

World
Watch
Research

Bahrain: Full Country Dossier

March 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2023	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Bahrain	5
Brief country details	5
Map of country.....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	6
Specific examples of positive developments	7
External Links - Situation in brief	7
WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Bahrain.....	7
Links for general background information.....	7
Recent history	7
Political and legal landscape	9
Religious landscape	10
Economic landscape.....	11
Social and cultural landscape.....	13
Technological landscape	15
Security situation	16
Trends analysis.....	16
External Links - Keys to understanding	16
WWL 2023: Church information / Bahrain	17
Christian origins.....	17
Church spectrum today.....	19
Areas where Christians face most difficulties	20
Christian communities and how they are affected	20
External Links - Church information.....	20
WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Bahrain	21
Reporting period	21
Position on the World Watch List	21
Persecution engines	21

Drivers of persecution.....	22
The Persecution pattern.....	24
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	24
Violence.....	30
5 Year trends	32
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	34
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	35
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	35
Future outlook.....	36
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	36
Further useful reports.....	37

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 / Bahrain

Brief country details

Bahrain: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
1,784,000	208,000	11.7

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

Map of country



Bahrain: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	55	66
WWL 2022	57	60
WWL 2021	56	60
WWL 2020	55	59
WWL 2019	55	55

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Bahrain: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	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

A considerable number of expatriate Christians (mainly from South Asia) work and live in Bahrain and can practice their faith in private places of worship as long as they do not publicly proselytize Muslims or insult Islam. There is also a small number of indigenous Bahraini Christians. Local Shia converts face severe pressure from family and community to recant their Christian faith, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. Converts from the dominant local Sunni community face significantly less hindrance. Especially Shia converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity experience similar pressure as in their home countries, as they are often living within their own national or ethnic communities.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Converts from Islam to Christianity, especially from Shia background, faced pressure from their families, local Islamic clerics and sometimes government officials. Several were physically and mentally abused.
- Migrant workers (including Christians) are vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse. However, migrants face a lack of access to legal protection and are often not aware of methods to report abuse. As a result, many incidents where Christian migrant workers are targeted most probably go unreported. In addition, victims feel vulnerable to possible retribution.

Specific examples of positive developments

- **December 2021:** A new Roman Catholic cathedral was inaugurated in Awali, 20 kilometers south of the capital Manama. The 'Our Lady of Arabia' Cathedral is the largest in the Gulf and can seat 2,300 people. It will serve the 80,000 Catholics in the country ([The National, 10 December 2021](#)).

Outside the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **September 2020:** The government agreed to normalize relations with Israel in a deal (The Abraham Accords) brokered by the USA (despite protests by some Bahrainis). This move is generally viewed as being a step towards more openness and tolerance and away from Islamist influence.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of positive developments: The National, 10 December 2021 - <https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/bahrain/2021/12/10/gulfs-largest-roman-catholic-cathedral-opens-in-bahrain/>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Bahrain

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 83-85)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	29 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14540571	29 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/BHR	29 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/bahrain/	29 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/bahrain	29 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (pp. 52/54)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	29 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	1 September 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Bahrain not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/bahrain/freedom-world/2022	29 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/bahrain/freedom-net/2022	7 March 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/bahrain	29 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#bh	29 June 2022
Middle East Concern – covering 24 countries	MEC country profile	https://www.meconcern.org/countries/bahrain/	1 September 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/bahrain	29 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/bhr	29 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/BHR	29 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/bahrain/	29 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Bahrain not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	29 June 2022
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank GCC overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/overview	29 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=BHR	29 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 4-5)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mena.pdf	29 June 2022

Recent history

Bahrain, a country where both Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia exert significant influence, is ruled by an authoritarian regime. The current political landscape in the Middle East has been shaped by the Arab Spring which swept the region in 2010/2011. No other Gulf state was so severely hit by the uprisings as Bahrain. The 65% majority Shiite population has been discriminated against for a long time in the tiny island kingdom, led by the royal Sunni family of

Khalifa. Shiites have less access to jobs and housing, less political rights and suffer from economic inequality and poverty. Inspired by the political unrest in the Middle East, these social frustrations grew into large demonstrations in February 2011. The government feared that Iran would use the demonstrations to extend its influence. The government dispersed all demonstrations violently, killing and wounding many. Other Gulf countries (all home to significant Shiite minorities) supported the Bahraini rulers by way of military intervention led by Saudi Arabia. Iran's action was limited to threatening rhetoric. More protests followed and continued even into 2013. The Bahraini government admitted using excessive violence and promised investigations into the abuse of prisoners, along with reforms and dialogue.

In February 2013, the National Dialogue between ruling and opposition groups was resumed after one-and-a-half years of deadlock, without any substantial result. However, when in 2013 moderate Crown Prince Salman was appointed deputy prime-minister (he became Prime Minister in November 2020), this was considered a positive development. Despite this, progress failed to materialize. In contrast, due to heavy oppression by the government, "moderate voices among the Shi'a opposition have become weaker, while more radical forces, including ultra-conservative Sunnis, are on the rise" (BTI 2022 Bahrain, p.7). Further unrest, including minor bomb attacks, took place during 2017 and 2018, but did not form a major threat to the reign of the royal family. A July 2021 report found that the human rights situation further deteriorated over the last decade, with a marked rise in judicial executions and torture being 'endemic', confirming the oppressive nature of Bahrain's regime ([BIRD, 13 July 2021](#)). Hence, promises by the King for fundamental human rights reforms seem to have been hollow ([DAWN, 15 February 2022](#)).

Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt in the [Qatari blockade](#) (2017-2021), cutting all ties and closing all borders with Qatar. The Bahraini government probably did not have a choice, as Saudi Arabia is its main protector (BBC News, 19 July 2017). The boycott did not have major consequences for Bahrain.

In a surprising move, Bahrain joined the United Arab Emirates in signing the Abraham Accords with Israel (and the USA) in September 2020. Bahrain normalized its ties with Israel and business deals followed ([BBC News, 19 February 2021](#)). Some protests as well as online condemnation of the deal occurred, apparently mostly among the Shia community ([Times of Israel, 18 September 2020](#)). When violence flared up between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, contact continued out of the public eye to avoid domestic unrest ([BBC News, 14 May 2021](#)). A recent survey found that the majority of Bahrainis oppose normalization with Israel, making it a potential issue for discontent between government and citizens, although it is unclear whether the ruling Sunni minority is as opposed to the Accords as the Shiite majority seems to be ([Washington Institute, 15 July 2022](#)).

The crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic affected Bahrain's economy significantly, particularly due to the lower oil prices. The contact-tracing app used by the government to monitor the spread of the virus was criticized for its infringement on citizens' privacy. As in many other countries of the world, there are fears that the government will use all collected data to increase its surveillance of the population ([BBC News, 16 June 2020](#)).

Political and legal landscape

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy and became a kingdom only in 2002 when Sunni King Sheikh Hamad changed his title from emir to king. The king and his family have been in power since 1999 and hold the country's political and military posts under tight control. As a result, the Economist Intelligence Unit classifies the kingdom as 'authoritarian' in its 2021 Democracy Index (EIU 2021) and Freedom House rates the country as 'not free' in its Global Freedom Index 2022. The Sunni rulers continue to hold power over the majority Shia Muslim population. This has caused tension and clashes between protesters and the government. Human rights groups consider the country a hostile place for dissent, peaceful political protest and independent press.

According to BTI 2022 Bahrain:

- "Despite the easing of Bahrain's crackdown against the opposition, authorities continued to arrest, prosecute and sentence opposition figures and dissidents on dubious charges, and increasingly restricted freedom of expression. The execution of three men in 2019 and the widespread torture and abuse of suspects and prisoners during the review period illustrate that the regime persistently continued to pursue a hardline approach in dealing with dissent."

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2022 country chapter):

- "Since 2017, Bahraini authorities have banned all independent media in the country and dissolved all significant opposition groups. Authorities failed to hold officials accountable for torture and ill-treatment. Oversight mechanisms are not independent of the government. ... Three detainees died in Bahraini prisons in 2021 amid allegations of medical negligence. ... Bahrain continued to deny access to independent rights monitors and the United Nations special procedures, including the special rapporteur on torture. ... Thirteen prominent dissidents have been serving lengthy prison terms since their arrest in 2011 for their roles in pro-democracy demonstrations. They include Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, a founder of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, as well as Hassan Mushaima and Abduljalil al-Singace, leaders of the opposition group Al Haq; all are serving life terms."

Fragile State Index indicators are stabilizing at quite a high level overall, but especially the indicator 'Group Grievances' scores exceptionally high due to Shia-Sunni tension and mean that the situation could easily lead to unrest (FSI 2022). The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2021) predicts: "The political scene will remain unstable, owing to periodic protests, predominantly by the Shia minority against the ruling Al Khalifa royal family."

An example of ongoing government pressure on Bahraini society can be found in King Hamad's ratification of an amendment to the Constitution at the beginning of April 2017. It empowered military courts to bring civilians to trial if they were involved "in acts of terrorism or violent crimes". According to the government, this step was needed to fight terrorism, but the wording of the amendment is so vague, that it can be easily used against any perceived opposition (which could include Christians).

Gender perspective

The Bahraini legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. Whilst it acceded to the CEDAW Convention in 2002, it maintained a reservation to Article 16, which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage ([UNDP, 2018, “Bahrain: Gender Justice and the Law”](#)). Under Article 26 of the Personal Status Code, women require the consent of a guardian before entering into marriage, and under Article 353 of the penal code perpetrators of rape are exempted from prosecution if they marry their victims (Bahrain’s parliament proposed a full repeal of that article in 2016, but this was rejected by the cabinet). Bahrain’s family laws further discriminate against women in relation to divorce, inheritance and custody rights (HRW 2021 country chapter; [OECD, 2019](#)). Article 334 of the penal code is a particular cause for concern since it reduces the penalties for perpetrators of so-called ‘honor crimes’. Representing more positive developments, in 2015 Bahrain introduced domestic violence legislation (Law on the Protection Against Domestic Violence), and in 2018 Bahrain [amended its labor law](#) to ban discrimination and harassment in the workplace on the basis of sex ([Gulf Business, 10 December 2018](#)).

Religious landscape

Bahrain: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	208,000	11.7
Muslim	1,451,000	81.3
Hindu	107,000	6.0
Buddhist	3,800	0.2
Ethno-religionist	450	0.0
Jewish	57	0.0
Bahai	4,500	0.3
Atheist	540	0.0
Agnostic	7,500	0.4
Other	410	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)

Bahrain has a population of close to 1.8 million, of which only half are national citizens (most of whom are Shiites). The rest of the population consists of migrant workers, of which a considerable number (about 25%) are Christian. The majority of migrant workers come from South Asia and the Philippines.

The Constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination (also on the basis of religion), and guarantees the ‘inviolability of worship’, including freedom to perform religious rites provided these are in accordance with national customs. Public defamation of an officially recognized religious group or of their practices is a criminal offence. Churches must be registered with the Ministry of Social Development and, in practice, there is relative freedom for both indigenous and expatriate Christians to practice their faith as long as they refrain from activities involving evangelism. The indigenous Christian community is well respected and some of them have held government positions.

Churches are typically overcrowded and new plots of land have been allocated for building new churches: In October 2016 the king [donated land](#) for the construction of a second Coptic church (Agenzia Fides, 13 October 2016). In July 2018, the building of a new Roman Catholic church complex outside the capital Manama was [announced](#); the church, the largest Catholic cathedral in the Gulf region, was inaugurated on 9 December 2021 ([Bahrain Cathedral, 9 December 2021](#)). However, for the most part, receiving permission to build new or to expand existing churches remains difficult to obtain (MEC country profile). As a result, recognized churches often function as umbrella organizations for many different denominations, with various church congregations using the same building. They are not allowed to advertise their services in Arabic, but they can in English.

In September 2017, King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa released a declaration which highlighted religious pluralism and unequivocally rejected compelled religion, while emphasizing the freedom of choice in religious matters. Also in 2017, the King Hamad [Center for Global Peaceful Coexistence](#) was set up to promote interfaith dialogue and religious diversity. The center regularly organizes interfaith activities and roundtable meetings on religious freedom (News of Bahrain, 15 September 2017).

According to the [2020 Freedom of Thought Report](#) (Humanists International, 7 August 2020):

- Bahrain committed grave violations of human rights and religious freedom. The Constitution does not fully guarantee the Freedom of Religion and Belief, but "it does make some provision for the freedom of conscience, the inviolability of places of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings, in accordance with the customs observed in the country. However, the Constitution also states that Islam is the official religion and that the principles of Islamic law are a main source for legislation."

Economic landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and the World Bank country profile:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$40,900 (2020 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 1.9% (2021 est.), with youth unemployment at 9.9% (2021).
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** No data available, but probably low among Bahraini citizens.

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

- **General situation:** "The economy is gradually picking up as pandemic pressures fade, non-oil economy recovers, and hydrocarbon production increases. The fiscal deficit remains high as emergency crisis-spending persists but is expected to narrow gradually."
- **Economic growth:** "Bahrain's economy is gradually emerging from a pandemic-caused recession. Latest official data indicate that the economy grew by 1.5% in the first nine months of 2021, after nearly a 5% contraction in 2020. The rebound was mainly underpinned by 2.3% growth in non-hydrocarbon, aided by strong expansion in the transportation and communication sector—one of the hardest-hit by the pandemic—as well as increased agricultural and fishing activity. ... Inflation remains in negative territory, averaging -0.6% due to weaker demand, as well as lower prices for rents caused in part by the departure of expatriates caused by the pandemic."
- **Outlook:** "Bahrain's economic outlook hangs on oil market prospects, pandemic conditions, and reform implementation. Growth is projected to accelerate to 3.5% in 2022, boosted by the surge in energy prices caused by the economic consequences the war in Ukraine and associated sanctions. Recovery of the non-oil economy is likely to continue thanks to successful vaccination rollout and further relaxation of restrictions on movement. ... Inflation is expected to increase to 2.5% in 2022, fueled by the doubling of VAT to 10% and continued recovery in domestic demand."

Other sources report:

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region report](#) (accessed 12 August 2022) puts the Bahraini economy in the high income category .
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2022) shows stability in the economic indicators on average following initial decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 'Economy' indicator shows improvement, but 'Social Inequality' increased strongly, probably showing that government support during the pandemic only reached part of society. 'Human Flight and Brain Drain' remained low.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2021) writes: "Higher oil prices and strong investment in infrastructure and 5G services will boost GDP growth in 2022. Growth will moderate in 2023, owing to moderately lower oil prices, before rising again in 2024-26 as production in the new Khaleej Al Bahrain oilfield commences."

Bahrain was the first Gulf country to produce oil and is now faced with dwindling oil reserves. This has prompted the government to start a program of economic diversification. Bahrain has become a banking and financial services center and its economy is less dependent on oil than that of most other Gulf States. Bahrain is now placing a particular focus on Information technology, health care and education.

According to BTI 2022 (Bahrain, p.22):

- "The COVID-19 crisis and its economic repercussions unequivocally illustrated Bahrain's exceptionally high and structural vulnerability to external shocks. The temporary but sharp decline in oil prices in early 2020 seriously affected Bahrain's fiscal stability. However, due to the country's geopolitical importance for its GCC allies and Western partners, the govern-

ment quickly attracted external support that mitigated fiscal repercussions of the pandemic, in particular related to the substantial drop in foreign reserves. ... Prior to the pandemic, Bahrain's deficit had been rising consistently. The deficit reached an all-time high of \$2.4 billion in 2018, following a shortfall of \$1.6 billion in 2017, but shrunk back to \$794 million in 2019 with the help of financial aid provided by Bahrain's GCC allies. A budgetary deficit of \$2.77 billion was forecast for 2020, mainly caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Meanwhile, overall public debt increased to 103.4% of GDP in 2019, up from 95% in 2018, 44.4% in 2015 and only 29.7% in 2010. This figure is expected to surge significantly again in 2020 and 2021."

The country is still dependent on financial assistance from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) partners and received a 10 billion USD bailout by GCC members in 2018. New-found oil and gas fields offer hope for the future. However, no investor has been found to develop the unconventional, offshore oilfield since the announcement of its discovery in 2018. The developing costs might be too high, despite the current high oil prices ([S&P Global, 16 May 2022](#)).

Thousands of expatriate Christians have found employment in Bahrain. Christians are generally treated respectfully. However, labor abuses persist and (temporarily) worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic (HRW 2022). Combined with racism, this especially affects Christians from Asian and African countries working in low-paid jobs.

Gender perspective

Women and girls remain economically disadvantaged compared to men, primarily due to patrilineal inheritance laws and reduced employment opportunities ([OECD, 2019](#)). On a positive note, girls have good access to education, reflected by a female literacy rate of 94.95% ([Country Economy, 2019](#)), and the female labor force participation rate is steadily rising (World Bank data, Labor Force Participation 1990-2019).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Bahraini citizens are from Arab decent. A wide variety of ethnicities can be found among the wider (expatriate) population, including Asians (45.5%), non-Bahraini Arabs (4.7%) and many others.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with English being widely spoken as well. Other languages include Farsi (among the Shiites) and Urdu.
- **Urban population:** In 2022, 89.7% of the population lived in urban areas, with the urbanization rate standing at 1,99%.
- **Literacy rate:** 97.5% of the population can read and write; with more men (99,9%) than women (94,9%) being able to read and write.
- **Education:** On average, Bahrainis are expected to have 16 years of schooling, with women enjoying 17 years and men 16 years of schooling on average (2019).

- **Population/age:** The total population is around 1.54 million, with immigrants making up 45% of the total population (2019 est.). The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up 33% of the population.
- **Life expectancy:** 79.7 years on average; women (82.2 years), men (77.6 years).

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Bahrain ranks #42 out 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score of 0.852 on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Gender inequality:** With a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 0.92, women are slightly disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Bahrain is a conservative Muslim country, despite the pluriform population and a modern economy. Ethnic strife and conflict between the majority Shiites and the ruling Sunnis continue to simmer under the surface and there is considerable social injustice towards the rights and freedoms of migrants living in the country. Although not primarily faith-related, it is very likely that many Christian expatriates experience (sexual) abuse, especially female domestic workers. The treatment of Christians in Bahrain is not so much based on their faith, as on their skin color and ethnic background. Western (white) Christian expatriates are far less likely to experience harassment than African or Asian Christian expatriates. The latter can also face discrimination and mistreatment from their fellow (Muslim) expatriates. In addition, high-skilled workers will face less difficulties than low-skilled ones. Hence, a low-skilled Christian migrant from an African or Asian background will be most vulnerable in Bahrain.

In general, conversion from Islam to Christianity will be seen as betrayal by the Bahrainis and can lead to high levels of family and societal pressure, especially among the Shia community. The pressure on expatriate converts from a Muslim background will be comparable to the norms in their home countries, as many expatriates live together in migrant camps or in the same areas (which explains why expatriate children often go to schools belonging to their own community group).

Gender perspective

Women continue to be seen in traditional roles, although women have increasingly been allowed to participate in public life. For instance, [a Bahraini Christian](#), Alice Samaan, was appointed ambassador to the UK for the period 2010-2015 (Gulf News, 30 December 2010). Noted as a regressive step by [Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index \(2019/20, p.39\)](#) however, a directive was introduced stating that women could only leave the house with their husband's permission. An ongoing threat for women is the risk of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Despite the introduction of the Law on the Protection Against Domestic Violence in 2015, victims of violence rarely report crimes for fear of social reprisals ([OECD, 2019](#)). Unlike other countries in the region, however, domestic violence is not believed to have risen during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the authorities did not impose a complete lockdown ([Wilson Centre, 10 June 2020](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 97.4% penetration - survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 88.5% penetration - survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phones:** 102.8 per 100 subscribers

Bahrain is one of a handful of countries where nearly all women report having a mobile cellphone ([Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p.27](#)).

Technologically, Bahrain is advanced with high levels of Internet access and modern ICT infrastructure. However media, including the Internet, is monitored. BTI 2022 reports: (p.11):

- "The government systematically uses vaguely worded legislation to restrict and crack down on the freedom of speech and freedom of the press, monitors online content, and prosecutes people for criticizing authorities. The Press Law allows the state to prosecute anyone who criticizes or insults the king or threatens national security. ... [S]ince 2019, authorities have increasingly widened online surveillance and the prosecution of free speech in social media."

Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report rates Bahrain as 'not free'. It states that social media platforms, as well as many websites containing political, social, or religious content are being blocked. In addition, it states that Internet users have been arrested and imprisoned because of social or political content.

According to Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom 2022):

- Bahrain is ranked at position #167
- "Ruled with an iron fist by the royal family, Bahrain is notorious for imprisoning many journalists. ... Freedom of expression does not exist in Bahrain. The situation worsened during the 2011 pro-democracy protests. The government reduced the space available for independent journalism, and the media became a mouthpiece for the royal family and its supporters. ... Several Bahraini journalists who have criticized the government on the internet from abroad have been accused of "cybercrimes". ... After being charged with participating in protests or supporting terrorism, professional and citizen journalists have been sentenced to long terms – sometimes for life – in prison, where they are mistreated. Some have had their citizenship revoked. Since 2016, Bahraini journalists working for international media outlets have encountered difficulties in renewing their accreditation."

Like all residents of Bahrain, Christians also have to be careful in their online communication. They can, in general, share expressions of faith as long as it is not critical of or contradicting Islamic beliefs.

Security situation

Bahrain – which literally means ‘two seas’ – hosts the most important American military presence in the Middle East. The US Navy’s Fifth Fleet is located on a sectarian fault line where Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia vie for dominance. Since 2016, the British Royal Navy also opened a base in Bahrain. The archipelago of 33 islands is also mentioned by observers as being a potential military target for Iran in the event of conflict.

Christians in Bahrain are generally safe. Crime rates are low and it is unlikely that Christians will be specifically targeted. If violence takes place, it is often on the sectarian fault line between Shiites and Sunnis.

Unlike neighboring Gulf countries, Bahrain has no major military involvement in any (international) conflict.

Trends analysis

1) Both Iran and Saudi Arabia seek to influence politics in the country

Bahrain is very prone to changes in regional politics and both Iran and Saudi Arabia seek to influence the politics of the country. Hosting a large US Navy presence forms a strong protection on the one hand, but it also puts Bahrain at risk if tensions between the USA and Saudi Arabia and Iran were to boil over.

2) The Shia majority is seen as a potential threat to the government

The key ongoing internal issue is the oppression of political opposition and other groups considered dissident. The oppressed Shia majority is seen as an internal threat which could be influenced by Iran, making Bahrain potentially vulnerable to intensified internal instability or to unpredictable regional currents. For now, the royal family from the minority Sunni group seems to have consolidated its power with the help of Saudi Arabia. However, a vicious circle has developed in which strong oppression leads to increasing radicalization and vice versa. Hence, the Sunni-Shia tensions could be a ticking time-bomb, endangering the stability of Bahrain, which would likely have an adverse effect on the Christian presence, if unrest were to break out. At the moment, however, the government is more interested in dealing with Shia dissidents than in restricting Christian church activities.

External Links - Keys to understanding

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- Political and legal landscape: amended its labor law - <https://gulfbusiness.com/bahrain-bans-discrimination-sexual-harassment-work/>
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- Religious landscape description: announced - <http://asianews.it/news-en/Bahrain%E2%80%99s-Our-Lady-Cathedral-to-become-the-heart-of-the-Catholic-community-in-Arabia-44433.html>
- Religious landscape description: Bahrain Cathedral, 9 December 2021 - <http://bahraincathedral.org/?p=2526>
- Religious landscape description: Center for Global Peaceful Coexistence - <https://www.newsofbahrain.com/epaper/15-09-2017/single/page-01.pdf>
- Religious landscape description: 2020 Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/bahrain/>
- Economic landscape: GCC Economic Update - April 2022 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/publication/economic-update-april-2022>
- Economic landscape: World by Income and Region report - <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/the-world-by-income-and-region.html>
- Economic landscape: S&P Global, 16 May 2022 - <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/051622-bahrain-still-evaluating-giant-shale-oil-discovery-despite-high-oil-prices-minister>
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- Economic landscape: Country Economy, 2019 - <https://borgenproject.org/education-in-bahrain/>
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WWL 2023: Church information / Bahrain

Christian origins

According to ancient [church traditions](#), it was the Apostle Bartholomew who brought Christianity to Arabia (WRMEA, March 2000). Many believe that the reference to ‘Arabs’ in the New Testament (Book of Acts 2:11) may point to substantial growth in eastern regions within the early stages of the church.

By the mid-3rd century, a Christian bishopric was established in the Bahrain Islands; during the 4th century the number of Christians began to increase significantly. This may have been due to the persecution of Christians in Persia that began with the reign of Shahpur in 339 AD. Bahrain

was an attractive safe haven, as it played an important role in the region's pearl trade. Those who brought Christianity to Bahrain were Nestorians, the branch of Christianity that flourished in southern Iraq and Persia.

Foundations of a monastery from the 4th century have been found in the coastal village of Samaheej. Another monastery may have existed in a village called al-Dair, as that is the Aramaic word for 'monastery'. Nestorian records show a consistent Christian presence in the region between the 5th and 7th centuries, as evidenced by the regular attendance of Bahraini bishops at synods. For example, the records from the Council of Nicea (325 AD) include mention of Arab bishops who were present. When the Arab armies conquered Bahrain in 633 AD (paving the way for the introduction of Islam), Bahrain had two bishops. This suggests that many on the islands had adopted the Christian faith. The two bishoprics survived until 835 AD.

By the end of the 19th century, Great Britain made Bahrain into a protectorate. This made it possible for Christianity to return to Bahrain, initially through the mission work of the Arabian Mission of Samuel Zwemer. His founding of the American Mission Hospital in 1903 is still appreciated by both government and society today.

Oil was discovered in the 1930s and the resulting economic growth, especially after the oil boom of 1973, resulted in a great influx of foreign workers from around 1950 onwards. Thousands of expatriate Christians came to Bahrain and a flourishing and very diverse Christian community came into existence.

Theologian Dr Hrayr Jebejian writes:

- "St. Christopher's Anglican Cathedral, founded in 1953, for example, hosts more than 40 different language and ethnic groups. Other examples are the National Evangelical Church, which in 1906 became the first church to hold public services in Bahrain, and the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, built in 1940, which is considered to be the principal worship center in Manama. It is the biggest church in the country and serves around 140,000 people, mainly Indians, Filipinos, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans."

(Source: Jebejian, H: The Gulf - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, in: Edinburgh Companion to Global Christianity, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 177-189).

At present, an estimated 11.7% of the total population of Bahrain is Christian (WCD 2022); almost all of those are expatriate workers. But Christianity in Bahrain has historical roots since Bahrain (unlike other Gulf countries - with the exception of Kuwait) also has an indigenous Christian community of around 500-1000 people. This makes Bahrain the only GCC country besides Kuwait to have a local Christian population who hold citizenship, according to [Al-Arabiya](#). (Al-Arabiya News, updated 20 May 2020).

Concluding with the words of Hrayr Jebejian: "From the fourth century onwards, Christianity flourished in the Gulf, and even when it did not flourish but only survived, it remained a spiritual and cultural force in the Gulf, right up to the present day." *(Source: Jebejian, see above)*

Church spectrum today

Bahrain: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	7,200	3.5
Catholic	172,000	82.7
Protestant	13,500	6.5
Independent	15,600	7.5
Unaffiliated	0	0.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	208,300	100.1
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	4,200	2.0
Renewalist movement	48,000	23.1

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.

There is a small number of indigenous Bahraini Christians, who are the descendants of Arab Christians who migrated to Bahrain before it became an independent nation state. The presence of foreign Christians in modern-day Bahrain goes back to the Arabian Mission, which opened a bookshop in the country in 1893 and a hospital in 1903. The [American Mission Hospital](#) (AMH, accessed 6 March 2022) is still functioning today.

The National Evangelical Church consists of seven congregations ([ELCNEC Bahrain, accessed 6 March 2022](#)). A number of other churches serve the expatriate Christian communities, including Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Coptic Orthodox and Anglican churches (MEC country profile).

WCD estimates show that almost two hundred thousand Christians are resident in the country today. As a result of the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of expatriates lost employment and had to leave the country, including many Christians. However, despite plans to nationalize the workforce, it is likely that the expatriate Christian community will remain present for the foreseeable future.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Bahrain is a very small country with the capital city, Manama, being the centre of all activities. Bahraini converts face the highest risks as society is conservative and family ties are strong. However, the risks which converts from Islam to Christianity face, depend on what sort of community they are part of. Some villages are known to be strict, while others are known to be more moderate.

Converts from an expatriate background often face similar pressure as in their home countries, as they are often living in compounds together with fellow compatriots.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, three types exist in Bahrain:

Communities of expatriate Christians: The majority of expatriate Christians are workers from Southeast Asia (e.g. from the Philippines), Africa and Western countries. They belong mainly to Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox congregations. Western Christian expatriates are most often free to practice their beliefs, as long as they refrain from proselytizing. Non-Western Christians like the Filipinos are more likely to face discrimination and abuse, especially female domestic workers. It is a matter of debate how much their non-Muslim faith adds to their vulnerability to abuse.

Historical Christian communities: Bahrain has a small group of indigenous Bahraini Christians, descendants of Arab Christian clans from an area which covers Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Converts to Christianity: In Bahrain, Christians with a Muslim background are under considerably more pressure than the expatriate communities are. Traditionally, society is intolerant towards conversion and converts have to be careful not to talk about their new faith openly. Pressure comes mostly from family and community, and to a lesser extent from the state.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are no non-traditional Christian communities in Bahrain except those involving expatriates.

External Links - Church information

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- Christian origins: Al-Arabiya - <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2016/12/27/An-inside-look-at-a-Gulf-Christian-community.html>
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WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Bahrain

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Bahrain: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	55	66
WWL 2022	57	60
WWL 2021	56	60
WWL 2020	55	59
WWL 2019	55	55

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

The two-point drop in WWL 2023 was mainly caused by decreases in reported pressure in the *Community, National* and *Church spheres of life*. The kingdom has shown improvement in terms of acceptance and tolerance towards Christians. Other than that, the persecution situation in the country remains stable with average pressure on Christians remaining very high. Pressure is highest in the *Private* and *Family* spheres, indicating that converts from Islam to Christianity are still facing most difficulties.

Persecution engines

Bahrain: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Medium
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
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 (Medium)

Islamic oppression in Bahrain should be seen in line with what is happening in the whole region, where there are many sources of tension and conflict. This causes both government and society to be vigilant, suspicious of new influences and therefore conservative. The legal framework is also a manifestation of this conservative Islamic view. The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, the inviolability of places of worship, the freedom to perform religious rites, and the

freedom to hold religious parades and religious gatherings as long as they are “in accordance with the customs observed in the country”. Given the fact that the Constitution also declares that the state religion is Islam and that Sharia (Islamic law) is the principal source for legislation, it actually means that freedom of religion is limited. The situation is therefore similar to that of other Gulf countries: Christians are free to practice their belief as long as they do it privately.

Islamic oppression is most keenly felt by converts as their families will put pressure on them to recant their faith and return to Islam. This pressure is not only exerted because of religious reasons, but is clearly mixed with tribal values (see below).

Clan oppression (Medium)

Tribalism still plays a major role in Bahraini society. Despite the incorporation of modern technology and architecture, age-old norms and values continue to be enforced. This tribalism is clearly mixed with Islam and especially affects converts. As in the rest of the Middle East, religion is connected to family identity. Therefore, leaving Islam is interpreted as betraying one’s family. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The government endeavors to stay in power at all costs. A Sunni-family is ruling a Shiite majority with the help of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni majority countries in the region. Freedom of assembly, freedom of association, due process or law and other fundamental rights are constantly violated by the government.

Drivers of persecution

Bahrain:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	MEDIUM			MEDIUM				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Medium							Medium	
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak								
One’s own (extended) family	Strong			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. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Family hostility is often rooted in both *Islamic oppression* and *Clan oppression*, with conversion from Islam to Christianity being seen as both a betrayal of Islam and family. Family hostility and the fear of provoking violent reactions is the main form of pressure faced by Bahraini converts.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The government can easily expel expatriate Christians, which forces them into self-restraint since opposing the government or infringing “fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine” is forbidden, as [Article 23](#) of the Constitution states. Churches have to be careful therefore when it comes to proselytizing activities. In the case of converts from Islam to Christianity, the government also sometimes puts pressure on converts by detaining them for a short period to quell public unrest and to pressurize the convert into recanting their faith.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** In addition to protecting the honor of the family, tribal leaders will try to uphold Islam and Islamic norms, which are closely linked to the Bahraini family identity. They will put pressure on a convert to recant his or her new faith.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Although the Bahraini government regularly monitors preaching in mosques to check for any statements inciting violence, Muslim religious leaders keep society conservative and encourage family and society to take action against converts.
- **Citizens (Medium):** The conservative nature of Islamic society in Bahrain is causing most of the pressure experienced by Christians, especially converts. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable. Additionally - although mixed with racial bias - poor and low-skilled Christian workers from South East Asia and Africa can face discrimination and abuse from their employers and other citizens. Especially foreign workers who convert from Islam to Christianity face persecution from their employers and peer workers.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **One's own (extended) family (Medium):** Bahraini families will try to protect the honor of the family. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for shaming their families.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Tribal leaders, often the eldest sons of their families, have a duty to protect the (extended) family and look after the well being, as well as the family honor of the whole group. They see it as their duty to put pressure on a convert to recant Christianity or to pressurize the family into taking action against an apostate family member. In the case of converts from expatriate communities, community leaders might apply pressure in line with the cultural norms of the home country.

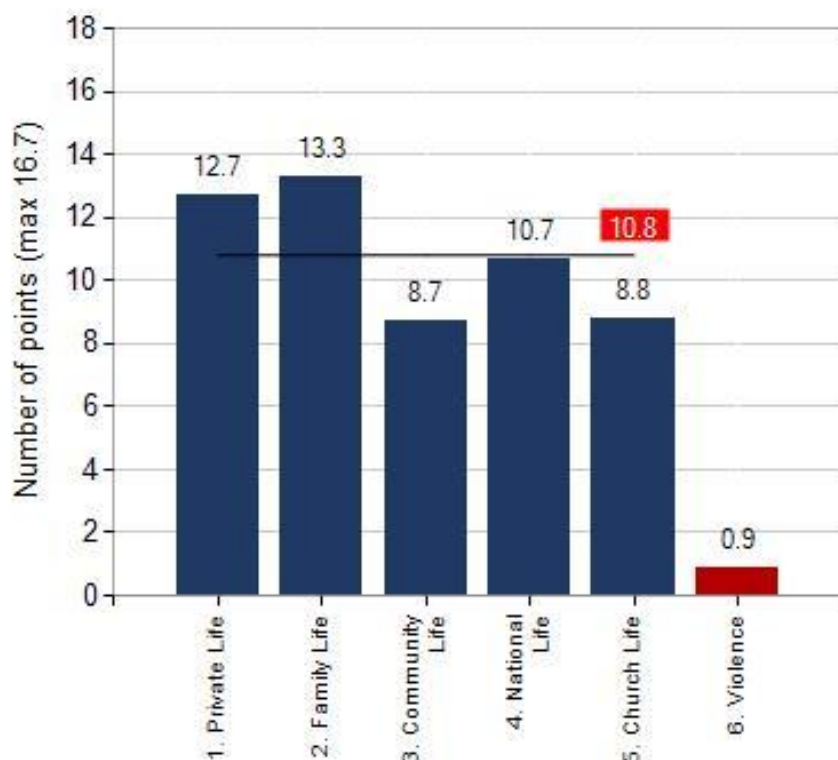
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Bahraini government is oppressive, especially against the Shia majority. As [Human Rights Watch](#) put it (in its Bahrain report summary, accessed January 2022): “Authorities arrested, prosecuted, and harassed human rights defenders, journalists, opposition leaders, and defense lawyers, including for their social media activi-

ty. All independent Bahraini media have been banned since 2017 from operating in the country and all opposition groups dissolved”. It goes without saying that Christians have to be careful in such an environment, especially if making statements which could be understood as criticism of the ruling elite.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Bahrain



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Bahrain shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (10.8 points), decreasing from 11.2 points in WWL 2022.
- Although all *spheres of life* show high and very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in the *Family* and *Private* spheres. This reflects the difficult situation experienced by converts in daily life as they face very high pressure from their (extended) family.
- The score for violence remained 0.9 points in WWL 2023. It is probable that there were a number of unreported incidents occurring.

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://open Doors analytical.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)

Expatriate Christians have to be careful that any discussions about their faith with (Bahraini) Muslims are not viewed as an attempt to proselytize, which is socially unacceptable. Converts face the biggest risk, as they are often pressured into keeping a low profile. Hence, discussing their faith with others can easily lead to extra pressure, including arrest and detention (probably on charges related to public order or security).

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.25 points)

Expatriate Christians can share their beliefs on social media, as long as their comments are not contrary to Islamic principles. Criticizing Islam is not possible and could lead to deportation. Converts from Islam to Christianity, especially from a Shia background, have to be very careful, as it could reveal their new faith or lead to an increase in repercussions.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)

The Constitution imposes no restriction on the right to choose, change or practice one's religion. In comparison to other Gulf countries, Bahrain is relatively tolerant and less cruel when it comes to conversion cases. Nonetheless, conversion from Islam to Christianity is not well received by the community at large and this attitude is rooted in the apostasy provisions of Islamic law and as such represents a permanent source of pressure, especially within the Shia community. Although there are reports of growing numbers of Bahraini converts from Islam, numbers remain very small. This is therefore a significant source of pressure for a small number of Christians.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.00 points)

Privately possessing a Bible or other Christian materials mainly represents a risk for converts from Islam to Christianity. If caught in possession of a Bible by a disapproving member of the family or community, this could lead to negative repercussions. Many converts find ways to cope with such risks, especially since new technological developments such as Bible apps are available.

Block 1 - Additional information

Members of non-Muslim religious groups that practice their faith privately do so without government interference. However, particularly Christians with a Shia Muslim background face serious difficulties. For those of them who live with their families or parents, worshipping and displaying Christian symbols (such as crosses) is likely to attract serious persecution.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)

Within Bahrain's small indigenous Christian community children are registered as Christian. In accordance with the principles of Islamic law, the children of Bahraini converts from Islam to Christianity would automatically be registered as Muslim.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.50 points)

The religion of the child is registered on the birth certificate application, although not displayed on the birth certificate itself or any identity documents. Converts from Islam to Christianity cannot register their child as Christian. A female Bahraini convert from a Muslim background is only permitted by law to marry a man also born a Muslim. While a man born Muslim would in principle have freedom to marry a non-Muslim - in both cases, Islamic marriage rites would be applied. Similarly, Islamic burial rites would be applied for anyone who was born Muslim, including converts to Christianity. For the small indigenous Christian Bahraini community, and for expatriate Christians, civil wedding ceremonies or church weddings (within some traditions) are possible, provided requirements set out by the Bahraini authorities and the relevant foreign government are met.

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.50 points)

For indigenous and expatriate Christians there are two cemeteries, but both have very little remaining capacity. An application by churches for new land for burials is still pending. The original generation of Bahrain Christians is now growing old so the issue is seen as increasingly urgent. For Christians from a Muslim background, Islamic burial rites apply.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

For indigenous and expatriate Christian children, Islamic classes in school are optional; schools may apply to the Ministry of Education for permission to provide non-Islamic instruction for non-Muslim students. However, Islamic instruction is compulsory for all children considered to be Muslim, including therefore for the children of Christians from a Muslim background. In addition, state school curricula include Islamic studies and there are no similar Christian classes for Christian students.

Block 2 - Additional information

In Bahrain, where Sharia law governs personal and property matters, Christians face many challenges. As mentioned above, Muslim women cannot marry a non-Muslim man. Any such marriage will not be recognized. The same holds true for converts. Therefore, any child custody or inheritance issues arising from such marriages will not even be considered and have serious implications for those involved, especially women. It is most likely that pressure will be exerted

on spouses of converts to divorce their husband or wife. Raising children according to Christian values is particularly challenging for converts as they are surrounded by an Islamic environment. There are no explicit laws restricting Christian parents from raising their children according to their Christian faith, but it can be difficult for Christian parents to raise their children in an Islamic environment.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.25 points)

Known converts from Islam to Christianity are monitored by their local communities. This forces them not only to act carefully among their immediate family members, but also in public. Converts have to take precautions when meeting with other Christians.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

It is most likely that converts from Islam to Christianity will lose their job when their new faith becomes known. Nepotism is widespread in Bahraini society and getting a job often depends on relationships and social standing. The latter is lost when one turns from Islam to Christianity, making it difficult to keep or find employment.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (2.75 points)

Converts from Islam to Christianity will feel obliged to participate in Islamic practices and traditions (for example, observing fasting during Ramadan) in order not to draw negative attention to themselves and to avoid the discovery of their new faith.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (2.75 points)

Known converts from Islam to Christianity, especially from a Shia background, are likely to be put under pressure by the wider community to return to Islam, for example through social isolation.

Block 3 - Additional information

Although converts from Islam to Christianity experience higher levels of social hostility, expatriate Christians and indigenous Bahraini Christians belonging to the Historical Christian Community can usually live their lives without experiencing social hostility because of their beliefs. This is also due to the government's active promotion of tolerance. Nonetheless, Bahraini converts to Christianity often keep a low profile to avoid any negative repercussions, including, but not limited to, disadvantages in education, not being allowed to participate in communal activities and other ways of social exclusion. If Bahraini converts are open about their new faith, it is not unlikely that they will end up being interrogated by the police.

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. (3.75 points)

The Constitution of Bahrain enshrines Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as a principal source of legislation. However, the Constitution also affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. Although indigenous and expatriate Christians enjoy a certain amount of freedom, Bahraini nationals or other Muslims who are considered apostates could face imprisonment under the Penal Code's defamation provisions, and under sanctions such as forcible divorce and removal of child custody under personal status laws overseen by Sharia courts. Hence, despite guaranteeing some elements of Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Constitution and other state laws are not aligned with the Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)

Most Christians exercise precautionary 'self-censorship' to avoid any form of provocation, particularly in relation to criticism of Islam or proselytizing.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.25 points)

Religious affiliation is not displayed on identity documents, nor on birth certificates, but the government does record a person's religion. Converts do not dare to request changes to this registration out of fear of reprisals (mostly from their family members).

Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.00 points)

All Christians exercise caution and a degree of self-censorship. Criticism of Islam can lead to prosecution, for example under Article 309 of the Penal Code which states that "any person who commits an offence by any method of expression against one of the recognized religions" faces a sentence of up to one year's imprisonment. In practice, expatriates who are found guilty will most likely be deported after completing their sentence. Converts from Islam to Christianity have to be even more careful, as accusations of blasphemy lead not only to prosecution but also to hostility from family and community members.

Block 4 - Additional information

National policies and laws often address issues aimed to help the Muslim population and ignore Christians and other minorities. The fact that the country is divided between Shia and Sunni groups puts Christians in an awkward position: They are often perceived as siding with the opposing group.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.25 points)

Churches are being monitored, sometimes even in visible ways. Such monitoring can protect churches against threats, but can also be a way of identifying whether converts from Islam to Christianity are attending church activities.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.25 points)

Even though the government sometimes allots land for church compound construction, in the majority of cases it is difficult for a church community to build a new place of worship. The registered places of worship that exist in the country cannot accommodate the large expatriate population.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.25 points)

Churches need to avoid any activity that could be considered proselytization. This, together with the government surveillance mentioned above, means that converts from Islam cannot participate in worship and activities at registered churches safely.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.00 points)

Churches are only allowed to organize Christian activities inside their premises. Any church event staged outside in public view could easily be interpreted as an act of proselytism, which is socially unacceptable. Self-censorship applies in this regard, as many churches do not want to jeopardize existing good relations with the authorities.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.00 points)

The expatriate churches in Bahrain often have a good relationship with the government, but they have to apply self-censorship and cannot openly criticize government policies or social issues relating to Islamic culture and norms. This limits the churches in how far they can speak up about issues of social justice in the country.

Block 5 - Additional information

Churches are in general able to organize meetings for worship, although lack of church space is often an issue. Producing and distributing religious materials is permissible, provided it does not criticize Islam; however, publicly distributing Bibles or Christian materials could provoke a serious reaction from the local population.

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.

Bahrain: 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?	10 *	10 *
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	5
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?	0	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

Christians attacked

- Several Bahraini converts from Islam to Christianity experienced domestic abuse from family members, including both physical and mental abuse.
- It is widely known that house-maids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable to incidents of (sexual) abuse. However, statistics are scarce as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have no interest in revealing the true situation: Bahrain needs the domestic staff to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the housemaids need the money coming in from the thousands of migrants working in the Gulf states and do not want to put their eco-

nomic interests at stake. The employers of abused house-maids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The house-maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as "dirty", whether in Bahrain itself or by their family at home. In addition, many provide a very much needed source of income for their families in their home countries. The home families are proud of the work being done in Bahrain, and the house-maid does not want to disappoint her family. Therefore, statistics and evidence of sexual abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any sexual abuse is due to the house-maid being a non-Muslim. Despite this, given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, conservative estimates agree that at least 10 Christian house-maids were (sexually) abused in the WWL 2023 reporting period, with their faith being one of the factors making them more vulnerable.

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

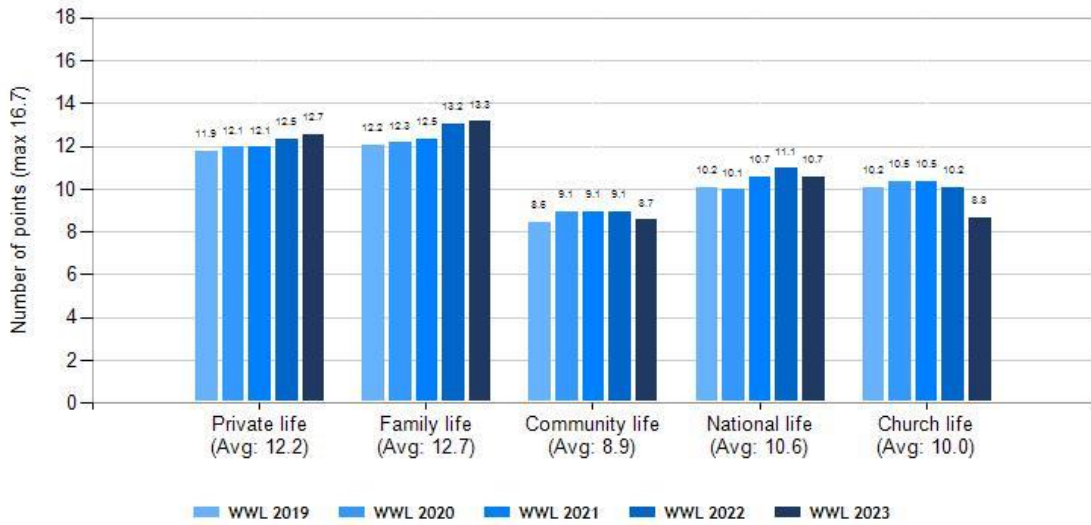
Bahrain: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	10.8
2022	11.2
2021	11.0
2020	10.8
2019	10.6

The average pressure on Christians has remained high/very high over the last five reporting periods and would seem to have stabilized around the 11 point mark. This reflects the difficulties experienced by converts in particular.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

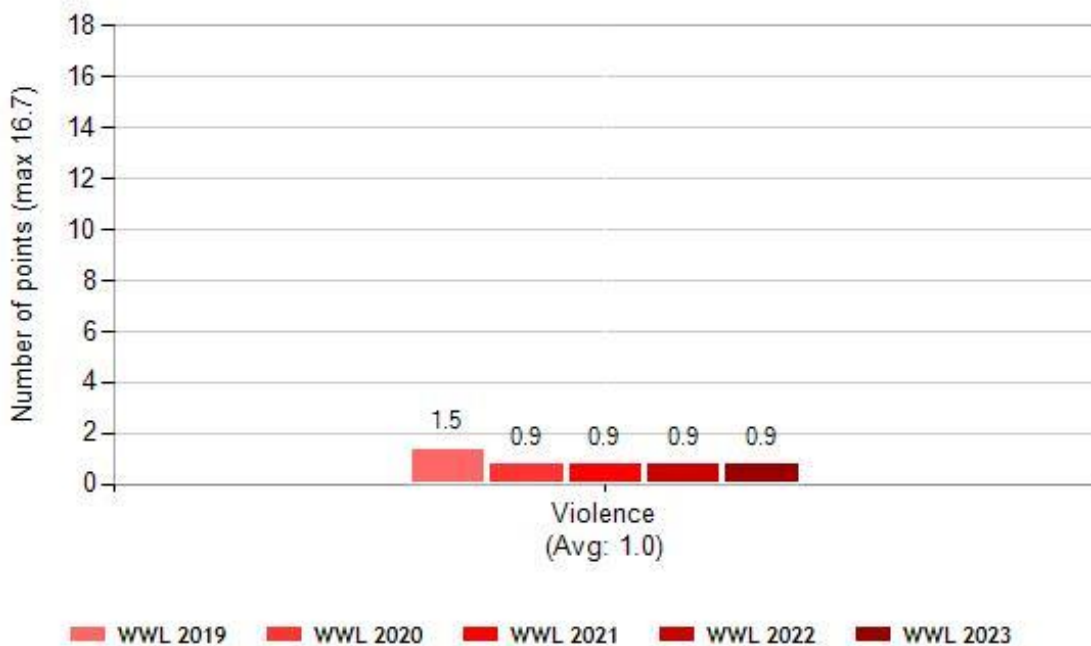
As the chart below shows: The average pressure per sphere of life shows that pressure is consistently highest in the *Family* and *Private spheres*. These two spheres also show a trend of steadily rising pressure over the five reporting periods.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Bahrain
(Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

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



The number of recorded violent incidents against Christians have always been very low/low. This pattern of very high pressure and low violence targeting Christians is typical for a Gulf country. The very high levels of pressure ensure that almost nobody 'crosses the line' and hence avoids provoking any violent reaction.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Despite some moves towards legal equality, women and girls continue to [be viewed as inferior](#) in Bahraini society (Wilson Center, 8 March 2020). Among the small number of converts to Christianity, pressure is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, then older men (reflecting levels of status and freedom within the culture). Women must dress like Muslim women to avoid harassment and discrimination.

A key challenge that women from a Muslim background experience is the legal marriage restriction that prevents them from marrying a non-Muslim; only Muslim men are permitted to marry a non-Muslim. A marriage between a formerly (and still officially registered) Muslim woman who has converted to Christianity to a non-Muslim will [not be recognized](#) (Article 11 of Law No.19, 2009). If a Christian woman is married to a Muslim man, her custody and inheritance rights will also [not be considered](#) (OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index, Bahrain, 2019).

In addition to these challenges, female converts face oppression from their families. They are likely to be beaten by families, placed under house arrest, and may be threatened with honor killing (although no such cases have been reported in the WWL 2023 reporting period). They can also face other violent threats, such as that of forced marriage. Financial dependence on male family members, which can be common among female Bahrainis, provides another opportunity for persecution.

The ill-treatment of foreign workers, including sexual abuse, remains a major issue. House-maids working in Bahrain often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level. Many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience (sexual) abuse, their faith being one of the factors making them more vulnerable. More broadly, there is also pressure to adhere to Islamic style of dress in order to avoid harassment.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Persecution of male Christian converts in Bahrain typically manifests itself in the workplace. Men may lose out on promotion, or in some instances, lose their jobs altogether. This can lead to serious economic hardship which has major implications on the whole family, as the man is normally the financial provider of the family. Converts may also be ostracized from their families, threatened, beaten, intimidated and expelled from the family home. Their status and role in the family will come under threat. In light of such pressure, it is extremely challenging for Christians from a Muslim background to meet for fellowship.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and adherents of Bahai are relatively free to practice their faith and there are no reports of interference with their religious practices. There are however reports showing that the country's majority Shia Muslim group does face discrimination.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "[T]here was a high degree of tolerance within society for minority religious beliefs, traditions, and houses of worship.
- "[A]lthough no law prevented individuals from converting from one religion to another, societal attitudes and behavior discouraged conversion from Islam."

According to the [USCIRF 2021 annual report](#) (page 3):

- Although Bahrain is the only Gulf state to officially recognize the Shiite Ashura commemoration as a public holiday, the Shia community remains under surveillance by the authorities and several arbitrary interrogations of Shia clergy have taken place. In addition, numerous Shia citizens had their citizenship revoked. This oppression has a political element since Bahrain's Sunni government regularly accuses Shiites of cooperating with Iran. Hence, the Shia communities are treated far more unfavorably than Christians in Bahrain.

According to [BTI 2020](#) (p.7):

- "Shi'ite Muslims, however, are subjected to state interference and face restrictions regarding the exercise of their religion. The government maintains supervision of religious textbooks and preaching, and monitors mosques and prayer halls. Clerics and activists claim

that authorities have demolished places of worship and restricted Shi'ite ceremonies. ... The state continues to extensively revoke the citizenship of Shi'ite opposition figures, which further undermines people's ties to the state and deepens rifts within society."

According to [BTI 2018](#) (p.3):

- "Al-Wefaq, the largest opposition party representing the mainstream of Bahrain's Shi'a majority, was banned and its secretary-general, Ali Salman, sentenced to nine years in prison for attempting to overthrow the regime. The government has also revoked the citizenship of the party's spiritual leader, Sheikh Isa Qassim."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

The continuing relative tolerance towards Christians - as illustrated, for example, in the recent construction of the largest Catholic cathedral in the Gulf - means that there is little discernible anxiety among expatriate Christians. Within the regional context of the Gulf, Bahrain's relatively liberal society continues to be a magnet for other citizens in the region, particularly from Saudi Arabia. However, this does not mean that it is likely that indigenous converts from Islam to Christianity will receive equal treatment in the near future.

Clan oppression

With the current levels of globalization and modernization, as well as an openness to other (Western) influences via the Internet, the younger generation is growing up in a world that is different from their parents' experience. However, family ties remain strong and it has yet to be seen whether these modern influences will change the tribal attitude of many Bahraini families. Bahraini society as a whole may follow the trends noted but, within tight-knit Shia neighborhoods, it is likely that conservative values will be reinforced in order to keep out influences not in line with Islamic religious and cultural values.

Dictatorial paranoia

The Bahraini government does not allow any dissent and it is unlikely that this attitude will change in the near future. Although Christians are definitely not main targets for government action - in contrast to the Shiite population - they have to live carefully and not cause public unrest through proselytizing activities.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: Article 23 - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bahrain_2012.pdf?lang=en
- Drivers of persecution description: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/bahrain>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: be viewed as inferior - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/we-have-achieved-lot-bahrain-we-strive-more>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: not be recognized - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/publications-of-the-law-library-of-congress/about-this-collection/interfaith-prohibition.php#bahrain>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: not be considered - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/BH.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: USCIRF 2021 annual report - https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021%20Annual%20Report_0.pdf
- Persecution of other religious minorities: BTI 2020 - https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2020_BHR.pdf
- Persecution of other religious minorities: BTI 2018 - https://www.bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2018_BHR.pdf

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=Bahrain>