

World
Watch
Research

Cameroon: Full Country Dossier

February 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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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 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Cameroon

Brief country details

Cameroon: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
28,608,000	17,647,000	61.7

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Cameroon: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	66	43
WWL 2023	65	45
WWL 2022	65	44
WWL 2021	64	42
WWL 2020	60	48

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

The process of radicalization has been accelerating, notably in regions with a significant Muslim population. Conversion from Islam to Christianity has become fraught with danger. New converts are often forced to practice their faith in secrecy. Owning Bibles or any Christian literature can lead to threats and acts of aggression. Revealing their new-found faith to family members or the community can expose them to significant risk. This is especially true in the remote northern regions. Church activities have been severely disrupted in areas with a strong Boko Haram/ISWAP presence.

Additional challenges are imposed on children and women who convert to Christianity. There are reported instances of Christian children being forced by non-Christian relatives to attend Islamic classes. Coercive marriages for female converts to non-Christians are also common, amplifying their vulnerability. Attacks by Boko Haram further enhance the dangers faced by Christian women, including potential abductions.

Church activities have been severely disrupted in areas with a strong Boko Haram presence. The constant displacement of people due to escalating violence has impeded the normal functioning of churches. Heavy restrictions have been imposed on church activities in certain areas due to security concerns. The government further burdens Christians by exerting significant pressure on those who publicly denounce the perceived injustice and limitations on religious freedom.

Armed separatist groups in the Northwest and Southwest regions have been setting fire to churches and kidnapping numerous church leaders and seminary students, as reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Cameroon).

The crisis in neighboring Central African Republic has created an enduring state of upheaval and distress in the region. Many Christians from there have been displaced from their homes and have sought refuge in Cameroon. As reported by the UN ([OCHA, CAR - A new life after displacement](#), last updated 8 June 2023): "490,066 people are internally displaced, and 743,000

Central African refugees are living in neighboring countries, primarily in Cameroon and DR Congo." New displacements are recorded every month, indicating a state of ongoing conflict and the dire state of affairs in the region.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Cameroon 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 on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
4. [Convention against Torture](#) (CAT)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian converts face coercion, violence, and harassment, including the loss of a job or opportunities for further education unless they renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- Christian peaceful religious gatherings are restricted by Boko Haram, security restrictions, and denial of registrations or meeting permits (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 21)
- Christians face discrimination in the public and private work force (ICCPR Art. 18, ICESCR Art. 2)
- For a fear of reprisals due to a lack of security, Christians are denied their right to freedom of expression (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian women are forcibly married and forced to recant their beliefs (ICCPR Art. 23 and CEDAW Art. 16)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Christians' freedom to practice their faith is restricted in northern areas affected by the presence of Boko Haram, which has carried out violent attacks against places of worship as well as kidnappings.
- There were numerous attacks against Christians and their religious facilities in connection with the separatist fighting in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. For example, the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Cameroon) reported: "According to a Roman Catholic priest of Kumbo Diocese, Northwest Region, during a worship service on October 16 [2022], separatists hoisted their flag in front of the church building at St. Therese Mission Station in Tobin Parish and fired weapons for several hours toward the center of the town. The gunfire interrupted a Sunday church service as worshippers locked the doors of the building and lay on the floor for several hours. He said no worshipper was hurt, and they all escaped after the separatists left nearly three hours later."
- Pastors and priests have been arrested without any justifiable grounds. Christian-owned buildings and church facilities have been taken over for military purposes. Christians cannot

speak out against injustices committed by the government without facing severe reprisals.

Specific examples of positive developments

None.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: OCHA, CAR - A new life after displacement - <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/car/card/JABlbpBDOT/>
- 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 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 against Torture - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Cameroon

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Cameroon report	AI Cameroon 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/cameroon/report-cameroon/	12 July 2023
BBC News Cameroon profile - updated 9 March 2023	BBC Cameroon profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13146029	12 July 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Cameroon Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CMR	12 July 2023
CIA World Factbook Cameroon - updated 3 July 2023	World Factbook Cameroon	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cameroon/	12 July 2023
Crisis24 Cameroon report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Cameroon report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/cameroon	12 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Cameroon profile 2023	EIU Cameroon profile 2023	https://country.eiu.com/cameroon	12 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Cameroon	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	12 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Cameroon not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom Index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Cameroon	https://freedomhouse.org/country/cameroon/freedom-world/2023	12 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Cameroon not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Cameroon profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/cameroon/	12 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Cameroon report	Girls Not Brides Cameroon	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/cameroon/	12 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Cameroon country chapter	HRW 2023 Cameroon country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/cameroon	12 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Cameroon	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#cm	12 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Cameroon	https://rsf.org/en/cameroon	12 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Cameroon	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/cmr	12 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Cameroon - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Cameroon	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CMR	12 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Report Cameroon	IRFR 2022 Cameroon	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/	12 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 - covering 17 CPC and 11 SWL - Cameroon not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank Cameroon data – 2021	World Bank Cameroon data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CMR	12 July 2023
World Bank Cameroon overview – updated 17 March 2023	World Bank Cameroon overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview	12 July 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Cameroon - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Cameroon	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2efc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-cmr.pdf	12 July 2023

Recent history

Cameroon is a West African country sharing borders with Gabon, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria. Europeans first entered the region when the Portuguese explorer, Fernando Po, led an expedition up the Wouri River in 1472. In 1520, the Portuguese established a sugar plantation which was later taken over by the French in the 1600s. In 1884, the agreement between Germany and local chiefs put the country under German domination. At the end of WWI, the country was taken away from Germany and divided into two with France getting a mandate over 80% of the area, and Britain getting a mandate over the remaining 20%. In 1960, the French colony became independent. The following year, the northern part of British Cameroon voted to join with Nigeria while the southern part voted to join French Cameroon leading to the formation of the first Cameroon Republic, officially known as the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Source: [History World](#), last accessed 2 February 2023).

From 1960 until 1982, Ahmadou Ahidjo ruled the country as president with an iron fist. He abolished the federal government structure in 1972, followed by more repressive measures against his opponents. In 1982, he was replaced by his deputy Paul Biya (Source: [Cameroun Web](#), last accessed 12 February 2023). Today, more than three decades have passed but Paul Biya's dictatorial regime continues to govern the country.

Since late 2016, Cameroon's Anglophone regions (i.e. North West and South West) have been engulfed in a crisis which started when English-speaking lawyers, students and teachers began protesting against what they saw as their cultural marginalization and under-representation in the central government. This was met with a heavy-handed government response and over the years many innocent civilians have been killed, arbitrarily detained and physically abused by the government security forces. The [heavy-handed response by the government](#) resulted in the formation of several non-state armed groups and fueled existing separatist sentiment; the subsequent violent confrontations have caused massive displacement. According to HRW 2023 (Cameroon country chapter) describing the situation in 2022: "As the crisis in the Anglophone regions continued for the sixth year, 598,000 people were internally displaced as of August [2022] and at least 2 million people needed humanitarian aid in the North-West and South-West. ... At least 6,000 civilians have been killed by both government forces and armed separatist fighters since late 2016".

There have been peace initiatives: In March 2020, a separatist group, calling itself "Southern Cameroons Defence Forces" (SOCADEF), called for a ceasefire when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. In June 2020, government officials held peace talks in the capital, Yaoundé, with the leaders of the Ambazonia Interim Government, a major separatist group. Neither initiative led to an end to the violence ([HRW 2021 Cameroon country chapter](#)). In 2023, reports emerged that [Canada had begun](#) to mediate a peace process between the Cameroonian government and the separatist group, with the aim of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict (International Crisis Group-ICG, 9 February 2023). However, the [Cameroonian government denied](#) seeking Canada's assistance in mediating peace talks, introducing a discrepancy in information and highlighting the complexities surrounding efforts to address the conflict (Reuters, 24 January 2023).

In 2023, Cameroon continued to experience restrictions on freedoms of expression and association, indicating ongoing challenges in upholding democratic rights and civil liberties for its citizens. In the ongoing civil war, Christians are impacted both directly and indirectly. There are direct attacks targeting Christians from both sides of the conflict if they do not support their cause. The indirect impact comes from the government focusing its attention on combating separatists, which has given Boko Haram the opportunity to take advantage of security loopholes left by the security forces. Christians and their places of worship are often targeted.

Political and legal landscape

Cameroon is a unitary republic with a president as head of state. Since the country has had experience with German, French and British occupation, the country's legal system is based on a mixture of English common law and the Napoleonic Code. The parliament is bicameral: The National Assembly (the lower house) has 180 members and the Senate (the upper house) has 100 members.

Christians are very active in the political sphere but suffer from the rampant corruption and lack of democracy. Many Christians have complained that government officials are not giving them the protection accorded to them by the law, if they do not openly support the government.

Presidential election (2018)

On 7 October 2018, the country held a [presidential election](#): The turnout of 54% was far lower than in previous elections and was just 10% in English-speaking regions. The six-term octogenarian President Paul Biya was declared the winner on 22 October following the dismissal of a petition filed by multiple opposition candidates at the constitutional court alleging fraud and irregularities (The Guardian, 22 October 2018). On 6 November 2018, 85-year-old Biya was sworn-in for a seventh term as president. In late January 2019, Maurice Kamto and several Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) officials were arrested by security forces after the party held nationwide rallies calling for a recount of the 2018 presidential vote. The government used force to disrupt the CRM's rallies and relied on the same tactics when the party held rallies to call for Kamto's release in June 2019. Kamto was tried on charges of insurrection and rebellion in September 2019, but President Biya ordered his release in October. The government also banned CRM rallies.

Parliamentary and regional elections (2020)

Parliamentary elections were held in Cameroon on 9 February 2020, together with municipal elections. The Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) retained its majority in parliament, winning 139 of the 167 seats. Cameroon also held regional elections for the first time in December 2020. President Biya hoped that the first ever regional vote would appease critics who were claiming he was neglecting the 10 provinces, and that it would also end a bloody four-year insurgency in the west by English-speaking separatists. The government viewed the polls as a step towards greater regional autonomy, but opponents claimed that the vote would only tighten President Biya's hold on power and boycotted the regional elections. As a result, President Biya's ruling party [won control](#) of nine out of 10 regional councils (Reuters, 10 December 2020).

Events in 2022 and 2023

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 Cameroon:

- Corruption remained a problem. Under pressure from the IMF, financial authorities opened investigations into alleged embezzlement of funds set aside to manage the COVID-19 pandemic in Cameroon. In May 2022, corruption proceedings against the director of the Autonomous Port of Douala were suspended, reportedly at the president's behest, despite clear irregularities in his awarding of service contracts.
- In March 2022, journalist Paul Chouta, known as a strong critic of the government, was kidnapped for several hours by unidentified assailants and severely beaten.
- Also in March 2022, a general strike of high school teachers to call for improved working conditions was heavily restricted by the police.
- The conflict in the Anglophone regions wore on, with frequent reports of violence and deaths attributed to both separatists and government forces.

According to the UN (Reliefweb, Cameroon - [Situation Report](#), 15 March 2023):

- In January 2023 alone, more than 15,130 people were displaced from their places of origin due to violence and targeted attacks.
- About 54 per cent of schools are still closed in the North-West and South-West regions.
- Health care providers, services, and facilities as well as patients remained vulnerable with continued attacks from parties to the conflict.

Cameroon is also known for its restrictive freedom of the press and the expression. It was reported by RSF (World Press Freedom 2023 Cameroon): "Although Cameroon has one of the richest media landscapes in Africa, it is one of the continent's most dangerous countries for journalists, who operate in a hostile and precarious environment."

As indicated above, Cameroon faces a rampant issue of corruption within its governance and public institutions. Transparency International (CPI 2022 Cameroon) ranked the country as 142nd out of 180 countries, with a score of 26 out of 100. This low score indicates that Cameroon is perceived to be more corrupt than 141 other countries out of the 180 countries assessed. The prevalence of corruption poses a significant challenge to the nation's development, as it undermines public trust, hinders effective governance, and diverts resources away from essential services and initiatives that could benefit the population.

Gender perspective

Cameroon's legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. In particular, marriage is a place where violent repression of women takes place, especially of female converts. Whilst forced marriages are prohibited, polygamy is legal (for men) and widely culturally accepted (Civil Code, Ordinance 81-02, Art. 49, 1981). The minimum age for marriage is 15 for girls (with parental permission) and 18 for boys; according to Girls Not Brides Cameroon, a total of 31% of girls are married by the age of 18, with most early marriages occurring in the North. Within marriages violence is pervasive, and due to a lack of legislation addressing domes-

tic violence or marital rape, victims have no recourse to justice or protection ([Home Office, Country Background Note, December 2020](#)). Human rights advocates have campaigned for the cessation of harmful practices towards widows, which include a widow being publicly blamed for the death of her husband, being forced to have sexual relations with one of her husbands' male relatives, being forcibly shaven and unclothed, and being imprisoned within her own home ([Global Fund for Widows, 15 December 2020](#)).

Religious landscape

Cameroon: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	17,647,000	61.7
Muslim	5,732,000	20.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	550	0.0
Ethno-religionist	4,915,000	17.2
Jewish	87	0.0
Bahai	71,300	0.2
Atheist	53,900	0.2
Agnostic	171,000	0.6
Other	17,300	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

As per the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Cameroon):

- "Christians reside primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The Northwest and Southwest Regions are largely Protestant, and the South, Center, East, Littoral, and West Regions are mostly Catholic.
- "The Mbororo ethnic community is mostly Muslim and is located primarily in the North, Far North, Northwest, Adamawa, and East Regions, where the highest percentage of Muslims also reside; the Bamoun ethnic group is also predominantly Muslim and located in the West Region."
- "Many Muslims, Christians, and members of other faiths also adhere to some aspects of traditional beliefs."
- "The government took no action to adjudicate applications for the registration of several religious groups that had been pending for years. The government had approved only one new religious group in the previous 19 years and none since 2010. Although by law groups must register, the government continued to allow hundreds of unregistered small religious groups to operate freely under a policy of 'administrative tolerance'. According to multiple

members of the Cameroon Association for Interreligious Dialogue (ACADIR), the government remained reluctant to register Pentecostal churches because they lacked the hierarchical and organizational structures that characterized “mainstream” religious groups such as Roman Catholics and Muslims."

- "State-sponsored radio stations and the sole state-sponsored television station continued to broadcast Christian and Islamic religious services and ceremonies regularly on national holidays and during national events. Government ministers and other officials often attended these ceremonies."

Economic landscape

According to Heritage Foundation's [2023 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- Cameroon's economy is categorized as 'mostly unfree'.
- "Cameroon's economic freedom score is 51.9, making its economy the 139th freest in the 2023 Index. "Weak foundations of economic freedom prevent sustained economic expansion. An unreliable legal system provides little protection for property rights and engenders widespread corruption. The lack of a dynamic private sector holds back economic development. Structural reform has progressed only marginally, and the entrepreneurial environment is not conducive to the creation of economic opportunity." Cameroon is ranked 32nd among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is lower than the regional average.
- The country's GDP stands at USD 110.8 billion.

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Cameroon:

- "Cameroon's economy expanded at a slightly slower pace in 2022, after growing by 3.6 percent in 2021. Real GDP growth recorded 3.4 percent in 2022. Economic growth is expected to gain momentum over the medium term and reach 4.2 percent, on average, over 2023-24, supported by sustained activity in the secondary and tertiary sectors. ... Fiscal deficit is projected to narrow to 1.5 percent of GDP by 2024 amid increasing non-oil revenues."

Gender perspective

Women and girls are among the most economically vulnerable in Cameroon, in part due to limited education and employment opportunities ([OCHA, Data on Gender equality, October 2019](#)). Making it additionally challenging for women to achieve economic independence, customary practices often deny widows their due inheritance, overriding statutory provisions. In some communities women are viewed as the property of their husband, or forced into levirate marriages.

Social and cultural landscape

Cameroon, often referred to as "Africa in miniature," offers a rich ethnic tapestry with over 200 ethnic groups, including Bamileke-Bamu, Beti/Bassa, Mbam, Biu-Mandara, and others. Official languages are English and French, with 24 major African languages spoken. It is a rapidly urbanizing nation, with 58.1% of the population residing in urban areas, and a population growth rate of 2.77%. The country has a young population, with a median age of 18.7 years. Literacy is relatively high at 77.1%, with an expected schooling duration of 12.1 years. The employment population ratio stands at 73.5%, with a low overall unemployment rate. (Source: World Factbook Cameroon)

According to the [UNHCR](#) Cameroon country page (accessed 21 February 2024):

- "Cameroon hosts about two million persons of concern to UNHCR, including one million internally displaced persons*, 460,000 refugees and asylum-seekers and 466,000 IDP returnees. The refugees are predominantly from the Central African Republic and Nigeria, while the internally displaced persons mainly come from Cameroon's Far North, North-West, and South-West regions."
- "Most of the 332,000 CAR refugees reside in towns and villages in Cameroon's eastern façade, while nearly 120,000 Nigerian refugees live in Cameroon's Far North Region. 52% of the refugees are women and girls, and 55% are children. 51% of internally displaced persons are children."

As per the UNDP Human Development Report Cameroon, the country ranks 153rd out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index, with a life expectancy of 59.3 years. The Gender Development Index stands at 0.864, while the Gender Inequality Index is at 0.560, ranking Cameroon at 150th among 189 countries, suggesting significant room for improvement in women's and girls' status.

Cameroonians often have large, extended families with both [polygamous](#) and monogamous marriages (DW, 26 July 2016). Due to the traditional encouragement to have large families, more than 60% of the current Cameroonian population is under 25 years of age.

Gender perspective

Cameroon is a heavily patriarchal society, which treats women and girls as inferior to men in daily life. By law, men are the head of the household and make decisions on behalf of the family (Ordinance 81-02, Art. 212-214, 1981; Constitution, 1996). According to the [CSPPS \(2020\)](#), the COVID-19 crisis magnified the gap between men and women. 56% of women have reportedly experienced sexual violence and domestic violence is reportedly rampant ([Reliefweb/GenCap, 17 October 2019](#)). Whilst primarily a danger for women, men and boys are not exempt from the threat of sexual violence – of all reported cases of sexual violence, 11% of victims are male.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Cameroon):

- **Internet usage:** 33.1% of the population – survey date: 31 December 2021 (Most recent survey at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 17.6% of the population - survey date: 31 December 2021

According to [Data Reportal 2023](#), as of early 2023:

- There were 12.89 million internet users in Cameroon at the start of 2023, when internet penetration stood at 45.6 percent.
- Cameroon was home to 3.90 million social media users in January 2023, equating to 13.8 percent of the total population.
- A total of 23.92 million cellular mobile connections were active in Cameroon in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 84.6 percent of the total population.

According to World Bank Cameroon data:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people):** 83

Cameroon has displayed efforts to reduce the gender gap in the information and communications technology sector (ICT); the number of female Internet users has reportedly risen in recent years ([UN Women, 2015](#); [Web Foundation, 2015](#)). According to [Napoleon Cat \(January 2023\)](#), 43.7% of Facebook users are female, compared to 56.3% male. This indicates that a gender gap in relation to technology access remains.

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (Publication date: February 2023):

- "The investment programs among operators over the next few years will considerably boost mobile broadband services in rural areas of the country, many of which are underserved by fixed-line infrastructure."
- "The ICT sector in Cameroon is making steady progress, enabling the country to make better use of the digital economy. About 95% of all electronic transactions are carried through the m-money services operated by MTN Cameroon and Orange Cameroon. The government has also been supportive, having launched its 'Cameroon Digital 2020' program, aimed at improving connectivity nationally."
- "Improved submarine and terrestrial cable connectivity has substantially increased international bandwidth, in turn leading to reductions in access prices for consumers."

Security situation

Attacks by ISWAP and Boko Haram

- **In 2021:** "In the first half of 2021, attacks and raids by the Islamist armed group Boko Haram increased in the Far North Region, with at least 80 civilians killed. On January 8, a Boko Haram suicide attack killed at least 14 civilians, including 8 children, and wounded 3 others, including 2 children. The presumed death in May of Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, ... helped consolidate ISWAP's power and increased insecurity in Cameroon's Far North region." (Source: [HRW 2022](#) Cameroon country chapter)
- **In 2022:** "The Islamist armed groups Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) [continued](#) attacks in the Far North region from January to April, killing scores of civilians and contributing to the internal displacement of over [378,000](#) people as of July. Government forces violated applicable international humanitarian and human rights law by failing to fairly prosecute suspected members of the Islamist groups who committed serious crimes. The government has fallen short on its promises to assist former members of Boko Haram and ISWAP who voluntarily left as part of a disarmament program. The authorities have also failed to assist and protect women and children linked to these groups." (Source: HRW 2023 Cameroon country chapter)
- **In 2023:** "In the Far North region, Boko Haram and ISWAP have attacked civilians, carrying out killings, abductions, and lootings. In the past, government forces also committed serious abuses as they responded forcefully to the attacks. Since January, 246 attacks have been reported, causing the deaths of 169 civilians. Most of these deaths were caused by attacks by Islamist groups." (Source: [HRW 2024](#) Cameroon country chapter)

ISWAP have been attacking security forces and civilians on a frequent basis around Cameroon's Lake Chad area and around Maroua. State resources are being invested in combatting the Anglophone insurgency instead of being used against Boko Haram and ISWAP. This has given the Islamic militant groups more freedom to recruit, organize and mount attacks against Christians.

Insurgency in the Anglophone region

According to a [Crisis 24 alert](#) published on 4 January 2023:

- "Separatist activism is likely to continue in the South West and North West regions of Cameroon through at least mid-2023. The threat of violence remains elevated in the English-speaking regions as various armed groups continue to call for secession, highlighting the dangers for those operating or traveling in the impacted areas. The situation has remained tense since October 2017, when secessionists unilaterally proclaimed the independence of the so-called state of Ambazonia, which is unrecognized internationally."
- "Security forces frequently skirmish with Ambazonia secessionist militants (also called 'Amba boys'), regularly leading to casualties. Separatists have carried out ambushes targeting security forces and government officials involving improvised explosive devices. There are also reports of militant abuses, including kidnappings and killings, against the local population. Militants often issue stay-at-home orders (also known as 'ghost cities'); residents who do not comply with such measures may face intimidation and violence."

- "While many kidnappings go unreported, it is estimated that dozens to hundreds of people are kidnapped each year in both the Northwest and Southwest regions. Targets notably include prominent members of civil society, politicians, security forces, teachers, and priests, among others. Militants may target foreign nationals due to their perceived worth in the event of a ransom demand. High-profile individuals have been kidnapped in recent months, including a senator and her driver, who were seized by ADF militants in Bamenda April 30 [2022]".

According to [HRW 2024](#) Cameroon country chapter describing events in 2023:

- "Separatist fighters continued to target civilians, forcing people to stay at home and launching attacks around major events, including an annual race, the elections, and as schools re-opened in early September."
- "After Biya's announcement that senatorial elections would be held in March, several separatist groups threatened anyone who announced their intention to participate, and killed an election official on January 18, among several others. On February 5, Honourine Wainachi Nentoh, a member of parliament of the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF), was abducted by armed separatists who allegedly demanded ransom in exchange for her liberation. She was freed days later."
- "On May 20, more than 30 women were abducted by separatists in a North-West village after protesting unlawful taxes imposed by armed groups. A government spokesperson said that some of the women had been tortured."
- "During the night from July 16 to 17, unidentified alleged separatists killed at least 10 civilians in Bamenda. The assailants who were wearing military uniforms reportedly opened fire in a bar after accusing locals of failing to support the separatists."
- "On August 11, separatists reportedly raided Kekukesim village, killing at least four civilians, including the village chairperson, and burning houses."
- "Separatist fighters disrupted the start of the 2023 academic year, planned for September 4, by enforcing a school boycott. On September 7, days after schools reopened, at least three civilians in the South-West were killed in an assault blamed on separatists, who shot at car passengers and set vehicles ablaze. [According](#) to the United Nations [OHCA, accessed 30 November 2023], at least 2,245 schools are not functioning in the Anglophone regions due to attacks and threats by armed separatists."

Violation of civilian rights and abuse of aid workers

As stated in HRW 2023 Cameroon country chapter:

- "At least 6,000 civilians have been killed by both government forces and armed separatist fighters since late 2016 in the North-West and South-West regions, as armed separatist groups seek independence for the country's minority Anglophone region."
- "Humanitarian access was restricted in the Anglophone and Far-North regions and humanitarian workers have been victims of attacks by both government forces and armed groups. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), humanitarian actors continued to operate under severe constraints including repeated lockdowns, harassment at checkpoints, and the risk of improvised explosive de-

vices by armed separatist fighters in the Anglophone regions."

Gender perspective

The COVID-19 crisis, the conflict in the Anglophone region and the jihadist presence in the North have created a cocktail of pressure and violence for men and women alike; women in particular are exposed to gender-based violence. Christian women and girls risk being abducted, forcibly married to fighters and forced to convert to Islam. Christian men and boys, particularly church leaders, are also vulnerable to abduction. They may be forced into the ranks of militias, used for forced labor, or tortured and killed.

Trends analysis

The trajectory of several West African nations is influenced by a multitude of factors, with common themes including the gradual erosion of the rule of law, the emergence of coups, the growing presence of Islamic jihadist groups, and the geopolitical tensions between Western powers and Russia. Cameroon, while affected indirectly by some of these factors, is not exempt from the broader regional dynamics shaping this trend.

1) The battle against Boko Haram and ISWAP affects the whole region

West Africa is increasingly becoming a battleground, with government forces locked in a struggle against Islamic militants, including Boko Haram which is launching relentless attacks across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. For example, in October 2022, [Boko Haram](#) "militants managed to take control of the Cameroonian army's advanced post in Djibrilli, on the border with Nigeria" (Africa Intelligence, 27 October 2022). Coupled with the fact that the Cameroon government failed to protect the rights of its citizens, the future of the country does not look bright. In April 2023, citing government officials, [VOA reported](#) that "in Cameroon's northern border with Nigeria Boko Haram militants in the past week destroyed hundreds of homes in large-scale attacks that killed at least six villagers and two soldiers, and left thousands homeless." In [May 2023](#), "Fighters with Boko Haram killed three customs officers, three soldiers and two civilians in separate attacks in the towns of Mora and Zigage on the border with Nigeria, said Midjiyawa Bakari, governor of the region." The situation has been increasingly aggravated as jihadist influence continues to spread throughout West Africa, year upon year, affecting the entire region.

2) Radical Islamic ideology has made deep inroads

In Cameroon's northern region, where radicalization and militancy are rampant, the Christian community faces a particularly challenging existence. Even if forces like Boko Haram and ISWAP were vanquished, societal harmony remains elusive, as Islamist ideology has deeply penetrated the region's Muslim youth. West African nations are grappling with the sprawling influence of this jihadist ideology, which is progressively extending towards the coast.

In countries like Cameroon, where multiple conflicts coexist, the situation becomes even more complex, as security vacuums arise, providing ripe grounds for such ideologies to flourish. The likelihood of escalating sectarian violence, mirroring the levels witnessed in the Central African Republic (CAR) in recent years, is disturbingly real if current trends persist.

3) The government has become more repressive

What initially began as a protest by Anglophone Cameroonians has escalated into a full-fledged civil war, significantly impacting the social and political landscape of the nation. As a reaction, the government's approach has become alarmingly repressive, attracting accusations of severe human rights infringements. As the government continues to shift its focus toward quelling political dissent and opposition, it's diverting critical resources from the essential fight against Boko Haram. Security forces have killed thousands of people, including civilians and Christian leaders, and arbitrary arrests have become a common occurrence. This situation severely undermines fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression and association.

4) The Anglophone crisis is not solved

The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon continues to worsen, with the conflict proving to be more protracted than initially predicted. In July 2020, it was reported that the government and separatists initiated peace talks, igniting a spark of hope. However, these negotiations saw little progression by the close of 2021 (Africa Intelligence, 8 November 2021), and experts contend that the "political and economic spoils of the war have reduced the incentive to find a negotiated settlement" (New Humanitarian, 19 July 2022).

In 2023, Canada attempted to mediate between the government and separatists in hopes of finding a resolution. However, the peace talks commenced in 2020 have not yielded any substantial outcomes. In 2024, the Anglophone conflict enters its eighth year with no resolution in sight: "Insurgents in the North West and South West – the country's two Anglophone regions – are still attacking government soldiers but increasingly one another as well. Civilians bear the brunt of the fighting. Killings, abductions and sexual violence are almost an everyday occurrence, while almost half the area's schools have stopped functioning. Pro-government militias have sprung up in the Anglophone regions, spreading more chaos. Meanwhile, in the capital Yaoundé, observers worry about the country's future. President Paul Biya, who turns 91 in February, appears to have left daily affairs to a handful of loyalists in government." ([International Crisis Group, 14 February 2024](#))

In the face of these crises, Christians in the country find themselves increasingly susceptible to attacks from both sides.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: History World - <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=pau>
- Recent history: Cameroun Web - <https://www.camerounweb.com/CameroonHomePage/people/person.php?ID=1253>
- Recent history: heavy-handed response by the government - https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2019/5/28/crisis-denied-in-cameroon-government-refusal-to-recognize-suffering-in-nsw-deters-donors?gclid=Cj0KCCQjws_r0BRCwARIsAMxfDRiNNM5F4-9K6toVx60UBgM9ohd6yEkzahVvLIHxS01nTgW6yqAXkbAaAnuJEALw_wcB
- Recent history: HRW 2021 Cameroon country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/cameroon>
- Recent history: Canada had begun - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/canada-initiative-offers-opportunity-cameroon-peace-process>

- Recent history: Cameroonian government denied - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/cameroon-denies-asking-help-mediate-separatist-conflict-2023-01-23/>
- Political and legal landscape: presidential election: - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/paul-biya-cameroon-85-year-old-president-wins-re-election-landslide>
- Political and legal landscape: won control - <https://www.reuters.com/article/cameroon-election-idINKBN28K145>
- Political and legal landscape: Situation Report - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-situation-report-15-march-2023>
- Political and legal landscape: Home Office, Country Background Note, December 2020 - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948164/Cameroon_-_Background_-_CPIN_-_v1.0__final__Gov.uk.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: Global Fund for Widows, 15 December 2020 - https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5fce889a3c0f6e35f56692ce/5fdce6b05dc11341870eac54_Cameroon%20final.pdf
- Economic landscape: 2023 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://indexdotnet.azurewebsites.net/index/country/cameroon>
- Economic landscape: OCHA, Data on Gender equality, October 2019 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/data-gender-equality-cameroon>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/cameroon>
- Social and cultural landscape: polygamous - <https://www.dw.com/en/polygamy-continues-among-camerouns-traditional-rulers/a-19420852>
- Social and cultural landscape: CSPPS (2020), - <https://www.cspps.org/toughest-battles-Cameroon-fought-by-women-girls>
- Social and cultural landscape: Reliefweb/GenCap, 17 October 2019 - https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/data_on_gender_equality_in_cameroon-hno_2020-17_oct_19.pdf
- Technological landscape: Data Reportal 2023 - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-cameroon>
- Technological landscape: UN Women, 2015 - https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national_reviews/cameroon_review_beijing20.ashx
- Technological landscape: Web Foundation, 2015 - <https://webfoundation.org/2015/10/narrowing-camerouns-gender-gap-reasons-for-hope/>
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat (January 2023), - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-cameroon/2023/01/>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Cameroon-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: HRW 2022 - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cameroon>
- Security situation: continued - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroun-extreme-nord-rapport-de-situation-no-24-juillet-2022>
- Security situation: 378,000 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroun-extreme-nord-rapport-de-situation-no-24-juillet-2022>
- Security situation: HRW 2024 - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/cameroon>
- Security situation: Crisis 24 alert - <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/01/cameroon-separatist-activism-likely-to-continue-in-the-southwest-and-northwest-regions-through-at-least-mid-2023>
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- Trends analysis: Boko Haram - <https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-africa/2022/10/27/boko-haram-attack-puts-armed-forces-on-high-alert,109839018-gra>
- Trends analysis: VOA reported - <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-s-large-scale-boko-haram-attacks-leave-thousands-homeless-/7057215.html>
- Trends analysis: May 2023, - <https://apnews.com/article/boko-haram-cameroon-attacks-ee7815d117fe92398bf089356d73badb>
- Trends analysis: International Crisis Group, 14 February 2024 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/african-union-regional-bodies/b195-eight-priorities-african-union-2024>

WWL 2024: Church information / Cameroon

Christian origins

The Portuguese brought Christianity to the country in 1429. However, the Roman Catholic Church only officially started establishing congregations in the country towards the end of the 19th century. The London Baptist Missionary Society (LBMS) sent missionaries in 1845 who were part of a wider influx of European merchants and explorers looking for business opportunities and raw materials. The first LBMS missionaries were led by Alfred Saker along with a group of West Indian Baptist preachers mainly from Jamaica. US Presbyterians came in 1879.

When Germany began colonizing the region in 1880, Protestant work was taken over by German Baptists and Basel missionaries. German Catholic missionaries opened the first successful Catholic mission in 1890.

(Source: Sundkler B. and Steed C., *A History of the Church in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.750-756.)

Church spectrum today

Cameroon: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	1,500	0.0
Catholic	7,738,000	43.8
Protestant	6,598,000	37.4
Independent	1,782,000	10.1
Unaffiliated	1,528,000	8.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	17,647,500	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,275,000	12.9
Renewalist movement	2,604,000	14.8

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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.

As stated by the US State Department IRFR 2022 Cameroon: "Christians reside primarily in the southern and western parts of the country. The Northwest and Southwest Regions are largely Protestant. ... There is a growing number of Christian revivalist churches."

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Governance and security in Cameroon are major problems, with the country facing violence in three regions: 1) Far North - where Boko Haram and ISWAP continue to mount attacks; 2) North West and 3) South West, which are both areas where the Anglophone insurgency is based.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Communities of expatriate Christians do not exist as a separate category for WWL analysis, since expatriates are free to interact with other Christian groups.

Historical Christian communities: According to World Christian Database statistics, Roman Catholics make up 43.8% of the Christian population. However, there are also several Protestant denominations (e.g. Presbyterians) who can also be considered as belonging to this category. They do not suffer as much persecution as convert communities, but nevertheless, some congregations have been affected by Boko Haram violence; also, the *Dictatorial paranoia* of the government undermines the autonomy of Historical Christian communities.

Converts to Christianity: Converts from Islam to Christianity are the most persecuted Christian group in the country, whether they meet in secret or riskily share fellowship with other Christians. Convert Christians in Protestant churches, are often persecuted by family and community in the northern regions, Adamawa and in the Eastern and Western regions. Some converts were reportedly threatened during Boko Haram attacks to reconvert to Islam. Therefore, this community of Christians faces the risk of pressure, ostracism and violence. This often leads to forced displacement to safer parts of the country. Those who convert from ethnic religious beliefs to Christianity also face pressure from their community and families to renounce Christianity, but the pressure is less intensive.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This is a growing category in Cameroon; Baptist and Pentecostal groups are examples. Some Pentecostal churches have criticized the government and have faced threats of closure. Pressure exerted by the government undermines the freedom of such churches. These churches also face threats and violence from groups like Boko Haram in the north. *Islamic oppression* in the north has also made the evangelistic efforts of such groups risky (as well as integration of Christians with a Muslim background).

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Cameroon

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Cameroon: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	66	43
WWL 2023	65	45
WWL 2022	65	44
WWL 2021	64	42
WWL 2020	60	48

In WWL 2024 Cameroon rose 1 point compared to WWL 2023. The overall pressure on Christians reached 10.0 points on average, with the most significant challenges evident in the *Church* and *Community spheres*. The level of violence was extremely high, scoring 15.9 points. Boko Haram's persistent activities continued to pose a severe threat to Christians in the northern part of the country. Additionally, the civil conflict in the western region impacted Christians, with separatists compelling churches to pay 'protection money' and refrain from criticizing their actions. The government exerted pressure on Christian groups, prohibiting leaders from speaking out against human rights abuses and corruption. Rampant corruption further contributed to the erosion of security and the rule of law in numerous areas. Moreover, established church denominations persecuted other Christian groups, viewing the growing number of non-traditional Christian communities as a threat.

Persecution engines

Cameroon: 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	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all

Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

Islamic oppression (Very Strong)

This persecution engine is particularly evident in the north, in Adamawa, and also in some eastern regions. *Islamic oppression* affects primarily Christians with a Muslim background who are persecuted by their family. The Boko Haram Islamic insurgency also poses a constant threat to the life and security of Christians and has caused the displacement of many Christians from Adamawa, the north and the extreme northern regions. In remote areas in these regions, some Muslim leaders believe that Islam should be the only religion present. Although Cameroon has generally been a country showing religious tolerance, the memories and legacies of Fulani-led *jihad* in previous centuries in the northern regions lingers on: It was through *jihad* that the indigenous population was forcibly converted to Islam. The violence and activity of Boko Haram have brought these memories alive and is undermining the history of peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims in modern-day Cameroon.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

During the past three decades of Paul Biya's rule, the regime has been responsible for a whole series of political arrests, killings and persecution of Christians. The Anglophone region of the country has been particularly affected by this due to the independence movement active in the area.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Cameroon is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. The dictatorial regime of Paul Biya is responsible for the rampant corruption that weakens the country's political structure. Although the country has oil resources, it still lags behind most African countries in economic development. Corrupt officials in the northern part of the country have been responsible for the persecution of Christians by not taking appropriate action to protect Christians under attack by radical Islamic groups. Corrupt officials have also been responsible for persecuting Christians who have views opposing the government.

Clan oppression (Medium)

A significant number of the population adhere to traditional belief systems - and there are also Christians who mix traditional beliefs with Christianity. In areas where Christians oppose such practices, they will face persecution.

Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)

Well-established denominations do not welcome the activities of new church groups in the country. For example, [in 2018](#), Cameroon's Protestant, Baptist and Catholic churches called on the government to shut down a number of Pentecostal churches (DW, 21 March 2018).

Drivers of persecution

Cameroon: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	MEDIUM			STRONG	STRONG
Government officials								Strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders				Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Medium				
Violent religious groups	Very strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium								
One's own (extended) family	Medium								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong								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):** The main drivers are militant groups like Boko Haram who engage in violent attacks targeting both Christians and Muslims who do not adhere to the same interpretation of Islam as them. In addition to these groups, government officials at the local level who sympathize with such groups also contribute to the persecution of Christians.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Some Islamic preachers encourage the persecution of converts in their teaching. Such teaching supports the activities of Boko Haram.
- **Family members (Medium):** Family members and neighbors will put pressure on converts to return to Islam.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** People from wider society also put pressure on converts in the northern part of the country.
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (Medium):** Organized crime cartels and criminal networks have also played a major role in making Boko Haram more potent in the country. These networks are not limited to Cameroon itself; it is a regional issue.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** Paul Biya's dictatorial regime has been ruling the country since 1982. Recently there has been a growing opposition movement throughout the country against his regime. Most opponents are Christians since Cameroon is a Christian majority country. Several Christian leaders have been arrested, tortured and killed by government officials because they oppose the government's inhuman treatment of political opponents.
- **Organized corruption (Strong):** Government officials also participate in organized crime networks. This has made rule of law a luxury. Even violent religious groups and other groups have benefited from this role of government officials.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Boko Haram engages with criminal networks to bribe officials and to traffic people and arms.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Paul Biya's regime supports corrupt officials in order to maintain its grip on power. Corrupt officials have taken part in the persecution of Christians in the Muslim-dominated parts of the country. There are also numerous cases where corrupt officials have arrested and killed Christian political opponents of the government.

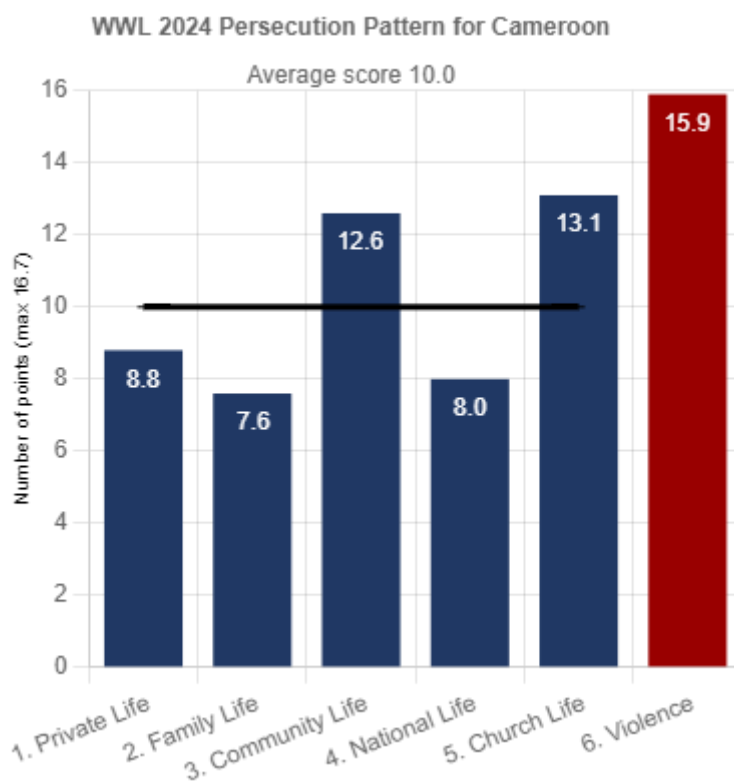
Drivers Clan oppression

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In this category of drivers are ethnic leaders, adherents of traditional belief systems, family members, and even some Christians who are mixing traditional beliefs with Christianity.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Christian religious leaders (Medium):** The leaders of well-established church denominations sometimes influence the authorities to crack down on smaller church groups in the country.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Cameroon shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Cameroon is high at 10.0 points, a very slight increase from WWL 2023 (9.9) points.
- The *Church sphere* score is the highest with 13.1 points, followed by the *Community sphere* score with 12.6 points.
- The score for violence is extremely high at 15.9 points. the same as WWL 2023.

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 2024 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 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.75 points)

Discussing Christian faith with anyone outside immediate family in the northern and northeastern regions of Cameroon risks being monitored by informers, potentially leading to attack by Boko Haram militants.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.75 points)

Christians in northern and northeastern regions face extreme risks when meeting for worship or fellowship due to the presence and influence of Boko Haram.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.25 points)

In the northern and northeastern regions, Christians - converts, in particular - face significant risks when mentioning matters of faith on social media platforms. The presence of Boko Haram sympathizers has created an atmosphere of intimidation and self-censorship.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.25 points)

Engaging in discussions about their faith poses a significant risk for Christians in the northern and northeastern regions where family and community members are likely to be influenced by radical Islam. This is especially the case for Christians with a Muslim background.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.75 points)

In northern and northeastern regions, Christian spouses of non-Christians are denied custody rights in divorce cases, mostly due to religious biases in legal systems and customs.

Block 2.13: Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity. (2.75 points)

In the northern and northeastern regions, Christians are likely to lose inheritance rights when they convert from Islam or switch church denominations.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.50 points)

Children - above all, those of covert parents - are expected to attend Islamic classes at school in the northern and northeastern regions. The closure and destruction of many Christian schools adds another layer of complexity, forcing many Christian families to send their children to schools where they may be exposed to teachings that are in direct opposition to their faith.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (2.00 points)

Baptism is particularly dangerous for Christians with a Muslim background in the northern and northeastern regions.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Christians residing in the northern and northeastern regions where there is strong ISWAP/Boko Haram influence face frequent discrimination and harassment in the local communities.

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

Discrimination, exclusion from job opportunities, unfair treatment in the workplace, or termination solely based on religious affiliation, contribute to the challenges faced by Christians in the employment sector in some areas.

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.). (3.25 points)

Christians in specific regions face heightened scrutiny, involving monitoring by local communities. This surveillance encompasses reporting to authorities, shadowing individuals, and intrusive measures like telephone line tapping or email censorship. The government does this to exert pressure on those who publicly denounce perceived injustice and limitations on religious freedom.

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

The utilization of abduction and forced marriage poses significant threats to Christians, particularly in the northern and northeastern regions. Extremist groups, such as Boko Haram, employ these tactics to instill fear, exert control, and further marginalize Christian communities.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

Governmental measures have specifically impacted the ability to openly discuss injustices or societal issues. These restrictions extend to church leaders, dissuading them from addressing matters of corruption, for instance.

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

Many Christians find themselves compelled to act contrary to their conscience. Some are coerced into serving in the armed forces, a situation that conflicts with their personal or religious beliefs. Additionally, there are instances where Christians are silenced and unable to voice their opposition to corruption, despite their desire to speak out.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.00 points)

While the Constitution does not explicitly restrict freedom of religion as outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, practical implementation poses substantial challenges to religious freedom, especially for Christians. Bureaucratic obstacles in legally registering churches act as de facto constraints, leaving these institutions in vulnerable legal positions susceptible to arbitrary closures and harassment.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (2.75 points)

Those who persecute Christians often do not face legal consequences. For example, there are cases where government officials, even with clear evidence of their role in persecuting Christians, manage to evade prosecution. Similarly, blatant violations of Christians' rights by military personnel are not prosecuted.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Churches often find themselves under surveillance by at least two major forces. Firstly, there is the monitoring from the dictatorial regime, which includes deploying agents to attend church services and observe activities. Secondly, in the northern part of the country, there are individuals sympathetic to Boko Haram who also keep a close watch on church activities.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)

Numerous churches, particularly newly established evangelical ones, are facing challenges as their applications for official recognition remain pending. The government, often withholding approval, creates a particularly difficult situation for these churches as they await responses. This delay in recognition significantly impacts their ability to function and grow.

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

Christians, particularly in the northern, northwestern and southwestern regions of the country, confront significant security threats when organizing activities outside their church compounds. These concerns are not limited to these areas; even in central regions, where security is ostensibly more stable, some churches allege that government restrictions impede their ability to organize as they desire.

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. (3.50 points)

In the northwestern and southwestern regions, several churches have been forcibly evacuated

by government forces or armed groups. Attempts by these religious communities to reclaim their compounds are often thwarted, as these sites are being utilized as military camps.

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.*

Cameroon: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	24	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?	53	10
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	5	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 *	25
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	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 *

5 Year trends

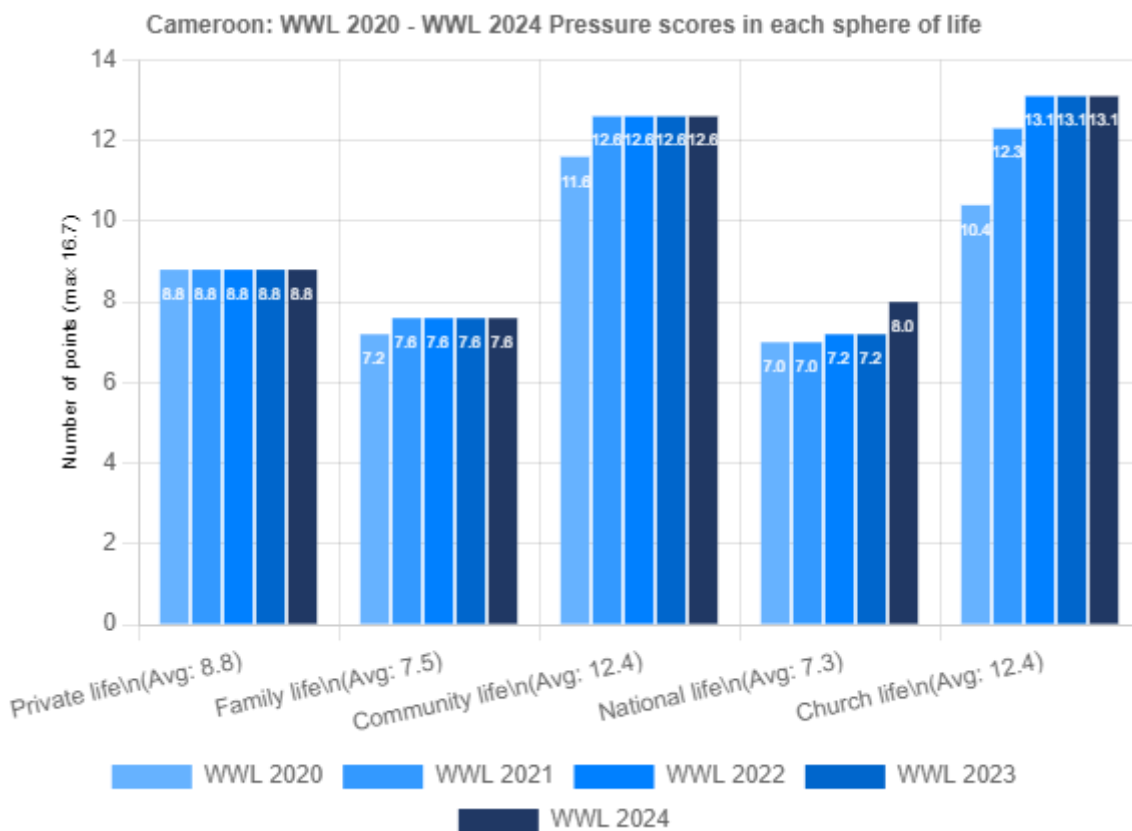
The following three diagrams show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

The table below shows that, over the last five WWL reporting periods, the average pressure on Christians in Cameroon has increased from 9.0 points to 10.0 points. However, average pressure has been stable since WWL 2022 at the 9.9/10.0 point mark.

Cameroon: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.0
2023	9.9
2022	9.9
2021	9.7
2020	9.0

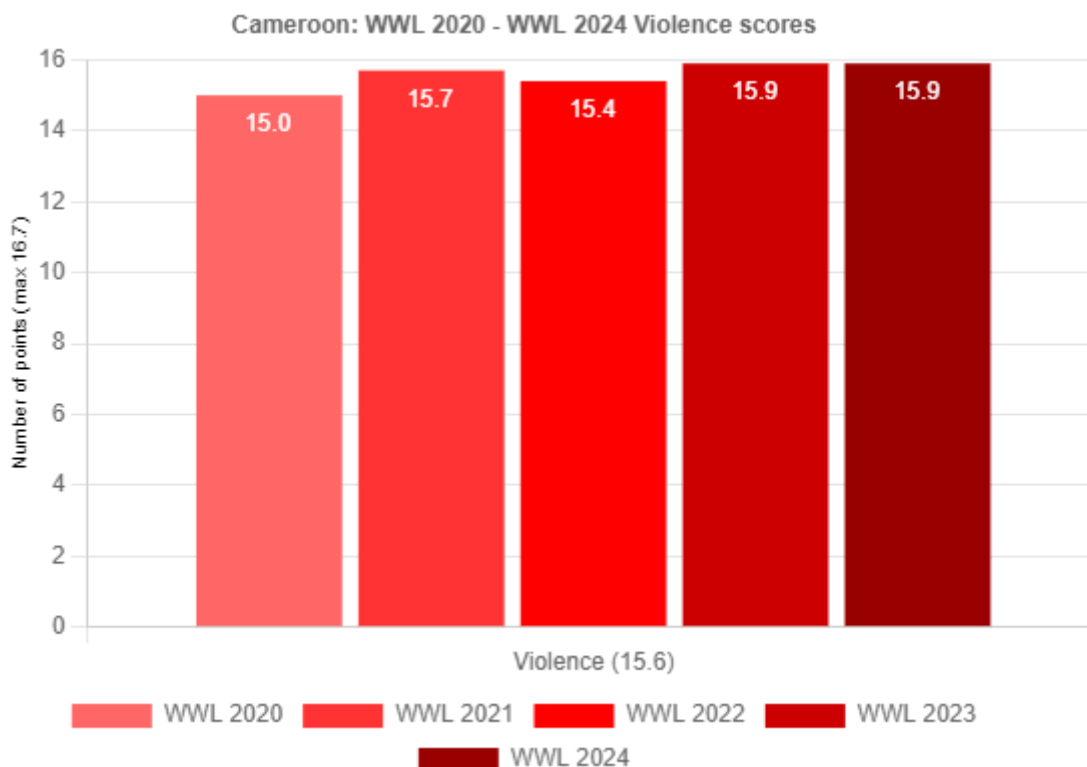
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Pressure in the *Private, Family and Community spheres*, all of which appear to have stabilized in the last few reporting periods, particularly affects converts. The five year average score is highest in the *Church and Community spheres* (12.4 points). Pressure in the *Church sphere of life* is caused by the operation of the Persecution engines *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression* coupled with the ongoing Anglophone crisis.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The chart below shows how violence against Christians is extremely high, consistently 15.0 points and above over the last five reporting periods. Although Cameroon is a Christian-majority country, Christians are being subjected to an extremely high level of violence.



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Cameroon is a secular country, yet the Far North region continues to suffer from the violent presence of Boko Haram. Christian women in northern Cameroon are subject to several forms of persecution related to their status in society. Boko Haram continues to regularly abduct women and girls, forcing them into marriage with one of their members or subjecting them to forced labor and rape. They are further put under extreme pressure to renounce their faith and embrace Islam. A country expert summarizes some of the risks: “There are reports of Christians, particularly women and girls, facing the danger of abduction and coerced marriages in specific regions of Cameroon’s northern regions where jihadist attacks are popular ... Christian women in particular are vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage as a means of intimidation and

control”. These Christians are also sometimes forced to marry Boko Haram leaders and fighters. Exemplifying just how repressive these Islamic militants are, country experts indicate that several girls have been forced to act as suicide bombers to further decimate Christian populations.

Compounding these pressures, strong governance is lacking in Cameroon. Multiple reports of sexual violence and other “pervasive” human rights violations by the military and armed separatist groups have spurred no significant government action ([Amnesty International, 2023](#)).

Female converts to Christianity from a Muslim or Animist background face further pressure within family and community. Linked partly to a lack of education, women in Cameroon are dependent on their husbands or fathers; when they decide to convert to Christianity, it can be considered an act of defiance. They can be denied the opportunity to socialize with other Christians and attend church services. Unmarried converts risk being forcibly married to a non-Christian, particularly in the north of the country. Cases of house arrests and forced confinement of Christian women and girls are rarely reported but are “very prominent, especially in families of Muslim converts.” Married converts conversely face the prospect of divorce, the loss of custody of their children, disinheritance, and eviction from the home. There are several instances where female converts have to choose between their husband or their Christian faith. If a man converts, the tendency is to alienate the wife and children, or if the woman converts, they will send her out of the house. “[This] pressure to renounce faith is part of the tactics employed by the community and radical groups to teach potential converts what awaits them should they convert”, an expert shares.

Poverty and financial dependency make Christian women and girls more vulnerable to such pressure and violence ([UN Women, 2023](#)). Women are also more likely to be employed in informal low-wage jobs that are highly susceptible to disruption during public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic ([World Bank, 25 May 2022](#)). Displaced Christian women also face severe economic hardship in Muslim-dominated regions. A country expert disclosed: “They are given irregular and meager wages by their Muslim employers. If they try to speak against this harsh treatment or demand regular pay and better wages, they are beaten and maltreated.”

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Boko Haram also poses a major threat to Christian men and boys living in the northern regions of Cameroon, particularly church leaders. Going to school remains risky for boys as well as men who are teachers, as evidenced by the chain of attacks on education since the [reopening of schools](#) in September 2022 (VOA, 15 September 2022). Men have been abducted by militant groups, tortured, and used for forced labor. Others have been forcibly recruited into the ranks of militias. This leaves Christian families without a family head and provider, making them vulnerable to attacks themselves. Communities have become reduced in size due to such attacks, compounded by many men leaving the locality for safer areas.

In the Northwest and Southwest regions, according to a country expert, men and boys are most at risk of threats to life because they are accused of supporting either military forces or separatist groups. An expert summarizes:

- “The proliferation of the Islamic militants in the North poses a major source of persecution for Christians. In their bid to establish a Sharia state, Jihadist religious leaders have mainly targeted the clergy, students, political leaders and humanitarian workers to advance their course. Under the period of review, students in mission schools have been reportedly killed, archbishops and teachers affiliated to the church have been kidnapped and molested by separatist groups and Boko Haram.”

Conflict in the Anglophone region, also known as the Southern Cameroons region, has also fueled instability in the country and caused many people to flee, including Christians.

Christian men also face discrimination in the areas of job opportunities and promotion. Furthermore, they also experience hindrances from government officials when they oppose corruption and violence. Several Church leaders have reportedly been arrested on false charges, tortured, and killed by government officials in response to their speaking out against the wrongdoings of the government. When a man refuses to get involved in unethical practices because of his Christian beliefs, he is taunted and called a coward. When jobs are refused due to discrimination, the family cannot thrive. Boycotts also affect Christian families economically, financially and psychologically. The lack of economic alternatives lends fertile grounds for the

recruitment of more men and boys into armed groups ([Relief Web](#), 2023).

Male converts to Christianity also face pressure from family and community members. They may be rejected by their nuclear families and be denied their due inheritance. A country comments, “Men too are also coerced into marrying Muslim girls to prevent them from staying Christians. Muslim girls are sent to seduce them and eventually get pregnant so the man will be forced to marry them.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

Any religious groups that have not openly supported the government face hostility from the authorities. In areas where Christians are the majority, Muslims are sometimes ostracized because the community sees them as likely Boko Haram sympathizers.

Future outlook

Dictatorial paranoia

The incumbent president (who turned 91 years of age in February 2024) has been in power for decades. He has been accused of violating the rights of the citizens. His government has restricted freedom of association, religion and expression. Some Christian groups are being denied licenses to operate in the country. As it stands there are no signs that the nature of the government will change.

Islamic oppression

The northern part of the country has seen devastating attacks by Boko Haram. This militant group has regrouped while the Cameroon government has been occupied with the Anglophone conflict. Attacks by Boko Haram are a regional issue and will likely remain a challenge for Christians in the country in 2024 and beyond.

Organized corruption and crime

The existing rampant corruption has made the life of most Cameroonians difficult and is also helping Boko Haram to operate. This issue will likely remain a challenge for the country in general and Christians in particular where they oppose it.

Clan oppression

Significant number of Cameroonians are still practicing traditional belief systems. However, Christians preachers are active in those areas and it is most likely that this Persecution engine will decrease in importance as those who adhere to such traditional belief systems are increasingly exposed to education and other religious views.

Christian denominational protectionism

This Persecution engine might grow in importance in the country. The differences between the churches are not so often about theology, but rather about who has the most members and best church buildings. If, in the future, the government chooses to allow non-traditional Christian groups (often Pentecostals) to operate without restriction, *Christian denominational protection-*

ism is likely to rise sharply.

The Anglophone crisis

According to a [report](#) by the International Crisis Group published on 23 February 2022:

- "On 16 April 2020, intelligence chief Maxime Eko met separatist leader Sisiku Ayuk Tabe, who had proclaimed himself interim president of the two regions in 2017 and was sentenced to life imprisonment in Yaoundé's maximum-security facility two years later. Together with three other imprisoned separatist leaders, they discussed conditions for talks, holding a follow-up meeting in July 2020. The separatists demanded the release of Anglophone prisoners, the army's return to the barracks, a ceasefire declaration and negotiations to be held outside Cameroon. But a hardline government faction intervened, angrily objecting to the separatists' terms when the media published details of the second meeting. The government responded by dismissing news of the talks as unfounded and ceasing all contact with the jailed separatists, dashing embryonic hopes for progress."

As stated in the *Trends analysis* above: The Anglophone crisis is more protracted than initially expected. If peace negotiations fail to materialize, the country will be in a deep crisis for years to come. However, successful peace negotiations are unlikely under Paul Biya's presidency.

Additional note

Upcoming 2025 Presidential Election: A Crucible for Democracy and Human Rights

The 2025 presidential election in Cameroon will be a significant litmus test for the state of democracy and human rights in the country. With President Paul Biya expected to run for another term at the age of 92, political tensions are already simmering. The opposition has been systematically stifled in the years leading up to this event. Arrests, imprisonments with sentences extending up to seven years, and other forms of repression have become almost commonplace tactics against those who dare to oppose the government.

If past experiences are indicative of future outcomes, the path leading up to the 2025 election will likely be fraught with challenges for opposition parties, civil society organizations and activists. It is expected that they will face an increased wave of harassment, arrests, and intimidation as the government seeks to quash any forms of dissent. This poses a considerable threat to the country's already fragile state of democracy and rule of law.

Moreover, such repressive actions could thrust Cameroon into further crisis, exacerbating existing social and political tensions. The lack of a genuinely competitive electoral environment could ignite unrest, as citizens become increasingly disillusioned with the prospect of political change. With the current trends of authoritarianism, the 2025 election risks becoming a mere formality, rather than a democratic exercise, casting a dark shadow on the future of human rights and democratic governance in Cameroon.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: n 2018 - <https://www.dw.com/en/camerouns-pentecostal-churches-under-fire/a-43070272>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (Amnesty International, 2023). - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/07/cameroon-rampant-atrocities-amid-anglophone-regions-must-be-stopped/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UN Women, 2023). - <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/west-and-central-africa/cameroon>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: World Bank, 25 May 2022 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2022/05/25/assessing-the-damage-early-evidence-on-impacts-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-girls-and-women-in-africa>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: reopening of schools - <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-officials-say-rebels-attacking-schools-/6749097.html#:~:text=FILE%20-%20Pupils%20stand%20in%20line,school%20year%20started%20on%20Sept.>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Relief Web - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/caafag-assessment-report-southwest-region-may-2023>
- Future outlook: report - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/307-rebels-victims-peacebuilders-women-camerouns-anglophone-conflict>

Further useful reports

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/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Cameroon>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.