

World
Watch
Research

Brunei: 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 / Brunei

Brief country details

| Brunei: Population (2020 UN estimate) | Christians | Chr% |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------|
| 445,000 | 52,000 | 11.7 |

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

| Brunei: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|--------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2021 | 64 | 39 |
| WWL 2020 | 63 | 37 |
| WWL 2019 | 63 | 36 |
| WWL 2018 | 64 | 26 |
| WWL 2017 | 64 | 25 |

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

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

Converts from Islam face considerable levels of pressure as conversion is punishable by penal law and everything will be done to bring them back to their original faith. Non-traditional Christian communities cannot be registered as churches, but have to be registered as companies, societies or family centers. As such, they are treated as secular organizations and are required to submit their financial and operational reports to the government every year. The

whole of society (Christians included) is affected by the continuing introduction of Sharia laws as well as by the tightening economic situation, also due to the COVID-19 crisis, which limits the authorities from being so generous with payouts to quell dissatisfaction.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- February 2020: An American Christian "street-evangelized" in Bandar Seri Begawan. He was quickly detained, interrogated by police and surprisingly swiftly [deported](#) (Christian News, 21 March 2020). A Bruneian citizen would not have been treated so lightly, let alone a convert.
- By decree, the importing of Bibles and any public celebration of Christmas continue to be banned.
- Christian pastors and workers are facing a multitude of restrictions. Both native and foreign Christians have been targets of aggressive Islamization.

External Links - Short country profile

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: deported - <https://christiannews.net/2020/03/21/american-evangelist-preaches-gospel-on-streets-of-brunei-muslim-country-governed-by-sharia-law/>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Brunei

Link for general background information

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

Recent history

Brunei was a British protectorate from 1888 to 1984 and is now the only politically independent sultanate in the world. The ruling sultan is the 29th, the royal line reaching back as far as 1363. On 1 January 1984, the day of independence, the ruling sultan officially proclaimed Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) as Brunei's national philosophy. MIB is a blend of Malay and Islamic cultural values guarded by the monarchy. This system opposes the concept of secularism. May 2014 saw the introduction of Sharia Penal Code (SPC); however, implementation was not announced until 2018 with the [introduction](#) of its Criminal Procedures Code (CPC) - see the section "Political and legal landscape" below (Borneo Bulletin, 31 March 2019).

Political and legal landscape

The sultan rules as [absolute monarch](#), being chief of state, but also concurrently prime minister, finance minister, minister of the interior as well as of defence and head of religion (East Asia Forum, 23 October 2019). Hence, all power is concentrated in his hands. Brunei people deeply respect the sultan and there is no demand for more political participation.

The sultan introduced obligatory Islamic religious studies for all schools. But more importantly, he announced the successive introduction of Sharia in criminal law, the so-called "Hudud" law, in October 2013. In 2014, Brunei enacted the new Sharia Penal Code (SPC), which is to apply also to non-Muslims, and which includes offences carrying the death penalty. The 2nd phase was

supposed to be implemented in 2015 but was delayed. In March 2018, the implementation of the second phase was finally announced.

In a surprising move only made public on 25 March 2019, Brunei's Minister of Religion declared 3 April 2019 as the commencement date for the [implementation of Sharia Penal Code](#). The Government Gazette was dated 29 December 2018, but the announcement was only made public ten days before implementation. After a five year period of leaving this law pending, the sudden publication of an imminent date for implementation seemed to have been an attempt by the sultan and his government to avoid as much international outcry and pressure as possible. Judging by the public outcry afterwards, these efforts did not succeed. International media was quick to highlight the immediate [serious consequences](#) for the LGBTI community in the country, but it would have consequences for converts from Islam to Christianity as well (Reuters, 25 March 2019). In reaction, there were calls to boycott all luxury hotels belonging to a company owned by the sultan.

Although it is unlikely that such a boycott would have been effective, since he is seen as being one of the richest men worldwide, the sultan did react publicly to criticism by announcing that his country did not intend to [implement the death penalty](#) as foreseen in Brunei's SPC (Reuters, 5 May 2019). It is anyway exceptional that the sultan responded to criticism at all and it is also highly unusual that an official English translation of his speech was published. More than one year after the implementation, [no cases](#) against religious minorities (or the LGBTI community) have been reported (The Diplomat, 1 April 2020).

Religious landscape

| Brunei: Religious context | Number of adherents | % |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------|
| Christians | 52,000 | 11.7 |
| Muslim | 261,000 | 58.7 |
| Hindu | 4,000 | 0.9 |
| Buddhist | 42,000 | 9.4 |
| Ethno-religionist | 45,000 | 10.1 |
| Jewish | 0 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 200 | 0.0 |
| Atheist | 120 | 0.0 |
| Agnostic | 5,200 | 1.2 |

| | | |
|---|--------|-----|
| Other - includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian | 34,820 | 7.8 |
|---|--------|-----|

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

According to the World Christian Database 2020 estimates, Muslims (mostly Sunni) make up 58.7% of the population. The ruling sultan is head of religion: What he wants, becomes law and if he decides that Islam will continue on a more conservative path, everyone (including the churches) have to accept that. Christians are free to worship, but they have been warned not to do so "excessively and openly". The Sharia Penal Code includes several provisions which limit the freedom of religion, not just for converts, but for the Christian minority as well. Time will tell how the provisions are implemented. Some of them are mentioned in more detail in the section entitled "Pressure in the 5 Spheres of life" below.

The [US State Department's IRF 2019 Report](#) explains the ethno-religious affiliations as follows: "There is significant variation in religious identification among ethnic groups. According to 2016 official statistics, ethnically Malay Bruneians comprise 66 percent of the population and are presumed to be Muslim as an inherited status. The Chinese population, which is approximately 10 percent of the total population and includes both citizens and permanent residents, is 65 percent Buddhist and 20 percent Christian. Indigenous tribes such as Dusun, Bisaya, and Murut make up approximately 4 percent of the population and are estimated to be 50 percent Muslim, 15 percent Christian, and the remainder followers of other religious groups, including adherents of traditional practices. The remaining fifth of the population includes foreign-born workers, primarily from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and South Asia or are stateless residents. According to official statistics, approximately half of these temporary and permanent residents are Muslim, more than one-quarter Christian, and 15 percent Buddhist." (page 2)

Economic landscape

According to [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300 onwards):

- The Gross National Income is 76.389 USD, the fourth highest GNI worldwide
- Poverty data is not available

Brunei is included in the [World Bank's Database](#):

- Brunei is classified as being a high income state.
- The GDP (PPP, constant 2017 international USD) is 26.9 billion USD
- The GDP growth rate is 3.9%

Brunei tries to diversify its economy in order to give more of its citizens a good future perspective, especially the younger generation. Although the development plan "Vision Brunei 2035" aiming to expand various economic sectors was already published in 2007, there is little to show for it so far. Rather than focus on efforts to strengthen sectors outside the oil and gas industry, Brunei has chosen to produce even more oil, although oil and gas production peaked and seems to have seen a [decline](#) in recent years (World Data Atlas, accessed 24 August 2020).

With an estimated 70-80% of the country's citizens employed by the government or government-linked institutions (as reported by FT Confidential Research), there is limited hope for an internally-driven economic expansion. This is the main reason why the younger generation is increasingly looking for employment opportunities abroad.

The government of Brunei needs to make some difficult choices. The comfortable days, when the ruling sultan was able to care for all his subjects' needs, will soon be over, even if the oil price recovers. Until now, his government provides free medical services and subsidizes goods such as rice and housing. There are no school fees for state schools, and citizens of Brunei do not have to pay income tax. But since the oil and gas reserves may only last for just one more generation or less, the government needs to start thinking about alternatives. Until now, it has [not been particularly successful](#) as it seems that the world does not need an "Islamic Singapore" (or already has one in United Arab Emirates' Dubai or Qatar's Doha) (Asia Times, 26 April 2017).

The slump in demand for oil due to the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent lockdowns all over the world left a tangible impact on Brunei's life and economy as well, but it has weathered the storm [better than other](#) countries (The Diplomat, 22 June 2020) and its [infection rate](#) has been low (The Star Malaysia, 5 July 2020) with only [148 cases in total](#) (and 145 recoveries) up to 17 November 2020 (BruDirect, 17 November 2020). The forecast by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is [1.4%](#) for 2020, with an expected recovery in 2021 (Borneo Bulletin, 22 June 2020). Christians are not excluded from these general trends.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and the [World Factbook](#) (updated April 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Malay 65.7%, Chinese 10.3%, other 24% (2016 est.)
- **Main languages:** Malay (Bahasa Melayu) (official), English, Chinese dialects
- **Urbanization:** 77.6%
- **Literacy rate:** 96.1% (15 years and above)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 9.1 years
- **Health and education numbers:** Per 10,000 people, Brunei has 17.7 physicians and 27 hospital beds. The pupil teacher ratio in elementary school is 10:1

According to the [World Bank's Database](#) (accessed 24 August 2020):

- **Age:** 22.6% of the population are below the age of 14, 5.2% are above the age of 65.
- **Education:** The primary school enrolment rate is 103.2%.
- **Unemployment:** 9.1%; the rate of vulnerable employment is 6.0%.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** There is no international data on migration to Brunei available, in any case, migration is only on a very small scale.

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

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.845, Brunei ranks 43rd on the list of 189 countries. Brunei's HDI has levelled off at a very high level
- **Life expectancy:** 75.7 years

- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.234, Brunei ranks 51st of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index.
- **Youth unemployment:** 20% (between 15 and 24 years of age)

The population of Brunei is ethnically homogenous but, like neighboring Malaysia, it also has a sizeable Chinese and a smaller Indian community. Restrictions are gradually being imposed on the whole population. For instance, during Ramadan all restaurants (including non-Muslim establishments) must close. Also, all restaurants (including inside hotels) must close every Friday from 12 noon to 2pm during Friday prayers. Public Christmas celebrations are [banned](#) (UCA News, 23 December 2019).

Citizens of Brunei are used to a high level of social benefits provided by the government, meaning the sultan. It may prove difficult to remove many of these benefits. At the same time, the government is trying to reduce the unhealthily large number of citizens employed in government departments. The overall unemployment rate is just over 9%, which sounds manageable, but youth unemployment is at least more than double this figure, explaining at least partly why many of the younger generation are planning to leave the country or have already left. This can become an incentive for Christian youth to leave too, in addition to the pressure of belonging to a religious minority.

Technological landscape

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

- **Internet usage:** 95.3% penetration - survey date: June 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 91.5% penetration – survey date: January 2020

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

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 131.9 per 100 people

Brunei is not included in Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#).

Brunei's Internet Penetration Rate is high, reflecting a modern and highly developed country. Accordingly, the mobile phone subscription rate is also high. Media is limited and it is unthinkable to openly criticize the government or the sultan. Nonetheless, the younger generation in particular is very active on social media sites like Reddit, which has been one of the first places where Bruneians have started to ask questions about the deliberately low-key introduction of the SPC.

One illustration of this was a discussion which started in [July 2020](#) on Reddit about if and how citizens can read religious books and have religious discussions in public. For Christians, these online forums are an opportunity to participate in debates and to cautiously share views. To what extent these discussions feed back into the "real world" is an entirely different question, of course.

Security situation

There are currently no Islamic militant groups active in Brunei and unlike in neighboring Southeast Asian states, no Bruneian Muslims appear to have joined the Islamic State group to fight in countries like Syria and Iraq. However, Islam is becoming increasingly conservative, limiting the space for non-Muslim Bruneian citizens. Therefore, the lack of militant groups does not mean Christians are not under pressure. Social cohesion is high and the potential for unrest is very limited. In Southeast Asia, Brunei may be one of the safest countries to live in. Christians (whether expatriates or citizens) are able to live unaffected by violence as long as they abide by the written and unwritten rules.

Trends analysis

1) Churches are facing continued restrictions

Out of fear that Muslims could be led astray, Christmas celebrations were banned from 2015 onwards in the whole of Brunei, with the exception of church buildings. The ban includes the use of religious symbols such as crosses, lighting candles, putting up Christmas trees, singing religious songs in public and sending Christmas greetings. Punishment for violation is potentially a five-year prison sentence. The limitations make it clear to churches that especially the young generation needs to grow up with a strong Christian faith. A particular challenge for churches is that young people are increasingly leaving the country to seek better opportunities abroad (see as well Trend 3). That Pope Francis for the first time ever made a Bruneian bishop [cardinal](#) just shortly after the end of the WWL 2021 reporting period came as a surprise to many (UCA News, 4 November 2020). It will definitely highlight the situation of (Catholic) Christians in Brunei worldwide, but it remains to be seen if this will also have consequences for the Christians' daily lives.

2) Brunei's heavy reliance on Chinese investment comes at a price

The fact that the ruling sultan decided to [close down](#) the popular English-language Brunei Times in November 2016 shows that he is trying (and succeeding) to control media and public reporting more tightly (Reuters, 7 November 2016). These efforts may become stronger as the sultan begins to rely more heavily on Chinese investment in improving infrastructure and diversifying the economy. Of course, this comes at a price. Brunei has become the first ASEAN member in 2018 to [relinquish its claims](#) in the South China Sea, so as not to block Chinese investment (Geopolitical Monitor, 4 April 2018). Another strong sign of the growing relationship between Brunei and China was the [opening](#) of Southeast Asia's longest bridge, the 30 kilometer Tamburong bridge, on 17 March 2020 (The Diplomat, 30 March 2020).

3) Young Christians are leaving the country in large numbers

In the future, Christians will be facing a changing church situation, since young Christians are leaving the country in large numbers. There is an increasing feeling of insecurity over the implementation of Sharia Penal Code (SPC). Uncertainty about the SPC affects the whole country, but religious minorities in particular, although so far no SPC cases have been reported. An encouraging sign is that young people use online forums to discuss even delicate questions

more freely; however, so long as this does not translate into more freedom to do so "offline" as well, young people will have even less incentive to stay.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Brunei country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12990058>
- Recent history: introduction - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/2019/03/syariah-penal-code-order-2013-to-be-enforced-on-april-3/>
- Political and legal landscape: absolute monarch - <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/10/23/the-state-of-islam-in-brunei/>
- Political and legal landscape: implementation of Sharia Penal Code - http://www.agc.gov.bn/AGC%20Images/LAWS/Gazette_PDF/2018/S068.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: serious consequences - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brunei-lgbt-laws/brunei-urged-to-halt-introduction-of-strict-new-anti-lgbt-laws-idUSKCN1R61M9>
- Political and legal landscape: implement the death penalty - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brunei-lgbt-sultan/brunei-says-it-wont-enforce-gay-death-penalty-after-backlash-idUSKCN1SB0FS>
- Political and legal landscape: no cases - <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/03/sharia-in-brunei-much-ado-about-nothing/>
- Religious landscape description: US State Department's IRF 2019 Report - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BRUNEI-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Economic landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's Database - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam>
- Economic landscape: decline - <https://knoema.com/atlas/Brunei-Darussalam/topics/Energy/Oil/Crude-oil-reserves>
- Economic landscape: not been particularly successful - <https://asiatimes.com/2017/04/wells-run-dry-brunei/>
- Economic landscape: better than other - <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/06/how-brunei-beat-covid-19/>
- Economic landscape: infection rate - <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2020/07/05/brunei-sultanate-maintains-high-income-economy-status-no-covid-19-cases>
- Economic landscape: 148 cases in total - <https://www.brudirect.com/news.php?id=106125>
- Economic landscape: 1.4% - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/2020/06/adb-revises-brunei-growth-forecast-to-1-4pc/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: Word Fact Book - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/BX-summary.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Bank's Database - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BRN>
- Social and cultural landscape: banned - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/foreigners-vacate-brunei-where-christmas-is-banned/86872>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#bn>
- Technological landscape: World Bank's country profile - https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&bar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=BRN
- 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
- Technological landscape: July 2020 - https://www.reddit.com/r/Brunei/comments/hmyguf/legally_can_you_read_religious_books_and_have/
- Trends analysis: cardinal - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/church-lives-in-smaller-countries-says-cardinal-elect-of-brunei/90156>
- Trends analysis: close down - <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brunei-media-idUSKBN1320YF>

- Trends analysis: relinquish its claims - <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/brunei-abandons-south-china-sea-claim-for-chinese-finance/>
- Trends analysis: opening - <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/new-temburong-bridge-opening-highlights-china-brunei-relations-amid-coronavirus-challenge/>

WWL 2021: Church information / Brunei

Christian origins

Random missionary activities by Portuguese traders in the 16th century largely failed and it was as late as 1846 that the "Borneo Church Mission" was founded and an Anglican church congregation established. The Roman Catholic Church has been present in the country for more than a century; independent Protestant churches came later, when migrant workers entered the country. Most of these churches are linked to organizations and churches in their countries of origin.

Church spectrum today

| Brunei: Church networks | Christians | % |
|--|---------------|--------------|
| Orthodox | 0 | 0.0 |
| Catholic | 20,000 | 38.5 |
| Protestant | 13,100 | 25.2 |
| Independent | 17,500 | 33.7 |
| Unaffiliated | 1,400 | 2.7 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 52,000 | 100.0 |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> | | |
| Evangelical movement | 10,200 | 19.6 |
| Renewalist movement | 16,000 | 30.8 |

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.

Apart from the Catholic and the Anglican church, there are a few Protestant churches in Brunei, which also serve expatriate communities (for instance, South Koreans and Indians). Brunei also has small Methodist and Seventh Day Adventist congregations, as well as those from the Borneo Evangelical Church.

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Brunei

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

| Brunei: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|--------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2021 | 64 | 39 |
| WWL 2020 | 63 | 37 |
| WWL 2019 | 63 | 36 |
| WWL 2018 | 64 | 26 |
| WWL 2017 | 64 | 25 |

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

The score in WWL 2021 increased by one point reflecting a stable, but difficult situation for Christians in the country. The implementation of Sharia Penal Law has not affected the score yet and it remains to be seen what it will mean for them, apart from increased insecurity and fear. The average pressure is very high and the scores increased slightly across all *spheres of life*, while the score for violence slightly increased as well, although remaining at a very low level. Controlling, watching and spying upon Christians remains more important for the authorities than exerting force.

Persecution engines

| Brunei: Persecution engines | Abbreviation | Level of influence |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Islamic oppression | IO | Very strong |
| Religious nationalism | RN | Not at all |

| | | |
|---|------|-------------|
| Ethno-religious hostility | ERH | Not at all |
| Clan oppression | CO | Not at all |
| Christian Denominational protectionism | CDP | Not at all |
| Communist and post-Communist oppression | CPCO | Not at all |
| Secular intolerance | SI | Not at all |
| Dictatorial paranoia | DPA | Very strong |
| Organized corruption and crime | OCC | Not at all |

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong), blended with Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)

Brunei is an Islamic nation, based on an ideology called “Malay Islamic Monarchy” or MIB (Melayu Islam Beraja). This form of government is claimed to be the fairest for all people in the country, whether they are Muslims or not. The sultan has favored Brunei government democratization (although Brunei is still far from becoming a real democracy) and declared himself prime minister and president.

Brunei wants to be a center of Islamic excellence: Sharia law was fully implemented in civil and religious affairs for all Muslims even before the country’s independence in 1984 and the government follows a plan of Islamization among the partly Christian, partly animist tribal people in supporting the so-called *dawah* movement (Islamic evangelism). As the US State Department's Country Report for 2018 states on page 11: "The government offered incentives to prospective converts to Islam and the Shafi'i school, especially those from indigenous communities in rural areas, including help with housing, welfare assistance, or help to perform the Hajj. The government gave presentations on the benefits of converting to Islam that received extensive press coverage in state-influenced media. According to government statistics, 292 individuals converted to Islam during the year, lower than previous years. Converts included citizens and permanent residents, as well as foreigners."

The sultans have held absolute power in the country for over 600 years. All important governmental positions are held by the ruling sultan; since citizens value him so highly, he is not blamed for the current tough economic situation, especially now that the COVID-19 crisis has become a strong contributing factor. His rule has not implied any danger to Christians so far, but his Islamic conservatism was shown in 2016 when he criticized authorities for their failure to implement the second phase of Sharia law (i.e. the criminal rules - CPC) which was delayed until its implementation in 2019. Therefore, conservative Islam serves both as state ideology backed by the ruler and as a means to control the population, leaving Christians as second-class citizens at best and insecure about their future.

Drivers of persecution

| Brunei: | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|----|-----|----|-----|------|----|-------------|-----|--|
| Drivers of persecution per engine | IO | RN | ERH | CO | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC | |
| | VERY STRONG | - | - | - | - | - | - | VERY STRONG | - | |
| Government officials | Very strong | - | - | - | - | - | - | Very strong | - | |
| Ethnic group leaders | Medium | - | - | - | - | - | - | Medium | - | |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Strong | - | - | - | - | - | - | Strong | - | |
| Religious leaders of other churches | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Violent religious groups | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Ideological pressure groups | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| One's own (extended) family | Very strong | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Political parties | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| 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 (Very strong):** Conversion is dishonoring to the family. As the family is usually the first to discover a convert, there will be great pressure on him or her to return to the family faith, also to avoid punishment from the government. Family members and neighbors can easily create trouble for converts to Christianity and churches by simply reporting them to the security department KDN, which is frequently happening.
- **Government officials (Very strong):** Since all MIB policies (which favor Muslims over other religions) are legally enforced by the government authorities in all sectors of the country, government officials are major drivers of persecution. MIB is a compulsory subject for students in both public and private schools, and at university level.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Islamic religious leaders have been sources of indirect pressure for Christians through the process of Islamization. There is much 'dawah' (Islamic mission) being carried out by these leaders and their efforts have been partly

successful, which causes rifts in Christian families. For carrying out *dawah*, Islamic authorities organize a range of proselytizing activities and offer financial incentives to propagate Islam. Both non-Muslims and Muslims alike face social pressure to conform to Islamic guidelines regarding behavior.

- ***Ethnic group leaders (Medium):*** The "M" in MIB stands for "Malay", so ethnic group leaders continue to emphasize the privileged position Malays hold in Brunei. Mission efforts are targeted at the ethnic minority groups living in Brunei.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- ***Government officials and non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong/Strong):*** The government describes its official national philosophy as Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), or Malay Islamic Monarchy, which the government defines as "a system that encompasses strong Malay cultural influences, stressing the importance of Islam in daily life and governance, and respect for the monarchy as represented by His Majesty the Sultan." A government body, the MIB Supreme Council, seeks to spread and strengthen the MIB philosophy and ensure MIB is enshrined in the nation's laws and policies. Religious (i.e. Islamic) and Malay leaders exercise great influence on the sultan (who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam) and thereby put pressure on the Christian minority too.
- ***Ethnic group leaders (Medium):*** As ethnic group leaders have a high interest to keep the government in power and secure the dominant position of the Malay people, they will go to great lengths to support the ruler and put pressure on minorities, including Christians, if necessary.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The country is geographically small and has no particular hotspots of persecution.

Christian communities and how they are affected

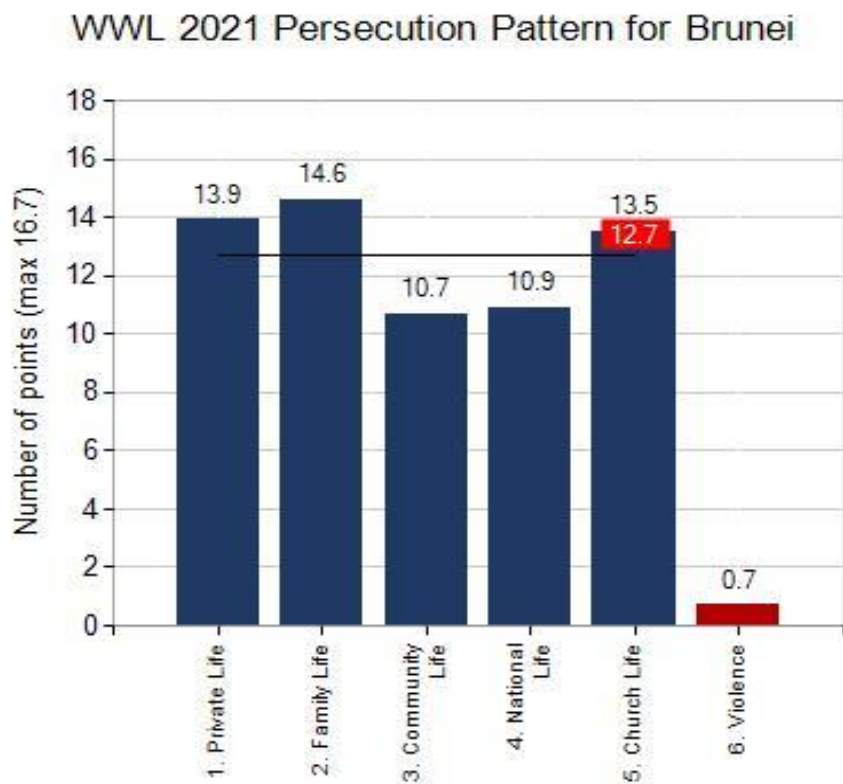
Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: These communities, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, are increasingly facing hostility and have to exercise more and more caution as they are strictly monitored, though they are still less affected by persecution than the newer Protestant groups and convert communities.

Converts to Christianity: Converts from a Muslim background face strong pressure from family and friends as conversion is considered illegal. Should their conversion become known, authorities would also step in to bring them back to their original faith.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Evangelical and Pentecostal churches know that they and their meetings (both in their private and church life) are being closely watched by the authorities and surrounding community and are forced to live their Christian life accordingly.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Brunei shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Brunei was at a very high level, reaching 12.7 points.
- Pressure is extreme and strongest in the *Family and Private spheres of life*, and very high in the *Church sphere of life*. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private and Family spheres*, while all Christians experience pressure in the *National and Church spheres*. This pressure is fuelled by the implementation of Sharia law; the legal prerequisites for full implementation are now given.
- The score for violence against Christians remained at a very low level. The persecution of Christians has never been very violent in Brunei.

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://open Doors analytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (4.00 points)

It is very risky for a convert from Islam to own any Christian materials as it could expose their Christian identity. The SPC includes a list of words and expressions, including the word “Allah,” reserved for use by Muslims only or in relation to Islam, excluding for example the use of the Bahasa Indonesia translation of the Bible, which is very common in the region for all Christians. Bahasa Malay bibles, preferred by native/Bahasa Melayu speaking Christians are likewise not easily obtained and it is risky to own one.

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.). (4.00 points)

All media in Brunei is monitored and censored, when the authorities see the need. It is therefore very risky for Christians to actively talk about their faith in social media under their real name. And even under a pseudonym, most would still be very cautious, as they could easily be accused of "propagating a religion other than Islam" (Section 209 SPC). For converts, this is out of the question and would bring serious danger.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (4.00 points)

Any private statement about Christianity can be construed as proselytizing for the Christian faith, so even wearing a cross is done with much more caution than in previous years. Reportedly, it is even quite common not to show any Christian affiliation by stickers, crucifixes etc. in a car. Christians are trying "not to rock the boat". Anything related to Christmas (whether Christian or not) is also banned in public places in Brunei.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (4.00 points)

It is dangerous and risky for Christian converts to discuss their faith with immediate and extended family or anyone else. As Bruneian laws do not allow Malay Muslims to leave Islam and strict punishments are imposed on those who do so, every conversation about Christian faith can be construed as proselytizing and, thus being against Sharia law. Section 112(1) of the Sharia Penal Code of Brunei stipulates that a Muslim who turns away from Islam is punishable with death, or with imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty years and corporal punishment, depending on the type of evidence. If a Sharia court is satisfied that the accused has repented, the court must order an acquittal. It remains to be seen how the new Sharia Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) will be implemented and change the practice. Nevertheless, Christians need to be very cautious about whom they talk with and what about. Spreading Christian "propaganda" to followers of other faiths or to members of the tribal groups, who are often adherents of ethnic religions, is prohibited and carries a penalty of up to five years in prison, a fine of up to 20,000 Brunei dollars, or both. Christians, especially church leaders, are under permanent surveillance by the authorities.

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)

The law bans any Muslim from surrendering custody of a minor or dependent in his or her guardianship to a non-Muslim. Therefore non-Muslims cannot adopt Muslim children, though they can adopt non-Muslim children. They also cannot adopt children whose parents are unknown.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)

No school, whether private or public, is allowed to teach Christian subjects and all students in primary and secondary schools are required by law to study Islam (or, more accurately, the national MIB philosophy). One pastor commented that some Christian students can recite the MIB principles better than the 10 commandments. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs manage most of the government and private schools in the country. Apart from MIB subjects and other religious subjects, the sultan stated in a speech in July 2018, that Islamic History should be made a compulsory subject in schools and learning centers. He further stated that "the education system must not leave out religion and religion must be its axis. Understand our religion well so as to grow love towards it. The way to understand it is of course by studying, especially studying its history." In schools and vocational schools, all girls are supposed to wear a headscarf.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (4.00 points)

Pressure is especially high for children of converts, once it is discovered that their parents are 'apostates'. Christian girls have to wear a hijab at work and in schools, together with all non-Muslim women and girls. Teachers also put pressure on children to convert and become Muslims. The pressure on Christians can even be felt in private schools.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)

Converts cannot be baptized openly and so baptisms rarely take place or have to be done abroad. As baptisms are possibly the strongest sign of a church being alive and growing, baptismal services will very low profile even among the other categories of Christianity, in order to avoid raising too much attention.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (4.00 points)

With the MIB national philosophy, Islam has permeated into every aspect of society. MIB is a system that encompasses strong Malay cultural influences, stressing the importance of Islam in daily life and governance, and respect for the sultan's monarchy. Thus, Christians are under

pressure to take part in Islamic rites and ceremonies. A refusal is seen as a rejection of the culture and the values of society. There are also strict regulations and penalties during Ramadan concerning the observance of Muslim prayer-times both for Muslims and non-Muslims.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (4.00 points)

Christians with a Muslim background are always under strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to give up their Christian faith. But the pressure is equally strongly felt by other Christians due to the intense Islamization efforts from the government. Churches are experiencing a gradual reduction in membership; one by one members succumb to Islam, primarily to avoid putting up with the great social pressure but also for monetary benefits like receiving 1,000 BN\$ per year for 10 years. As many churches in Brunei are very small and even if it is "only" 2 or 3 people in the church who leave, it can have a serious effect on the remaining congregation. The missionary (or "dawah") efforts are widely publicized and celebrated in national newspapers, where converts are announced with their new names (for more information, see the Block 3 general section below).

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)

Especially the Malay-speaking churches are under serious threat and are always monitored, resulting in a high level of caution and fear among church members and leaders. Everyone is aware of the monitoring and surveillance that is being done. Reportedly, in many churches there are informers (sometimes other Christians) sent by the authorities. The authorities extract information from local citizens about church activities.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.75 points)

Courses on Islam and MIB are mandatory in all schools and while non-Muslims were exempted from some religious requirements, the government reported that many non-Muslim children chose to take courses on Islam. Reportedly, those applying for government-funded scholarships believed that attendance at such courses could be advantageous (according to the US State Department's 2019 IRF report, page 10). Due to economic restraints, the number of university scholarships has gone down. With numbers decreasing, many Christians feel they have even less chance of getting a place at university in Brunei. This trend may accelerate due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

As mentioned above, the Sharia Penal Code (SPC) was introduced in May 2014. This legal code not only regulates crimes like murder and theft but also affects the public display of Christian symbols, the questions of proselytism, apostasy and many other matters. The implementation

of the CPC was almost clandestinely announced in April 2019, leading to an international outcry and to a very rare public reaction by the sultan (see details under Political and Religious landscape above). No matter how Sharia will be implemented in the end - and so far, it seems to be more on the [lenient side](#) (The Diplomat, 1 April 2020) - freedom of religion is strongly limited in Brunei.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)

With a sedition law in place and MIB and SPC always as filters in the backs of their minds, there are limits to how Christians can express their views and faith in public. Bruneian Christians are very careful and law-abiding and self-censor to avoid trouble, especially as it is not totally clear what faith-induced statements could be considered seditious.

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

Although there are a number of political parties active in Brunei, they all abide by the sultan's will, as he holds all power. There are neither Christian political parties nor Christian civil societies as they are not allowed in the country. Where civil societies are owned by Christians, they do not operate as Christian societies or NGOs but as businesses and fulfil all the statutory requirements set out for standard business praxis, e.g. concerning reporting and taxes.

Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Christians are not completely barred from public office, but there is a ceiling as to how far they can go. Benefits and promotion are limited to the Malays and converts to Islam, if they are citizens. This adds pressure on Christians to convert because if they do, they can be rewarded with benefits and career advancement.

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)

Those churches having a registration permit, obtained it in the colonial era and still enjoy its legal status today. Six churches have this status countrywide. However, the government does not allow any further churches to be registered. Even registered churches face problems: In the capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan, the government implements zoning restrictions on Sundays and all roads leading to the Catholic and Anglican churches are closed for "recreational" purposes from 6am to 1pm. Only those with valid permits are allowed to enter the area near the two main churches.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

All church activities - especially the content of preaching - are monitored, with registered churches being particularly affected by government informers. These informers are sometimes Christians themselves, who are offered bribes. Because Sunday services are monitored closely, pastors (especially those preaching in Bahasa Malay) are very careful not to say anything what could be interpreted as criticizing or offending the government or the royal family in their sermon. Published materials are also subject to scrutiny.

Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (4.00 points)

There is a permanent ban on importing printed religious material. However, electronic copies of the Bible and other religious material are available, but converts need to be very cautious when accessing these online.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (4.00 points)

Christians schools in Brunei are subject to the rules of the Bruneian authorities and thus, have to hire Muslim teachers and also provide Islamic studies for Muslim pupils. Other Christian organizations cannot be run by churches and have to function as independent entities, operating as professional or business groups. All groups including schools and charity organizations are required to register with the government. Registration can be refused for any reason, and registered groups can be suspended at any time without prior warning or reason.

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.

Persecution has never been very violent in Brunei and no Christians or churches have been attacked in the WWL 2021 reporting period. However, it is enough to cause some Christians to leave the country and for converts to go into hiding. The American street-preacher mentioned above was detained for a few hours, prior to deportation.

| Brunei: Violence Block question | WWL 2021 | WWL 2020 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| 6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons? | 1 | 0 |
| 6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 0 |
| 6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons? | 10 | 10 |

5 Year trends

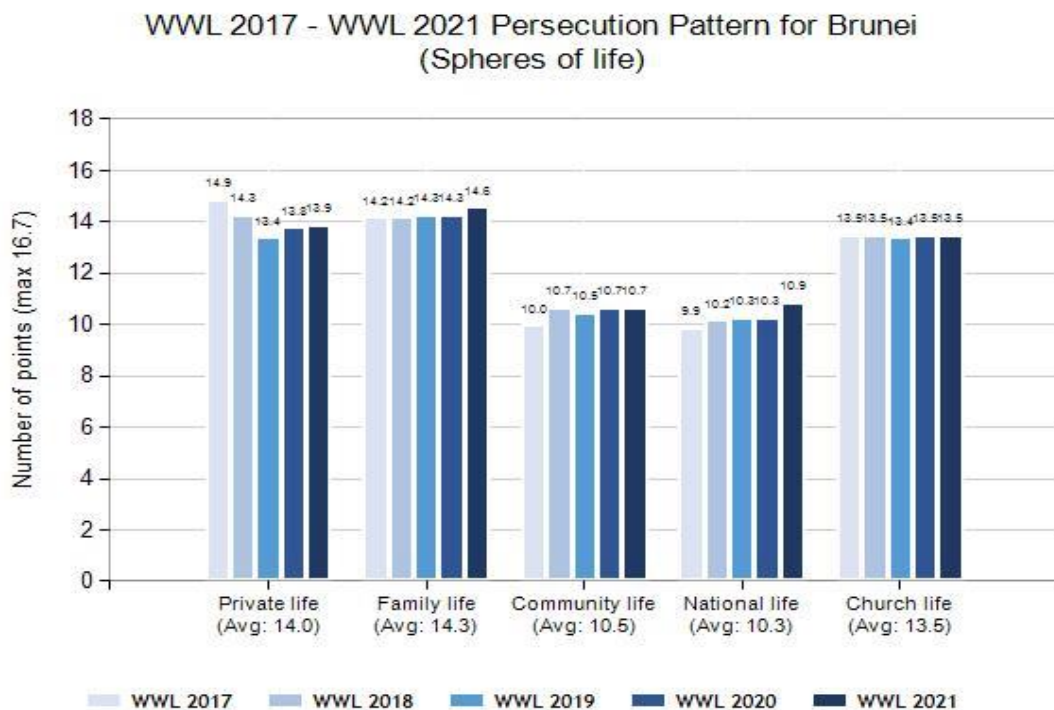
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

| Brunei: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|---|---|
| 2021 | 12.7 |
| 2020 | 12.5 |
| 2019 | 12.4 |
| 2018 | 12.6 |
| 2017 | 12.5 |

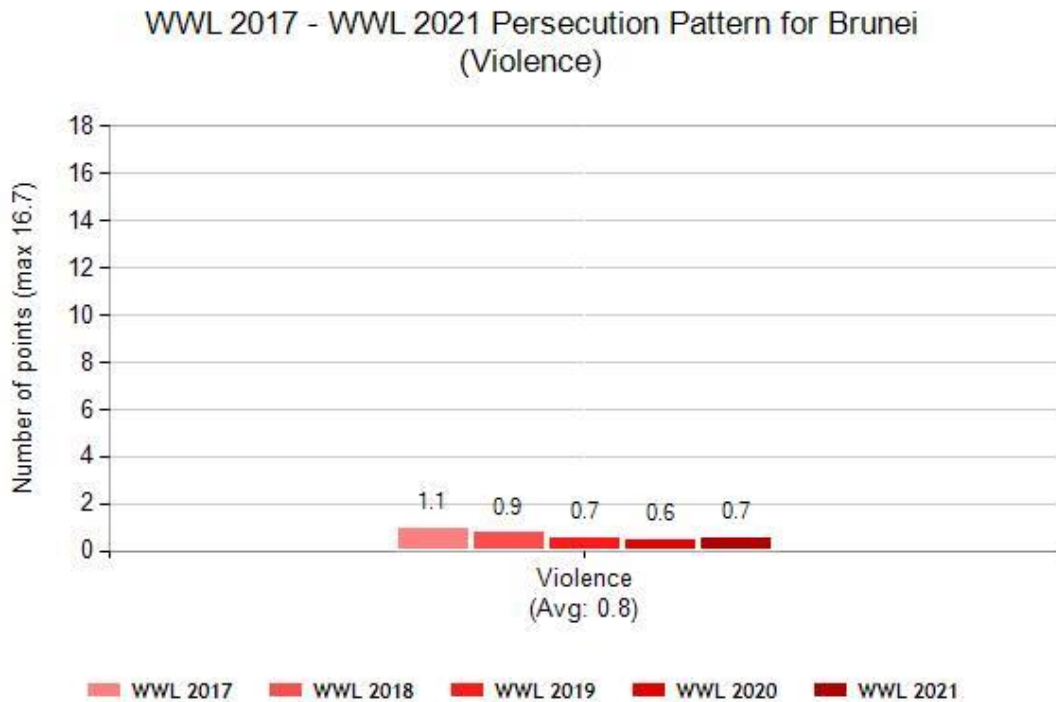
The score for average pressure has continually been at a very high level and is stable at the 12.4 - 12.7 point mark. So far, the implementation of the Shariah Penal Law has not affected the level of pressure.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the levels of pressure in the *Private and Family spheres of life* have nearly always been extremely high. The scores in *Church life* have also been repeatedly at the top end of very high. All spheres indicate that scores for pressure are plateauing, to a greater or lesser degree.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart shows that the violence score has been stable within the very low range 0.6 - 1.1 points. This can partly be explained by the difficulty researcher have in obtaining reports (especially concerning the treatment of converts), but in general it reflects the fact that persecution has never been particularly violent in Brunei.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

| Female Pressure Points |
|--|
| Denied custody of children |
| Enforced religious dress code |
| Forced marriage |
| Incarceration by family (house arrest) |

| |
|--------------------------|
| Violence – psychological |
| Violence – Verbal |

Although Brunei is a CEDAW signatory, Human Rights Watch reported in May 2019 about the [threat](#) the new Syariah Penal Code poses to minority groups such as women and religious minorities (HRW, 22 May 2019). Despite international condemnation, rights and freedom continue to be [restricted](#), including religious freedom and the rights of women (New Naratif, 30 Oct 2019).

Male and female converts to Christianity face the most pressure for their faith. Due to the ever-stricter implementation of Islamic laws, women are forced to wear a hijab and are punished by the religious authorities when they refuse to wear one. This generally does not apply to known Christian families, but to converts (although all women will need to wear a veil in Government positions). Similar to the experience of male converts, women and girls are usually disowned by the family when their conversion becomes known. The family often isolates them, and Imams are called to make them recant. They may also be forced to attend Islamic spiritual rehabilitation programs. For unmarried women, sometimes their families also threaten them with forced marriage to Muslim men they know. Married converts to Christianity are likely to have their children taken away from them in order to ensure they are raised as Muslims. As a country expert commented, the decision for custody of children comes down to one factor: “Muslim trumps all.”

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

| Male Pressure Points |
|--------------------------------|
| Forced out of home – expulsion |
| Violence – physical |
| Violence – Verbal |

As stated above, male and female converts to Christianity face the strongest levels of pressure for their faith. Men and boys are usually disowned by the family when they convert and are forced to leave the family home. They also face beatings, humiliation and harsher treatment when persecuted by religious authorities. Students may also experience discrimination and verbal abuse within educational settings.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department's IRF 2019](#) report:

"The government continued to prohibit non-Muslims from proselytizing among Muslims or persons with no religious affiliation. In October sharia courts charged non-Muslim defendants in two criminal cases. The government permitted Shafi'i Muslims and members of non-Muslim

religious minorities to practice their faiths but continued to ban several religious groups it considers “deviant.” The sultan publicly warned the government to strengthen its stance against deviation from what he called authentic Islamic teachings." (Page 1) And: "As in past years, the government limited traditional Lunar New Year lion dance performances to a three-day period and restricted them to the Chinese temple, Chinese school halls, and private residences of Chinese Association members. Members of the royal family publicly attended Lunar New Year celebrations and lion dance performances during the allowed period, with front-page coverage in state-influenced media." (Page 10)

Non-Sunni Muslim groups seen as deviant - such as Shiite and Ahmadis - are banned and persecuted. Atheism is also not allowed. The activities of Hindus have been restricted. The only Hindu temple in the country is located in the British military barracks of the Gurkha regiment. Sikh and Buddhist communities also visit the temple to pray. Chinese residents have been banned from celebrating their new year with the dragon dance.

In what was said to be a first, on 15 October 2019, a non-Muslim was [charged under Sharia law](#) for theft (Borneo Bulletin, 15 October 2019). Posts on social media in Brunei expressed shock that Sharia law was evidently now applicable to non-Muslims, too.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression, blended with Dictatorial paranoia

The growing economic pressure may lead to increased insecurity in the country, especially as the government is not employing more staff. By pushing for the introduction of Sharia law (and by issuing a ban on public Christian celebrations), the sultan is evidently relying on a conservative brand of Islam - certainly out of conviction - but also as a means of keeping his people in check. The influence of *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia* thus looks set to increase in the future.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: lenient side - <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/sharia-in-brunei-much-ado-about-nothing/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: threat - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/22/bruneis-pernicious-new-penal-code>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: restricted - <http://restricted/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department's IRF 2019 - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: charged under Sharia law - <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/man-stole-mothers-gas-cylinder-behind-bars/%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/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Brunei>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Brunei>