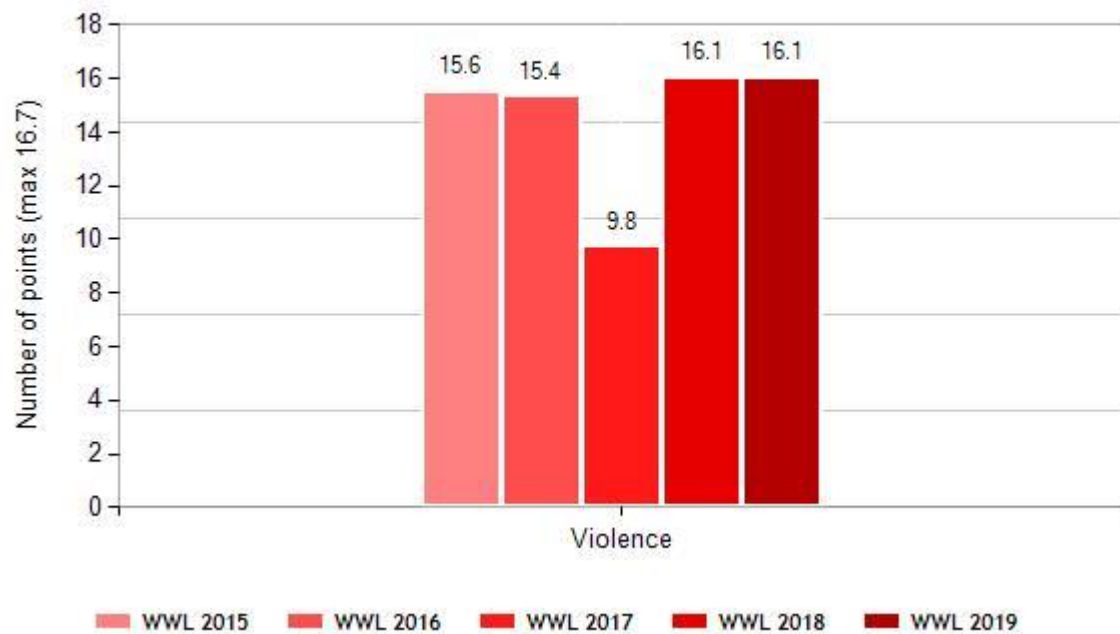
The three charts below show the situation for Christians in CAR over the last five reporting periods. Chart 1 clearly shows that the suffering of Christians in all spheres of life has most often been high or very high, with spikes in WWL 2015 and WWL 2019 for Private, Community and National spheres. In Chart 2, it can be seen that the average pressure on Christians has oscillated between 8.8 and 10.7 points, with highest levels recorded in WWL 2015 and WWL 2019. Chart 3, depicting the violence scores over the last five reporting periods, shows that the level of violence against Christians has been stable at an extreme level, except in WWL 2017 when it dropped to 9.8 points. This lower score reflected the initial lull in violence following President Faustin-Archange Touadéra's election in 2016.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Central Africa Republic (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Central African Republic	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	10.7
2018	9.0
2017	9.6
2016	8.8
2015	10.3

### WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Central Africa Republic (Violence)



## Gender specific persecution

### Female:

Women and girls are frequently subjected to rape and sexual assault in CAR, particularly when militants attack civilian communities. They are also often forced into marriage under threat of violence. Polygamy also seems to be an accepted practice. Hence, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, and young girls who are abused and get pregnant are likely to drop out of school.

### Male:

Boys and men are at times forced to join some of the Islamic militant groups and they are also targeted for torture and assault. They are also exploited as forced laborers in the mining industry.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Muslim civilians in southern parts of the country where they are a minority have been targeted and attacked by the predominantly Animist Anti-Balaka militia.

## Future outlook

**The political outlook:** The conflict in the last few years has fundamentally changed the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the country. Unless the reconciliation process and the attempt to end the cycle of impunity in CAR succeeds, there is a grave risk that the polarization among Muslims and Christians will continue and exacerbate the religious conflict. Despite the elections in 2015 and 2016 (which many hoped would bring a fresh chance of reconciliation), ex-Séléka militants seem unwilling to lay down their arms and there is still a serious risk of a relapse into violent conflict with religious overtones. Church leaders of the main denominations have condemned the violence perpetrated by Anti-Balaka forces. Although President Touadera (elected in 2016) has made peace and

reconciliation his priority since taking office, various militant groups are active and the UN has issued a report regarding the growing risk of a deadly [civil war and genocide](#).

As the instability continues in the country, the situation is becoming more and more complex with several criminal splinter-groups emerging from the Séléka and Anti-Balaka militant groups - and in some places even [joining forces](#). This delicate situation is summarized by the [International Crisis Group](#) in the following way: "The Central African Republic has been in turmoil since a violent takeover of power in 2013. The aftermath saw widespread violence as armed militia fought each other and took revenge on the population. The March 2016 election of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra brought an initial lull, but was followed by more fighting in late 2016 and early 2017 between armed groups including ex-Seleka factions and anti-balaka militias – both controlling vast areas of the country. Lasting peace is still some way off as neither the new government nor the large UN force have the means to force armed groups to negotiate and disarm."

**The outlook for Christians:** The situation for Christians in CAR is becoming increasingly complex. The conflict between two rival armed forces (Séléka and Anti-Balaka) has morphed into a conflict between various militant off-shoots. These all attack Christians, although for different reasons. This has put tremendous pressure on Christians in all areas of lives. Killings and destruction of property and churches have become common. If the status quo remains as it is, Christians will continue suffering from persecution.

**Conclusion:** The past five years has been one of the most challenging periods for the population of CAR as well as for the government administrations. The election in 2016, which it was hoped would solve many of the most serious problems, has failed to do so. If the parties to the conflict continue to refuse to commit to a ceasefire and disarmament:

- The country might descend further into full-blown civil war.
- Neighboring countries would be likely to get involved in arming or training groups, based on their national interests.
- Christians are likely continue suffering at the hands of ex-Séléka and other militants.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

1. Context: France - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/france-poisoned-legacy-central-african-republic>
2. Context: direct French military interventions - <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/136-central-african-republic-anatomy-of-a-phantom-state.aspx>
3. Context: a second investigation. - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29354134>
4. Context: mostly Animist - <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/march/central-african-republic-churches-pledge-action-car.html>
5. Context: declaration - [http://www.opendoorsuk.org/campaign/documents/Bangui\\_II.pdf](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/campaign/documents/Bangui_II.pdf)
6. Context: 45 civilians - <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-violence/dozens-of-civilians-killed-in-central-african-republic-report-idUSKBN17Y0BX?il=0>

7. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: secular republic. - [https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Central\\_African\\_Republic\\_2016.pdf?lang=en](https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Central_African_Republic_2016.pdf?lang=en)
8. Future outlook: civil war and genocide - <http://theanalytical.org/central-african-republic-reports-warn-of-rising-levels-of-violence/>
9. Future outlook: joining forces - <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/clashes-in-car-leave-at-least-2-dead-10-injured-20171031>
10. Future outlook: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic>

## Additional Reports and Articles

### WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

### Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is 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/car>

### Recent country developments

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