

World
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Somalia: Country Dossier

November 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 / Somalia

Brief country details

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

Somalia: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
16,105,000	hundreds	OD estimate

Somalia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	92	3
WWL 2020	92	3
WWL 2019	91	3
WWL 2018	91	3
WWL 2017	91	2

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

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

The only Christian community in the country that is considered for WWL analysis is the category for Christians with a Muslim background. They are regarded as a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives and have often been killed on the spot when discovered. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, which subscribes to the doctrine of Wahhabism, advocates Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia. This group has repeatedly expressed its desire to eradicate Christians from the country. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country, but *Islamic oppression* is not limited to militants only.

Christians also face serious violations of their religious freedom from family, extended family members and the community at large. Any conversion to Christianity is regarded as a betrayal of the Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them. In every sphere of life – private, family, community, and national – being exposed as a convert to Christianity means life-threatening danger, often leading to immediate execution. ‘Church life’ simply is not possible. This persecution pattern is exceptional and puts Somalia high up in the category of extreme persecution.

Over the last years, the situation appears to have worsened. Islamic militants intensified their hunt for people who are Christian and in a position of leadership. An attempt to reopen a church in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in [August 2017](#) also failed as the government was forced to shut it down due to pressure from the local Islamic population (World Watch Monitor, 4 August 2017).

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC). Yet the country puts reservation on the provision that deals with freedom of religion- Article 14 (1) "States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

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

- Christian converts are killed on the spot if their conversion is discovered or merely suspected (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian parents cannot raise their children according to their religious values (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- All Somali are assumed to be Muslim and forbidden to leave Islam (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Women converts are forcibly married and pressured to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

No details about specific incidents of violations of rights can be published since doing so could potentially endanger the life of converts from Islam to Christianity in the country.

Specific examples of positive developments

On 15 September 2020, the United Nations Security Council [extended the mandate](#) of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) for a further year (until September 2021). This is a positive step for a country that is struggling to regain vast areas of territory still occupied by al-Shabaab militants and supporters.

External Links - Short country profile

- Brief description of the persecution situation: August 2017 - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/somaliland-closes-catholic-church-due-public-pressure-re-opened-week-ago-30-years/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

- Specific examples of positive developments: extended the mandate - <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14303.doc.htm>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Somalia

Link for general background information

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

Recent history

Somalia declared independence in 1960 when the British protectorate and Italian colony merged. In 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's military government came to power and introduced 'Scientific Socialism' into the country. During this process, property owned by Christian missions and churches, including schools and clinics, were seized and Christians were expelled from the country. In 1974 a new law was introduced giving women the same inheritance rights as men. Islamic leaders preaching against this new law were imprisoned or executed. The secular and reformist nature of the government undermined the Islamic identity of the Somali people. This resulted in a revival of radical Islamic influence and the growth of Muslim clan-based militant organizations. They aimed to turn Somalia into an Islamic state. Siad Barre's regime and Islamic militants shared an enemy – Christians. During Barre's rule, radical Muslims used their influence to encourage the government to ban the printing, importing, distributing or selling of Christian literature in the country. Moreover, the National Security Services (NSS) threatened, arrested, tortured and murdered many Somali Christians. Other Christians lost their jobs and businesses.

Relations between Somalia and its neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya had been soured by the Somalian government's claim that all territories where Somalis live belong to Somalia. As a result of this agenda to form a 'Greater Somalia', the country waged a major war with Ethiopia in 1977. In 2020, there were border clashes between Kenyan and Somalian government soldiers and there were rumours that Kenya might seek to annex some Somalian territory. Deutsche Welle reported on 13 March 2020 that the Somali government [requested](#) Kenya to "halt its ongoing violations of Somalia's sovereignty and encroachment in the border areas. The situation in the area remains precarious as Jubbaland forces are regrouping for possible fresh clashes, despite efforts to ease the hostility."

After decades of ruling the country with a mixture of terror and guile, Siad Barre's regime finally collapsed in 1991. The country was left without an effective government. The war between the clans and drought threatened the lives of millions. The United Nations (UN) and the Organizations of African Unity (OAU) sought to end the crisis. In 1992, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 751 by which a UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) was established. UNOSOM I sent in a US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF). As the situation spun out of control, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 755 to establish a second UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II). Following the unsuccessful attempts to help Somalis create a central government,

the USA withdrew its forces in 1994. The UN then decided to withdraw all its forces from Somalia (Security Council Resolution 954). For the following two decades Somalia became a lawless state where Islamists, local militias and warlords continued to fight each other. The country became a hub for militant Islamic activity.

In the meantime, even though not recognized by the international community, Somaliland declared unilateral independence from Somalia by citing the colonial boundaries between British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Puntland also declared its autonomy without severing its ties from the rest of Somalia.

After several attempts at mediation by the international community, the current federal government was eventually formed in 2012. The government only controls cities and towns; many parts of rural Somalia still remain in the hands of al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has been consistently propagating anti-Christian ideology and regarding all foreign forces in Somalia as Christians intent on conquering Islam. In 2016, parliamentary elections were held and in February 2017, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed was elected president. This was [greeted enthusiastically](#) by many Somalis and the international community (New York Times, 8 February 2017). It has been seen as a big step forward for Somalia.

In 2017 and in 2018, al-Shabaab remained potent enough to conduct deadly attacks in the country. AMISOM soldiers (deployed in Somalia by the African Union since 2007) were targeted on numerous occasions. For example, in [April 2018](#), up to 46 Ugandan peacekeepers were killed in a double suicide car bomb attack by Islamic militants (The Guardian, 1 April 2018). In May 2019, the Security Council extended the mandate of AMISOM and authorized a troop reduction, unanimously adopting Resolution 2472 (2019) at its 8537th meeting. In 2018/2019, the government has continued to fight al-Shabaab with the help of African Union Forces. Al-Shabaab conducted a bombing in the capital city in July 2019 and wounded the Mayor of Mogadishu, who later [died](#) of his injuries (New York Times, 1 August 2019).

Before the early 1990s, the presence of Christians in Somalia was visible. The Catholic Cathedral in Mogadishu was the largest in Africa. According to an article in Aleteia published on 15 July 2019, when the [Catholic cathedral](#) in Mogadishu "opened in 1928, it was the largest cathedral in Africa. Built in three years and designed in a Norman Gothic style by architect Antonio Vandone di Cortemilia, the church was heavily influenced by the Cefalù Cathedral in Sicily." In July 1989, Bishop Colombo was gunned down in the middle of a church service. The cathedral was looted and damaged and, after that, Islamic militants in the country and from other parts of the world began to target Christians and Christian symbols.

Political and legal landscape

The [Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia](#) was adopted on 1 August 2012 and affirms the absolute predominance of a strict interpretation of Sharia law. According to Article 2 of the Constitution, "Islam is the religion of the State; no religion other than Islam can be propagated in the country; and no law which is not compliant with the general principles and objectives of Sharia can be enacted." Furthermore, the Constitution categorically declares that Sharia law is supreme. Since the Constitution took a step back from securing freedom of religion

by prohibiting apostasy, it can be expected that a better functioning federal government will not lead to a cessation of the regular violation of rights of Christians. Likewise, as stated in the Constitution, the province of Puntland has declared that only Islam may be propagated: “Islam shall be the only religion of the Regional Puntland State of Somalia. With the exception of Islam, no other religion can be spread in the Puntland State; the laws and culture of the people shall be based on the Islamic religion.” The Constitution of Somaliland also states: “Islam is the religion of the Somaliland state, and the promotion of any religion in the territory of Somaliland, other than Islam, is prohibited.”

The political situation in the country has created a hostile environment for Christians, especially for those coming from a Muslim background. As a result, the religious freedom violations against Christians in Somalia nearly always involves a very high level of violence. The new Ethiopian prime minister, who took up office in April 2018, has brought fresh hope to the region: Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia are committed to solving current regional issues.

The president of Somalia has signed a landmark federal law, paving the way for the country to hold its first popular election in half a century. A long-awaited “one person, one vote” election is now in the pipeline for 2020 or 2021. [James Swan](#), Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) described (in a UN Security Council meeting on 24 February 2020) the year 2020 as a potentially transformative year and warned that progress on political, security, economic and humanitarian issues would be at stake if the lack of consultations between President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo” and other political leaders continued. He went on to state that the upcoming elections in 2020 (or 2021) will be a critical test of Somalia’s progress. While the enactment of a new electoral code is an important step, it fails to address many issues, including guarantees that 30 percent of parliamentary seats will be set aside for women. On the security front, James Swan said that with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) committed to reducing its troop strength in early 2020, the Federal Government must generate the military strength required to combat al-Shabaab, which retains the ability to mount large-scale attacks in Mogadishu and elsewhere.

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive, in particular making marriage a place of enacting violent repression of female converts. Somalia is one of just six UN states not to have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Within the summer of 2020, outrage was sparked as the long-awaited Sexual Offences Bill (aimed at protecting women and girls from sexual abuse, rape and child marriage and heralded as a progressive step) was [overturned](#) by Parliament (Reuters, 11 Aug 2020). Instead of outlawing them, the replacement bill permits child and early marriage to continue. According to [UN Women](#), 45% of women are married before 18 (UN Women, Global Database on Violence Against Women: Somalia). Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical sheikh as a corrective measure.

Within marriages, women are vulnerable from a lack of legislation addressing [domestic violence or marital rape](#) (UNDP, 2019, “Somalia: Gender Justice and the Law”); according to Sharia, anyone found guilty of the death of a woman must [pay](#) “half the amount that would be payable to the aggrieved family if the victim were male” (US State Department, 2009 Human Rights Report). Divorce laws prevent women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. A man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq*, requiring him simply to repeat the word ‘*talaq*’ three times.

Religious landscape

The population of Somalia is overwhelmingly Muslim, 99% being Sunni Muslims. The small Christian community is under constant threat of attack, since Christians are seen as a foreign element that is in the country to damage both the culture and Islam. Open Doors estimates the number of Christians in the country to be “hundreds”. However, in the past, the country was home to one of the largest Catholic cathedrals in the region and the Christian community was much larger.

The years of chaos following the overthrow of President Siad Barre’s military regime in 1991 has culminated in the rise of Sharia courts and of radical Islamic groups like al-Shabaab. They all pursue a clear Islamic identity against the background of a strong tribal identity. Changing religion – i.e. to Christianity – not only means a betrayal of Islam and the Muslim community but also a break with the norms and values of the clan as well. In tribal societies, this is a very serious offense. According to many Somalis, a “Somali is born Muslim and dies Muslim”. Therefore, even if al-Shabaab is currently in decline, it does not mean that the threat to Christians is diminishing. An example is Somaliland which declared independence in 1991 (still unrecognized): It would seem to be a region free of Islamic militant activity, but Christians are just as much persecuted there because anti-Christian sentiment is rooted in the country’s religion and culture.

Within this context, Christian male converts face extremely hostile treatment as are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; for instance, they are responsible for determining the faith of the family and therefore more is expected from them. They can be blamed if a sister or wife converts, or killed.

Economic landscape

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

- Growth in 2019 remained steady at 2.9 percent, on par with the estimated population growth rate.
- Devastating floods and drought, as well as locusts, left 5.2 million people in need of assistance and at risk of food insecurity. This crisis is expected to be met with humanitarian relief, estimated at 16.5 percent of GDP.
- Prices remained relatively stable, with inflation hovering at above 3% at end-2019, in line with the previous year’s trends.
- Stable external flows including remittances, grants, and foreign direct investment refinance Somalia’s high structural trade deficit (at - 89% of GDP). According to estimates in 2016, remittances in 2019 were expected to reach around 32% of GDP in 2019.

- Somalia remains among the poorest and most fragile states in the world. More than two in three Somalis live on less than US\$1.90 per day, in 2011 purchasing power parity terms (PPP). Limited economic opportunities, economic exclusion, conflict, and natural disasters are contributors to poverty. Due to insecurity, climate-related changes and constrained humanitarian access, most rural and nomadic communities remain vulnerable to shocks, with limited coping mechanisms.
- “The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a downgrading of the growth outlook from a projected 3.2 percent to 2.3 percent through the combined forces of a fall in consumption, lower exports, and a potential slowdown in private investments. Somalia’s growth is largely consumption-driven, with remittances supporting households particularly in urban areas and for internally displaced people living outside of settlements. Recessionary impacts related to COVID-19 in more advanced economies are expected to result in a lowering of the remittance-to-GDP ratio from 32 percent to 23 percent, which may contribute to a fall in demand for food imports and increase the vulnerability of those close to the poverty line. Somalia’s exports are dominated by livestock to major markets in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which are expected to decline by as much as 50 percent following restrictions to pilgrimage related activities. Uncertainties surrounding the spread of COVID-19 may also contribute to a fall in private investment. However, the steep decline in oil prices should reduce the cost of energy production and could provide a much-needed boost to households and businesses. As remittances and demand for imports decline, revenues from international trade (which accounts for 63 percent of taxes) are also expected to fall, which will further constrain Somalia’s ability to respond to a shock. A fall in the growth outlook combined with a reduction in remittances could result in a contraction of household earnings, including for those engaged in the livestock supply chain. Social distancing measures are likely to continue, including school closures, which could have an impact on demand for services provided by small businesses. However, the projected fall in global commodity prices could help to alleviate pressure on households.”

Somalia’s economy is based mainly on agriculture with animal farming contributing about 40% of GDP and accounts for almost 50% of export [revenue](#) (World Factbook, 4 August 2020 update). Real GDP in 2018 was an estimated 2.9%. The growth [was supported](#) in the supply sector by agriculture including livestock farming, financial and telecommunication services. Current government spending focuses on security and administrative services which accounts for about 90% of total spending, leaving out economic and social services (World Bank Overview, 23 March 2020). There is also illegal trade in charcoal and other smuggled products that are not part of the formal economy. This, together with the security issues in the country, has made economic study and analysis very difficult.

According to Heritage Foundation's [2020 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- "Somalia is not graded in the 2020 Index because of the continuing unavailability of relevant comparable statistics on some facets of the economy. Although Somalia lacks effective national governance because of ongoing violence and political unrest, its largely informal economy is able to function through remittance/money transfer companies and telecommunications. The central government controls only part of the country, and formal

economic activity is largely restricted to urban areas such as Mogadishu and a few regional capitals."

Women are, in general, the most economically vulnerable within Somalia. This is in part due to [low education rates](#) for girls (Borgen Project, 13 July 2018); whilst enrollment rates are low across the board, of the 30% of children who go to school only 40% are girls. The widespread practice of FGM results in thousands of girls withdrawing from school due to debilitating scarring and infections. Early marriages also result in girls ending their education earlier than their male counterparts.

Women and girls regularly lose their inheritance rights, too. Whilst under the 1975 Family Code (Article 158) women have equal rights to men, Sharia rules of inheritance are applied. Daughters receive half the share that sons receive. Considering these economic vulnerabilities, Christian women depend heavily on their husbands and families. Should this support be lost, they will likely fall into destitution, and converts may be forcibly married to a Muslim man.

Social and cultural landscape

According to [the UNDP 2019 report](#) and [the World Factbook](#) (December 2019):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (Including 30,000 Arabs)
- **Main languages:** Somali, Arabic, Italian, English
- **Total population:** 15.0 million
- **Median age:** 16.7 years
- **Urban population:** 45.0%

According to [UNHCR](#) (2019):

- **Refugees:** By the end of 2019, Somalia was home to nearly 35,700 registered refugees and asylum-seekers, 37% of whom were of Yemeni nationality and 61% Ethiopian, while 2% represented other nationalities. Women and children constituted some 68% of people of concern. Since December 2014, more than 129,000 Somali refugees had returned, including some 5,500 during 2019 (more than 2,100 of whom returned from Kenya through a facilitated process)
- **IDPs:** At the end of 2019, some 2.6 million people were internally displaced and 820,000 Somali refugees resided in other countries across the horn of Africa and Yemen

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

- **Life expectancy at birth:** 57.1 years

The insecure situation in the country has also been compounded by millions being affected by [drought and famine](#) (Reliefweb, accessed 10 November 2020). In the past three decades, conflicts and famine in the country have led to hundreds of thousands fleeing the country. In June 2019, a [UN official warned](#) that more than five million people (mostly Somalis) in the Horn of Africa were at risk of famine due to severe drought (New York Times, 5 June 2019). More social problems are likely in 2020 - especially famine - due to the COVID-19 crisis.

As stated in the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) (Section: People, accessed 17 August 2020):

- "In culture, language, and way of life, the people of Somalia, north-eastern Kenya, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, and the southern part of Djibouti are largely one homogeneous group." _Further: "The Somali people make up the overwhelming majority of Somalia's population. They are divided into numerous clans, which are groups that trace their common ancestry back to a single father. These clans, which in turn are subdivided into numerous sub-clans, combine at a higher level to form clan families. The clan families inhabiting the interfluvial area of southern Somalia are the Rahanwayn and the Digil, which together are known as the Sab. Mainly farmers and agro-pastoralists, the Sab include both original inhabitants and numerous Somali groups that have immigrated into this climatically favorable area. Other clan families are the Daarood of north-eastern Somalia, the Ogaden, and the border region between Somalia and Kenya; the Hawiye, chiefly inhabiting the area on both sides of the middle Shabelle and south-central Somalia; and the Isaaq, who live in the central and western parts of northern Somalia. In addition, there are the Dir, living in the northwestern corner of the country but also dispersed throughout southern Somalia, and the Tunni, occupying the stretch of coast between Marca and Kismaayo. Toward the Kenyan border, the narrow coastal strip and offshore islands are inhabited by the Bagiunis, a Swahili fishing people."

Somali culture is patriarchal and shaped by the Islamic religious landscape. Conversion from Islam to another religion is socially unacceptable in all areas. Some families forcefully send their young men to be trained as al-Shabaab militants, including Christian converts. Suspected female converts, too, face extreme pressure from their families and local communities; they are commonly raped, publicly humiliated, or forcibly married to a radical sheikh .

Technological landscape

Despite the fact that there is no strong central government, the country has made advances in telecommunication technology.

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

- **Internet usage:** 10.7% of the population – survey date 31 December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 10.5% of the population – survey date 31 December 2019

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

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 51.0 per 100 people

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (update 25 May 2020):

- Through the anarchy which continues to disrupt the country, the telecoms market, dominated by the competitive mobile sector where seven networks compete for customers, has flourished. Some of these mobile services operators also offer fixed-line and internet services. Tariffs are among the lowest in Africa, and although the absence of regulation led to problems with frequency spectrum coordination and interconnection between networks these issues are to be addressed by the new telecom regulator.

- In general, Somalia has been going through conflicts, famine, drought and so much more for the past three decades. There was and is no strong central government. Warlords have always controlled stretches of land and sea and so there has been no concerted effort to have a well-functioning infrastructure for technology in the country. The government has also made some progress in regulating and helping the growth of this sector. For example:
 - The government set up an Internet Exchange Point (IXP) in Mogadishu.
 - A director-general of the new telecoms' regulator has been appointed.

A National Communications Law was passed to reform the telecoms sector.

As the number of internet users increases, it is likely that citizens (converts from Islam in particular) will have more access to online Christian resources.

According to a 2018 report, women in Africa are on average [34%](#) less likely to own a smartphone than their male counterparts (OECD, 2018, "Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskills, Innovate" p.13). This restricts their access to both information and community networks.

Security situation

Somalia is viewed as a classic example of a modern failed state. For more than 25 years, the country has been a safe haven for Islamic militants who constantly target Christians both in Somalia and in neighboring countries. The country has now become a patchwork of competing clans, clan-based militias and Islamic groups. Thus, it has been difficult to have a central government or any sort of government in the country.

Al-Shabaab has conducted numerous attacks in the WWL 2021 reporting period. The list below is not exhaustive:

- [13 October 2019](#): Al-Shabaab militants launched mortars at compounds of UN and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in Mogadishu (Crisis Watch, October 2019).
- [16 October 2019](#): Suspected al-Shabaab militants attacked and killed 3 people in Mogadishu (Crisis Watch, October 2019).
- [28 October 2019](#): An al-Shabaab bombing killed at least 2 civilians in Mogadishu. [In south and central Somalia](#), al-Shabaab kept up attacks in Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, Bay, and Hiraaan regions, killing at least 16 Somali and international soldiers and three civilians (Crisis Watch, October 2019).
- [25 March 2020](#): An al-Shabaab suicide bomber detonated himself at a crowded tea shop near the Somali Federal Parliament in Mogadishu, killing at least 2 people and injuring several others (ABC News, 25 March 2020).
- [30 March 2020](#): An al-Shabaab suicide bomber attacked the vehicle of Abdisalan Hasan Hersi, a governor in Somalia's Puntland, killing him and injuring 2 others (Garowe Online, 12 April 2020).
- [10 April 2020](#): Al-Shabaab militants ambushed and killed Osman Hussein Haji Farey, a senior immigration official, in Galkayo (Counter Extremism Project, accessed 17 August 2020).

- [20-21 June 2020](#): At least 7 people died in two separate bomb attacks in southern and central Somalia within 24 hours (Reuters, 21 June 2020).
- [4 July 2020](#): A suicide car bomb detonated near the port in Mogadishu and a remote-control land mine in a restaurant on the outskirts of the city of Baidoa killed 4 people (International Christian Concern - ICC, 9 July 2020).
- [13 July 2020](#): A suicide car bomb attack targeted the head of Somalia's army, General Yusuf Rage, travelling in a convoy in Mogadishu. The commander and his guards escaped unhurt but one civilian was killed (ICC, 22 July 2020).

According to the [UN Security Council](#) (accessed 17 August 2020):

- “The security situation in Somalia remained volatile during the reporting period [5 November 2019 to 4 February 2020], with security incidents increasing from 239 in November to 266 in December, followed by a slight decline to 235 in January. The increase in December was recorded mainly in Al-Shabaab hit-and-run attacks targeting security forces, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (two in December compared with none in November), improvised explosive device attacks, and hand grenade attacks, as well as incidents categorized under crime. A decline was recorded in terrorism-related incidents in January, compared with December, while incidents categorized under armed conflict remained the same”.

On 15 September 2020, the United Nations Security Council [extended the mandate](#) of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) for a further year (until September 2021). The authorization of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been [extended](#) to 28 February 2021. The Security Council's Somalia sanctions expire on 15 November 2020.

In the context of this fragile state, the proliferation of jihadists and impunity, Christians are regarded as 'a high-value-target' by al-Shabaab and other radical groups. Against this backdrop of extreme hostility towards Christians, daily life is a challenge for both men and women. If identified, Christian men might have their businesses boycotted or receive verbal abuse. They might further be threatened, tortured or brutally killed, such as by being beheaded. Women and girls also face the threat of death, in addition to sexual violence and/or forced marriages. Campaigners are pushing for the [overturned](#) Sexual Offences Bill, which sought to provide greater protection to victims of gender-based violence, to be reintroduced (Reuters, 11 Aug 2020).

Trends analysis

1. Somalia is known for being hostile to Christians

The country has been on the World Watch List since 1993 and will no doubt continue to be listed high up. Violations of religious freedom are particularly severe for Christians with a Muslim background who commonly face beheading if discovered. As it stands, al-Shabaab will continue targeting converts to Christianity and none of the severely damaged church buildings will be reopened within the next few years.

2. Somalia is a failed state

Somalia is a failed state. The international community and the African Union (AU) have tried to establish different governments on more than two occasions. The current federal government is supported by AU forces and is backed by the UN Security Council. Despite this, al-Shabaab remains powerful enough to conduct deadly attacks even in Mogadishu - the seat of the federal government. The USA has been conducting [airstrikes against al-Shabaab](#) but these have failed to produce the desired effects, as reports have indicated (e.g. The Guardian, 11 November 2018). Nevertheless, it seems that the Somali Federal Government is heading towards becoming a functioning government.

What is worsening the situation, however, is that the central government has started fighting with [governments of some of the provinces](#) (Reuters, 2 March 2020). This has two implications: On the one hand, it shows that the government of Somalia - with its soldiers trained by Turkey - wants control beyond Mogadishu. On the other hand, it is an indication that the forces that are supposed to be united in the fight against al-Shabaab and its allies clearly lack unity. If this issue is not solved thoroughly and swiftly, it will erase most of the achievements gained on the road to establishing an effective central government. COVID-19, can only exacerbate this situation.

3. The government of Somalia remains weak

The election of the new president in February 2017, despite the dubious election procedure, was a sign of hope for many Somalis and the international community. However, the government has been weak and has only managed to survive the years 2018-2020 with the help of troops from the African Union, backed by the UN. The UN has extended the mandates of UNSOM and AMISOM into 2021.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: requested - <https://www.dw.com/en/could-kenya-annex-chunks-of-somalia/a-52725856>
- Recent history: greeted enthusiastically - https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/world/africa/somalia-farmajo-mohamed-abdullahi-mohamed.html?_r=0
- Recent history: April 2018 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/al-shabaab-attack-kills-ugandan-soldiers-in-somalia>
- Recent history: died - <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/world/africa/mogadishu-mayor-dead.html>
- Recent history: Catholic cathedral - <https://aleteia.org/2019/07/15/this-was-once-africas-largest-cathedral-but-its-throne-cannot-be-filled/>
- Political and legal landscape: Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia - <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: James Swan - <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14120.doc.htm>
- Political and legal landscape: overturned - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-women-rights/outrage-as-somali-parliament-drafts-law-permitting-child-forced-marriages-idUSKCN257200>
- Political and legal landscape: UN Women, - <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/africa/somalia?typeofmeasure=d61a959e1a7641e98bdaffb7c0ce6a00>
- Political and legal landscape: domestic violence or marital rape - <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Somalia%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: pay - <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/af/135976.htm>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2020 - <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/720441492455091991/mpo-ssa.pdf>
- Economic landscape: revenue - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html>

- Economic landscape: was supported - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/somalia/overview>
- Economic landscape: 2020 Index of Economic Freedom - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/somalia>
- Economic landscape: low education rates - <https://borgenproject.org/facts-about-girls-education-in-somalia/>
- Social and cultural landscape: the UNDP 2019 report - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SOM>
- Social and cultural landscape: the World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/SO-summary.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/somalia>
- Social and cultural landscape: the UN Global Human Development indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SOM>
- Social and cultural landscape: drought and famine - <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2015-000134-som>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN official warned - <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/05/world/africa/africa-famine-united-nations-somalia.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: Encyclopedia Britannica - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Somalia/Plant-and-animal-life>
- Social and cultural landscape: - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Somalia/Economy>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#bf>
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- Security situation: 13 October 2019: - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/november-alerts-october-trends-2019>
- Security situation: 16 October 2019 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/november-alerts-october-trends-2019>
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- Security situation: 25 March 2020: - <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/somalia-suicide-bomber-detonates-tea-shop-killing-69787836>
- Security situation: 30 March 2020: - <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-al-shabaab-assassinates-an-official-outside-mosque-in-puntland>
- Security situation: 10 April 2020: - <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/somalia>
- Security situation: 20-21 June 2020: - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-security/blasts-kill-7-people-in-southern-and-central-somalia-idUSKBN23S08D>
- Security situation: 4 July 2020: - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/07/09/four-people-killed-bomb-attack-baidoa-somalia/>
- Security situation: 13 July 2020: - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/07/22/al-shabab-conducted-attack-mogadishu-somalia/>
- Security situation: UN Security Council - <https://www.ecoi.net/en/countries/somalia/featured-topics/security-situation/>
- Security situation: extended the mandate - <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14303.doc.htm>
- Security situation: extended - <https://www.nation.co.ke/kenya/news/africa/un-extends-amisom-mandate-311792>
- Security situation: overturned - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-women-rights/outrage-as-somali-parliament-drafts-law-permitting-child-forced-marriages-idUSKCN257200>
- Trends analysis: airstrikes against al-Shabaab - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/11/us-airstrikes-fail-to-weaken-al-shabaab-grip-on-somalia>
- Trends analysis: governments of some of the provinces - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-security/somali-forces-supposed-to-unite-against-islamists-fight-each-other-idUSKBN20P29Z>

WWL 2021: Church information / Somalia

Christian origins

[Arab sources](#) from 10th-12th century describe the port of Seylac (Zeila), near the border with Djibouti, as a majority Christian city (Aram, B I, Somalia's Judaeo-Christian heritage, in: Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology 22.2,2003). However by the end of the 15th century the Christian presence had died out. Jesuits visiting the island Soqotra in 1542 were amazed to find that the inhabitants were clearly Christian, although illiterate. It had to wait until 1881 before Christianity was introduced again into Somalia. Christian faith spread in the following years, especially after the Italians took control of the southern coast, including Mogadishu. However, the colonial powers in both British and Italian territories at times opposed the work of missionaries among Somalis for fear of instability. For further information see: Melton J & Baumann M (Editors), Religions of the World (2nd Edition), 2010, p.2664f.

In 1886 a French Roman Catholic mission agency and the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Mission set up bases in the port town of Berbera (in the then British protectorate of Somaliland), in Mogadishu and Kismayo. The church grew rapidly. Lutheran missionaries from the Church of Sweden came to Somalia in 1898 and opened educational and medical facilities. They also engaged in evangelistic outreach and had their greatest success among a group of Bantu-speaking former slaves. The mission was disrupted when the Italian authorities expelled the missionaries in 1935. The work was revived after World War II and during the 1950s further Christian missions participated. The Swedish Lutheran Mission, Mennonite mission and Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in particular left their mark but in 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's Socialist government came to power and all property owned by Christian missions and churches (including schools and clinics) was confiscated. In 1972 the government nationalized all of the Roman Catholic Church's property. However, in spite of the changes in the Catholic Church's status and the resultant departure of much of its personnel, a [Diocese of Mogadishu](#) was created in 1975 (Living Word, accessed 20 August 2020). By 1976 all foreign missionaries had left the country. Two groups of Somali nationals, one formerly associated with the Mennonites and one with SIM, continued to meet after the missionaries left. In the 1980s, a few Mennonites were able to return.

Church spectrum today

No details can be published.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Arab sources - https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/22-2_003.pdf
- Christian origins: Diocese of Mogadishu - <https://sites.google.com/site/hiyawkal/%C2%A0briefhistory%3A%C2%A0somalia>

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Somalia

Reporting period

01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Somalia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	92	3
WWL 2020	92	3
WWL 2019	91	3
WWL 2018	91	3
WWL 2017	91	2

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

The score has remained more or less stable, although there was an increase in the violence score from 9.4 points in WWL 2020 to 9.8 points in WWL 2021. The pressure on Christians has remained at an extreme level. Christians in the country risk being killed by Islamic militants and clan leaders, elders and family members monitor the movements of any suspected Christian convert. The country is mired in ceaseless civil war, social fragmentation, tribalism and violent Islamic militancy. Al-Shabaab showed its power by conducting a number of attacks in Mogadishu, killing the mayor of the capital city, among others. The COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated the already fragile situation.

Persecution engines

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

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):

Somalia is a majority Muslim nation and society expects all Somalis to be Muslim. Imams in mosques and madrassas (as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab) state publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians and churches in Somalia. The country's Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, targets and kills Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country. However, Islamic oppression is not limited to militants only. Christian converts also face serious violations of religious freedom from family, extended family members and the community at large. To be Christian, especially a convert from Islam, is a huge challenge and can lead to brutal death at the hands of radical groups.

Clan oppression (Very strong):

The clan is a major factor in Somali society and orders the way daily life is run and how one community is related to another. This clan structure also has a profound impact on how the federal government is structured and how elections are conducted, as was evident in the 2017 Somali election: The president was elected by a parliament that was itself elected by 14,025 clan elder-appointed delegates. Al-Shabaab is also relying on the same clan-based structure to gather intelligence, recruit members and advance its ideology. It uses this structure to force sheiks and imams to teach jihad or face expulsion or death. According to many Somalis and clan leaders, Somalis are Muslims and therefore conversion to Christianity is a betrayal of the Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):

In the current fragile and lawless situation, crime and corruption is rampant in Somalia. The federal government controls only some cities and towns and leaves the majority of rural Somalia to be controlled by al-Shabaab. Militants collect taxes and fund their operations through illegal trade. This situation has made life for Christians very delicate as they have no protection whatsoever. The organized nature of this engine means that, at times, militants have networks in governments as well. In WWL 2021, this engine is becoming stronger (in combination with *Islamic oppression* driven by violent religious groups) as a result of COVID-19. This is because as the government decided to focus its attention on fighting locusts and COVID-19, thereby giving al-Shabaab and its allies a chance to strengthen themselves.

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Islamic militants operate freely in many regions. Al-Shabaab militants kill Somalis who are suspected of being converts to Christianity. This driver is so potent and dangerous that it even drives violence and violations of religious freedom outside Somalia, particularly in Kenya where the group has been responsible for the death of hundreds of Christians. Al-Shabaab is considered a threat to the peace and security of the whole region and is a designated terrorist organization globally.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Muslim religious leaders state publicly that there is no room for Christianity.
- **Family and ordinary citizens (Very strong):** Society in general and family members are against any thought of conversion to Christianity and will treat converts harshly.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** This driver is very linked to violent religious groups as well. It is this driver that is helping the jihadists finance their oppression.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials also show their anti-Christians on many occasions. For example, celebrating Christmas was prohibited by the government.

Drivers of Clan oppression:

- **Political parties (Strong):** Political parties are ethnically based and at the same time subscribe to the idea that Somalia is for Somalis – and being Somali means being Muslim.
- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** Clan leaders do not want to see any conversions to Christianity. They do not want to see Christian symbols in the country.
- **Family and ordinary citizens (Strong):** Family and ordinary citizens also serve as drivers of persecution for a clan and ethnic antagonism engine. This is true because a family and ordinary citizen are also defined in the context of a clan.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Groups like al-Shabaab also uses the clan system to recruit. Thus, for this jihadists, any person who leaves Islam is seen as a threat.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

- **Criminal cartels (Very strong):** Criminal networks profit from the lawlessness in Somalia. They work with a network of illegal trade routes. These cartels have a strong connection to al-Shabaab or they are being operated by al-Shabaab itself. The money that these cartels generate buy weapons that are used to kill Christians and other civilians.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Al-Shabaab engages in illegal trade and taxation as a means of income for financing operations against Christians in Somalia and in neighboring countries.

Map of country



Areas where Christians face most difficulties

No area is safe for Christians in the country. However, the harshest places are the areas under the control of al-Shabaab. These are particularly in the southern and south-western region and include areas around Kismayo, Jamaamee, Marka, El Hur and many other places. Christians are not safe even in relatively peaceful and stable places like Puntland and Somaliland.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Since this group is restricted to chaplaincies for soldiers (e.g. among officers of the African Union Mission – AMISOM), foreign workers in Mogadishu and some refugees in Hargeisa (Somaliland), it is not treated as a separate category for WWL analysis and scoring.

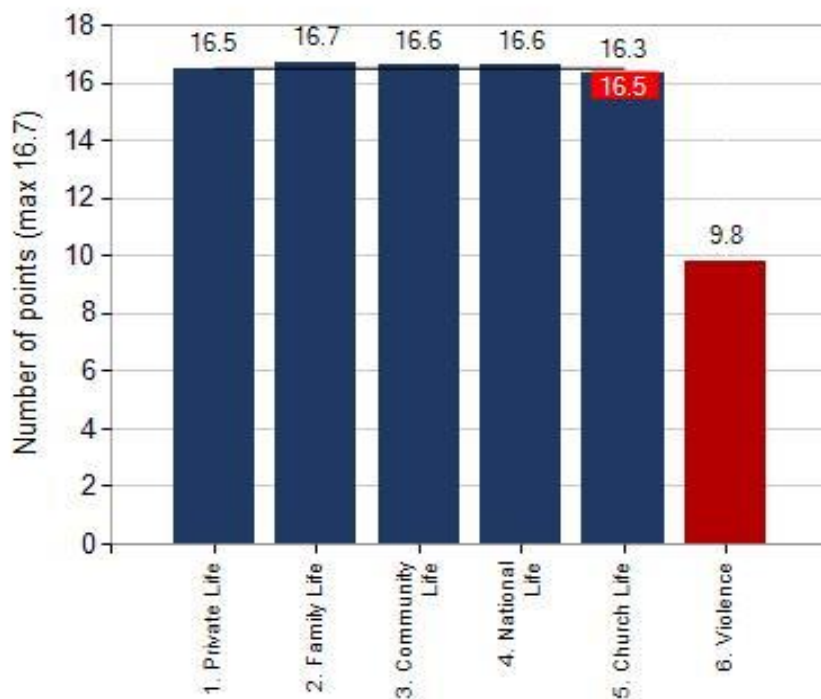
Historical Christian communities: These do not exist in the country. One of the biggest Roman Catholic cathedrals in Africa was built in 1928 in Mogadishu. However, this building has been a ruin since 2008.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background face the most severe violations of their fundamental rights and are considered a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives. In the country’s very recent history, converts - or those accused of being converts - have often been killed on the spot when discovered.

Non-traditional Christian communities: These do not exist in the country.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Somalia



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Somalia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Somalia is 16.5 points, compared to 16.6 in WWL 2020. The overall pressure on Christians in the country remains at an extremely high level.
- The pressure is at an extreme level in all spheres of life, with the highest scores in the *Family sphere* (with maximum 16.7 points) and *Community* and *National spheres* (16.6 points), reflecting the immense pressure exerted on converts by family and neighborhood and the national situation of the church.
- The score for violence is very high at 9.8 points, an increase of 0.4 points compared to 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. (4.00 points)

Conversion carries a severe consequence in Somalia. Converts have to hide their conversion to Christianity not only from their extended family and clan members but also from their own closest family members. The family will not only be unsympathetic towards Christianity, they will also fear being suspected of being converts too.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (4.00 points)

Individual Christians in Somalia face severe difficulties in trying to live according to their faith. They have to pray in secret and change their place of worship regularly to avoid detection.

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

Owning or carrying Christian materials or symbols would be seen as evidence of Christian faith, should they be caught. The mere suspicion of being a Christian is generally a death sentence, except in very rare cases where the person is found with 'soft copies' of Christian material on their phone. In such cases they receive a beating and are warned to desist from befriending Christians or being interested in Christian materials. However, if found in possession of a Bible or other printed Christian material, the person is executed with the blessing of their immediate family members, relatives, neighbors and even friends. According to one country researcher, Christians hardly dare to express their faith in any form: "There is a worldwide Somali Christian social media network, and just 'liking' a post on that social media network invites serious danger." This is a country where a mere suspicion is enough to land you in danger.

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)

Talking to any ordinary citizen in Somalia about a conversion or leaving Islam can be deadly. As a result, converts or any other person for that matter avoid talking about non-Islamic faith with others. A country expert adds: "The laws and the practices in the country would not allow Christian to thrive in the country. It is designed to favor Muslims at the expense of others. The militant group in the country would do all it takes to make sure that Christians in their private life face the worst of scenarios - death. So, no worship or no gathering is possible whatsoever."

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (4.00 points)

Both society and government assume that to be Somali is to be Muslim. There is no room for the existence of any other faith. Thus, a baby born from a Somali parent is considered Muslim. Any attempt to challenge this would mean inviting a problem that would cost lives.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Celebrating weddings according to Christian faith or celebrating Christian festivals in a family is virtually impossible. This is an extension of the situation in a country that dictates 'there is no room for Christians'. Family members, community vigilantes always look for Christians in the country. Thus, any Christian celebration could turn into a deadly situation.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (4.00 points)

Christians cannot raise children as Christians especially the very young as they are likely to sing, recite a Bible verse or pray in the name of Jesus and will reveal the identity of their parents and family. Parents are limited in what they can do. One country expert writes: "They cannot tell their kids about their religion. ... Relatives and the community would ensure children are raised with Islamic beliefs."

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

In areas controlled by al-Shabaab (which is geographically large) all children, women and even men must attend madrasa teaching and other Islamic lessons. In government-controlled areas, Islamic religious education is a mandatory subject in formal education. This means that Christian children have no option but to attend. Somali children have to participate in mandatory Islamic classes and Christian parents often find it too dangerous to teach their children about their Christian faith.

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.). (4.00 points)

The Somali community is very conservative and adheres to a strict dress code. Christians have to adhere to this too. As one country expert explains: "Christians are unable to practice their faith outwardly in any way, quite literally at the risk of death or (at the minimum) violent persecution." Celebrating family events, festivals and religious discussions are always risky for Christians. In the community, anyone who is deemed not a good Muslim faces suspicion and serious opposition.

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.). (4.00 points)

Christians from a Muslim background are under pressure from members of their community in various ways, especially in terms of monitoring. One country researcher reports: "Through monitoring, the local chiefs or elders say, 'this person is not acting according to our faith.' Then those who are suspected converts get intimidating messages via phone calls from 'concerned' community members or even from al-Shabaab personnel who would tell them they have heard rumors of their conversion or have observed some 'contrary' behavior [contrary behavior according to the Quran] and first warn them to change or risk death." To survive such threats and other similar problems, Somali Christians have to hide their faith in order to get access to basic social services or education.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (4.00 points)

Some Somali Christians have fled their homes and are in hiding because of threats to their lives. One country expert states: "Forced marriage is the best option because they could otherwise be killed." Another states: "This seems to be the 'easiest solution' for parents who notice that their daughters are behaving in non-Muslim ways." Abduction not only affects Christians in Somalia but also in neighboring countries.

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

Communal pressure is one of the primary avenues of violence, intolerance, and discrimination for those suspected of being converts to Christianity. Somali society is made up of a mixture of very close interaction and suspicion. Anything seen as deviating from acceptable good Islamic behavior is responded to with intense pressure to conform. Each Somali considers themselves responsible for ensuring their 'brothers' remain 'good Muslims'.

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)

This sphere of life is critical for analyzing violations of religious freedom in a given country since policies or laws that emanate from the national or regional level set the tone for how things are implemented at the local level. In Somalia, the Constitution has set it out loud and clear that Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the source of all laws. There are no provisions exempting non-Muslims from the application of Sharia law. Officials at the federal and local level enforce laws that limit a Christian's freedom severely, which has left Christians with no option but to live out their faith in secret. It is also important to note that Somali governments believe that there are no Somali Christians.

Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (4.00 points)

In Article 2, the Somali Constitution expressly forbids conversion from Islam to any other religion. Article 2 says: State and Religion: (1) Islam is the religion of the State. (2) No religion other than Islam can be propagated in the country. This means that no Somali national can declare conversion from Islam.

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

Freedom of expression is generally restricted. Sheikhs and other religious leaders in the country have repeatedly said that there is no room for Christians in the country. For Christians to express their views and opinions in public is a dangerous thing to do. This is also supported by the government of the country - it does not allow Christians to even celebrate Christmas in public.

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)

There is no room for individual Christians in the country, let alone for Christian political parties. Christian NGOs also struggle to operate in the country as they are a prized target for al-Shabaab.

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)

There is no mechanism to apply for church registration and there is no will to give a license for non-Islamic purposes. If the government did allow that, it is feared that al-Shabaab would use that as propaganda to recruit further fighters and gain increased support from the Somali population.

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. (4.00 points)

Christians are not allowed to consider rebuilding churches. An attempt to reopen a Catholic church in Mogadishu was not successful. Another attempt to reopen a Catholic church in Hargeisa was met with public outcry and hostility.

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

Let alone outside activities, Christians cannot even organize activities indoors safely. There is no opportunity for Christians to run and maintain a place of worship. Militant groups such as al-Shabaab or other Salafists have declared publicly that there is no room for Christians in the country.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)

There are no recognizable church buildings in the country. Many churches were destroyed in the past decades, including the Roman Catholic cathedral in Mogadishu which was regarded as one of the finest and biggest cathedrals in Africa. There is constant monitoring to see if there are informal places of Christian worship (house churches) operating in the country.

Violence

Due to security risks, no details about violent incidents can be published.

5 Year trends

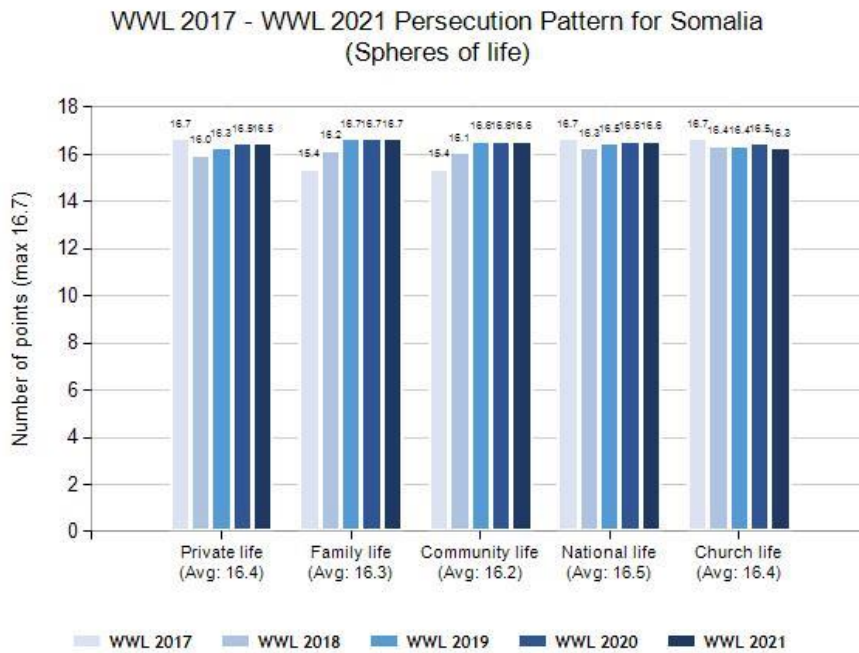
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Somalia: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	16.5
2020	16.6
2019	16.5
2018	16.2
2017	16.2

Over the last five WWL reporting periods extreme levels have been recorded for the average pressure, where 16.2 has been the minimum. It is extremely difficult to live in the country as a Christian. A mere suspicion can lead to killing. Any 'abnormal' behavior can be construed as abandoning Islam and can lead to serious problems.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the extreme levels of pressure on Christians in all spheres of life are more or less stable. Apart from a minor reduction in WWL 2017 in Family and Community life, all spheres of life have consistently scored 16.0 or above. This reflects the fact that persecution in Somalia is everywhere and a national phenomenon; Christians lack meaningful space in society and protection by the government. The highest average score of the last five years reporting period is 16.5 (national sphere) and the lowest average score is 16.2, which shows an extreme level of persecution and violations of the rights of Christians.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Compared to the charts for pressure, the scores for violence are lower. This is probably also due to the inaccessibility of the country and difficulties in reporting. The scores have nevertheless consistently reached the category "very high". Since WWL 2019, violence has gradually increased. Except in WWL 2019, the violence scores have been above 9 points. The average score of 9.7 shows that violence in the country is very high.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to Christian religious materials
Denied access to social community/networks
Denied custody of children
Denied food or water
Discrimination/harassment via education
Enforced religious dress code
Forced divorce
Forced marriage
Forced to flee town/country
Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

Women in Somalia, for the most part, lead prescribed lives with little leeway for personal belief or expression. A woman does not have a voice in her community and is dependent on men. Young female converts to Christianity remain one of the most vulnerable populations. It is common for a woman suspected of Christianity to be raped and humiliated in public, kept under strict house arrest, abducted, forcibly married to a radical sheikh or killed. If already married, she will likely be divorced and have her children taken away in order to ensure that, as one country expert explains, “they are raised well, in the Islamic way.”

Forced marriages are commonplace in Somalia; in 2020 the long-anticipated Sexual Offences Bill was [overturned](#) by Parliament (Reuters, 11 Aug 2020). Instead of protecting women and girls from sexual abuse, rape and child marriage, the new legislation permitted child and early marriages to continue. As such, forced marriages – often to much older men – is easily accessible as a means of coercion to restore converts back to Islam. Some are pressured by their families, whilst others are abducted by radical Muslims for the purpose of forced conversion, marriage and sexual slavery. According to media [reports](#), abducting and marrying girls to militants is part of an organized program by al-Shabaab to breed its next generation of fighters (BBC News, 24 May 2017).

[Education](#) is often brief for girls, with only 5% making it to high school enrolment (No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project, accessed 20 November 2020). In education, Christian girls can be pressured into attending Islamic *Duksi* classes and dressing in al-Shabaab compliant burkas. Additionally, by law women and girls can [inherit](#) only half the amount of property to which their brothers are entitled (UNDP, 2019, “Somalia: Gender Justice and the Law” p.17). These factors contribute to the economic vulnerability of women, which is often exploited. Christian women also suffer when their husbands are imprisoned or killed; widows tend to be forced to marry Muslim men, property is confiscated and the widow is left at the mercy of the man's family. Many are taken advantage of by male relatives and young daughters married off. The family often ends up impoverished.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to Christian religious materials
Enforced religious dress code
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – death

Violence – physical

Somalia is a patriarchal society with high social control. Somali men and boys merely suspected of conversion to Christianity face extreme violations of their fundamental rights. They are at risk of being verbally abused, physically assaulted, have their businesses taken over, imprisoned, heavily threatened, tortured, abducted, or killed in abhorrent ways. These are no idle threats and fear is a constant companion for Somali Christian men and boys.

Men face more hostile treatment because they are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; they are expected to lead their family in religious matters and can consequently be blamed if a family member converts. Leadership positions are stripped from them and they lose their wives and children. For those suspected of conversion themselves, pressure is applied on them to conform by their local community. For instance, they may be deliberately selected to lead the Mosque prayers and be expected to grow a beard, marry more than one wife or perform Islamic rituals in public. These are means of testing suspected converts.

Additionally, boys are expected to own and operate weapons, and many are abducted and indoctrinated by al-Shabaab. Families forcefully send their young men to Islamic rehabilitation centers to be trained as al-Shabaab militia, including converts. If exposed within this context as Christians, they face further dangers; as one country expert notes, “they are subject to manipulation by the ones who know their identity.”

If discovered, Christian men are also denied their inheritance and boys are denied education. For a Christian family, the whole family and community is affected if the husband is killed or compromised, for the man is the breadwinner. When the men are killed, their family is often left unprotected and labeled kaffirs: They will be seen as a dirty stain on the community. The underground church also suffers greatly when the men are persecuted or killed because most of the other men opt to go deeper underground, leading to leadership crises.

Persecution of other religious minorities

No religious groups other than Sunni Islam have any meaningful rights in Somalia. In areas controlled by al-Shabaab, the situation has become so extreme that even Shia Muslims keep a very low profile. Moderate Sunnis are also targeted. As stated above, laws in Somalia prohibit the propagation of any religion other than Islam and prohibit Muslims from converting. The Constitution also states that all laws must comply with the general principles of Sharia. In this context, any other religion except (Sunni) Islam will experience severe challenges.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression:

Islamic oppression is embedded in society and government. As it stands, unless a political solution is sought, *Islamic oppression* in the context of radical Islamic groups will remain the main problem for religious minorities in Somalia and neighboring countries. The COVID-19 crisis has also served to strengthen the militant groups and weaken the government. In summary:

- Al-Shabaab will continue targeting converts to Christianity;
- It is unlikely that any of the severely damaged church buildings can ever be reopened;
- If AU troops were to leave the country or are reduced in strength (as the UN plans after 2020), al-Shabaab would be emboldened again and might pose an even greater threat to Christians in the country and beyond. The same is true if Ethiopia were to withdraw significant number of its troops.

Clan oppression:

Somali society is structured in clans. A government cannot make decisions without clan support. As outlined by Reuters in December 2007, this is because: "[The clans control districts and businesses](#) and are the arbiters of most aspects of Somali life. Decisions are made collectively within the clans and their complex sub-divisions." It is difficult to see this situation change in the near future. Thus, any violations of religious freedom that emanate from this engine are likely to remain.

Organized corruption and crime:

Somalia [ranks](#) among the world's most corrupt countries (Somalia Corruption Report, updated July 2020). Insecurity is also a major issue; the ongoing instability greatly restricts business. Corrupt government officials tolerate illegal activities in return for bribes. Dysfunctional institutions facilitate an environment of lawlessness, and the absence of any form of regulatory framework hinders prospects of economic competitiveness." It seems that there is no appetite to fight this problem and al-Shabaab is using this rampant corruption to infiltrate the government. It also uses corruption to finance its operations. This issue will likely continue, and as long as al-Shabaab and its supporters flourish in the country, the chance for the Church to grow is very slim.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: overturned - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-women-rights/outrage-as-somali-parliament-drafts-law-permitting-child-forced-marriages-idUSKCN257200>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: reports, - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-40022953>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Education - http://www.noceilings.org/child-marriage/?utm_source=CeilingBreakers&utm_medium=Web&utm_campaign=NoCeilings%22%20%5

CI%20%22SOM%22%20%5Ch%20HYPERLINK%20%22http://www.noceilings.org/child-marriage/?utm_source=CeilingBreakers&utm_medium=Web&utm_campaign=NoCeilings%22%20%5CI%20%22SOM%22%20%5C#SOM

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: inherit - <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Somalia%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English.pdf>
- Future outlook: The clans control districts and businesses - <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL05364051>
- Future outlook: ranks - <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/somalia/>

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=Somalia>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Somalia>