

World
Watch
Research

Turkey: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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research@od.org

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

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

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

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Turkey

Brief country details

Turkey: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
85,562,000	171,000	0.2

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

Map of country



Turkey: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	41
WWL 2022	65	42
WWL 2021	69	25
WWL 2020	63	36
WWL 2019	66	26

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Turkey: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups
Religious nationalism	Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups
Ethno-religious hostility	Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Clan oppression	Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

The very strong *Religious nationalism* in society puts a lot of pressure on Christians. In recent years, the government started not only to target foreign (Western) Christians, but has also banned foreign Christians with Turkish spouses and children from the country. Although the number of deportations has slowed down in WWL 2023, they have not stopped and several Christians have been banned from the country. In addition, society's nationalism leaves almost no space for Christians to make an alternative message heard. Nationalism and Islam are intrinsically linked and anyone who is not a Muslim, particularly a convert or someone who openly lives out their different faith, is not seen to be a loyal Turk. Although conversion from Islam to Christianity is not legally forbidden, converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. Christians therefore sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Once known, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights by family members. Converts from Islam can legally change their religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity, but it can be a stressful process and they can still face discrimination at the hands of individual government officials.

The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects Christians who do not have a Muslim background. These are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syriacs). They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions.

Christians from all categories of Christian communities have limited access to state employment, and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government. Since religious affiliation is still recorded on ID cards (nowadays via electronic chip), it is easy to discriminate against Christian job applicants.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **December 2021:** Graffiti stating the phrase "Allah 1" was sprayed on the door of the Kadıköy Protestant Church in Istanbul ([Greek City Times, 4 January 2022](#))
- **December 2021:** On Christmas Eve, the former Hagia Sophia church in Enez, close to the Greek border, was converted into a mosque. The opening ceremony was performed by the head of the Directorate for Religious Affairs, who also held a similar ceremony in 2020, when the Hagia Sophia church in Istanbul was converted into a mosque.
- **April 2022:** A swastika was sprayed on the gate of an Armenian school in Istanbul. Armenian Christians and churches have faced vandalism and discrimination in Turkey annually around the time of the anniversary on 24 April commemorating the Armenian Genocide.
- **June 2022:** Assyrian Christians visiting a cemetery in Yemişli, a village close to Midyat, Mardin district in south-eastern Turkey, discovered that headstones had been demolished, graves had been opened and bones scattered around ([AINA News, 4 July 2022](#)). Although it remains unclear who the perpetrators are, such an act fits within a wider pattern of similar attacks on (ancient) Christian properties in previous years.
- **Entry bans:** Although the number of Christians receiving an entry ban decreased in the WWL 2023 reporting period, the Turkish government continued to ban some expatriate Christians from (re)entering the country, often on vague security grounds.
- **Christian refugees:** Although levels of violence and pressure differ between cities, Christian refugees in Turkey, including converts from Islam to Christianity, faced high levels of abuse and discrimination from both local communities and the authorities. Converts from Islam

to Christianity are particularly vulnerable as they often have no legal status and deportation to their home countries would be very dangerous. Many of those Christians are Iranian, but there are various nationalities present, including Syrian, Iraqi and Afghans. While their refugee status put them at risk, mistreatment becomes worse when their Christian faith becomes known.

- **Forced relocation:** In the WWL 2023 reporting period, both Christian refugees and some young Turkish Christians had to relocate because of family and societal pressure.
- **Imprisonment:** Syriac Orthodox monk Father Sefer Bileçen is still in prison after being sentenced to more than two years in prison in April 2021. His crime was providing visitors with bread; according to the Turkish prosecutor, the visitors in question were members of the banned Kurdish PKK movement ([Asia News, 7 April 2021](#)).

Specific examples of positive developments

- **New church under construction:** For the first time in a hundred years, a new church is being built in Istanbul. The cornerstone of the Syriac Orthodox Saint Ephraim church was laid by President Erdogan himself in August 2019. The construction is expected to be finished in 2023 ([Daily Sabah, 16 February 2022](#)).
- **Monastery re-consecrated:** In October 2022, the Syriac Catholic Monastery of St Ephrem in South-East Turkey was re-consecrated by Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan, head of the Syriac Catholic Church. The first mass for a hundred years was celebrated at the monastery ([Vatican News, 24 October 2022](#)).
- **Permission for Christian cemetery:** During the previous WWL reporting period [WWL 2022], a church was given permission to have its own church cemetery for burials. However, many other churches are still waiting for such permission, having made their applications several years ago.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Greek City Times, 4 January 2022 - <https://greekcitytimes.com/2022/01/04/istanbul-church-allah-1/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: AINA News, 4 July 2022 - <http://www.aina.org/news/20220704121818.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Asia News, 7 April 2021 - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Assyrian-monk-gets-two-years-in-a-Turkish-prison-for-giving-a-piece-of-bread-52809.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Daily Sabah, 16 February 2022 - <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/minorities/first-republic-era-church-rises-over-istanbuls-yesilkoy>

- Specific examples of positive developments: Vatican News, 24 October 2022 - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2022-10/syriac-monastery-mor-efrem-reopening-assyrian-liturg.html> WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Turkey

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 371-375)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	20 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17988453	20 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/TUR	20 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/turkey-turkiye/	20 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/turkey	20 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (pp. 62/64)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	20 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	1 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Turkey not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2022	20 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-net/2022	12 January 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkey	20 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#tr	20 June 2022
Middle East Concern – covering 24 countries	MEC country report	https://meconcern.org/countries/turkey/	1 August 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/country/turkey	20 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/tur	20 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/TUR	20 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkey/	20 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022%20Turkey.pdf	20 June 2022
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview	20 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=TUR	20 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 40-41)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-eca.pdf	20 June 2022

Recent history

Early on, Turkey's history was marked by a focus on religious identity with people being divided by their religious beliefs rather than their ethnicity. During the 19th century, Christian minorities became influenced by the Enlightenment philosophy of nationalism. This changed their focus from being Greek Orthodox (for example) within the Ottoman Empire, to being a Greek who was also Orthodox. This change in emphasis led first to Greeks and Bulgarians wanting independence from the Ottoman Empire and then spread to other groups. The fear of the rise in nationalism amongst ethnic Christian groups was one of the reasons for the genocide of the Armenian, Syrian and Greek-Orthodox Christians in the late 19th century and then again during the 1st World War. This has since instigated the further marginalization of minority groups.

Turkey is a remnant of the Ottoman Empire, which consisted of the Balkans in south-eastern Europe, modern-day Turkey, the Middle East and most of North Africa. The empire took part in World War I on the losing side of the German and Austrian-Hungarian empires. The Ottoman Empire lost all its territories outside current Turkey, when France and England divided up the Middle East and North Africa. The Turks felt utterly humiliated which led to the establishment of the Turkish National Movement. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (a.k.a. Atatürk), the Turkish War of Independence was waged, the occupying armies were expelled and a new political system was created. On 1 November 1922 the newly founded parliament formally abolished the Sultanate, thus ending 623 years of Ottoman rule. The Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 led to the international recognition of the "Republic of Turkey".

Mustafa Kemal became the republic's first president and subsequently introduced many radical reforms with the aim of transforming the Ottoman-Turkish state into a modern, secular republic. The country rapidly modernized and became a multiparty democracy in 1945. However, politics were dominated by the Turkish army which staged coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997 against the elected governments. Strongly secular politicians were viewed by the Turkish public as incapable and highly corrupt, which led to a political change in 2002. Since 3 November 2002, Turkey has been governed by the conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In August 2014, after three terms as prime minister, Erdogan was elected Turkish president. On 15 July 2016 a coup was foiled and the regime took the opportunity to strike back fiercely. It accused the Islamic preacher and former ally, Fethullah Gülen (in self-exile in USA), to be behind the attempted coup. Tens of thousands of soldiers, policemen, judges, politicians, journalists, teachers, imams etc. were arrested on accusation of supporting Gülen and many more were removed from their workplaces and made unemployed. Nationalism, which already played an important role in Turkey, soared to new heights and minorities have since under renewed pressure (especially the Kurdish population).

In April 2017, a referendum was held on [constitutional reforms](#) which would change Turkey from being a parliamentary democracy into a presidential one, granting considerable power to the president and making him the absolute decision-maker in Turkish politics (BBC News, 16 April 2017). In addition, the [new reforms would allow](#) Erdogan to stay in power until 2029 (BBC News, 16 April 2020). A small majority of 51% voted in favor of the reforms, with many yes-votes coming from the Turkish diaspora, and in April 2018 Erdogan announced new elections for both parliament and the presidency. Both elections in June 2018 [were won](#) by Erdogan and his AKP party, making him one of the most powerful leaders Turkey has ever had (BBC News, 25 June 2018).

Although President Erdogan cancelled the state of emergency which had been in place since the June 2016 coup, it did not stop the Turkish government from [cracking down](#) on opponents and alleged coup supporters (BBC News, 8 July 2018). One case in particular was the detention of US Pastor Andrew Brunson for alleged support of Fethullah Gülen and the PKK, which [led to sanctions](#) being imposed by the USA (BBC News, 2 August 2018). The Turkish economy [suffered quite severely](#) from these developments (BBC News, 10 August 2018). Brunson was eventually [released in October 2018](#), after being sentenced to three years imprisonment (World Watch Monitor, 12 October 2018).

In a major shift, the AKP party lost Ankara and Istanbul in the 2019 mayoral elections, which was perhaps a sign that the president had begun losing popularity. An important and positive development was the AKP's [acceptance of the re-election results](#) for the position of mayor in Istanbul in June 2019 (BBC News, 24 June 2019). The acceptance of the results of the re-election was (internationally) regarded as a major test for Turkish democracy. However, Erdogan significantly undermined the elections by transferring authority from the mayors to government-led ministries, making it impossible for opposition mayors to materialize their own plans ([Al-Monitor, 25 Augustus 2020](#)). In addition, the lack of freedom of press and the strong accusations against opposition parties remain an issue of major concern.

In a show of strength, Turkish army units [invaded Syria](#) in October 2019 to drive Kurdish forces back from the Turkish border (BBC News, 14 October 2019). Turkey views the armed Kurdish groups in Syria as terrorists who support the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, which Turkey has been fighting against for decades. Later on, in January 2020, Turkey officially began [deploying troops in Libya](#), in support of the West Libyan UN-backed Government of National Accord; support which did not come for free (see below: *Security situation*). Its intervention became a game-changer for the war in Libya, with the Turkey-supported forces ending the siege of Tripoli by East Libyan strongman Field-Marshal Haftar (The Independent, 6 January 2020). Currently, Turkey is keeping its troops and Syrian mercenaries in Libya to protect its interests and recently extended the mandate of its troops, although there is growing international and Libyan pressure to remove them ([Al-Monitor, 30 June 2021](#), [AP News, 21 June 2022](#)).

On 10 July 2020, after a ruling by the Council of State which cancelled the decision to turn [Istanbul's Hagia Sophia](#) into a museum, Erdogan signed a presidential decree to convert the building into a mosque again. The move was internationally widely condemned and viewed as derogatory towards Orthodox Christianity in particular (CNN, 10 July 2020). Nevertheless, the move was a longstanding wish of Erdogan's religious support base, with Erdogan being in need of support given the various (economic) difficulties being faced. Slowly, but steadily, Erdogan is reversing the legacy of Turkey's founder Ataturk, with some analysts asking whether Turkish secularism will now be completely replaced by Islamism ([Al-Monitor, 24 July 2020](#)).

Domestically, Erdogan has continued to tighten his grip on society. In December 2020, the AKP-dominated parliament adopted a new law introducing far-reaching oversight measures for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). It allows for the replacement of NGO executives by government appointed officials as well as annual inspections, which can lead to restrictions on NGO activities ([Freedom House Press Release, 4 January 2021](#)). In addition, in July 2021 Erdogan announced that he intends to 'regulate' foreign funded news agencies. In June 2022, the Turkish-language websites of Deutsche Welle and Voice of America were blocked for not applying for broadcasting licenses. The licenses would have given the Turkish media regulator RTÜK editorial control over online content ([Politico, 1 July 2022](#)). In addition, a [new anti-disinformation law](#) adopted in October 2022 seeks up to three years in prison for anyone "disseminating misleading information" in an apparent effort to further curb online media (The Guardian, 13 October 2022; see also below: *Technological landscape*).

In the current Turkish media landscape, in which over 90% of the media companies are owned by businessmen connected to the AKP, independent media can only survive with foreign funding. Although Erdogan would appear to have almost total control over Turkish society, these measures might well be introduced with an eye on holding early parliamentary elections ahead of the scheduled June 2023 date. These measures would then serve to counter the independent media's popularity - especially in social media news coverage ([Al-Monitor, 22 July 2021](#)).

On the geopolitical level, Erdogan saw himself forced to seek rapprochement with the UAE and Saudi-Arabia, in an effort to increase foreign investments in an economy strongly hit by inflation, which saw the cost of living soar by 70% ([BBC News, 5 May 2022](#)). In exchange for those investments, he almost made a U-turn regarding his support for the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, which the UAE and the Saudi Kingdom deem to be a 'terrorist organization' ([Haarezt, 7 May 2022](#)).

However, Erdogan has not given up all contact with the Muslim Brotherhood as a meeting with representatives in May 2022 showed ([Nordic Monitor, 30 May 2022](#)).

Political and legal landscape

Turkey is a presidential republic currently under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. According to Turkish legislation based on the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, only four religious groups are recognized by the state: Sunni Islam, Greek Orthodoxy, Armenian Apostolics and Judaism. A citizen's religion is recorded in official documents, although since 2017 new ID cards no longer have a written entry for religion anymore. However, religious affiliation is still registered on the ID card's electronic chip and it is still common for government officials to ask for one's religion.

Turkish legislation does not allow the training of church ministers in private education centers. As a result, all Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic seminaries were forced to shut down in the 1970s and 1980s and remain closed to this day. But under the guarantees of the Lausanne Treaty, the Greek and Armenian communities still maintain church grade schools accredited by the Ministry of Education. The Catholic and Protestant churches are able to provide catechetical training to their children on church premises. Turkish Christians from a Muslim background have no facilities at all - they must either pursue their studies informally or train their pastors and leaders abroad.

Purchasing premises for church use can prove to be very difficult, since zoning laws tend to be arbitrary. Turkish law stipulates that only certain buildings can be designated as churches. Whether or not a specific building may be used by a religious group as a church is highly dependent on the political and personal leanings of the local mayor, as well as on the attitude of the local population.

According to the Association of Protestant Churches: "[A] large portion of the Protestant community tries to overcome the problem of finding a place to worship by establishing an association or religious foundation ... and then renting or purchasing a property such as a stand alone building, shop or depot that has not traditionally been used for worship. ... However, many of these premises do not have official status as a place of worship and therefore ... they cannot benefit from the advantages ... given to an officially recognized place of worship such as free electricity and water as well as tax exemption. When they introduce themselves to the authorities as a church, they receive warnings that they are not legal and may be closed down." ([TeK, 2021 Human Rights Violation report](#))

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU, Democracy Index 2021) classifies Turkey as a 'hybrid' regime, although Turkey scores lower for the indicator 'civil liberties' than many "authoritarian" ranked countries.

According to Middle East Concern (MEC country report):

- "The constitution establishes Turkey as a secular state, affording no privileged status to Islam or Islamic law. While a founding principle of the modern Turkish state is the separation of State and religion, a degree of tension is inherent in this as the State must control religion to the extent necessary to prevent religion controlling the State. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion,

and guarantees the free exercise of worship and religious rites, including freedom from religious compulsion, provided religious practices do not undermine the fundamental rights of others. Religious conversion is legally permitted, including from Islam, though social disapproval may be encountered.”

- All non-recognized religious groups "must register as associations or foundations (with charitable or cultural objectives) in order to gain legal status. Although the Lausanne Treaty stipulated that recognized non-Muslims could govern personal status issues according to their own rites, all citizens of Turkey are now subject to the secular civil code."

Gender perspective

Turkey’s legal framework has several loopholes that allow for gender inequality; indicative of this, Turkey ranks 130th out of 153 states in the [Global Gender Gap Index ranking of 2020](#). Whilst child marriage is prohibited, it is not punished as a criminal act; 15% of girls are married before the age of 18, with Syrian refugee girls at a heightened risk ([Girls Not Brides, 2022](#)). In 2020 President Erdogan made a second attempt to pass legislation that would grant rapists amnesty on the condition they married their victim ([Freedom United, 7 February 2020](#)). Whilst unsuccessful in passing this new law, the president withdrew Turkey from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in March 2021 (the Istanbul Convention) ([Council of Europe, 22 March 2021](#)). This is viewed as a political move to appease conservatives within Erdogan’s party, who oppose the bill for encouraging divorce and protecting victims regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, which they fear could lead to same-sex marriage being permitted ([BBC News, 26 March 2021](#)). In the light of high rates of violence against women, femicides and ‘honor killings’, the withdrawal has been met with widespread condemnation; it is feared that perpetrators now have a greater sense of impunity than before ([Deutsche Welle - DW, 3 March 2021](#); [London School of Economics, 17 September 2020](#)).

Religious landscape

Turkey: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	171,000	0.2
Muslim	84,148,000	98.3
Hindu	830	0.0
Buddhist	40,600	0.0
Ethno-religionist	13,300	0.0
Jewish	15,500	0.0
Bahai	24,300	0.0
Atheist	59,700	0.1

Agnostic	932,000	1.1
Other	155,500	0.2
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

According to WCD's 2022 estimates, 98.3% of the Turkish population is Muslim, a third of whom are Alevis or Shia Muslims. Most Turks are Sunni Muslims. Only 0.2% of the population are Christian.

Turkey is currently going through a gradual change from being a strictly secular country to a country based on Islamic norms and values. When secularism prevailed, Christians and Muslims in Turkey experienced many restrictions since the state interpreted secularism to mean far-reaching state controls and that no religion should be encouraged to flourish. Under the current regime of President Erdogan, secularism has steadily diminished and the country is accepting a more pronounced Islamic influence.

Non-Muslims are tacitly banned from jobs in state administration, security forces and in teaching positions, especially regarding subjects like history and religion. Non-Muslims state that when they enlist for military service, their religious affiliation is noted by their superiors and there is also a "security check". There are no non-Muslims among Turkish military officers, provincial governors or mayors. However, in June 2011, for the first time in Turkey's history, a Syriac Orthodox citizen was elected to parliament.

In May 2010 the government released a decree to all government organs stating that the rights of Christian and Jewish minorities should be respected and their leaders should also be treated with respect. In August 2011 the government published a decree to return state-confiscated assets that once belonged to Greek, Armenian or Jewish trusts. Two issues should be noted in this context: For the return of the properties it is essential to be a registered organization, which is difficult in Turkey; and in all these actions there is no mention at all of the emerging Turkish Protestant church. The decrees did not prevent the government from seizing over 100 title deeds from the Syriac Church since 2014. [55 deeds were returned](#) in May 2018 after the EU parliament also addressed the issue (World Watch Monitor, 1 June 2018). In addition, hundreds - if not thousands - of old church buildings are in a state of total neglect and are on the verge of becoming ruins where Christians have been forced to leave. This all adds to the slow but ongoing disappearance of Christian heritage in the country.

Other sources report:

- USCIRF 2022: Turkey has been kept on the 'Special Watch List' after recording troubling religious freedom conditions. Serious bureaucratic obstacles remained in place, including the closure of the Halki seminary. Various religious and ethnic minority communities were targeted both by government officials as well as non-state actors and received threats of violence and actual violence.

- **Middle East Concern (MEC country report):** [Since 2018] “significant numbers of foreign Christians resident in Turkey have been banned from the country. In 2018 the Armenian Apostolic Church in Turkey attempted to elect a patriarch as the incumbent was suffering from dementia and unable to function in his role. The election was prevented by the state and this state interference was condemned by the Constitutional Court. The death of the patriarch in 2019 opened the way for elections to proceed. In 2019 President Erdogan laid the foundation stone of a new Syriac church in Istanbul – the first such church to be built since the founding of the republic in 1923.”

Economic landscape

According to the CIA World Factbook:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$28,400 (2020 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 13.7%, with youth unemployment being almost twice as high at 25.2%
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 14.4% (2018 est.)
- **Youth unemployment:** "High unemployment rates among young people - male: 20.8%; female: 26.0% according to World Bank, 2020 - are clouding Turkey's economic future in addition to the negative effects of COVID-19, especially on tourism. Gender gaps in pay and labor force participation rate were highest when including the refugee population" [Georgetown](#), 2019/20, p.37).

According to the World Bank country overview (Recent Economic Developments):

- **Economic growth:** "Economic growth is expected to moderate to 1.4 percent in 2022 as macro-financial volatility intensifies and the impacts of Russia-Ukraine materialize, before returning to 3.2 percent and 4.0 percent in 2023 and 2024, respectively. Net exports are expected to drive growth in 2022, offsetting the drag from contractions in investment and private consumption."
- **Inflation:** "Inflation is projected to accelerate further to 61 percent in 2022, assuming no change in the monetary policy stance and high global commodity prices."
- **Account deficit:** "In 2022, lower export growth and rising import prices are expected to widen the current account deficit to 6.4 percent of GDP."
- **Outlook:** "Both external and domestic risks are tilted significantly to the downside. The Russia-Ukraine war has raised considerable uncertainty around the outlook. The war could: continue to increase commodity prices and exacerbate inflation, disproportionately impacting the poorest households; undermine Turkey's nascent tourism recovery; and spill over into Türkiye's financial sector by raising nonperforming loans in affected corporate sectors. ... The slowdown in economic growth and job creation in 2022 and persistently high inflation mean that the poverty rate is to remain high at 11 percent through 2024."

Other sources report:

- The World Bank's [World Development Indicators \(Fiscal Year 2021\)](#) rank Turkey in the "Upper middle income" category.
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2022) shows that after years of steady improvements in the economic indicators, the COVID-19 crisis negatively effected the economy, which is taking

time to recover. "Human Flight and Brain Drain" indicators as well "Economic inequality" indicators are showing steady improvement.

- A [2020 study by SODEV](#) found that the majority (70.3%) of Turkish youth think that making a career is not possible without the right social contacts (i.e. nepotism) and more than 60% want to move abroad (Middle East Eye, 21 May 2020).
- A 2022 SODEV report entitled "[Youth crises](#)" describes how students feel underrated and excluded in a country where politicians drive polarization (on ethnical lines), and where they are labeled as "traitors" and "terrorists" because of their criticism.

Gender perspective

Due to the increasing Islamization, it has reportedly become harder for women (both Christian and secular) who do not wear a head-covering to obtain employment. Many Christians also report that by not listing themselves as Muslims on their identity cards (or leaving it blank), they have been unable to obtain jobs in the private sector. In general, Christians in Turkey face discrimination in employment due to the hostile environment in Turkey. Christians are also kept out of senior positions in the government and armed forces.

Female converts may be additionally vulnerable due to patrilineal inheritance practices; whilst the Civil Code grants. The 2021 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security study showed that the proportion of women in Turkey aged 25 and older and in employment was 28.5% ([GIWPS](#), 2021, p.78). Data suggests that Turkey has the highest gender gap in Europe and Central Asia as regards female labor force participation, with a gender gap of 38%, about 12% higher than the global average ([GIWPS](#), 2022).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Turkish population (70-75%) are Turkish. 19% of the population is from Kurdish descent, while other minorities make up 6 -11% of the population (2016 est.).
- **Main languages:** The official language is Turkish. Kurdish and other minority languages are spoken as well.
- **Population growth rate:** 0.67% (2022 est.).
- **Urban population:** In 2022, 77% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 1.11%.
- **Literacy rate:** 96.7% of the population can read and write; with a difference between men (99.1%) and women (94.4%) (2019).
- **Youth population:** The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up 39% of the population, making it a country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** In 2022, Turkey hosted 3.65 million refugees from Syria and 145,000 refugees from Ukraine. In addition, there are 173,000 Iraqi's, 116,000 Afghani's and 27,000 Iranians living in Turkey. Around 1.1 million Kurds are internally displaced because of the conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdish PKK.
- **Life expectancy:** 76.2 years on average; women (78.7 years), men (73.8 years).

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Turkey ranks 54th out of 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score of 0.820, making it one of the highest scoring countries in the wider MENA region.
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.924, women are somewhat disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender. Reflecting this disparity, the mean years of schooling for girls currently sits at 7.3 years, compared to 9 for boys (HDI profile).

Turkish society is on average conservative, Muslim, tribal and patriarchal. 'Turkishness' as an identity is continually used as a political weapon, since being Turk is commonly understood as being a Sunni Muslim. All other religious groups experience discrimination. In addition, many Arab refugees face hostility as they are blamed for rising prices and unemployment. Despite the social hatred, Turkey still hosts millions of Syrian refugees and has been hailed as an example for other countries by the World Bank. Nonetheless, President Erdogan has used the migrant crisis to force the European countries to [pay six billion euros](#) for hosting the refugees (The Guardian, 17 March 2020).

Despite the agricultural roots of Turkish culture, modern-day Turkey is urban and has a young population (see above). In addition, a 2020 poll by the Foundation for Social Democracy ([SODEV](#)) found that the majority of the youth prefer "freedom of speech for all" over national and religious values (Middle East Eye, 21 May 2020). The majority of the Turkish population (77%) lives in urban areas and the rate of urbanization stood at 1.1% in 2022.

An issue of particular concern remains the general hostility towards Christians and Jews; hate-speech targeting Christians has been common for many years now. This has been encouraged by the government's response to the attempted coup in 2016; by vehemently attacking all (assumed) enemies it has stirred up nationalism in the country. The Hudson Institute wrote in April 2019:

- "Since the abortive coup, revisionist historical dramas disseminating anti-minority conspiracy theories ... have become the most effective form of propaganda. ... What is most alarming is the role of Turkey's state-run media outlets in smearing and scapegoating religious minorities, using state funds for incitement, particularly against Jews and Christians" ([Hudson Institute, 19 April 2019](#)).

Christians among Iranian refugees in Turkey are experiencing great difficulties. Many Iranian converts from Islam to Christianity flee to Turkey to escape persecution in their home country, with some of them illegally crossing further into Europe. However, those who follow the legal path and register with the UNHCR most often find themselves stuck in Turkey, because there are no (Western) countries willing to resettle them. They are not legally allowed to work and cannot open a bank account or even rent an apartment legally. Making things worse, they are settled in a specific location in Turkey and are not allowed to travel elsewhere, although circumstances often simply force them to live elsewhere ([Article 18, 6 November 2019](#)). Hence, many of them accept illegal and very low paid jobs to survive, leaving them vulnerable to

exploitation and abuse. One Iranian convert described his escape to Turkey as "the worst decision you could ever make" ([Article 18, 1 July 2022](#)). In addition, despite their refugee status, they are still at risk of deportation back to Iran ([Article 18, 16 March 2021](#), [Duvar English, 4 February 2022](#)).

Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, conversion to Christianity is widely considered to be unacceptable. Social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity or from one Christian denomination to another are likely. This causes converts to sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Christians with a Muslim background who hide their new identity from their family and relatives would also hide their praying, their Bible and Christian materials and their accessing of Christian television and websites, etc. Those who hide their Christian identity are often afraid to meet up with other Christians. In conservative Islamic families it is more difficult for converts to be open about their Christian belief - in particular for women. Converts are under close watch by their families and communities and are sometimes put under house arrest by their families in an attempt to force them to recant their new faith. The lockdowns introduced to combat the spread of COVID-19 also served to increase the risk of domestic violence as family members spent more time together at home ([DW, 10 April 2020](#)). Many victims are hesitant to file for divorce or report abuse – particularly sexual violence – due to the attached stigma ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 83.8% penetration – survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 83.8% penetration – survey date: January 2022

A survey by the Turkish Statistical Institute ([TUIK, 27 August 2022](#)) identified that 89.1% of men aged 16-74 were Internet users, compared to 80.9% of women. Data further indicates that more men use social media platforms such as [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) (NapoleonCat, July 2022). This gender gap in access to technology could make it more difficult for female converts to access Christian resources and community.

According to World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 97.4 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report:

- Turkey is rated as "not free".
- "Internet freedom continued to decline in Turkey. During the coverage period, the 2020 Social Media Law was used to force platforms to remove content, primarily from independent and critical media outlets' websites. Thousands of online users, including members of the political opposition, faced criminal charges for their social media activities. Self-censorship, the proliferation of progovernment outlets, and blocking of independent media websites has created a less diverse online space in Turkey. Furthermore, progovernment troll networks orchestrated smear campaigns against outspoken activists, and prominent journalists faced physical violence in retribution for their online reporting."

Turkey is a modern country, although rural areas tend to be less well developed. The Turkish government monitors all Internet use, mobile phones and landlines. Many websites are blocked in Turkey. Moreover, a recent law forces all major social media companies to store their user data inside Turkey, making it potentially possible for the government to track down anonymous posts ([Independent, 29 July 2020](#)). The Turkish government has proposed a new anti-disinformation law that "allows for jail sentences of up to three years for those who "disseminate information that misleads the public" about public health, public order, or internal and external security of the country. ... It also affords new powers to the administration to sanction the online media with various financial tools. ([Al-Monitor, 26 June 2022](#)) This is another nail in the coffin for free speech in Turkey.

The US International Trade Administration reported in 2022 (ITA, [Turkey - Country Commercial Guide](#), 26 July 2022):

- "92% of households have access to broadband internet. Turkey has 68.9 million active social media users (80,8% of the population). The most used social media platform is WhatsApp, followed by Instagram, and Facebook. On August 6, 2020, Parliament passed legislation that could significantly restrict access to platforms (those with more than 1 million daily users in Turkey) that are non-compliant with official requests to remove content deemed offensive. The law also requires social media companies to have at least one representative in the country."

Epitomizing the current political situation is Turkey's record regarding journalism: For four years, Turkey was the country with the highest number of journalists in prison. This strict policy seems to have been successful: While the freedom of press has further deteriorated, the number of imprisoned journalists has dropped slightly as journalists apply self-censorship. However, even more striking is the high level of control the Turkish regime has over almost all Turkish television, radio and newspapers. All broadcasts are automatically paused when a speech by the president is to be aired and there is a strict screening process for checking which commentators can appear on TV ([Al-Monitor, 12 June 2020](#)).

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks Turkey 149th out of 180 countries (World Press Freedom 2022). RSF states:

- "Authoritarianism is gaining ground in Turkey, challenging media pluralism. All possible means are used to undermine critics. ... tactics such as near systematic censorship on the internet, frivolous lawsuits against critical media outlets or the misuse of the judicial system have, until now, enabled Erdoğan to restore his popularity rating. ... As the 2023 elections approach, ultra-nationalist groups, spurred on by anti-media political rhetoric, are taking to the streets to attack reporters, columnists, commentators and citizen-journalists who cover politics and discuss the economic crisis."

Turkey's intelligence agencies are well equipped and it is believed that the activities of Protestant Christians in particular are monitored closely. Nevertheless, Sat-7, God TV and other Christian television and radio channels are broadcasting into Turkey. The Internet is used by many Christian groups to access Christian materials, which is often preferred over owning a hard copy of the Bible. Bible correspondence courses are particularly popular.

Security situation

After the attempted coup of July 2016, developments in Turkey changed dramatically. The government took on more dictatorial powers and both nationalism and Islamization soared. The fight against the militant Kurdish minority intensified and Turkey took a much more assertive stance on the international scene, becoming [militarily active](#) in neighboring Syria and Iraq, primarily targeting Kurdish forces (Reuters, 22 July 2020). As an example of this, WWR reported ([Open Doors Analytical, 8 July 2020](#)), that in June 2020 the Turkish airforce explicitly bombed Christian villages in the area surrounding Zakho in Dohuk district of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), allegedly to target PKK supporters. The Turkish presence in Syria led to a further building up of tensions with Syria, Kurdish groups in Syria as well as with the USA. Domestically, the conflict with the Kurdish PKK continues after the ceasefire ended in 2015 ([International Crisis Group, 28 June 2021](#)).

Secondly, in a growing effort to enlarge its role in the wider region, in 2020 Turkey gave substantial military support for the UN-backed West Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA). Turkey's navy, air and intelligence support, including thousands of pro-Turkish Syrian fighters, proved to be a [game-changer](#) in Libya. Libya's capital Tripoli was in immediate danger of being overrun by East Libyan strongman Field-Marshal Haftar and the Libyan National Army; but with the Turkish support Haftar was driven back from the capital (Middle East Eye, 20 August 2020). The different Libyan governments have since stated clearly that all foreign forces should leave the country, including the Syrian mercenaries and Turkish troops. To date, Turkey has been unwilling to comply and in June 2022 even extended the mandate of its troops in Libya for another 18 months ([Arab News, 9 May 2021](#), [AP News, 21 June 2022](#)). The main reason why Turkey does not want to withdraw is that Turkey's support did not come for free; in exchange for supporting the GNA, the latter signed a deal [allowing Turkey to drill for gas](#) in Libya's territorial waters in the Mediterranean Sea (DW, 4 January 2020).

Furthermore, Turkey's involvement in Libya should also be seen in light of President Erdogan's neo-Ottoman vision, as well as in support for Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. This pits Turkey, together with like-minded Qatar, against countries like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt who all strongly oppose the Muslim Brotherhood, which those governments view as a threat to their stability. Unsurprisingly, those countries support Libyan strongman Haftar. That said, recent rapprochements between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt respectively seem to have forced Erdogan to tone down his support for Islamist groups ([Arab Center DC, 2 June 2022](#)).

In addition, Turkey is also battling with Russia for influence in the region. Russia actively supports Syrian President Assad, and mercenaries from Russian security firm Wagner fight alongside Field-Marshal Haftar's forces. While Turkey supported Azerbaijan with drones and Syrian fighters during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, it was Russia which ended the conflict before all of Nagorno-Karabakh was conquered by Azerbaijan and installed a peace-keeping force in the area. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 offered a new opportunity in the fight for regional influence, with Turkey supplying Ukraine with Turkish-built drones ([Al-Jazeera, 19 July 2022](#)).

To complicate its foreign activities even further, Turkey is involved in a [conflict with Greece](#) regarding natural resources in the eastern Mediterranean Sea (BBC News, 13 September 2020). Unsurprisingly, while Turkey made a deal with Libya's GNA, Greece made an agreement with Egypt regarding their mutual boundaries in the Mediterranean. It appeared that both sides recently started talking again, but in May 2022 Erdogan accused Greece of recommending the USA not to sell F-16 fighter jets to Turkey and vowed not to speak to the Greek prime-minister again ([Al-Jazeera, 24 May 2022](#)).

Hence, it is clear that the ideological battle and the battle for resources remains closely linked in the context of a wider battle for regional influence.

Turkey remains the only Member State of the Council of Europe that has not recognized the right to conscientious objection to military service and as such Christian men who object on religious grounds face severe harassment by the state, including administrative and criminal proceedings based on the Law on Conscription and the Military Criminal Law which ultimately results in 'civil death' – the loss of fundamental rights and freedoms ([IOG, 5 January 2022](#)).

Trends analysis

1) The security services continue to clamp down on all opposition

The state of emergency which was declared after the failed 2016 coup has officially ended, but the security services are continuing to clamp down on all forms of opposition. With new laws in place, human rights organizations are claiming that the state of emergency has now actually been made permanent. Even six years later, there are still arrests being made of alleged followers of Fethullah Gülen. For example, in October 2021, more than 175 arrest warrants were issued against (ex)soldiers and others who allegedly had links to the Gülen movement ([Politico, 19 October 2021](#)). Anti-terrorism laws are also frequently used to target government critics and the last remaining independent journalists in Turkey ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 30 June 2022](#)).

2) Turkey's economy and geopolitical activities point to an uncertain future

Although Turkey has seen huge economic growth since 2000, there is now a lot of uncertainty about the future. The value of the Turkish Lira has been in a downward spiral for almost three years and youth [unemployment](#) remains generally high (Trading Economics, accessed 12 January 2023). The unstable political situation on the geopolitical level is another major challenge, with Turkey fighting against the PKK inside Turkey and the Kurdish-led SDF in Syria, and supporting the GNA in Libya, having supported Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Hence, President Erdogan is playing an insecure (geopolitical) game on multiple fronts which might deeply affect Turkey in the coming years.

Yet, to bolster his reputation in light of upcoming elections in June 2023, Erdogan is looking to invade other parts of Syria ([Al-Jazeera, 20 July 2022](#)). Starting a conflict to increase his support is a trick Erdogan has used before ([Politico, 11 August 2015](#)).

3) All non-Sunni citizens have faced growing pressure

As a result of strict government policies, the level of intolerance has risen and all those not siding with President Erdogan face oppression. Non-Sunni citizens (including the tiny Christian minority) are facing growing pressure, which is increasingly translating into violent incidents. Christians do not seem to be direct targets for government persecution but the general situation for Christians is deteriorating. The situation for Historical Christian communities in the southeast of Turkey is particularly worrying. A lot of their property has been taken away by the Turkish government in recent years and their ancient culture is gradually disappearing. Besides that, the arrest and prosecution of US Pastor Andrew Brunson, who was being held as a political hostage from 2016 to 2018, shows clearly that the Turkish government under President Erdogan has developed into a regime without scruples. Overall, Christians need to act carefully, especially in the public sphere.

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WWL 2023: Church information / Turkey

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in Turkey going back to the Bible's earliest New Testament days. Due to the missionary activity of the Apostle Paul and others, Christian congregations were founded in what is now Turkey in the 1st century AD. Indeed, the Bible's Book of Revelation starts off with letters written to seven congregations in western Turkey.

Under Constantine (Roman emperor from 306 to 337 AD) Christianity became the state religion. The city of Byzantium (a.k.a. Constantinople - the current Istanbul) became a hub for Christianity. In 1054 the Great Schism took place which caused a lasting split between the Western and Eastern Church. The result was that Byzantium became the center of eastern or Orthodox Christianity, and also the capital of a huge empire - the Byzantine Empire. In 1453, the Ottoman Turks conquered this empire when they took the capital by military force. Since then, Christians

in Turkey have been under Muslim domination. A policy of Islamization began and Christianity gradually lost its influential position in the country.

Protestant missionaries entered Turkey in the early 19th century and from the 1840s worked predominantly with the Armenians. By the end of the 19th century there was a large Armenian Protestant population throughout the land. Since the 19th century, the power of the Ottoman Empire began to crumble, and territories were lost. During the First World War the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary. In 1915 (and following years) more than 1 million Armenians and Assyrians [Syriacs] were killed, decimating the Armenian Orthodox Church in what came to be known as the Armenian Genocide ([Britannica, accessed 12 January 2023](#)).

The Ottoman Empire finally collapsed in 1920. After the 1st World War and the ensuing 1919 Paris Peace Conference and 1920 Treaty of Sevres, the allies divided Turkey up into various areas. The Greeks were given a large portion in the west, the Kurds and remaining Armenians were to have areas in the east, the allies were to control areas in the south and the main waterways, leaving a small part in the center for Turkish administration. The Greeks invaded to claim the area given to them but were defeated by the new Republican movement led by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). At the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, Turkey was formally recognized in its current form. The failed attempt by the Greeks helped lead to the population exchanges in the early 1920s; a large part of the Greek minority was forced to leave Turkey and moved to Greece, weakening not just the position of the Greek Orthodox Church but also the wider Christian witness in Turkey. In the newly formed state of Turkey, the remaining Greek, Armenian and Syriac minorities faced heavy discrimination. Protestant missionaries were allowed to stay after the Treaty of Lausanne, but under tighter restrictions and with fewer rights than before and slowly stopped working there. Protestant missionaries returned to Turkey in the 1960s and found two Turkish Christians; the Turkish church has been slowly growing ever since.

Church spectrum today

Turkey: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	78,900	46.1
Catholic	45,000	26.3
Protestant	25,000	14.6
Independent	12,200	7.1
Unaffiliated	10,400	6.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	171,500	100.3

(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)

Evangelical movement	8,000	4.7
Renewalist movement	8,500	5.0

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

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

Originally, in 1923, only two church denominations were recognized by the Turkish state - the Greek Orthodox Church and the Armenian Orthodox Church. At that time, they together formed about 70% of all Christians in Turkey. In addition to the Syriac Orthodox community, which was not included for protection listed by the Lausanne Treaty, there are also Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, expatriate Protestant Christians and indigenous Turkish Christians. After a lengthy court battle, official status was granted in the year 2000 to the Istanbul Protestant Church in Altintepe. This was the first (and up until now, only) official recognition of a Protestant church in Turkey.

In April 2007, the Turkish (Protestant) Christian community was shocked by the brutal torture and murder of Christian converts Ugur Yuksel and Necati Aydin and German national Tilman Geske. The murder took place at the Zirve publishing house in Malatya, in the east of the country (see above: *Map of country*). The culprits, who pretended to be interested in the Christian faith, were caught, but it took more than ten years to bring them to justice, while significant doubts remain whether all those involved were actually punished ([Mission Network News, 28 January 2019](#)).

Further southeast, once the heartland of the historical Christian communities, only a small number of the their population remain. In 1914, nearly 25% of the Turkish population was Christian. Only 0.2% remains today ([The Conversation, 21 November 2019](#)). Near Midyat (see above: *Map of country*), several monasteries are still inhabited, including the famous Mor Gabriel Monastery - built in 397 AD, which is the oldest surviving Syriac Orthodox monastery in the world. Another 1,500 year old monastery in the same area, Mor Yakup, has been restored after being abandoned following the Armenian Genocide. However, both monasteries are further threatened in their existence. Title deeds were taken from Mor Gabriel and only (partly) returned after a lengthy legal dispute even involving the European parliament and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ([World Watch Monitor, 1 June 2018](#)). Father Aho, the custodian of Mor Yakup, was sentenced in April 2021 to two years in prison for "supporting a terrorist organization" after providing bread for visitors who where allegedly members of the Kurdish PKK ([Asia News, 7 April 2021](#)). Christians from the historical Christian communities in this area have been caught up in the struggle between the Turkish government and the local Kurdish population, and that ordeal continues to this day.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Historical Christian groups like the Armenian and Assyrian (Syriac) churches face high pressure and hostility in the south-eastern region of Turkey. For decades, they have been caught between the rivalries of the Turkish army and Kurdish resistance groups. Most Christians from those churches do not live in their ancestral region anymore but have moved to western areas of Turkey.

Most Turkish Protestant communities are located in the Western coastal cities, including Istanbul. Those cities tend to be more liberal and secular, while inland areas are more conservative, Islamic and socially hostile towards Christians. However, some urban areas within the bigger cities are conservative as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

There are expatriate Christians in the country, but they are not involuntarily isolated from other Christian communities. Because these foreign Christians can freely interact with other Christian communities, they are not considered as a separate category for scoring and WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

These include the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches (the only churches "recognized" in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923), and the Assyrian, Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic churches, all of which are monitored regularly and subjected to controls and limitations by the government; their members are considered "foreign" in many official dealings, as well as in the minds of the general public. They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstacles. For example, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches need permission from the Turkish government to select new church leaders.

There are also expatriate Christians belonging to Historical Christian churches. There are Russian Orthodox Christians who have residency permits, while there are also Roman Catholics, mostly immigrants from Africa and the Philippines. In the past few years, their ranks have swelled with the thousands of Christian refugees arriving from Syria and Iraq to escape the war in their homelands.

Converts to Christianity:

Christian converts from a Muslim background bear the brunt of rights violations in Turkey. Pressure comes from family, friends, community and even the local authorities. They are considered traitors to the Turkish identity. Besides converts from a Turkish background, there are also communities of converts from other countries such as Iran.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations mostly exist as small groups and some are unable to afford a rented place of worship. Many of them are meeting in private homes, which can lead to opposition from neighbors.

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WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Turkey

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Turkey: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	41
WWL 2022	65	42
WWL 2021	69	25
WWL 2020	63	36
WWL 2019	66	26

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

The rise in total score was due mainly to an increase in reported violence against Christians, with the violence score rising from 4.6 to 5.7 points. Average pressure only increased very slightly to the level of 12.1 points. Although no Christians were killed during the WWL 2023 reporting period, a higher number of church buildings were damaged, desecrated, converted into mosques or otherwise attacked. In Turkey, Islam is totally blended with a fierce nationalism. Aggressive rhetoric from the government has left little space for other voices, including the Christian one. There is a high level of distrust towards Christians, especially in inland Turkey, making public outreach hard, and resulting in high levels of societal opposition. During the WWL 2023 reporting period, asylum seekers and refugees of Christian faith in particular (including converts from Islam to Christianity) from such countries as Iran, Afghanistan and Syria faced significant discrimination and abuse.

Persecution engines

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

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 (Strong) combined with Religious nationalism - Islamic (Strong)

Fierce, fanatical nationalism affects all categories of Christian communities in Turkey. The greatest pressure is on Christian converts from a Muslim background. Family, friends and community will often exert heavy pressure on them to return to Islam, the faith of the fathers. The general opinion is that a true Turk is a Muslim. Conversion is not only a question of family honor being hurt, it is also seen as a case of 'insulting Turkishness'. This can result in court cases and imprisonment. The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects non-convert Christians who are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syrians). They are hardly regarded as full-fledged members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions.

Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

This persecution engine has grown stronger since the WWL 2020 reporting period in the context of the Kurdish conflict. Syriac Christians in the south-eastern region particularly feel the pressure from the Syrian civil war and are caught between Kurdish clans, the government and the Kurdish militant group, PKK. Tribal leaders use their power to push out the Syrians from their homeland in the southeast. This mostly affects rural Christian populations. Many Christians live in large cities in western Turkey and are not strongly affected by this, although social hostility towards ethnic Christian minorities is present in all of Turkey.

Clan oppression (Medium)

Tribal law and customs still play an important role in especially the eastern provinces of Turkey. Converts from Islam are likely to face more pressure there, as conversion to Christianity is not only seen as betrayal of Islam, but also of the family and clan.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

Since the failed coup of July 2016, President Erdogan's government has dropped its mask of supporting democracy and is openly restricting freedom throughout Turkish society. The media have been curtailed, and all forms of opposition face persecution. In addition, President Erdogan has [declared](#) that "democracy and free press are incompatible" (Ahval News, 3 October 2018), which is not surprising given the many journalists in prison. Although Turkish Christians are not directly targeted by the government at the moment, the regime has openly declared Sunni Islam to be the religious norm in the country, thus clearly marginalizing Christianity.

Drivers of persecution

Turkey:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	STRONG	STRONG	MEDIUM				STRONG	
Government officials	Strong	Strong	Medium					Strong	
Ethnic group leaders			Medium						
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	Medium							
Violent religious groups	Medium	Medium							
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	Strong	Strong	Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Medium					
Political parties	Medium	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. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism - Islamic

- Government officials (Strong/Strong):** President Erdogan seems intent on changing Turkey from being a secular country into a Sunni Muslim one. So far, the changes have been implemented very gradually. One of those steps was the change in the Constitution after the [referendum](#) in April 2017, which gave the president more power and freed the way for him to stand in two more elections (The Guardian, 10 April 2017). In contrast to previous years, the government has now also started to target Turkish Christians: Some non-Turkish spouses of Turkish Christians have been banned from the country. In addition, many expatriate Christians who fulfilled important roles within the Turkish Protestant church have been banned from the country. In the recent past, there have been issues over church property, particularly in the troubled south-eastern region. The government closed down and confiscated church buildings there for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the government said this happened because of reformed land registry laws and the reorganization of

municipalities, in other cases the government [seized control of churches](#) for security reasons (WWM, 18 July 2017). Although it is difficult to prove whether the government is purposely hindering Christian communities or not, one country researcher is convinced that the government is trying to push the already diminished historical Christian communities out of Turkey.

- **Extended family (Strong / N/A), non-Christian religious leaders (Medium/Medium) and citizens (Medium/Strong):** Converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. Once discovered, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights.
- **Political parties (Medium/Strong):** In July 2017 the opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP), organized a "Justice March" against the government, which was joined by hundreds of thousands of people. Nevertheless, it seems that none of the opposition parties are vocally supporting the historical Christian or other Christian communities, which leaves them vulnerable to government pressure. In contrast, the coalition parties encourage the Islamic-nationalism narrative.
- **Violent religious groups (Weak/Weak):** The Turkish Grey Wolves are a group that has grown in influence in Turkey, also due to the nationalist rhetoric of President Erdogan. Being fiercely nationalistic, they blend Turkish identity with Islam. The Grey Wolves are not shy of using violence and it is believed that its members have been behind several attacks on Christians, especially Christian refugee communities.

Drivers of Ethno-religious hostility

- **Citizens, including mobs (Strong):** Turkish society is in general hostile towards its ethnic religious minorities. Refugee children in particular have been bullied in schools, while right-wing mobs intimidatingly drove through Armenian neighborhoods in Istanbul during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** In the more rural areas, conservative norms and values are upheld by ethnic leaders. In the southeast, it would seem that Kurdish chiefs are trying to force the historical Syriac community out of the traditionally Christian territory. The Kurdish PKK is also trying to purposely drag the Syriacs into their conflict with the Turkish government for nationalistic reasons.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials often have a negative attitude towards the ethnic historical Christian communities (Armenians, Syriacs and Greeks).

Drivers of Clan oppression

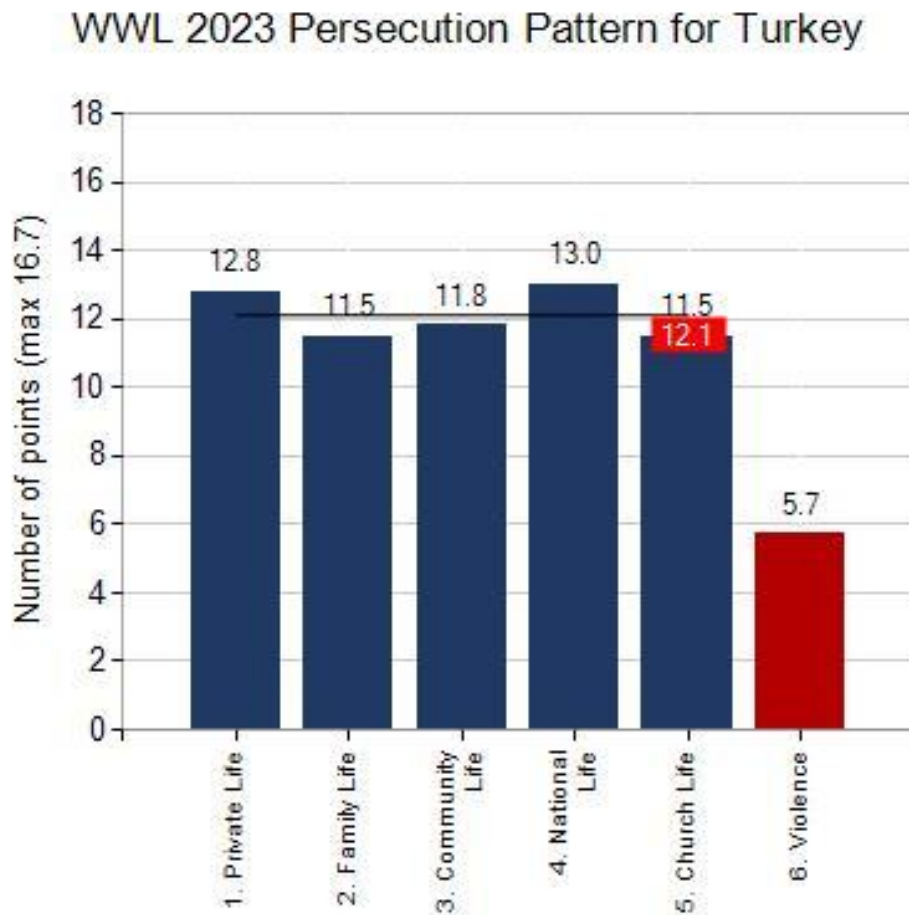
- **Citizens and (extended) family members (Medium):** Family ties can be strict within Turkey and society regards a true Turk to be a Sunni Muslim. Christians, even those coming from historical Christian communities, are seen as foreigners and a conversion from Islam to Christianity is often regarded as shaming the honor of the family.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The backlash resulting from the attempted coup of July 2016 has led to heightened polarization and public scapegoating of anyone who (allegedly) does not support Turkey or President Erdogan's vision for Turkey. The fact that the alleged

mastermind behind the coup, Fethullah Gülen, is residing in Pennsylvania and that the USA has not extradited him so far (due to lack of evidence that he orchestrated the attempted coup) has increased tension between Turkey and the USA. Protestants in particular have felt the deterioration in relations. Since the USA is seen as Christian, Christians in Turkey are portrayed as spies of the West. Hate-speech and threats to Protestant churches have increased. The general atmosphere is tense and the murder of South Korean evangelist Jinwook Kim in November 2019 stirred up fear.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Turkey shows:

- The average pressure on Christians remains at the very high level of 12.1 points. In WWL 2022 it was 12.0 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *National sphere of life* (13.0 points) and is directly related to the animosity towards Christians (caused both by nationalistic feeling and the growing societal opposition towards anything Christian). It indicates not only the difficulty Christians individuals experience but also that of Christian organizations operating in Turkey. Media reporting on Christians is also very biased and Christians regularly experience discrimination when engaging with the authorities.

- The next highest score is for *Private life (12.8 points)* and reflects both the difficulty for converts to openly practice their faith among their family members as well as the growing pressure on all Christians to be careful about how and with whom they speak about their faith in a climate that is hostile towards Christianity.
- The score for violence rose from 4.6 points in WWL 2022 to 5.7 in 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 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, there are likely to be social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity (or from one Christian denomination to another). Although the level and nature of oppression from families varies considerably depending on the background of the family, conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable.

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.). (3.50 points)

Public expressions of faith in writing (often online) can result in some level of persecution, either in writing or in other forms. Especially converts from Islam to Christianity can sometimes lose their jobs, face harassment by family and friends, or receive threats after their new faith has come to be known.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

Levels of social hostility towards Christianity are high in Turkey and conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable. Discussing one's Christian faith with fellow citizens can lead to harassment and social exclusion.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

Harassment of Christians is common in Turkey and displaying Christians symbols can provoke hostility and (physical) violence.

Block 1 - Additional information

Individually, Turkish convert Christians experience the highest levels of pressure in the Private sphere where family members can make life difficult, especially for (young) women. However, Turkish society is diverse, with traditional Islamic, secularist, leftist, cosmopolitan, nationalistic,

or a combination of these traits, present in families. Hence, family pressure can vary significantly depending from which background a convert comes. In contrast to neighboring countries, Turkish converts do not have to be afraid of being arrested by the police, since conversion is not illegal in Turkey.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)

If the ID card of a convert parent reads Muslim, the family's children are obliged to attend courses on Islam at school. Although it has recently become easier to get an exemption from Islamic classes, many converts have not changed their religious registration because of the social stigma for them and their children. In addition, the Turkish curriculum is in general influenced by Turkish nationalism and the idea that Christianity is something alien to Turkish society.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.75 points)

Several instances of children of Christians being bullied have been reported over the years. Children of Christians, and especially of converts, are often harassed either because of society's religious intolerance or because of nationalist zeal.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.25 points)

Adoption is not a common practice in Turkey, but Christians are even more likely to be unable to adopt a child. In 2013, President Erdogan stated that Turkish children adopted by Christian (and gay) couples in foreign countries should be retrieved and brought back to Turkey. Hence, it is nearly impossible for Christians to adopt a Muslim child.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)

The hostile environment makes it difficult for parents who are converts to raise their children in a Christian way, especially if there is also pressure from the (extended) family.

Block 2 - Additional information

Establishing Christian family life is not impossible in Turkey, but significant challenges remain, especially regarding the upbringing of children in a Christian way. Baptisms are not hindered by the authorities, but family and societal pressure can still force Turkish Christians to conduct them secretly. While marriage registration and other civil procedures are in principal secular in nature and do not cause much hindrance, finding a burial spot to have a Christian funeral can be difficult as the number of Christian cemeteries are few and the deceased has to be registered as a Christian. In theory, Turkish Christians should not be discriminated against in custody, inheritance or divorce cases as the law is secular and not based on the Sharia. However, in practice prejudices

and discrimination might occur, especially due to the Islamization of the judiciary under President Erdogan.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Name calling, death threats and other types of harassment are commonly experienced by many Christians in Turkey.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.75 points)

There are compulsory Islamic classes in the schooling system, although non-Muslim children can opt out. However, there have been reports of societal and teacher discrimination against those who opt out. Christian schoolchildren are regularly discriminated against in classes, by both teachers and other students. There are Christians who study at Turkish universities but they are barred from reaching higher positions or professorships at university level. In addition, thousands of new Imam Hatip schools have been opened in recent years; raising the total number of these Islamic education schools to over 5,000. Hatip schools are playing a more and more important role within the Turkish educational system and are generally inaccessible for Christians.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Christians have no access to state employment and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government.

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

Individual Christians are being watched by both government and society. Turkish Christians know that all their communication is monitored by the government. Also, Turkish intelligence agencies actively try to recruit informers and there are fears that it is not uncommon for unidentified agents to be participating in church activities. Even newspapers can be threat, as some media have been publishing negative articles (including names and pictures) about several Christians.

Block 3 - Additional information

Turkish society is in general hostile towards Christianity, not least because President Erdogan commonly portrays 'the West' as a threat. Turkish historical Christians are generally viewed as 'foreigners'; as the saying goes: "A true Turk is a Sunni Muslim", which summarizes well social attitudes towards Christians. In the once majority Christian southeast of Turkey, the few remain-

ing Christians from the historical Christian communities are still being discriminated and driven out, as recent abductions and (legal) actions against clergy and monasteries have shown. Despite this, Turkish society is diverse with the Turkish Christian community being able to flourish in some areas, especially in the western, more liberal coastal areas.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)

The Turkish Constitution is very restrictive in its approach towards the rights of religious minorities. Although the Constitution does not technically limit the freedom of religion, it clearly promotes 'Turkishness' above all other ideologies.

Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Access to public sector jobs, the state's security apparatus and law enforcement is denied to Christians, as is promotion in the army, despite obligatory military service. Although one's religious affiliation is no longer visibly displayed on the new ID cards, it is still registered on the chip in the card.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (4.00 points)

Local media and columnists in particular have been biased against Christians. There have been several reports of intolerance and prejudice against Christians.

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

Christians have to be very careful when expressing themselves in public. Social prejudice makes it difficult to speak out and the Turkish government does not accept criticism.

Block 4 - Additional information

At the national level, Christianity is viewed as a foreign influence, despite the fact that the historical Christian communities have roots going back to the beginning of Christianity. Especially since the attempted coup in 2016, Turkey has seen a rise in Islamization and has become even more religiously (and ethnically) intolerant. A clear example is the case of Fabronia Benno, the first Syriac Christian politician, who functioned as co-mayor of the south-eastern city of Mardin. Running under the name Februniye Akyol, as longstanding policies prohibit the use of the Syriac language, she was dismissed after two years in 2016 following accusation of ties with the Kurdish PKK.

In recent years, hundreds of expatriate Christians, including ones with Turkish spouses and children, have been deported from the country. Although such action is claimed to be necessary on grounds of security, it seems that these deportations are linked to the holding of a conference about working with youth and children. In addition, it is likely that foreign spouses of Turkish Christians and pastors are being deported to put the latter under pressure.

Turkish converts can formally change their religious affiliation, but family pressure and fear of discrimination prevents some from doing so. While the media have almost been completely taken over by companies linked to the AKP and President Erdogan, Turkish civil society and NGOs have become increasingly restricted. For instance, a new NGO law focusing on anti-terrorism allows severe interference by the authorities.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)

It is impossible to register as a new religious community. Although there is an option for churches to register as an "association", this is also a difficult process and some applications have been denied. Establishing a foundation with the aim of supporting a new religious community is also prohibited.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (4.00 points)

It is very difficult to get official permits for repairing or renovating church buildings. Many church buildings, seminaries or schools that have been confiscated in the past, have not been returned. Building new church buildings is almost impossible. It is an absolute exception - the first time in a hundred years! - that a [new church](#) is under construction in Istanbul. The cornerstone of the Syriac Orthodox church was laid by President Erdogan himself in August 2019. (TRT World, 3 August 2019).

Block 5.10: Christians have been hindered in training their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)

The training of Christian leaders is impossible to do legally in Turkey. The seminaries of the historical Christian communities were closed down in the 1970s and have remained closed ever since, despite a campaign from the Greek Orthodox Church to reopen their seminary in Halki. Only unofficial training can take place. Many church leaders are sent abroad for their training.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.75 points)

It remains very difficult to formally establish and run any kind of association with a clear Christian profile. All activities in this area are monitored and Christians struggle even more as they are supported by foreign churches in most cases, which is viewed with suspicion.

Block 5 - Additional information

Church life is restricted in Turkey. Although Christians are able to freely gather for worship, Christian converts do not have their own church buildings; they have to rent spaces or have to use (foreign) historical church buildings. Following the Lausanne treaty, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches need permission from the Turkish authorities to appoint church leaders. All

church activities, publications and (foreign) visitors are being monitored; there were recent attempts by the intelligence agencies to recruit church members as informers among both Turkish and foreign refugee Christians. On the positive side, Bibles and Christian materials can be imported, printed and sold openly, although churches refrain from distributing them freely because of (severe) social opposition. Likewise, Christian programs can be broadcast from within Turkey, but some churches censor themselves and keep a low profile to avoid social opposition. Others have an open and active online presence, but have to put up with a lot of hate-speech.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

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

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

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

Turkey: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	7	4
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	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?	1	1
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	10 *
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?	1	1
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?	1	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	5	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	3	40

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** No Christians were killed because of their faith during the reporting period, but several Christians have been killed in previous years.
- **Churches and Christian buildings attacked:** Several (historical) church buildings, a Christian cemetery and a monastery were desecrated, while an Armenian school was vandalized.
- **Christians attacked:** Several Christians have faced attacks, harassment and bullying.

- **Christians sentenced:** Assyrian priest, Sefer Bileçen, was sentenced to two years in prison on charges of supporting the outlawed PKK in 2021 and remained imprisoned during the WWL 2023 reporting period. His case is a typical example of historical Christians becoming the victim of the ongoing friction between Kurdish separatists and the Turkish authorities.
- **Christian properties attacked:** At least one family in the southeast of the country was the victim of mob violence and damage to their property.
- **Christians forced to relocate or leave the country:** Several foreign Christians were forced to leave the country or were not allowed to re-enter. Several Turkish Christians had to relocate because of (family) pressure.

5 Year trends

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

5 Year trends: Average pressure

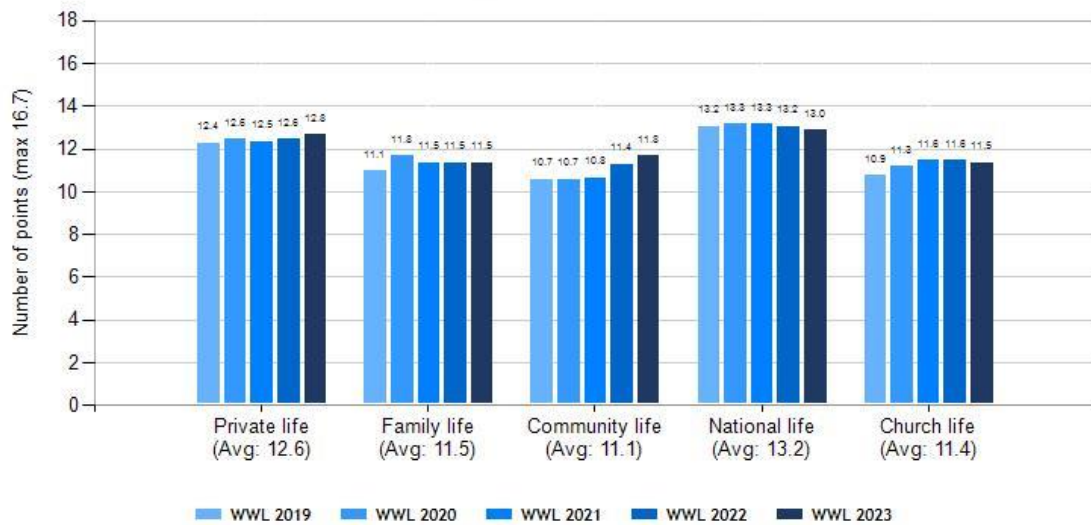
Turkey: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	12.1
2022	12.0
2021	11.9
2020	11.9
2019	11.7

The table above shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has slightly risen in the last five reporting periods, remaining at a very high level. This reflects the growing pressure on Christians in general due to the changing political climate.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

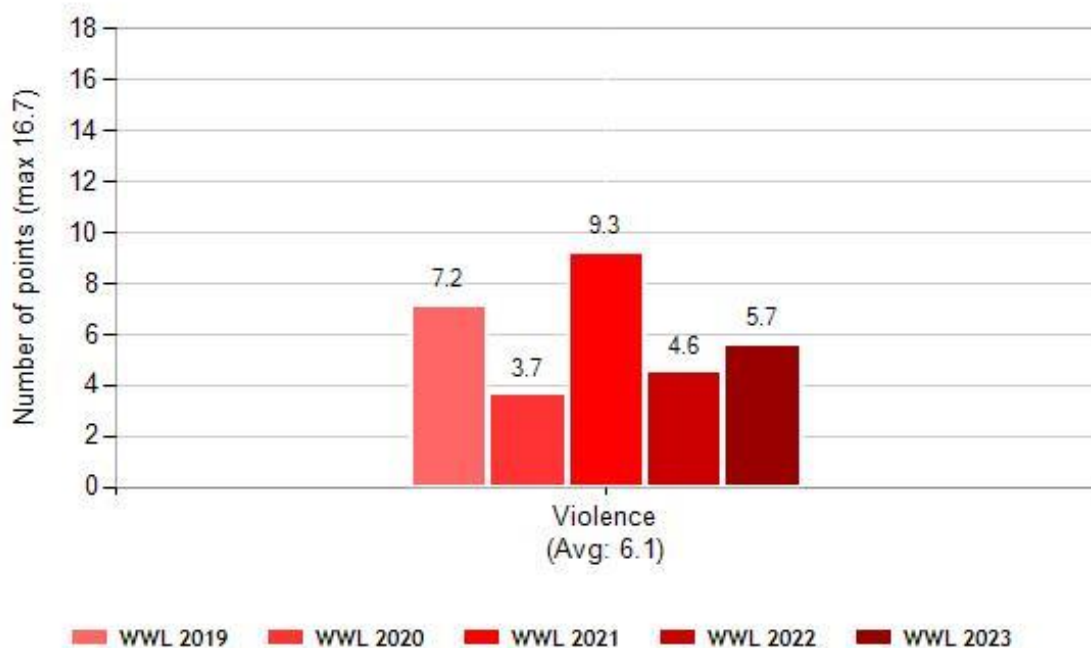
The chart below shows that - with the exception of *Community life* - the level of pressure in all *spheres of life* has more or less been stable over the last five WWL reporting periods. The very high score for the *National sphere of life* for five consecutive WWL reporting periods reflects the difficult political and public climate for Christians in Turkey.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Turkey
(Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Turkey
(Violence)



The chart above shows that the score for violence targeting Christians in Turkey was at a very high level during the WWL 2019 reporting period, but then decreased considerably in WWL 2020. The highest score occurred in WWL 2021 and was mainly caused by the killing of two Christians and a higher number of attacks on church properties being reported. Likely due to less Christian activities being organized during the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer violent incidents were reported for WWL 2022. The rise in WWL 2023 was due largely to a higher number of at-

tacks on church properties, with also a higher number of Christians being forced to relocate inside the country.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

Although the Turkish legal system is generally not prejudicial as regards religious freedom, “elevating Islam’s public role in this constitutionally secular republic has been more than a slogan; it has found expression in many government policies”, according to the [Economist](#) (1 July 2019). As regards the rights of men and women, the prevailing culture and the lack of implementation of their equal rights under law allows for some gender inequality in practice.

Turkey knows high levels of domestic violence and femicide. Despite [several campaigns](#) organized to change these attitudes, Turkey [withdrew from the Istanbul Convention](#) (BBC News, 30 July 2020 and 20 March 2021). A country expert summarizes: “Generally speaking, women are more vulnerable to persecution in Turkey because their position in society is of inferior status...Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence, did anything but help the role of women in Turkey. Christian or other minority women are particularly vulnerable, even more so in rural areas. Violence and murders of women have massively increased over the past years under Erdogan’s rule.”

Female converts are most vulnerable to persecution, especially in rural areas. Within Islamic society they are already considered to have less authority than men and are subject to familial control. Becoming a Christian, or marrying a Christian, contradicts the expectations on women to bring honor to their family; they are expected to honor their families by their career choices, their relationships and their marriage choices. The violation of rights of women and girls affects their families, inspiring anger, fear and anxiety in other family members.

Converts – particularly those who are unmarried – face the threat of being locked in the family home. Reports indicate that girls have fled their homes to other cities in order to find safety. Converts also risk sexual abuse, harassment, rejection and being denied access to church or religious materials. Sexual abuse is rarely talked about in Turkey’s honor and shame culture – as such, many victims carry trauma alone. Experts indicate that female Turkish Christians experience greater levels of mental abuse than men in general.

Christians also face pressure in the public sphere. Given the current increased emphasis on Islam in Turkey, women are likely to face increasing pressure to meet Islamic expectations of dress

and conduct. Those who fail to do so risk being harassed, insulted and even physically harmed.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In Turkey, media, police, bureaucratic and communal discrimination and hostility target both male and female Christians. However, men face the additional pressure of interwoven religious and cultural expectations: They are expected to be defenders of Islam and Turkishness, concepts which are closely aligned in public perception. Failure to live up to that expectation creates pressure on men that can prevent them from ever stepping foot into a church.

According to sources, men and boys are more likely to be detained or threatened. They may be arrested and mistreated by the authorities, face job loss, disinheritance loss or family rejection. During military service men are in an environment where, if their Christian religion is recorded in their ID, they are likely to be viewed with suspicion by their superiors and bullied by their peers. Despite obligatory military service, Christians are unlikely to rise in army ranks, and converts face extra challenges to live as a Christian in the military environment. A country expert shared a story of a convert conscripted into the army who “had to keep his Christian faith basically a secret... maintaining his devotional practices had become a virtual impossibility.”

Christians also have much difficulty finding employment in the public sector, while they also face discrimination in the private sector. As men are the main financial providers, the violation of rights of male Christians can hit his wider family and community hard. It can cause anger, fear and anxiety. The psychological toll of being unable to provide for their families can be considerable.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Both government and society verbally attack religious minority groups such as Alevites and Jews and ethnic minority groups such as the Kurds. This trend is likely to continue. Turkey is a supporter of Muslim Brotherhood entities such as Hamas and hence has become opposed to Israel. Public attitudes have therefore become increasingly anti-Israel and anti-semitic in nature. This has naturally made the small Jewish community in Turkey anxious and some hundreds have recently emigrated to Israel, leaving those behind even more vulnerable.

In Turkey, young nationalistic Turks can be quickly won over by hate-speech propaganda and carry out violent acts, thinking they have the state's and public approval. In addition, the Gülen movement has been heavily persecuted since the 2016 coup attempt. Yazidis in Turkey's southeast face similar issues as the Syriac Christians. Nusayri refugees (Alawites) from Syria feel enormous pressure to leave the country. The Alevites are also discriminated against (officially they do not exist as a specific group and cannot run any houses of worship) as well as Kurds in general.

According to the US Department of State's IRFR 2021:

- "The government continued to limit the rights of non-Muslim minorities, especially those not recognized under the government's interpretation of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which includes only Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. ... The government continued to treat Alevi Islam as a heterodox Muslim 'sect' and not to recognize Alevi houses of worship (*cemevis*), despite a 2018 ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeals that *cemevis* are places of worship. In March 2018, the head of Diyanet said mosques were the appropriate places of worship for both Alevis and Sunnis." (p.1, 12)
- Non-Sunni religious minorities are also disadvantaged in the educational system: "Non-Sunni Muslims and nonpracticing Muslims said they continued to face difficulty obtaining exemptions from compulsory religious instruction in primary and secondary schools and often had to choose from electives dealing with different aspects of Sunni Islam The government said the compulsory instruction covered a range of world religions, but some religious groups, including Alevis and members of Christian denominations, stated the courses largely reflected Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine and contained negative and incorrect information about other religious groups." (p.14).

In November 2018, [the Appeals Court ruled](#) that the government should pay the electricity expenses of *cemevis* (Alevi houses of worship), just as the government also does for mosques (Al-Monitor, 10 December 2018). However, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) gave a similar ruling in 2016, and both rulings seem to be ignored by the government. If the government does heed this ruling, that might open up possibilities for churches to ask for equal treatment too.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression / Religious nationalism - Islamic

There has been a rise in the use of hate-speech in the press directed against unnamed 'foreign entities', which is commonly understood as a reference to the (Christian) West and hence foreign Christian church workers and the (Turkish) churches they support. The general atmosphere remains tense. Christian refugees are experiencing increasing restrictions from the authorities and are being threatened with deportation. It is not likely that the situation will improve. The country's Islamization is continuing and the pressure on the Christian community has increased massively ever since the coup attempt in 2016 - and is still growing.

Ethno-religious hostility

The Christian population is tiny, consisting only of 0.2% of the population. Taking into consideration the fact that at the start of the First World War Christians made up [nearly 25%](#) of the country's population (The Conversation, 21 November 2019), the fear of total extinction is not unrealistic, in particular for the ancient Historical Christian communities. The overall atmosphere against Christians is hostile, with Christianity being seen as something foreign. As long as "Armenian" is used as a slur, instead of being spoken of as a respected and legitimate minority, it is unlikely that the attitude towards Christians will change.

Clan oppression

Although urbanization and modernization are continuing, it is likely that adherence to tribal customs and laws will remain important in parts of the country. This will continue to make conversion from Islam to Christianity difficult.

Dictatorial paranoia

The arrest and detention of Andrew Brunson in 2016 (he was released in 2018) resulted in many foreign families leaving the country and in fewer new Christian workers considering taking up positions in Turkey. Furthermore, the government has expelled at least 75 foreign Christian workers and their families in the months covered by the WWL 2020 - WWL 2023 reporting periods. There is a fear that the Turkish government will increasingly target indigenous Turkish Christians after so many expatriate Christians have been driven out. In addition, although President Erdogan ended the state of emergency in July 2018 after a two year period, thanks to his new presidential powers, he does not need the state of emergency laws in order to control the country with an iron fist and oppress all political opponents of the regime.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: declared - <https://ahvalnews.com/press-freedom/media-and-democracy-not-compatible-says-erdogan>
- Drivers of persecution description: referendum - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/10/turkish-referendum-all-you-need-to-know>
- Drivers of persecution description: seized control of churches - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/legal-limbo-turkeys-syriac-christian-properties-still-unresolved>
- Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (4.00 points): new church - <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/syriac-orthodox-church-is-new-wealth-for-istanbul-turkish-president-28737#:~:text=A%20new%20Syriac%20Orthodox%20Church%20to%20be%20built,the%20church%20would%20be%20completed%20in%20two%20years.>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Economist - <https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2019/07/01/in-turkey-demography-is-a-brake-on-islamisation>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: several campaigns - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-53596483?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c207p54mdq3t/turkey&link_location=live-reporting-story%5C
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: withdrew from the Istanbul Convention - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56467689>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: the Appeals Court ruled - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/turkey-court-recognizes-alevi-houses-of-worship.html>
- Future outlook: nearly 25% - <https://theconversation.com/christians-have-lived-in-turkey-for-two-millennia-but-their-future-is-uncertain-127296>

Further useful reports

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

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