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## Djibouti: Full Country Dossier

February 2023



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

February 2023

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

| Rank | Country      | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 | Total Score WWL 2019 |
|------|--------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1    | North Korea  | 16.7         | 16.7        | 16.7           | 16.7          | 16.7        | 14.4     | 98                   | 96                   | 94                   | 94                   | 94                   |
| 2    | Somalia      | 16.5         | 16.7        | 16.6           | 16.6          | 16.6        | 8.7      | 92                   | 91                   | 92                   | 92                   | 91                   |
| 3    | Yemen        | 16.7         | 16.7        | 16.7           | 16.7          | 16.7        | 5.9      | 89                   | 88                   | 87                   | 85                   | 86                   |
| 4    | Eritrea      | 14.6         | 14.9        | 15.5           | 15.9          | 15.7        | 12.2     | 89                   | 88                   | 88                   | 87                   | 86                   |
| 5    | Libya        | 15.6         | 15.5        | 15.9           | 16.1          | 16.3        | 9.1      | 88                   | 91                   | 92                   | 90                   | 87                   |
| 6    | Nigeria      | 13.8         | 13.8        | 14.6           | 14.8          | 14.4        | 16.7     | 88                   | 87                   | 85                   | 80                   | 80                   |
| 7    | Pakistan     | 13.4         | 13.8        | 14.8           | 14.8          | 12.9        | 16.7     | 86                   | 87                   | 88                   | 88                   | 87                   |
| 8    | Iran         | 14.5         | 14.6        | 13.8           | 15.8          | 16.5        | 10.7     | 86                   | 85                   | 86                   | 85                   | 85                   |
| 9    | Afghanistan  | 15.4         | 15.7        | 15.4           | 16.1          | 16.6        | 4.6      | 84                   | 98                   | 94                   | 93                   | 94                   |
| 10   | Sudan        | 14.1         | 14.2        | 14.9           | 14.9          | 15.5        | 9.4      | 83                   | 79                   | 79                   | 85                   | 87                   |
| 11   | India        | 12.3         | 13.1        | 13.0           | 14.8          | 13.3        | 15.7     | 82                   | 82                   | 83                   | 83                   | 83                   |
| 12   | Syria        | 13.2         | 14.1        | 13.6           | 14.1          | 14.1        | 11.3     | 80                   | 78                   | 81                   | 82                   | 82                   |
| 13   | Saudi Arabia | 15.2         | 15.3        | 14.9           | 15.8          | 16.7        | 2.4      | 80                   | 81                   | 78                   | 79                   | 77                   |
| 14   | Myanmar      | 12.5         | 11.6        | 13.9           | 13.9          | 12.9        | 15.4     | 80                   | 79                   | 74                   | 73                   | 71                   |
| 15   | Maldives     | 15.4         | 15.3        | 13.8           | 16.0          | 16.4        | 0.2      | 77                   | 77                   | 77                   | 78                   | 78                   |
| 16   | China        | 12.9         | 10.0        | 12.7           | 14.5          | 15.6        | 11.1     | 77                   | 76                   | 74                   | 70                   | 65                   |
| 17   | Mali         | 11.1         | 10.1        | 14.7           | 10.3          | 15.1        | 15.0     | 76                   | 70                   | 67                   | 66                   | 68                   |
| 18   | Iraq         | 14.1         | 14.6        | 14.0           | 14.8          | 13.9        | 4.6      | 76                   | 78                   | 82                   | 76                   | 79                   |
| 19   | Algeria      | 14.1         | 14.1        | 11.5           | 13.7          | 15.1        | 4.8      | 73                   | 71                   | 70                   | 73                   | 70                   |
| 20   | Mauritania   | 14.5         | 14.2        | 13.3           | 14.1          | 14.2        | 1.3      | 72                   | 70                   | 71                   | 68                   | 67                   |
| 21   | Uzbekistan   | 14.9         | 12.7        | 13.9           | 12.7          | 15.6        | 1.5      | 71                   | 71                   | 71                   | 73                   | 74                   |
| 22   | Colombia     | 11.8         | 8.9         | 13.1           | 11.3          | 10.4        | 15.4     | 71                   | 68                   | 67                   | 62                   | 58                   |
| 23   | Burkina Faso | 9.4          | 9.7         | 12.5           | 9.6           | 13.8        | 15.6     | 71                   | 68                   | 67                   | 66                   | 48                   |
| 24   | CAR          | 10.3         | 8.6         | 13.9           | 9.6           | 12.2        | 15.6     | 70                   | 68                   | 66                   | 68                   | 70                   |
| 25   | Vietnam      | 11.8         | 9.6         | 12.8           | 14.6          | 14.4        | 6.9      | 70                   | 71                   | 72                   | 72                   | 70                   |
| 26   | Turkmenistan | 14.5         | 11.3        | 13.6           | 14.1          | 15.7        | 0.6      | 70                   | 69                   | 70                   | 70                   | 69                   |
| 27   | Cuba         | 13.1         | 8.3         | 13.1           | 13.2          | 14.9        | 7.0      | 70                   | 66                   | 62                   | 52                   | 49                   |
| 28   | Niger        | 9.4          | 9.5         | 14.5           | 7.7           | 13.1        | 15.4     | 70                   | 68                   | 62                   | 60                   | 52                   |
| 29   | Morocco      | 13.2         | 13.8        | 10.9           | 12.2          | 14.5        | 4.8      | 69                   | 69                   | 67                   | 66                   | 63                   |
| 30   | Bangladesh   | 12.6         | 10.7        | 12.8           | 11.3          | 10.6        | 10.7     | 69                   | 68                   | 67                   | 63                   | 58                   |
| 31   | Laos         | 11.7         | 10.2        | 13.3           | 14.2          | 14.0        | 5.0      | 68                   | 69                   | 71                   | 72                   | 71                   |
| 32   | Mozambique   | 9.3          | 8.5         | 13.9           | 8.4           | 12.5        | 15.6     | 68                   | 65                   | 63                   | 43                   | 43                   |
| 33   | Indonesia    | 11.3         | 12.0        | 11.6           | 11.1          | 9.2         | 12.8     | 68                   | 68                   | 63                   | 60                   | 65                   |
| 34   | Qatar        | 14.2         | 14.1        | 10.5           | 13.2          | 14.4        | 1.5      | 68                   | 74                   | 67                   | 66                   | 62                   |
| 35   | Egypt        | 12.7         | 13.5        | 11.6           | 12.1          | 10.8        | 7.0      | 68                   | 71                   | 75                   | 76                   | 76                   |
| 36   | Tunisia      | 12.0         | 12.8        | 10.4           | 12.0          | 13.5        | 6.5      | 67                   | 66                   | 67                   | 64                   | 63                   |
| 37   | DRC          | 8.0          | 7.9         | 12.6           | 9.7           | 13.0        | 15.6     | 67                   | 66                   | 64                   | 56                   | 55                   |
| 38   | Mexico       | 10.3         | 8.3         | 12.5           | 11.0          | 10.5        | 13.9     | 67                   | 65                   | 64                   | 60                   | 61                   |
| 39   | Ethiopia     | 9.9          | 10.3        | 13.1           | 10.4          | 12.1        | 10.6     | 66                   | 66                   | 65                   | 63                   | 65                   |
| 40   | Bhutan       | 13.2         | 12.3        | 11.6           | 13.9          | 14.2        | 1.1      | 66                   | 67                   | 64                   | 61                   | 64                   |
| 41   | Turkey       | 12.8         | 11.5        | 11.8           | 13.0          | 11.5        | 5.7      | 66                   | 65                   | 69                   | 63                   | 66                   |
| 42   | Comoros      | 12.7         | 14.0        | 11.2           | 12.4          | 14.2        | 1.5      | 66                   | 63                   | 62                   | 57                   | 56                   |
| 43   | Malaysia     | 12.8         | 14.3        | 11.4           | 12.2          | 11.1        | 3.9      | 66                   | 63                   | 63                   | 62                   | 60                   |
| 44   | Tajikistan   | 13.8         | 12.2        | 12.3           | 12.8          | 13.4        | 1.1      | 66                   | 65                   | 66                   | 65                   | 65                   |
| 45   | Cameroon     | 8.8          | 7.6         | 12.6           | 7.2           | 13.1        | 15.9     | 65                   | 65                   | 64                   | 60                   | 54                   |
| 46   | Brunei       | 14.8         | 14.6        | 10.1           | 10.9          | 14.4        | 0.4      | 65                   | 64                   | 64                   | 63                   | 63                   |
| 47   | Oman         | 14.0         | 14.1        | 10.3           | 13.3          | 12.9        | 0.6      | 65                   | 66                   | 63                   | 62                   | 59                   |
| 48   | Kazakhstan   | 13.2         | 11.6        | 11.9           | 12.7          | 14.2        | 1.1      | 65                   | 64                   | 64                   | 64                   | 63                   |
| 49   | Jordan       | 13.0         | 14.0        | 10.5           | 12.3          | 12.7        | 2.0      | 65                   | 66                   | 64                   | 64                   | 65                   |
| 50   | Nicaragua    | 10.8         | 5.9         | 11.9           | 12.8          | 13.6        | 9.4      | 65                   | 56                   | 51                   | 41                   | 41                   |

| Rank | Country                 | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 | Total Score WWL 2019 |
|------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 51   | Kenya                   | 10.3         | 9.2         | 11.4           | 8.0           | 11.5        | 13.3     | 64                   | 63                   | 62                   | 61                   | 61                   |
| 52   | Kuwait                  | 13.5         | 13.7        | 9.8            | 12.3          | 13.1        | 1.1      | 64                   | 64                   | 63                   | 62                   | 60                   |
| 53   | Tanzania                | 9.3          | 10.8        | 10.3           | 8.6           | 8.7         | 15.6     | 63                   | 61                   | 58                   | 55                   | 52                   |
| 54   | UAE                     | 13.4         | 13.4        | 9.9            | 11.2          | 12.8        | 1.1      | 62                   | 62                   | 62                   | 60                   | 58                   |
| 55   | Nepal                   | 12.0         | 9.8         | 9.4            | 13.0          | 12.6        | 4.4      | 61                   | 64                   | 66                   | 64                   | 64                   |
| 56   | Djibouti                | 12.3         | 12.6        | 12.7           | 10.1          | 12.3        | 0.6      | 60                   | 59                   | 56                   | 56                   | 56                   |
| 57   | Palestinian Territories | 13.0         | 13.3        | 9.7            | 10.3          | 12.0        | 2.0      | 60                   | 59                   | 58                   | 60                   | 57                   |
| 58   | Azerbaijan              | 13.2         | 10.0        | 9.5            | 12.0          | 13.6        | 0.6      | 59                   | 60                   | 56                   | 57                   | 57                   |
| 59   | Kyrgyzstan              | 12.9         | 10.2        | 11.0           | 10.4          | 12.0        | 2.0      | 59                   | 58                   | 58                   | 57                   | 56                   |
| 60   | Chad                    | 11.6         | 8.2         | 10.2           | 10.2          | 10.3        | 7.6      | 58                   | 55                   | 53                   | 56                   | 48                   |
| 61   | Russian Federation      | 12.3         | 7.9         | 10.3           | 11.8          | 12.8        | 2.0      | 57                   | 56                   | 57                   | 60                   | 60                   |
| 62   | Sri Lanka               | 12.8         | 9.1         | 10.6           | 11.3          | 9.5         | 3.9      | 57                   | 63                   | 62                   | 65                   | 58                   |
| 63   | Rwanda                  | 9.4          | 7.7         | 9.0            | 10.4          | 11.7        | 8.9      | 57                   | 50                   | 42                   | 42                   | 41                   |
| 64   | Venezuela               | 6.0          | 4.6         | 11.7           | 10.2          | 11.4        | 11.7     | 56                   | 51                   | 39                   | 42                   | 41                   |
| 65   | Burundi                 | 7.6          | 7.8         | 9.4            | 9.8           | 9.7         | 11.1     | 55                   | 52                   | 48                   | 48                   | 43                   |
| 66   | Bahrain                 | 12.7         | 13.3        | 8.7            | 10.7          | 8.8         | 0.9      | 55                   | 57                   | 56                   | 55                   | 55                   |
| 67   | Honduras                | 7.1          | 5.0         | 11.9           | 7.6           | 9.8         | 11.9     | 53                   | 48                   | 46                   | 39                   | 38                   |
| 68   | Angola                  | 6.8          | 6.7         | 8.1            | 11.5          | 11.4        | 7.2      | 52                   | 51                   | 46                   | 43                   | 42                   |
| 69   | Uganda                  | 8.1          | 5.0         | 7.4            | 6.7           | 9.2         | 14.8     | 51                   | 48                   | 47                   | 48                   | 47                   |
| 70   | Togo                    | 9.2          | 6.7         | 9.3            | 7.1           | 11.0        | 5.4      | 49                   | 44                   | 43                   | 41                   | 42                   |
| 71   | Guinea                  | 10.3         | 7.5         | 8.3            | 8.3           | 10.5        | 3.0      | 48                   | 43                   | 47                   | 45                   | 46                   |
| 72   | South Sudan             | 5.7          | 4.4         | 7.0            | 6.3           | 7.6         | 15.0     | 46                   | 43                   | 43                   | 44                   | 44                   |
| 73   | El Salvador             | 7.7          | 4.2         | 10.6           | 7.4           | 9.1         | 6.7      | 46                   | 45                   | 42                   | 38                   | 30                   |
| 74   | Ivory Coast             | 12.0         | 6.5         | 8.7            | 5.9           | 8.0         | 3.3      | 44                   | 42                   | 42                   | 42                   | 43                   |
| 75   | Gambia                  | 8.3          | 8.2         | 8.9            | 8.8           | 8.9         | 1.1      | 44                   | 44                   | 43                   | 43                   | 43                   |
| 76   | Belarus                 | 9.5          | 3.8         | 4.8            | 9.4           | 12.1        | 3.3      | 43                   | 33                   | 30                   | 28                   | 35                   |

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

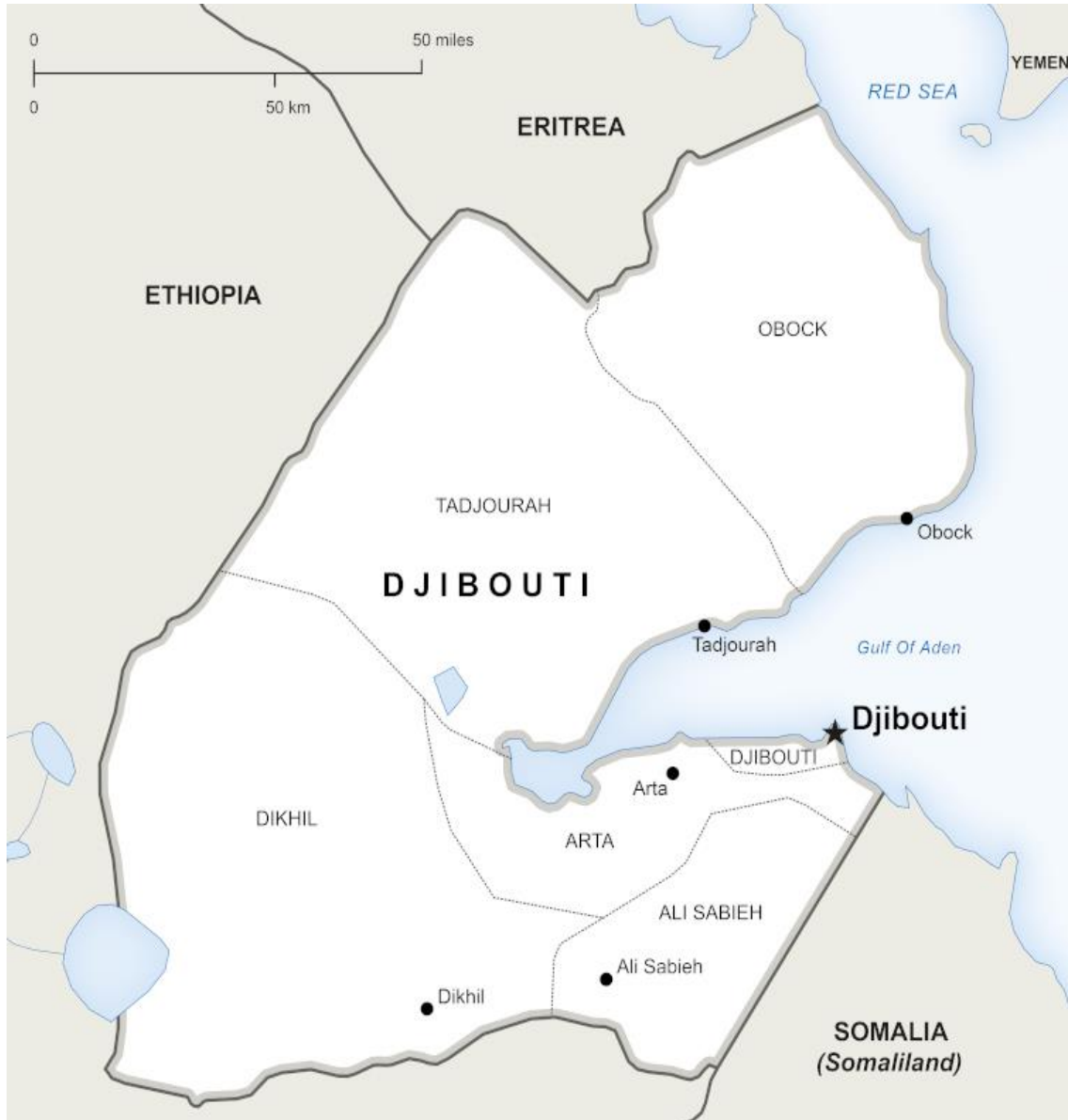
# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Djibouti

## Brief country details

| Djibouti: Population (UN estimate for 2022) | Christians | Chr% |
|---|------------|------|
| 1,016,000                                   | 10,900     | 1.1  |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

## Map of country



| Djibouti: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|----------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2023                   | 60     | 56       |
| WWL 2022                   | 59     | 58       |
| WWL 2021                   | 56     | 59       |
| WWL 2020                   | 56     | 56       |
| WWL 2019                   | 56     | 53       |

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

| Djibouti: Main Persecution engines | Main drivers   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Islamic oppression                 | Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family |
| Clan oppression                    | Non-Christian religious leaders  |
| Dictatorial paranoia               | Political parties, Government officials  |

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

## Brief description of the persecution situation

All laws and policies in the country are shaped by Sharia law. Christians with a Muslim background experience face great difficulties both from the local community and from their own family members. Hiding one's faith is one means of protection but the communal lifestyle makes this very difficult. If someone converts to Christianity or there are rumors of a possible conversion, that person will lose all inheritance rights. The local authorities do not protect Christians if they are attacked.

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Known converts from Islam to Christianity are targeted by clan leaders and ostracized
- Christians are harassed at workplaces
- Female converts face sexual attacks and forced marriages
- It is illegal for any faith to proselytize in public (Source: US State Department IRFR 2021)

## Specific examples of positive developments

The government of Djibouti made burial space available for Ethiopian expatriate Christians.

# WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Djibouti

## Links for general background information

| Name  | Quote Reference                      | Link  | Last accessed on |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries, Djibouti not included            | AI country report 2021/22            | <a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/</a>   |                  |
| BBC News country profile  | BBC country profile                  | <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13231761">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13231761</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries                           | BTI report 2022                      | <a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/DJI">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/DJI</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| CIA World Factbook  | CIA Factbook                         | <a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/djibouti/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/djibouti/</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries  | Crisis24 country report              | <a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/djibouti">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/djibouti</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries                               | EIU 2021 (p.58)                      | <a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries  | FSI 2022                             | <a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>   | 30 August 2022   |
| Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Djibouti not included                     | Democracy Index 2022                 | <a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries                                      | Global Freedom Index 2022            | <a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2022</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Djibouti not included           | Freedom on the Net 2022              | <a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>   |                  |
| Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries, Djibouti not included | HRW 2022 country chapter             | <a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022</a>   |                  |
| Internet World Stats 2022   | IWS 2022                             | <a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#dj">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#dj</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries   | World Press Freedom 2022             | <a href="https://rsf.org/en/djibouti">https://rsf.org/en/djibouti</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries                 | CPI 2021                             | <a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/dji">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/dji</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries                   | HDI profile                          | <a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/DJI">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/DJI</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)                            | IRFR 2021                            | <a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/djibouti/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/djibouti/</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Djibouti not included                           | USCIRF 2022                          | <a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>   |                  |
| World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries  | World Bank overview 2022             | <a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/overview</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries  | World Bank profile (2020 data)       | <a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=DJI">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=DJI</a> | 28 June 2022     |
| World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)                     | Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 6-7) | <a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mena.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mena.pdf</a>   | 28 June 2022     |

## Recent history

Djibouti became independent from France in 1977. After years of civil war (1991-2000), the first free multi-party elections took place in 2003. However, the ruling party has effectively gained control of all levels of power and the country no longer has an electoral democracy. President Guelleh, who first came to power in 1999, was re-elected for a [fifth term in April 2021](#), winning over 98% of the votes (Al-Jazeera, 10 April 2021). The main opposition group boycotted the election.

Djibouti is a country of contrasts. On the one hand, it has made considerable progress in developing its port, economy and banking sector, making it attractive for foreign business and military investment. On the other hand, it is likely that Djibouti will continue to face challenges such as serious unemployment, a severe lack of skilled workers, chronic drought and food insecurity, high electricity costs and underdeveloped government institutions. This mix of factors is already leading to poverty and political tension; a need is felt for more inclusive governmental policies, a more equal distribution of revenues across the population, an improved energy infrastructure and a significant decrease of corruption within the ruling elite. In Djibouti, these issues, as seen across many parts of Africa, are compounded by the country having a large youth population, which is particularly affected by the high unemployment. It is expected that the trends described above will lead to a continuation of repressive actions keeping Djibouti society in line with elite interests.

Now that Ethiopia is expanding its alternatives by mending its relationship with Eritrea (since mid-2018), Djibouti could struggle financially as the port used by Ethiopia up until now has been the main source of income for the Djiboutian economy. Some commentators have suggested that this could encourage Djibouti to react by playing a destabilizing role in the region. The port's role was diminished further by the global COVID-19 crisis.



## Political and legal landscape

According to Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (EIU 2021, p.58):

- Djibouti is labeled an “authoritarian regime” and ranks #139 out of 167 countries examined.

According to Freedom House (Global Freedom Index 2022):

- Djibouti is categorized as “not free” with a score of 24/100, as basic political rights are absent and basic civil freedoms are denied. Political pluralism is considered absent or severely lacking, effectively creating a level of dictatorship; some formal institutions of democracy may exist but have little substance and elections are not free or fair. The state was ruled by a one-party system from its foundation in 1977 until 1992 when a new Constitution was brought in to allow for a multi-party system. The state has become increasingly repressive over the years and is intolerant of dissent, leaving the population with little if any influence over their government.
- Moreover, civil liberties are systematically abused, the media is state-controlled, government criticism is repressed and there is no independent judiciary. There are no strong political parties that can challenge the status quo. "In June and July [2020], police used excessive force, including live ammunition, to suppress demonstrations against the government's detention and alleged mistreatment of an air force lieutenant who had been arrested in April after criticizing authorities on social media and attempting to flee the country. Journalists who sought to cover the case and corresponding protests were arrested or forced into hiding." The air force pilot, Fouad Youssouf Ali, was referred to a criminal court in November 2021 and convicted of attempting to incite a coup and of attempted theft of military property, with the court sentencing him to 10 years' imprisonment together with a monetary fine.
- The Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and belief. However, the government continued to curtail these rights. Journalists engage in self-censorship. The government continues to own the dominant newspaper, television station, and radio broadcaster, as well as printing presses. Domestic media outlets usually reflect government views. Journalists affiliated with outlets based abroad or small opposition publications are subject to harassment and arbitrary arrest.
- Academic freedom is not always guaranteed, and teachers will be detained if they are found to have alleged affiliation with the political opposition. Permits are required for public gathering and the government usually uses force to disperse unauthorized protests and arrest participants.

At the end of October 2019, the arrest of Kako Houmed Kako a member of the Republican Alliance for Development (ARD) led to [two days of protests](#) in Arhiba (Africa Times, 1 November 2019). The security forces used tear gas and live ammunition against the demonstrators. Opposition sources reported that 50 people were injured. Smaller protests also occurred in Tadjourah and Obock regions. Street protests also erupted in June/July 2020 over the apparent torture of Lieutenant Fouad Youssouf Ali who was detained for anti-government posts on social media (see above). The protests were compounded by general public dissatisfaction with corruption and poverty in Djibouti and were met with excessive police force. In this highly re-

stricted and guarded political and legal system, Christians have to carry out self-censorship at all times.

### Gender perspective

Djibouti’s political and legal landscape is additionally restrictive towards women and girls, in part as Sharia law forms the basis for family and personal status laws ([OECD, 2019](#)). Women are only allowed to marry a non-Muslim man if he converts to Islam (Family Code, Article 23), and whereas a husband has the right to divorce his wife unilaterally, she can only seek one under specific circumstances (Article 39.2). Djibouti lacks a comprehensive law that addresses violence against women, and whilst the 1995 Penal code criminalized acts of violence, it does not have a separate law that specifically addresses domestic violence ([UNFPA, Djibouti: Gender Justice and the Law, 2018](#)).

On a positive note, Djibouti has low rates of child marriage compared to other countries in the region ([Girls Not Brides, 2021](#)) and saw a 15 percentage point increase in female representation in parliament, after a 25% quota was introduced in advance of the February 2018 election ([Georgetown, Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p.38](#)).

### Religious landscape

| Djibouti: Religious context   | Number of adherents | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians  | 10,900              | 1.1  |
| Muslim  | 992,000             | 97.6 |
| Hindu   | 410                 | 0.0  |
| Buddhist  | 0                   | 0.0  |
| Ethno-religionist   | 0                   | 0.0  |
| Jewish  | 0                   | 0.0  |
| Bahai   | 910                 | 0.1  |
| Atheist   | 410                 | 0.0  |
| Agnostic  | 12,000              | 1.2  |
| Other   | 0                   | 0.0  |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> |                     |      |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Islam is the state religion but the Constitution provides for religious freedom. Non-Sunni religious minorities - including Christians - have at times been treated unfairly. 94% of the population is Sunni Muslim. The Ministry of Islamic and Cultural Affairs oversees religious matters and has authority over mosques and private Islamic schools. Imams are civil service

employees of the ministry (Source: US State Department IRFR 2021)

## Economic landscape

Djibouti is one of the poorest countries in the world and is ranked #166 out of 189 countries in the UN Human Development Index (HDI profile). It imports 90% of the food it needs, which makes it highly dependent on international market prices. Moreover, the country has few exports and the majority of its imports come from France. Another large contributor to the nation's GDP comes from the rent of military bases to foreign powers (see below: *Security situation*).

According to World Bank's [Economic Update \(April 2022\)](#):

- **Economic growth:** "GDP growth in Djibouti rebounded to 4.3% in 2021 from 0.5% in 2020 (lowest growth since 2000), driven by the withdrawal of COVID-19 movement restrictions, which allowed for the resumption of major public works, such as the transformation of the old port into a shopping center, preparatory works for the construction of a shipyard repair factory, and the development of the Damerjog Industrial Development Free Trade Zone."
- **Inflation:** "Headline inflation rose to 2.5% at the end of 2021 (year-on-year), reflecting the recovery of domestic demand, high global commodity prices, and recurrent shortages in imports of fresh food from Ethiopia."
- **Poverty outlook:** "With continued economic growth, poverty is expected to resume its downward trend from 14% in 2022 to 12.4% in 2024."

According to Heritage Foundation's [2022 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- **Economic Freedom:** Djibouti scored 55.3 points, making its economy the 120th freest in the world (Its overall score increased by 2.4 points), primarily because of an improvement in fiscal health. Djibouti's economy still ranks in the mostly unfree category in 2022 despite the improvement in the fiscal health score.
- **Debt:** National debt is high and despite a positive fiscal health score, Djibouti remains heavily indebted to China due to its reliance on foreign funding to undertake its ambitious infrastructure projects.

According to [AllGov/Nations](#) (accessed 30 August 2022):

- "Djibouti is a poverty stricken nation with few natural resources and little industry. The country's greatest resource, in fact, is its strategic location on the Gulf of Aden at the southern entrance to the Red Sea. As a result, the economy of Djibouti is based on service activities connected with international maritime trade. Imports and exports from landlocked neighbor Ethiopia represent 85% of port activity at Djibouti's container terminal. Djibouti provides services as both a transit port for the region and an international transshipment and refueling center. The nation is heavily dependent on foreign assistance to help support its balance of payments and to finance development projects, including salt mining at Lake Asal, gold mining, geothermal energy, and tourism."

According to the World Bank country overview:

- **Poverty:** Extreme poverty increased slightly to 14.7% in 2020. The World Food Program (WFP) also stated that despite recent economic growth in the country, poverty rates stand at 79%, with 42% of the population living in extreme poverty. The population living below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day was estimated at 17.1% in 2017 but is expected to decrease it reaps the benefits of infrastructure and investments.

### Gender perspective

As highlighted by UN Human Development Indicators (HDI profile), women and girls remain economically disadvantaged in Djibouti, primarily due to Sharia rules of inheritance (whereby daughters typically receive half the amount that sons receive), as well as reduced employment opportunities compared to men. According to [Georgetown's 2019/20 Women, Peace and Security](#) Index (p. 34), Djibouti scores particularly low in relation to financial inclusion for women.

### Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and UNDP'S Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Somali 60%, Afar 35%, other 5% (mostly Yemeni Arab, also French, Ethiopian, and Italian)
- **Main languages:** French (official), Arabic (official), Somali, Afar
- **Urban population:** 78.4% (2022)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 1.56% (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 1.97% (2022 est.)
- **Median age:** 24.9 years (male: 23 years; female: 26.4 years) (2020 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 6.8 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** Data not available
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 54.0%
- **Unemployment, total (% of the labor force):** 10.3%
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 20.8 years
- **Human Development Index:** Djibouti ranked 166th out of 189 countries with a value of 0.524
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 67.1 years (65.3 according to CIA Factbook 2022 est.)

According to the [UNHCR Global Focus 2021](#):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** Djibouti hosted nearly 31,300 refugees and asylum-seekers mainly from Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. The Tigray emergency in Ethiopia that broke out in 2020 resulted in displacement of Ethiopians in the region. In Djibouti, although no refugees from the Tigray region were received, UNHCR and the government registered a total of 188 Ethiopians of Tigray origin who were stranded in Djibouti and who were granted asylum as refugees.

According to the US State Department's [2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#):

- The Somali Issas control the ruling party and dominate the civil service and security services, which means relations between Djibouti's predominantly Somali and Afar ethnic groups remain a sensitive issue. This marginalization and perceived exclusion of the Afar has generated animosity and periodic armed resistance. Although the governing coalition has remedied these tensions by including all of the country's major clan and ethnic groups, there remains discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in employment and job advancement.
- Among the problems relating to human rights issues are: The use of excessive force, including torture; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrests and prolonged pretrial detention; denial of fair public trials; interference with privacy rights; harassing, abusing, and detaining government critics; restrictions on freedoms of speech, assembly, association and religion.

### Gender perspective

Within Djibouti's patriarchal, Islamic context, women and girls traditionally assume subordinate roles within the family and society, whereas men take up the position of head of the household. Domestic abuse is believed to be widespread, but rarely reported publicly. Rather, violence in the domestic sphere is often dealt with either within a family or traditional context ([OECD, 2019](#)). This discriminatory practice against women extends to education with girls' right to education, especially that of [pregnant girls and adolescent mothers](#), not guaranteed because of absence of positive law or regulation required under the Convention on Rights of the Child to which Djibouti is a party (Statement by Amnesty International, 14 April 2022).

### Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 54.3% of the total population - survey date: December 2021 (Most recent survey available at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 16.4% of the total population - survey date: January 2022  
According to [NapoleonCat](#), (January 2023), 60.7% of Facebook users were male, and 39.3% female.

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 43 per 100 people

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (Publication date: February 2023):

- "Djibouti remains one of the last bastions where the national telco has a monopoly on all telecom services, including fixed lines, mobile, internet, and broadband. The lack of competition to Djibouti Telecom for such services has meant that the market has not lived up to its potential. Despite the country benefitting from its location as a hub for international submarine cables, and with Djibouti Telecom being a partner in at least eight of them, prices for telecom services remain relatively high, and out of reach for a number of customers, weighing on market advancement."

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022 (D4):

- "Open discussion of sensitive political issues is impeded by restrictive laws on defamation and other such offenses. The government reportedly monitors social media and conducts surveillance on perceived opponents. Individuals are subject to arrest for posting critical content about the government online."

According to a report by the [New African magazine](#) published on 1 April 2020:

- "Djibouti now has 11 undersea cables, making it one of the best-connected countries in Africa and with its data centre, it is well on its way to becoming a regional digital hub."

## Security situation

The fact that neighboring countries have become hotspots for Islamic radicalization, the future of Djibouti will also depend on developments in the rest of the region. The war in Yemen could increasingly pose problems for Djibouti since Islamic militants fighting in Yemen could easily cross the ocean with those escaping the conflict and expand their networks in Djibouti. If anything escalates in the region and Djibouti fails to secure its borders, Christians in the country - especially many from Ethiopia - could be seriously affected. Furthermore, the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia has been posing a threat to Djibouti and the entire Horn of Africa.

Djibouti "is home to the most extensive array of military powers seen anywhere else in the world, from the United States, Japan, France, Italy, Spain and most recently China and Saudi Arabia". Russia and India have also expressed interest in setting up bases. (Source: [Medium, 30 June 2020](#)). The country has received the deployment of 960 Somali AMISOM security forces in 2022 (CIA Factbook).

Intercommunal violence is rare, but did break out at the beginning of August 2021 in the capital city. Many houses were set on fire and at least three people were killed. The fighting was "between the ethnic Afar group, which straddles Djibouti's borders with Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Issa, Djibouti's other main ethnic group" (Al-Jazeera, 2 August 2021).

## Trends analysis

### 1) Djibouti is relatively stable despite not being a democracy

Djibouti is at a critical geopolitical location. This gives the country's government the leverage to deal with both Western as well as other powerful nations. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, there have been no significant changes in the country in terms of freedom of religion. Although the situation in the region, in general, has been unstable, Djibouti itself is relatively stable despite not being a democracy. There is no room for dissent. President Guelleh and his government are still in firm control of the country. In the near future, it is difficult to see any change in the status quo. However, the instability that has engulfed Ethiopia (and an emboldened president of Eritrea) might threaten the stability of the country and the region. The fighting in Yemen could also have a negative impact on the country.

## 2) The position of the Church is vulnerable

Due to the international community's interest in having a stable Djibouti as a strong partner for regional security, it is likely that political repression and other forms of human rights violations will be 'overlooked' in exchange for continued internal stability. This could further anger the population and foment increased levels of antigovernment sentiment across the country. This, in turn, could have a negative impact on Christians as the Djiboutian state might well clamp down on all groups not under direct control. Or Muslim groups could further radicalize and blame Christians - who are allegedly associated with the West - for supporting the regime and defending its repressive policies.

Due to a reciprocal relationship between Western nations (France and the USA in particular) and the Djiboutian government, the latter has an incentive not to sponsor violence against Christians; however, to expect a positive development regarding freedom of expression and association (two fundamental rights very connected to freedom of religion) would be plainly naïve. There is also another dynamic that is emerging in the country, namely the influence of China. China has built a military base (its first overseas base) in Djibouti costing over half a million dollars. The presence of China in the country is likely to give leverage to Djibouti over USA and France. This is a key development as China is known for serious violations of freedom of Christians.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: fifth term in April 202 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/10/veteran-ruler-guelleh-re-elected-djibouti-leader-for-fifth-term>
- Political and legal landscape: two days of protests - <https://africatimes.com/2019/11/01/in-djibouti-opposition-protests-met-with-force/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/DJ.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: UNFPA, Djibouti: Gender Justice and the Law, 2018 - [https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Djibouti%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English\\_0.pdf](https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Djibouti%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf)
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2021 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/djibouti/>
- Political and legal landscape: Georgetown, Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p.38 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Economic Update (April 2022) - [https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/publication/economic-update-april-2022?cid=mena\\_fb\\_mena\\_en\\_ext](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/publication/economic-update-april-2022?cid=mena_fb_mena_en_ext)
- Economic landscape: 2022 Index of Economic Freedom - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/djibouti>
- Economic landscape: AllGov/Nations - <http://www.allgov.com/nations?nationID=3539>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown's 2019/20 Women, Peace and Security - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Global Focus 2021 - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/djibouti>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/djibouti/>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/DJ.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: pregnant girls and adolescent mothers - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/14/submission-committee-rights-child-review-djibouti>
- Technological landscape: NapoleonCat - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-djibouti/2023/01/>



- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Djibouti-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Technological landscape: New African magazine - <https://newafricanmagazine.com/22934/>
- Security situation: Medium, 30 June 2020 - <https://medium.com/@LongTwentiethCentury/why-are-there-so-many-military-bases-in-djibouti-f8c579e961d5>

## WWL 2023: Church information / Djibouti

### Christian origins

"Around the 1st century AD, Djibouti made up part of the powerful Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum, which included modern-day Eritrea and even stretched across the Red Sea to parts of southern Arabia. It was during the Aksumite era, in the 4th century AD, that Christianity first appeared in the region. As the empire of Aksum gradually fell into decline, a new influence arose that would forever supersede the Christian religion in Djibouti: Islam. It was introduced to the region around AD 825 by Arab traders from Southern Arabia." (Source: [Lonely Planet](#), accessed 9 September 2020)

The historical connections between Ethiopia and Djibouti have led to a sustained presence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the country. European powers brought Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity to the country following the arrival of French, who first gained a foothold in the region in 1883 (which was named "French Somaliland" in 1894). The Roman Catholic Church sent its first priest from Arabia to Djibouti in 1883. In 1940 the Reformed Church of France was established.

### Church spectrum today

| Djibouti: Church networks  | Christians    | %           |
|--|---------------|-------------|
| Orthodox   | 2,000         | 18.3        |
| Catholic   | 7,500         | 68.8        |
| Protestant   | 430           | 3.9         |
| Independent  | 500           | 4.6         |
| Unaffiliated   | 390           | 3.6         |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians   | 0             | 0.0         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>10,820</b> | <b>99.3</b> |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> |               |             |
| Evangelical movement   | 400           | 3.7         |
| Renewalist movement  | 520           | 4.8         |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)



**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:** Christians 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.

The Christian presence, which is partly over 100 years old, is divided up into various denominations, including Roman Catholics, Protestants, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and a small convert community with a Muslim background.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no specific hotspots.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

All Christian communities in Djibouti face challenges, each experiencing different levels of persecution.

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians in Djibouti, some of whom have lived in the country for decades, are not immune from persecution. In the past there was a level of tolerance. However, the tolerance towards Orthodox Christians originating from Ethiopia is withering away as radical Islam is rising. Congregations made up of French and US service personnel experience minimal restrictions.

**Historical Christian communities:** In the WWL analysis for Djibouti, this category has been combined with the category for expatriate Christians above. (The French Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches represent the only active Christian witness recognized by the government.)

**Converts to Christianity:** Christians with a Muslim background are few in number and face intense pressure from family, community and those fulfilling (religious) leadership roles at the community level. This is particularly true outside the city where the lifestyle is communal and pastoralist. Converts do not have the luxury of giving their children Christian names, or of celebrating Christian weddings and church festivals. They have to stay underground and live their Christian life in secret. Converts have even been discriminated against and harassed in refugee camps.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This group consists of Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations who are known for their interest in evangelization and hence face severe opposition.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Lonely Planet - <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/djibouti/history>

# WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Djibouti

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

| Djibouti: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|----------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2023                   | 60     | 56       |
| WWL 2022                   | 59     | 58       |
| WWL 2021                   | 56     | 59       |
| WWL 2020                   | 56     | 56       |
| WWL 2019                   | 56     | 53       |

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Djibouti rose 1 point in WWL 2023. The fact that the ruling government seeks to stay in power at all costs is critical for understanding the current state of affairs for Christians in this country which has an Islamic population of 97.4%. For the last five reporting periods, pressure on Christians had been stable. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, the increase by one point was due to increases in score in the *Community* and *Church spheres of life*. As a conservative society, those discovered leaving Islam and becoming Christians face being shunned, ridiculed and completely rejected by society. The country is located in a strategically important as well as volatile location; countries that have a major influence over the government have not put it under pressure to improve its human rights conditions for fear of losing access to the country. Thus, the government can oppress the population without any fear from the international community.

## Persecution engines

| Djibouti: Persecution engines           | Abbreviation | Level of influence |
|---|--------------|--------------------|
| Islamic oppression                      | IO           | Strong             |
| Religious nationalism                   | RN           | Not at all         |
| Ethno-religious hostility               | ERH          | Not at all         |
| Clan oppression                         | CO           | Strong             |
| Christian denominational protectionism  | CDP          | Not at all         |
| Communist and post-Communist oppression | CPCO         | Not at all         |

|                                |     |            |
|--------------------------------|-----|------------|
| Secular intolerance            | SI  | Not at all |
| Dictatorial paranoia           | DPA | Medium     |
| Organized corruption and crime | OCC | Not at all |

*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.*

### **Islamic oppression (Strong) blended with Clan oppression (Strong)**

Islam is deeply rooted in society and hence any other religion is regarded as alien. Furthermore, Djibouti's geographical location is very convenient both for international trade and for the transit of jihadists from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East and vice-versa. Around 94% of the Djiboutian population are Sunni Muslims. Radical Islam is growing in the country in a similar pattern to other East African countries and is of major concern for the government. The government attempts to control the content of the Muslim Friday sermons and who does the preaching. Since approximately 60% of the population are ethnic Somali, the growth of radical Islam in Somalia affects society in Djibouti too.

Djibouti is the home of the Afar and Issa ethnic groups. The Issa belong to the larger Somali tribe. Tribalism in the country is so deeply rooted that any attempt to accept Christianity is deemed a betrayal of the tribe and tribal faith (Islam). Christian converts will be isolated and treated badly for their faith.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)**

The fact that the ruling government seeks to stay in power at all costs is critical for understanding the current state of affairs for Christians in Djibouti. President Ismael Omar Guelleh was elected in 1999; in the year 2000 the government and the radical faction of Afar Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) signed a peace agreement finally putting an end to the civil war. President Guelleh does not want to be viewed as moderate by the radical forces in his party. Thus any people thought to be a threat to his political power are treated in a tough manner – this includes the Christian communities.

Djibouti is rated as “not free” by Freedom House/Global Freedom 2022. World Press Freedom 2022 published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) also lists Djibouti as one of worst countries regarding freedom of expression and information (at rank 164 out of 180). According to the RSF report:

- "The government led by President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, who was reelected for a fifth term in 2021, deploys a draconian arsenal that includes judicial harassment, illegal searches, arrests and physical violence in order to impose a reign of terror on the media."

## Drivers of persecution

| Djibouti:  |        |    |     |        |     |      |    |        |     |
|--|--------|----|-----|--------|-----|------|----|--------|-----|
| Drivers of Persecution                                     | IO     | RN | ERH | CO     | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA    | OCC |
|  | STRONG |    |     | STRONG |     |      |    | MEDIUM |     |
| Government officials                                       |        |    |     |        |     |      |    | Medium |     |
| Non-Christian religious leaders                            | Strong |    |     | Strong |     |      |    |        |     |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | Strong |    |     |        |     |      |    |        |     |
| One's own (extended) family                                | Strong |    |     |        |     |      |    |        |     |
| Political parties  |        |    |     |        |     |      |    | Medium |     |

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.

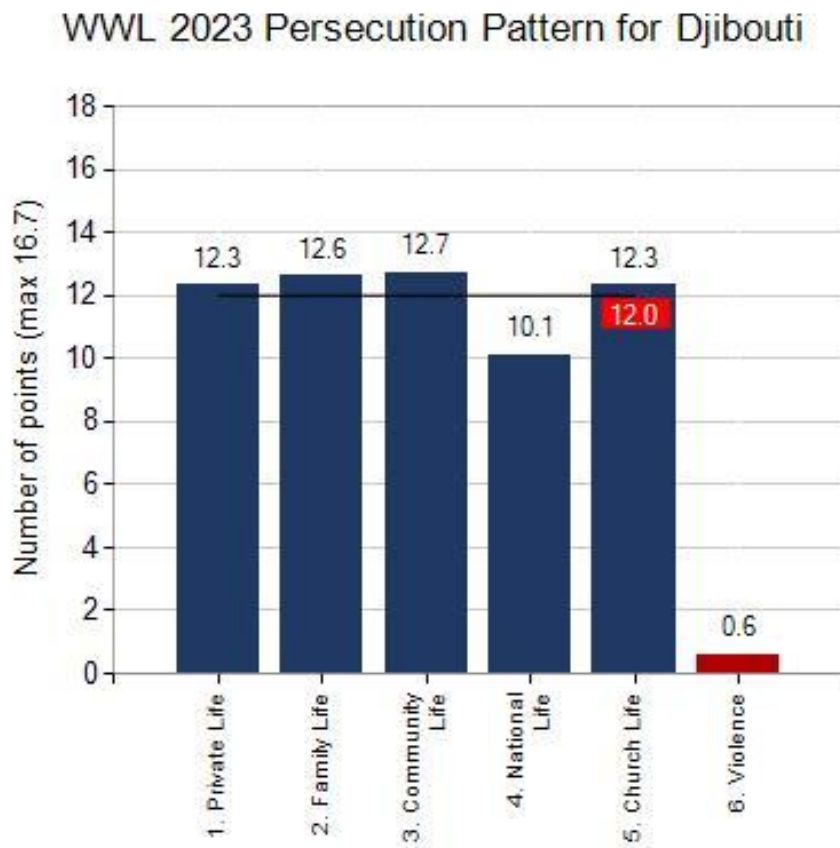
### Drivers of Islamic oppression / blended with Clan oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Imams and sheiks create an environment of fear for Christians. They preach hate and animosity toward Christians and because of their radical messages, the government always monitors their Friday sermons.
- **Family members (Strong):** Any discussion about matters of faith by converts is seen as sinful and an attempt at undermining Islam. It will cause severe opposition from both close and extended family members. Persecution can range from being denied participation in family activities to physical violence for refusing to renounce Christianity. It is worth mentioning here that family members react in this way not only because they care about Islam but also because they fear the societal rejection of the whole family which occurs if a family member is known to have become a Christian.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Djibouti has a 97.5% Muslim population and is a conservative society with the attitude: 'People should be converted to Islam, not Christianity'. Thus, if someone in the community does become a Christian, they will persecute that person.
- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** Tribal leaders always make sure Islam is the faith adhered to by all members of the tribe. The tribal leaders of Afar and Issa are also very conservative Muslims and persecute Christians. Every convert knows that leaving Islam means betraying the clan.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials and the ruling political party (to a lesser extent) have made the procedure for obtaining official church recognition very difficult and at times do not listen to the concerns of Christians.
- **Political party (Medium):** With the president at the helm, the ruling party has established itself in society and does not tolerate any 'freedom of religion'.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Djibouti shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Djibouti is very high at 12.0 points, an increase by 0.4 points from WWL 2022 (11.6 points).
- The *Community sphere* scores the highest with 12.7 points, followed by the *Family spheres* (12.6 points), and the *Church and Private spheres* (12.3 points each).
- The *National sphere* scored lowest with 10.1 points.
- The score for violence is very low. 0.6 point.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

### **Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)**

In countries like Djibouti where such a great majority of the population is Muslim - and where many citizens see Islam as the sole religion with a right to exist and operate in the country - the idea of talking about a non-Islamic religion with a family member is unthinkable. Thus, converts face harsh treatment from society. The Islamic population also regard Christians as being inferior and their presence in the country as being aimed at converting Djiboutians. As a result, all Christians tend to refrain from talking directly about Christianity to any non-Christians in the country.

### **Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)**

As indicated above in 1.8, in the given Islamic context, the idea of conversion is unthinkable. Even though conversion is not punishable by law, the Islamic population will not accept it. Those who are found to be converts face harsh treatment and can be expelled from home and denied access to community services.

### **Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.25 points)**

There is a risk associated with this caused by society rather than by the government. If Christians meet up outside of the officially recognized churches, ultra conservatives might attack them. For converts, the problem is far greater as they can easily be targeted by their own family members if they are found meeting with others Christians.

### **Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.00 points)**

As mentioned above, the very idea of leaving Islam is not acceptable. Converts must take maximum care in their engagement with their family members when it comes to matters of faith. This is because the idea of conversion is taboo and a disgrace to both family and community.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)**

Raising children or living a Christian lifestyle is very difficult in the country. Many Christians struggle with this issue, especially those who cannot afford to send their children to private schools. Christians are anyway not allowed to set up Christian schools that would enable them to have a curriculum designed to teach Christianity in addition to regular classes. For converts to raise their children in the Christian faith is particularly challenging, since the population lives in close-knit communities with strong family relationships and control.

**Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.00 points)**

For the bigger churches in the country, if they carry out baptisms within the church compounds, no problems arise. However, as stated in Block 2.7, Djibouti is a very communal community with strong family relationships and control; if a convert is baptized, that convert will be shunned, harassed and bullied in family and local community.

**Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (3.00 points)**

Conservative Islamic families will not allow any of their family members to have a Christian wife or to convert to Christianity. The children of a known convert would be taken away to prevent them being brought up as Christians. This is used as a tool to deter people from converting to Christianity.

**Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (3.00 points)**

Inheritance is often regulated by Sharia laws or customs. That means religion and custom/culture play a key role. In this context, converts to Christianity will lose any inheritance rights the day their new faith is discovered. If the convert is a woman, the punishment is even worse as there is a cultural dimension.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)**

As a minority group, Christians struggle to live with little legal protection. Christians are widely viewed as being second-class citizens (or even 'less than human', in some cases). As a result they have to live a very careful life and must not offend anyone. They face harassment, mocking and bullying in many forms. Converts are likely to be dispossessed of their property, among other things.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)**

Pressure on Christians takes many forms. The highly inter-connected Somali and Afar communities in Djibouti put pressure on converts to renounce their faith by expelling them, denying them support and at times threatening to kill them. Furthermore, they can be denied their right to visit their family or children.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

Christians in Djibouti face persecution in many forms. There are widespread allegations that Muslims get preferential treatment when it comes to getting public employment. It is the same when it comes to private companies owned by Muslims. Nepotism is very common and it is even

encouraged by government officials. There is clear discrimination against Christians.

**Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.25 points)**

The way schools are run and classes are arranged does not reflect the interest of all people in the country. Christians are not in a position to influence the content of the curriculum and have no voice to challenge any curriculum that is not designed fairly. This has a huge impact on young Christians who want to pursue higher education.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)**

Islam is the state religion and most of the laws and policies of the country are in line with Sharia law. This sends a clear message that says other religions are not equal and are not welcome. The fact that Islam is declared a state religion in itself encourages laws to be passed by taking Sharia law into consideration. It encourages people not to tolerate other religious groups in the country. Particularly worrying is the fact that officials in some places act as if Christians do not have any legal right to exist in the country.

**Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Faith is key in many aspect. The Christian minority's participation in public life is negligible. Although there is no law that says so, it is expected that the president is always a Muslim and is sworn in using an Islamic oath. As mentioned under 4.1, the fact that Islam is declared a state religion makes it easy for businesses to deny Christians equal treatment when it comes to hiring or promotion.

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.00 points)**

There are two issues here: First, with Sharia law influencing Djibouti's laws and how they are enforced, there is no room for Christians to express their faith-based views and opinions in public. Secondly, freedom of expression in the country is anyway very limited. Thus, if Christians speak up against persecution, injustice, corruption or other malpractices and mismanagement, they will face government action against them.

**Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.00 points)**

Perpetrators of such hate speech etc. are mainly radical Islamic leaders who want Djibouti to be a country for Muslims only under Islamic law. Hostile statements are mainly directed against foreign nationals living in the country who are known to follow Christian faith.



## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)**

Church activities are tightly controlled. Thus, organizing church programs outside the registered compounds is restricted. For one thing, it is difficult to get permission, and secondly, the Islamic population would most likely be offended and take violent action against the church. In general terms, this is a country where freedom of assembly is highly restricted.

### **Block 5.16: Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (e.g. via local or national radio, TV, Internet, social media, cell phones). (3.75 points)**

Using mass media is highly monitored and controlled. Any form of media with religious content produced by non-Muslims is not encouraged, especially if the religious group is not registered with the authorities. Measures against this range from censoring the content to banning the media outlets involved.

### **Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)**

Church activities are very much under close surveillance by the community and/or by the government. Thus, there are two major issues here: First, Djibouti has more or less become a police state, with the government controlling everything. Secondly, society is very conservative. This makes church life in Djibouti complicated and restricted. Registration procedures are lengthy and difficult. The building of a church - even if officially allowed - could attract danger from offended residents. Churches that exist in the country must live in a way that does not provoke others and must not distribute Bibles or materials about the Christian faith. Churches that do that would be investigated and have action taken against them.

### **Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.50 points)**

There is a law that prohibits proselytization. While the government allows registered non-Muslim religious groups to operate with relative freedom, when it comes to integrating converts - especially converts from Islam - the government will strictly oppose this. In order to discourage interest in conversion, the government also does not allow churches to talk openly about converts in public.

## Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.** Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

**3. For further discussion** (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

**4. The use of symbolic numbers:** In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

| Djibouti: Violence Block question |   | WWL 2023 | WWL 2022 |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------|----------|
| 6.1                               | How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?   | 0        | 0        |
| 6.2                               | How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 0        | 0        |
| 6.3                               | How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?   | 0        | 0        |
| 6.4                               | How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?   | 0        | 0        |
| 6.5                               | How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?   | 0        | 0        |
| 6.6                               | How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?   | 0        | 1        |
| 6.7                               | How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?   | 0        | 0        |
| 6.8                               | How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?   | 2        | 10 *     |
| 6.9                               | How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?                       | 0        | 0        |
| 6.10                              | How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?                                      | 0        | 0        |
| 6.11                              | How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?   | 1        | 0        |
| 6.12                              | How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?  | 0        | 0        |

## 5 Year trends

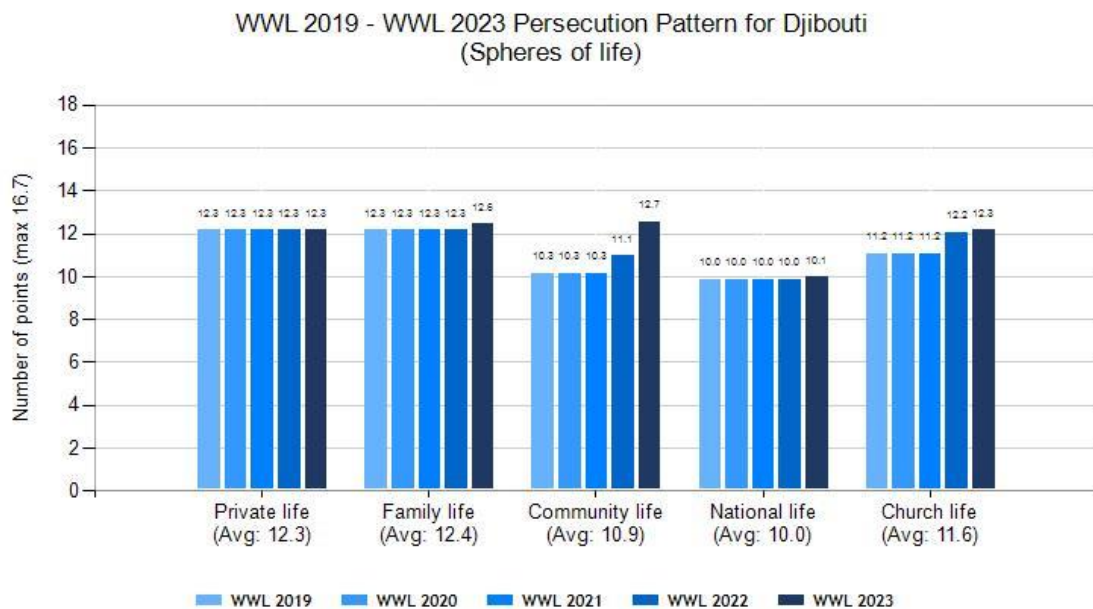
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows that in the period WWL 2019-2021, the level of pressure was stable at the very high level of 11.2 points. In the following two reporting periods there has been an increase after a period of stability. This very high level of pressure shows that if the violence score was higher, the country would have reached a much higher overall score and ranking.

| Djibouti: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Persecution Pattern history   | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
| 2023                          | 12.0                                    |
| 2022                          | 11.6                                    |
| 2021                          | 11.2                                    |
| 2020                          | 11.2                                    |
| 2019                          | 11.2                                    |

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

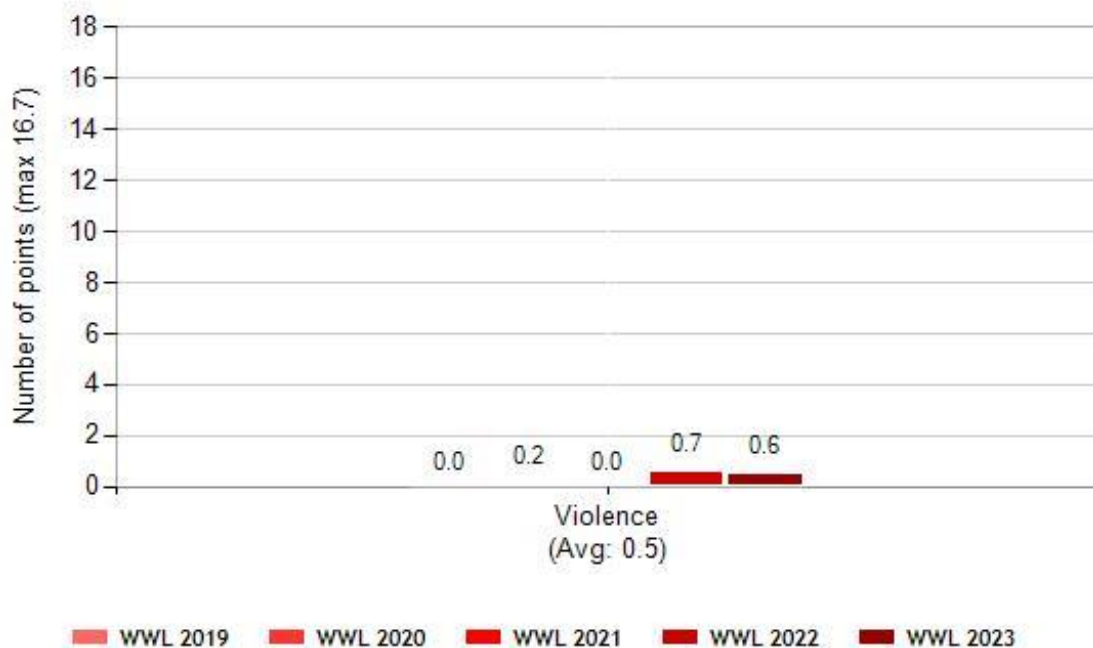


The graph above shows that the pressure on Christians has been very stable in the *Private, Family and National spheres of life*. The recent increases in pressure have been most visible in the *Community and Church spheres of life*.

### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

As can be seen in the chart below, violence in the country is very low. If violence against Christians was as prevalent in Djibouti as in other countries in the region, the country would score much higher and rank among the worst countries for persecution.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Djibouti (Violence)



### Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Group               | Female Pressure Points  |
|---------------------|---|
| Economic            | Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education  |
| Political and Legal | Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement                         |
| Security            | Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual |
| Social and Cultural | Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal                                   |
| Technological       | -   |

Those who are found to be converts in Djibouti face harsh treatment. Female converts in Djibouti are vulnerable to physical beatings and house arrest (particularly in rural areas). Although not common, reports in the past indicated that in some instances, Christian women have been abducted by radical Muslims and forced to marry Muslims without their consent. “When a Muslim converts to Christianity, his or her family abducts or forces him or her to marry. This situation has a disproportionate impact on women and girls,” a country expert confirmed. The majority of those who enter pre-arranged marriages do so under pressure from their families and local communities who are eager to see them return to Islam. Female converts may be forced to marry older religious leaders in an effort to influence their faith.

Converts who are already married face various forms of pressure from their spouse and extended families. If a newly converted Christian woman refuses to recant her new-found faith, she will likely face divorce. Whilst men in poverty-ridden Djibouti would normally want to escape the burden of looking after the children in a case of divorce, sources state that families of devoted Muslims will not allow the woman to claim custody and raise the children as Christians. According to a country expert, women automatically lose their custodial rights upon conversion as it becomes virtually “impossible to trust her with the children”. Whether they succeed in claiming custody rights or not, female converts are usually crippled financially without a stable income and by the denial of inheritance rights.

The wife is a pivotal member of the family unit in Djibouti, with women playing a major role in raising children and representing the family at societal events. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a significant negative impact on the wider family and community.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Group               | Male Pressure Points                        |
|---------------------|---|
| Economic            | -   |
| Political and Legal | -   |
| Security            | Violence – physical                         |
| Social and Cultural | Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal |
| Technological       | -   |

Although data is sparse, Christian men in Djibouti are at risk of physical attacks, verbal harassment and intimidation. Some can be forced out of their homes, leaving them displaced and economically vulnerable. Others pay an even greater price and have reportedly been killed on faith-related grounds in the past (although there are no recent incidents of killing). Christian leaders in Djibouti– the majority of whom are men – are at greater risk of persecution. A country expert remarks: “In Djibouti, pastors and church leaders are the principal targets of persecution. Officials and the general public keep track of whether or not they meet converts and preach the gospel in the neighborhood.” Being known in the country as a Christian leader also exposes family members to serious threats.

As men are typically the breadwinners in Djibouti, their absence throws the family into emotional and financial turmoil. It also compromises the family’s physical security, particularly in remote parts of the country, as a husband/father’s absence could lead to looting of the family property and attacks on his wife and daughters.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minority groups in the country are Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hindus, Jews and Bahai. Country researchers did not find any concrete evidence to suggest that they also face pressure or violence. However, considering the fact that it is illegal for any faith to proselytize in public, those belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses probably face severe challenges in the country.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression blended with Clan oppression

Islam is the state religion and clan-based life is part and parcel of Djiboutian society. The general attitude of government and society towards Christians and other non-Muslim minorities is negative and is likely to continue to be so. Expecting this to change in the near future is not realistic, especially since Djibouti is located at a crucial location for jihadist transit.

### Dictatorial paranoia

Theoretically, the Djiboutian government upholds the constitutional protection of religious freedom. However, in practice, the government attempts to control all religious institutions. The government's negative attitude towards Christians might increase in the future due to an intensification of foreign investments from neighboring Gulf countries in a series of economic sectors (including Islamic banking). This engine will remain potent for the foreseeable future.

### Regional dynamics

The Horn of Africa is becoming extremely volatile. Ethiopia, one of the anchor states in the region, has been at war in the Tigray region in recent months. Somalia is not progressing towards democracy as hoped. Egypt and Ethiopia have locked horns over the Nile Dam. Ethiopia and Sudan have border issues. Eritrea is becoming emboldened by what is happening in Ethiopia. Such pressure from the region could cause Djibouti to enter a crisis, which would mean danger to Christians in the country and beyond. On the other hand, the fact that Djibouti is so crucial for international trade (particularly its shipping lines), Western countries might do all it takes to keep the country stable. That would mean propping up the dictatorial regime in the country. At one point in 2022, rebels in Ethiopia were trying to cut the route that connects Addis Ababa to Djibouti and also tried to control the capital city. The conflict in Ethiopia will have serious ramifications in terms of further destabilizing the region if the [November 2022](#) peace agreement between Ethiopia and the rebel forces fails to hold (Reliefweb, 3 November 2022). That would seriously affect Djibouti in many ways. Meanwhile, the [bilateral meeting](#) on regional issues of mutual concern held by the Djiboutian president with the Ethiopian Prime Minister in March 2022 was intended to create a more stable economic and security environment in the region (Africanews, 28 March 2022).

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Future outlook: November 2022 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/cessation-hostilities-agreement-between-government-federal-democratic-republic-ethiopia-and-tigray-peoples-liberation-front-tplf>
- Future outlook: bilateral meeting - <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/28/djiboutian-president-meets-ethiopian-prime-minister-in-addis-ababa/>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Djibouti>