

World
Watch
Research

Central African Republic:
Full Country Dossier
January 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

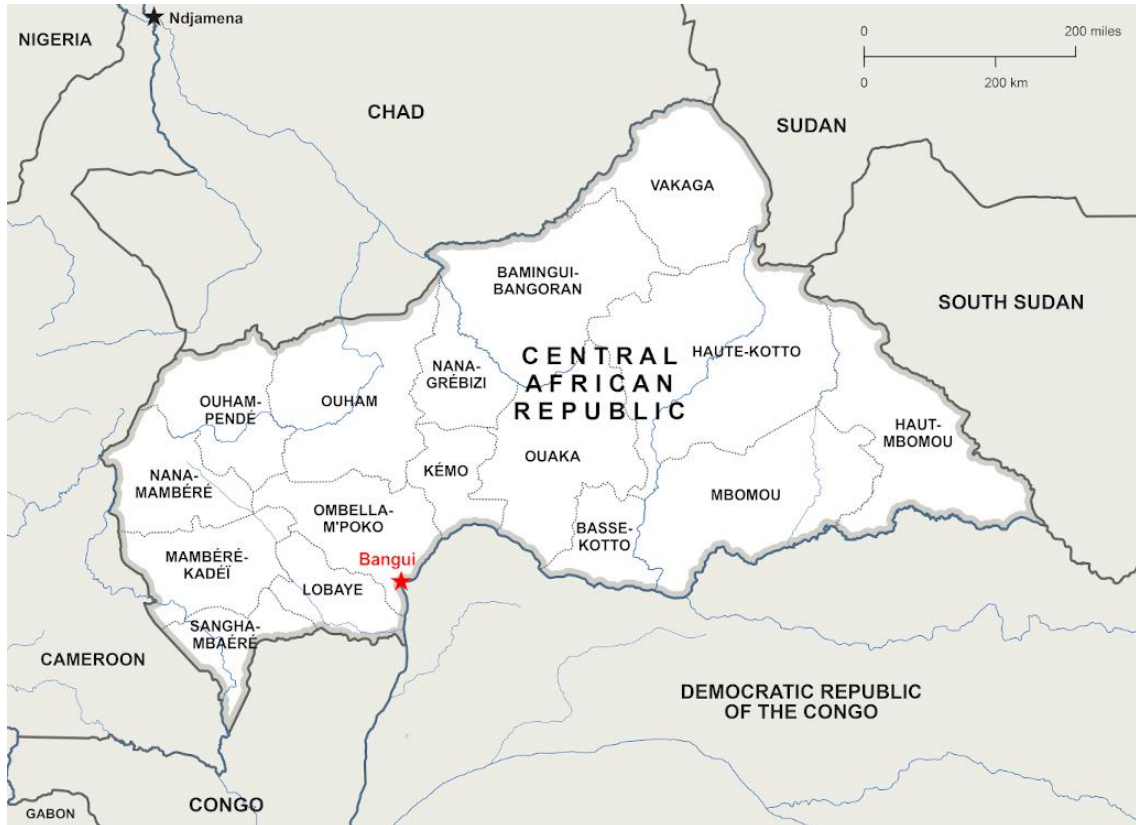
WWL 2023 Situation in brief / CAR

Brief country details

Central African Republic: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
5,017,000	3,712,000	74.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Central African Republic: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	70	24
WWL 2022	68	31
WWL 2021	66	35
WWL 2020	68	25
WWL 2019	70	21

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Central African Republic:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Organized corruption and crime	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 Central African Republic (CAR) has been embroiled in conflict since 2013 and most of the country is occupied by armed groups, responsible for a range of human rights abuses. Christian leaders who have publicly denounced the violence have been threatened and church buildings have been burned and ransacked. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of Christians who have been forced to live in camps and lose their homes and livelihood. In addition to the insecurity and violence from which all categories of Christian community suffer, converts to Christianity also face the persecution that comes from their immediate family members. The local community will often ostracize Christian converts and sometimes try to force them to renounce Christianity through acts of violence.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

CAR 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)

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

- Christian converts in Muslim-majority areas experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by rebel groups (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being abducted and 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

- Many Christians have been killed in the ongoing conflicts. For example, on 5 October 2021, at least 11 Christians were killed in the vicinity of Bambari in the central, southern region.
- Many churches have been damaged. Example 1: On 22 January 2022, the Union of Evangelical Churches of the brothers (UEEF) was the target of an armed attack from elements of the rebel group of 3R. Example 2: In October 2021, the Catholic church at Konan was looted along with two other buildings by UPC elements. Example 3: In November 2021, the Apostolic Church in Gouzama was burned down by an armed group.
- Property and houses belonging to Christians have been deliberately damaged.

Specific examples of positive developments

12 November 2021: The UN passed Resolution [S/RES/2605](#) thus renewing MINUSCA's mandate for another 12 months. Thirteen Council members voted in favor, while China and Russia abstained.

External Links - Situation in brief

- 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: S/RES/2605 - https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2605.pdf

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / CAR

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp.118-120)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	10 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13150040	10 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/CAF	10 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/central-african-republic/	10 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/central-african-republic	10 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.58)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	10 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	3 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, CAR not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom Index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/central-african-republic/freedom-world/2022	10 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report – covering 70 countries, CAR not included	Freedom on the Net 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/central-african-republic	10 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#cf	10 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/central-african-republic	10 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/caf	10 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CAF	10 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/central-african-republic/	10 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, CAR not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/centralafricanrepublic/overview#1	10 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbarsydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CAF	10 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp.16-17)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf	10 June 2022

Recent history

The Central African Republic (CAR) used to be a French colony known as Ubangi-Shari, which gained independence in 1960. Since then, the country has been mired in cycles of violence. These cycles have been driven by overlapping tensions between armed groups, religious and ethnic groups, and herders and farmers. As a result, CAR has endured repeated outbreaks of conflict, population displacement, alarming food insecurity, and limited access to basic services and economic opportunities.

General François Bozizé seized power in a 2003 coup backed by neighboring Chad. The following years saw intermittent fighting between the government and various rebel groups. In 2013, a militia called Séléka (widely perceived as a coalition of Muslim fighters) took control of the capital Bangui and their leader Michel Djotodia became the first Muslim president in CAR's history. However, that same year President Djotodia resigned due to intense pressure from the international community and was replaced by Catherine Samba-Panza, who served as interim president from 2013-2014 until elections were held.

After much delay, in February 2016 the Interim Government managed to hold the election that was supposed to be a significant milestone in the country's history. Faustin-Archange Touadéra won the election and was sworn in as a president. He immediately made peace and reconciliation his priority, but clashes continued in some parts of the country involving the mainly Muslim Séléka and the self-defense groups, called Anti-Balaka. Although these latter groups are frequently referred to as Christians, they are mostly Animists in faith and churches have strongly disassociated themselves from them. Due to the obvious religious overtones of the conflict, both Christian and Muslim civilians are victims of the violence perpetrated by the Séléka and Anti-Balaka militants.

Attempts by both UN peacekeepers and government forces failed to stop the conflict, which has continued with attacks against civilians, humanitarian workers and peacekeeping forces. In February 2019, yet another agreement - the Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation - was signed with more than a dozen rebel groups. This gives hope that after all there might be light at the end of the tunnel.

According to the [UN Security Council Report](#) of 31 January 2020: Since the signing of the Political Peace Agreement on 6 February 2019, "there has been a notable decrease, compared to the previous year, in military confrontations between armed groups, CAR security forces, and MINUSCA and in human rights violations linked to the conflict. However, the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee, which was presented to the committee on 2 December 2019, determined that the implementation of the peace agreement 'remained limited'."

The 27 December 2020 elections were held amid violence as rebels belonging to the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) sought to disrupt the process across the country by burning ballot boxes and intimidating voters. In roughly a dozen towns, including Bozizé's stronghold of Bossangoa, residents were unable to vote at all. Several opposition presidential candidates called for the results to be annulled, claiming widespread fraud. Despite this, the head of the National Elections Authority declared that incumbent President Touadéra had won re-election, gaining an absolute majority of 53.9% of the vote in the first round. The wave of violence that preceded the elections continued, having worsened since the beginning of 2021. The post-election period has seen a surge in attacks by armed groups seeking to overthrow President Touadéra. In light of the rising violence, on 21 January 2021, a state of emergency was announced after CPC forces attempted to blockade the country's capital, Bangui.

According to the BTI report 2022 (covering the year 2021): "The International Criminal Court continued its investigations into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since 2012 and made its first arrest since 2018 in January 2021. The country's own Special Criminal Court also continued its investigations."

Political and legal landscape

The [2016 Constitution](#) provides for freedom of religion under conditions set by law and equal protection under the law regardless of religion - and this is generally respected in practice.

Most analysts agree that family bloodlines, local ethnic politics and rebel militancy have been key in shaping politics in CAR. Several tribes have been waging war against each other, aggravated by the political and economic situation and social issues. Northern tribes are dominantly Islamic; before the coup by Bozizé in 2003 they fought each other for power but joined forces under the umbrella of Séléka prior to staging the 2013 coup. Across the country, relations have been tense among the various tribes, and conflicts between them have led to considerable loss of life over the years.

Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022 states: "Due to the long-lasting tribalization of politics, the country's public institutions and army are dominated by its ethnic majority, the Gbaya, to which former President Bozizé belongs. President Touadéra has also promoted mem-

bers of his groups, the Mbaka-Mandja, to key senior positions and to the presidential guard."

Political parties are legally able to form and operate but party members conducting political activities are at risk of intimidation and violence in areas controlled by irregular armed groups.

According to the [UN Security Council Report](#) of 31 January 2020: "The return of former presidents François Bozizé and Michel Djotodia to the CAR on 15 December 2019 and 10 January, respectively, has raised concerns about their possible destabilizing effect on the already fragile political climate". Despite the danger of instability, elections went ahead as described above in *Recent History*.

Gender perspective

Under CAR's family code, men and women have equal rights in relation to marriage, divorce and child guardianship. According to traditional law however, in cases of divorce women are expected to leave the home and leave their children under the guardianship of the father; practices vary by territory and according to the religious affiliations of communities ([OECD, 2019](#)). CAR has the second highest prevalence of child marriage globally, with 68% of girls marrying before 18 and 29% before the age of 15. The figure is also high for boys, at 28% ([Girls not Brides, 2022](#)). Driving factors include poverty, lack of education and opportunities and insecurity. Whilst the minimum age of marriage is 18 years under the [Family Code 1998](#), individuals can marry under this age with parental consent. This loophole could be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution, particularly for female converts to Christianity. Rape and domestic violence are outlawed, although gaps remain in legislation, for example in failing to recognize economic violence as a form of domestic violence ([OECD, 2019](#)). One of the characteristics of countries in crisis is that men play a significant role both in initiating and participating in conflicts. The natural flow from this is that any negotiation or settlement puts men at a better position in terms of political power. Even though it is difficult to know the role of religion in the final analysis of political power-sharing, it can be assumed that women are not on equal terms with men.

Religious landscape

CAR is a predominantly Christian country; although relations between Muslims and Christians appeared good on the surface in previous years, tension had been growing under the surface. In particular, converts from Islam to Christianity have always faced persecution. Male converts most commonly experience physical violence, whereas female converts risk being forcibly married to a Muslim. Christians living in Muslim-dominated areas in northern, eastern and western regions have reported discrimination and other forms of social pressure. Many Christians (and Muslims) intermix their faith with several ethno-religious practices including sorcery and witchcraft.

According to WCD 2022 estimates for 2022, Christians constitute 74.0% of the population and Muslims 13.9%. Islam has shown significant growth in the last decade - rising from 5% to almost 14% - and has been strengthened by groups settling from Chad and Sudan. Dissatisfaction at the perceived marginalization of northern Muslims was one of the root causes for the coup in March 2013 that gave rise to a deadly conflict along religious and ethnic lines. The Christian community

is very concerned about the Islamic inroads being established in the country and church leaders have repeatedly pointed out that the rebellion that led to the coup had a religious agenda.

Central African Republic: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	3,712,000	74.0
Muslim	697,000	13.9
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	559,000	11.1
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	12,700	0.3
Atheist	700	0.0
Agnostic	36,300	0.7
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Normal church life is very difficult as meetings of Christians in many areas take place under the threat of possible attack. Ex-Séléka groups attack churches in the Muslim-dominated areas of the country and especially target churches that are more involved in openly integrating converts from the Muslim community. Anti-Balaka rebel groups also attack churches and any Christians who oppose their activities. Both rebel groups have involvement in criminal activities. Christians also face frequent harassment in the big cities - especially in Bangui close to the PK5 quarter - and in north-eastern areas.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank country overview:

- Economic activity slowed in 2020 but remained positive at about 0.8%, more than 2 percentage points below its 2019 level. This slowdown was primarily due to COVID-19 and the related restrictions that affected trade between the Central African Republic and the rest of the world, disrupting imports and food supply chains. However, the sound performance of the agricultural sector helped reduce the downturn in economic activity in 2020.
- Post-electoral disputes and the related waves of insecurity added to the slowing of the economy in 2021, owing, among other things, to the blockade of the Bangui-Douala corridor, which adversely affected economic activity and tax revenues.

- The main challenges remain the restoration of lasting peace and security and the implementation of an ambitious reform agenda to foster a sustainable economic recovery; more inclusive economic growth; sound and prudent management of public finances; economic diversification; the creation of better jobs; improved human capital; the promotion and improvement of the business environment; and strengthened farming capacity.

According to the [2022 Economic Freedom Index](#):

- CAR scored 45.7 points, ranking as the 168th freest country in the 2022 index. Its overall score decreased (compared to 2021), primarily because of a decline in property rights. CAR ranked 43rd among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages.

Gender perspective

CAR performed poorly on Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index, which is mainly due to poor rates of financial inclusion for women ([Georgetown, 2022/21](#)) at rank #157 although this was an improvement by 22 points from the previous year. The labor force participation rate stands at 64.4% of women, compared to 79.8% of men (UNDP's HDI profile). Many women and girls are therefore economically dependent on their families, which can make them vulnerable if they convert to Christianity.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Baya 28.8%, Banda 22.9%, Mandjia 9.9%, Sara 7.9%, Mboum 6%, M'Baka 7.9%, Arab-Fulani (Peul) 6%, Mbum 6%, Ngbanki 5.5%, Zande-Nzakara 3%, other Central African Republic ethnic groups 2%, non-Central African Republic ethnic groups 1%
- **Main languages:** French (official), Sangho (Lingua franca and national language), tribal languages.
- **Population growth rate:** 1.79% (2021 est.)
- **Urban population:** 42.6% of the total population (2021)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.32% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Median age:** 17.6 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.6 years (6.2 years for girls, compared to 8.9 years for boys)
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 37.4%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 69.3%
- **Unemployment:** 3.7% of total labor force
- **Youth unemployment (15-24 years):** 5.7%

According to the World Bank country overview:

- **Poverty:** "Poverty is high, with more than 7 in 10 Central Africans living below the international poverty line (measured using US\$1.90 per day, 2011 PPP). Inadequate social protection systems and limited access to education and healthcare facilities are major bottlenecks for human capital accumulation. The formal private sector is small and con-

strained by several structural challenges, including limited access to finance, a weak regulatory framework, poor infrastructure (e.g., energy and transportation), lack of skilled labor, and a fragile security and political environment. The humanitarian situation remains precarious, with 43 percent of the population facing acute food insecurity. As of January 2022, there were 734,000 refugees outside the country—the highest level since December 2013—and 652,000 internally displaced persons”.

According to [UNHCR data](#) as of May 2022:

- **IDPs:** An estimated 602,134 people remain internally displaced.
- **Refugees:** 739,394 Central African refugees are sheltering in neighboring countries (particularly in Cameroon, DRC and Chad).
- "The dire crisis in the Central African Republic continues to trigger massive forced displacement, increasing pressure on resources and living conditions in host communities and countries. Intense militia activity and inter-community violence hampers humanitarian access and exposes civilians to serious protection risks. According to OCHA, CAR remains the country with the highest humanitarian needs per capita, with 50 per cent of the population having to rely on humanitarian assistance to survive, while 25 per cent is displaced either internally or in a neighboring country."

According to the UNDP's HDI profile:

- **Human Development Index:** CAR is one of the poorest countries in the world and one of the 10 poorest in Africa ranking 188th out of 189, with an index value of 0.397.
- **Average life expectancy at birth:** 53.3 years
- **Gender inequality:** CAR has also one of the lowest education and gender equality indicators of the world. The gender development index (GDI) is 0.801 and gender inequality index (GII) is 0.680. The youth unemployment rate (female to male ratio) is 0.90.

Gender perspective

CAR is heavily shaped by patriarchal norms; men are widely held as the head of the household, whereas women are expected to lead in the domestic sphere. According to a [2016 Tearfund report](#), marital rape and domestic violence are not just common place, but are widely accepted. The study revealed that both men and women believed that there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten or disciplined (e.g. by refusing sex to their husband, or being deemed confrontational). Many chose not to report incidents of abuse due to stigma and out of fear of losing their children. According to a [UNDP report published on 15 July 2020](#), gender-based violence (GBV) surged when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced; despite a national strategy aimed at reducing GBV, statistics pre-COVID were already of concern.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 11.2% of the population – survey date: July 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 3% of the population – survey date: July 2022

According to the World Bank profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 33.6 per 100 people (Statistics on Internet usage and mobile phone ownership by gender are lacking.)

The ongoing violence in CAR and in neighboring countries has created obstacles in the establishment of technological infrastructure. Hence, in communications, financial services, agriculture and transportation sectors, the use of modern technology is not advanced.

Security situation

There are more than 14 factions fighting against the government and against each other. Many armed groups have been forming alliances with others and some groups have foreign fighters who are fighting in the country to establish a Sharia state. Others are motivated by greed and power and have no mercy toward anyone opposing them. The Rwandan and Russian Wagner groups also joined the fighting which is making life for Christians more challenging. Many credible reports have showed that different fighting groups including government security forces have committed atrocities. In the middle of this, Christians cannot speak out against the injustice being committed in the country. They cannot comment on the increasingly powerful criminal gangs that are in fact facilitating the prevalence of the different armed factions. The government is only in control of the capital city, Bangui. The rest of the country is divided among different factions. These factors have also made the tracking of persecution more complex.

In February 2019, the government and 14 armed groups [signed a peace treaty](#) (AP News, 2 February 2019) but this collapsed in the run-up to the December 2020 elections and the fighting has not come to an end.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2022 country chapter):

- “Violence involving attacks on civilians continued across the country as government forces, with support from the Rwandan military and Russian mercenaries, fought the remnants of a rebel coalition that controls significant parts of the country. The Coalition of Patriots for Change (Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, CPC) attacked major towns in late 2020, preventing hundreds of thousands of people from voting in the December 27 presidential election won by President Faustin Archange Touadéra”.
- “A January 13 [2021] CPC offensive on the capital, Bangui, was thwarted, and the city remained relatively stable. Much of the countryside, especially the northwest and the east, remained contested territory, with civilians often caught between the rebels and the government forces with their foreign allies”.

- “Groups allied to the CPC, notably the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) in the east and 3R in the northwest, committed widespread abuses, including deliberately targeting civilians. Credible reports, including from the United Nations, indicated that security forces and Russian mercenaries also committed serious human rights abuses. On July 21 [2021], unidentified assailants carried out an attack in Ouham province, outside of Bossangoa, killing at least 13 people. The government committed to investigate the crime via a special commission of inquiry”.
- “More than 2,000 Russian mercenaries, possibly from Wagner - a mercenary outfit affiliated with Yevgeniy Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch said to be close to Russian President Vladimir Putin - are deployed in the Central African Republic. While officially in the country to serve as military instructors, the UN has documented several instances in which these mercenaries participated in active fighting and were implicated in human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.”

If the parties to the conflict continue to refuse to commit to a ceasefire and disarmament:

- The country could descend into a full-blown civil war.
- Neighboring countries would be likely to get involved in arming or training groups, based on their national interests.
- Christians are likely to continue suffering at the hands of Ex-Séléka and other militants.

Gender perspective

Within this context of fragility and insecurity, women and girls (especially IDPs) are especially vulnerable to incidences of sexual and gender-based violence at the hands of armed groups ([Human Rights Watch, 21 June 2019](#)). Despite these threats, women are reportedly left out of the peace building process, causing deep frustration among female leaders ([UN, Africa Renewal](#), last accessed 30 January 2023). Men and boys are vulnerable to forced recruitment into militias, as well as to abductions and killings.

Trends analysis

1) Instability and impunity is rampant

The conflict that erupted in 2013 has created massive humanitarian suffering. It has also fundamentally changed the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the country. Despite the elections in 2015, 2016 and 2020 (which many hoped would bring a fresh chance of reconciliation), there are no state structures that can effectively restore peace and accountability. On many occasions church leaders of the main denominations have condemned the violence perpetrated by armed groups against civilians. President Touadera (elected in 2016 and re-elected in December 2020) has not been able to extend government control over the whole of the country's territory. As a result, many armed groups are controlling a large portion of the country. Traffickers, other organized crime cartels, and fighters from other countries are active in CAR. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and government security forces have not been able to exert effective control beyond the capital city. The government itself, in October 2021, "... officially acknowledged that rebel militants, FACA troops, and Russian forces in the country had comit-

ted numerous human rights violations against civilians in the CAR." Nothing has been done to address the impunity that is rampant in the country.

As the instability continues in the country, the situation is becoming increasingly complex with several criminal splinter-groups emerging from the Séléka and Anti-Balaka militant groups - and in some places even joining forces. These groups both attack Christians, although for different reasons. This has put tremendous pressure on the Christian community in all areas of life. Killings and the destruction of property and churches have become common and there is nothing to change this if the status quo remains as it is. The peace treaty of February 2019, signed by the government and 14 armed groups, collapsed in the run-up to the December 2020 elections.

2) The risks behind a possible Constitutional amendment

There have been concerns [expressed](#) by civil societies that the government is seeking to amend the Constitution to enable the incumbent president to run for a third term (Africa News, 25 March 2021). In April 2022, government supporters demonstrated to show support for such amendment. The desire for a 'third term' in presidential office has become a trend in Africa. But this is very risky for a country which is in such a deep-crisis; an attempt to amend the Constitution would be like adding gasoline to a fire.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: UN Security Council Report - <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-02/central-african-republic-5.php>
- Political and legal landscape: 2016 Constitution - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Central_African_Republic_2016.pdf?lang=en
- Political and legal landscape: UN Security Council Report - <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-02/central-african-republic-5.php>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/CF.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls not Brides, 2022 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/central-african-republic>
- Political and legal landscape: Family Code 1998 - <https://data.unicef.org/crvs/central-african-republic/>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/CF.pdf>
- Economic landscape: 2022 Economic Freedom Index: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/centralafricanrepublic>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown, 2022/21 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR data - <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/car>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2016 Tearfund report - <https://learn.tearfund.org/-/media/learn/resources/reports/gender-norms-violence-and-masculinity.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP report published on 15 July 2020, - <https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/car-violence-against-women-surg-ing-amid-covid-19-pandemic-study>
- Security situation: signed a peace treaty - <https://apnews.com/article/a250380046554b6cb0bbf6feb1510786>
- Security situation: Human Rights Watch, 21 June 2019 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/21/central-african-republic-wars-most-forgotten-victims>
- Security situation: UN, Africa Renewal - <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/web-features/women-seek-greater-role-rebuilding-central-african-republic>
- Trends analysis: expressed - <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/25/central-african-republic-confusion-over-possible-modification-of-constitution/>

WWL 2023: Church information / CAR

Christian origins

Like most African countries, CAR society was dominated by several traditional African religions practiced by different tribes. Most traditional religions in the area were dependent upon the animist tradition with practices differing from one tribe to another. The animist African tradition was more dominant in the southern and central parts of the country. Muslim traders in the northern part of the country introduced Islam to the region. Christianity became dominant in CAR after French colonists took power in the 1880s and became the religion of choice for many - possibly also due to its close association with powerful and respected colonial officials. While Roman Catholic missionaries came as early as the second half of the 19th century, Protestant missionaries (for instance, sent by US Baptists) did not start operating in the country until 1921. (Source: [World Atlas, 12 April 2018](#))

Church spectrum today

Central African Republic: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	1,926,000	51.9
Protestant	886,000	23.9
Independent	899,000	24.2
Unaffiliated	0	0.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	3,711,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,516,000	40.8
Renewalist movement	973,000	26.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The Roman Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian denomination.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Rights violations against Christians are most severe in the northern and eastern parts of the country which are dominated by the Muslim population and where Séléka splinter-groups are operating. There are also difficulties for Christians in the eastern part of the country that borders Sudan.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Since expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated in CAR, this category is not included for WWL analysis and scoring.

Historical Christian communities: This category is comprised of Roman Catholic and older Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics and schools. When the Séléka militants were in the ascendancy, cars, computers and other valuable items were looted from church-buildings and other church properties. The Catholic Church and its leadership in CAR, alongside other religious leaders, have been a strong voice calling for peace and reconciliation and have also provided places of refuge for civilians, both Muslim and Christian, fleeing attack. As a result, Catholic churches have often been targeted for attack.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background experience opposition and pressure from family members to renounce Christianity if their conversion becomes known. They also have very limited opportunities to have fellowship with other Christians and worship collectively. Most Christians of Muslim background do not worship in public due to the fear of attacks by Muslim agitators. This is especially the case in the northern Muslim-dominated areas of the country.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Christians belonging to Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations (as well as those belonging to historical Christian communities) have been subject to attacks by Ex-Séléka militants. Recently, the number of people joining these Christian congregations has increased dramatically.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: World Atlas, 12 April 2018 - <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-religious-beliefs-of-the-central-african-republic.html>

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / CAR

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Central African Republic: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	70	24
WWL 2022	68	31
WWL 2021	66	35
WWL 2020	68	25
WWL 2019	70	21

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The rise in overall score was due to increased pressure, particularly in the *Community* and *Church spheres of life*. Violence remained at the extreme level of 15.6 points. Armed groups and organized crime have made the life of Christians very difficult. Many churches have been forced to close. Christians have been most at risk in the northern and eastern parts of the country, which are dominated by the Muslim population and where Séléka splinter-groups have been operating.

Persecution engines

Central African Republic: 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	Very strong

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

Besides the violence against Christians perpetrated particularly by the offshoots of the Séléka militia, *Islamic oppression* is also evident in the persecution of Christians by society in general in predominantly Muslim parts of the country.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong)

This engine is particularly evident where Anti-Balaka militants attack churches and Christians. Although Anti-Balaka began as a collection of vigilante groups, they have morphed into becoming criminal gangs. Particularly in Bangui, they have often targeted Christians and church leaders, especially those who do not subscribe to their ideals or those who oppose their violent activities. While the group claims to protect Christians, it has become evident over the years that this is untrue since they attack Muslims and Christians alike.

Clan oppression (Medium)

There are two dimensions to this Persecution engine in CAR: i) Animism/ATR (religious and/or cultural) and ii) tribal fighting.

According to a country researcher:

- “Both are prevalent in CAR, while ethnic and religious motives often go together.”
- “There is pressure to participate in cultural religious practices, such as rites of passage, rituals and customs at milestones like birth, marriage and death, but also for protection (Anti-Balaka are known for this).”
- “Some ethnic minority groups are specifically targeted, for instance, Ba'aka pygmies, who are forcibly recruited for labor. Anti-Balaka forces are mainly Animists, and they attack Muslims, but often also Christians. Sometimes they force Christians into their ranks.”

Drivers of persecution

CAR:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK				VERY STRONG
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
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								

CAR:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK				VERY STRONG
One's own (extended) family	Medium								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very strong								Very strong

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

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Muslim militant and paramilitary groups (that could be considered Ex-Séléka groups) are significant drivers of persecution. Two of them are the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central African Republic (FPRC), and the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC). Although many of these groups can be categorized as violent religious groups, it is also possible to view them as political parties and paramilitary organizations. These rebel groups have inflicted multiple attacks on Christian churches and private Christian property.
- **Organized crime cartels (Very strong):** Some factions of the militant groups mentioned above act as organized criminal gangs and often engage in looting and frequently target churches and church-affiliated entities.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Islamic leaders occupy all the market places, control trade and impose a huge tax on Christian businessmen and often loot the shops of Christians to reduce them to poverty. Furthermore, at a national level, figures like Michel Djotodia who was the president of the country, Nouredine Adam who was the second in command to Michel Djotodia and Ali Darassa, a Fulani ethnic Muslim leader of the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) and Ex-Séléka leader, have led the persecution of Christians.
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In the predominantly Muslim parts of the country tribal or ethnic elders also play a role in this process since they reinforce the pressure against converts to Christianity.
- **Family members (Medium), Citizens (Medium):** In the northern part of the country and areas that border Sudan, Muslim family members and communities will persecute known converts to Christianity.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

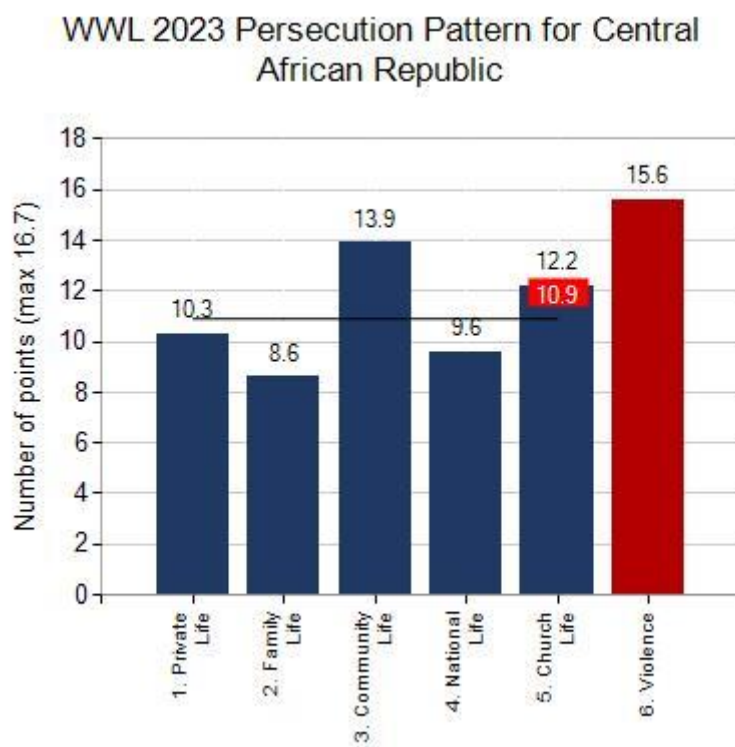
- **Organized crime cartels (Very strong):** Some factions of the militant groups mentioned above act as organized criminal gangs and often engage in looting and frequently target churches and church-affiliated entities. In addition to militants that used to belong to the Séléka, Anti-Balaka fighters also engage in such acts. The state of lawlessness and the inability of the state to impose law and order means that Christians and the wider community have little protection from the criminal acts of these groups.

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Violent religious groups also run criminal chains and syndicates to finance their operations.
- **Paramilitary groups (Very strong):** In the context of the conflict in CAR, paramilitary groups like Anti-Balaka are also attacking Christians.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** The main drivers of this Persecution engine are ethnic leaders and some community leaders and their members. According to a country researcher: “Tribal pressure is [present in the country] especially since Muslim leaders are from certain tribes, who target Christians for persecution, for instance, Peulh/Fulani and leaders of other movements and tribes.” Within the context of this Persecution engine, there is also an overlap between ethnic leaders and non-Christian religious leaders. Some Islamic leaders are also seen as ethnic leaders and can create an environment of hate and violence around the observance of cultural religious practices.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for CAR shows:

- The score for average pressure on Christians in CAR is 10.9 points, rising from 10.4 points in WWL 2022.
- The *Community sphere* scored highest with 13.9 points, followed by the *Church sphere* which scored 12.2 points.
- The score for violence remains at an extreme level with 15.6 points, the same as in WWL 2022.

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 2023 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://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.00 points)

Since 2013, the political landscape and everything that derives from it has changed the lives of Christians in CAR, both at an individual and group level. In the northern part of the country (which is dominated by the Muslim population and where Séléka splinter-groups are operating), converts are likely to risk their life by owning Christian materials. When certain armed groups come into a house and find someone reading a Bible, they have been known to kill them immediately.

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

As mentioned under 1.3, many important factors in private and public life have changed since 2013. In addition to the general hostile environment for Christians due to the ongoing conflict in the country, there is a further layer of pressure on converts. Converts from Islam experience interference from their family members if their conversion becomes known. This category of Christians is the most persecuted of all. The backlash from Muslim families is harsh and family members are likely to cut off all financial help. There are many families where the wife is a Christian and the husband is not. The husband commonly prevents wife and children from attending church activities.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (2.75 points)

The level of control at house and individual level has increased since the civil war started. Converts and non-convert Christians in areas controlled by Séléka forces face this problem. A country expert explained how converts face high risks: They "will do nothing to be seen as Christians, not even listening to Christian radio channels. In families, family members act as spies, sometimes children spy on their parents to tell if they have converted, so it becomes risky for them to be seen accessing Christian media."

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.50 points)

Religion has become one of the dividing factors in CAR in the last decade. The conflict in CAR has divided the country more or less along faith lines. If a Christian host talks about Christian faith to a Muslim guest, he/she may get into trouble. It is even becoming dangerous (in some places) for Christians to host Muslim guests as the situation has become so unpredictable.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Any form of Christian celebration has become extremely dangerous in CAR. As the situation in the country is far from safe, it is very difficult for Christians (converts in particular) in the north-eastern provinces to do anything that would attract unwanted attention.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.00 points)

Baptism is often done with celebration and, in the context of the unsafe environment, this has become extremely dangerous. Culturally, in some places Christians would like to have guests at baptisms and have Muslims experience Christian preaching. However, in a country where groups are targeting each other based on religion, it is difficult to openly baptize new Christians.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.75 points)

In CAR, no one is immune from violence and harassment - even children. In areas controlled by rebel groups, where children's parents have been killed or have been forced to flee, any children left behind remain at the mercy of the attackers. Some have been brutally killed. Also, due to the lack of unity and understanding between some churches, children are known to have been harassed because of the denominational faith of their parents.

Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (2.50 points)

This is happening in the north and eastern part of the country and often occurs after a spouse has converted to Christianity. Extended families and the local community who find out about the conversion will then often put pressure on the non-convert to divorce the Christian. In addition, converts almost automatically lose family inheritance rights.

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)

This is one of the most serious issues in the country. The conflict has gone to village level and Christians in their communities are often targeted and threatened. The country is dominated by warring factions and the government has lost effective control over many areas. Christians are often targeted directly or indirectly (for instance, considered to be supporters of Anti-Balaka). In Muslim dominated areas, Christians are often discriminated against, especially where Sharia law is more or less officially implemented.

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)

Except for the capital city, the majority of the country is under the control of a variety of different armed groups. Monitoring at village/community level has become one of the defining characteristics of the ongoing conflict in the country. In some instances, vigilante groups act as informers for jihadists.

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

In the context of the ongoing conflict, Christians suffer from attack and abduction. Young girls have often been abducted. Christians from a Muslim background suffer most in such attacks. At times, those men and women who have been abducted are indoctrinated and forced to fight.

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

The conflict in the country has religious dimensions, as reported on numerous occasions. Muslim community members usually do not want to share community resources (such as healthcare) with converts to Christianity, especially in remote northern parts of the country. The conflict has forced some converts to live in IDP camps and others to flee to neighboring countries such as Cameroon or even DRC.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

One of the limitations that the ongoing conflict has brought upon Christians is the inability to travel for missionary work or even for daily lives. Some of the areas in the country are literally owned by armed groups; in these places, no one is safe. In areas controlled by Ex-Séléka militants, all transportation facilities are under Muslim control thus making movement for Christians difficult. When violence flares up, pastors are particularly vulnerable when travelling between churches to carry out church work.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

This issue should be seen in the context of the competing groups in the country. Allegiance in the country is divided along religious lines. Christians face this problem mostly in areas where the Muslim community forms the majority or where Ex-Séléka militants are in control. It is particularly difficult where Christians are considered to be supporters of Anti-Balaka. There is where the 'us versus them'-mentality kicks in.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.25 points)

Expression of opinions or views have a huge price in the context of the civil war in CAR. No peace negotiations or 'Truth and Reconciliation' initiatives are currently helping the country return to stability. The elections that were held in 2020 and 2021, even though described as a positive development, are not bringing true freedom and stability: For instance, Christians in the Muslim-dominated northern part of the country do not have the right or the possibility to express their views. If they do that, they will be seen as being supporters of Anti-Balaka forces and will probably then be killed by Ex-Séléka militants.

Block 4.7: Christians have been hindered in running their own businesses without interference for faith-related reasons (e.g. personnel policy, client admission policy). (3.00 points)

In some circumstances, Christian businesses have become a contentious issue when it comes to what they sell and to whom they sell. Looting, destruction and other forms of property-related crimes are frequently committed against Christian business owners. There is no longer effective control by the government and in several regions rebel groups wield power. These groups frequently discriminate against Christians and sometimes attack them, forcing them to flee home and country.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

CAR has become a country without an effective government. As a result, a variety of armed groups are controlling parts of the country, some of which are decidedly anti-Christian. Although there is no official surveillance from government security officers, civilians are being watched by various rebel groups to discover their possible sympathy for or links to other groups. Many attacks have been reported, with church services disrupted and church buildings set on fire.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)

Church activities outside church compounds have come virtually impossible outside of Bangui. CAR has become synonymous with violence and weak government. In such an environment, conducting religious activities outside a church would risk attracting unnecessary attention. Especially in areas with a Muslim majority and that are controlled by rebel groups, churches keep a low profile. Even in areas where there is no direct crisis, sometimes churches are hindered from carrying out such activities, for instance in regions where there are many Muslims or animists.

Block 5.4: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities inside their place of worship. (3.25 points)

Organizing church activities inside the church compounds have come risky in areas controlled by some armed groups. Freedom of religion, movement, or expression and even the right to life is frequently being fundamentally challenged in CAR. When it comes to the hindering of church events inside church compounds, it was noted by a country expert: "Indirectly it happens in rebel-controlled areas because of the fear and insecurity of what may happen if the activity happens to be disrupted. The past experiences have also traumatized Christians and they often avoid church gatherings due to fear of attack."

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.00 points)

The civil war that started in 2013 has resulted in the destruction many Christian buildings and churches. At the moment, building or renovating church property is actually seen as a luxury since Christians are struggling to keep what they have. The situation in the country is volatile and where churches have been severely damaged and need to be rebuilt or renovated, the Christian communities face difficulties, particularly where Muslim rebels are acting as the local 'authority'.

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 5 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. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. 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.

5. The symbol “x” in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Central African Republic: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	61	29
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	11	100 *
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	35	10 *
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	66	10 *
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	20	10 *
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	1000 *
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 *	71
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	100
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1000	100 *

5 Year trends

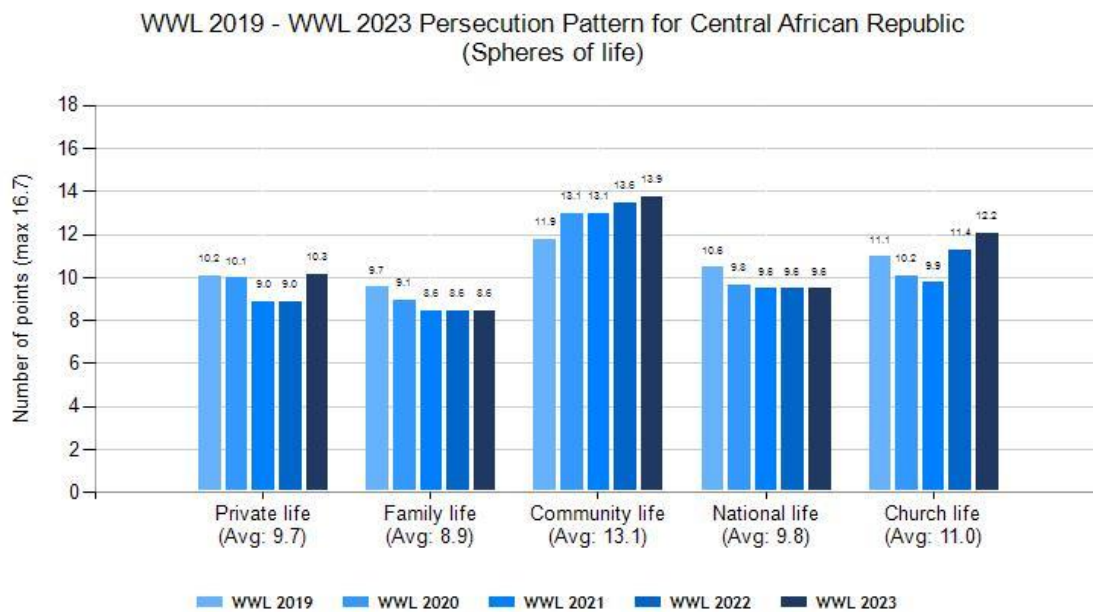
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Central African Republic: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	10.9
2022	10.4
2021	10.0
2020	10.5
2019	10.7

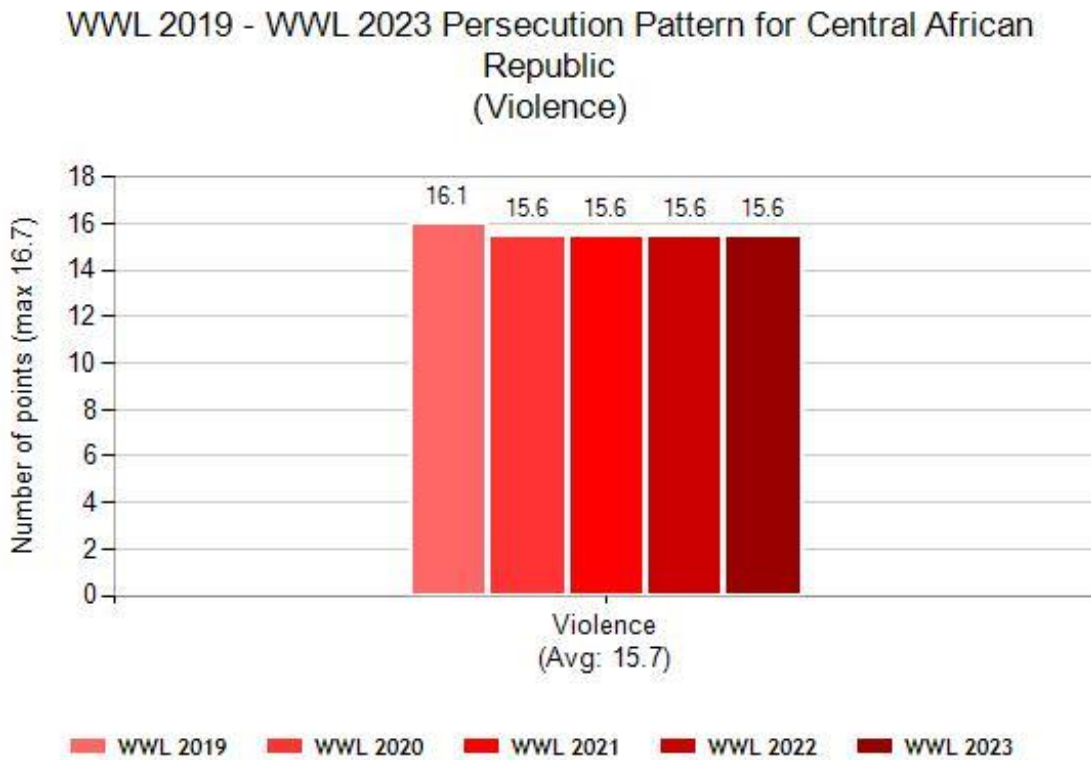
In the table above it can be seen that in the last five reporting periods the score for average pressure has been between 10.0 and 10.9 points.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above clearly shows that the pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* has most often been high or very high. Pressure has been highest (and has increased most strongly) in the *Community sphere of life*, reaching an extreme level in WWL 2023. The lowest average score over the five years occurred in the *Family sphere* with 8.9 points.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the five year period, the level of violence against Christians has been stable at an extreme level. The highest score was recorded in WWL 2019 with 16.1 points. In the last four years it has leveled off at 15.6 points.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

The many years of violence and instability in CAR have left Christian women and girls vulnerable to various forms of religious persecution, particularly, rape, abduction, trafficking and forced marriage. Some girls who are abducted are subjected to sexual slavery; sexual abuse is a source of shame for women and girls, and they can struggle to move on from the trauma, particularly if they become pregnant. “Rape is an interminable part of the lives of Christian girls and women in the country,” a country expert asserted, observing that sexual violence against women in CAR remains a “weapon of war used by rebel groups to terrorize, traumatize and demoralize Christians in their faith”.

Within the context of high poverty rates, parents are sometimes enticed into giving their Christian girls in marriage in exchange for significant gifts. [68% of women](#) in CAR between the ages of 20 and 24 were married off before they turned 18 – the second highest prevalence of child marriage in the world (Girls Not Brides, 2022). In other cases, Christian girls who thought they would be free to practice their faith once married to a Muslim discover that they are instead forced to convert. Female students in particular face the risk of abduction and sexual violence while on the way to and from school. This has discouraged parents living in high-risk areas from sending their daughters to school. Girls who are abused and become pregnant are likely to drop out of school.

In CAR, women are generally more dependent on their families than men, so family-driven persecution affects them more. Because CAR is one of the poorest countries in Africa, ranking near the bottom of almost every indicator, financial need can drive Christian women with many children to agree to convert to Islam in order to survive. Converts to Christianity face further pressures from family members. They can be put under house arrest to prevent them from meeting with other Christians or forcibly married to a much older Muslim. There are reports that sometimes a Christian mother is only allowed to attend Christian gatherings on condition that her children are sent to the mosque. Mothers have been separated from their children because of their faith.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

When Christian families are targeted by radical militias, Christian women in CAR are usually sexually assaulted and left alive, while men are mostly killed for their faith or detained by the militia. Others are abducted and either incorporated into the ranks of the rebel group or used as forced labor to extract gold and diamonds in the mines.

Pastors are especially targeted on account of their perceived efforts to convert members of the community, and sometimes, false accusations revolving around espionage are used as a pretext. Pastors have even been attacked during church services. A country expert narrates: "The deacon of one church was found on the telephone and accused of having provided information about them to the FACA and their Russian allies. He was shot in late 2021."

Christian men also experience discrimination in the workplace. Islamic leaders dominate the marketplaces, control trade and impose large taxes on Christian businessmen or even loot the shops of Christians to keep them in poverty. Boys and men are at times forcibly recruited into rebel militant groups and they are also targeted for torture and assault. Within national military service, too, they can experience discrimination on the grounds of their faith. Forced disappearance, killing, threats and the tactical impoverishment of men is greatly affecting Christian families.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Christianity is the overall majority religion in the country but a minority in some parts of the country. This has created a complex dynamic of persecution.

As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "According to CNN and the investigative group The Sentry, 14 persons were killed on February 16 at a mosque in Bambari when progovernment forces recaptured the city from the CPC. During this assault, Wagner Group forces and soldiers from the national military – the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) – reportedly raped, tortured, and killed Muslim civilians. Imams in Bangui stated that Muslim IDPs had been victims of torture, rape, extrajudicial killing, disappearance, and theft at the hands of FACA and Wagner Group forces."

In the context of the ongoing conflict, religious minorities are not the main targets. However, adherents of small religious minorities do face challenges in the communities where they live.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

There are reports indicating that there are foreign Islamic fighters in the country supporting the Ex-Séléka groups. As long as Ex-Séléka militia are armed and operating in the country, violent oppression will continue and the chances of peace in CAR are very unlikely. As far as the ordinary Muslim population in the country is concerned (i.e. excluding the jihadist groups), the level of *Islamic oppression* is only a problem where family and community put pressure on converts.

Organized corruption and crime (and armed groups)

The levels of corruption and crime in the country go hand in hand with the breakdown of law and order. Thus, through the lens of this Persecution engine, the future depends on how the country can enforce its laws and how it can prosecute criminal networks and co-opted government officials. It is important to note that criminal networks are working hand in hand with various militant groups. This engine is operating in coordination with armed groups and the current state of affairs favors its further development. The government is only in control of the capital city (Bangui) and the rest of the country is under the influence of different armed groups. These groups are reportedly engaged in illegal activities, including [trafficking in arms](#), child soldiering and so forth (UN Security Council, 19 October 2022). Tackling the effects of this Persecution engine requires solving the political crises that the country has faced since 2013.

Clan oppression

The future development of this Persecution engine depends upon how the country emerges from the current crisis (exacerbated by the post-election violence). If the country manages to bring concrete peace through 'Truth, Reconciliation and Justice' initiatives, then the influence of this Persecution engine will decrease. It is also important to mention that there is - to a certain extent - a link between religion and ethnicity in the country; thus how *Islamic oppression* develops will also shape the future of this engine.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis

The aftermath of COVID-19 is likely to lead to food shortages in the country. That could, in turn, fuel further conflict which might then be fought along religious lines. This is compounded by the war in Ukraine that has impacted many other African countries, especially concerning the importation of energy, food and fertilizer.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution / Female: 68% of women - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/central-african-republic>
- Future outlook: trafficking in arms - <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19buqi7os>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Central African Republic>