

World  
Watch  
Research

## Morocco: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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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 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Morocco

## Brief country details

Morocco: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
38,194,000	31,200	0.1

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Morocco: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	71	24
WWL 2023	69	29
WWL 2022	69	27
WWL 2021	67	27
WWL 2020	66	26

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Morocco:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
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 recurrent problem for Christians who are open about their faith relates to Article 220 of the Penal Code which criminalizes 'shaking the faith of a Muslim'. This puts many Christians, both Moroccan and foreign, who talk to others about their faith at risk of criminal prosecution and arrest. Advocates for the rights of Christians have also been targeted by the government for their activities, while they also face the threat of violent attacks by radical Islamic groups. While the law only punishes proselytization, Moroccan converts to Christianity can be punished in other ways, for instance by losing inheritance rights and custody of children.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Morocco has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Morocco is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Women converts are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs. (ICCPR Art. 23.3 and CEDAW Art. 16)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)

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

- The monitoring and questioning of Moroccan Christians by the Moroccan police continued throughout the WWL 2024 reporting period. Several Moroccan Christians were publicly arrested and subsequently questioned about their activities by the police. Although no Christian has been prosecuted, these public arrests have a chilling effect, stigmatizing Moroccan Christians both in front of their families and communities. The pervasive monitoring forces many Moroccan Christians into self-censorship.
- In cases of violence against Moroccan Christians, the police usually sides with the perpetrators.
- Several house churches of Moroccan Christians were forced to stop meeting by the police.
- At least three cases of forced marriages were reported. In addition, several converts from Islam to Christianity, mainly young women, were relocated against their will.
- Many Moroccan Christians had to relocate inside the country due to (family) pressure.
- Numerous other Moroccan Christians have been mentally or physically abused, with several being expelled from their communities and forced to relocate, mostly by family members.
- Several non-Moroccan Christians have been banned from the country or were not allowed to enter, because they allegedly were involved in proselytizing.

## Specific examples of positive developments

Morocco is keen to emphasize its track record on interfaith dialogue and co-existence. However, this discourse mainly focuses on the relationship between Moroccan Muslims and the tiny Moroccan Jewish community. During the visit of the Roman Catholic Pope in 2019, no mention was made of the growing community of Moroccan Christians. In a speech held at the esplanade of Hassan Mosque in Rabat on the first day of the Pope's visit in 2019, it was noticeable that the Moroccan king only referred to expatriate Christians and not to all Christians living in Morocco:

- "As Commander of the Faithful, I cannot speak of the Land of Islam, as if only Muslims lived there. I am keen to ensure freedom to practice the religions of the Book and I am the guarantor of that freedom. I protect Moroccan Jews as well as Christians from other countries, who are living in Morocco." ([The North Africa Post, 30 July 2022](#)).

The king repeated that same stance during a Parliamentary Conference on interfaith dialogue in 2023. While stating "We guarantee the free exercise of worship", it was accompanied once again with the precondition that it applies to "Moroccan Jews and Christians who come from elsewhere to reside in Morocco". While explicitly mentioning "Moroccan Jews", the king deliberately omitted saying "Moroccan Christians" ([MAP, 13 June 2023](#)).

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>



- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: The North Africa Post, 30 July 2022 - <https://northafricapost.com/59406-morocco-model-of-inter-faith-coexistence-under-king-mohammed-vi.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: MAP, 13 June 2023 - <https://www.mapexpress.ma/actualite/activites-royales/sm-roi-adresse-message-aux-participants-conference-parlementaire-dialogue-interconfessionnel-collaborer-notre-avenir-commun-texte-integral/>

## WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Morocco

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Morocco report	AI Morocco and Western Sahara 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/morocco-and-western-sahara/report-morocco-and-western-sahara/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/morocco-and-western-sahara/report-morocco-and-western-sahara/</a>	30 June 2023
BBC News Morocco profile - updated 20 June 2023	BBC Morocco profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14121438">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14121438</a>	30 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Morocco Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/MAR">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/MAR</a>	30 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Morocco - updated 18 June 2023	World Factbook Morocco	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/morocco/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/morocco/</a>	30 June 2023
Crisis24 Morocco report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Morocco report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/morocco">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/morocco</a>	30 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries	EIU Democracy Index 2022 - MENA 00.60-63	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf</a>	30 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Morocco	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	30 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Morocco not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Morocco	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-world/2023</a>	30 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Morocco	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-net/2023</a>	16 January 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Morocco profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/morocco/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/morocco/</a>	30 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Morocco report	Girls Not Brides Morocco	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/morocco/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/morocco/</a>	30 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Morocco country chapter	HRW 2023 Morocco and Western Sahara country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/morocco-western-sahara">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/morocco-western-sahara</a>	30 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Morocco	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ma">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ma</a>	30 June 2023
Middle East Concern Morocco profile	MEC Morocco	<a href="https://www.meconcern.org/countries/morocco/">https://www.meconcern.org/countries/morocco/</a>	16 January 2024
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Morocco/Western Sahara	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/morocco-western-sahara">https://rsf.org/en/morocco-western-sahara</a>	30 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Morocco	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/mar">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/mar</a>	30 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Morocco	UNDP HDR Morocco	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/MAR">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/MAR</a>	30 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Morocco	IRFR 2022 Morocco	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/morocco/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/morocco/</a>	30 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Morocco not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Morocco - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Morocco	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mar.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mar.pdf</a>	30 June 2023
World Bank Morocco data 2021	World Bank Morocco data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yin=nzm=ncountry=MAR">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yin=nzm=ncountry=MAR</a>	30 June 2023
World Bank Morocco overview – updated 30 May 2023	World Bank Morocco overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco/overview#1">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco/overview#1</a>	30 June 2023

### Recent history

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

After the initial Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Morocco was also touched by the wind of liberty and desire for economic change. Large numbers of young people, many of whom found themselves unemployed even after getting university degrees, expressed their frustration by

taking to the streets. Responding to the demonstrations and calls for change, the government organized a referendum on constitutional reforms which was held on 1 July 2011. In the elections held since these constitutional reforms were put in place, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) won the largest number of seats in parliament enabling it to form coalition governments. Therefore, Morocco was able to avoid the political upheaval that engulfed much of North Africa. However, the Islamists were not able to deliver any real change and in the 2021 parliamentary elections, the PJD lost badly. The liberal-leaning, royalist National Rally of Independents (RNI) came out first and its billionaire leader, Aziz Akhannouch, was subsequently appointed as prime-minister by the king ([Institut Montaigne, 30 September 2021](#)).

However, grievances and discontent remain especially strong in the Rif region (in the northern part of the country) where the mainly ethnic Berber population feel marginalized and neglected by the government. In previous years, there were occasional demonstrations in this region. In 2018, some of the leading protesters [were given](#) lengthy prison sentences (The Washington Post, 27 June 2018). Protests re-emerged in February 2020 in Casablanca, but due to COVID-19 restrictions and internal divisions the demonstrations did not last long ([MEM, 24 February 2020](#); [Al-Araby, 23 April 2021](#)). However, in December 2022, another protest took place in the capital, Rabat, with demonstrators rallying against the high cost of living and corruption ([Al Arabiya, 4 December 2022](#)).

Moreover, a new trend has emerged in recent years in which the general public have directed criticism at the king himself, rather than at the ruling political class. This might well be due to the king's frequent absence from the country and his total lack of interviews with (local) media. It has strengthened rumors that Morocco is de facto more and more ruled by a "Security Alliance", comprising senior intelligence officers, politicians, high-ranking officials and businessmen ([Carnegie Endowment, 11 July 2023](#)).

The COVID-19 crisis affected Morocco significantly: As of 31 December 2023, the total number of Corona-related deaths stood at 16,300 ([WHO, accessed 20 January 2024](#)) and the economy shrank for the first time in two decades. Both the tourist industry as well as companies depending on trade with Europe were heavily affected. However, the Moroccan government also used the pandemic to tighten its grip on society under the guise of introducing health measures. Popular protests were quelled, and voices critical of the government were targeted and arrests made ([Bloomberg, 24 July 2020](#)). Newspaper editors and journalists have received high prison sentences in recent years ([RSF, 12 October 2021](#)). In addition, it became clear in recent years that the Moroccan authorities were involved in hacking numerous journalists' phones using the infamous Pegasus spyware ([The New Arab, 19 July 2021](#)).

In December 2020, Morocco became the fourth Arab country in 2020 to normalize ties with Israel ([The Guardian, 10 December 2020](#)). The deal was brokered by the USA and included important incentives for Morocco: In exchange, the USA recognized Morocco's claims on the Western Sahara and it secured an important arms deal including US-made drones ([Al-Jazeera, 12 December 2020](#)). However, Islamist groups in the country denounced the deal, making it a potential stumbling block for the king's popular support among the Moroccan people ([The Guardian, 13 December 2020](#)). Since then, demonstrations by thousands of people have taken place in several cities ([The Cradle, 30 November 2021](#)). Despite the popular discontent, ties be-

tween Israel and Morocco were intensified in the last two years with the Israeli Chief of Staff visiting in July 2022 and through Israeli participation in combined army maneuvers in Morocco in June 2023 ([Peoples Dispatch, 25 July 2022](#), [The New Arab, 6 June 2023](#)). In addition, in a first-ever visit to an Arab country, the speaker of the Israeli parliament officially visited the Moroccan parliament in June 2023 ([Yvet News, 8 June 2023](#)). However, following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, large demonstrations were held again, with the protesters demanding an end to all ties with Israel. The demonstrations were organized by leftist and Islamist groups ([Reuters, 24 December 2023](#)).

Moroccan Christians with a Muslim background continue to face discrimination and marginalization. They are not recognized by the government, are closely monitored by the security services and most often face hostility from (extended) family and society.

## Political and legal landscape

Morocco is a parliamentary monarchy in which the king is granted extensive executive powers and is both political and religious leader, being officially designated “Commander of the Faithful”. He presides over the Council of Ministers and appoints the prime minister following legislative elections from the winning party. On recommendations from the prime minister, he appoints the members of government. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2022) classifies Morocco as a 'hybrid' regime (in a ranking ranging from 'full democracy', 'flawed democracy', 'hybrid regime' and 'authoritarian state').

According to Humanists International's [Freedom of Thought report](#) (last updated 22 October 2020), which classifies the government as 'severely restricting':

- "Although Morocco signed and ratified few UN treaties and resolutions on civil rights and freedom of religion, conscience and thought, ... their primacy over national laws is compromised: ... Morocco commits itself 'To comply with the international conventions duly ratified by it 'subject to their compatibility with the constitution' and 'its immutable national identity'." This means that international civil rights, including the Freedom of Religion and Belief, are de facto subject to the cultural Islamic values of Morocco and its interpretation of Sharia law.
- "The constitution declares that 'Islam is the religion of the State' (Article 3), and that Morocco 'commits itself ... to deepen the bonds of togetherness with the Arabo-Islamic Ummah' (Preamble). It also refers to Islam, as well as monarchy, as one of the 'federative constants' of the Nation (Article 1). The king is considered as a direct descendant of the prophet of Islam, which gives the ruling Alaouite dynasty its legitimacy."

Although conversion from Islam to Christianity ("apostasy") is not prohibited, Middle East Concern (MEC Morocco) writes:

- "Legal provisions strictly prohibit blasphemy and defamation of religions, as well as non-Islamic proselytism. According to the Penal Code, anyone who attempts to prevent persons from the exercise of their religious beliefs, and anyone who offers incitements in order to 'shake the faith of a Muslim' or to convert a Muslim to another religion faces imprisonment and a fine. The Associations Law prohibits any association that seeks to undermine Islam,

and the distribution of non-Islamic materials is restricted. Although Rabbinical authorities have jurisdiction over personal status issues for the small Jewish communities, there is no equivalent provision for Christians – those born into Muslim families are subject to Shari’a courts in matters of personal status. Women registered as Muslim are not permitted to marry non-Muslims”.

As mentioned above (in: *Specific examples of positive developments*), During the visit of the Roman Catholic pope in 2019, the king emphasized that he is “the Commander of all believers ... [including] Moroccan Jews and Christians from other countries, who are living in Morocco.” The failure to include "Moroccan Christians" was a clear sign of the total lack of recognition of indigenous Christians from a Muslim background ([Christianity Today, 8 January 2021](#)). In addition, despite the king's inclusion of foreign Christians, serious (legal) limitations regarding the Freedom of Religion or Belief remain. Hence, it is no wonder that Christians in Morocco, especially those from a Muslim background, are severely limited in their civil and religious rights in Morocco's restricted political and religious environment. Because Moroccan Christians are not officially recognized, they are forced to practice their faith away from the public eye.

### Gender perspective

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2023 country chapter Morocco) Morocco’s Family Code (2004) discriminates against women in relation to divorce proceedings, marriage and inheritance. Whilst it sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage, judges can grant ‘exemptions’ to marry girls over the age of 15 at their family’s request; 19,000 such exemptions were granted in 2021 ([Middle East Monitor, 24 January 2023](#)). Recent data suggests that 14% of girls are reportedly married by the age of 18 ([Girls Not Brides](#), last accessed 30 June 2023). Morocco’s 2018 Violence Against Women Law (which criminalized some forms of domestic violence and offered improved protections for victims) was welcomed as a positive step, although critics have argued it stops short at addressing all crimes, such as marital rape (HRW 2023 country chapter Morocco). These legal gaps can be utilized for the purpose of religious persecution, in particular making marriage a dangerous context for converts.

## Religious landscape

Morocco: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	31,200	0.1
Muslim	38,073,000	99.7
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	2,200	0.0
Bahai	37,900	0.1

Morocco: Religious context (continued)	Number of adherents	%
Atheist	350	0.0
Agnostic	49,200	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Over 99% of the population is Muslim (majority Sunni), with the remainder being mostly agnostic, Bahai or Christian. Islam is the official state religion. The majority of expatriate Christians in Morocco are Roman Catholic. Non-Muslim foreign communities can practice their faith, but proselytization with the intent to convert Muslims from Islam to another religion is still considered illegal.

Middle East Concern (MEC Morocco) reports:

- "Registered expatriate Christian communities enjoy considerable freedom in Morocco, provided that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. In recent years (and particularly in 2010) the government has deported significant numbers of expatriate Christians on the grounds that they were contravening the Penal Code provisions relating to proselytism, or on even more vague grounds of 'threat to public order'. Moroccan Christians, who mainly meet in small house churches, are especially aware of close surveillance of their activities by the authorities. In early 2017 Morocco's highest religious authority issued a declaration regarding apostasy which it defined in narrow political terms. A broad ruling by the same authority in 2002 had urged that apostates be sentenced to death. The revised ruling has been widely welcomed, including by Christians in Morocco. Similarly, Christians welcomed a recent ruling that a Christian who offered a bible to a friend did not 'shake the faith' of that friend as the bible is a book that Muslims should read. However, there continues to be family and societal pressure against those who choose to leave Islam. Some who are considered apostates are referred to the courts (facing sanctions such as forcible divorce, loss of inheritance and removal of child custody), and in extreme cases they can face violent responses from family members."

## Economic landscape

According to the World Factbook Morocco:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$8,100 (2021 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 11.5%
- **Youth unemployment:** 27.2%
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 4.8% (2013 est.). However, recent publications claim that "a fifth of the Moroccans lives near the poverty line" ([Fanack, 8 April 2022](#)).

According to a [World Bank Press Release on 14 February 2023](#):

- **General situation:** "After a strong post-COVID-19 rebound last year, Morocco's economy came under mounting pressure from overlapping supply shocks: a severe drought and a surge in commodity prices that have fed inflation."
- **Economic growth:** "Nonetheless, Morocco's economic growth is expected to accelerate to 3.1% in 2023, thanks to a rebound of the primary sector. Still, downside risks persist due to geopolitical tensions, including the war in Ukraine, the deceleration of Morocco's main trading partners in the Eurozone, and new potential climate shocks. Real GDP growth dropped from 7.9% in 2021 to an estimated 1.2% in 2022, while the current account deficit increased from 2.3% to 4.1% of GDP. "
- **Food crisis:** "To soften the impact of food and energy prices on households, Morocco adopted a policy package that included general subsidies on staples and maintained pre-existing regulated prices. This approach stabilized the prices of goods and services that absorb almost one-quarter of the average household's expenditures, avoiding what could have been a higher increase in poverty. ... Notwithstanding these measures, modest and vulnerable households still suffered the most from the impact of rising food and other prices due to inflation. The report calculates that annual inflation was almost one-third higher for the poorest 10% of the population, compared to the wealthiest 10% of the population primarily due to the impact of food price increases which represent a higher share of spending in poorer households."

Other sources report:

- World Bank's "[World by Income](#)" report (FY 2021-2022) puts the Moroccan economy in the lower middle income category.
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2023 Morocco) shows that the small but steady improvements in the economic indicators in the last years have been disrupted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the 'Economy indicator' being particularly affected. However, all three indicators, including 'Economic inequality' and 'Human flight and brain drain' show improvement for 2023, although the still high level of latter remains a cause for concern.

Morocco's economy has important industrial sectors such as mining, agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Moroccan companies are becoming increasingly active and investing in other African countries, especially in West Africa and this is helping foster economic growth. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Morocco is also the world's largest producer and exporter of cannabis. A government agency is currently taking steps to legalize production, export and import for "medical, cosmetic and industrial use", in particular to take production away from criminal traffickers ([Africa News, 3 June 2022](#), [Morocco World News, 27 April 2023](#)). Compared with most other countries in the region, Morocco's economy is relatively dynamic and robust.

### Gender perspective

Although Morocco had one of the largest relative drops in women's employment between 2016 and 2020 (GIWPS 2021 Morocco profile, p. 34), the female [labor force participation](#) rate increased from 20.7% in 2020 to 21.4% in 2022; compared to a slight drop from 69.8% to 69.7% for men (World Bank Gender Data Portal, 2023). Moroccan Christians, almost all of them from

a Muslim background, often face discrimination in the job market. If their conversion becomes known, they are likely to lose their employment. Finding another job is difficult, especially employment in government departments. As men are typically the primary breadwinners, this predominantly affects men.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Morocco:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Moroccan population (99%) are from Arab-Berber decent.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with French being widely spoken in business, government and diplomatic circles. Tamazight (official) and other Berber languages are spoken as well.
- **Population growth:** Morocco has a population growth rate of 0.88% (2023 est.)
- **Urban population:** In 2023, 65.1% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 1.88%
- **Literacy rate:** 75.9% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (84.8%) and women (67.4%) (2021).
- **Youth population:** The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up almost 44% of the population, making it a country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **Life expectancy:** 74.0 years on average; women (75.7 years), men (72.3 years) (2023).
- **Education:** Moroccan citizens enjoy 14 years of schooling on average (2021). The mean years of schooling for girls is 4.7, compared to 6.6 for boys.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Morocco:

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Morocco ranks #123 out of 191 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a medium score of 0.683, making Morocco score lower than its North African neighbors.
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.861, women are significantly disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Morocco is socially conservative and Muslim, although there is also a strong Arab youth culture, and society is influenced by the large Moroccan population living in Europe.

A Moroccan Christian convert [dedicated an episode](#) of his weekly show “Daring Questions” on the discrimination of non-Muslims encouraged by school textbooks (YouTube video, accessed 6 July 2023). He gave an example of the Islamic education’s book for the 1st grade in primary school which stipulates: “I love those who love the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and I am hostile to those who are hostile towards him”. He also brought attention to a Baccalaureat schoolbook which states that the punishment for apostasy is execution. However, a comparative study on the recently introduced new curricula found that “The old curricula ... make a clear distinction between what is lawful and unlawful from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, whereas the new textbooks confine themselves to what is commonly believed as right values and behaviors,

such as honesty, peace, freedom, tolerance, etc." (Somaya Zine-Dine and Moulay Sadik Maliki, "[Religious Educational Reforms and the Shaping of Moroccan Identity](#): Islamic Education Textbooks as a Case Study," 52nd International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development – Porto, 16-17 April 2020, p.563).

According to FFP's Fragile State Index (FSI 2023 Morocco): 'Social indicators' showed continual improvement in previous years, although 'demographic pressures' shortly worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and "Refugees and IDPs" worsened slightly during 2023. However, 'Cohesion indicators' showed that 'group grievances' were alarmingly high. This trend is confirmed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2023): "Morocco's political situation will be fragile in 2023-27 as high unemployment and initially elevated inflation drive social unrest. [However,] we expect that the government, led by the prime minister, Aziz Akhannouch, will remain in office throughout the forecast period and that global factors easing inflationary pressures will work to his advantage."

### Gender perspective

Moroccan Christians remain side-lined and face discrimination by society. Once their conversion becomes known, family and society are likely to put pressure on them to recant their faith (US State Department IRFR 2022 Morocco). Some of them face divorce by their spouses, while others are forced to marry a Muslim. Converts from Islam to Christianity are also likely to be excluded from family inheritance and lose custody rights in cases of divorce. Such measures affect both male and female converts; women and girls are more likely to be forced into a marriage whereas men are more likely to face discrimination in the workplace or be targeted by the authorities. Pressure mounted during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to economic uncertainty, which gave rise to an increase in domestic violence and a decrease in prosecutions of perpetrators ([HRW 2021 country chapter Morocco](#)).

### Technological landscape

According to World Internet Stats (IWS 2023 Morocco):

- **Internet usage:** 79.4% penetration – (December 2021 - most recent survey at time of writing)
- **Facebook usage:** 66.3% penetration – (January 2022)

There is a small gender gap in regards to technology in Morocco: 61.1% of women – 68.5% of men – use the internet lower than the country-wide average of 64% ([Morocco World News, 9 March 2021](#)). High [illiteracy rates](#), especially among women, is cited as one of the main barriers to internet access (Freedom House, 2023). According to [Napoleon Cat](#), there is a greater imbalance in regards to social media; as of May 2023, 58% of Morocco's Facebook users were male, compared to 42% of female users.

According to World Bank Morocco data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 137.5 per 100 people



As reported by Freedom House (Freedom on the Net 2023), Morocco scored 53/100 and was classified as 'partly free':

- "Internet freedom in Morocco remained tenuous during the coverage period. While internet access continues to expand overall, the government is believed to maintain sophisticated surveillance systems used to constrain online speech. The proliferation of progovernment outlets and state-sponsored propaganda drowns out critical voices online, while state-affiliated news sites publish false information about activists and journalists. Self-censorship around Western Sahara, the royal family, and religion remain pervasive, and numerous social media accounts are used to harass, defame, intimidate, and threaten activists who criticize the authorities."

Reporters without Borders ranked Morocco #144 out of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom 2023 index, falling 9 places from #135 in the 2022 Index. RSF states:

- "The Moroccan authorities put pressure on the media to ensure they do as they are told. Independent journalists are subjected to constant harassment."
- "The Moroccan media may appear diverse, but this is a facade. The media do not reflect the diversity of political opinion in Morocco. Independent media and journalists are harassed and persecuted, and the right to news and information is crushed by a powerful propaganda and disinformation machine serving the political agenda of the government and its close allies. Morocco's only remaining independent publication, the daily *Akhbar Al Yawm*, finally gave up and published its last issue in April 2021. Social media and websites are the population's main source of information."
- "Corruption, the role of Islam, the status of the Western Sahara and the status of the monarchy are among the many subjects that have been implicitly off limits for Morocco's journalists in recent years. Recent additions to the list include the security services, the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and the crackdown on street protests."
- "Although a new press law adopted in July 2016 abolished prison sentences for press offences, critical and outspoken media content can lead in practice to criminal proceedings. Journalists are forced to censor themselves because of the lack of legal safeguards for freedom of expression and press freedom, the low level of judicial independence, and the frequency with which they are the targets of judicial proceedings."
- "Journalists are often subjected to arrest without warrant and prolonged pre-trial detention. Trumped-up sex charges – such as rape, human trafficking, adultery and having an illegal abortion – have been used against journalists in the past five years."

One victim of such 'absurd' charges was investigative journalist Omar Radi, who received a 6 year prison sentence in July 2021 ([Committee to Protect Journalists](#), 19 July 2021). The Moroccan authorities used spyware from the Israeli NSO Group to hack Radi's telephone ([Amnesty International](#), 22 June 2020). In March 2022, his conviction was upheld in appeal and he remains in jail ([HRW](#), 28 July 2022).

Christians in Morocco, especially converts from a Muslim background, are careful in their social media postings. Criticizing Islam or the (religious authority of the) king can lead to arrest and detention, as well as social hatred. Most Christians in Morocco use a pseudonym to post Christian material. On the positive side, with the rise of Internet access and social media, many converts to Christianity can now find fellowship online, despite being geographically isolated.

## Security situation

In August 2018, the king reinstated obligatory military service for men and women aged between 19 and 25 years old ([Reuters, 21 August 2018](#)). Critics say this was a way to quell protests ([Morocco World News, 10 April 2019](#)). Many soldiers are needed to protect the border-wall in occupied Western Sahara, which Morocco sees as its 'southern provinces'. The Western Sahara dispute started after Morocco annexed the former Spanish colony in 1975. The indigenous Western Sahara Sahrawi people resisted the annexation and - led by the POLISARIO Front - they established the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976. After years of conflict, a truce was brokered by the UN upon promise of an independence referendum in 1991. This referendum has still not taken place, while Morocco has allowed thousands of its citizens to settle in the 75% of the area it controls. Meanwhile, the SADR controls a small area in the east of the country. According to [Reliefweb \(19 January 2022\)](#): "Over 173,000 Sahrawi refugees are estimated to live in five camps in Tindouf province, Algeria, on the border between Mauritania, Morocco and Western Sahara. Some have been displaced for more than 45 years."

In December 2020, the US government recognized Morocco's claim over Western Sahara in return for Morocco's normalization of ties with Israel ([Middle East Eye, 1 May 2021](#)). This move, followed by several other diplomatic incidents, led to the unilateral severing of ties by Algeria in August 2021 ([Al-Monitor, 25 August 2021](#)). Consequences remain at the moment limited to a closure of Algerian airspace for Moroccan planes and the discontinuation of the Maghreb-Europe Gas Pipeline, which transferred Algerian gas to Morocco ([Carnegie, 3 May 2022](#)). Furthermore, Algerian President Tebboune declared in March 2023 that the relationship between the two countries had reached "the point of no return" ([Al-Jazeera, 22 March 2023](#)). Besides the Western Sahara issue, varying geopolitical approaches also come into play: Morocco is concentrating on a (security) partnership with the USA (and the EU), while Algeria keeps its ties with Russia. However, it is unlikely that these tensions will result in a military conflict. Surprisingly, in December 2023, the Algerian foreign minister stated that the country could be "considered as [being] more inclined towards seeking [a] quick resolution" ([Morocco World News, 25 December 2023](#)).

In December 2018, Morocco was shocked by the murder and beheading of two Scandinavian women by men who had sworn alliance to the Islamic State group (IS). This kind of violence had not happened before in Morocco and the killing was widely condemned. The main suspects received the death penalty, although Morocco has not executed any convicted criminals since 1993 ([BBC News, 18 July 2019](#)).

Morocco's security apparatus is known to be strong and intelligence agencies are well-informed. These capacities have also been used against Christians in Morocco, especially against converts from a Muslim background. The security services monitor all Christians extensively, as they are seen as a threat to the king and his authority, which is derived from the claim that the king is a

direct descendant of the Islamic prophet, Mohammed.

## Trends analysis

### 1) The country's image is progressive except where religious minorities are concerned

Morocco has been quite stable in both political and economical terms in a region that has been fraught with political instability and economic crises. Its incremental and evolutionary approach to political reform has proved to be quite successful so far. Morocco's international image is that of a progressive, tolerant and economically dynamic country. However, there is the risk of complacency setting in and this image does not fully reflect the country's record when it comes to the rights of religious minorities, with Moroccan Christians being severely limited in their religious freedom. Also, unless the unrest in the Rif region is seriously addressed, the situation could destabilize the country.

### 2) The monarchy remains strong

Currently, well over ten years since the start of the so-called Arab Spring which saw dictators being toppled in neighboring countries, the monarchy sits still on top, with the Islamist PJD defeated in the September 2021 elections by the royalist RNI. However, there could be an opening for the Islamists to return to power, depending upon whether the economic marginalization and political discontent of certain groups persists. The country's growing general economic pressure, in combination with an often absent king, could add to that. Nevertheless, if its current overall trajectory continues, Morocco is likely to remain stable.

### 3) Moroccan Christians still have no official recognition

Even the Roman Catholic Pope did not raise his voice to call for more acceptance of Moroccan's Christians during his visit in 2019, as this issue remains highly sensitive in Morocco ([New York Times, 29 March 2019](#)). The Pope's visit underlines the keenness of the Moroccan state to maintain its image of being a tolerant and progressive modern state; the state is thus unlikely to openly increase restrictions on religious freedom. However, Christianity looks set to remain a foreign religion in Morocco. Article 4 of the Constitution states that "the motto of the Kingdom is Dieu, La Patrie, Le Roi [God, the Country, the King] and many Moroccans are happy with that. As long as "God" is interpreted as the God of Islam, Christians will remain outsiders, even if they are of Moroccan descent.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

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- Recent history: Peoples Dispatch, 25 July 2022 - <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2022/07/25/moroccans-protest-israeli-military-chiefs-visit-and-deepening-of-morocco-israel-ties/>
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## WWL 2024: Church information / Morocco

### Christian origins

Christianity arrived in Morocco when it was part of the Roman Empire and became very prominent in areas like Tangiers, Rabat and Fez. The first known Christian martyr in Morocco was Marcellus (298 AD) in Tangier. By the end of the 4th century, the Romanized areas of Morocco were solidly Christian and inroads had been made among the Amazigh ('Berber') tribes, who sometimes converted en masse. In that same 4th century, it was also one of the countries where Donatism and Arianism became a major theological issue. In the 5th century, German Vandals, coming via Spain, conquered Morocco and brought their Arian version of the Christian faith with them. In 533 AD, the Byzantine Empire [reconquered](#) Morocco to reinstate 'Roman' rule and to reinstall orthodox bishops and priests (Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed 29 September 2020).

According to Islamic tradition, Islam reached Morocco by the 7th century. Many Christians were forced to convert and the number of Christians decreased due to the policies of Islamization. In 1220, priests of the Franciscan Order made a brave attempt to re-introduce Christianity and a diocese was set up at Marrakesh in 1234 which was able to function until 1566.

Missionaries from North Africa brought the Protestant faith to Morocco in 1884. The Gospel Missionary Union and Emmanuel Mission Sahara came to the country in 1894 and 1926 respectively. Other churches and movements would follow, such as Anglicans, the Assemblies of God, the Christian Brethren and the Seventh-day Adventists.

Morocco's instability in the 19th century had resulted in European countries intervening to protect investments and to demand economic concessions. In 1912, Morocco became a French Protectorate, and Spain also assured itself of major parts of Morocco. Tens of thousands of French, Spanish and other colonists, entered Morocco and acquired large tracts of the rich agricultural land. During this colonial period, both Catholics and Protestants could freely worship in Morocco and the Reformed Church of France formed the Evangelical Church of Morocco. Churches, hospitals, schools and orphanages were built for the colonists and for mission work among the Muslim population.

When Morocco became independent in 1956, the country was home to 500,000 Europeans and the Roman Catholic Church was very visible. Since then, the Europeans and their churches have largely departed. Today the expatriate Christian community (Roman Catholic and Protestant) consists of a few thousand members.

According to Jack Wald in "Christianity in North Africa and West Asia" (Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp.41-44), the indigenous Moroccan church began to emerge in the late 1960s, meeting in house-churches held in the homes of missionaries. In 1984 the community suffered a major setback when King Hassan II forced many Moroccan Christians to recant their faith, after suspecting them of plotting a coup. With the arrival of incumbent King Mohammed VI in 1999, a decade of relative freedom started which allowed house-churches, this time mostly led by Moroccans, to grow. However, in March 2010, around 150 foreign Christians from all over the country were suddenly deported. [Reportedly](#), the country wanted to take a tough line against proselytism (BBC News, 12 March 2010). Moroccan Christians were interrogated too and it became apparent that the police had inside informers; many house-churches disbanded as a result.

## Church spectrum today

Morocco: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	1,100	3.5
Catholic	17,600	56.4
Protestant	4,900	15.7
Independent	6,200	19.9
Unaffiliated	1,400	4.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	4,100	13.1
Renewalist movement	4,800	15.4

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The majority of Christians in Morocco are expatriate Roman Catholics. Recognized churches for expatriates exist only in major cities. Denominations that existed prior to independence in 1956 include the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church and the French Protestant Church. Indigenous Moroccan Christians are not allowed to join these congregations.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The Islamic population in rural areas is known to be conservative. The majority of incidents of persecution take place in the mostly Berber populated northeast of the country, the Atlas mountains in the east of the country and the south-eastern desert area. Most converts reside in the urban areas, where it is easier to escape family and community pressure.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians

Expatriate Christians, many of whom are engaged in a variety of professional activities, are often under surveillance and risk deportation if they are perceived to engage in acts of evangelization. However, compared to other groups - especially Moroccan converts to Christianity - expatriate Christians from the West enjoy relative freedom of religion. Recognized churches for expatriates

(i.e., those already in existence at Independence in 1956) are only found in major cities. Most own church buildings but the government owns the land. As long as the building is being regularly used for church services, the church keeps control of the building. If it falls into disuse, the government takes over the building and uses it for other purposes. Given the difficulty for these churches to get new members and the fact that it is impossible for Moroccan Christians with a Muslim background to join these churches, historical Christian communities find it challenging to remain active and present in the country.

Expatriate Christians from Sub-Saharan African countries, who are often Pentecostal Christians, are usually marginalized and discriminated against. They usually gather in self-established house-churches.

### **Historical Christian communities**

These communities are not considered as a separate category in WWL analysis since they consist mainly of expatriate Christians and have been included in the category above.

### **Converts to Christianity**

Moroccan Christians meet in house-churches because they cannot get permission and official recognition to congregate in public. They change location regularly and do not have the history or level of organization to develop into a denomination as such (i.e. as a non-traditional Christian community). Converts to Christianity still face pressure from society at large and family to renounce their faith. They also tend to be under surveillance and risk further forms of persecution, especially if they engage in evangelism.

### **Non-traditional Christian communities**

This category does not exist in Morocco.

## **External Links - Church information**

- Christian origins: reconquered - <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/06/afw.html>
- Christian origins: Reportedly - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8563111.stm>



# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Morocco

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Morocco: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	71	24
WWL 2023	69	29
WWL 2022	69	27
WWL 2021	67	27
WWL 2020	66	26

The rise in score is due to increases both in pressure (in the *Family* and *Community spheres of life*) and in violence, which rose from 4.8 points in WWL 2023 to 5.4 points in WWL 2024. The growing number of Moroccan Christians is increasingly leading to more incidents, which also translates into higher levels of pressure.

## Persecution engines

Morocco: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

### Islamic oppression (Strong)

Restrictions imposed by the Islamic authorities include the confiscation of Christian literature in Arabic (including Bibles) if discovered, bans on cooperating with Christians from abroad (espe-

cially if missionary work is planned) and insuperable challenges in securing recognized places of worship for Christians with a Muslim background. In addition, converts from Islam face pressure as a result of their new faith from family and friends and from the local community, if their statements about faith are felt to be an attempt at proselytization.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The Moroccan government looks at the Church with suspicion, especially activities involving converts. Moroccans are expected to be loyal to Islam, king and country; Christianity would seem to threaten this hegemony. In past years, the Moroccan authorities have accused Christians of being disloyal to the king and have deported many foreign Christians without due process. One of the reasons for this sort of government action could be the fear of radical Muslim groups: By appeasing them, the government tries to prevent any unrest. This means in practice that converts are regularly detained and questioned about their motives and contacts.

## Drivers of persecution

Morocco: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			WEAK				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Strong							Medium	
Ethnic group leaders				Weak					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Violent religious groups	Very weak								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong			Weak					
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Weak					
Political parties	Weak								

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

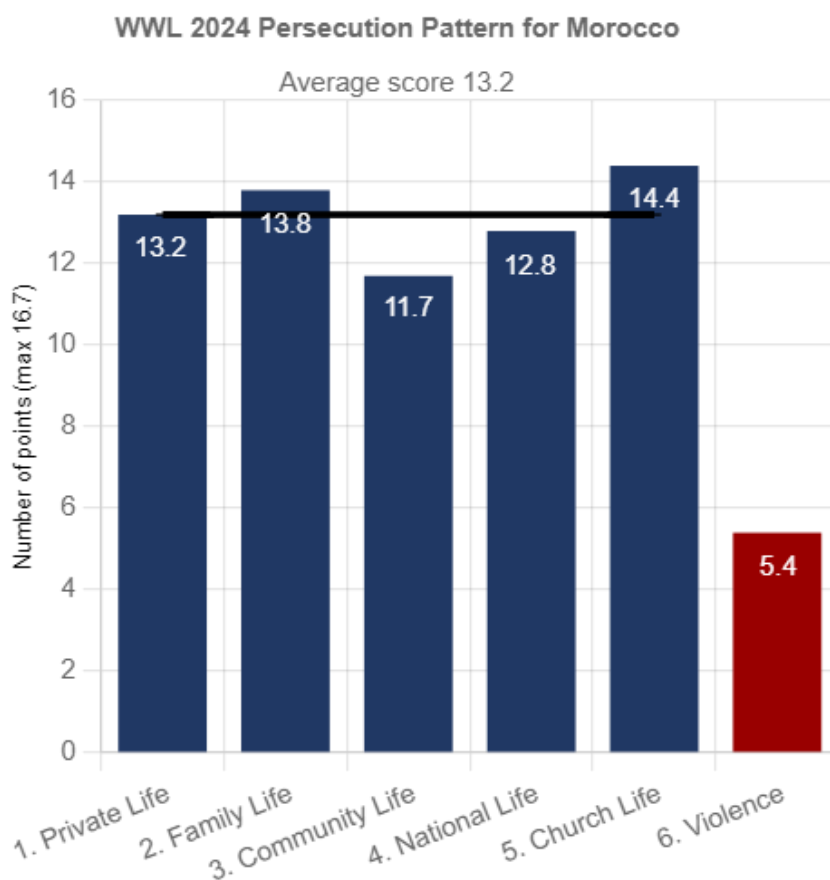
- **Government officials (Strong):** Among the main drivers of *Islamic oppression* in Morocco are government officials. The government does not fully recognize the right to freedom of belief and worship for Christians and state officials are also unwilling to register and allow Christian converts with a Muslim background to congregate freely, gain recognition and evangelize.
- **Citizens (Strong):** Moroccan society views Christianity mostly negatively and converts from Islam to Christianity are seen as shaming family and community.
- **Extended family (Strong):** The extended family of converts from Islam - especially in rural areas - put pressure on converts to renounce their faith in Christ.

- **Non-religious leaders (Strong):** Islamic radical thought is present and preached in Morocco and adds to the pressure on Christians.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Moroccan authorities and security services are monitoring all church life. Converts to Christianity are actively watched and sometimes interrogated. There is fear that the security services are actively infiltrating the convert movement.

### The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Morocco shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.2 points), increasing from 12.9 points in WWL 2023.
- The pressure is highest and at an extreme level in *Church life* (14.4 points). This reflects the limitations expatriate churches face if they try to share their faith with others and how the government has effectively strangled fellowship among convert communities. The next highest score (also at an extreme level) is to be found in *Family life* (13.8 points), which reflects the pressure converts have to face when they want to practice their new religion in public: Getting baptized, married or even buried as a Christian is difficult and converts will face pressure from family, society and even the government, especially in rural areas.

- The score for violence went up from 4.8 points in WWL 2023 to 5.4 points in WWL 2024. While the overall level of violence remained comparable to last year, this year more Christians were refused entry into the country.

## 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 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

### **Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)**

Both family and community members can react harshly or even violently when seeing a convert displaying a cross or Christian symbol. Some converts do share their new faith on social media, using fake identities to hide their real names.

### **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)**

Both local and expatriate Christians can be charged with "shaking the faith of a Muslim" under Moroccan law. Hence, speaking about the Christian faith requires great sensibility.

### **Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.25 points)**

Many converts are afraid to talk about their new faith with their families. The first reaction can be intense and there are many cases known of converts who have been ostracized or abused because they have done this. Therefore, converts often only discuss matters of faith with their family over time, with only some families engaging in dialogue to give them the chance of recanting their new faith.

### **Block 1.10: Christians have been isolated from other family members or other like-minded Christians (e.g. house arrest). (3.25 points)**

This especially affects (young) female converts from Islam to Christianity. In the past years, numerous incidents have been reported in which young women have been forced to stay at home or even (against their will) relocated (often to family members) in the countryside. In addition to the clear infringement of their religious rights, their further development and education is also hindered or even stopped. In some cases, they are forced or given no other option than to marry a partner selected by their families.

### **Block 1: Additional information**

Especially young and recent converts from Islam to Christianity experience high levels of mostly family pressure, with (young) women generally facing higher risks than men. It is often difficult for them to pray and worship privately at home, while many prefer to read their Bibles online

rather than owning a physical copy. At the same time, due to social stigma, it is often difficult for them to connect and share their faith with other Christians. Risks and levels of pressure generally become less over time as converts find ways to rebuild relationships and receive support from other Christians, although for some, relief only arrives after they have been ostracized by their families. A significant number of converts keep their faith a secret.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

To adopt a child in Morocco you have to be a Muslim. Part of the adoption procedure entails a meeting with an imam, who will ask the adoptive parents about the tenets of Sunni Islam.

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (4.00 points)**

To adopt a child in Morocco you have to be a Muslim. Part of the adoption procedure entails a meeting with an imam, who will ask the adoptive parents about the tenets of Sunni Islam.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)**

Islamic religious education is a compulsory subject in state schools and officially takes a moderate approach. School books have been adapted in recent years in order to fight Islamic extremism. Many texts deemed offensive towards Christians and Jews have been removed, although there is still no room for (religious) pluralism and it remains questionable whether these top-down reforms are supported at the grass-roots level. Although some private schools allow children from Moroccan Christian homes to skip the Islamic classes, this is not the norm and private schooling is often too expensive for Moroccan Christians to begin with.

In addition, even expatriate Christian parents, especially those from a Sub-Saharan African background, struggle with sending their children to state schools, as their children are not exempted from Islamic religious education.

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

This is especially problematic for female converts, as they are only allowed to marry a Christian man if their intended husband first converts to Islam. In practice, this means that they cannot marry a foreign Christian spouse in Morocco or that their marriage abroad will not be recognized by the state. Marrying another (Moroccan) convert is legally possible, but only via an Islamic marriage. Children born to Moroccan convert Christians cannot be registered with Christian names.

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

Moroccan Christians can only be buried with Islamic rites in an Islamic cemetery, as the government, and often (extended) family members as well, do not recognize the conversion of Moroccan Christians.

## **Block 2: Additional information**

Conversion to Christianity can trigger a hostile reaction from a convert's immediate and extended family. Children of known Moroccan Christians often face harassment and bullying, forcing many to lead a double life. The state considers all Moroccans to be Muslims, and Moroccan Christian converts can be married (without being asked if they are Muslims because it is assumed they are). However, foreign Christian men wanting to marry a Moroccan woman would have to say they are Muslims because they are asked this question. It is not uncommon for Moroccan Christians, especially women, to be divorced or to lose custody of their children because of their conversion. Many accept certain levels of pressure or even domestic violence in order to avoid such problems and the shame it brings.

## **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.). (3.75 points)**

Both local and foreign Christians are monitored by the Moroccan security services. Local community members regularly inform the police when they are aware of proselytizing activities. This kind of monitoring became clearly present again following the earthquake that hit Morocco in September 2023: Several Moroccan Christians were questioned about and hindered in organizing relief activities.

**Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.25 points)**

Christians, especially converts, feel a great deal of societal pressure to take part in Islamic religious activities and rituals. Especially during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, but also during family events like circumcision ceremonies.

**Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Christianity is seen as a foreign religion and Christians are not considered to be part of Moroccan society. Hence, there is no room for them within communal groups.

**Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Converts, especially those active in ministry, are monitored and regularly called in for questioning.

## **Block 3: Additional information**

Christian converts face being ostracized by their family and community, particularly in rural areas. Societal pressure also makes it difficult for converts to raise their children as Christians. Such pressure could, for instance, take the form of bullying at school or Islamic instruction without parental consent. In urban areas, Christians have more freedom but expressions of

Christian faith could still be perceived as an attempt at proselytization and could have negative repercussions.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

### **Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)**

Civil society organizations with clear Christian convictions, or who aim to defend the rights of Moroccan converts, are actively opposed by the government. The Law on Associations prohibits any organization that the government considers to be carrying out activities "for an unlawful purpose contrary to the laws or public morals, or which could harm the Islamic religion, territorial integrity or the monarchy ...". They are prevented from organizing activities such as conferences on religious freedom in Morocco or from advocating for religious freedom in general.

### **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 declares Islam to be the state religion (Article 3) but the same article also guarantees all citizens the "free exercise of beliefs". In addition, Article 41 designates the king as the "Guarantor of the free exercise of beliefs" but the same article also defines him as the "Commander of the Faithful", who "sees to the respect for Islam". In practice, this means that a Moroccan citizen is expected to only practice Islam.

### **Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.75 points)**

Churches in Morocco are largely invisible in the public sphere. Only (foreign) historical churches in urban areas display Christian symbols publicly. However, both Moroccan Christians and expatriate Sub-Saharan African Christians gather in house-churches or general buildings not recognizable as churches from the outside, so as not to draw unwanted attention and pressure.

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

Christian evangelism is banned. Giving Christian literature to Muslims and proselytization is illegal. Christians involved in missionary activity could be accused of "shaking the faith of Islam" and this will entail criminal liability.

### **Block 4: Additional information**

There are considerable restrictions on Christians in public. For instance, eating in public during Ramadan is considered illegal. Morocco's High Religious Committee has retracted its 2012 ruling stating that apostasy is punishable by death and seems to have decided to permit Muslims to change their religion ([Christian Today, 6 February 2017](#)). However, proselytizing ("undermining the faith of others") and criticizing Islam remain punishable offenses and state officials conduct surveillance on Christians and monitor their activities to enforce the ban on evangelism.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Churches are hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings as these could be construed as proselytism. This will be the case both for Christians with a Muslim background and for other Christians.

### **Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)**

Churches of expatriate Christian communities are always monitored to make sure that Moroccan nationals do not attend their services. The restriction on fellowship between expatriate Christian communities and Moroccan church groups affects both communities negatively.

### **Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)**

Only the Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Anglican and French Protestant Church have a special recognized status. Other churches have to register as associations. All churches are legally prohibited from pursuing any activities that could undermine Islam. Moroccan Christians cannot officially establish their own churches or belong to foreign churches.

### **Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.75 points)**

The government has continued to permit the display and sale of Bibles in French, English and Spanish. A limited number of Arabic translations of the Bible have also been available for sale in a few bookshops for use in university religion courses. However, the authorities confiscate Bibles they believe are intended for use in proselytizing, and the Bible and Christian literature are not generally available for purchase.

### **Block 5: Additional information**

Expatriate churches are not hindered in establishing and managing schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, but these organizations must refrain from any activities that could be construed as proselytizing. Any perception of being evangelistic will lead to problems. Therefore, although they enjoy more freedom than churches in other countries in the region, churches in Morocco operate under substantial restrictions.



## Violence

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 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. 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 WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Morocco: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	3	2
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	13	21
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	1
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	8	11
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	12	10
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	3	5
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	54	46
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?	7	4
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?	13	27
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	7	0

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christians attacked:** The table above shows that many Christians have faced physical and mental abuse, with female converts especially being vulnerable to sexual harassment and rape. This abuse took place mostly in the family sphere, although there have also been reports of police abuse. In addition to the reported cases, many other incidents remain unknown as they often happen in the domestic sphere and are an issue of shame.
- **Christians arrested:** Several Christians were detained and questioned for possessing a Bible, Christian materials or engaging in evangelism.
- **Christian-owned houses attacked:** Several Christian properties have been attacked and vandalized, both by family members and members of the wider community.

- **Violence against female Christians:** Several incidents of forced marriage, sexual abuse and forced relocation of female converts from Islam to Christianity were reported. Those incidents all took place in the family sphere.
- **Christians forced to leave:** Several Moroccan Christians had to find refuge elsewhere in the country to escape from family pressure.
- **Christians refused entry:** Several non-Moroccan Christians were refused entry to the country due to allegations of proselytizing.

## 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.

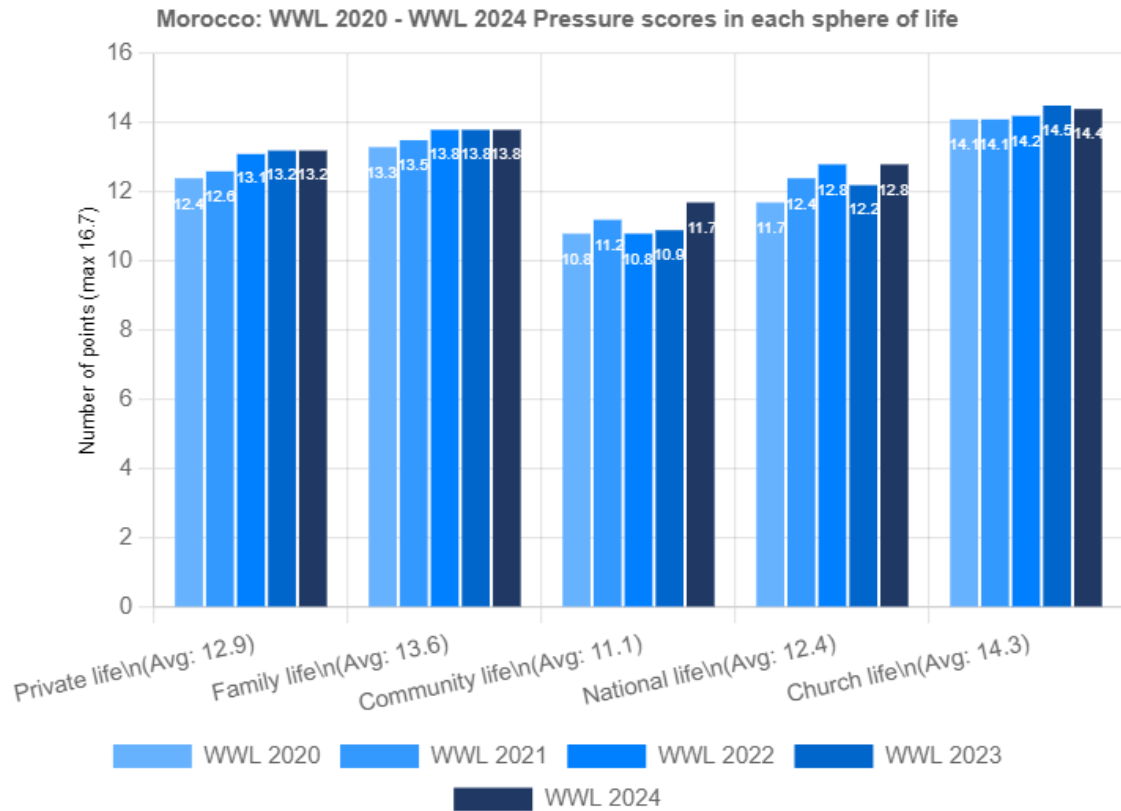
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Morocco: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	13.2
2023	12.9
2022	12.9
2021	12.8
2020	12.5

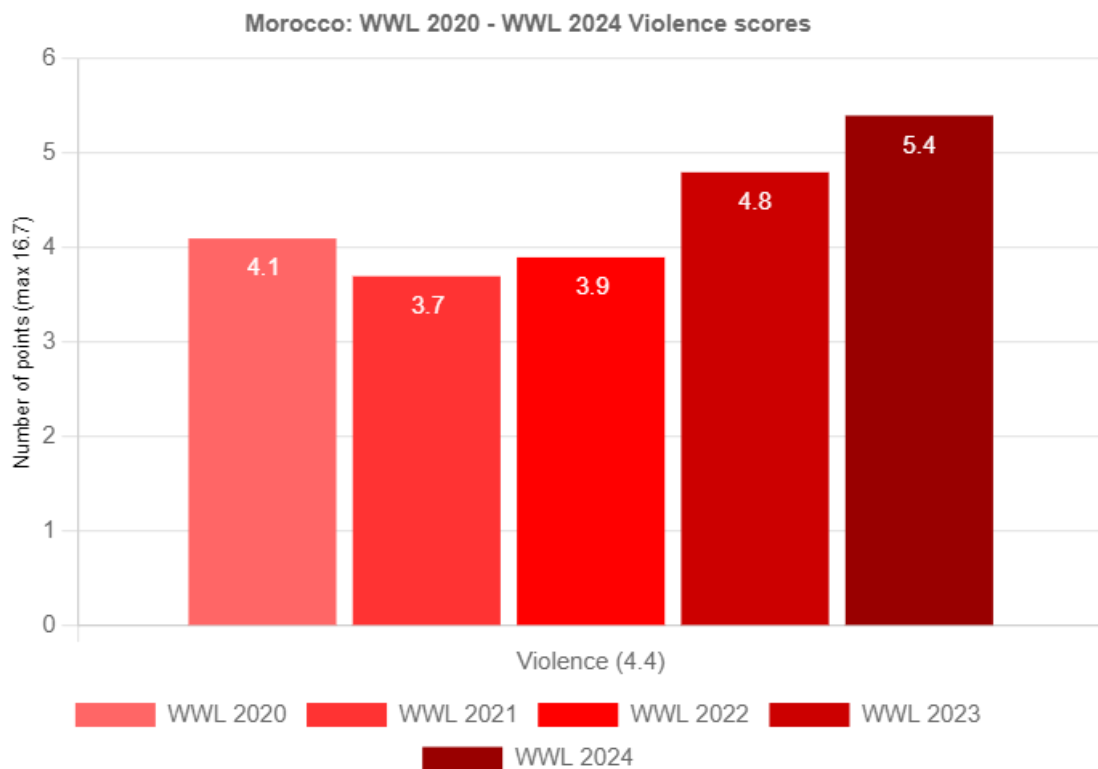
The table above shows that in WWL 2021 - 2023 reporting periods the average pressure on Christians stabilized at the very high level of 12.8/12.9 points. However, in WWL 2024, the level rose to 13.2 points.

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

The chart in blue below shows that there have been very small increases in pressure in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life* over the last five reporting periods. In comparison, Pressure has been more or less stable at an extreme level in the *Church sphere*. The lowest pressure is to be found in the *Community* and *National spheres*, where the levels have tended to fluctuate somewhat over the reporting periods.



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Since WWL 2021, the violence score has steadily risen from 3.7 points to 5.4 points.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

According to reports, most people in Morocco who openly declare their Christian faith are men, because their ability to be more independent in society means that they are less vulnerable to pressure than women. Although women's rights in Morocco have developed over the last sixteen years, which has given women more legal equality, women in Morocco remain in a generally less advantageous position than men (HRW 2023 country chapter Morocco). For example, they have few economic opportunities, making them dependent on men (see scoring on financial inclusion, p.84, Georgetown's [Women, Peace and Security Index 2023/24](#)). Cultural expectations bind women to the home and domestic duties, especially in rural areas.

While all Christians from an Islamic background can, in practice, be denied their rights to inheritance or family affiliation, this is a particular risk for women. They are also more vulnerable to arbitrary divorce and the denial of access to their children. Personal status law follows the country's Maliki-Ashari Sunni interpretation of Sharia which enables such persecution.

Christian converts also at risk of domestic confinement, forced marriage to a non-Christian and/or being expelled from the home. In some instances, the pressure is simply so intense that the girl relents and agrees to a marriage to someone who does not share her faith in order to escape the pressure of her family. As these pressures demonstrate, religious persecution against women characteristically takes place within the private sphere, in the family home. Family members fear the scandal of their daughter's conversion, particularly if she is bold enough to demonstrate it in public. A country expert explains: "The family exerts all types of violence and pressure so that the Christian desists and returns to the religion of the family. Both men and women are affected by this type of persecution but women are much more vulnerable and less independent Moroccan society."

Considering these pressures, it is extremely difficult for converts to grow in their faith. Gaining access to Christian religious materials is difficult. Christian women using the internet as a way to counter isolation, risk experiencing cyber harassment for their faith and self-expression.

Although Moroccan society is relatively liberal in some respects, Christians from an Islamic background in rural areas must adhere to the religious form of clothing and way of life and may suffer harassment if they change these customs, especially during Ramadan.

Additionally, rape, or the threat of rape, is a taboo subject that is socially associated with a woman's personal honor, which is linked to her family's honor. The high level of stigma attached makes it a powerful tool for religious coercion. This is the case both for Moroccan women and for the numerous female Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, of whom it is thought a majority are Christian; their rape is not just motivated by exploitation but also by religious intolerance.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In general, male converts to Christianity are among the most vulnerable in Moroccan society: By leaving Islam, they are perceived to bring shame upon their families and will face a wide variety of pressure and violence in both family and public life.

Within the domestic sphere, they will likely be ostracized by their families. If young and unmarried, a male convert will likely be denied financial support. If already married, he risks abandonment by his wife, whose family will also place pressure on the couple in order to ensure she is freed from his influence. Additionally, a convert can, in practice, be deprived of his inheritance. If single, he will also face pressure to marry a Muslim, although this pressure affects women more. If he reaches the age of 40 however and is still single, the pressure will mount.

In the public sphere, Christian men, particularly converts, also face difficulties. They are more likely than women to be targeted for government interrogation, beatings or imprisonment, especially if they are a church leader. However, the severity of the backlash after conversion depends on their social position and political standing within the local community.

Employment is also a key area of pressure for men, as they are usually the main providers in their families. A country expert explains: “[Men] usually need to take care of the family. By hitting them in their ability to provide for their family, the whole family is being hit.” They may lose their jobs or be harassed at their workplace, throwing them into economic uncertainty. It will be harder for them to secure new employment if their faith is known. Christians are sometimes accused of having converted for financial gain, since Christianity is associated with opulent Western society. Discrimination and harassment have also been reported in educational

settings.

Every year, there are reports of a handful of arrests of Christian men. These arrests can occur for nothing more than having a Bible in their possession, or for discussing Christian faith with a Muslim. Fines can accompany the harassment. The pressure from families and society can be so sustained that male converts leave their homes, particularly those who are threatened with death. This makes Christian fellowships harder to form or sustain.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Judaism is the only minority religion officially recognized in the Constitution and Jews have their own religious courts for family matters. Although Islam is the official religion of the state, only Sunni (Maliki) Islam is de facto socially acceptable. Shia Muslims, Ahmadiyya Muslims and adherents of Bahai are religious minorities in Morocco facing government restrictions that make it nearly impossible for them to engage in public acts of worship.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Morocco):

- **Shia Muslims:** "[T]he government's refusal to allow Shia Muslim groups to register as associations continued to prevent these groups from gathering legally for public religious observations. There were no known Shia mosques or husseiniyas (Shia prayer halls) in the country. According to Shia community members, they were able to pray in Sunni mosques, but they risked criticism from other worshippers for their religious practices. ... Shia reported they observed Ashura in private to avoid societal harassment. Shia Muslims said that many avoided disclosing their religious affiliation in areas where their numbers were smaller" (pp. 9, 13).
- **Bahai:** "Members of the Baha'i Faith said they were open about their faith with family, friends, and neighbors" (p.13). However, a local human rights activist reported that several adherents of Bahai have been questioned by the police in the past, but that their leadership does not speak up for them and does not offer them support.
- **Judaism:** "Jewish citizens continued to state that they lived and attended services at synagogues in safety. They said they were able to visit religious sites regularly and to hold annual commemorations and that increased tourist visitation to Jewish heritage sites, facilitated by the government, meant more resources to revitalize Jewish places of worship." In addition, the King announced the establishment of several organizations to promote, manage and safeguard "the cultural and religious heritage and influence of Judaism in Morocco." Furthermore, "in November, the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in Rabat opened the first university synagogue in the Arab world next to the university's new mosque. According to a media report, the synagogue was expected to provide religious services for the Jewish community on campus and teach Muslim students about Judaism." (pp. 10, 12, 13).

Atheists and atheism are suppressed by both society and the government. Several known atheists and other citizens have received death threats and were harassed by the government in the recent past. In May 2020, a Moroccan actor was arrested and fined on charges of blasphemy after mocking Islam in a social media post ([Morocco World News, 26 May 2020](#)). The Freedom of Thought Report states that a Moroccan court upheld a 6 months prison sentence in

July 2020 for Mohammad Awatif Kachchach for 'insulting Islam' after he had shared a satirical cartoon ([Humanists International, 22 October 2020](#)). In June 2021, a 23-year old Moroccan-Italian woman was sentenced to a three and a half years prison sentence for 'insulting Islam'. In 2019, she had re-written verses from the Quran on Facebook in praise of alcohol ([Morocco World News, 30 June 2021](#)). Two months later, in August 2021, she received a suspended sentence in appeal and was subsequently freed ([Arab News, 23 August 2021](#)).

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

Converts from Islam to Christianity are likely to keep facing pressure, mostly from the side of their families and society. Ongoing modernization in urban areas might change the attitudes towards converts in the long term. It is unlikely that the government will change its approach towards converts, especially so long as the king remains "the Commander of the Faithful, [who] sees to the respect for Islam" ([Constitution of Morocco](#), Article 41).

### Dictatorial paranoia

Morocco remained one of the more peaceful Arab countries during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. Morocco's strong security apparatus plays an important role in keeping the peace. It will keep monitoring all activities that can create unrest, looking especially for any acts of proselytization by Christians. In the past, it has shown it can effectively paralyze the (convert) church. It will probably keep doing so, also to appease Islamists who might otherwise cause unrest.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: Christian Today, 6 February 2017 - <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/morocco-religious-authorities-rule-leaving-islam-is-no-longer-punishable-by-death/104476.htm>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Women, Peace and Security Index 2023/24 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WPS-Index-full-report.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Morocco World News, 26 May 2020 - <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2020/05/303884/police-arrest-moroccan-actor-rafik-boubker-for-blasphemy-against-islam/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Humanists International, 22 October 2020) - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/morocco/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Morocco World News, 30 June 2021 - <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/06/343170/moroccan-court-convicts-woman-for-publicly-insulting-islam>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Arab News, 23 August 2021 - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1916026/middle-east>
- Future outlook: Constitution of Morocco - [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco\\_2011.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011.pdf)



## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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