

World
Watch
Research

Egypt: Country Dossier

December 2020



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

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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).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Egypt

Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Egypt: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
102,941,000	16,250,000	OD estimate

Egypt: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	75	16
WWL 2020	76	16
WWL 2019	76	16
WWL 2018	70	17
WWL 2017	65	21

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Egypt: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Islamic oppression	One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials, Violent religious groups
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Ethnic group leaders

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Christians in Egypt report that freedom of religion violations come mostly at community level. Incidents vary from Christian women being harassed while walking in a street to a mob of angry Muslims forcing a whole community of Christians to move out, leaving their houses and belongings to be confiscated. These sort of incidents take place mostly in Upper Egypt, where Salafist movements are active in the rural communities. The Islamic Salafi al-Nour party continues to exist and operate legally, although the Constitution prohibits religious parties (Art. 74). Their influence is considerable in rural societies where there is a high percentage of illiteracy and poverty.

Al-Azhar University, one of the most influential Islamic universities in the world, has a prominent place within Egyptian society and even the Constitution. The university's Grand Imam, Ahmed el-Tayyeb, has [clearly stated](#) that there is no place in Islam for Muslims to convert to Christianity (World Watch Monitor / WWM, 22 June 2016).

The presidential institution keeps speaking positively about Egypt's Christian community. However, the lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians leave them vulnerable to all kinds of attacks, especially in Upper Egypt. In addition, due to the dictatorial nature of the regime, neither church leaders nor other Christians can speak up against these practices.

Furthermore, in clear contrast to how mosques and Islamic organizations are dealt with, churches and Christian NGOs are restricted in building new churches or running social services. Christians of all backgrounds face difficulties in finding (new) places for communal worship. The difficulties come both from state restrictions as well as from communal hostility and mob violence.

Christians with a Muslim background have great difficulties in living out their faith since they face enormous pressure from their families to return to Islam. The State also makes it impossible for them to get any official recognition of their conversion.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Egypt 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)

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

- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are arbitrarily accused and charged for blasphemy (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face discrimination in public and private employment because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings and to receive licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)
- Christian women, especially in rural areas, may be targeted, abducted and forced into marriage with Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- During the WWL 2021 reporting period, 39 years Rania Abdel-Messih went missing and a video appeared with Rania clearly being under duress and claiming to have converted to Islam. She safely returned to her family after twelve weeks, without giving any further explanation. ([Watani, 17 July 2020](#)). Several other cases of forced conversion of female Copts have also been reported in recent years.
- On 20 May 2020, Egyptian authorities demolished a church in Koum Al Farag after local Muslims built an illegal mosque next to the church to prevent the church's official legalization. To quell the sectarian unrest, the authorities decided to demolish both the illegal mosque and the church. The church had been used for over 15 years and was home to 3000 parishioners ([Bibliatodo News, 29 May 2020](#)).
- During the WWL 2021 reporting period, several Christians have been arrested on charges of blasphemy, often after posting a message related to Islam on social media ([Al-Monitor, 20 November 2020](#)). Even only discussing Islamic prayer can be enough to get arrested. In addition, blasphemy charges can easily lead to mob violence against Christians, especially in Upper Egypt.
- Ramy Kamil, a Coptic Christian activist who primarily advocates for full rights for Coptic Christian minority, has been in prison for more than a year without trial. Kamil was arrested in November 2019 on terror charges because of his activism and leadership of the Maspero Youth Union ([USCIRF, 13 December 2019](#)).

Specific examples of positive developments

- The legalization of churches under the 2016 Church construction law has been continuing. 1568 churches out of 5540 requests have been legalized, but many churches are still waiting. The official recognition of churches often leads to sectarian tensions with the local Muslim population ([Asia News, 4 August 2020](#)).
- No major violent attack by Islamic militants targeting the Christian Coptic community has taken place during the WWL 2021 reporting period.

External Links - Short country profile

- Brief description of the persecution situation: clearly stated - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/06/al-azhar-to-leave-islam-is-treason/>
- 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 violations of rights in the reporting period: Watani, 17 July 2020 - <https://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/coptic-affairs/coptic-woman-missing-for-12-weeks-back-home/33216/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Bibliatodo News, 29 May 2020 - <https://www.bibliatodo.com/En/christian-news/church-in-egypt-demolished-for-the-crime-of-building-sunday-school-classrooms/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Al-Monitor, 20 November 2020 - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/11/egypt-arrests-christians-muslims-insulting-religion.html#ixzz6eVqSrh59>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: USCIRF, 13 December 2019 - <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-condemns-egypts-arrest-coptic-activist-ramy-kamel>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Asia News, 4 August 2020 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Egypt-legalizes-74-Christian-churches-and-places-of-worship-49773.html>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Egypt

Link for general background information

- [Egypt country profile - BBC News](#)

Recent history

After serving as president for three decades (from 1981 to 2011), Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down during the Arab Spring uprisings. The demonstrators put forward demands for more political freedom and expressed the discontent of the population with the country's social and economic situation. In June 2012, after a brief transition, Mohamed Morsi, a politician who used to be senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood, won the controversial presidential election (gaining 52% of the votes). "Victory of Islam" was a widely used slogan to promote his chances to win the election, which caused fears among the Coptic minority. Once in power, he assumed dictatorial executive powers that alienated many Egyptians. Popular demonstrations were organized by a group called the Tamarrod which enjoyed the [support](#) of the police, the army, businessmen and also prominent Islamic and Christian Coptic religious figures (International Crisis Group, 7 August 2013). Ultimately, the army [intervened](#) and ousted President Morsi alleging that he had failed to respond satisfactorily to the demands of the Egyptian people (BBC News, 4 July 2013). The army adopted its own transition road map which culminated in the adoption of a new constitution and the holding of new parliamentary and presidential elections.

At the end of the process, Field-Marshal Abdul Fattah al-Sisi emerged as the new Egyptian strong man. Al-Sisi was the minister of defense during Morsi's rule and he was the principal figure behind the ousting of Morsi. He was hailed by some as a hero who saved Egypt from the clutches of the Muslim Brotherhood, while others contend that his rule is a sure sign of Egypt's return to

the old days of autocracy backed by the army. Once the new constitution was adopted, al-Sisi ran for president as a civilian and - given the personality cult that had been built around him prior to the election - it was not surprising that he [won the election](#) with an overwhelming majority (International Crisis Group - ICG, 7 August 2013). Since al-Sisi's ascent to power there has been a large scale crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. In March 2018, al-Sisi was [re-elected](#) with 97% of the votes (The Guardian, 2 April 2018). This huge win is a clear indication of how effectively all opposition had been ousted during his first term.

In February 2019, parliament members voted (later passed by a referendum) on extending the presidency term to allow President al-Sisi to stay in office for another 12 years after finishing his current term. New amendments also boost the power of the army, already the dominant force in Egyptian politics. The political situation is generating some tension in the country as even some of al-Sisi's supporters are quite frustrated by the army's strong influence concerning the country's political decisions and economy. President al-Sisi's popularity is decreasing and hopes are currently low that he will be able to secure the basic needs for Egyptians in the low income bracket.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the country hard in 2020. The official number of cases and deaths towards the end of the WWL 2021 reporting period stand at 99712 cases and 5511 deaths, but actual numbers are probably higher ([World Health Organisation, September 2020 Update](#)). The whole COVID-19 crisis in Egypt has been accompanied by much fake news and conspiracy theories, with some Muslim and Christians clerics claiming that Muslims or Christians cannot catch the virus ([Al-Monitor, 31 March 2020](#)). However, it does not help that the Egyptian government has arrested health workers who dared to criticize the government's approach under anti-terrorism laws ([Amnesty International, 18 June 2020](#)). Despite the release of some political prisoners because of the COVID-19 virus, the Egyptian government did not free Coptic activists Patrick George Zaki and Ramy Kamel ([The Tablet, 28 April 2020](#)) - their only 'wrongdoing' being their highlighting of the plight of Egypt's Copts. This is an indication that President al-Sisi may not have been entirely sincere in his 2014 public declaration to be a "[protector](#)" of the Christian community (Egyptian Independent, 28 November 2014).

During 2020, Egypt started to increase its support for Libyan strongman General Khalifa Haftar, who controls the east of Libya. Like al-Sisi, Haftar is strongly opposed to Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood (which Egypt has declared to be a terrorist organization). However, during 2020 Haftar's forces suffered considerable losses after Turkey brought military support to the UN-backed Government of National Accord, which controls the west of Libya. Thus, in June 2020, al-Sisi announced that Egypt's army would intervene if Haftar were to lose more territory ([BBC News, 17 August 2020](#)). However, this has not yet happened since several efforts have been made to establish a ceasefire in Libya. Nonetheless, the situation in Libya remains volatile and could lead to a confrontation between Egypt and Turkey in Libya.

Political and legal landscape

With President al-Sisi sworn into power in 2014 the situation in Egypt stabilized, but human rights have been experiencing a crisis as [Human Rights Watch](#) noted (last accessed 11 September 2020): "Authorities have jailed tens of thousands of peaceful critics, including over 4,000 persons arrested in the wake of peaceful protests in September 2019. Security officers routinely commit serious human rights violations, including torture, disappearances and extra-judicial executions, in near-absolute impunity. Detention conditions are appalling and hundreds of prisoners, including political detainees, have died in detention from apparent insufficient medical care, including former president Mohamed Morsy."

In June 2019, former Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi died during his trial, some reports linking his death to poor prison conditions. Since al-Sisi's rise to power, many other of the [Muslim Brotherhood's senior leaders](#) and members have been detained, prosecuted and sentenced to death or life imprisonment. The government continues to ban most forms of independent organization and peaceful assembly and has cracked down on various dissident and opposition groups.

One cannot help but feel a sense of déjà vu when noting that a military strongman is once again cracking down on the Muslim Brotherhood. President al-Sisi's regime wants to project itself as a guarantor of stability, order and security for Christians. The administration seems determined to tackle the increasing Islamization of the state that accelerated under the leadership of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. At the same time, there is a risk that segments of the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters, who feel aggrieved by their loss of power and the repression they are facing, might become more radicalized and join underground militant Islamic groups in great numbers. Such developments could lead to a further polarization of society in Egypt and could pose a serious risk to the nation's stability and the security of Christian Egyptians in the long run.

The current high level of support for President al-Sisi's regime by a large number of the churches and Christians, might also be used against them. Followers of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups are likely to [view church buildings](#) and Christians as easy targets to show that the Egyptian government is not able to protect its supporters (World Watch Monitor, 11 November 2019).

According to the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) (EIU):

- Egypt is classified as an 'authoritarian' regime (EIU, Democracy Index 2019).

According to [Middle East Concern](#) (accessed on 11 September 2020):

- "Egypt's 2014 constitution establishes Islam as the State religion and the principles of Islamic law as the main source of legislation. It also provides that Christians and Jews may govern personal status and religious affairs according to their own codes. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It states that freedom of religion is absolute and guarantees freedom of religious practice in accordance with regulations, though this right is limited to adherents of the Abrahamic religions (i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Although religious conversion is not prohibited in codified

legislation, conversion away from Islam is not allowed in practice. ... In late August 2016 Egypt's House of Representatives passed Law 80/2016 on the construction of churches. The law aims to make obtaining a permit for the construction of churches easier. The president has since then given permission for several new church buildings, but no new churches have obtained a permit following the procedures of this new law. Critics complain that under the new law the National Security Agency maintains a de facto veto on church building permits. Prime Ministerial Decree 199/2017 formed a committee that deals with existing unlicensed church buildings. Church denominations had until September 2017 to file a list of unlicensed building with the committee. Of the more than 3,700 applications for a license the committee had issued 1,109 licenses by the end of August, 2019."

The Egyptian legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. Whilst it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, it maintained a [reservation to Article 16](#) (UNDP, 2018, "Egypt: Gender Justice and the Law"), which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage. Egypt has made positive steps in recent decades, introducing several laws that improve gender equality such as the [2008 Child law](#) (International Labor Organization), which raised the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18. The President of the Republic even declared 2017 as 'the year of the Egyptian woman' and female representation in Parliament has [steadily risen since 2012](#) (Index Mundi). Despite this, accomplishments lie behind aspirations and many laws are inadequate. Child marriage continues, particularly in rural areas; [17%](#) of girls are reportedly married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides). Under the Muslim Personal Status Law, men have the right to divorce their wives by '*talaq*'. Women can apply for fault-based divorces, although judges have discretion regarding the threshold of harm and whether divorce is granted. Upon divorce they will likely lose [custody](#) of their children (UNDP, "Egypt - Gender, Justice and the Law", 2018).

Men face conscription into the army from the age of 18, where they are bound to serve 18-36 months. Within this context, Christians face discrimination. They are reportedly [denied promotion](#) and the possibility to serve in more sensitive branches of the army, linked to intelligence (Open Democracy, 29 May 2014).

Religious landscape

Egypt: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	16,250,000	15.8
Muslim	86,087,179	83.6
Hindu	1,391	0.0
Buddhist	816	0.0

Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	93	0.0
Bahai	2,041	0.0
Atheist	88,121	0.1
Agnostic	510,176	0.5
Other	1,762	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020). (Adapted according to OD-estimate)

Islam is the most dominant religion in Egypt. The Open Doors estimate for the number of Christians is 16,250,000. However, the total number and percentage of Christians remain a topic of some debate, with Egyptian Christians claiming that over 15% of the population is Christian. Although Christianity has deep roots in Egypt going back centuries before the advent of Islam in North Africa, Christians are often marginalized and treated as second class citizens in modern Egypt. Christians can be found all over the country, but "they are particularly concentrated in Upper Egypt (the southern part of Egypt) and in major cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. Suburbs in Cairo, other cities and some villages are sometimes regarded or described as 'Christian areas', but few are exclusively Christian (or Muslim)." ([Australian Department of Foreign affairs and Trade, May 2017](#))

Humanist International writes in its [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (accessed 9 September 2020): "Egyptian State ID cards include a section on religion and only members of the three "divine religions" can be recognized. ... Muslim-born individuals who leave Islam are not allowed to change the religion field on their identity card. Since the Arab Spring, the ID card issue has become a major campaign issue for the Coptic Christian minority as sectarian tensions have increased."

Within this religious context, men and women face significant pressures, particularly converts from Islam to Christianity. Egyptian law permits Christians to convert to Islam, but despite several [campaigns](#) against the disparity, not vice versa (European Centre for Law and Justice, 25 January 2010). As such, a Christian woman can be married to a Muslim man, but a Christian man cannot marry a Muslim woman.

Economic landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 8 September 2020) and [World Bank data](#) (June 2020):

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$12,700 (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 10.8%, with youth unemployment being twice as high at 31.1%
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 27.8% (2016 est.)

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#):

- "Egypt's growth in Fiscal Year 2018-2019 increased to 5.6% (up from 5.3% the previous year) Growth was driven by a macroeconomic stabilization program that was largely successful, generating a solid primary budget surplus, reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio, and replenishing reserves."
- However, "vulnerabilities persist, including underperformance in exports and foreign direct investment, which may be aggravated by the disruptive repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic".
- Hence, "Growth is expected to be undermined by COVID-19. Despite the expected gradual recovery of private consumption and investment, the pandemic is expected to hamper growth through its effect on production and exports. Key sectors, such as tourism and natural gas, are expected to experience a slowdown due to restricted international travel and the crash in oil prices."
- "The poverty rate, projected to remain elevated at 27% ... could rise further."

Other sources report:

- The [World Bank](#) puts the Egyptian economy in the lower middle income category (World Bank, accessed 9 September 2020).
- The [Fragile State Index](#) shows that there are small but steady improvements in the economic indicators (FSI, accessed 9 September 2020).

President al-Sisi's administration has embarked upon an ambitious plan to revitalize the Egyptian economy and create much needed economic growth and jobs. However, many Egyptians are still suffering from the effects of the 2016 devaluation of the Egyptian pound which was carried out to secure a loan from the International Monetary Fund ([The Guardian, 3 November 2016](#)). The unemployment rate has dropped slightly in recent years, but structural problems of illiteracy and poverty continue to be devastating. A 2019 report by Egypt's bureau for statistics found that around 32.5% of the population lives under the poverty line of \$2 a day, a 4.7% increase compared to 2015 ([Egypt Independent, 30 July 2019](#)). It is likely that the poverty rate will increase, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Egyptian Christians report that increased taxes and higher gas, electricity and water supply prices led to rises in the prices of food, transportation and houseware. Price increases have put more pressure on the social structure of society, with the middle class struggling to make ends meet, while the high poverty rate especially affects many Christians living in rural areas. The increased economic pressure on already marginalized families fuels migration.

In addition, poverty is used to manipulate poor people for religious and political purposes. Unemployed Muslim youth can be led by radical Islamic groups to initiate attacks on churches and individual Christians. Secondly, there are indications that radical Islamic groups target poor Christians to convert them to Islam. Especially women and girls are vulnerable, as they become easy targets for forced marriages.

Discrimination against Christians in the job market remains evident, especially in governmental institutions. This applies in general to all Christians in Egypt, but converts from a Muslim background remain particularly vulnerable.

A [2017 Inheritance law](#) has gone some way to protecting the economic rights of women, preventing persons from denying women their inheritance rights. Nonetheless, according to Inheritance Law No. 77 of 1943, all citizens – including Christians - are subject to Islamic Inheritance Law, which typically stipulates that men should inherit double that of what a woman receives. There have been positive developments in this regard, however; an Egyptian court recently [ruled](#) that a Coptic Christian woman should receive equal inheritance to her brothers. She was encouraged by her brothers to fight for this right (The Times, 27 November 2019).

The economic situation can also be used against Christian men and boys as a religious trap. Some Muslims are known to first offer financial loans to help Christians, but when they cannot pay the money back, tell him that the debt will be dropped on the proviso that he converts to Islam. Christian businesses are boycotted and many Christians find it hard to find a job, especially because their religion is written on their identity cards and due to systemic [workplace bias](#) (International Christian Concern, 20 February 2018).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [Word Factbook](#) (accessed 4 September 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Egyptian population (99.7%) are ethnically Egyptian.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with French and English "being widely understood by the educated classes".
- **Urban population:** In 2020, 42.8% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 1.86%
- **Literacy rate:** 71.2% of the population can read and write; with a significant difference between men (76.5%) and women (65.5%) (2017).
- **Youth population:** The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up almost 52% of the population, making it another African country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities
- **IDPs/Refugees:** In 2020, Egypt hosted 130.000 Syrian refugees. In addition, there are 70,000 refugees from the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip residing in the country (2018); as well as roughly 66.000 refugees from Sudan and South Sudan. Other refugees are from Eritrea (18.000), Ethiopia (16.000), Somalia (6900) and Iraq (6700). The number of Internally Displaced Persons stands at 97.000 (2019).
- **Life expectancy:** 73.7 years on average; women (75.3 years), men (72.3 years).

- **Education:** Egyptians enjoy 13 years of schooling on average (2016).

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Egypt ranks #116 out 189 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI). Despite ongoing difficulties, the combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a high score of 0.700. However, Egypt scores slightly lower than the world average.
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.878, women are still clearly disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

The HDI 2019 report also shows that life expectancy is low at 73.7 years of age and expected years of education is also low. Egypt is one of nine countries with the highest illiteracy rates in the world, with adult illiteracy at about 26%, according to the BTI Transformation Index (BTI Egypt 2020, p.15). In addition, poverty, a low level of health awareness and education and high and widespread domestic violence are common for many Egyptians, including Christians. It is common for children in villages to leave school on an early age to help earn family income. Reportedly, many Christian children face discrimination within the educational system from both teachers and peers. Although there are private Christians schools, most Christians cannot afford them. Power dynamics are at play at all levels of society: Muslims oppress Christians, men oppress women, and some church leaders may use their authority to oppress the most vulnerable Christians of other denominations.

Culturally, Egypt is conservative and despite its large urban centers (Cairo and Alexandria) is dominated by tribal attitudes. The population is not as ethnically diverse as other countries in North Africa and the Middle East and has a strong national identity.

Especially with the rise of more radical interpretations of Islam, the pressure on Christians has been increasing over the past few decades. Egypt seeks to be a social and cultural center for Sunni Islam and continues to be influential through its Islamic Al-Azhar University and its media production houses. President al-Sisi called upon scholars at the prestigious Al-Azhar University to fight radicalism and introduce reforms in Islamic teaching. However, in rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are growing in prominence. The government is making efforts to reverse this trend, but has not been very successful so far.

Christians in Egypt report that, although Muslims and Christians have much contact in everyday life, it cannot be called a peaceful co-existence. Although all speak the same language, there is nevertheless considerable division caused by their contrasting belief systems. Radical Muslims in rural areas, where many Christians live, promote attitudes of rejection towards Christians, which is a fertile ground for aggression, especially targeting women and children. Christian women, in rural areas in particular, find themselves targeted by radical Islamic groups and as a result kidnapping for either conversion, ransom or forced marriage is not uncommon.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a serious economic effect on many Christians. Because of existing discrimination, many Christians are self-employed or work in the private sector. Only a small percentage of the Christian population has a job in the (semi-)public sector. Whereas the government continues to pay salaries and pensions, the private sector has come to a complete standstill. Hence, Christians do not profit from this system of continued payment of salaries and pensions. Many Christians have had to use their savings, if they have any, to buy food. 'Garbage City', the slum area where most of Cairo's waste is recycled by around 60.000 Christians ([BBC News, 26 September 2016](#)) has come to a complete standstill. This leaves them more vulnerable than before. Hence, years of discrimination in government employment now result in the Coptic community being disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 48.1% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 41.4% penetration – survey date: December 2019

According to [World Bank's country profile](#) (2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 95.3 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#):

- Egypt is rated as "not free", scoring lower than neighboring Arab countries.
- Egypt's government interferes heavily with elections, with more than 34.000 websites being blocked during the 2019 campaign for the referendum on the new constitution.
- Levels of censorship have increased under President al-Sisi, with many websites being blocked because of their (political content). Journalists and others critical of the regime have been arrested, tortured and imprisoned.

Other sources report:

- [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#) reports that freedom of the press is clearly deteriorating (RSF, 9 September 2020): "The press freedom situation is becoming more and more alarming in Egypt, with frequent waves of raids and arrests. Egypt is now one of the world's biggest jailers of journalists, with some spending years in detention without being charged or tried, and others being sentenced to long jail terms or even life imprisonment in iniquitous mass trials.."
- Data from the Committee to Protect Journalists shows that at least 26 journalists are currently imprisoned in Egypt. In addition, it shows that the number of attacked journalists has strongly increased since President al-Sisi came to power in 2014 ([CPJ, accessed on 9 September 2020](#)).
- According to the [Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression \(AFTE\)](#), the government has blocked access to almost 500 websites, most of them belonging to media organizations (AFTE, 2 July 2018)

Under al-Sisi, media censorship in Egypt has [increased](#) at a drastic pace (Atlantic Council, 28 August 2018). In 2018, the president ratified the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law, which ostensibly aims to combat "extremism" and "terrorism". However, these laws allow Egyptian authorities to arbitrarily block websites that are considered a threat to national security or to the national economy. Individuals who visit these websites can face steep fines and penalties. Although the anti-cyber laws regulate and restrict the press and all other media channels and is restricting freedom of speech, Christians in Egypt report that modern communications technology is widely used in Egypt. Social media (especially Facebook) is used to mobilize public opinion. However, all multimedia is monitored by the government and criticism of the government or Islam is not tolerated. Most churches are currently using little modern technology in youth-work or for evangelistic purposes.

According to [Statista](#), the internet is more accessible to men (Statista, 25 August 2020). In 2018, 52.4% of men had access to the internet, compared to 41.3% of women. The gender gap in relation to mobile phone ownership [stands at 14%](#) with men out in front (Gallup World Poll, 2018). It is therefore harder for women to access digital Christian resources or online Christian communities.

Security situation

The security situation in Egypt is currently stable except in the northeast of the Sinai region, near the border with Gaza, where there has been an increase in violent Islamic militancy. The Egyptian security forces conduct operations against these militant groups on a regular basis. These groups include Islamic State group-affiliated *Wilayat Sinai*, which probably also conducted the terror attack against a Sufi mosque in the north of the Sinai in 2017, killing 305 people. Since then, the Egyptian army has increased its military efforts in the region ([Al Monitor, 7 September 2020](#)). However, it is very difficult to control the entire area and the security forces cannot prevent militant groups from attacking undermanned checkpoints and sometimes civilian targets. Although these violent Islamic groups do present a security threat, for the most part the violence is limited to northern Sinai. Nevertheless, the threat of bomb attacks remains, especially for minority groups (including Christians). It is likely that this situation will continue in the short term.

There is also the threat of protests becoming violent. Minor demonstrations, initiated mostly by the Muslim Brotherhood, occurred on 20 September 2019 in protest against government policies but they were quickly contained by arresting the demonstrators. Fear increased after the security services started checking the mobile phones of ordinary pedestrians who had shared messages about the protest ([Washington Post, 30 October 2019](#)). In March 2020, four activists were arrested after demonstrating for the release of prisoners threatened by the COVID-19 virus in overcrowded prisons ([The Guardian, 18 March 2020](#)). However, due to the very oppressive nature of the regime, protests are scarce.

Most Egyptian Christians support President al-Sisi for the very reason that he has vowed to keep Egypt safe and to [protect](#) the Christian community against terrorist attacks (Egyptian Independent, 28 November 2014). Nonetheless, Christians remain vulnerable, especially in the face of mob attacks. Rumors of alleged blasphemy or the opening of a new church can lead to

mob violence against Christians. Usually, the local authorities use so-called 'reconciliation sessions' to resolve a conflict, which de facto often means that Muslim attackers go free. This has resulted in a culture of impunity for violence against Christians.

A 2020 Coptic Solidarity [report](#) (entitled “Jihad of the womb - Trafficking of Christian Women and Girls in Egypt”) highlights how Coptic women and girls are particularly vulnerable for exploitation across Egypt, with reports of abductions, disappearances and trafficking. Attackers can easily identify Coptic girls as they do not wear Islamic clothing. Whilst some are kidnapped directly off the street, others are approached by Muslim men who lure them into romantic relationships and entice them into eloping with them, promising they would convert to Christianity; many girls are then forcibly married (often not to the man she eloped with) or sold on, and forcibly converted to Islam. Captors have reportedly filmed the girls being sexually abused and used the footage as blackmail material to deter them from returning to their families, utilizing the strong [shame culture](#) in Egypt to their advantage (J Zakarriya, 2019, Journal of International Women’s Studies). The response by Egyptian police has been [dismissive and ineffective](#), particularly in instances where Christian girls displayed initial willingness to elope (World Watch Monitor, 14 September 2017). Additionally, conversion to Islam is always accepted and encouraged.

Trends analysis

1) Egypt continues to be susceptible to the influence of radical Islam

Egypt is an important country in the region due to its strategic location, its territorial and population size and because of its historical and diplomatic influence. The Church is also of critical importance since the Christian presence in Egypt is the largest surviving Christian population in the region. Throughout the 20th century and beyond, it seems that competing visions of the Egyptian state have been vying for dominance in the country. One vision (advanced by the army and political establishment) puts more emphasis on nationalism as opposed to religion, while on the other hand Islamists (including the Muslim Brotherhood) want to make religion the foundation and central element of Egyptian identity. Both visions have offered Egyptian Christians little by way of rights and security and as the competition between these two camps unfolds, Egyptian Christians are often caught in the political crossfire and forced to make difficult choices. The high level of illiteracy, economic stagnation and demographic pressure also means that - regardless of the political dispensation in the country - Egyptian society continues to be susceptible to the influence of the most radical and intolerant versions of Islam that are particularly appealing to the youth and the poor.

2) Christians continue to experience vulnerability and insecurity

Despite the government's efforts to tackle the violent attacks that have targeted Christians, the sense of vulnerability and insecurity that has become pervasive among Christians in Egypt is likely to persist in the foreseeable future. The extent to which such attacks will continue or increase will determine the trajectory of the persecution dynamics in Egypt. The non-violent forms of rights violations that are prevalent in various spheres of life are likely to continue without much change for the better.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Egypt country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13313370>
- Recent history: support - <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/marching-in-circles-egypt-s-dangerous-second-transition.pdf>
- Recent history: intervened - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23173794>
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- Political and legal landscape: view church buildings - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/11/egypt-series-of-fires-in-their-churches-not-a-coincidence-say-copts/>
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- Political and legal landscape: Middle East Concern - <https://meconcern.org/countries/egypt/>
- Political and legal landscape: reservation to Article 16 - https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Egypt%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: 2008 Child law - http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=79736&p_country=EGY&p_count=537
- Political and legal landscape: steadily risen since 2012 - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/egypt/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- Political and legal landscape: 17% - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/egypt/>
- Political and legal landscape: custody - https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Egypt%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf
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- Security situation: report - <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/jihad-of-the-womb-report-fa.pdf>
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WWL 2021: Church information / Egypt

Christian origins

The Coptic (= Egyptian) Orthodox Church prides itself in the tradition which names the apostle Mark as founder of Christianity in Egypt. In Alexandria, a vibrant church developed with its own 'school' of theology in the 2nd century. This was home to the Church Father, Athanasius of Alexandria (+ 373 AD), who was one of the foremost theologians of the worldwide church, especially for his defence of the view of God as a Trinity. Initially, the church was mainly a Greek phenomenon in the cities, but the original Egyptian population was soon won over for the new faith as well. Egypt became the cradle of monasticism; the Monastery of St Anthony became an important model for monasticism throughout Europe.

Persecution under Roman occupation was often severe in Egypt. This is why the Coptic calendar begins with 284 AD as its first year: In that year Diocletian became Emperor of Rome. His reign was marked by the torture and mass executions of Christians, especially in Egypt. After Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, the Coptic Christians were soon in trouble with the Empire since their theology was branded as heretical at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). Arab armies then conquered Egypt (639-646 AD) and this led to more periods of severe persecution under Islam. The Church became focused on survival, instead of playing a public role in society. In the 10th century, the Coptic Christians had decreased in number, making up about half of the population.

The British colonial role in Egypt (1882-1952) gave much freedom to Christians. After the Revolution of 1952 this freedom has been steadily eroded and there have been short periods in which Christians have faced severe violations of religious freedom, but this has always been a local phenomenon and not driven by the state.

Currently, the vast majority of Christians in Egypt (well over 90%) belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Roman Catholic Church entered Egypt in the 17th century through the missionary activity of the Capuchins and Jesuits. In 1847 the Anglicans began working in the country, followed by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1854. Many other independent church groups and missionaries have followed since, adding to the rich variety of Egyptian church life.

Church spectrum today

Egypt: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox		92.8
Catholic		3.0
Protestant		5.3

Independent	1.3
Unaffiliated	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-2.5
Total	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>	
Evangelical movement	4.4
Renewalist movement	7.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020).

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 Coptic Orthodox Church remains the largest Christian denomination in Egypt with more than 90% of the Christian population. The Coptic Evangelical Church and the Coptic Roman Catholic Church are the two other main denominations in Egypt.

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Egypt

Reporting period

01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Egypt: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	75	16
WWL 2020	76	16

WWL 2019	76	16
WWL 2018	70	17
WWL 2017	65	21

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The one-point drop in score in WWL 2021 was caused mainly by fewer killings being reported. The lower number of incidents could be the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as Egyptians were told to stay at home as much as possible. The level of violence against Christians remains extremely high, with at least 8 Christians being killed and 82 attacked, among other reported incidents.

Persecution engines

Egypt: 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	Medium
Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very weak

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):

In Egypt, *Islamic oppression* operates in different ways. Islamic culture sustains a view in Egyptian society whereby Christians are regarded as second-class citizens. This view causes the discrimination of Christians in the political realm and their dealing with the state. It also creates an environment in which the state is reluctant to respect and enforce the fundamental rights of Christians. In the family sphere, converts to Christianity face great pressure to renounce their

faith. Christians also face pressure from *Islamic oppression* in their daily lives in their local neighborhood or at work. There have also been several violent attacks perpetrated by militant Islamic groups targeting Christians in the recent past. Nonetheless, the activity of such militant groups is largely concentrated in north-eastern Sinai.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

The tradition of authoritarian rule is perhaps the only permanent feature in Egypt's political system, which experienced three regime changes in just three years (2011-2014). All of Egypt's rulers have had an authoritarian government style. In 2011, Mubarak's long dictatorship was ended through massive social protests, which eventually led to the controversial election of the Muslim Brotherhood. The government led by Mohamed Morsi did not behave democratically and was ousted by a national uprising supported by the army in 2013. Currently, Egypt is ruled by a civilian government led by former army chief Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, after a presidential election in May 2014 and reelection in March 2018. This government seems to regard basic human rights and democratic pluralism as a low priority in view of the huge current economic, political, social and security challenges. In this context, therefore, religious freedom for Christians is not fully guaranteed.

Clan oppression (Medium):

Although only few commentators see an ethnic distinction between (Christian) Copts and (Islamic) Arabs, Christians and Muslims act as two distinct groups in Egyptian society. As in many other Arab countries, tribal thinking strongly influences group thinking and this can easily lead to verbal and physical violence being aimed against those outside the group. In Upper Egypt for instance, many cases of mob violence happen when Christians try to implement the official recognition of a church building. There is a mixture of *Islamic oppression* and *Clan oppression* in such cases which necessitates that the Christian minority has to operate carefully. In addition, converts from a Muslim background face pressure in particular from their (extended) family for shaming values like the honor of the family.

Drivers of persecution

Egypt: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	MEDIUM	WEAK	-	-	STRONG	VERY WEAK
Government officials	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Egypt: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	MEDIUM	WEAK	-	-	STRONG	VERY WEAK
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- **One's own (extended) family (Very strong):** Family members of converts regard their conversion from Islam to Christianity as betrayal of Islam, while Islam is seen as the all-encompassing pillar of society; something you cannot breakaway from. Those strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for family members to target relations who convert to Christianity.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Radical Islamic preachers who propagate hatred play a crucial role in sustaining a climate of intolerance and in fuelling hostility against Christians.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** Militant Islamic groups (such as the Islamic State group) are responsible for many of the most gruesome acts of violence targeting Christians.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs (Strong):** Ordinary people whose views are shaped by intolerant and radical imams are significant drivers of persecution and contribute the lion's share of the pressure that Christians face in their daily lives in their local neighborhoods and at work. Societal hostility and prejudice against Christians are more pronounced in the poorer and rural parts of the country.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials also act as drivers of intolerance, discrimination and persecution through their failure to vindicate the rights of Christians (e.g. protecting Christians from mob attacks) and also through discriminatory acts which violate the fundamental rights of Christians (e.g. their refusal to acknowledge conversion from Islam to Christianity).

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials, including judicial officers, local administrative officials as well those belonging to various branches of the security apparatus in Egypt are the principal drivers here. The administration of President al-Sisi is attempting to shore up its support with the majority of the population and hold on to power. Thus, despite its promises to the contrary, the government has actually maintained existing restrictions on the freedom of religion of Egyptian Christians. Church leaders in Egypt are also constantly monitored and under surveillance by the state. In addition, the freedom of speech has been extremely restricted for all Egyptians by the al-Sisi government. Hence, Christians cannot speak out against injustices and violations.

Drivers of Clan oppression:

- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** In a context of tribal thinking based around Islamic faith, family members often regard conversion from Islam to Christianity as betrayal of the family and a shame to the family honor, which needs to be corrected.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** The tendency to see conversion from Islam as a betrayal of both Islam and family, is strengthened by radical and intolerant imams and other group leaders when they call upon local Muslims to protect their faith (group) against the other group, the Christians.
- **Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs (Medium):** Wider society functions as a watchdog to make sure that the honor and power of the tribe is protected. This is especially the case in rural areas. Even allegations that another group, the Christians, are being given more space in society (e.g. by having their church legitimized) can ignite mob attacks.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Upper Egypt, the southern part of the country, is known to be more Islamically conservative and radical than the north. Most incidents and mob attacks take place in this region, with the Minya Governate being the most notorious and having the highest number of attacks on Christians. However, Christians in the economically disadvantaged rural areas in the north experience a similar degree of oppression by radical Muslims, especially in the Nile delta villages and towns. Radical Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood have nationwide support, but violent Islamic militants are only openly active in the north-eastern area of the Sinai peninsula.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians in Egypt are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

The largest church in this category is the Coptic Orthodox Church. There are also established Protestant denominations throughout the country. The large Coptic minority, while facing important difficulties (including discrimination in education, health and government legislation

that hinders essential aspects of church life), has been tolerated by the state and by the Muslim majority in the country because of its historical presence and its significant size of several million. In recent years, this has changed, however, causing historical Christian communities to be targeted both by their surrounding neighborhoods and by radical Islamic groups.

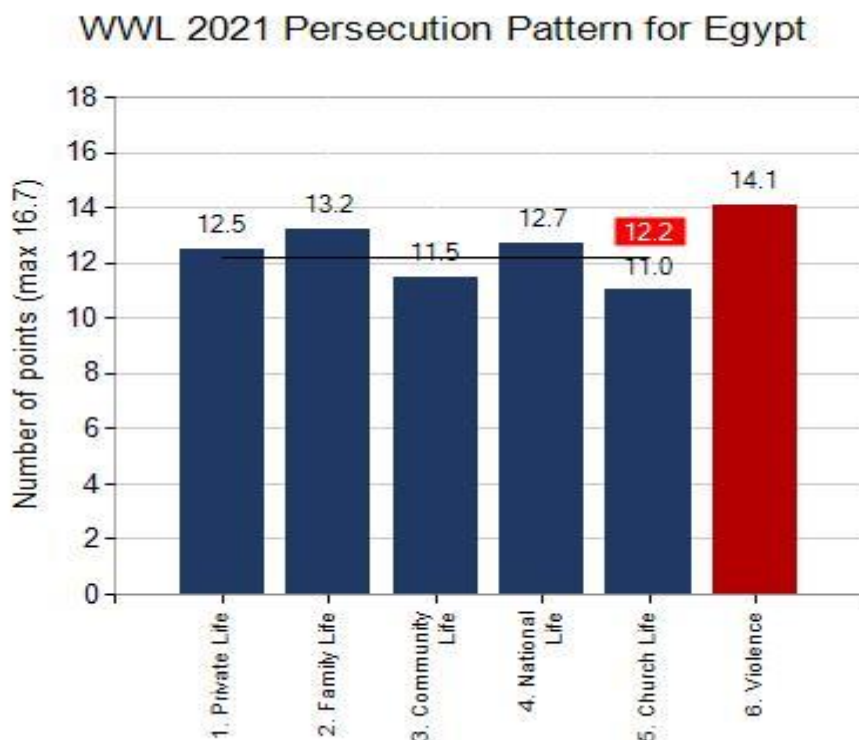
Converts to Christianity:

There is a small but growing number of Christian converts who bear the brunt of violations, most often at the hands of family members. The latter punish converts for abandoning the Islamic faith, often by means of beatings or house expulsion.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are several Evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the country, some of them being 2nd, 3rd or even further generations of converts from a Muslim background. Others come from an Orthodox background. They face pressure from both the Islamic society and to a lesser extent from the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Egypt shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.2 points), rising from 11.9 points in WWL 2020.
- All *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, which is highest in the *Family* and *National spheres of life*. The very high score of 13.2 points for *Family life* reflects in

particular the difficulties converts from Islam to Christianity face concerning Christian weddings, baptisms and funerals. The very high score for *National life* reflects the levels of discrimination all Christians face - and especially those with a Muslim background - when engaging with the authorities. The danger of being accused of blasphemy, followed by mob violence, is always present, while the police and other authorities will often side with the accusers and attackers in order to retain public order.

- The score for violence is at an extreme level, decreasing slightly from 16.1 points in WWL 2020 to 14.1 in WWL 2021.

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 2021 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: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)

Conversion from Islam to Christianity ('apostasy') is not officially forbidden by law. However, a key ruling by the Cairo Administrative Court in 2008 stated that the freedom to practice one's religion is subject to certain limitations, and affirmed that conversion from Islam to another faith is a violation of the principles of Islam and therefore not allowed. In addition, conversion is punished via the blasphemy laws. Societal hostility to converts is very high and mere rumors of conversion can lead to mob violence, especially in rural areas. Conversion is seen as a huge shame for the honor of the family and family members will often cast out converts, try to get them to recant their faith or even kill them.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

The use of Christian symbols, for example in cars, has decreased due to the fear of violent acts against Christians. Most, if not all, Coptic Christians wear a tattooed cross on their wrist or arm, which is used for recognition, i.e. to enter a church. However, it also makes them easily recognizable for attackers. Converts from Islam to Christianity have to be careful in particular, as wearing Christian symbols could lead to discovery of their new faith or lead to uneasy questions from family members or society.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

Accusations of blasphemy are easily made, so most Christians refrain from discussing their faith with people they do not know or trust. Discussing their faith can easily be interpreted as an

attempt to proselytize, which is heavily opposed by society. However, converts face the highest risk since discussing Christian faith can lead to discovery of their conversion.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.00 points)

In the recent past, several converts from a Muslim background who openly declared their Christian faith on social media have been arrested. Most converts refrain from publishing anything indicating their new faith, mainly out of fear of repercussions from family or society. On another note, the blasphemy law is widely used to target those who are criticizing Islam. Several Christians have been arrested or have been the victim of mob violence after allegedly insulting Islam on social media. Nonetheless, many Christians share large quantities of Bible verses, Christian images and other Christian content on social media.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

It is very difficult, if not impossible, for converts from Islam to Christianity to change the religious registration on their ID cards. The registered religion of the father is automatically applied to the child. Hence, the child is registered as Muslim. If both parents are converts, their wedding is invalid under Egyptian law and the children are considered to be illegitimate.

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

Children of converts from Islam to Christianity have to attend Islamic religious classes, as their conversion is not recognized. However, other Christian children also face difficulties, as the Egyptian curriculum is heavily influenced by Islamic teaching. Christians have their own Christian religion classes, but they still have to learn verses of Islamic literature and parts of the Quran at school. Some of the educational material contains anti-Christian teachings. Children of privileged Christians can avoid this by attending private Christian-run schools, but this is only financially possible for some parents.

Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (3.25 points)

This is an issue that mainly concerns converts from a Muslim background. The pressure from family members and society to divorce a convert is high, also due to the legal implications. If the spouse does not agree to divorce, the convert will anyway lose all inheritance and guardianship rights according to Sharia law.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.00 points)

Converts from Islam to Christianity face the biggest challenges in this regard. As their conversion is not recognized in any way, neither by government nor society, it is very difficult for them to

get married with a Christian ceremony (which is done in secret or in a foreign country). Under Sharia law, a Christian man cannot marry a Muslim woman. So the children of a Christian man married to a convert woman, will be regarded as born out of wedlock. Converts will have to register their children as Muslim upon birth.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.50 points)

Discrimination of and hostility against Christians is pervasive and can be felt in all areas of life. Civil servants at all levels and large segments of society are unwilling to accept Christians as peers with the same rights and guarantees of safety. Although all women in Egypt may experience some forms of (sexual) harassment, Christian women are particularly vulnerable because they do not veil themselves. Levels of pressure and discrimination vary; there is often less pressure in urban areas compared to rural areas.

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

This discrimination occurs at different levels. Christians are not employed within the intelligence agencies, and cannot serve on senior positions within the army or police force. Christians are also underrepresented in senior government positions. Job discrimination in private employment depends on the level of tolerance of the employer, but happens regularly. Such discrimination has led to a high level of entrepreneurial activity among Copts and other Christians, since they cannot rely on the state or even private (non-Christian) employers for employment. Finally, although constituting more than 10% of the population, there has not been a single Christian player in Egypt's national team in a decade and Christians are discriminated against and denied opportunities to play in the top professional football clubs in the country.

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

Monitoring occurs at different levels. Local communities and Islamist groups know where the Christians live in their neighborhood or villages. They watch and observe them, making sure the Christians do not disrespect Islamic principles by evangelizing or causing problems in others ways. This tension is less in urban places, but remains a problem in poor neighborhoods and rural areas, especially in Upper Egypt. In recent years, several Christians have been attacked after allegedly insulting Islam or allegedly having a relationship with a Muslim woman. Police presence and government control is less strict in poor and/or rural areas and mob attacks often go unpunished. At the state level, security and intelligence agencies spy on converts and try to force them to supply information on the activities of convert groups.

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.00 points)

The practice of so-called 'customary reconciliation councils' is relevant here. After Christians or churches have been attacked, (local) authorities often force Christians to accept a meeting before such a council instead of requesting the prosecutor to prosecute the attackers. Christians often have to accept the terms imposed by these councils, which in most cases benefit the perpetrators at the cost of the Christian victims. In some cases, the Christians are even forced to sell their houses and leave the village. Despite intentions for peaceful reconciliation, in reality these councils perpetrate a climate of impunity and encourage further attacks.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

Sharia law is "the principle source of legislation", according to the Constitution. Hence, converts from Islam to Christianity are not protected by the Constitution, although Article 64 states that "Freedom of belief is absolute". Recognized Christians are free to manage their own personal status laws and religious affairs, but Sharia law also applies in cases between a Muslim and a non-Muslim.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.50 points)

Although conversion is not forbidden by law, it is heavily opposed in practice. If converts try to officially change their religious registration, it is highly likely that the authorities will put them under surveillance and prosecute them under the blasphemy laws.

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

There are two major concerns for Christians when expressing their views in public: First, to be careful not to insult or criticize Islam in any way. Even alleged blasphemy can lead to mob violence or prosecution. Secondly, President al-Sisi's government has developed into a strict dictatorship. Speaking out against the government can lead to arrest, torture and imprisonment.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.00 points)

This is common in many areas of the country where perpetrators of mobbing and looting go unpunished either through deliberate 'turning a blind eye' or through the use of customary reconciliation councils (see explanation to Block 3.12). In addition, mistreatment of converts by family members is considered to be a family issue. Converts do not receive any protection from the government and can even be killed by their family members with virtual impunity.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points)

Depending on the part of the country, Christian outside activities (such as activities for children) can be organized in a discreet manner. However, churches often refrain from holding processions in the street out of fear of attack by radical groups or mobs, since such processions might be interpreted as displaying a threat to Islam.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 points)

There is strong opposition against conversion and proselytizing. Churches rarely accept converts into their meetings, in order to avoid troubles with both the government and society. Accusations of proselytizing are easily made and can lead to attacks on churches, followed by the closure of the church for 'security reasons'.

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

It is common practice for the police and intelligence agencies to request a schedule of all events happening in the church. Moreover, they have the authority to cancel any of the events under the rationale of protecting national security. In addition, police in plain clothes sometimes attend church services to monitor what is said during sermons. In addition, many churches face opposition or even violence from society, especially when they are trying to legitimize their church building under the 2016 Church Construction Law.

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

Despite the legitimization of over a thousand churches under the 2016 Church Construction Law, many churches are still awaiting recognition. In many other villages with a Christian population, Christians do not even have a church. There are still many administrative obstacles (such as security clearances) when Christians want to build a church and opposition from society is in many cases strong.

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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol "x" denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.

Egypt: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	8	23
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10	18
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	26	22
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	2
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10	48
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10	1000
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	1	100
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	19	57
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?	9	33
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?	3	9
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10	10
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	7	9

For the WWL 2021 reporting period:

Christians killed: No major terrorist attack happened during WWL 2021, as happened in previous years. However, the killing of at least 8 Christians has been reported, mainly in Upper Egypt. In some cases, their Christian faith was the clear reason for the murder. In other cases, it is very plausible that they have been killed because of their faith as Christians are viewed as second-class citizens and murdering a Christian can often be done with impunity, especially in Upper Egypt.

Christians attacked: Many Christians have been attacked and sometimes severely wounded because of their faith. At least ten girls or women have been abducted and sexually abused, while several have been forced to marry Muslims. In addition, hundreds have experienced sexual harassment. Reportedly, Christian girls are targeted in a systematic way, with their kidnappers sometimes being paid per victim.

Christians arrested: Several Christians have been arrested. They were in most cases the victims of a mob attack and arrested to satisfy their attackers' demands and to de-escalate the situation. At least one Christian has been imprisoned after being accused of blasphemy.

Churches attacked: Several churches have been attacked or have been closed by the police, which often happens after mobs have attacked a church and/or the church was unlicensed. At least three church buildings were burned down.

Christian homes/shops attacked: During mob violence, several houses and shops belonging to Christians were attacked and damaged. In other cases, individual shops and houses were targeted for attack.

Impunity for attackers: Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished.

5 Year trends

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

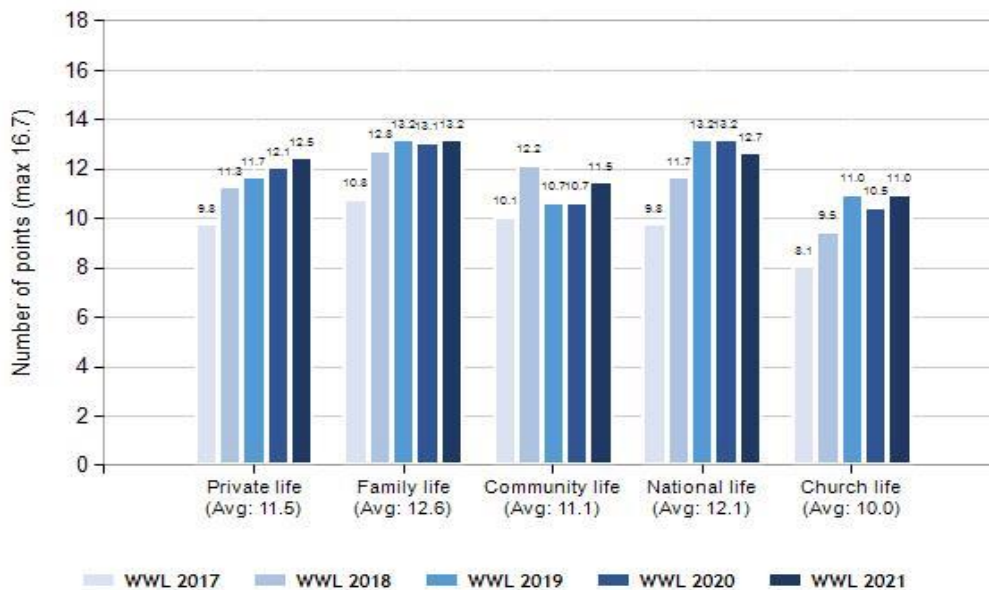
5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows that the average pressure on Christians in Egypt increased at first and now seems to be levelling off between 11.9 and 12.2 points.

Egypt: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	12.2
2020	11.9
2019	12.0
2018	11.5
2017	9.7

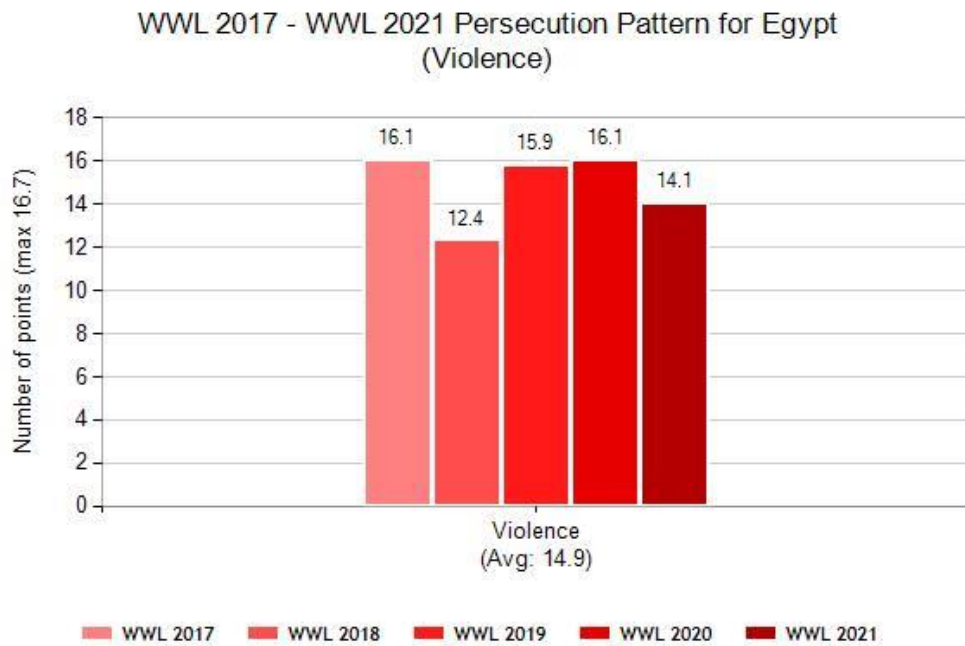
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Egypt (Spheres of life)



The chart above shows that the levels of pressure on Christians in the individual *spheres of life* have in most cases risen steadily and then levelled off in the last three reporting periods (except for Private life). The sharp increase in pressure from 9.8 to 12.7 in the *National sphere* reflects the fact that the situation for Christians has not improved under the rule of President al-Sisi. Christians are discriminated against in public life and speaking out against such violations can have serious consequences.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The table above shows that all the scores for violence have been at an extreme level, with three reporting periods scoring 15.9 points or above.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points

Abduction

Denied access to social community/networks

Denied custody of children

Enforced religious dress code

Forced marriage

Incarceration by family (house arrest)

Targeted Seduction

Violence – death

Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

There have been [numerous](#) reports that Christian women are targeted for marriage by abduction, rape and forced conversion by Islamist networks, mainly in rural areas, villages and southern towns (Coptic Solidarity, 2020, “Jihad of the Womb - Trafficking of Coptic Women and Girls in Egypt”). Police response has been often complicit or apathetic and many women remain missing. The psychological toll is high, and many women live in fear, especially in rural areas. They feel as though they cannot leave the house by themselves and that they constantly need male company for protection.

There are also reports that Christian girls are lured into marriage; these girls are often underage and come from vulnerable families. Traditional practices do not help in this regard: Early marriage is part of the [norm](#) in more rural and traditional societies (Egypt Independent, 21 November 2018). Older married Christian women whose husbands regularly work away have also been targeted. “Muslims know about these lonely women” a country expert explained, “and use their need for love, financial need, and lack of awareness to get into a relationship with these women then convert them to Islam.” This also serves to devastate their husbands.

Female converts from Islam are most vulnerable to freedom of religion violations. They may be isolated and locked in the home, physically beaten, tortured or even killed to defend the family honor. If married, they will very likely be divorced by their Muslim husbands, leaving them without any financial support. The custody of their children may be taken from them, as well as inheritance rights, although an important [legal case](#) in 2019 may diminish scope for this abuse in future years (The Times, 27 Nov 2019).

Egypt has had a reputation for having relatively high rates of sexual harassment and violence within the Middle East. Due to international pressure and internal activists, there have been some [improvements](#) in protection for those reporting sexual abuse (Reuters, 16 Aug 2020). Official statistics for past years are lacking, in part because women and girls refrain from reporting incidents [out of fear](#) of retaliation and the stigma attached to sexual abuse (Library of Congress, accessed 2 December 2020). Giving some indication of a baseline from which these improvements have come, a 2013 survey (UN Women, “Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in Egypt,” p.6), reported that over 99% of women in Egypt have experienced sexual harassment, regardless of what they wear or what their religion is.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
False charges
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

Christians in Egypt often feel they are being treated as second class citizens in a Muslim-majority country. Exemplifying this, the number of Christian in senior military or Government positions is minimal. Unemployment is a great pressure on men throughout the country, but especially in Upper Egypt. Particularly in rural areas, it is hard for Christian young men to find a job. In one town, a Christian man started a business selling desserts. In response a Muslim started selling the same product and told other Muslims not to buy from the man, because he was a Christian. His business consequently failed. Further exemplifying economic discrimination, Christian men can experience discrimination simply due to their conspicuously Christian names.

According to [Coptic Solidarity](#) (9 September 2019), of 540 players playing in top level clubs in 2019, only one was a Copt, despite Copts making up 10% of the Egyptian population. As the main financial provider, this hinders a Christian man's ability to provide and impacts his self-confidence, which in turn affects his family. The strain of these dynamics has reportedly caused higher rates of domestic violence and divorce. Perpetrators have also used these financial difficulties to convert younger men to Islam, luring them with financial incentives.

There were ongoing reports of abductions of men in the WWL 2021 reporting period, most of whom were kidnapped for ransom. Church leaders - most of whom are male - are particularly vulnerable to rights violations, in part as they are easily identifiable as Christians. The killing of clergy evokes feelings of fear and helplessness in the Christian community and leads to a spike in emigration. Those who speak out against injustices are also targeted. In November 2019, Ramy Kamel, a Christian journalist and activist was arrested for his continued reporting on violence and discrimination against Christians in Egypt. He has since been charged for "joining a terrorist organization" and "spreading false news".

Social media can also trigger physical violence and arrest. In August of 2020 a 65-year-old Christian was arrested and jailed for a 'blasphemous' post on Facebook. Coptic activists and researchers have also been arrested for "undermining social order".

Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious groups facing intolerance, discrimination and persecution in Egypt include Shia and Sufi Muslims, Bahai, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. Shia Muslims are particularly targeted by Sunni militants, making it dangerous for them to worship and practice their faith openly. Mormons, Bahai and Jehovah's Witnesses are denied recognition by the authorities, hence making it difficult for them to have places of worship. The missionary zeal and corresponding activities of such groups are considered illegal and thus adherents face hostility both from state officials and society, including Christian Egyptians.

In its [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (last updated 3 November 2020) Humanist International writes: "Egyptian State ID cards include a section on religion and only members of the three 'divine religions' can be recognized. Many elderly members of Bahai or other minority communities further lack birth and marriage certificates. In 2009 the situation slightly improved, when two Bahais were given permission to use a dash ('-') in the religion section. [...] Muslim-born individuals who leave Islam are not allowed to change the religion field on their identity card."

A clear example of violence against other religious minorities happened in November 2017, when Sunni militants attacked a crowded Sufi mosque in the Sinai peninsula, killing over 300. (Source: [New York Times](#), 24 November 2017)

In addition, atheists are very prone to violations, especially those active in social media networks. For example, blogger and atheist Sherif Gaber has been arrested and tortured several times by the Egyptian authorities ([Inside Arabia, 2 November 2019](#)).

Other sources report:

According to the US State Department's 2019 International Religious Freedom report ([IRF 2019 Egypt, p.6, 11, 13](#)):

- "The law does not recognize the Baha'i Faith or its religious laws and bans Baha'i institutions and community activities. Although the government lists "Christian" on the identity cards of Jehovah's Witnesses, a presidential decree bans all Jehovah's Witnesses' activities."
- "Efforts to combat atheism sometimes received official support, including from multiple members of parliament, although in late 2018 President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi stated individuals have the "right to worship God" as they see fit or "even worship nothing."
- "According to Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), an international NGO, there continued to be no husseiniyahs in the country and Shia Muslims remained unable to establish public places of worship. According to MRGI, "The state has failed to respect the right of the Shia to practice their religious rituals" and that security services often subjected Shia citizens traveling on religious pilgrimages to interrogations, sometimes including

torture. Shia risked accusations of blasphemy for publicly voicing their religious opinions, praying in public, or owning books promoting Shia thought. Shia Muslims said they were excluded from service in the armed services and security and intelligence services.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians - as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression:

There have been no successful major attacks against Christians since the November 2018 bus attack. Nonetheless, marginalization and legal obstacles will continue to pressure the Church and the Egyptian Christians. Discrimination is likely to continue, especially in Upper Egypt. Converts from Islam to Christianity will continue facing the most severe violations from their own families, as well as from society and the government.

Clan oppression:

It is unlikely that the majority of society will ever recognize Christians as equal citizens with equal rights. Generally, Egyptians are expected to be Sunni Muslims and any deviation is seen as betrayal. Converts from Islam to Christianity will continue to be very vulnerable.

Dictatorial paranoia:

Most Christians are happy that Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi was ousted. However, incumbent President al-Sisi does not seem to have the political will or power to improve the situation and security of the Christian community significantly. This can also be seen in the arrest of Coptic activist Ramy Kamel in Cairo on 23 November 2019 for his continued reporting on violence and discrimination against Christians in (Upper) Egypt. He has been charged with "joining a terrorist organization" and "spreading false news" ([Coptic Solidarity, 26 November 2019](#)).

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: numerous reports - <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/jihad-of-the-womb-report-fa.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: norm - <https://egyptindependent.com/child-marriage-in-egypt-reaches-117000-children-capmas/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: legal case - <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/woman-overturms-arab-inheritance-rules-jcv3g2qr9>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: improvements - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-women-metoo/egypt-approves-law-to-protect-identities-of-women-reporting-sex-abuse-idUSKCN25C0SC>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: out of fear - <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/sexual-violence-against-women/egypt.php>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Coptic Solidarity - <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2019/09/08/coptic-solidarity-urges-fifa-and-the-egyptian-football-association-to-end-discrimination-against-coptic-athletes/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/egypt/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: New York Times - <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/mosque-attack-egypt.html>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: Inside Arabia, 2 November 2019 - <https://insidearabia.com/atheist-egyptian-blogger-jailed-for-expressing-his-views/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRF 2019 Egypt, p.6, 11, 13. - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/egypt/>
- Future outlook: Coptic Solidarity, 26 November 2019 - <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2019/11/26/coptic-rights-activist-ramy-kamel-arrested-in-cairo/%20>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>

E.g. [EGYPT – A Church under Siege – 2017](#)
and [Egypt UPDATE 2020](#)

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Egypt>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Egypt>