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World Watch Research

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# Iraq: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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[research@od.org](mailto:research@od.org)

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

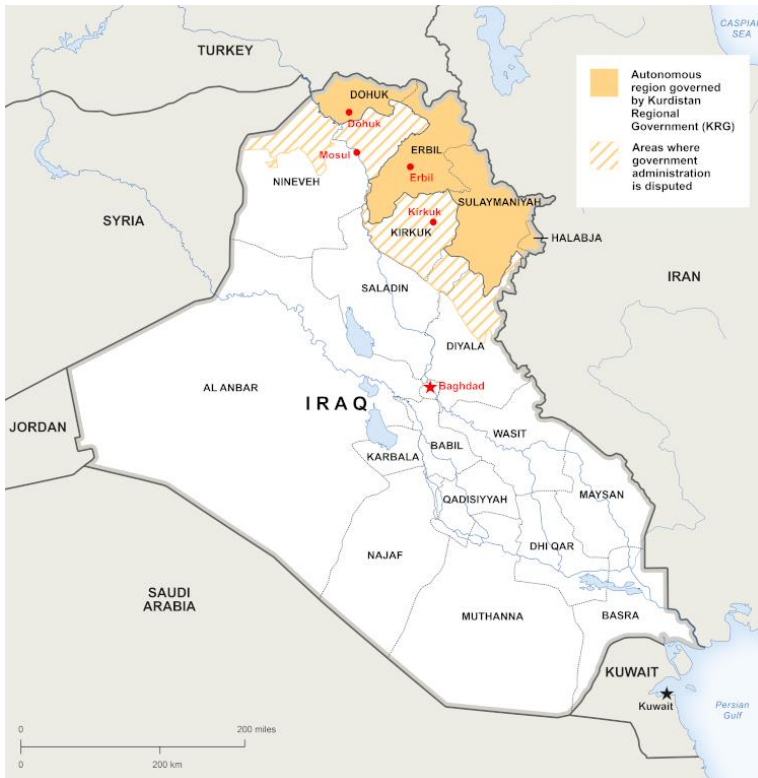
Iraq: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
46,524,000	187,000	0.4

*Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024*

Iraq: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	187,000	0.4
Muslim	45,371,000	97.5
Hindu	5,800	0.0
Buddhist	440	0.0
Ethnic religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	22	0.0
Bahai	2,400	0.0
Atheist	85,500	0.2
Agnostic	223,000	0.5
Other	648,630	1.4
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

## Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Iraq:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Organized crime cartels or networks
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Political parties, Non-Christian religious leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, One's own (extended) family

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

The main focus of pressure on Iraqi Christians following the territorial losses by the Islamic State group (IS) has been the Shia militias backed by Iran. However, IS continued its attacks against civilians, infrastructure and security forces in 2023, and to a lesser extent in 2024. Both Turkey and Iran also continued airstrikes and - in Turkey's case - ground operations in various areas of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) allegedly targeting members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In recent years, these attacks hit predominantly Christian villages as well, causing severe damage to civilian property and forcing many Christians to flee, leading to the emptying of these communities. Christians have still not recovered from the displacement and emigration caused by IS and are now barely able to cope with new displacement. According to a local expert, the main Turkish target is the PKK, but Christians are a 'soft' target to attack and perpetrators can easily get away with it. Although Christians are not the main target, the attacks make them particularly vulnerable. In addition, they have reportedly received no protection from the local government.

The Assyrian Church of the East, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Armenian Orthodox Church are all seriously affected by intolerance, discrimination and persecution, issuing especially from militant Islamic groups and non-Christian leaders. They also face discrimination from government authorities. In central and southern Iraq, Christians often do not publicly display Christian symbols (such as a cross) as this can lead to harassment or discrimination at check-points, universities, work places and government buildings.



Pressure on Christians in Iraq increased after pages of the Quran were publicly burned in Sweden and Denmark in June and July 2023.

In 2023 the conflict intensified between Chaldean Catholic Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako and Babylon Brigade militia leader Ryaan al-Kaldani, a nominal Chaldean, who has close ties to Iran. The Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid sided with the Christian militia leader by revoking a special presidential decree which had officially recognized Patriarch Sako as head of the Chaldean Church and sole administrator of its assets. In July 2023 Patriarch Sako decided to relocate the Church's headquarters from Baghdad to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) after receiving threatening messages from Iranian-backed militias. Following re-instatement of his status by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, the patriarch returned to his headquarters in Baghdad in April 2024.

Already several years ago, the Catholic seminary was no longer able to operate in Baghdad as a result of threats of kidnapping and attacks by Islamic militants and was forced to move to the IKR (Asia News, 1 April 2007). Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal churches in Baghdad and Basra are also seriously affected by violence from radical Islamic groups and non-Christian leaders, and regularly experience discrimination from the authorities. Outspoken Christians have frequently become targets in central and southern Iraq. Blasphemy laws can be used against them too if they are suspected of carrying out outreach among Muslims.

Christians with a Muslim background experience most pressure from (extended) family and often keep their faith a secret as they risk being threatened by family members, clan leaders and the society around them. Converts risk losing inheritance rights and the right or means to marry. To openly leave Islam leads to difficult situations throughout the country, but can also be risky in the more moderate, Islamic IKR. In 2023, pressure on Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan increased further as two Christian converts from Islam were accused of blasphemy after posting online messages on social media. One of them was sentenced to prison, the other had to leave the country for his safety while a case against him was pending. The two cases were widely publicized online, leading to incitement of hatred against Christians in the region. Apart from that, several Christians were killed for their involvement in Christian activities. Changing church affiliation (e.g., by moving from an Orthodox to an Evangelical congregation) most often has less serious consequences, such as being refused rights and loss of employment. Leaders of Orthodox and Catholic churches have been known to refuse to conduct marriages for members who have been attending Evangelical churches.

In May 2024, the total number of quota seats for religious and ethnic minorities in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) parliament was reduced from 11 to 5 following a ruling by the Iraqi Supreme Court. This means that Christians now have a total of 3 instead of 6 quota seats in the IKR parliament. In July 2024, the Nineveh provincial council, influenced by the Babylon Movement, dismissed 15 independent Christian and Yazidi officials from important roles, sparking protests and legal action. This move has raised concerns that the absence of meaningful reforms and protection of Christian rights will lead to a continued exodus of Christians from Iraq.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christian converts from Islam are killed because of their new faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- The law prohibits conversion from Islam (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian converts lose custody of their children and inheritance rights (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Children of Christian converts are registered as Muslims and forced to receive Islamic education (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christian female converts are forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

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

- **Christians killed:** One convert was killed for faith-related reasons during the WWL 2025 reporting period. For security reasons no further details can be shared at this point.
- **Churches attacked/damaged:** Two churches were damaged due to Turkish attacks in northern Iraq in June 2024.
- **Christians detained:** Several Christian converts from Islam were detained for carrying out Christian activities.
- **June 2024:** An Iraqi court told a Christian woman in KRG that she and her children – who were all raised as Christians - must convert to Islam since her mother had converted to Islam after divorcing her father and marrying a Muslim man (which occurred when the woman informed by the court was a teenager).
- **September 2023:** An important incident occurred although it may not be directly linked to Christian persecution: A devastating fire broke out at a Christian wedding in northern Iraq that claimed the lives of at least 133 people and injured more than 100 others. According to the official report, the fire could have been caused by 'gross negligence' and a lack of safety measures, but several of the Christian survivors believe they were the latest victims of a political power-struggle. Regardless of which claim is true, the incident has had a profound impact and raises grave concerns for the current and future safety of the Christian community in Iraq.

## Specific examples of positive developments

- **May 2024:** The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) formed a committee to address Christian property disputes, with the aim to help resolve issues related to land and property rights ([Syriac Press](#), 8 May 2024).

- **April/May 2024:** There were reports of the reconstruction or renovation of several churches such as the Chaldean Catholic church of Um al-Mauna in Mosul, which during the period of Islamic State control was used as an IS headquarters. Others concern the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Church in Mosul and the Armenian Church in Zakho. Also, the Iraqi PM announced the government's preparedness to reopen the Seventh-Day Adventist church in Baghdad, after years of closure ([Syriac Press](#), 6 April 2024; [Syriac Press](#), 16 May 2024; [Syriac Press](#), 20 May 2024; [Syriac Press](#), 25 May 2024).
- **March 2024:** IMPACT-SE, an organization focused on analyzing educational content, reported that Christianity and Christians are increasingly portrayed positively in the Iraqi national school curriculum. Despite this, the curriculum also includes controversial content, such as labeling non-Muslims as "infidels" said to "expect torment in Hell" and promoting jihad and martyrdom ([IMPACT-SE](#), March 2024).

The majority of Iraq's Christians are Chaldean Catholics (an eastern rite of the Roman Catholic Church), and nearly 20 percent are members of the Assyrian Church of the East. The remainder are Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Anglican, and other Protestants and evangelical Christians including converts from Islam."

Most Christians in Iraq are concentrated in the IKR provinces. There is also a Christian concentration in Nineveh province. The Nineveh plains are among the so-called disputed areas between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Government of Iraq (GOI). After the referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan in September 2017, most of the plains of Nineveh came back under the control of the Iraqi government. Very few Christians (non-converts) are left in Baghdad and only small numbers in Basra. Converts to Christianity can be found in all provinces of Iraq.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians

Expatriate Christians have not been counted as a separate category according to WWL Methodology as they do not usually function as an involuntarily isolated group in Iraq.

### Historical Christian communities

Churches such as the Assyrian Orthodox Church, the Chaldean Catholic or Syrian Catholic Church and the Armenian Church are all seriously affected by violations from radical Islamic movements and non-Christian religious leaders. They also face discrimination from government authorities. In central and southern Iraq, Christians often do not publicly display Christian symbols like a cross as this can lead to harassment or discrimination at check-points, university, work-place or government buildings. Most of the Christians in the IKR usually display Christian symbols without any problems, although in rare cases some have reportedly removed the crosses from their cars so as not to attract unwanted attention.

### Converts to Christianity

This category consists of Christians from a Muslim background. Converts from Islam experience most pressure from (extended) family and often keep their new faith a secret as they risk being threatened by their family members, tribal leaders and society around them.

### Non-traditional Christian communities

Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal churches in Bagdad and Basra are also seriously affected by violations from radical Islamic movements and non-Christian leaders, including discrimination from the authorities. To some extent, Christians in this category are also affected by opposition from (extended) family - especially where they previously belonged to a Historical Christian community. Outspoken Christians have regularly become targets in central and southern Iraq. Blasphemy laws can be used against them too if they are suspected of carrying out outreach among Muslims. For Christians in this category there is no legal framework for setting up Bible schools or for recruiting and registering organizations from outside Iraq to support them in this.

### Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Most Christians in Iraq live in the north of the country, especially in the following provinces: Nineveh, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk and northern Kirkuk. The central and southern regions of Iraq have seen a dramatic decrease in the Christian population: Most provinces in these regions have been largely abandoned by Christian communities, with the exception of small groups of converts from a Muslim background. Baghdad (in central Iraq) and Basra (in the south) also have very few Christian residents remaining and face particularly challenging circumstances.

Violations against converts - particularly in the form of *Islamic* and *Clan oppression* - tend to be more frequent in Arab than Kurdish areas. For a long time, the atmosphere in Kurdish areas had been more tolerant of non-Muslims. However, according to a country expert, that tolerance is now decreasing with the growing influence of conservative Islam, which is mainly reflected in increased pressure being exerted on converts from Islam.

### Position on the World Watch List

Iraq: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	78	17
WWL 2024	79	16
WWL 2023	76	18
WWL 2022	78	14
WWL 2021	82	11

The score for Iraq decreased from 79 points in WWL 2024 to 78 points in WWL 2025. The average pressure score remained stable at the extreme level of 14.3 points. The slight drop in overall score was caused by a fall in the violence score from 7.8 points in WWL 2024 to 6.7 points as there were fewer Christians killed. However violence continues to score very high with two churches damaged by Turkish attacks and several Christians detained.

## Persecution engines

Iraq: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	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)

Christians in Iraq experience *Islamic oppression* from Sunni and Shia Muslims irrespective of their ethnicity (Kurdish, Iranian, and Arab). Considering the high level of conservatism and strong collaboration of Sunni elements with Islamist insurgents, the line between who is an extremist and who is not, is somewhat blurred. The influence of Islamic militants has made Islamic consciousness a new factor in the country, including in the IKR in the north. In the Iraqi and Kurdish governments, the role of Islam is increasing due to regional developments.

Several Shia parties have close relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Christian converts with a Muslim background in particular have for some time reported being monitored by Iranian secret service agents in areas close to the Iranian border. In general, Iraqi society is becoming more Islamic: Islamic dogma and rhetoric dominate daily life, and Islamic leaders (especially Shiites) continue to influence social, religious and political life. This is then reflected in social norms and practices that affect all people in Iraq and becomes a benchmark for non-Muslims as well. Social control of women is on the rise and even Christian women in Baghdad and Basra are forced to cover up in order to move around safely outside their homes.

### Clan oppression (Strong)

Iraqi society is still very tribal, especially where areas have been disrupted by sectarian tensions and violence (mostly in territory previously controlled by IS). Tribes in Iraq have a very strong influence and impose their age-old customs and traditions on society. Compliance with this is often more important than adherence to government law, as tribes often consider themselves above the law and, in some areas, tribal groups have influence within (and sometimes even over) the government. Where this

tribalism is mixed with Islam, it will mainly affect Christians with a Muslim background. A convert's tribal background - especially where it concerns a prominent tribe - can cause problems for other Christians and keep them from giving support to the convert.

### **Organized corruption and crime (Strong)**

Corruption is deeply rooted in Iraqi society, right up to the highest levels and plays an important role in the persecution of Christians in Iraq both in the area controlled by the Government of Iraq (GOI) and in the IKR. Drivers of this engine are specifically putting Christians at a disadvantage when it comes to finding jobs and registering Christian companies; they are also known to take over properties belonging to Christians. In many majority Islamic areas, Christians can often only sell their houses at 60% of the price.

Other examples are: i) The seizure of land belonging to Christians; in the GOI area, at least 70% of properties left behind by Christians fleeing the country were illegally seized by organized criminal groups, which included very influential politicians and religious leaders. Similar phenomena can be observed in the IKR, where the perpetrators are influential tribal leaders who are affiliated with the ruling clan. The vulnerable position of religious minorities such as Christians is being exploited. ii) The killing and kidnapping of Christians; since 2003 this has occurred in waves, causing great concern over the insecurity they are forced to live with. These two reasons are among the main causes for Iraqi Christian emigration and for the depletion of the Christian community in Iraq. The COVID-19 crisis served to further exacerbate this state of chaos and corruption.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)**

This engine is blended with *Islamic oppression*. The aim of staying in power whatever the cost has been a key issue in central Iraqi government and is fed by the patronage system, corruption and nepotism. This focus leads to failure in supporting a pluralistic society in which Christians (and other minorities) would feel truly welcome. In the north, there were reports in June 2018 of the Kurdish authorities confiscating 'Assyrian' land. Also, elements within the central government in Baghdad have attempted to arrange a longstanding, systematic campaign of demographic change of minority areas by facilitating land and housing for "Shia and Sunni Muslims to move into traditionally Christians areas", according to Christians in the region. Religious and political Christian leaders continue to renounce the fraudulent and forced appropriation of Christian-owned property.

Finally, as in the 2018 parliamentary elections, Christians complained about the alleged exploitation of the electoral law in the 2021 parliamentary elections, when Kurdish and Shia Arab parties took the five quota seats reserved for Christians on the National Council and put forward Christian candidates that were not chosen by Christian parties but by parties that did not give priority to issues that were important to Christian communities and were not politically loyal to them. In the Kurdish Regional Government (KGR), the total number of quota seats for Christians was reduced to 3 (instead of 6) following a ruling by the Iraqi Supreme Court in May 2024.

### **Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)**

*Christian denominational protectionism* was weaker when IS still had a territorial presence in Iraq and churches of many different denominations were more inclined to cooperate with each other. In Iraq, there are fourteen Christian denominations recognized by the state authorities, two of which are

Protestant. If a new denomination applies for registration, the officially recognized churches are asked to approve the application. Often, they strongly object to registering non-traditional Protestant groups. Historical churches often try to prevent members of their congregations from visiting the newer church groups. Some Catholic churches refuse to allow Protestant Christians to bury their dead in Catholic cemeteries. As there are no non-traditional Christian cemeteries, this constitutes a significant hindrance. In southern and central regions of Iraq, Christians who have moved from a Historical church community to join a non-traditional Christian group can face threats and opposition from family members, tribal leaders and society around them. These threats include the risk of losing employment, inheritance or the means to marry. Bishops of Historical church communities have also be known to refuse to hold weddings for members who have been visiting non-traditional church groups. Families and community sometimes disassociate themselves from such 'cross-denominational converts'.

### Drivers of persecution

Iraq: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	-	STRONG	MEDIUM	-	-	STRONG	STRONG
Government officials	Strong	-	-	Very weak	Weak	-	-	Strong	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	Strong	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Weak	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Weak	Strong	-	-	Very weak	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Weak	Weak	-	-	Strong	Medium
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	-	Strong	Medium	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Strong	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Strong	Medium

*(table continued below)*



Iraq: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	-	STRONG	MEDIUM	-	-	STRONG	STRONG
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	Strong	Weak
Organized crime cartels or networks	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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) and Paramilitary groups (Strong):** Violent religious groups such as IS and Shia militants are known to target Christians for kidnapping and murder. Whereas IS is still actively present in the areas of Khanaqin, Kirkuk and Mosul where they target minorities, Shia militias have now become one of the greatest sources of persecution against Christians. Militias have been known to expropriate Christians' land and are a particularly dangerous source of serious religious freedom violations against converts. Examples of Shia militias (mostly affiliated with Iran and linked to Iraqi political parties) are: The Badr Corps, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades, the Army of The Mukhtar, the Brigade of Abi Fadl al-Abbas, Badr Affiliate of Iran (considered a terrorist group by the USA) and Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army.
- **Extended family (Very strong):** Relatives are known to put severe pressure on Christians with a Muslim background to get them to return to Islam, and this sometimes includes attempts to kill them. Converts can face physical harm and abuse, detention, being disowned and expelled from the family home, being ostracized from clan, family and community, forced divorce (especially targeting women), forced marriage with a radical Muslim (especially targeting women) and loss of custody of children.

**Government officials (Strong):** Some government officials (such as Bartalla District judge) are said to have tried to encourage demographic change by offering land and housing to Shia and Sunni Muslims in the historically Christian areas of the Nineveh plains, e.g. in Diyala and Babil provinces, including Jurf al-Sakhar district. Local authorities in some regions continued to verbally harass and restrict religious activities, according to representatives of minority religious communities. (Source: US State Department [IRFR 2019 Iraq](#)). Government officials have been responsible for anti-Christian poster campaigns, e.g. telling Muslims to boycott Christmas festivals, not to wish Christians well at Christmas and not to use Christmas decorations; or (through posters fixed to church buildings in the GOI area) telling Christian women to wear the hijab. Government officials



who belong to radical Islamic groups can make it very difficult for Christians to complete all necessary paper work. Considering the high level of conservatism and strong collaboration of Sunni elements with Islamist insurgents, it is often unclear who is 'extremist' and who is not. Government officials are known to have arrested Christians with an Islamic background and have been involved in violent incidents against them.

- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** If the new faith of converts from Islam to Christianity becomes known, ethnic leaders are very likely to put strong pressure on them to renounce their new faith. Some tribal elders have agreed to converts being killed. There were also reports of serious pressure by Yezidi leaders against converts to Christianity.
- **Political parties (Strong):** In the parliamentary elections of May 2018 and October 2021, a Shia political group and Kurdish parties manipulated the election to deprive Christians of their five 'quota seats'. In the past, some Shia political parties proposed laws, which discriminate against Christians, i.e. the national ID law. This law stipulates that the children of a spouse who converts to Islam, will be automatically considered Muslim. Apart from Islamic political parties, ethnic, paramilitary and tribal groups have also at times formed parties that have had exclusivist agendas. Most of the Shiite militias mentioned above are connected to political parties or more specifically political leaders, such as Muqtada al-Sadr. Reportedly, Nouri al-Maliki, vice-president of Iraq from 2016 to 2018 and secretary-general of the Islamic Dawa party, is a major supporter of armed Shiite groups.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Another source of persecution, discrimination and intolerance are radical Islamic leaders, both Shia and Sunni, who directly influence politics and other aspects of life in Iraq. Their influence is reflected in i) discriminating policies, laws and administration practices against Christians, and ii) the very common use of hate-speech by Muslim leaders alienating Christians.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** In the highly conservative Iraqi society, many Muslims view Christians as infidels and sometimes as 'crusaders' or as part of a 'Western plan'. In this context, the non-traditional Christian community is sometimes viewed as promoting a Zionist program. Christians of a Muslim background tend to be seen as apostates who deserve death for leaving Islam. Speeches by Islamic radicals in the IKR have sometimes led to protests or mobs destroying churches and shops which sell alcohol. Shops selling alcohol in Baghdad are also sometimes targeted. Since Muslims are not supposed to drink alcohol (according to their religious laws), the owners of these shops are often Christians or Yezidis. In previous years, Muslim citizens collaborated with IS or became part of militias that persecuted Christians - for instance in Mosul. This has greatly harmed the levels of trust Christians now have for neighbors and others in their communities. Normal citizens in all areas of Iraq have also put pressure on Christians with a Muslim background to make them return to Islam.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Medium):** Apart from political parties and some militia groups, criminal networks have also been involved in the confiscation of more than 30,000 Christian properties in Baghdad and other areas. This took place with impunity in spite of commitments by the Prime Minister's office to launch inquiries into the seizures (Source: US State Department [IRFR 2018](#) Iraq). Mafia-like groups have been joining forces with real estate offices and confiscating Christian-owned properties by falsifying documents with relative impunity. In some cases, the Christian owners or tenants were threatened directly, which made them leave their homes.

### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Strong), Ethnic leaders (Strong) and non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** *Clan oppression* concerns the imposition of age-old norms and values shaped in 'tribal' context and is often blended with *Islamic oppression*. Belonging to and obeying a tribe is commonly seen as being more important than obeying national laws. Drivers of this engine are particularly families of converts and tribal, ethnic or Islamic leaders.
- **Political parties (Medium) and Paramilitary groups (Strong):** Iraqi political parties (and militias linked to them) in general have contributed to reviving and strengthening tribalism in various ways. In some areas there are clans whose impact exceeds the influence of a particular party. If someone who violates another's rights belongs to this clan, no one can do anything to assert justice. In these cases, where the perpetrator belongs to the ruling group, Christians are a soft and easy target. Ethnic and tribal groups have at times formed parties that have had exclusivist agendas. The same holds true for the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU), an Iraqi umbrella organization funded by the state, comprising some 40 militias, mainly Shia Muslim groups, but also Sunni Muslim, Christian and Yezidi groups, some of which form political arms to their military groups. Tribal pressures can especially affect converts to Christianity: If a convert's tribal background is known, this can seriously discourage other Christians from helping him or her due to the influence tribal groups have even at government level.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Political parties, government officials and normal citizens (Strong):** Government officials at all levels are reported to threaten Christians and 'encourage' them to emigrate. Also, citizens in the north have reportedly made remarks in public, questioning why Christians are still in Iraq. By failing to promote a pluralistic society, political parties also contribute to freedom of religion violations against Christians. Christians have complained about the alleged exploitation of the electoral law in the 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections, when Kurdish and Shia parties took the quota seats reserved for Christians on the National Council and put forward their own Christian candidates. Religious, ethnic, paramilitary, and tribal groups have at times formed parties that have had exclusivist agendas. Shiite and Sunni political parties are the biggest threat to Christians, whereas the pressure coming from nationalist parties (e.g. Kurdish) is lower.

Sources claim that some government officials have been trying to bring about demographic change by providing land and housing for Shia and Sunni Muslims to relocate to traditionally Christian areas in the Nineveh plains and Sunni areas in Diyala and Babil provinces. According to a source in the region, prominent members of Kurdish parties or persons loyal to them have been responsible for stealing money, property, land and factories belonging to Christians in the IKR. The relationship between Kurds and Assyrians is ambivalent. In some cases Assyrian nationalists say that Kurdish parties are trying to dominate their villages and region. But at the same time, Kurds have supported Christians, for instance by allowing new churches to be established.

- ***Violent religious groups, ethnic leaders (Strong) and paramilitary groups (Strong):*** Other drivers that will do virtually anything to strengthen their power are ethnic group leaders (e.g. Kurdish leaders) ethnic militias (e.g. the Shabak) and violent religious groups like IS, al-Qaeda and the Khorazan group. For example, Shabak and other minority groups have prevented Christians from returning to their villages and have de facto expropriated them in many places.

#### **Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism**

- ***Religious leaders of other churches (Strong):*** At a lower level of pressure, leaders of Historical church communities have sometimes thwarted the official recognition of new Christian denominations. In one case, a Catholic leader used his influence to motivate the police to harass a Protestant pastor who was active in a traditionally Catholic village. The pastor and his team were detained on false accusations and the pastor was forced to leave the village. Some Catholic churches in IKR prevent Protestant Christians from burying their dead in Christian cemeteries. In Baghdad, non-traditional Christian denominations which are not (yet) recognized by the central government, have to make a payment to be able to bury their dead. The land is provided by the state and the cemetery is administered by the one Protestant denomination in Baghdad. In the IKR government, the Department for Christian Affairs is dominated by the Chaldean (Catholic) Church which influences and hinders some administrative practices.
- ***Extended family (Medium):*** Family members who change church affiliation - often this concerns leaving a Historical church denomination for a newer, non-traditional one - are often frowned upon by other family members. Pressure is likely to be exerted to stimulate return to the traditional church.

#### **Drivers of Organized corruption and crime**

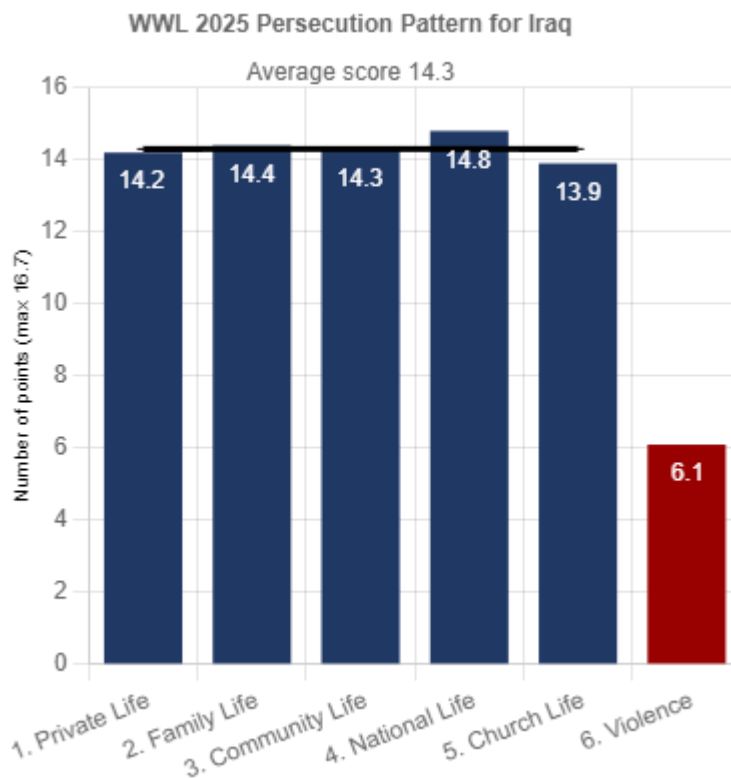
- ***Violent religious groups, government officials, organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):*** Government officials connected to criminal groups take advantage of their authority and falsify documents. Criminal groups link up with real estate offices and commit fraud to get hold of Christian-owned properties - mostly belonging to Christians who have fled. This has been going on for years and is still continuing in Baghdad. Members of military forces are also known to have stolen factories that belonged to Christians in the south of Kirkuk province. Even in the north of Iraq, most often cases of Christian property theft remain unresolved and without restoration of the rights of the owners. In central and southern Iraq, Christians are exposed to the threats of armed groups who force them to leave their country and flee for their lives. Other areas with such cases are Tel Kefe and Bartella in the Nineveh plains region. The former is completely free of Christians (despite being a Christian-majority city prior to 2014) and the latter has become majority Shabak (Shia) despite being predominantly Christian before IS came. In both cases, militias created facts on the ground and maintained their position through the monopoly of violence.

Minorities regularly complain about this situation and the impunity of 'the occupiers'. Yezidis, Christians, and local and international NGOs reported that members of the People's Mobilization Force (PMF) continued to engage in verbal harassment and physical abuse, at checkpoints as well as in the cities and surrounding areas which are controlled by PMF in the Nineveh plains region.

According to Christians in the region, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) dominated Nineveh province trade routes, forced merchants to pay bribes and controlled real estate in Christian areas (IRFR 2019). In general drivers of this engine are mostly people in or close to political power or Shia militia backed by Iran. The kidnapping of Christians also often comes in the form of organized crime, having both financial and religious motives.

- **Political parties (Medium):** Apart from criminal networks and some militia groups, political parties have also been involved in the seizure of more than 30,000 Christian properties in Baghdad and other areas, in defiance of promises made by the Prime Minister's office to investigate the appropriations.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** Some citizens have become complicit in this process of appropriation of Christian properties by buying and moving into them. Individuals have also confiscated land from Christian villages and started building on it, despite the fact that the Christians have official papers which prove they are the owners. This is happening in various cities in the IKR, Nineveh plains, Mosul and Baghdad. Finally, Christians and other non-Muslims have reported corruption, nepotism and uneven application of the rule of law in employment which negatively affected the economic situation of non-Muslim communities and was one of the reasons for them to emigrate.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Iraq shows:

The average pressure on Christians in Iraq remained at the extreme level of 14.3 points, the same as in the past three years. Extreme levels of pressure are recorded in every *sphere of life*, which is typical for a situation in which there are many different persecution engines operating.

- Pressure from *Islamic oppression* affects all five *spheres of life* especially for converts. *Clan oppression* (blended with *Islamic oppression*) is most prevalent in the *Family* and *Private spheres of life*. *Organized corruption and crime* is mostly reflected in the *Community* and *National spheres of life*. *Christian denominational protectionism* particularly affects the *Church, Family* and *Private spheres of life*.
- The level of violence against Christians decreased from the very high level of 7.8 points in WWL 2024 to 6.1 points. The decrease is mainly explained by a lower number of Christians killed.

## 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 2025 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: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.75 points)***

For converts from Islam, it is very risky to discuss Christian faith with extended family and others. Historical churches had experienced in the course of the centuries that they could not engage in discussions about faith outside their community or any activity that could be considered evangelization. For other Christian communities, talking to non-Christians about their faith always comes with the risk of alleged proselytization and subsequent harassment and possible violence.

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

Iraqi law does not allow a Muslim to convert to another faith. As such, it is not possible for former Muslims to change their religion on identity cards. Converts will therefore still be officially registered as a Muslim (which would also apply to any children born to converts). Aside from significant social pressure, the greatest pressure comes from a convert's family which may issue death threats, place them under house arrest and carry out beatings and other forms of violence. Many have had to flee as a result. That is why many Christians with a Muslim background keep their faith secret.

***Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)***

In a country heavily affected by sectarian violence (and even genocide in the past), the display of religious symbols comes with the risk of harassment, abduction and violence. This holds especially true for central and south Iraq, but also in some parts of the Nineveh plains such as Mosul. Indigenous Christians (not converts) wear and display Christian symbols and images in their private and public life except where they are living in very conservative Islamic communities. For converts from Islam, this would reveal their faith and is therefore very risky in the entire country, both in public and private life.

***Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.50 points)***

Converts from both Islamic and Yezidi backgrounds cannot talk to their families about their conversion for fear of social hostility and violence. Murders to restore family honor are still practiced in Iraq and can especially affect converts from Islam. Additionally, they may be beaten and expelled from home by their non-Christian family.

***Block 1: Additional information***

Of all Christians, it is converts who are the most restricted in their personal practice of faith. Converts cannot talk about their faith or possess Christian materials in a Muslim environment because they would face hostility and violence. In addition to being an 'apostate', talking about the Christian faith is viewed as an act of proselytism and betrayal. Pressure in this sphere of life was particularly high in central and southern Iraq and, to a lesser extent, in the IKR.

**Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere**

***Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (4.00 points)***

Under Iraqi family law, which is based on Sharia law, custody of children generally goes to the Muslim parent. Children of converts are officially considered to be Muslims and, according to Sharia, a non-Muslim parent cannot raise a Muslim child. If the husband is a Christian, he will be required to give custody to the mother so that the children can be raised in accordance with Islamic law. If the mother is a Christian, she may also be allowed to take custody up to a certain age, but it is most likely that custody of the children will go to the Muslim parent, as most of the judges are Muslim.

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

According to Article 26 of the 2015 National Identity Card Law, children under 18 with one Muslim parent will be registered as Muslim, even if the non-Muslim mother was raped by a Muslim man and the child is the result of sexual assault. Once registered as Muslim, they cannot change their religion back to Christian. In some cases, this has led to the emigration of converts from Islam and other Christians. Christians with an Islamic background face the same issue, since they cannot change their religion, their children will automatically be registered as Muslim.

***Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.50 points)***

This is impossible for Christians with an Islamic background, since the authorities will continue to consider them Muslim. As a result, the marriage of a former Muslim to a non-Muslim will not be recognized. Their children will be treated as Muslims in all aspects of their legal and social life. This issue has been exacerbated by those who were forced to convert to Islam by IS militants, including Christians who are now considered Muslims, because they had to appear in front of a court to declare their conversion to Islam. Finally, unregistered non-traditional Christian communities are not able to register weddings or deaths of their members.

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

This is especially true for children whose parents have an Islamic background since they are considered Muslims and will be obliged to attend Islamic religious classes at all levels of education. To a lesser extent this can also affect indigenous Christians, particularly in majority Islamic areas under the Iraqi central government and in very conservative Islamic environments (e.g. Mosul). Pressure either from teachers or fellow students can play a considerable role here. In the entire country, all schools (including Christian based ones) are required by law to hold regular Islamic classes and exams. Failing these exams means failing to move up in grades. Also, the national curriculum is geared towards Islam - this goes beyond classes for religious education and influences, for instance, lessons in history.

***Block 2: Additional information***

Converts from Islam often have to hide their Christian faith from their Islamic families due to the shame this brings to the family. They run the risk of otherwise being threatened and abandoned. Though under less pressure than converts, Christian families from other categories of Christians are restricted in several ways. In central and southern Iraq, children of Christian families who attend state schools are often discriminated against. Apart from getting lower grades than Muslim children, they are required to attend Quran lessons and are not allowed to explain their faith even when asked. Christian parents are careful what they share about their faith with their children. If the children were to talk about their faith in school – especially during Islamic classes – the family could face accusations of blasphemy. Christian children who refuse to attend Islamic classes are often bullied and pressured into becoming Muslims. Also, Islamic dress can be forced on Christians in school. Some Christian girls have had to wear a headscarf at the university of Mosul. Converts were forced to either register their child as a Muslim or "have the children remain undocumented by federal authorities, thereby denying them the ability to legally convert from Islam. They said that remaining undocumented affected the family's eligibility for government benefits, such as school enrollment and ration card allocation for basic food items, which are determined by family size," as the US State Department mentions in [IRFR 2023 Iraq](#).

**Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere**

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

Discrimination of Christians is pervasive in Iraq. The lack of accountability (caused by the civil war and numerous militias that are not controlled by the central government) has left persecutors unpunished. Discrimination takes place on a daily basis in Iraq, even in the IKR. Discrimination based on dress codes, crosses in cars etc. is commonplace. Christian women of all Christian communities are put under pressure to wear a head-covering in Baghdad and Basra. Even in the north of the country (Dohuk, Zakho and some areas of Erbil) there is a growing social pressure on Christian women to wear a headscarf.

***Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.50 points)***

Christian women from an Islamic background risk their lives if their new faith is known and they could be forced to marry a Muslim. There is a widespread fear of rape and other forms of violence among



women from all Christian communities which could lead them to be married to the rapist, a situation which is supported by law: Rape in Iraq is not prosecuted if the rapist marries the women he violated, in order to restore the family honor. As such, women (including Christians) could be forced to marry their attacker.

***Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.50 points)***

The main disadvantage which Christians face in education is the Islamic focus of the religious education syllabus and the overall disregard of the contribution of 'other' communities to the history of Iraq. This engenders a mentality of Christians being subordinate to Muslims and causes Christians and other non-Muslim communities not to be considered an inherent, indigenous part of Iraq's history and culture. Some of the official teaching materials, in governmental schools and universities, even define Christians as infidels and enemies and incite *jihad* against them. Also, there are reportedly few Christians obtaining scholarships or higher positions within the education system and universities. Christian students have complained that some Muslim university professors (intentionally) set exams during Christian festivals (Christmas and Easter). Finally, Assyrian schools have reported that they face neglect and discrimination, not receiving the full funding they are entitled to or the textbooks they need.

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

Even highly qualified Christians are not getting equal opportunities for employment or reaching higher positions. Although Christians hold senior positions in the national parliament and central government, they feel generally under-represented in government appointments and elected positions and particularly in public sector jobs (especially at provincial and local levels) which limits minorities' access to government-provided economic opportunities.

For Christians from an Islamic background the situation is far more difficult: They are likely to lose their job as soon as their new faith gets known (for instance, by not fasting during Ramadan). In such cases, they will not receive any official documentation or letter of recommendation, thus making it very hard for them to find another position, especially with larger firms.

**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)***

Although the Constitution acknowledges basic human rights and religious freedom and Iraq is a signatory of all treaties and agreements relating to human rights, a number of laws go against the principles which guarantee the religious freedom of Christians. For instance: The constitutional acknowledgment that Iraq is an Islamic country and that no laws can be issued which are contrary to Islam or Islamic principles. Iraqi laws allow conversion from other faiths to Islam, but it neither allows nor recognizes the conversion from Islam to other religions or beliefs. The ID law stipulates that if a person converts to Islam, all his/her children are considered Muslims, including his/her children from earlier marriages. According to personal-status law, in a marriage where one of the spouses is a



Muslim, the right of divorce, child-custody and inheritance goes almost automatically to the Muslim party.

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

Representatives of Christians communities regularly complain that they are under-represented in the public sector, particularly at provincial and local levels. Christians have complained about the alleged exploitation of electoral law in the 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections, when Kurdish and Shiite parties took the quota seats reserved for Christians on the National Council and put forward their own Christian candidates. Generally speaking, as in most of the rest of the Middle East, Christians are not allowed to reach the highest ranks in certain institutions, such as the armed forces. Sometimes Christians have been challenged to become Muslim in order to receive promotion.

***Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)***

Christians in Iraq face significant challenges in expressing their opinions publicly. Many are afraid to discuss their views on political or religious issues because of the risk of violence, shaped by years of marginalization, displacement, and persecution, often leading to self-censorship. Christian converts from Islam face even greater restrictions, as voicing their beliefs risks exposing their conversion and the serious dangers associated with it.

***Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.75 points)***

Most of the perpetrators of crimes against Christians are not held accountable. Christians from an Islamic background are even more vulnerable in this respect, especially where it concerns 'honor crimes' by their family. The central government does not exert control over militias, particularly in the Nineveh plains region. Cases of expropriation, destruction, abduction and murder in the IS and post-IS period have not been prosecuted.

In spite of the great number of Christian homes and Christian property being seized, the number of those who have been brought to justice is nominal. As reported by ICN on 9 June 2015: "In an interview with Al-Mada TV station, Mohammed al-Rubai, a member of Baghdad's municipal council, said: 'Almost [70 per cent of Baghdad's Christian homes](#) have been illegally seized. These houses belonged to Christians who fled from Baghdad, seeking refuge from violent attacks targeting them and their homes. The title deed documents have been falsified and the new title deeds have been lodged with the real estate registry. Many properties had been given illegally to other Iraqi citizens. Thus, it is possible that both parties [the original and new owners] can possess legally registered title deeds to the same property. The area's most affected where in the al-Wahda neighborhood of Baghdad.'" This illegal practice reportedly has [persisted](#) in recent years (Syriac Press, 3 August 2023).

## **Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere**

***Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)***

It would not be possible to integrate Christians with an Islamic background in a church located in the town or city where the converts originate from. Most of the time, converts have to leave their hometown for security reasons and find Christians in the anonymity of a large city - or leave the country for

good. If it is known that a church integrates converts, it will become a target and might be closed. (The exception is in the IKR where some Kurdish churches have been able to integrate Kurdish converts. Regardless of the relatively greater freedom in the IKR, they are still closely watched and potentially at risk.)

**Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)**

It is generally difficult for churches or Christian organizations to speak out publicly against those who persecute Christians, except when this concerns crimes committed by IS. In Iraq, instigators of major acts of persecution are usually high-ranking religious and political leaders with considerable influence and military power. Christian leaders are very careful in how they formulate criticism and accusations. Christian leaders who have been more vocal in this respect have received threats to remain silent. Some people who have criticized the government, its militias or its political parties have been killed.

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

It is generally difficult for churches or Christian organizations to speak out publicly against those who persecute Christians, except when this concerns crimes committed by IS. In Iraq, instigators of major acts of persecution are usually high-ranking religious and political leaders with considerable influence and military power. Christian leaders are very careful in how they formulate criticism and accusations. Christian leaders who have been more vocal in this respect have received threats to remain silent. Some people who have criticized the government, its militias or its political parties have been killed.

**Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.50 points)**

Youth work is only allowed inside church buildings; also, youth camps and other events can only take place inside the walls of a church compound and are not permitted outside. Church youth work can only be focused on Christian youth; no youth work is possible among the majority Muslim population. Unauthorized Christian communities that meet in a house or shop may face problems from the local police as a result of social pressure and Muslim neighbors who do not want to have these gatherings near their homes.

## 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, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

**3. The use of symbolic numbers:**

- In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. 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 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Iraq: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	1	4
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	2	1
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	5	3
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	1	2
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 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	2

*(table continues below)*

Iraq: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	40	35
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?	10 *	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 *	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	22
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	15	100 *

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** One Christian convert from Islam was killed by a family member for faith related reasons. For security reasons no further details can be shared.
- **Churches attacked/damaged:** In June 2024, two churches in northern Syria were damaged in a Turkish attack. A shell completely destroyed the church in the Assyrian Christian village of Miska, while the church in Rabatkeh caught fire but sustained only minor damage thanks to the swift response of local villagers.
- **Christians detained:** several Christian converts from Islam were detained for Christian activities.
- **Christians physically or mentally abused:** There were reports of at least 40 Christians physically (or mentally) abused for their faith, most of whom were converts from Islam.
- **Christian homes, properties, shops or businesses attacked or confiscated:** Confiscation and seizure of Christian land and property in both the Kurdish region as well as the rest of Iraq continued. Reports included document-tampering and forgery concerning Christian properties in Iraq. According to research, the perpetrators also included Iraqi politicians. Finally, Christian-owned houses and other properties were severely damaged in 2024 as a result of Turkish bombardments in the north, including areas like the Assyrian Christian village Miska in July 2024.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes:** Many Christian families are still leaving Iraq due to the instability of the security situation in their areas; partly because of the presence of militias in the Nineveh plains. Their disadvantaged position as a vulnerable minority plays a major role in this. Among them were several Christians of Muslim background who went abroad for reasons directly related to their faith. In 2024, Christians in northern Iraq were also forced to abandon their villages due to Turkish attacks.

## 5 Year trends

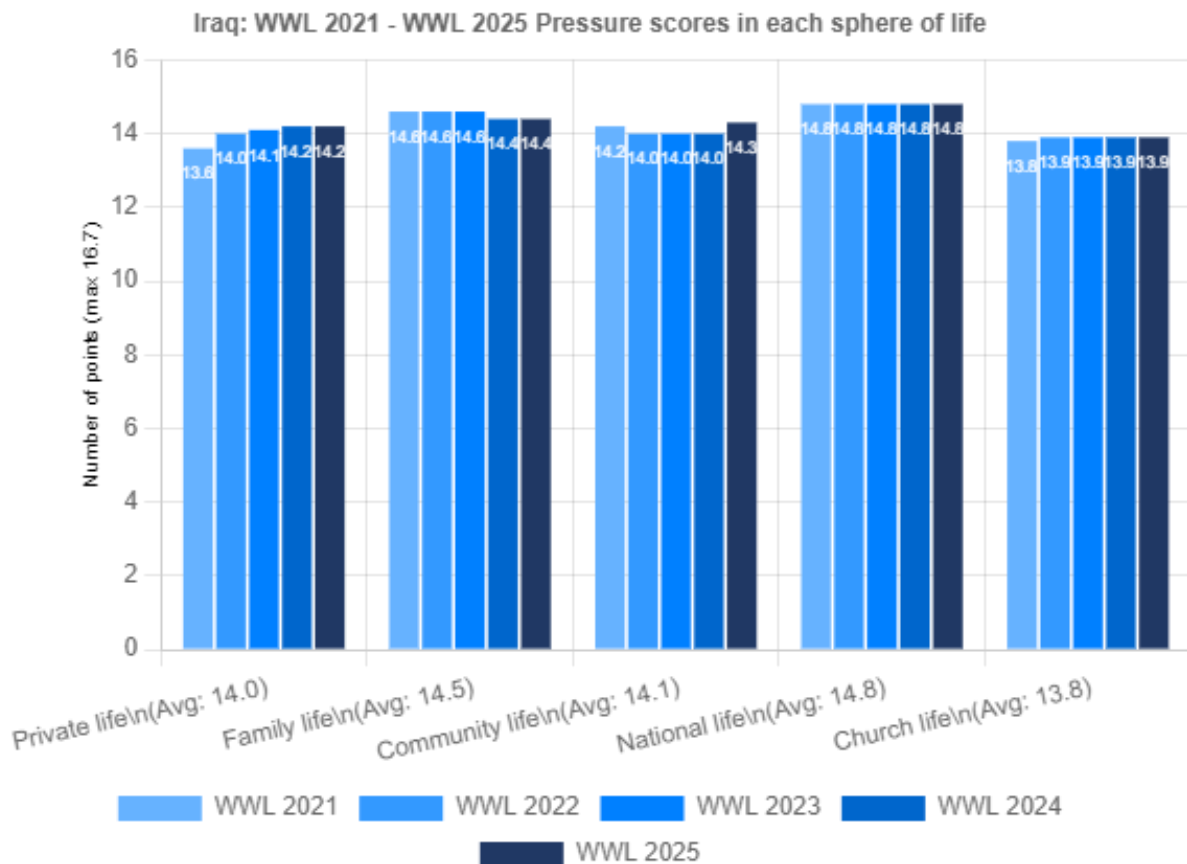
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Iraq: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	14.3
2024	14.3
2023	14.3
2022	14.3
2021	14.2

The average pressure over all 5 WWL reporting periods has been stable at an extreme level, remaining within the range 14.2-14.3 points.

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



The graph above shows that pressure in all *spheres of life* has been fairly stable at an extreme level for the last five reporting periods. The fact that *Family Life* and *National Life* score so high is characteristic of a situation where *Islamic oppression, Clan oppression, Dictatorial paranoia* as well as *Organized corruption and crime* are the predominant persecution engines.

### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



During the reporting periods of WWL 2022 and WWL 2023, violence against Christians showed a significant decline, following a sharp rise observed in WWL 2021. This earlier surge in violence was primarily attributed to the closure of numerous churches, which occurred as predominantly Christian villages were evacuated due to Turkish attacks in the north. The decrease in WWL 2022 and WWL 2023 was mainly because fewer Christians were killed (WWL 2022) and fewer churches were attacked (WWL 2022, WWL 2023).

In the reporting periods WWL 2021-WWL 2025, Turkish attacks in northern Iraq were one of the factors contributing to the violence score. In WWL 2025 the violence score saw a slight decrease since fewer Christians were killed (one as compared to four in WWL 2024, all Christian converts from Islam). Still, the violence score remained at a very high level, with two churches being damaged in northern Iraq as a result of Turkish attacks.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Iraq	<b>Female Pressure Points</b> <b>Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024</b>
	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse Enforced religious dress code Forced divorce Forced marriage Incarceration by family (house arrest) Targeted Seduction Violence – death Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – sexual Violence – Verbal

Following years of atrocious treatment of women from religious minorities during the war against IS, survivors of sexual enslavement who returned to their families carry the shadows of their trauma, as they work to re-establish their lives. Women remain unprotected from gender-based violence and due to social stigma associated with sexual violence, victims often choose to remain silent. Rape victims – who can be forced to marry their rapist under Iraqi law – often choose not to report incidents of assault to avoid such a fate. A country expert explains that “there is a widespread fear among women...as rape in Iraq will not be prosecuted if the rapist marries the woman he has violated. To restore family honor, women, including Christians, may be forced to marry their attacker”. If the rapist is a Muslim, the child born out of rape will be registered as Muslim as well, regardless of the mother’s faith.

Within the wider community, Christian women are often viewed as being loose and free. Women have reported that they have suffered sexual harassment and vulgar threats because of this perception, including in the workplace. There are ongoing reports that Christian Iraqi girls, especially teenagers, are at heightened risk of harassment, verbal and sexual abuse when travelling by public transport, because their faith is clearly visible. A country expert shared that “it is socially acceptable to harass women on the street who do not conform to [Islamic] dress codes”. As a result, in some areas, Christian women and girls must wear veils (as Islamic women do) for their own safety.

Female converts from Islam are vulnerable to violations of their fundamental rights for their faith. A country expert explained: “Kurdish/Iraq society is a male controlled environment. When a female might become a Christian, things will likely turn out very bad for her, and she might be abused, locked up, and even killed”. Pressure comes most often from the wider family. A convert risks house arrest, beatings, sexual harassment, abduction and even being killed to restore the 'honor' to the family ([AsiaNews, 9 March 2022](#), [Al-Jazeera, 8 March 2021](#)). If single, a female convert may be forcibly married to a conservative Muslim. Further adding challenges, female converts from Islam cannot officially marry male Christians, as the Iraqi state still considers them to be Muslims; Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslims.

Whilst not reported in this WWL 2025 reporting period, there remains a live risk that Christian girls without a convert background may be lured by Muslim men, who then harass them and coerce them into marriage. There have been reports in the past of even married Christians being targeted for seduction in such a way. A country expert summarizes: Overall, living in Iraq, “girls face social constraints and expectations that can make living out their faith particularly challenging”. Christian women – especially converts from Islam - suffer from unequal treatment in all sectors of Iraqi society.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Iraq	<b>Male Pressure Points</b> <b>Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024</b>
	Economic harassment via business/job/work access Imprisonment by government Violence – death Violence – psychological

Christian men face various forms of pressure in Iraq. In particular, job discrimination affects men belonging to all WWL categories of Christian communities, especially those working in the public sector. Christians in central and southern Iraq have been put under pressure to leave their jobs, especially if they are working for foreign organizations or are employed at higher levels of society (e.g. government companies). In the north, Christians often struggle to get employment and allegedly feel vulnerable and prone to exploitation at their workplaces. Christian business owners also face discrimination, including closure, boycott and attacks on their business, causing many to emigrate. In this mostly traditional and tribal Iraqi society, men are often the primary breadwinners for their families and losing their jobs or income can have a considerable effect on Christian families.

Male converts from a Muslim background are particularly vulnerable to violations. In a culture where retaining honor means everything, they risk being ejected from their families, threatened or killed. Men from Christian background also risk being killed for their faith, the perpetrators being mostly violent Islamic militants. These factors greatly increase the already strong motivation for emigration; the loss of Christian men not only affects their direct families, but also the local churches which consequently find themselves confronted with a lack of potential leadership.

There have been several incidents of the movement of priests being prevented, blocking them from delivering services to parishioners. Travelling through checkpoints is risky for Christians, who are often stopped or harassed. Further weakening the Church, priests and Christian leaders (the majority of whom are men) remain vulnerable to imprisonment, kidnappings and killings, particularly in the Nineveh plains region. A country expert shared that it is “very dangerous for pastors and priests these days”. This may particularly be if they are considered to be speaking out against political leaders or militias, and (according to another expert) is “a common method used by Shiite militants to target Christians in Iraq”. There is not only direct harm and distress to the individual who is kidnapped, but also ransom demands which impose severe financial pressure on their families. Further, a country expert observes how churches and church leaders (typically male) are targeted: “Before it was more a matter of evident and fierce act of violence by terrorist groups, now is becoming more subtle and tacitly understood as a general state of the affairs in a country severely hit by years of conflict.”



## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities facing persecution, discrimination and intolerance in Iraq include: Yezidis, Sunnis, Kakai, Sabaeon-Mandaeans, Bahai, Zoroastrians, Shabak, and Jews. According to USCIRF 2024 Iraq, many of these minority groups have been displaced and continue to struggle to return and rebuild their homes, even after the defeat of IS. The recurrent Turkish airstrikes have further instilled fear among these communities, hindering their ability to rebuild and return.

### **The Yezidi community**

August 2024 marks the 10th anniversary of the Yezidi genocide, with human rights organizations expressing concerns about the lack of justice and plans to abandon the Yezidis in Iraq. In 2024 and 2025, critical support mechanisms such as UN missions UNITAD (collecting evidence for the prosecution of Daesh crimes) and UNAMI (human rights support, promotion of rule of law, rehabilitation and protection of vulnerable communities such as Yezidis) are set to close, while the still largely displaced Yezidi community faces pressure to return to Sinjar without security guarantees. Although the Yezidi Survivors Law of 2021 offers compensation and rehabilitation, its full implementation remains incomplete, and further reparations are needed, especially for children born from sexual violence. These children and their mothers face ongoing challenges, including forced religious registration and social rejection. Religious freedom for Yezidis in Iraq continues to be a concern, and many still live in camps with limited resources. The Iraqi government's decision in September 2024 to terminate UNITAD, which collected evidence of genocide, has sparked outrage within the Yezidi community. Trials against IS members are often limited to terrorism charges, with crimes against Yezidis inadequately addressed. Over 2,600 Yezidi women and children remain enslaved, despite known locations. Additionally, the closure - without guarantees of safety and assistance - of IDP camps where Yezidis were living has created uncertainty, especially in Sinjar, where the attacks began. Turkish airstrikes and the presence of militias (including PKK and PMF) further complicate the situation, making it difficult for Yezidis to rebuild their lives. Around 200,000 Yezidis remain internally displaced, according to a 2024 UN Migration report ([IOM, 2024](#)).

### **The Sunni community**

While Sunni Muslims (approximately 40% of the Iraqi population) can practice their faith, they often experience discrimination and marginalization at the hands of the dominant Shia population, particularly in politics and security sectors. Sunni Muslims have also reported other human rights violations, including forced expulsion by government-affiliated Shia militias and discrimination through the process of de-Baathification. Militias under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces have targeted Sunni Arab Muslims, accusing them of links to IS and making it challenging for them to return to their areas of origin. The Iraqi government has not intervened in the actions of these militias.

### **Other faith communities**

While the Iraqi Constitution guarantees freedom of religion for Christians, Yezidis, and Sabean Mandaeans, it does not explicitly protect adherents of other religions or atheists. Certain beliefs, such as the Bahai faith and Wahhabi Sunni Islam, are banned by law, and practicing the Bahai faith can lead to imprisonment. However this ban is not enforced in the IKR where the Bahai faith is recognized as a religion. Also in other parts of the country this law is generally not applied.

The Jewish community also faces restrictions, including being barred from government jobs and military service, resulting in widespread discrimination and reluctance to publicly identify as Jewish.

On 6 August 2023 media reported that 233 Shabak individuals kidnapped by ISIS in 2014 were still missing, while Sukina Ali, the Ninewa Governorate’s Advisor for Women’s Affairs, stated that 900 Shia and Sunni Turkmen were also unaccounted for by the end of 2023 (US State Department, [IRFR 2023 Iraq](#)).

### Examples of incidents of persecution

#### [IRFR 2023 Iraq](#):

- “On February 6 [2023], Yazidi representatives reported that Iran-aligned militias maintained private real estate offices to buy Yazidi and Arab Sunni real estate and properties in order to change the demography of the Sinjar district in favor of Shia. Yazidi observers also accused Iran-backed militias and the PKK of using the Sinjar district as a passage for drugs and weapons through the Iraqi-Syrian border.”
- "Community members reported Shia militias and the Shia Endowment continued to confiscate properties owned by the Sunni Endowments in Diyala and Ninewa Provinces, leading to sectarian tensions in those provinces. On March 9, the Iraqi Sunni Endowment and Sunnis in Samarra condemned the announcement by Shia Imam Askari to change the name of the city’s oldest Sunni mosque to a Shia name. The Samarra Sunni Endowment condemned the action, describing the proposed name change as “provocative.””
- "Kaka’i community members again said the federal government’s Shia Endowment seized Kaka’i worship sites in Diyala and Baghdad and later converted them into Shia mosques. According to Kaka’i representatives, the government had still not responded to their request for the return of the Baba Mahmud House of Worship, which was transferred to the Shia Endowment in 2019. Kaka’i representatives also reported the Sunni Endowment seized Kaka’i houses of worship in Kirkuk during the year HK: 2023].”
- "In a July 22 program on al-Nujaba TV, Islamic scholar Yasser al-Tarbouli said Jews control the West through freemasonry and the “global crusaders.” He said Jews have “blown the Holocaust out of proportion” and asked, “Didn’t Hitler have Jewish cabinet members? Didn’t the Jews financially support Hitler’s wars to take over Europe?””

#### [USCIRF 2023 Iraq](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Iraq.pdf): <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Iraq.pdf>

- “In February [2023], the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court further limited the political representation of Yazidis, Shabaks, and Feyli Kurds, forcing those minorities to campaign within the already severely circumscribed Christian and Mandaean components.”

#### [Middle East Institute](#), 5 July 2023:

- "In April 2023, Yazidis became the target of a campaign of hate speech and false accusations, which included rhetoric that condoned the crimes committed against them by IS. The proliferation of hate speech on social media started after Yazidis were wrongly accused of burning a mosque in Sinjar district during a peaceful demonstration against the return of families suspected of being affiliated with IS."

## Trends Summary

### 1) Struggle for safety amidst sectarian violence and radicalism

Iraq was only given national status early in the 20th century, but was built on the ancient powerful kingdoms of Babylonia and Assyria. The ethnically and religiously diverse nation is suffering from sectarian violence and corruption which are the main factors hampering progress and the process of democracy. Closely related is the problem of impunity, which greatly affects the position of Iraq's Christians, and the rise of radical Islamic groups which do not tolerate any other religion than a strict and violent form of Islam. Although the general situation in Iraq remains far from stable, there are hopeful developments after IS was territorially defeated in December 2017, allowing Christians to return to a number of villages. Since 2019, IS and Shia militias escalated their attacks on civilians, security forces and infrastructure, fostering a climate of fear that has made Christians feel increasingly unsafe and unwelcome in Iraq. By 2024, IS's focus had shifted predominantly to military and infrastructure targets, but the instability caused by these actions continued to undermine the sense of security for Christians and other vulnerable groups. According to a church leader, Christians feel that the country is becoming more Islamically conservative in general, making it difficult for Christians - and even secular Muslims - to live there. Even in the IKR, which - especially compared to the rest of Iraq - is known for a certain tolerance of religious minorities, the situation for Kurdish Christians (of Muslim background) seems to be getting more difficult.

### 2) The central government continues to be unable to guarantee the safe return of Christian IDPs

Many church leaders have said that living under the terror of IS and being driven away from their homes was the most severe persecution the Church in Iraq had experienced in recent times. Even during earlier waves of persecution, discrimination and intolerance, the Nineveh plains were never fully emptied of Christians as was the case starting in 2014. It was expected that the defeat of IS would improve the situation of Christians in Iraq. However, only when Christian IDPs successfully return to their former homes and cities can any improvement in their situation take root and the majority of Christian IDPs are still not resettled. Land disputes are making it very difficult for the majority of them to return. Iranian-backed militias, Kurds, Arabs and others continue to occupy or expropriate land previously belonging to minorities in the Nineveh plains, in a competition to gain control of the once multi-ethnic region. Christians are in the weakest position because of their now small numbers and lack of external support.

The central government does little to ameliorate the situation and ignores pleas from community representatives. If the central government continues to be unable to guarantee the safe return of Christian IDPs, they may continue to face severe violations of their basic rights and leave Iraq. Many among the Christian youth in particular are prepared to leave if the opportunity arises due to the lack of security, future prospects and financial stability. Added to this are the attacks by Turkish forces in northern Iraq to drive away the PKK from its border with the IKR. This affects Christians as much as the Kurds targeted by the Turkish army. These attacks might not be singling out Christians but they serve as yet another destructive level of pressure on the community.

### 3) There is danger that the Christian situation may well become 'a secondary issue'

It is important to keep the spot-light on this new phase of state-building in Iraq. The danger is, now that IS is considered defeated, that the levels of pressure and violence targeting the Christian community will be ignored or dismissed as a secondary issue. As this country report shows, religious freedom violations against Christians in Iraq are rooted in many factors and it has not just been a product of radical Islamic attacks. Also, the demographic changes going on in the Nineveh plains are possibly an indication of more oppression to come in the future, especially if the government continues to be weak and impunity widespread.

### Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

### External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: forced to move - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Theological-university-and-seminary-leave-unsafe-Baghdad-and-head-north-8150.html>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: (Syriac Press - <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2024/05/08/kurdistan-region-of-iraq-forms-committee-to-address-christian-property-disputes/>)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Syriac Press - <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2024/04/06/iraq-nineveh-council-pledges-to-return-displaced-christians-to-mosul-governorate/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Syriac Press - <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2024/05/16/iraqi-prime-minister-al-sudani-announces-plan-to-reopen-historic-seventh-day-adventist-church-in-baghdad/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Syriac Press - <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2024/05/20/101-year-old-armenian-church-restored-in-zakho-iraq/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Syriac Press - <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2024/05/25/unesco-to-finish-reconstructing-our-lady-of-immaculate-conception-syriac-catholic-church-in-mosul-iraq/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: IMPACT-SE - <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Clashing-Narratives-and-Identities-in-Iraqs-school-curriculum-2015-2022.pdf>
- Drivers of persecution description: IRFR 2019 Iraq - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>
- Drivers of persecution description: IRFR 2018 - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/IRAQ-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Drivers of persecution description: IRFR 2019 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>

- Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere: IRFR 2023 Iraq - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>
- Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.75 points): 70 per cent of Baghdad's Christian homes - <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/27645>
- Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.75 points): persisted - <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2023/08/03/catholicos-patriarch-of-assyrian-church-of-the-east-mar-awa-iii-royel-illegal-iraqi-parties-seizing-property-of-christians-in-baghdad/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: AsiaNews, 9 March 2022 - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Maria-20-killed-in-Erbil-by-relatives-for-converting-to-Christianity-55319.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Al-Jazeera, 8 March 2021 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/3/8/as-if-she-had-never-existed-the-graveyards-for-murdered-women>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IOM, 2024 - [https://iraqdtm.iom.int/files/BorderMonitoring/20244304316478\\_iom\\_iraq\\_protection\\_yazidipaper\\_digital.pdf](https://iraqdtm.iom.int/files/BorderMonitoring/20244304316478_iom_iraq_protection_yazidipaper_digital.pdf)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Iraq - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Iraq - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: USCIRF 2023 Iraq - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Iraq.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Middle East Institute - <https://www.mei.edu/publications/addressing-challenges-tolerance-and-religious-diversity-iraq>