

World
Watch
Research

Mali: 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 / Mali

Brief country details

Mali: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
20,284,000	467,000	2.3

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

Mali: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	28
WWL 2020	66	29
WWL 2019	68	24
WWL 2018	59	37
WWL 2017	59	32

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

Mali: Main persecution engines Main drivers	
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Ethnic group leaders, Organized crime cartels or networks, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Ethno-religious hostility	Ethnic group leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

When radical Islamic groups took control of the northern part of the country in 2012, churches were burned down and Christians had to flee. The displacement of Christians that occurred at that time still affects Christians who lost their homes and whose churches were destroyed. Although some Christians and congregations have returned to the north under police protection, they still live under the threat of attack by Islamic militants. Evangelistic activities in the north are especially risky and could lead to being attacked by radical Muslims. Christian missionaries operating in Mali also live under the constant threat of abduction and some have indeed been kidnapped by jihadists. Christians with a Muslim background risk violence (especially in the north) and pressure from their relatives and family members if their conversion to Christianity is discovered. This part of the country is also unsafe for operating NGOs.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

[2-3 June 2020](#): At least 27 people were killed (some burned alive) when Islamic militants attacked the villages of Bankass, Koro, and Tille which are all predominantly inhabited by Christians (Christian Post, 4 June 2020).

[1 July 2020](#): An armed group of suspected Fulani on motorcycles attacked farming villages in Mali's central Mopti region, killing at least 33 people and wounding at least 5. The villages have a Christian majority population which was probably the main reason behind the attack by the jihadists (AP News, 3 July 2020).

Specific examples of positive developments

The government has kept up its efforts to end the violence perpetrated by the jihadists and has continued to increase the engagement of religious leaders of different faiths to work together to fight extremism. This is a follow-up of the 2019 issuance of a decree creating a national secretariat under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Worship for the implementation of a new national 'Counter Violent Extremism' (CVE) strategy. The strategy, launched in 2018, includes inter-faith dialogue and the promotion of religious tolerance.

External Links - Short country profile

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 2-3 June 2020 - <https://www.christianpost.com/news/27-killed-some-burned-alive-in-jihadist-attacks-on-predominantly-christian-villages-in-mali.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 1 July 2020 - <https://apnews.com/4df8f15ba35622b4dc412abe06e890a0>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Mali

Link for general background information

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

Recent history

Before modern-day Mali came into existence, there were several kingdoms and empires that flourished in the territory that covers part of Mali today. After the short-lived Wassoulou Empire, France established a colony called French Sudan in 1892. French colonial administration came to an end in 1960 and Mali became independent. After experimenting with one-party rule and military rule for decades, Mali adopted a new constitution in 1992 and made a successful transition to democratic rule. Before the coup that overthrew the democratically elected Malian government in March 2012, the country was considered exemplary among African countries for protecting civil liberties and political rights. The media, in particular, was vibrant and open and not subject to governmental pressure or restrictions. For instance, during the presidential election of 2007, the results were considered valid and there was little or no electoral violence. 70 parties ran in the election and the right to vote was extended to all citizens of Mali.

However, in 2012 Tuareg rebels (who had been active in northern Mali for a number of years) formed an alliance with radical Islamic groups, including some foreign fighters mainly coming from Algeria. They overran government forces and took control of several cities and a sizable portion of northern Mali. Consequently, a military coup ousted the civilian administration, but civilian administration was restored after the presidential election in 2013 was won by Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, a veteran politician and a former prime minister. The Malian government was able to push back the advance of the rebels and reclaim most of the occupied territory with the help of French troops. Despite the persistence of occasional clashes between rebels and government forces, a [ceasefire](#) was concluded in 2013 between the rebels and the government (The Guardian, 19 June 2013).

Despite the UN sending in a 12,000 strong peacekeeping force (called the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), the central government has still not managed to regain control and assert its authority over a significant portion of Malian territory. In addition to this political problem, the country faces several economic challenges related to the high poverty level. Most people live in remote parts of the country which face various environmental problems like rapid desertification and lack of access to water.

In July/August 2018, the country conducted a successful presidential election in which President Keïta managed to win a second term. Despite opposition [allegations of fraud](#), this can be seen as a positive development but there is a long way to go before Mali can ever be considered a 'model for African democracy' again (Al-Jazeera, 5 August 2018). That was proven in June 2020 and the following months.

In June and July 2020, the president faced opposition from protesters who demanded his resignation. [On 18 August 2020](#), President Keïta was ousted by a group of soldiers calling itself the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (BBC News, 19 August 2020). The UN, African Union and regional leaders all condemned the coup, but the coup leaders claimed to have saved the country from sliding into chaos and confirmed they would prepare elections within a reasonable time-frame.

Political and legal landscape

Despite Mali's positive record on civil liberties and political rights, prior to 2012 there were notable inconsistencies on how these rights were applied in the northern two-thirds of the country, a reality which was often overlooked by foreign observers. Political power in Mali was concentrated in the southern one-third of the country, dominated by Muslim sub-Saharan African tribes such as the Songhai and Zarma, while the more conservative Muslim northern tribes, such as the Tuareg and the Arabs, were often left out of power. While discrimination against the Tuareg and Arabs was not official policy, in practice they received a smaller proportion of government revenue and services, which had led the Tuareg into intermittent open rebellion over several decades.

The insecurity and instability that has resulted from the 2012 civil war and the continued attacks by Islamic militants are major challenges in the current political landscape. Unless the [2015 peace-deal](#) between the rebels and the government is fully implemented and the grievances of the Tuareg are addressed (BBC News, 20 June 2015), an improvement in the political situation in Mali is unlikely, which will mean continued insecurity and anxiety for Christians in the country.

French government involvement in the country's political affairs has been a major problem for the country. Although the country claimed its independence half a century ago, France continues to influence its political decisions. France was, for instance, the first country to send troops in order to contain the Tuareg uprising.

The highly contested elections in the summer of 2018 concluded with the re-election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta for a second term as president. Given that his election required a second round of voting and that his main challenger alleged that the election had been rigged, Keïta's mandate and legitimacy was weak, hampering his ability to tackle the political and security challenges his government faced effectively.

In 2020, despite the unfolding [COVID-19 crisis](#) and the kidnapping of opposition leader Soumaila Cisse, the country held the long-awaited parliamentary elections on 29 March 2020 (Deutsche Welle, 30 March 2020). These elections should have taken place after President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta's 2018 re-election but were postponed several times due to security concerns. The voter turnout for the elections was extremely low (just 36 %). It was not long before demonstrations took place with demands for the resignation of the president. The president's attempt to negotiate with the opposition failed. Neighboring countries and foreign powers became [uneasy](#) (US News, 10 July 2020): "Mali's neighbors and outside powers worry the impasse could further destabilise the country and jeopardise a joint military campaign against Islamist insurgents in the West African Sahel region."

As a result, on 18 August 2020, elements of the army conducted a coup and the president and some of his cabinet were placed under arrest. The African Union (AU) [suspended](#) Mali's membership (France24, 19 August 2020) and the West African regional bloc (ECOWAS) also urged the coup leaders to transfer power to a civilian government. The back and forth between the regional leaders and the coup leaders ended with a mixed result that is summarized by the International Crisis Group (ICG) as follows: "Following the military junta's seizure of power in August, Malian Prime Minister Moctar Ouane on Monday announced a new government. Crisis Group expert Jean-Hervé Jezequel says that while the formation of the new administration is ostensibly a positive step in accordance with the government's pledge to oversee an eighteen-month transition to civilian rule, the junta still maintains considerable influence. It holds four key government positions, including the defence and security portfolios, in addition to the head of the Junta serving as vice president. In a positive signal, however, the new cabinet marks the demise of an older generation of politicians who have dominated the government since the 1990s and whose failure to implement governance reforms contributed to the current crisis." ([ICG Weekly update, 9 October 2020](#)).

While the Mali politicians and the regional bloc are busy negotiating a possible way forward, Islamic militants in the region are gaining in strength.

Religious landscape

Mali: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	467,000	2.3
Muslim	17,992,000	88.7
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,800,000	8.9
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	1,200	0.0
Atheist	1,200	0.0
Agnostic	22,000	0.1

Other	800	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)

Mali, as is typical for other West African states, has been dominated by Islam for centuries (in a mostly moderate form) and by a constitutionally secular political system which prohibits religious political parties. Apart from the northern part of the country where the Christian minority had always faced discrimination at the hands of the Muslim majority, Christians used to enjoy a fair amount of freedom in Malian society, which also allowed the presence of foreign Christian missionaries. Malian Muslims had a reputation for being moderate and tolerant of other religious beliefs. There was also a high tolerance level towards converts to Christianity during the colonial period. This tolerance, however, faded as time went by and it is now highly dangerous to be known as a Christian of Muslim origin. Both Malian Christians (the majority being Roman Catholic) and Muslims tend to combine their faith with indigenous animist beliefs, since there is a significant presence of Ethno-religionists or Animists in the country. Even though most Malian Christians live in the south of the country, they have come under increasing pressure as a result of the threat from radical Islamic activities in the north.

An estimated 88.7% of the population are Muslim according to WCD 2020 data and most are adherents of Malikiite Sunni Islam which is a version of Islam influenced by Sufism. This brand of Islam is moderate and tolerant of other faiths. In northern Mali, especially among the Arab and Tuareg tribes, the influence of more radical versions of Islam has grown over the past few years who have little respect for Sufi-influenced religious practices, as evidenced by the destruction of 13th century Sufi shrines in Timbuktu when radical Islamic groups controlled the city in 2012.

The situation in Mali changed abruptly in April 2012 when the creation of the independent state of Azawad in northern Mali was proclaimed. The Islamists, most of whom can be identified as Wahhabis, soon established an Islamic state system with a strict Sharia regime in the north. Most Christians fled before the Islamists took over. In the meantime, they destroyed churches and other Christian buildings. The Church in southern Mali has also been negatively affected by the increasing visibility of various Wahhabi groups. Although the rebels and the government reached a peace agreement in 2015 and international peacekeepers were brought in, Islamic radicalization in Malian society has continued.

Economic landscape

Mali is one of the least developed countries in the world and finds itself ranked 184th out of 188 countries in the 2019 [UNDP Human Development Index](#).

According to the [World Bank's 2020 Macro Poverty Outlook report](#):

- **Economic growth:** Growth increased from 4.7% in 2018 to 5.1% (1.9% per capita) in 2019. On the supply side, economic activities were driven by services, agriculture, construction, and mining, which made up to 85% of the GDP growth. On the demand side, government investment accelerated and contributed to 2.8 percentage points of growth.

- **Inflation:** Inflation turned negative in 2019 at -0.4% with a continued downward trend.
- **Import/Export:** The external current account deficit remained unchanged at 4.9% of GDP with the rise in import volumes offset by an improvement in the terms of trade. Exports were driven by gold production.
- **Fiscal deficit:** The fiscal deficit decreased from 4.7% of GDP in 2018 to 2.9% in 2019.
- **Tax revenues:** Tax revenues recovered from 11.9% of GDP in 2018 to 14.6% in 2019, thanks to improvements in tax and customs administrations as well as increased audit coverage.
- **Total expenditure:** This increased by 4.5% of GDP to 24.8%, due to a public investment surge.
- **Public debt:** This rose from 37.5% of GDP to 38.3% in 2019. Mali remains at moderate risk of overall and external debt distress.
- **Poverty:** The extreme poverty rate is estimated to have declined from 42.2% in 2018 to 41.2% in 2019. Strong agricultural production including cotton and the tertiary sector expansion led to increase in consumption of rural households and induced a decline in poverty.
- **COVID-19:** Due to the combined effects of insecurity, Covid-19, energy sector fiscal risks, deteriorating terms of trade, and adverse weather conditions, economic growth is projected to decelerate to 2.9% in 2020, and to an average 4.6% over the medium-term. Poverty reduction is projected to stall and remain unchanged at 41.3% in 2020.

According to [Theodora.com](https://www.theodora.com) (January 2020 update):

- About 65% of Malian territory is arid or semi-arid making a significant portion of the country ill-suited for farming. Thus, Economic activity is largely confined to the riverine area irrigated by the Niger River. About 10% of the population is nomadic and about 80% of the labor force is engaged in farming and fishing. Industrial activity is concentrated on processing farm commodities. Mali is also rich in gold and other minerals, which are exploited by South African and European companies. The country's fiscal status fluctuates with gold and agricultural commodity prices and the harvest; cotton and gold exports make up around 80% of export earnings. Despite all this, Mali's economy heavily relies on foreign aid, including the World Bank and other international donors, and bilateral donations from the European Union, European countries, and the USA.
- France is a main commercial partner and other countries (e.g. China and Middle Eastern states) also trade and invest in Mali. Mali used to have strong ties with Russia and a number of its elite were trained in Russia (including Dioncounda Traoré who served as president from April 2012 to September 2013 after the military coup). However, Russia no longer has a strong economic presence.

According to [Heritage World's 2020 Index of Economic Freedom](https://www.heritage.org/economic):

- Mali's economy is ranked as the 126th freest in the 2020 index with a score of 55.9 points. Mali is ranked 20th of the 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Social and cultural landscape

Mali is one of Africa's richest countries in terms of history and culture. It is the home of Timbuktu, one of the oldest trade and intellectual centers in the world and was added to the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1988.

According to [UNESCO](#) (accessed 12 October 2020):

- "Founded in the 5th century, the economic and cultural apogee of Timbuktu came about during the 15th and 16th centuries. It was an important center for the diffusion of Islamic culture with the University of Sankore, with 180 Koranic schools and 25,000 students. It was also a crossroads and an important market place where the trading of manuscripts was negotiated, and salt from Teghaza in the north, gold was sold, and cattle and grain from the south."
- Three sites in the country have been placed on UNESCO's [List of World Heritage in Danger](#) because of threats related to armed conflict: Old towns of Djenné (2016), Timbuktu (2012), Tomb of Askia (2012).

According to [UNDP's 2019 Human Development Indicators report](#) and [World Factbook](#) (April 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Bambara 33.3%, Fulani (/Peuhl) 13.3%, Sarakole/Soninke/Marka 9.8%, Senufo/Manianka 9.6%, Malinke 8.8%, Dogon 8.7%, Sonrai 5.9%, Bobo 2.1%, Tuareg/Bella 1.7%, other Malian 6% (2018 est.).
- **Main languages:** French (official), Bambara 46.3%, Peuhl/Foulfoulbe 9.4%, Dogon 7.2%, Maraka/Soninke 6.4%, Malinke 5.6%, Sonrhai/Djerma 5.6%
- **Population and growth rate:** The overall population is expected to reach 19.6 million this year (July 2020 est.) with growth rate of 2.95% (2020 est.)
- **Median age:** 16.3 years
- **Urban population:** 43.9% of the total population
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.86% annual rate of change (2015-2020 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.6 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 33.1%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 64.2%
- **Unemployment:** 9.6 of total labor force
- **Youth unemployment (15-24 years):** 24.8% of total labor force

According to [USAID](#) (April 2020):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** Armed conflict continues to exacerbate humanitarian needs across Mali, particularly in central and northern regions, generating widespread displacement and threatening livelihoods. As of late February, violence had displaced approximately 219,000 people across the country, an increase of nearly 100,000 people since February 2019, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The majority of Mali's IDPs currently reside in Gao, Ménaka, Mopti, Ségou, and Timbuktu regions.

- The authorities in Mopti registered 11,000 IDPs from March 7 to 9, bringing the region’s IDP count to 88,000 people as of mid-March and accounting for approximately 40 percent of the country’s total IDP population, according to the UN. Further, the UN reports that nearly one-third of Mali’s IDPs have been displaced more than once since fleeing their homes.
- Malians have continued to flee to neighboring countries due to ongoing violence. More than 142,000 Malian refugees were residing in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger as of late February, including approximately 25,000 Malian refugees in Burkina Faso, nearly 58,000 individuals in Mauritania, and an estimated 59,000 refugees in Niger, according to the Government of Mali and UNHCR.

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

- **Human Development Index:** Mali is ranked 184th out of 189 countries with a human development value of 0.427.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 59.9 years.
- **Gender Development Index (GDI) score:** 0.807
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII) score:** 0.676

Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed 7 July 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 61.6% of the population – survey date: 31 December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 8.2% of the population – survey date 31 December 2019

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

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 115.1 per 100 people

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (update 22 Apr 2020):

- Mobile penetration in Mali is relatively high and given the sparse nature of the fixed-line infrastructure there is considerable potential for mobile broadband services. Nevertheless, Mali’s landlocked location makes it dependent on neighboring countries for international bandwidth, which has kept prices high. Improvements in this sector can be expected from the recent arrival of several new competitive international submarine fibre optic cables in the region, while the government in late 2017 set in motion plans for a local Internet Exchange Point.

In a nutshell, Mali is not well advanced in technology, although a university specializing in science and technology has been opened in Bamako.

Security situation

In 2019 and 2020, many attacks were conducted by [Islamic militants](#) (International Crisis Group, 28 May 2019); armed Fulani herdsmen have also committed atrocities.

Due to its better democratic and civil liberties record compared to other Muslim majority countries in the region - as well as the influence of Sufiism - Mali was a relatively tolerant country for Christians. However, the 2012 civil war and the opportunity that it gave Islamic militant groups changed this situation and since then there has been a serious risk and challenge to Christians. Militant Islamic groups - such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) - are still active, especially in the northern region, and target UN peacekeepers in particular. The UN Security Council has increased the number of peacekeeping troops in the country and has also expanded its mandate to allow a more robust military action against militant groups. The situation in Mali is still fragile and it will take a number of years before there is peace and stability in the country. In July 2019, the UK government also decided to send troops to fight Islamic militants in the country.

With the proliferation of jihadist groups like Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, the vast territory of Mali that is not under effective government control is becoming a sanctuary for Islamic militants who are a threat to the security of the entire region. As Mali is located in one of the hotbed regions for jihadists, the situation in the country cannot be seen in isolation; it is part of the overall rise of Islamic militancy and Wahhabism in the entire [Sahel region](#) (WWR, August 2016). Therefore, the trajectory of the political and security situation in the whole region is crucial for the future of Mali. Furthermore, even if the government of Mali and other regional states manage to crush the armed Islamic militancy of groups like AQIM, the radicalization of the youth and society at large by this group is a more intractable problem and is creating a hostile environment for Christians for years to come.

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, instability and violence have created fear and chaos in the country. Impunity is rampant and the government is not in a position to stop or bring the perpetrators to justice.

Notable attacks by Islamic militants include:

- [2 October 2019](#): At least 25 Malian soldiers were killed and 60 more are missing after militants attacked two army camps in the towns of Boukessy and Mondoro (BBC News, 2 October 2019).
- [3 November 2019](#): IS militants attacked a military post in Indelimane, in Menaka region close to the border with Niger. They killed at least 53 soldiers and a civilian (Al-Jazeera, 3 November 2019).
- [18 November 2019](#): An attack by Islamic militants in the north-eastern Gao region killed 24 soldiers and left 29 injured (AP News, 19 November 2019).

According to the [UK Government Foreign Travel Advice](#), accessed 13 October 2020:

- 26 January 2020: Islamic militants attacked a military camp in Sokolo, Segou region, killing 20 soldiers.
- 6 April 2020: Islamic militants attacked a military base in Bamba, Gao region, killing 25 soldiers.
- 6 June 2020: Islamic militants conducted an attack in Sarakala, Segou region, resulting in army vehicles and weapons being stolen.

- 14 June 2020: Islamic militants attacked a military convoy approximately 160km north of Segou town, killing 24 soldiers.

Mali's inability to contain the jihadist situation has caused demonstrations to be held. The protestors are critical of the government's continued failure to stem Mali's extremist insurgency and inter-community bloodshed. As a result of the lack of security, Christians face the risk of being targeted, kidnapped and killed. Church-run schools have also been forced to close down.

Trends analysis

1) Islamic militancy is a major challenge

The main trend facing Mali is the growing influence of militant Islam and Wahhabism. It will take a long time to build up a Christian presence again in the north of Mali. Islamic militants continue to be active in Mali, notwithstanding the peace-deal that was [signed in 2015](#) and will remain a threat in the years to come. The peace-deal is very fragile, and the government and UN peacekeepers are still unable to establish the authority of the government in some parts of the country. Despite all the challenges that the country has faced in the past five years, it managed to hold a relatively peaceful and successful presidential election in 2018.

2) Lawlessness is spilling over from neighboring countries

The lawlessness in neighboring countries has been affecting Mali greatly. After the fall of Gaddafi in Libya, the region became filled with rebel groups and Mali paid the highest price with civil war and a coup. As reported by [BBC News](#) on 22 March 2012: "The trouble began when hundreds of Malian combatants who had fought to defend the late Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, fled back home with weapons at the end of last year and formed the most powerful Tuareg-led rebel group the region has known - the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA)." As the region is still in turmoil with the COVID-19 crisis only exacerbating the problem, Mali is facing a spill-over effect from the situation in the neighboring countries.

3) The series of governance crises continues

In the last decade, Mali has been through a series of governance crises. A country that was once hailed as a symbol of African democracy experienced a coup and a militant jihadist group controlling the vast majority of the country. During the WWL 2021 reporting period, the continued protests demanding the resignation of the country's leader led to a further military coup in August 2020. While the coup leaders have pledged to oversee an eighteen-month transition to civilian rule, they still maintain a considerable influence which is far from democratic.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Mali country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13881370>
- Recent history: ceasefire - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/19/mali-peace-deal-tuareg-insurgents-aid>
- Recent history: allegations of fraud - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/mali-candidate-soumaila-cisse-court-alleging-vote-fraud-180805154952537.html>
- Recent history: On 18 August 2020 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53833925>

- Political and legal landscape: 2015 peace-deal - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33213931>
- Political and legal landscape: COVID-19 crisis - <https://www.dw.com/en/mali-legislative-elections-hampered-by-low-voter-turnout/a-52958735>
- Political and legal landscape: uneasy - <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-07-10/protesters-rally-in-mali-after-rejecting-presidents-concessions>
- Political and legal landscape: suspended - <https://www.france24.com/en/20200819-mali-coup-leaders-face-international-condemnation-au-suspends-membership>
- Political and legal landscape: ICG Weekly update, 9 October 2020 - <https://mailchi.mp/crisisgroup.org/this-week-in-conflict-crisis-x7ndmp7lm0-2389408?e=b87d31638c>
- Economic landscape: UNDP Human Development Index - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's 2020 Macro Poverty Outlook report - <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/720441492455091991/mpo-ssa.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Theodora.com - https://theodora.com/wfbcurrent/mali/mali_economy.html
- Economic landscape: Heritage World's 2020 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/mali>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNESCO - <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/119>
- Social and cultural landscape: List of World Heritage in Danger - <https://whc.unesco.org/en/danger/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP's 2019 Human Development Indicators report - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/ML-summary.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: USAID - <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/04.09.20%20-%20USAID-DCHA%20Mali%20Complex%20Emergency%20Fact%20Sheet%20%231.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#bf>
- 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=MLI
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Mali-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: Islamic militants - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-malis-jihadists>
- Security situation: Sahel region - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf>
- Security situation: 2 October 2019: - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49904226>
- Security situation: 3 November 2019: - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/mali-dozens-troops-killed-military-outpost-attack-191102052705177.html>
- Security situation: 18 November 2019: - <https://apnews.com/c69e3b109b764265a11cc02c80a47e6b>
- Security situation: UK Government Foreign Travel Advice - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/mali/terrorism>
- Trends analysis: signed in 2015 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33213931>
- Trends analysis: BBC News - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17481114>

WWL 2021: Church information / Mali

Christian origins

The present area called Mali was dominated by various Muslim empires and kingdoms before the French colonization. Especially the northern part of the country was predominantly Muslim and there were some followers of traditional African religion in parts of the southern areas. It was the White Fathers, a Roman Catholic missionary order, who brought Christianity to Mali in 1895. However, the growth of Christianity in Mali was very slow. Most of today's Christians are descendants of former Muslims and Animists who converted to Christianity during the colonial period. It was only in 1936 that the first African Roman Catholic priest was ordained, and it was only in 1962 that the first Malian bishop was consecrated. Protestants came to the country in 1919 via the Gospel Missionary Union (GMU) from the USA. That was followed by the arrival of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in 1923.

Church spectrum today

Mali: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	280,000	60.0
Protestant	160,000	34.3
Independent	25,000	5.4
Unaffiliated	1,700	0.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	466,700	99.9
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	166,000	35.5
Renewalist movement	50,000	10.7

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 main denomination in Mali is the Roman Catholic church but there are many Protestant church communities too. Christians are mainly located in major cities, especially around the Bamako area. Those Christians who live outside the major cities face extreme danger even as civil servants (e.g. as teachers).

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Mali

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Mali: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	28
WWL 2020	66	29
WWL 2019	68	24
WWL 2018	59	37
WWL 2017	59	32

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

The increase in one point in WWL 2021 was due to an increase in violence. However, the situation has become complex and it is difficult to distinguish clearly between religious-based and ethnic-based violence. Pressure in the *Community* and *Church spheres* remained very high as jihadists have utilized the security vacuum left by the government due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Persecution engines

Mali: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Strong
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	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

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):

Mali has been dominated by Islam for centuries (in a mostly moderate form). However, in April 2012, Islamists (mostly Wahhabis) set up a strict Sharia regime in the north, destroying churches and other Christian buildings. The Church in southern Mali also faces an increasing influence of Wahhabi groups and as a result, Islamic radicalization and hostility towards Christians is growing.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong):

The country is situated in the Sahel region of West Africa where there are vast desert and arid areas that are difficult to control. Criminal gangs use this as an opportunity to expand their activities for transporting illegal substances to Western Europe. Most criminal organizations have allied themselves with radical Islamic groups and persecute Christians. The former Tuareg rebel forces have now basically become criminal operators.

Ethno-religious hostility (Medium):

Although most of the Malian population are Muslims, they still intermix their Islamic beliefs with several forms of witchcraft and sorcery. The current Wahhabi movement is trying to 'purify' Islam from such traditional practices. Many Malian Christians also combine tribal practices with Christian beliefs. Most tribal or ethnic leaders in the remote parts of the country are hostile towards Muslims or Christians who oppose such practices and there have been clashes between tribal leaders and Christians in some instances.

Drivers of persecution

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

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** The main drivers of Islamic oppression in Mali are militant Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) who are active mainly in the northern part of the country but also conduct attacks and kidnappings in southern regions. Segments of the population influenced by the radical and intolerant teaching of Wahhabism are also drivers of persecution and especially target Christians with a Muslim background.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** In some areas where jihadists are operating, Muslim religious leaders teach the same radical sentiment. These religious leaders provide a platform for the jihadists to have a strong presence in the community.
- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** Islamic oppression in Mali is combined with ethnic motivation as well, and Tuareg/ 'Arab' and Fulani group leaders are also drivers of persecution. Arabs and Fulani oppose any advance of Christianity in Mali. A country expert states: "Indigenous ethnic communities with minority Christian numbers have complained of persecution by Fulani and Tuareg herders who they accuse of destroying their farms and means of

subsistence, including the looting of food stores, as well as maiming and killing them and burning their houses."

- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** Society in general does not see Christianity positively. This is particularly true in the case of converts.
- **Family (Medium):** This varies from family to family. However, it is common for extended family members to exert pressure and use violence against family members who decide to join Christianity (or leave Islam).
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (strong):** This gives the jihadists the means and method to stay afloat. It is through this driver that they finance their operations.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** There are several criminal organizations operating in Mali. The country's geographical situation with its vast desert and arid areas had helped the expansion of these organizations. These criminal networks are involved with radical Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) and persecute Christians. Corrupt government officials who turn a blind eye to incidents targeting Christians are also a factor behind the persecution.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Militant Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) are active mainly in the northern part of the country. These jihadists have established or joined already established crime syndicates. Through these syndicates, they are able to buy weapons, carry out kidnappings and act with impunity.

Drivers of Ethno-religious hostility:

- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** Most ethnic tribal leaders (such as Tuareg tribal leaders) are involved in the persecution of Christians. Traditional animist tribal leaders in the south are also hostile toward Christians and attempt to prevent the advancement of Christianity. They especially target Christian groups that try to remove elements of African traditional beliefs from Christian expressions of faith.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians experience most difficulties for their faith in the areas where jihadists and Fulani herdsman are active in [the north and the north-eastern](#) part of the country. To some extent, there are small pockets of intense persecution in the southern part of the country as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation in Mali and so this category is therefore not included in WWL scoring and analysis.

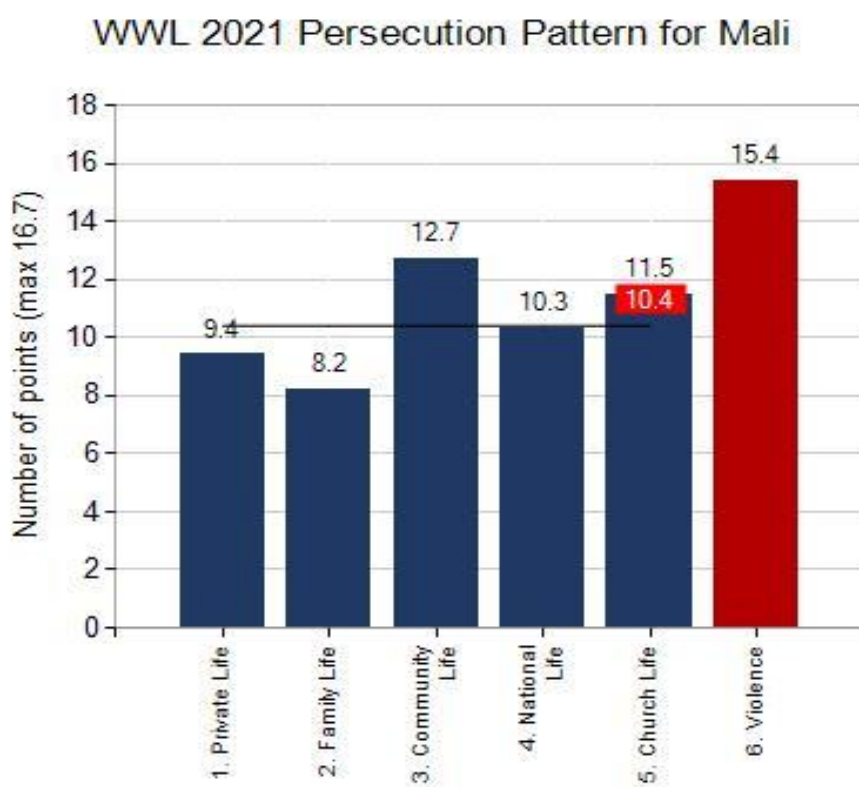
Historical Christian communities: Of the less than 3% of Malians who are Christian, the majority belong to historical Christian communities. These include Roman Catholic churches and a significant number of Protestant denominations. Those living in the southern part of the country enjoy freedom of religion in relative terms in comparison to their counterparts in the north. Nevertheless, although the degree and intensity of the threat of attacks by Islamic militants is

greater in the north than in the south, those in the south also have to face threats of attack and kidnapping.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background are mainly to be found among the Bozo and the Dogon, but there are also converts living elsewhere in the country. In addition to the threat from Islamic militants that most Malian Christians face, it is converts to Christianity who additionally face varying degrees of pressure from their family members, relatives and neighbors to renounce Christianity.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Mali has a small number of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches mainly found in the southern part of the country. Due to their style of worship and their likelihood to be more engaged in evangelism, such communities are likely to draw the ire and hostility of society at large.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 persecution pattern for Mali shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mali is high at 10.4 points, the same as in WWL 2020.
- All *spheres of life* show high or very high levels of pressure. Pressure is strongest in the *Community sphere* (12.7 points) followed by the *Church* and *National spheres*.
- The level of violence against Christians is extreme with a score of 15.4 points in WWL 2021, up from 13.7 points in WWL 2020.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (2.75 points)

Converts with a Muslim background experience most difficulties in this *sphere of life* compared to other Christians. Pressure to recant is exerted by family and community members.

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.). (2.50 points)

Non-convert Christians living in the northern parts of the country face several forms of hindrances in their daily lives and have become increasingly in danger of attack even when they express their Christian faith privately. One country researcher reported that hatred towards Christians is especially on the increase in Dohara and Bodwall where Catholic churches have been attacked in the past.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.50 points)

It has been very risky in northern Mali for Christians to display images and symbols of Christianity. In the south, Christians have been denied land for building new churches and denied permission to rent places for worship. This is more prevalent in areas where Christians openly display images and symbols such as the cross or religious statues.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.25 points)

Christians in the northern part of the country face massive problems in conducting any act of worship. Converts particularly cannot express their Christian beliefs openly or practice their faith in private due to the customary living arrangements; any deviance from Islamic rites is easily detected and will lead to persecution.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

This is more a security issue than formal prohibition. In the northern part of the country, expression in such a manner would mean exposing oneself to jihadists in the region.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

In the context of the ongoing crisis in the country, Christians are being targeted at schools, public places and other social gatherings. Children of Christians often bear the brunt of harassment and bullying: In northern Mali in particular, Christian children are made to feel like second class citizens and they are often referred to as 'infidels'.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.75 points)

Teachers have been intimidated and children forced to attend Quranic classes. In many parts of Mali, Islamic militants have tried to stop the use of French as the main language for instruction and replace it with Arabic. They have also demanded that these schools, many of which are operated by Christian organizations, be converted into Islamic schools.

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.75 points)

Muslim families will not tolerate any conversion of a family member, including the conversion of a spouse. For reasons of family honor, having a convert within the family could make the whole family vulnerable to ostracism by the community. Particularly in the northern region, the extended family of any Christian with a Muslim background is likely to exert pressure with the aim of making them renounce Christianity.

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.). (3.75 points)

The severity depends upon where one lives: The north is most severe, but harassment in central Mali is increasing: Although the government is forbidding religious propaganda, radio and sermons in mosques are becoming radical in their opposition towards Christian faith and practice. Pressure is being put on local communities in central Mali to adopt Sharia law, although this is against the state law. Although Christians in places like Bamako are much more free in general, they also report discrimination.

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.). (3.50 points)

In some areas (particularly in the north), Islamic groups have been monitoring churches and Christians. Local citizens and community leaders like to know where Christian groups might be planning to establish new churches or build schools and hospitals. They also seek information about conversions.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)

A country researcher reports: "Christians in Mali are under constant threat to renounce their faith. Such threats come in the context of national narrative - where Christians are considered as following the wrong religion. Life is made difficult for Christians considering the lack of tolerance, respect, and regard for Christian beliefs in Mali. Again, as a matter of policy, the government is more sympathetic towards Islam".

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.25 points)

In the last years, several Christians have been abducted for ransom and some are still believed to be in captivity. Due to the growth in radical Islam and lack of security, the number of forced marriages of Christian girls to Muslim men is high in many areas.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

In the context of the ongoing conflict, Christians face serious reprisals if they speak out about Islamist activities and the atrocities militants are committing.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

There is no existing political party in Mali founded on the basis of the Christian faith. The few Christian civil society organizations in existence are closely monitored under the suspicion that they are actively promoting conversion from Islam.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.25 points)

Quite frequently, Christians have been pressured into converting to Islam and to act against their consciences in certain professional positions. Such pressure is particularly prevalent in the Malian army and other security agencies and in the public health sector, banking sector and some other ministries.

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

This is one of the toughest issues that face Christians in the country; it is not the law hindering travel but the danger. Missionaries, in particular, require an enormous amount of security to travel to the north. This is a very dangerous place to travel. For example, a Swiss missionary who was kidnapped in 2016 in northern Mali [was executed](#) in September 2020 (Christianity Today, 16 October 2020).

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points)

Christians in the north have been experiencing great problems in repairing or building places of Christian worship. In May 2018, for example, a group of Christian refugees came under attack after they tried to construct a makeshift church in one of the refugee camps close to the border with Niger.

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

In parts of the country where it is dangerous to identify as a Christian or carry out evangelism, it is the lack of security which is hindering outside activities.

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

In the north, Christians and churches are being monitored by Islamist groups and Western NGOs and even UN peacekeepers are being accused of 'evangelizing', where contact with Western culture is equated with Christianity. In the rest of the country, churches need permission from the government to do outdoor activities such as evangelism campaigns. In many areas, this is no problem and the Jesus Film, for instance, can be shown openly.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.50 points)

Islamist groups often monitor Christian teaching and published materials. This is also happening in schools where militants go round schools and intimidate teachers into not teaching anything to do with Christianity or secularism. The government is also keen on detecting any 'hate speech' occurring in schools and churches.

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.

Mali: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	33	10
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10	100
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10	10
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	2	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	21	100
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?	100	10
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?	10	4
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000	10
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	40	0

5 Year trends

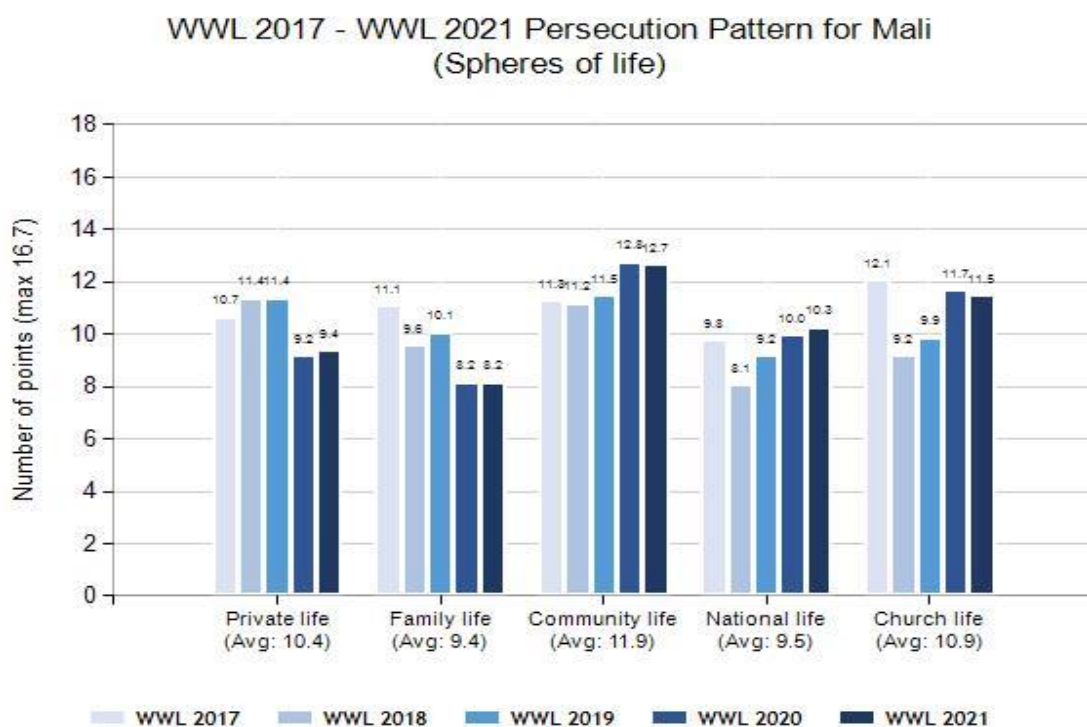
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Although there have been variations for the first two reporting periods shown below, the level of average pressure would seem to be stabilizing at around the 10.4 point mark. It is stabilizing, but at a high level. This also shows that Islamic militants and other intolerant groups have maintained their influence in the country.

Mali: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	10.4
2020	10.4
2019	10.4
2018	9.9
2017	11.0

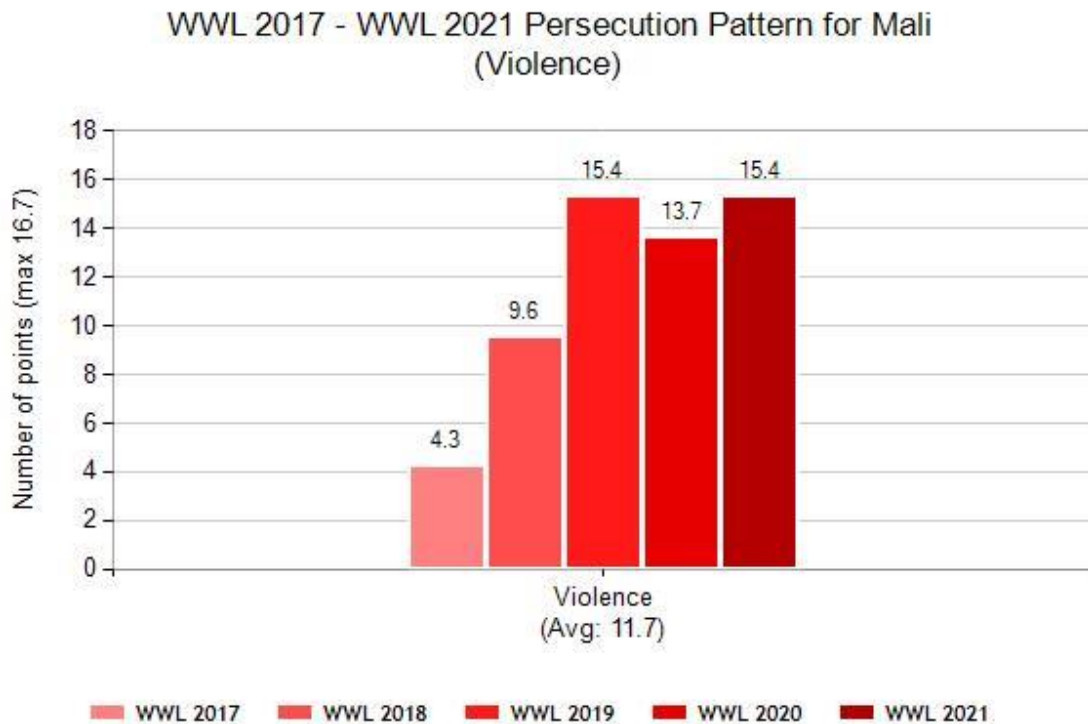
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Looking at the averages per *sphere of life*, over the last 5 reporting periods, pressure has been greatest in *Community life* with an average score of 11.9 points, followed by *Church life* with an average score of 10.9 points. These high scores indicate that the space for Christians is shrinking.

This is partly and indirectly helped by the weak and fragile central government which is unable to protect Christians from the jihadists.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The graph above shows that the average score for violence is very high with 11.7 points. The score for violence peaked at the extremely high level of 15.4 points in the WWL 2019 and WWL 2021 reporting periods.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied custody of children
Enforced religious dress code
Forced divorce
Forced marriage
Forced out of home – expulsion

Targeted Seduction
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

There has been a resurgence of attacks by Islamic militants since the last quarter of 2019. Militant groups kidnap girls and forcibly marry them to some of their members. Whilst this does not affect Christian girls alone, it is considered a common tactic used by Islamic militants to spread Islam, and is a widely feared threat for female Christians. Christian women live in an ambiance of Islamic culture with its associated and imposed dress code. They experience social rejection and when facing persecution, the children suffer repercussions of whatever befalls their parents. When parents are separated, or fathers are killed or some other loss of subsistence income occurs, some Christian girls feel they have no option to survive but prostitution. Widows are also particularly vulnerable to this.

In Mali, female converts to Christianity are most vulnerable to pressure and violence for their faith. They are exposed to harassment and threats, sexual abuse, physical violence and even killings. Single converts will likely be forcibly married to a Muslim, in order to reduce the shame brought upon the family. Married converts face forced divorce and the possibility of losing their children. This is particularly common in northern Mali. Women have also reportedly been expelled from their homes. Even where it is tolerated that they live in the vicinity, they are not supported or fed, making them extremely vulnerable. Although there are national laws that protect women and girls in general, traditional and cultural practices and gender norms make women more vulnerable to such treatment. Mali has one of the world’s [highest rates](#) of child marriage in the world, with 54% of girls married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides).

As a result of the traumatizing pressures that Christian women and girls face, families and communities are weakened.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to social community/networks

Denied inheritance or possessions
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Forced divorce
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

As violent militant attacks continue unabated across Mali, Christian men and boys are particularly subject to death-threats and to violent, physical attack because of their faith. Targeted attacks on Christian homes and businesses are effectively being used to impoverish families. This dire situation for Christians can be exacerbated by the targeted loss of inheritance rights, social rejection or the blocking of access to positions of responsibility and scholarships. Converts face the greatest level of persecution in this regard. Married males may additionally be forcibly divorced by their wives.

Within the context of widespread poverty and [ongoing violence](#) in one of Africa’s poorest nations, men and boys are exposed to recruitment by jihadist groups where they will be forcibly converted to Islam (Human Rights Watch, July 10 2020). They may also be abducted by such groups and killed. Those living in rural and remote areas in northern parts of the country are especially vulnerable to forced recruitment into violent groups. This has a devastating effect on their families and fellow Christians who are traumatized by such persecution. In an attempt to protect Christian boys, they may be separated from their parents and moved to safer areas, but this creates other challenges.

The loss of Christian men and boys financially weakens families, as males are the primary providers in Mali. It also weakens the health of the Church in Mali.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Apart from Christians, those adhering to indigenous traditional belief systems are also religious minorities in Mali. Although historically such beliefs have co-existed with Islam, with the rise of more militant and intolerant versions of Islam in Mali, that coexistence has been seriously challenged. The jihadists also went to the extent of holding mass lectures for the people. Freedom House reported in its ([Freedom in the World 2019 Report](#)): “Islamist armed groups have reportedly compelled civilians to attend lectures at mosques, at which they promote their interpretations of Islam and discourage residents from having contact with the government and UN and French peacekeeping forces. There were a number of reports of armed attacks on

mosques, as well as detentions and murders committed within.” For these Islamic militants, Muslims who do not follow their strict interpretation of Islam are not proper Muslims.

Future outlook

Note about the current government situation: Although the [National Transitional Council](#) has now begun to function (BBC News, 5 December 2020), if a proper transition that allows free and fair election does not materialize, the August 2020 coup could lead to a situation where the central government simply becomes weaker and weaker. That is exactly what the jihadists are hoping for, since they thrive on the weakness of the governments in the Sahel region.

Apart from the above consideration, here is the outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Christians in Mali have suffered from the chaos and instability in the country caused by violent Islamic groups. Islamic militants have worked hard to destroy evidence of any Christian presence in the northern part of the country. The restoration of law and order and of government authority in the northern part of the country are a prerequisite for any improvement in the situation for Christians. In the WWL 2021 reporting period, jihadists stepped up their attacks, making the country unsafe for Christians, even in the capital city, Bamako. Communal violence also increased. International peacekeepers are struggling to contain the level of violence but there are no signs that they can swiftly get the situation under control. The presence of international troops is being used by the Islamic militants as a recruiting tool. As it stands, *Islamic oppression* will continue to affect Christians in the country and in the region for many years to come.

Ethno-religious hostility

Ethnicity, religion and politics overlap at times. Jihadists and religious leaders both use ethnicity and religion (Islam) to influence and control their supporters. There is also communal violence as a result of ethnic conflict, which can result in Christians being targeted. This situation will likely continue.

Organized corruption and crime

Islamic militants in the country survive through the existence of crime cartels and use kidnapping for ransom as a means for generating income. There are also reports that Islamic fighters are participating in drug-trafficking by linking up with criminal cartels in Latin America. Due to the current absence of law and order this will likely continue unabated.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: the north and the north-eastern - <http://newirin.irinnews.org/dataviz/2015/11/20/map-of-conflict-in-mali-2015>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: was executed - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/october/swiss-missionary-hostage-killed-mali-islamist-extremist.html>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: highest rates - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/mali/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: ongoing violence - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/12/mali-security-forces-use-excessive-force-protests>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Freedom in the World 2019 Report - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2019>
- Future outlook: National Transitional Council - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55198934>

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. [THE SAHEL – Rising-islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-christians-in-the-region – 2016](#)
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mali>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Mali>