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## Tunisia: Country Dossier

December 2020



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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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	-	-

## Copyright notice

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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 / Tunisia

## Brief country details

Tunisia: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
11,903,000	23,100	0.2

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

Tunisia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	26
WWL 2020	64	34
WWL 2019	63	37
WWL 2018	62	30
WWL 2017	61	29

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

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

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

A journalist [who has investigated](#) the situation of Tunisian Christians in depth states: "Tunisian Christians face discrimination and targeting that is often obscure and hidden to the public eye. It affects their day-to-day lives. Because of their Christian identities, many experience job insecurity, abandonment from family, friends and even fiancés; they are victims of verbal, mental and physical abuse." (Hwang P, Underground - The plight of a religious minority living in a Muslim society, April 2016)

Due to the factors mentioned above, most Tunisian converts to Christianity cannot worship openly and choose to hide their faith. The hostility and pressure they face from society at large makes it dangerous for them to share their faith with their family members, relatives, neighbors, friends or colleagues. They also find it difficult to gather for worship and fellowship due to the risks any possible exposure would entail, while being monitored by the Tunisian security services.

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

- Several Tunisian Christians were detained and interrogated about their activities.
- Several house churches have been attacked by individual Islamic radicals, spreading fear in the wider Christian community.
- At least one Christian Tunisian family had to rebury a deceased family member because because of complaints by neighbors.
- At least one church was sprayed with graffiti containing hate speech.
- Because of restrictions caused by the COVID-19 crisis, Tunisian Christians experienced higher levels of family pressure, especially those living isolated with Muslim family members.

## External Links - Short country profile

- Brief description of the persecution situation: who has investigated - <http://underground.priscillahwang.com/>

# WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Tunisia

## Link for general background information

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

## Recent history

For centuries, Tunisia has had a strategical position in the Mediterranean region. Its original capital, Carthage, was once the arch-enemy of ancient Rome, until it was completely destroyed at the end of the [Punic Wars](#) in 146 BC (Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed 2 July 2020). The Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs and the Ottomans all included Tunisia as a province in their respective empires, until it became a French protectorate in 1883. Tunisia gained independence from France in 1956. The first president, Habib Bourguiba, [introduced secular influences](#) such as the emancipation of women (BBC Country profile, accessed 2 July 2020). In 1987, President

Bourguiba was replaced by President Ben Ali, who ruled Tunisia until he was ousted from power through the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011.

In 2011, an interim government took over and a new constitution was approved in January 2014; presidential and parliamentary elections followed in December 2014. A coalition of secularist and Islamist parties emerged from the elections, but the new government struggled to deal with both security and economic challenges. However, even more concerning was the [infighting](#) within the political parties (The Washington Institute, 6 November 2018), resulting in October 2019 with the election of a total outsider as president. While not giving clarity on many issues, newly elected President Kais Saied vowed to combat corruption and poverty. Saied is a law professor and known to be socially conservative, although he also [promised](#) to advance women's rights (Al-Monitor, 23 October 2019).

Parliamentary elections also took place in October 2019, with the Islamist Ennahda party winning most seats in parliament (52 out of the 217). However, this was 17 seats less than in the 2014 elections. The new secular 'Heart of Tunisia' party came in second with 38 seats. Since then, three different governments have been formed, with incumbent Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi currently leading a cabinet of mainly technocrats ([Africa News, 25 August 2020](#)). The rapid changes in government have led to political instability and have especially increased the power and position of the president.

Tunisia's Christians from a Muslim background remain socially marginalized in the meantime and are kept under surveillance by the security services.

## Political and legal landscape

Tunisia has a unitary semi-presidential system; this means it has only a House of Representatives as the legislative part of the government, a president as Head of State and a prime minister as head of government.

Tunisia is considered by Economist Intelligence Unit ([EIU, Democracy Index 2019](#)) to be a flawed democracy (in a ranking ranging from: "full democracy", "flawed democracy", "hybrid regime" and "authoritarian state"). Nonetheless, Tunisia still has a more democratic and legitimate government than any other country in the region. Despite that, FFP's [Fragile State Index 2020](#) has Tunisia's cohesion indicators scoring high and reflects how the ruling elite has not yet managed to build trust among the general population. The 27% difference in turnout between the 2014 parliamentary elections (69%) and the 2019 parliamentary elections (42%) would seem to prove this point. In this sense, Tunisia is still struggling with its revolution of 2011. Hence, political indicators show that state legitimacy remains low even though other indicators, most notably human rights, show signs of improvement.

The key challenges for the government are the activities of militant Islamic groups in the region and the necessary revitalization of the economy. If the government succeeds in keeping the former at bay, while improving the latter and decreasing unemployment structurally, Tunisia could be regarded as the most successful country to emerge from the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.



According to [Middle East Concern](#) (MEC, accessed 28 September 2020):

- "Tunisia's constitution of January 2014 established Islam as the State religion and stipulates that the president must be a Muslim. It upholds the principle of non-discrimination. The constitution obligates the State to guarantee freedom of conscience and religion and to protect the exercise of religious practices, provided such practices are consistent with public order. In order to uphold values of moderation and tolerance, accusations of apostasy by one Muslim against another are prohibited. Proselytism and blasphemy are effectively prohibited. ... Civil personal status laws are codified, though judicial authorities have regularly also drawn on Islamic law in personal status matters. However, legal changes announced by President Essebsi in September 2017 strengthen the civil codes, for example by allowing civil marriage between Tunisian women and foreign men, including non-Muslims."

Christianity is regarded as a foreign religion by the government and there is no formal recognition of indigenous church communities.

## Religious landscape

Tunisia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	23,100	0.2
Muslim	11,844,000	99.5
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	90	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	1,900	0.0
Bahai	2,400	0.0
Atheist	3,900	0.0
Agnostic	27,800	0.2
Other	190	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)

According to World Christian Database, 99.5% of Tunisians are Muslims, virtually all being adherents of Sunni Islam, with most following the [Maliki tradition](#) (Global Security, accessed 29 September 2020). This is one of the largest groups within the Sunni tradition. A major center of Maliki teaching from the 9th to 11th centuries was in the Mosque of Uqba in Tunisia. There are also very small Bahai and Jewish minorities in Tunisia.

Despite the French legacy of *laïcité* (French: secularism) among the urban and educated elite, Islam is very influential and the Constitution recognizes Islam as state religion. Christianity and Judaism are the most significant minority religions, although the number of agnostics/atheists is greater than both. The number of Christians with a Muslim background are growing in number in Tunisia. This gradual growth of the Church has become noticeable since the 1990s.

According to Humanists International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (updated 25 September 2020):

- "The government subsidizes mosques and pays the salaries of imams. Local religious committees and imams must be approved by the religious affairs directorate. The president appoints the grand mufti of the state. The government allows the Jewish community to worship freely and pays the salary of the grand rabbi. It also provides some security for all synagogues and partially subsidizes some restoration and maintenance costs. The government recognizes all Christian and Jewish religious organizations established before independence in 1956. The government permits [*expatriate*] Christian churches to operate freely, and formally recognizes the Roman Catholic Church through a 1964 concordat with the Holy See."

According to [Middle East Concern](#) (MEC, accessed 28 September 2020):

- "Both expatriate and local Christian communities enjoy relative freedom in Tunisia, provided that they avoid activities that could be construed as proselytism. A potential source of threat is from Salafist organisations, though recent attacks have principally been on cultural and economic targets rather than against non-Islamic religious groups. The most significant challenge for local Christians is the family and societal pressure that is often faced by those who choose to leave Islam, though this only takes violent forms in extreme cases."

## Economic landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 28 September 2020) and [World Bank data](#) (June 2020):

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$11,900 (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 16.2%, with youth unemployment being twice as high at 36.5%
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 15.5% (2010 est.)

According to [World Bank's April 2020](#) and [October 2020 Economic Update](#):

- **COVID-19:** "Following a successful containment of the initial Covid-19 outbreak, sharp contractions in growth, employment and fiscal revenues by mid-2020 are making the extent

of the shock more apparent. The economic outlook for 2020 has worsened since the last forecast. In the meantime, a second wave of infections and further turbulence on the political front are causing more uncertainty."

- **Economic growth:** "The economy is projected to contract by 4% in 2020 in a scenario where COVID-19 spreads globally with disruptions to travel and trade, as well as social distancing behaviors, all of which impact economic growth. This forecast assumes 2 to 3 months of social distancing, travel restrictions over the summer resulting in a large contraction of the tourism sector, and the gradual coming online of the Nawara field. The outlook is subject to major downside risks related mainly to the coronavirus pandemic."
- **Additional risks:** "Domestically, there are additional risks relating to reform continuity (in light of recent elections and the installation of a new government), socio-political tensions, and a deterioration in security which would adversely impact investment and tourism. Spillovers of instability in neighboring countries could affect economic stability."

Other sources report:

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region report](#) (accessed 28 September 2020) puts the Tunisian economy in the lower middle income category .
- The [2020 Fragile State Index](#) (accessed 28 September 2020) shows some improvement in the economic indicators on average, although "Human Flight and Brain Drain" has remained quite high over the last years . It is likely that these indicators will be negatively effected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the brain drain even further increasing in the coming years.
- The [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) (accessed 28 September 2020) writes: "The coronavirus will pose significant challenges to the government, exacerbating already social, political and economic problems. Parliament is highly fragmented, which will complicate efforts to respond to the crisis, as well as to address the economic fallout. This will include a sharp recession, higher unemployment and fiscal and current-account deficits."

Despite Tunisia's successful transition from a one-party dictatorship to a multiparty democracy, its economy has remained struggling for years, with unemployment remaining steadily around 15% and youth unemployment being more than twice as high. Obviously, it has not helped that Tunisia has had 13 governments in 9 years, with three new governments since the October 2019 parliamentary elections ([Carnegie Endowment, 28 March 2019](#)). The COVID-19 crisis is now causing the economical situation to deteriorate even further, especially since tourism has declined as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Some Tunisians are even joining the sub-Saharan migrants in seeking asylum in Europe ([AP News, 27 July 2020](#)).

In June 2020, the World Bank approved a 175 million USD relief package to help Tunisia "respond to the COVID-19 crisis", with the promise of even more support in the near future ([World Bank, 15 June 2020](#)), but it is likely that Tunisia's economy will continue to struggle - especially since tourism, a key sector of the economy, has been severely hit by COVID-19. This increases the lack of economic opportunities available to the younger generation, which increases Tunisia's brain drain and remains a cause for social unrest. Tragically, the [World Bank](#) concludes in its Country overview (accessed 28 September 2020): "Tunisia is one of the few countries in the world where a higher level of education decreases employability, in particular for women."

Tunisian Christians with a Muslim background face discrimination from government, society and family. Some of them lose their jobs once their conversion becomes known, while others struggle to find employment. Christians are also kept out of positions in the government and army. The coming years are likely to become even more difficult for Christians due to the COVID-19 crisis.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 28 September 2020)

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Tunisian population (98%) are from Arab decent, with others having European (1%) or Jewish (1%) ancestry
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with French being widely spoken too. Tamazight, the official Berber language, is spoken as well
- **Population:** Tunisia has a population of around 11.700.000 people (July 2020 est.)
- **Urban population:** In 2020, 69.6% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 1.53%
- **Literacy rate:** 81.8% of the population can read and write; with a difference between men (89.6%) and women (74.2%) (2015)
- **Youth population:** The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up 38% of the population, making it a country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities, although
- **Life expectancy:** 76.3 years on average; women (78.1 years), men (74.6 years)
- **Education:** Tunisia's citizens enjoy 15 years of schooling on average (2016)

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

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Tunisia ranks #91 out 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a high score of 0.739, making it one of the higher scoring countries in the wider region.
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.899, women are disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Tunisian society is mainly conservative and Muslim, although there are differences between the (rural) south and (urban) north. Due to Tunisia being a hub of Arab secular government there is a strong liberal urban youth culture. Tunisian Christians, almost all of them from a Muslim background, remain side-lined and are discriminated against by family and society. Once their conversion becomes known, they face pressure to recant their faith and are often threatened with divorce or with forced marriage to marry a Muslim. Converts from Islam to Christianity are also likely to be excluded from family inheritance and lose custody rights.

Other reports:

- **Women:** In September 2017, Tunisia [overturned](#) the law that prohibited Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men (BBC News, 15 September 2017). For converts from Islam to Christianity this was a particularly significant step. However, social opposition [prevents](#) implementation of the law in practice (The New Arab, 8 August 2018). In November 2018,

- the government proposed an amendment of the Personal Status Code, which would lead to gender equality regarding inheritance rights. However, the proposal [ignited a huge debate](#) as conservative Muslims regards it contrary to the Quran and Islamic law (Al-Monitor, 7 December 2018). Newly elected President Kais Saied is an opponent of equal inheritance for women. According to the [BTI Tunisia 2020 report](#), there is educational gender balance in Tunisia with more than 90% of both sexes being literate and more women than men entering higher education. However, women remain significantly under-represented in the workforce, particularly in higher positions, with a 27% labor force participation. This is an indication of the societal conservative views on marriage and motherhood.
- **Conservative Islam:** In April 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief [reported](#) on Tunisia (World Watch Monitor, 23 April 2018). He concluded that "old laws and societal pressure pose the greatest challenges to religious freedom in Tunisia; a number of old laws, such as 'public morality concepts' and 'public order provisions', are used to enforce restrictions on, for example, food consumption during Ramadan." According to Humanists International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (updated 25 September 2020): Islamic religious education is mandatory in state schools. However, the courses on Islam are approximately only one hour per week and the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The state allows other religious groups to educate in private schools.

## Technological landscape

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

- **Internet usage:** 66.8% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 63.0% penetration – survey date: December 2019

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

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 127.7 per 100 people

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

- Tunisia is rated as "partly free".
- Key internet controls include the increase of "internet surveillance" and "the arrest and detention of journalist and bloggers".

Most North African countries are making rapid technological development. According to the [US International Trade Administration](#) (accessed 29 September 2020), the overall majority of the population in Tunisia had Internet access in 2019, although many (only) via their mobile phones.

Although the freedom of the press has significantly increased after the Arab Spring revolution, legal guarantees are still lacking, leaving uncertainty for journalists, bloggers and others. Reporters without Borders' (RSF) [2020 World Press Freedom Index](#) states: "Freedom of the press and information was the most important achievement of Tunisia's 'Jasmine Revolution' in 2011. Nonetheless, ... RSF has noted with concern that the climate for the media and journalists has worsened since the election of a new president in October 2019."

Christians in Tunisia, especially converts from a Muslim background, are careful in their social media postings. Many Christians in Tunisia use a pseudonym when posting Christian material. Those who are too overtly active on social media risk being tracked down by the authorities or by radical Islamic groups. However, with the rise of Internet access and social media, many converts to Christianity can now find fellowship online, even if they are alone and isolated (for example due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions).

## Security situation

Over the last decade, thousands of Tunisians have joined the Islamic State group (IS) and other Islamic militant groups. Many of them have returned or have joined IS cells or other groups closer to home. The lawlessness in neighboring Libya creates opportunities for them to maintain an active presence.

As of September 2020, the last major attack dates back to 2015 when Islamic militants linked to IS [killed](#) at least 60 tourists and civilians in two attacks in and around Tunis (BBC News, 27 June 2015). The security situation has improved since then, but the security services [remain targets for attacks](#), with suicide bombers killing police officers in June 2019 and March 2020 ([New York Times, 6 March 2020](#)) while a national guard was killed by a knife attack in September 2020 ([France24, 6 September 2020](#)). Violent Islamic militancy is undermining the state's ability to provide security and remains a [destabilizing factor](#) and risk for the future of Tunisia (BBC News, 25 June 2016).

Militants seem to mainly target the security services, so Tunisian Christians who keep a low profile are not likely to be attacked by violent Islamic groups. Nonetheless, the presence of such groups remains a threat and forces Tunisian Christians to be careful in their activities and on social media.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Tunisian democracy remains fragile

Tunisia is a country that is more advanced than most northern African countries in terms of socio-economic development, civil liberties and democratic governance. The country has the potential to act as a model for other Arab countries due to its peaceful and consensus-driven transition to democracy. However, regional instability, the presence of violent Islamic militants as well as a high unemployment rate and difficulties in implementing economic reforms necessary for economic growth, mean that Tunisian democracy is still in a fragile state. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to lead to a further deterioration in the situation. Partly due to this crisis, Tunisia already has the [third government in one year](#), with the most recent attempt taking up the reins at the beginning of September 2020 (Bloomberg, 2 September 2020). In short, it looks likely that Tunisia will continue to look politically fragile in the near future.

### 2) Islamist and liberal ideals continue to fight for influence in politics and society

Although the political situation in Tunisia has stabilized to a degree since 2011, this does not mean that the pressure on Christians has decreased or will do in the future. There is a battle

going on in both Tunisian society and at the political level between (hard-line) Islamists and moderate liberals. It was hoped that the parliamentary and presidential elections in October 2019 would be instrumental in determining Tunisia's future direction, but neither the Islamists nor the liberals gained a clear majority in the parliament, while President Kais Saied has no clear political profile. It seems likely that Tunisia will continue without a clear direction and with both sides compromising to meet half way.

### 3) Society at large remains conservative

It is unlikely that the situation for Christians in the country will improve in the coming years, as Tunisia's Islamic society remains mostly conservative and there is no indication that a majority of the population want to improve matters concerning Freedom of Religion and Belief.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Tunisia country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14107241>
- Recent history: Punic Wars - <https://www.britannica.com/event/Punic-Wars/Campaigns-in-Sicily-and-Spain>
- Recent history: introduced secular influences - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14107241>
- Recent history: infighting - <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/infighting-in-nidaa-tounes-a-danger-to-tunisia's-democracy>
- Recent history: promised - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/10/tunisia-swear-in-president-kais-saied.html>
- Recent history: Africa News, 25 August 2020 - <https://www.africanews.com/2020/08/25/tunisia-new-government-formed/>
- Political and legal landscape: EIU, Democracy Index 2019 - <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>
- Political and legal landscape: Fragile State Index 2020 - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Political and legal landscape: Middle East Concern - <https://meconcern.org/countries/tunisia/>
- Religious landscape description: Maliki tradition - <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-maliki.htm>
- Religious landscape description: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/tunisia/>
- Religious landscape description: Middle East Concern - <https://www.meconcern.org/countries/tunisia/>
- Economic landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>
- Economic landscape: World Bank data - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/tunisia>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's April 2020 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/publication/economic-update-april-2020>
- Economic landscape: October 2020 Economic Update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/publication/economic-update-october-2020>
- Economic landscape: World by Income and Region report - <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/the-world-by-income-and-region.html>
- Economic landscape: 2020 Fragile State Index - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Economic landscape: Economist Intelligence Unit - <https://country.eiu.com/tunisia>
- Economic landscape: Carnegie Endowment, 28 March 2019 - <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/03/28/tunisia-s-political-system-from-stagnation-to-competition-pub-78717>
- Economic landscape: AP News, 27 July 2020 - <https://apnews.com/article/north-africa-italy-tunisia-sicily-africa-b474727f240025023d439e42e368fde8>
- Economic landscape: World Bank, 15 June 2020 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/15/world-bank-approves-us-175-million-budget-support-for-tunisia-to-mitigate-the-economic-impact-of-covid-19-and-hasten-recovery>

- Economic landscape: World Bank - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/overview>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: Human Development Indicators (2019) - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TUR>
- Social and cultural landscape: overturned - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-41278610>
- Social and cultural landscape: prevents - <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2018/8/8/tunisia-muslim-women-still-unable-to-marry-non-muslims>
- Social and cultural landscape: ignited a huge debate - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/tunisia-bill-women-rights-equality-inheritance.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: BTI Tunisia 2020 report - <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report-TUN-2020.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: reported - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/tunisia-religious-freedom-curbed-by-societal-pressure/%20>
- Social and cultural landscape: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/tunisia/>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#tn>
- Technological landscape: World Bank's country profile - [https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report\\_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=TUN](https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=TUN)
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net Report 2019: - [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/11042019\\_Report\\_FH\\_FOTN\\_2019\\_final\\_Public\\_Download.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/11042019_Report_FH_FOTN_2019_final_Public_Download.pdf)
- Technological landscape: US International Trade Administration - <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Tunisia-Telecommunications-Equipment-Services>
- Technological landscape: 2020 World Press Freedom Index - <https://rsf.org/en/tunisia>
- Security situation: killed - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33287978>
- Security situation: remain targets for attacks - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/27/suicide-bombers-kill-police-officer-in-attacks-in-tunis>
- Security situation: New York Times, 6 March 2020 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/world/europe/us-embassy-tunisia-bomber.html>
- Security situation: France24, 6 September 2020 - <https://www.france24.com/en/20200906-tunisia-says-three-militants-killed-after-fatal-stabbing-of-officer-in-sousse>
- Security situation: destabilizing factor - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36629059>
- Trends analysis: third government in one year - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-02/tunisia-s-new-government-is-welcomed-with-a-presidential-rant>

## WWL 2021: Church information / Tunisia

### Christian origins

Tunisia has a very rich Christian history. The first reports on Christianity in Tunisia concerned the interrogation and martyrdom in 203 AD of two Christian women, Felicitas and Perpetua, in the city of Carthage. In that same city, three very influential Church Fathers lived, worked and died, namely Tertullian (160-230 AD), Cyprian (210-258 AD) and Augustine (354-430 AD).

The early church of Tunis was at times severely persecuted by Rome, especially under Emperor Diocletian, who ruled from 284–305 AD. It was one of the places where the Donatist controversy erupted in the 4th century concerning the appointment of leaders who had previously betrayed their Christian faith during persecution. It seems that the Amazigh ('Berber') Christians were, generally speaking, less forgiving than the urbanized Romans in Tunisia.



In 439 AD Carthage was conquered by Germanic Vandals. The Vandals tried to convert the urban Christians of Africa to their Arian version of Christianity. The Vandals sent the Catholic clergy into exile and expropriated their churches, and at times had Catholic leaders killed. In 534 AD the Byzantine Empire - representatives of Rome and of 'non-heretical' Christian faith - captured Tunisia again.

The Byzantines rebuilt fortifications and border defences and entered into treaties with the Imazigen ('Berbers). Nevertheless, for many decades security and prosperity were precarious and were never fully restored. Direct Byzantine rule did not extend far beyond the coastal cities. In 698 AD, Arab armies defeated the Byzantine forces at the Battle of Carthage and destroyed it. As in other countries in North Africa, the arrival of Islam significantly affected Church development, but Christianity managed to survive in Tunisia until the 11th century.

Christianity did not succeed in getting firmly established again until the 19th century when many French and other expatriate Christians came to the country under the political protection of France. The Roman Catholic witness grew considerably and an archbishop of Carthage was installed in 1884. Various other Christian organizations also began work: Anglicans in 1829, the North African Mission in 1881, the Seventh-day Adventist in 1905, Methodists in 1908, and in 1911 Pentecostals from the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). After Tunisia's independence in 1956, the public life of the Church became more restricted; expatriates could worship without much difficulty but Tunisians converting from Islam to the Christian faith faced great opposition.

*(For further details, see: Ross R K, Tadros M and Johnson T M (eds.), Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity. Christianity in North Africa and West Africa, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp.45-51)*

## Church spectrum today

Tunisia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	220	1.0
Catholic	19,000	82.3
Protestant	1,000	4.3
Independent	2,500	10.8
Unaffiliated	300	1.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,020</b>	<b>99.7</b>

*(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals.)*

Evangelical movement	900	3.9
Renewalist movement	2,400	10.4

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 Roman Catholic Church is the largest officially recognized domination among the expatriate Christians in Tunisia. The Russian Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox Church, as well as the French Protestant and the Anglican church are also officially recognized by the government. All denominations have functioning churches in the capital Tunis and are mainly serving expatriate Christians residing in the country.

Tunisian Christians from a Muslim background are not officially recognized and do not have officially recognized church buildings.

## WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Tunisia

### Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

### Position on the World Watch List

Tunisia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	26
WWL 2020	64	34
WWL 2019	63	37
WWL 2018	62	30
WWL 2017	61	29

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

The main reason for the rise in score of three points in WWL 2021 was that the violence score rose from 5.4 points in WWL 2020 to 7.4 in WWL 2021. This was due mainly to a greater number of Christian buildings being attacked. In addition, the average pressure on Christians rose to 12.0 points (from 11.6), due to rises in pressure in both the *National* and *Church spheres of life*.

## Persecution engines

Tunisia: 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	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
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)

This persecution engine operates at different levels: At the family level, converts from Islam to Christianity are often not supported by family members in their decision to convert. There are cases of converts being locked up in their houses by their own families. At the social level, Islamic militants spread fear throughout the country. At the political level, Islamist political parties are still influential. The links between some Islamist movements and organized crime should not be underestimated. They create unrest in Tunisian society and contribute to the increase of the already high levels of fear among Christians.

### Clan oppression (Medium)

Tribal aspects of society, especially outside major cities, particularly affect converts from Islam to Christianity. Turning away from Islam is not only seen as religious betrayal, but also as a betrayal of the (extended) family. Nevertheless, tribalism is less strong than in neighboring countries due to a government campaign in the 1950s and 1960s directly aimed at combatting its influence.

## Drivers of persecution

Tunisia: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	-	VERY WEAK	-	VERY WEAK
Government officials	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
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

- **Extended family (Strong):** The main driver of persecution for Christian Tunisians who have converted from Islam is their own (extended) family. They will put pressure on the convert to recant his or her new faith, or even abuse the convert. Spouses will be pressured to divorce the convert and any children can be taken away.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** The local neighborhood is also a source of persecution for converts. This is particularly the case outside the major urban centers. Neighbors will often, for instance, exclude converts from social gatherings and are likely to cause converts to lose their jobs.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Despite the country's reputation as being the most celebrated success story of the Arab Spring uprisings, radical Islamic teaching and militancy is widespread.

- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** The threat of activities by militant Islamic groups affects all categories of Christian communities in the country. Radical groups remain a significant threat, with thousands of Tunisians having joined radical Islamic groups (including IS) in recent years.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The government and state apparatus could also be regarded as drivers of persecution since they deny registration and official recognition to congregations of Christians with a Muslim background.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Family heads and other important members of the family put pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity to recant their faith.

### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** The (extended) family is the main driver. As the regional expert, Katia Boissevain, observed: "When a conversion is announced, or discovered, families feel they have been cheated and abandoned .... Stepping aside and choosing the Christian religion is not only a break with the social body, but also a break with the social rhythm (which is defined by Islamic traditions). Becoming Christian is interpreted by the others as a choice formulated against everything for which they have been raised" (in: *Algeria and Tunisia, Christianity in North Africa and West Asia, Edinburgh Companion to Global Christianity, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p.47*).
- **Ordinary citizens (Medium) / Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Especially in rural areas, society encourages the upholding of traditional values and customs that make it difficult for converts to turn away from Islam.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Weak):** Family heads and other important members of the family put pressure on converts to return to Islam, in order to restore the family honor.

### Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Converts from Islam to Christianity have most to fear from their own family members and society. This is especially true in the south of the country, where the Islamic population is more conservative. Urban areas, and especially the capital Tunis itself, offer possibilities for converts to escape family pressure and live their faith in the anonymity of the big city.

Violent Islamic militants are active in the border areas to the south, in particular. They will target any Christian, whether foreign or national, if the opportunity arises.

### Christian communities and how they are affected

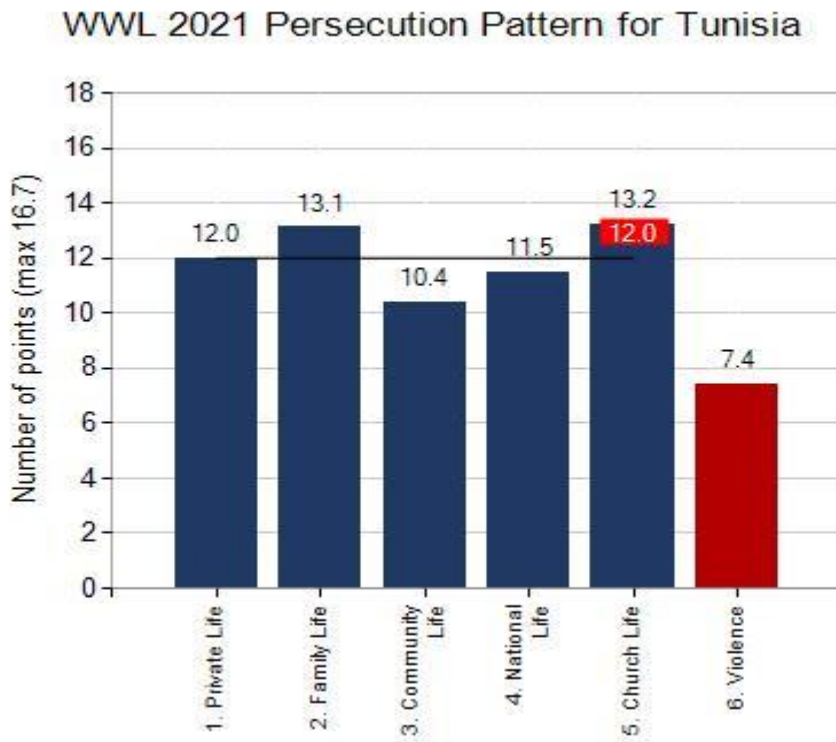
**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians experience a relative amount of freedom, although public evangelism is not tolerated. Foreign Christians worshipping at the few international churches hardly encounter any problems.

**Historical Christian communities:** This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by WWL Methodology.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts with a Muslim background face various forms of persecution, e.g. from their family members. However, they (and others) are more or less free to seek and receive information about the Christian faith, particularly content posted online.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This category does not exist in Tunisia as defined by WWL Methodology.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Tunisia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.0 points), rising from 11.6 points in WWL 2020.
- Although all *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, it is highest in *Family* and *Church life*. This reflects the difficulties converts from Islam to Christianity face, both within their own families, as well as in the public sphere, e.g. if they want to be baptized or register churches.
- The score for violence went up from 5.4 points in WWL 2020 to 7.4 in WWL 2021. The main reason for this rise was an increase in reported violence, with a higher number of Christians being detained and questioned. Also, more (house) churches were attacked.

## 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://openodoorsanalytical.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. (3.00 points)**

Particularly converts from Islam experience pressure from their families when their conversion is known at the private level, although there are notable differences between rural areas and the country's capital, Tunis, where the situation is comparatively better.

**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)**

The fact that many Tunisian Christians feel it is safer to use a pseudonym when posting Christian messages on social media is an indication of the pressure they are facing.

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

Most converts (especially young people) face some sort of opposition or rejection because of changing their faith. Especially for young converts, it is risky to be seen reading the Bible and difficult to find a place for prayer by themselves, let alone speaking about their faith with family members.

**Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.00 points)**

This is especially problematic outside of the capital Tunis and other urban areas. Meeting other Christians might draw unwanted attention for converts and might lead to pressure from their families upon discovery.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Only Muslims can adopt a child in Tunisia.

**Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (3.75 points)**

Due to their conversion, several converts have lost custody of their children.

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

There is no category for 'Christian Tunisian' in the birth registration process. The Tunisian Constitution separates Tunisian citizenship from religious affiliation, but in reality it is assumed that all Tunisians are Muslims when registering civil rites of passage (birth, marriages, deaths etc.). Converts have to accept that official documents will state that they are Muslim. If they seek to change this, it proves impossible and causes repercussions.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.00 points)**

Children of converts will have to follow Islamic education when they go to school and can face harassment if their parent's faith is known.

## 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.). (3.00 points)**

Although most pressure stems from the family, harassment and social isolation by the community are known consequences of conversion from Islam to Christianity.

**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.). (3.00 points)**

Monitoring happens frequently and Tunisian Christians are aware that their messages and calls are being intercepted. Police officers regularly question Tunisian Christians about their activities and even a simple request for a new passport can lead to detailed interrogation.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.00 points)**

Converts receive threats from their families or the society around them when their conversion is known. Especially in rural parts of the country young female converts are scared of being forced to marry a Muslim. There are also cases known of converts being expelled from their university, or who are not able to go to school because they have been turned out of their homes. Sometimes customers are told not to buy from shops run by a Christian. Hence, community pressure to recant their new faith is high for Tunisian Christians.

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

Employment has been a major struggle for most Tunisian Christians. As converts, they either lose their jobs or cannot get hired because they lose all social connections (since family and friends will no longer help them find employment). Tunisian Christians therefore tend to seek employment with foreign institutions to avoid such discrimination.

## 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. (3.50 points)**

Sharia law is not the "principal source of legislation" as in many other Arab countries, but Islam is still the state religion and the state is the guardian of religion. Hence, this means that other faiths (and their adherents) do not have the same status as Islam and Muslims.



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

The authorities generally expect all Tunisians to be Muslim and there is no official recognition of conversion.

**Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.50 points)**

Christians try to avoid drawing unwanted attention, especially from radical Islamic elements within society. Hence, only recognized (foreign) churches display Christian symbols.

**Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (3.00 points)**

Media (newspapers and TV shows) have been spreading incorrect information about Christians and drawing a false picture of the Christian community. Christians are accused of converting for financial gain due to rich foreign Christians promising vulnerable Tunisians wealth and the possibility to migrate to a Western country. Christians are also accused of influencing under-age youth to become interested in the Christian faith.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)**

Tunisian converts cannot register their churches and no new church has been granted official registration since Tunisia's independence in 1956. This stands in stark contrast to the law that regulates mosques. Registered churches are allowed to operate freely but face practical difficulties, particularly relating to their property-upkeep, hiring staff and obtaining permission to publish and distribute Christian texts in Arabic.

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

Due to social opposition, foreign churches (like Roman Catholic congregations) are very cautious about accepting Tunisian Christians in their midst.

**Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.50 points)**

Selling Christian materials is not forbidden and Bibles can be bought in secular bookstores. (There are no Christian bookstores in Tunisia.) However, distributing Christian materials for free is seen as proselytizing and is forbidden .

**Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.50 points)**

Registered churches does not want their already vulnerable relationship with the government to deteriorate. Hence, they prefer to keep a low profile concerning infringements to their Freedom of Religion and Belief.

## 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.*

<b>Tunisia: Violence Block question</b>	<b>WWL 2021</b>	<b>WWL 2020</b>
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	5	2
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	17	3
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?	5	3
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	3
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10	6
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	5	2
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	12	10
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	17	12
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?	2	3

Tunisia: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10	13
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	4	4

In the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians attacked:** Several Christians have been affected due to incidents involving (physical) abuse, forced marriage, rape and sexual harassment. In addition, several Christians had to relocate inside the country after facing pressure (from their families).
- **Christians arrested:** Several converts were detained and interrogated about their activities and for possessing Christian literature. They were accused of proselytization and having links with foreign organizations.
- **Churches attacked:** At least one church property was vandalized, while several other church groups experienced attacks by individual Islamic radicals.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Several converts have been attacked inside their houses, often by family members. In other cases, shop owners have been forced to end their business or had their shops damaged after the local community discovered they had converted to Christianity.

## 5 Year trends

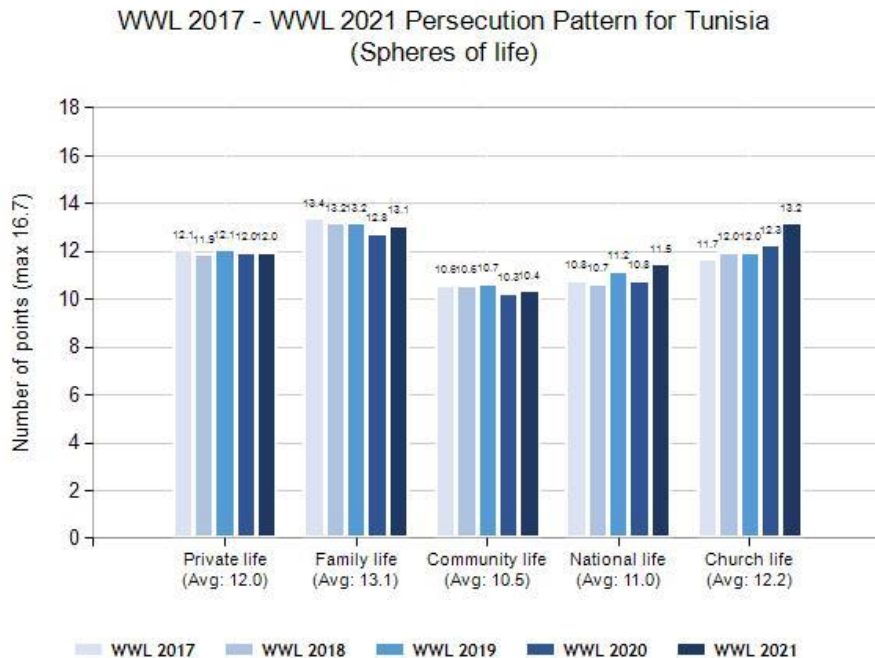
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Tunisia: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	12.0
2020	11.6
2019	11.8
2018	11.7
2017	11.7

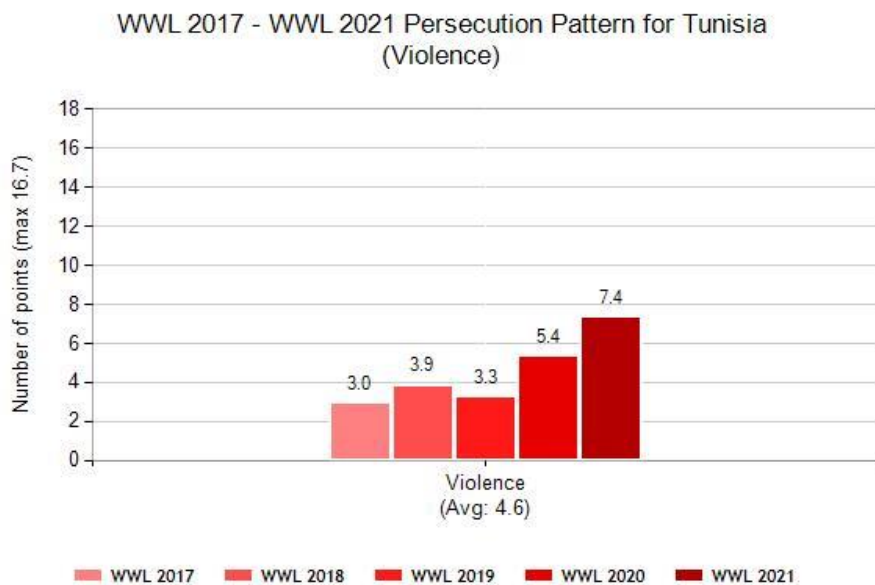
Since WWL 2017, the average pressure on Christians has more or less stabilized at the 11.7-12.0 point mark. This is a very high level of pressure and reflects the fact that in the years following the Tunisian Revolution of 2011 the situation for Christians has not improved.

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



The levels of pressure in all *spheres of life* have been more or less stable over the last five reporting periods, although in WWL 2021 there were distinct increases in pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*.

### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the first three reporting periods, the scores for violent incidents remained more or less stable under 4.0 points (a fairly high level). However, more incidents were reported for WWL 2020 and WWL 2021, causing a rise in score to a high level in WWL 2020 and very high level in WWL 2021 (7.4 points).

## Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to Christian religious materials
Denied custody of children
Discrimination/harassment via education
Forced divorce
Forced marriage
Forced out of home – expulsion
Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

Christian women and girls in Tunisia are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and domestic violence. On Georgetown’s [‘Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20’](#), Tunisia ranked 121st out of 167 countries. Whilst the country has a relatively high female parliamentary representation, the report highlights the lack of education and employment opportunities for women and ongoing societal discriminatory norms. The culture is not generally respectful of women in practice, nor does it recognize women as leaders. The free movement of women and girls is also restricted. This gap in gender equality is also exploited as a means of religious persecution.

As conversion from Islam is forbidden, converts from Islam face the greatest breadth of persecution if their faith is discovered. Women are more at risk in the traditional family context (since men have more freedom to express their own opinion). They may be physically beaten, expelled from their home, put under house arrest, threatened with death and raped. If already married, she will likely be divorced, have her children taken away and have her financial support withdrawn. A country expert explains the difficult choice that married female converts have to make: “She has to choose which life she will grow up - the life with husband and kids or her life with the Lord.” Some Christian women have been separated from their children for prolonged periods due to disputes related to their new Christian faith. Single female converts on the other hand may be forced into a marriage with a Muslim man, to “cover the shame”. This is particularly common in rural areas.

The main source of persecution for women in Tunisia comes from the dominating male in the family: For a single female that would mean the father, the brother or any other family member who follows in rank after that (uncle etc.); for a married woman that would be her husband or even fiancé. A country expert describes the dynamics that can occur in particularly conservative regions: “Women are checked on by their ‘male dominator’ so it can be tricky to have a Bible or a Bible app. The girl is expected to leave her phone at any time where anyone can see it. Some husbands have a specific app to check the phone of the wife.” Female converts therefore have little chance of accessing either Christian community or Christian materials.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Forced out of home – expulsion
Forced to flee town/country
Imprisonment by government
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

New converts to Christianity - both male and female - are by far the most vulnerable of Christians in Tunisia. Christian men who convert face intimidation, beatings and death threats. They bring shame upon their families by leaving Islam and are therefore likely to be ostracized. Pressured by their families, Muslim wives will leave a Christian convert, and he may be denied inheritance or even access to his possessions. However, the severity of backlash following conversion depends on his social position and his political standing within his community. While Christian

men may have been expelled from their home when the family first learnt about their conversion, many have found that their families will quietly accept the conversion at a later point in time. Others however have been forced to permanently relocate, particularly away from rural areas.

Male converts also face loss of jobs and promotion, being denied access to social community/networks, as well as being detained by the police for faith-related reasons. When a man is persecuted, his family becomes vulnerable and lacks protection. The church, too, suffers. As a country expert reflects, “the lack of good male role models within the church is having a negative impact in its development.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department's [2019 International Religious Freedom report](#) (p.7), adherents of Bahai reported difficulties in practicing their belief as they are not officially recognized and cannot have their own place of worship. However, they have had some constructive dialogues with government officials in the recent past. No such difficulties were reported by the Jewish community: "Jewish groups said they continued to worship freely, and the government continued to provide security for synagogues and partially subsidized restoration and maintenance costs. Government employees maintained the Jewish cemetery in Tunis. ... In accordance with government permits, the Jewish community operated private religious schools, and Jewish children were allowed to split their academic day between public schools and private religious schools or attend either type of school full-time."

Regarding atheists in the country: "Some atheists reported facing societal pressure to conceal their atheism, including by participating in Islamic religious traditions." (p.2). Although Tunisia is one of the most liberal societies in the wider region, the Freedom of Thought Report lists several recent incidents regarding allegedly blasphemous posts, including the sentencing of Emna Chargui to 6 months in prison for "sharing a Facebook post that imitated the rhyme and format of some verses of the Quran to urge people to follow COVID-19 hygiene rules." ([Humanist International, 28 October 2020](#))

No issues regarding the Sunni-Shia divide have been reported in the WWL 2021 reporting period, although Shia Muslims are generally discriminated against and public figures have spoken out against Shia Islam [in the past](#) (Al-Monitor, 16 September 2012).

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

Society and culture, particularly in rural areas, remains opposed to Christian faith and activity and this has not been influenced by the political changes since 2011 so far. Tunisia's Constitution may seem a positive step forward, but the wording is general enough to make restrictive interpretations possible. Interpretation will strongly depend on the kind of government that is in power and its attitude towards religious minorities. If the hard-liners gain more influence in the country this could make life more difficult for Christians. In addition, Tunisia faces a real

threat of instability and conflict as a result of the rise in the activity of militant Islamic groups in the country. The situation is getting even more disconcerting now that quite a number of Tunisians are fighting for or have been part of radical Islamic groups, including Islamic State (IS). If groups like [Hizb-ut-Tahrir](#) gain more influence in Tunisia (AFPC World Almanac, accessed 18 December 2020), the situation for Christians in the country will get much worse, most likely leading to more intense and violent persecution.

### Clan oppression

The positive developments regarding women's rights and a more positive approach towards religious minorities among the moderate liberals could create a backlash among more conservative elements within society, who want their traditional Islamic customs and practices upheld .

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 2019 International Religious Freedom report - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/tunisia/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Humanist International, 28 October 2020 - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-northern-africa/tunisia/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: in the past - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/shiites-in-tunis.html>
- Future outlook: Hizb-ut-Tahrir - <http://almanac.afpc.org/hizb-ut-tahrir>

## 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. [NORTH AFRICA – Freedom of religion since the Arab Spring – 2016](#)
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Tunisia>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Tunisia>