
World Watch Research

Niger:

Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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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

Niger: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
28,239,000	69,200	0.2

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

Niger: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	69,200	0.2
Muslim	27,011,000	95.7
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	1,126,000	4.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	10,200	0.0
Atheist	140	0.0
Agnostic	16,100	0.1
Other	6,900	0.0
<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

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

The jihadist group *al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah* (ASWJ) has made life increasingly difficult for Christians in Niger. In areas under their influence, Christian gatherings are severely restricted, and communal worship often occurs under the threat of violence. The presence of such radical Islamic factions has led to frequent physical attacks and kidnappings, significantly limiting the freedom and safety of Christians in these regions.

Converts from Islam to Christianity face particularly harsh challenges. These individuals often endure severe hostility from their families, including threats and coercion to abandon their new faith. Social ostracism and pressure are common, making it extremely difficult for converts to practice their beliefs openly. This situation is exacerbated by legal and bureaucratic hurdles that complicate the registration and establishment of Christian congregations, further isolating converts and Christian communities.

In addition to these threats, Christians in Niger face discrimination in employment, particularly in the public sector, and are frequently targeted in attacks against church-affiliated properties such as schools and healthcare facilities. The broader instability in the Sahel region, driven by the rise of jihadist groups and criminal organizations, continues to exacerbate these challenges.

The situation for Christians worsened after the July 2023 coup, which led to the arrival of Russian military instructors and the potential involvement of the Russian Africa Corps (Wagner Group mercenaries), known for its brutal tactics. This development has deepened fears within the Christian community and introduced new uncertainties about the future of religious freedom in Niger. The region's weak governance and the rise of jihadism have created an increasingly complex and perilous environment for Christians.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Niger 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)

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

- Christians can be harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christians often experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians can face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christian converts lose custody of their children and inheritance rights (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings and to receive licenses for legal recognition (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **Church attacks:** Jihadist groups frequently attack churches, leading to their vandalization or complete demolition. Many churches in the country were forced to close in 2024 due to sustained attacks, and re-opening them has so far proved impossible.
- **Restricted freedom of movement:** Christians' ability to move freely is severely hindered. This limitation impacts their capacity to engage in routine activities, such as going to work, attending church services, or visiting family and friends.
- **Targeted violence and abductions:** Christians are often the specific targets of violence, which can range from verbal and physical assaults to kidnappings. The intention behind these abductions is usually to spread fear within the Christian community or to extract ransom payments.
- **Destruction of Christian property and buildings:** There is a worrying trend of Christian properties, including homes and businesses, being deliberately targeted for destruction. Churches and other buildings used by Christians are not spared, with many being vandalized or completely demolished. This not only results in a loss of safe spaces for worship and fellowship but also serves as a stark reminder of the intolerance Christians face.

Specific examples of positive developments

The Grand Imam of Niamey, the Catholic Archbishop of Niamey, a prominent Islamic sheikh, and the National President of the Union of Evangelical Missions and Churches of Niger continue to work together to promote religious tolerance.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Many of the older Protestant and Catholic churches were established by American mission groups. They can be found in all seven departments of Niger: Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillaberi, Zinder and Niamey (the capital). Several independent, non-denominational churches originating from Nigeria exist - especially in the capital Niamey and in the departments of Maradi and Zinder. Outside of the bigger cities and in areas closer to the southern border of the country, Christians with a Muslim background are treated as outcasts by the local communities and at times face violent attacks.

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Niger are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included for scoring in the WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: Both older Protestant and Catholic churches belong to this category. They suffer from the growing Islamic militancy in Niger and, in the past few years, there have been attacks by armed groups such as Boko Haram in the departments of Diffa, near the border to Nigeria. Pastors and church leaders from such villages have been forced to flee to larger cities fearing for their safety. Such incidents have also been observed in the department of Tillabéri. Many historical Christian communities in areas close to Nigeria live under fear of violent attack.

Converts to Christianity: In some cases, the pressure on converts from Islam is particularly pronounced, especially in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life* (see below). Parents and relatives may oppose a family member’s conversion to Christianity more than the government. Radical Islamic imams and teachers influence ordinary Muslim people to attack and chase converts away - and any Christians found ministering to converts.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are present in Niger and face pressure. This category faces more or less the same kind of pressure as historical Christian communities and - in comparison to converts from Islam to Christianity - are less vulnerable to societal pressure.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The areas outside the main cities, especially outside the capital city, are the main areas where Christians experience persecution. Taking advantage of the COVID-19 crisis, Islamic militants were able to expand their areas of influence, which has put more Christians under pressure, particularly in the western areas of the country.

Position on the World Watch List

Niger: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	72	28
WWL 2024	70	27
WWL 2023	70	28
WWL 2022	68	33
WWL 2021	62	54

Niger’s score increased by 2 points in WWL 2025, with overall pressure rising from 10.9 to 11.2 points. Although the extremely high violence score decreased very slightly (15.7 points in WWL 2025, down from 15.9 in WWL 2024), targeted attacks against Christian institutions—including schools, healthcare facilities, and other properties—remained intense. At least 100 churches were attacked, and over 100 Christians lost their lives during WWL 2025. These challenges are compounded by the broader insecurity gripping the Sahel region, where jihadist groups and criminal organizations wield

growing influence. The volatile dynamics in the Sahel have significantly impacted Niger, especially following the July 2023 coup, which has placed Niger at the center of a shifting geopolitical landscape in the region.

Persecution engines

Niger: 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	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	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), blended with Clan oppression (Medium)

In Niger, the vast majority of the population, 95.7% according to 2024 WCD statistics, identifies as Muslim. This religious affiliation is deeply intertwined with their national identity - to be a Nigerien is seen as synonymous with being a Muslim. As such, conversion to other faiths, notably Christianity, is often met with hostility from family and local communities, being seen as a form of betrayal.

The country's traditional secular governance, which keeps state affairs separate from religious matters, is facing increasing pressure. Islamic groups like the *Izala*, a radical faction originating from Northern Nigeria, and the *Tariqa*, proponents of a Sufi pathway to Allah, are becoming increasingly active in parts of Niger, including Maradi and Niamey. Both groups exert significant pressure on religious minorities and on Muslims who they perceive as deviating from true Islam.

Niger has historically fostered harmonious relationships between its dominant Muslim population and smaller faith minorities. However, the country's ongoing conflict with Boko Haram and other militant groups has aggravated local intercommunal tensions and posed a significant threat to the security and freedom of Christians in Niger.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Niger's ex-President Issoufou prioritized an anti-corruption drive within his government, leading to the implementation of anti-corruption laws targeting government officials, their families, and political

parties alike. Similarly, legal measures have been introduced to counteract conflict of interest issues in contract awarding; bribery of public officials by private entities is now also officially prohibited.

However, corruption continues to be a significant problem within the judiciary, with a lack of prosecutions contributing to a culture of impunity among office-holders who engage in illicit activities. The public exposure of these practices has yet to lead to substantial legal action. This situation negatively impacts society, including the Christian population.

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the successful operation of jihadist groups in the region is facilitated by the presence of organized crime networks. In this turbulent environment, the Church faces additional vulnerability: The influence of jihadist groups and organized crime networks can lead to targeted attacks against Christian communities, places of worship and individuals, infringing upon their rights to religious freedom.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

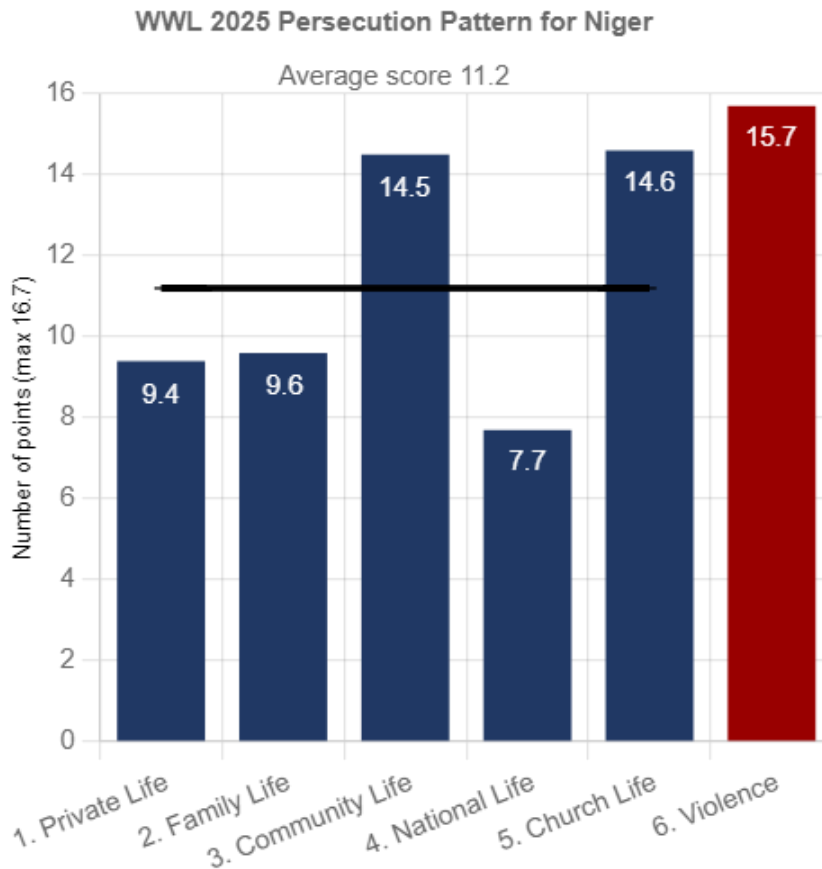
Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** This is probably the strongest driver in the country. Radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP and al-Qaeda-affiliated militants have attacked Western-aligned institutions and tourists, soldiers and peacekeepers. They kill Christians and attack churches and Christian schools.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong) and ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Non-Christian religious leaders such as Islamists and violent militant leaders of Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa have all combined to threaten, intimidate and persecute Christians in Niger. The Wahhabis, a radical branch of Islam originating from Saudi Arabia, are regularly preaching opposition to Christianity in public and via mass media (radio and television). Also, leaders among such groups as the Fulani are trying to enhance the ancient Islamic pedigree of their ethnic group by cleansing their communities of Christians. At Tunga, in Dosso state, no Christian presence is tolerated by the religious and tribal leaders who have enormous influence in these areas.
- **Extended family (Strong) and ordinary citizens (Medium):** Extended family members in the community oppose converts to Christianity, often violently.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Many of Niger's government officials are Muslim and some would like to pursue policies and agendas that are discriminatory against Christians and would exclude them from public life. President Issoufou promised to counter the expansion of radical Islamic teaching promoting violence in his February 2016 re-election campaign but no concrete measures were ever delivered. In some places, government officials are also subscribers to jihadist ideology.
- **Organized crime networks (Medium):** There is a strong link between criminal and violent religious groups in the Sahel region. This driver plays a vital role in financing the operations of the jihadists and in making the environment easy for them to operate in.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime networks (Medium):** Various criminal organizations are operating in the country. Lawlessness and criminal activities are common in the vast uninhabited areas of the country. Some criminal organizations are operating in cooperation with militant groups and persecute Christians. Indeed, radical Islamic groups in the country are known to earn money through drug trafficking and kidnapping to purchase weapons.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Corruption continues to be a problem in the judiciary and impunity is a serious challenge facing the country.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution Pattern for Niger shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Niger is high at 11.2, which is a slight increase from 10.9 in WWL 2024.
- The *Church sphere* scored the highest at 14.6 points, rising sharply from 13.1 in WWL 2024. The *Community sphere* closely followed with a score of 14.5 points. These extremely high scores show the growing challenges Christians face in Islamic communities, including restrictions on practicing their faith and conducting church activities due to the presence of Islamic militants.
- The violence score reached 15.7 points, a slight decrease from 15.9 in WWL 2024. Despite the small decrease in violence, the score was still extremely high and the presence of jihadist groups is rapidly growing, further threatening the safety and freedom of Christians in the country.

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 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (2.50 points)

Converts from Islam to Christianity face severe consequences. The country’s societal norms and the influence of extremist groups advocating for a strict interpretation of Sharia law create an environment where such acts are not only discouraged but actively punished. Conversion from Islam contradicts the core beliefs of jihadist groups, who view Niger as a Sharia-bound state. This ideology enforces a rigid societal structure where leaving Islam is seen as a betrayal of faith and community, leading to widespread persecution. Converts often face rejection and isolation from their families and communities. Parents may disown their children, spouses may initiate divorce, and friends and neighbors might ostracize them entirely. Beyond social rejection, physical violence, threats, and expulsion from homes are not uncommon. Converts are pressured relentlessly to renounce their new faith, and those who refuse may endure beatings or even be driven out of their villages. Although Niger’s constitution guarantees religious freedom, informal societal norms and extremist influences have effectively created a de facto prohibition on conversion from Islam to Christianity.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.50 points)

The situation in Niger poses significant challenges for Christians, particularly for converts, as the influence of jihadist ideology dominates large areas of the country. The environment is exceptionally dangerous for converts, who often face severe threats from family members, the community, officials to some extent, and jihadist groups. Thus, personal worship in most regions, especially for converts, is fraught with significant risks, making it unsafe to practice openly.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.50 points)

The private ownership of Christian materials in Niger has become increasingly hazardous due to the rise of jihadist groups advocating strict interpretations of Sharia law. These groups have exploited the country’s instability to impose their ideology, making it dangerous for Christians to practice their faith or possess religious items privately. The risks associated with such expressions of faith underscore the growing challenges Christians face in an environment of escalating religious intolerance.

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

Displaying Christian images or symbols in Niger has become increasingly perilous due to the growing influence of jihadist groups enforcing a stringent interpretation of Sharia law. These groups view the Christian cross, for instance, as a provocation. In many parts of the country, individuals who publicly or privately showcase Christian symbols risk threats, social ostracism, physical violence, and, in some

cases, being forced to flee their homes. The pervasive fear of retaliation has made it exceedingly dangerous for Christians to openly express their faith, even in spaces that might traditionally be considered private or personal.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (2.75 points)

In many parts of Niger, the dominant religious and cultural norms often lead to the default registration or consideration of newborns as Muslims. This practice poses significant challenges for Christian converts, as the process of registering a child with a Christian name can draw unwanted attention and hostility. Baby names in Niger are deeply tied to religious identity, and Christian names are often seen as a direct challenge to the prevailing norms enforced by both society and extremist groups. The act of registering a child with a Christian name can expose families to severe risks, including social ostracism, threats and even violence. Many Christian parents live in constant fear of retaliation, leading them to either avoid registering their children's names altogether or to choose names that appear neutral or Muslim to avoid detection. This fear is exacerbated in areas under the influence of jihadist groups, where any deviation from Islamic norms is met with harsh consequences.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (2.50 points)

Niger's society, deeply influenced by Islamic traditions and norms, views child-rearing through a religious lens, where children are expected to be raised within the Muslim faith. Adoption and fostering processes frequently prioritize Muslim families, reflecting a cultural and religious bias that marginalizes Christians. This systemic discrimination creates significant barriers for Christian families seeking to provide homes for vulnerable children. Religious elements compound these challenges, as jihadist movements and extremist ideologies have intensified across the country. These groups promote the idea that children must be raised strictly within the framework of Islam, discouraging and, in some cases, actively opposing the placement of children with Christian families. Even in areas not directly controlled by extremist factions, societal norms often echo similar sentiments, creating an unwelcoming environment for Christians attempting to adopt or foster. In addition to institutional and societal obstacles, Christians face fears of retaliation for openly practicing their faith during the adoption process. Christian ceremonies, names, and traditions associated with parenting or family life are often viewed as provocative or threatening by the wider community. As a result, many Christian families refrain from pursuing adoption or fostering out of concern for their safety or the well-being of the child they hope to bring into their home. These overlapping religious and cultural dynamics make the process of adoption and fostering not only arduous but, in many cases, deeply perilous for Christian couples in Niger.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.50 points)

Christian children in Niger often face harassment and discrimination in playgrounds, schools and other social or communal settings due to their parents' faith. This mistreatment is deeply rooted in societal biases against Christians and exacerbated by the growing influence of jihadist ideologies, which

promote religious intolerance. Children are frequently isolated, mocked, or bullied by peers, and in some cases, they face exclusion from activities or resources within these spaces. Schools, which should ideally provide a neutral and supportive environment, often reflect the broader societal attitudes. Christian children may encounter biased treatment from teachers or administrators, further marginalizing them and limiting their opportunities for educational advancement. Similarly, in playgrounds and community gatherings, these children are at risk of being ostracized, subjected to verbal abuse, or pressured to conform to the majority faith. These discriminatory practices create significant challenges for Christian families striving to raise children with a strong foundation in their faith. The hostile environment not only affects the children's emotional and psychological well-being but also poses a direct threat to the sustainability of the Christian community. Raising children who can confidently uphold their faith under such circumstances is a monumental task.

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.50 points)

In Niger, Christians, particularly converts, often endure forced separations from their children or loved ones as a method of religious persecution. This tactic exploits their emotional ties to family as a means of pressurizing them into renouncing their faith. Under the guise of ensuring their "proper" religious upbringing, children are sometimes removed from their parents and spouses are coerced into divorcing their Christian partners. These separations are a powerful tool for extremists and hostile community members to weaken Christian families and force compliance with dominant religious norms. The impact of these forced separations is profound, leading to emotional and psychological trauma for both parents and children. While parents endure the agony of losing their children, children frequently find themselves in environments that suppress or erase their Christian identity.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)

Christians in Niger often experience harassment, threats, and obstruction in their daily lives, stemming from their faith and non-compliance with societal norms tied to the dominant religion. They face pressure to conform to Islamic dress codes and participate in religious practices contrary to their beliefs. Public services and community resources often exclude Christians, severely affecting their social and economic well-being. These forms of marginalization are particularly dangerous in rural areas where resources are already limited and the influence of extremist groups is more pronounced. The hostility Christians endure is further exacerbated by the presence of jihadist groups and systemic discrimination within their communities. In regions outside major cities, Christians face heightened risks, including restricted access to clean water, healthcare, and education. Harassment often escalates into overt threats or physical violence, leaving many Christians unable to live openly or safely practice their faith. This oppressive environment creates significant challenges for Christians striving to maintain their livelihoods and preserve their religious identity in an increasingly hostile society.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.75 points)

Niger is increasingly known for the grim reality of abductions, with Christians often targeted because of their faith. Converts to Christianity are especially vulnerable, facing not only abduction but also the threat of forced marriage. Demands for large ransoms frequently accompany kidnappings, and the collected money often funds the purchase of weapons to intensify persecution of Christian communities. This cycle deepens the oppression, turning acts of violence into tools that sustain and expand extremist activities against Christians. These abductions are part of a broader campaign to marginalize and terrorize Christians, forcing them to live in constant fear. Beyond the immediate trauma, the financial strain of securing a release and the subsequent use of ransom funds to fund violence contribute to the systematic oppression of Christian communities.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 points)

Christians in Niger are systematically excluded from accessing critical communal resources, including clean drinking water, as a result of their faith. In many communities, religious discrimination dictates access to these essential resources, with Christians often being marginalized or outright denied. Converts to Christianity face even greater hostility, as their rejection of the dominant religious norms makes them targets for exclusion and harassment. There is a systemic lack of resources that is caused by religious and societal biases. The growing power of jihadist groups and organized crime makes this problem even worse. These groups exploit and reinforce discriminatory practices to deepen the isolation of Christian communities.

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

Christians in Niger live under constant pressure to renounce their faith, especially in communities dominated by extremist ideologies and societal norms that equate religious conformity with communal harmony. This pressure manifests in various ways, including social ostracism, verbal harassment, and economic discrimination. Converts to Christianity face even harsher treatment, as their decision to leave the majority religion is seen as a betrayal. Community leaders, neighbors, and even extended family members often join in efforts to coerce Christians into abandoning their beliefs. The pressure is further compounded by threats of violence and exclusion from essential resources such as water, education, and healthcare. In some cases, Christians are publicly humiliated or subjected to intimidation to force them back into the majority religion

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere***Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)***

Christians in Niger face significant dangers when traveling, as their faith makes them vulnerable to attacks and targeting in regions influenced by extremist groups and hostile communities. The lack of protection during travel leaves Christians exposed, particularly in areas where law enforcement is weak or complicit with local biases. Converts are especially at risk, as their visible departure from the dominant religion often draws heightened hostility. Traveling in rural areas or regions controlled by jihadist groups amplifies the threat, with Christians facing the risk of abduction, harassment, or even

execution. These risks discourage mobility, forcing many Christians to avoid essential travel for work, education, or family obligations.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)

Interacting with authorities in Niger presents unique challenges for Christians, who frequently encounter discrimination and bias due to their faith. Christians, especially converts, often struggle to access justice, protection, or essential services, with their complaints or requests dismissed or ignored by local officials. In some instances, their attempts to seek assistance lead to further harassment, deepening their vulnerability and limiting their ability to assert their rights. These challenges are intensified in regions where extremist ideologies hold sway, influencing the attitudes and actions of local authorities. Christians seeking to resolve disputes, report crimes, or access government services face systemic barriers, as officials often favor the majority religion or fear backlash from hostile groups. This institutional discrimination leaves Christians marginalized and unprotected.

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (2.50 points)

Christians, churches, and Christian organizations have faced significant restrictions on publicly displaying religious symbols, especially in volatile regions. The prevailing political and social instability, driven by a military government focused on geopolitical concerns rather than internal stability, exacerbates this marginalization. The limitations on public expressions of faith, including the display of religious symbols, restrict religious freedom and identity.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (2.50 points)

Evidence has shown that individuals who have harmed Christians in certain regions have indeed avoided punishment. Amid political upheaval and rising jihadist activities, state authorities, influenced by the current military leadership, seem more focused on geopolitical struggles than on ensuring justice for marginalized communities like Christians. This systemic impunity further alienates Christian communities, making their exclusion from national and local decision-making increasingly problematic.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.17: Churches, Christian organizations or institutions have been hindered in expressing or putting into practice their convictions on marital and family arrangements. (4.00 points)

In Niger, churches and Christian organizations always struggle in expressing and implementing their beliefs regarding marital and family arrangements. This restriction is part of the broader religious persecution faced by Christians, where extremist views heavily influence social norms, compelling Christians to compromise on core beliefs and practices due to threats of violence or social exclusion.

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

Conducting church and Christian activities outdoors in Niger is extremely difficult due to the hostile environment created by extremist groups and societal discrimination. Public gatherings for worship, preaching, or religious celebrations often attract unwanted attention, making Christians vulnerable to threats, harassment, and even violent attacks. Jihadist groups actively target such activities in areas they perceive as provocative. Reports of disrupted Christian gatherings, detained leaders, and assaulted attendees demonstrate how quickly these situations escalate into violent confrontations. The risk of attacks forces many Christians to restrict their religious practices to indoor spaces, limiting their ability to openly share their faith or engage with the broader community.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)

Christians in Niger face significant challenges under the combined pressures of jihadist activity and political instability, with their preaching, teaching, and religious materials subjected to intense monitoring. This scrutiny acts as a tool of suppression, severely restricting the distribution of Christian texts and complicating church operations. The targeting of these activities forms part of a broader strategy by extremist groups to diminish Christian influence and presence. The constant surveillance of religious practices not only limits Christians' ability to freely express their faith but also exacerbates their daily hardships.

Block 5.12: Churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses. (3.75 points)

Churches and Christian organizations face severe restrictions in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses, which significantly hampers their ability to produce religious literature and educational resources. Such restrictions not only impede the spiritual and educational development of the Christian community but also align with extremist efforts to curtail the spread of Christianity. This suppression of printing capabilities is a strategic move by extremists aimed at erasing Christian presence and severing access to crucial resources.

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 WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Niger: 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)?	100 *	10 *
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?	100 *	100 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	1	2
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	10 *
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	11

(table continues below)

Niger: 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)?	1000 *	100 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *
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?	100 *	100 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- Christians killed:** The vast arid regions in Niger have fallen under the control of armed jihadist groups, exploiting lawlessness to enforce their radical agendas. Operating with impunity, these groups target vulnerable communities, including Christians, in a campaign of violence and intimidation. During the WWL 2025 reporting period, at least 100 Christians were killed. These killings were deliberate acts aimed at eradicating the Christian presence in the region, instilling fear, and suppressing religious practices.
- Churches/public Christian properties attacked:** Over 100 churches and Christian properties, including schools, and hospitals, were attacked, looted, damaged, or destroyed. These attacks have a profound impact on Christian communities, stripping them of vital resources and sacred spaces. The destruction of churches and religious institutions leaves lasting scars on the cultural and spiritual life of the community. In addition, many Christian schools have been forced to either teach Quranic principles or close entirely. This has led to the closure of numerous educational and social service institutions, leaving many Christians without access to essential services such as education and healthcare. These closures further isolate Christian communities, depriving them of critical support and opportunities for growth.
- Christians forced to flee homes or hide in-country (including IDPs):** At least 1,000 Christians were forced to flee their homes or go into hiding due to escalating threats. Many now live as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in dire conditions, facing uncertainty, lacking basic necessities, and having little hope of returning to their homes amid ongoing violence.

5 Year trends

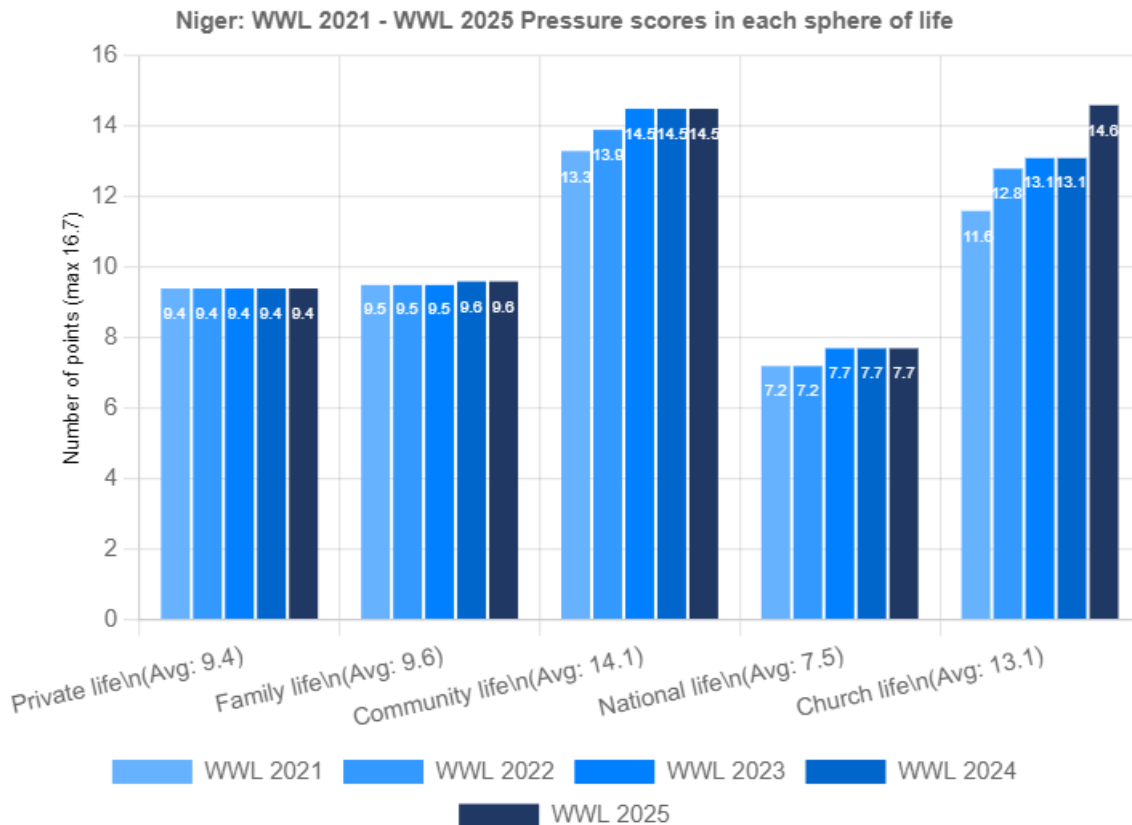
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Niger: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	11.2
2024	10.9
2023	10.8
2022	10.5
2021	10.2

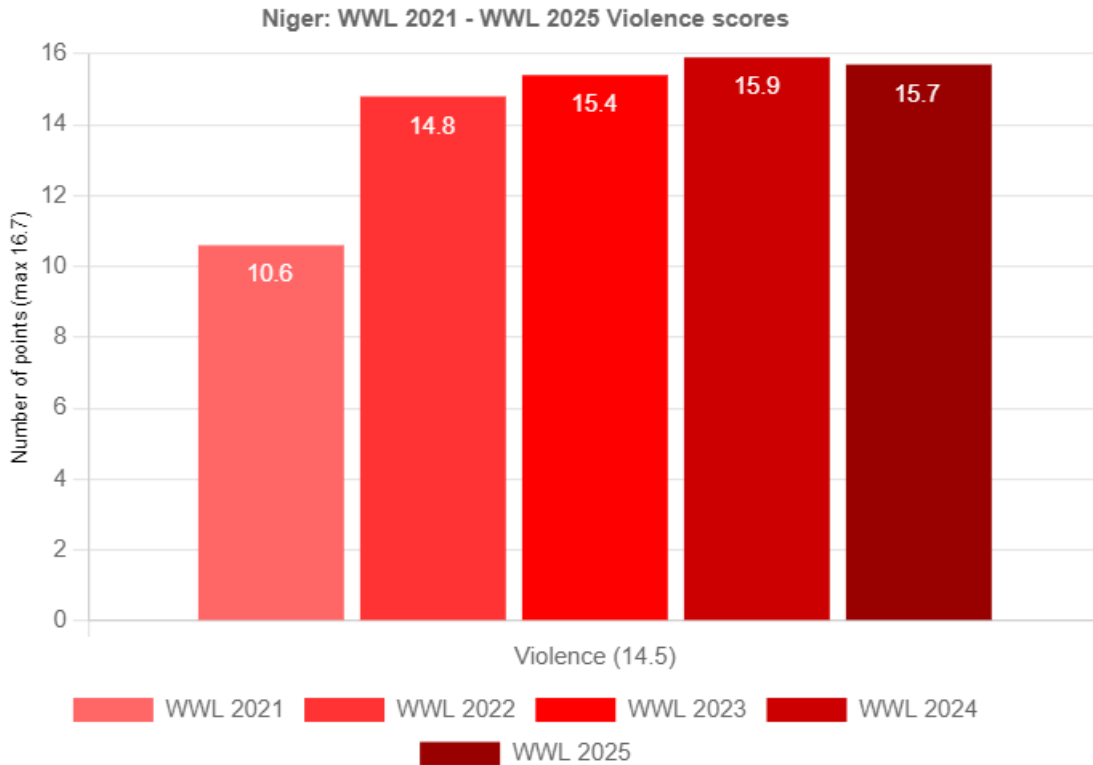
The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has been slowly increasing every WWL reporting period, from 10.2 points in WWL 2021 to 11.2 points in WWL 2025. This rise signifies a notable deterioration in the situation for Christians in the country.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The five-year average score shows that *Community life* is the most profoundly affected sphere, with an extreme score of 14.1 points, closely followed by *Church life* with an average of 13.1 points. These figures highlight the pervasive influence of jihadist activities on the daily lives of Christians. The *National sphere of life* shows the lowest impact, with a five-year average score of 7.5 points. The *Private* and *Family spheres* have leveled off over the past five years, while the *Community* and *National spheres* stabilized in the last three reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The five-year average score of 14.5 is extremely high. In the last three WWL reporting periods, the score for violence specifically targeting Christians has stabilized within the range 15.4 -15.9 points, underscoring the alarming threat and danger faced by Christians in the country.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Niger	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Abduction Denied custody of children Denied inheritance or possessions Enforced religious dress code Forced divorce Forced marriage Forced out of home – expulsion Incarceration by family (house arrest) Violence – psychological Violence – sexual

Although the law mandates equal treatment of women and men, Niger’s society is heavily male-dominant and harmful traditional practices like forced marriage and widow inheritance cause women to be more vulnerable to persecution. It has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 76% of girls being married by the age of 18 ([Girls Not Brides Niger](#), accessed 9 January 2025). Certain Islamic interpretations are being used to justify child marriage in Niger and resist legislative and policy changes. Customary and Sharia laws have a very strong influence in Niger, including in the process of marriage. Child marriage is perceived as a means to protect a girl’s dignity and preserve her virginity. The fear of dishonor from pregnancy outside of marriage is aggravated by the high levels of sexual violence against women and girls in the country. It is reported that in certain areas people believe that girls should be married before their first period, as bloodstained clothing may be perceived as loss of virginity which brings shame to families ([Girls Not Brides Niger](#), accessed 9 January 2025). This is in part due to widespread poverty, food insecurity and continuing instability within Niger and in neighboring countries ([Concern USA, 10 January 2022](#)).

Like many other countries in the Sahel, women and girls in Niger are also particularly vulnerable to abduction, rape and sexual abuse by extremist groups. A country expert comments: “Abducting and marrying girls to militants is part of an organized program by Islamist militants to breed its next generation of fighters.” There have been numerous instances of abduction and kidnap of Christians by militia groups, as well as forced marriages as a way of recruitment. Indeed, beyond the threat from extreme jihadist groups, female Christians face the possibility of rape and sexual grooming for the purposes of forced conversion. Due to the high poverty rate, some Muslims allegedly use gifts of money, clothes and phones to entice Christian girls, according to reports. A country expert states that rich Muslim men and imams may sponsor young Muslim men to seduce and marry Christian girls. Families also do not report instances of rape as it will impact the marriage prospects of the victim and is viewed as a source of shame. More broadly, many Christian girls also face sexual harassment and discriminatory remarks for failing to wear the hijab. Female genital mutilation remains a live risk for Christian girls living among ethnic communities, for instance, the Gurma tribe in the Tillaberi region.

Additionally, Christian women in Niger are affected by living under Sharia. For example, according to Sharia, a Christian woman has no right to claim custody of her children in divorce cases, even though Niger is officially a secular country and in principle, women have more right to custody of children than

men under Sharia law. Converts to Christianity can face extreme hostility from their families and local communities. They can be denied custody of their children, forced out of the home, forced into marriage with a Muslim man and raped. “Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical cleric as a corrective measure”, as a country expert shared. Many have also been denied their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity. Reports also suggest that women are often unaware of their [legal options](#) to defend their rights (OECD, SIGI 2023, Annex A).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Niger	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abduction Economic harassment via business/job/work access Imprisonment by government Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence – death

Converts to Christianity can face the most severe forms of persecution, as conversion from Islam to any religion is considered a betrayal by some families. They may be rejected by their families, chased out of their family home, or put under house arrest.

There is another phenomenon in Niger – although not specifically a form of targeted religious persecution – which affects all communities and has a strong negative impact on Christian families: Boys in Niger are subject to recruitment as child soldiers. There is a high potential for boys to be abducted and forced to join the ranks of militant groups, or physically harmed during raids. They can also be abducted for forced labor, and/or trafficked between militant groups in exchange for money, weapons or other resources. Christian men and boys have also been targeted for killings by extremist groups. Attacks by violent Islamic militants forces many men, especially pastors and church leaders to flee to safer cities like Niamey, or across the border to Burkina Faso. Since Nigerien tribes are close-knit, this situation can harm all families in a community. “There were numerous reports of abduction or kidnap of priests and other religious leaders, especially in the Tillaberi and Diffa regions”, a country expert shared. Older men who cannot flee are at a higher risk of being killed ([Human Rights Watch, 23 February 2022](#)).

Christian men in Niger can also face dismissal from their jobs because of their faith or have their business boycotted by the Muslim community. Christian men often face persecution in the workplace and pressure to renounce their faith by Muslim colleagues who tend to hold higher positions of power and authority over their Christian co-workers. As men and boys are usually the financial providers, this leaves his family vulnerable and exposed.

Persecution of other religious minorities

For the past decade, hardline Islamic teachers from countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Kuwait have put pressure on the Muslim community, contributing to a broader societal shift towards radicalization. As a result, religious minorities in the country, such as the Bahá’í and Jehovah’s Witnesses, often face serious challenges. Even local communities that blend Islam with indigenous

religious practices have increasingly been persecuted, with efforts to force them to abandon all non-Islamic belief.

Trends Summary

1) The presence of violent Islamic militants remains a constant threat

Over the past years, the Sahel region has witnessed a dramatic rise in attacks by radical Islamic groups, leading to significant territorial losses for the government of Niger. Reclaiming these territories is expected to take considerable time. The presence of groups like Boko Haram, ISWAP and AQIM has become an enduring threat to both state authorities and Christians in the country and the region. Similar to the situations in Burkina Faso and Mali, jihadist groups are likely to continue their expansion and destabilization efforts in Niger. The July 2023 coup can be seen within this context, as well as the two coups in Mali between 2020 and 2021. Countries like Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Libya and Mali are also under significant threat from the expanding jihadist influence. From January to June 2023, Niger experienced a surge in violence, with at least 77 terrorist attacks reported by ECOWAS, leading to numerous fatalities, widespread destruction, and civilian displacement. The threat extends beyond national borders, underscoring the need for a regional resolution.

2) Niger joins the list of countries with a coup trend

Niger has recently joined the list of countries experiencing a coup trend. Once known for receiving substantial international military aid to secure its borders, the landscape shifted after the July 2023 coup, thrusting Niger into a new geopolitical struggle. In the coup's aftermath, global powers and neighboring countries adopted divergent stances. While the USA and several African nations issued ultimatums for the release of the president, held under house arrest, Russia and neighboring countries with close ties to Russia and the Russian African Corps (the re-named Wagner group), such as Burkina Faso and Mali, supported the coup.

3) Society has become radicalized

Research indicates a concerning trend towards the amplification of *Islamic oppression*, primarily driven by jihadist radicalization efforts and support from certain imams promoting extremist ideology. The influence of jihadist factions and their affiliated imams has led to an increasingly ultra-conservative social landscape. This radicalization results in stringent adherence to interpretations of Sharia, imposing repressive norms that curtail individual freedoms and rights, particularly for minority groups, dissenters, and those not aligned with radical Islamic beliefs.

4) Niger joins the anti-West coalition by aligning itself with Russia

In the wake of the July 2023 coup, Niger has increasingly aligned itself with Russia, moving away from its long-standing alliances with Western nations, particularly the USA. This alignment with Russia includes the support and presence of the Russian Africa Corps, highlighting a significant geopolitical shift. Niger, along with Burkina Faso and Mali, has formed closer ties with Russia, distancing itself from ECOWAS and other Western influences. This realignment poses risks to the region's stability and alters the dynamics of international relations in West Africa.

5) Transnational trafficking, persecution, and its impact on governance and security in Niger

A critical trend in Niger has been the proliferation of transnational trafficking networks spanning Sub-Saharan Africa, facilitating the smuggling of people, precious minerals, narcotics, and other illicit commodities. Traffickers exploit institutional weaknesses to sustain their operations, significantly undermining the rule of law and governance in Niger. The participation of jihadist groups, who not only engage in trafficking but also use the profits to procure weapons, further aggravates the issue. The jihadist groups subsequently use these arms to carry out acts of persecution against vulnerable populations and to strengthen their insurgent activities, thereby intensifying instability and insecurity in the region.

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/>.
- [Africa - Recent upsurge in military coups - September 2023](#)

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- 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>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Girls Not Brides Niger - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/niger/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Girls Not Brides Niger - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/niger/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Concern USA, 10 January 2022) - <https://concernusa.org/news/poverty-in-niger/>
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