

World
Watch
Research

Myanmar: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2021

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2022	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic.....	5
External Links - Introduction	5
WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Myanmar	5
Map of country.....	5
Brief country details	6
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Specific examples of positive developments	8
External Links - Situation in brief	8
WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Myanmar.....	9
Links for general background information.....	9
Recent history	9
Political and legal landscape	10
Religious landscape	13
Economic landscape.....	15
Social and cultural landscape	16
Technological landscape	19
Security situation	20
Trends analysis.....	22
External Links - Keys to understanding	24
WWL 2022: Church information / Myanmar	28
Christian origins.....	28
Church spectrum today.....	28
WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Myanmar	29
Reporting period	29
Position on the World Watch List	29
Persecution engines	30

Drivers of persecution.....	32
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	34
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	35
The Persecution pattern.....	35
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	36
Violence.....	44
5 Year trends.....	46
5 Year trends: Violence against Christians.....	47
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female.....	48
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male.....	49
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	50
Future outlook.....	51
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	52
Further useful reports.....	53



Man in Bagan, Myanmar (c) Open Doors International

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

Copyright note

This document is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2021 Open Doors International.

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 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Myanmar

Map of country



Since 2006, Yangon (formerly Rangoon) is no longer the country's capital city.

Brief country details

Myanmar: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
55,269,000	4,409,000	8.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Myanmar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	79	12
WWL 2021	74	18
WWL 2020	73	19
WWL 2019	71	18
WWL 2018	65	24

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Myanmar: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Religious nationalism	Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders
Ethno-religious hostility	Government officials, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Ethnic group leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Political parties

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

2021 has been a momentous year for Myanmar and also for the situation Christians find themselves in. After the army coup on 1 February 2021, fighting has continued and even well-established churches belonging to historical Christian communities are being attacked in predominantly Christian states like Chin State and Kayah State, but also in states with a strong Christian minority like Kachin State, Karen State or in northern Shan State. More Christians than ever have been driven out to live in IDP camps, take refuge in churches or even flee to the jungle where they are often deprived of access to food and healthcare. Estimates for the additional

numbers of IDPs range from around 250,000 at a minimum. In the quickly evolving Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), Christians are involved as well. Parallel to this widely peaceful resistance, fighting has increased across the country and although not all ethnic minority armed groups are involved, some Christian ones are, even those that have been out of the spotlight for a considerable time, like the Karen. Government forces have attacked Christian villages and churches (while leaving Buddhist monasteries untouched) and killed Christian aid workers and pastors. Summing up, one country expert said: "The situation in Christian areas has taken a turn for the worse since the military took control in February."

Converts to Christianity find themselves additionally persecuted by their Buddhist, Muslim or tribal families and communities because they have left their former faith and have thereby removed themselves from community life. Communities who aim to stay "Buddhist only" make life for Christian families impossible by not allowing them to use community water resources. Non-traditional church groups experience opposition too, especially when they are located in the rural areas of Myanmar and/or are known for proselytizing. While Buddhist monks are somewhat divided concerning the coup, many of the more radical ones support it.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
2. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
3. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christian children are forced to receive Buddhist religious education and to participate in religious ceremonies and festivals that are not in line with their religious beliefs (CRC Art. 14)
- Christians are denied access to communal resources because of their faith (ICESCR Art. 2)
- Christian homes and shops are attacked and destroyed, in violation of the right to an adequate standard of living and to a continuous improvement of living conditions (ICESCR Art. 11)
- Christian female converts are forcibly married to Buddhist men and pressured to renounce their new faith (CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Kachin Christian women and girls are trafficked into sex trade (CRC Art. 34 and CEDAW Art. 6)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

18 September 2021: Baptist pastor [Cung Biak Hum](#) was shot dead when he tried to extinguish fire caused by indiscriminate shelling which had destroyed 19 houses in Thantlang township, Chin State (UCA News, 20 September 2021).

August/September 2021: Several church grounds in Chin State have been used as military camps and church buildings as headquarters, causing [desecration and serious damage](#) (UCA News, 2 September 2021)

6 June 2021: In addition to the churches mentioned below, a [third church](#) was damaged when indiscriminately shelled - Our Lady, Queen of Peace Church in Doungankha, Kayah State (Catholic News, 7 June 2021).

27 May 2021: [Two Catholic youths](#) were shot dead in Demawso Township, Kayah State, when they went to collect rice supplies for IDPs in the church compound (Radio Free Asia - RFA, 27 May 2021).

24 May 2021: [Four Catholics died](#), when their shelter in Sacred Heart Church in Kayanthar parish near Loikaw, Kayah State, came under attack in fighting between government forces and the People's Defense Force (UCA News, 24 May 2021).

8 March 2021: Two young people in Myitkyina/Kachin State were killed by the army, after they had [sought refuge](#) in the city's Catholic Cathedral compound (Fides, 8 March 2021).

Specific examples of positive developments

While it is hard to find positive news in the midst of an (emerging) civil war, it may be seen as a positive development - or rather as a ray of hope - that the interim government (CPRH) wants a more inclusive (i.e. not just Bamar-centered) country. One of the proponents of this reform (who is also the main public face for the international audience) is Dr Sa Sa, the Special Envoy to the United Nations. He is a highly regarded [ethnic Chin Christian](#) (Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin, 16 March 2021), but has since been charged with [high treason](#) by the military regime (The Irrawaddy, 17 March 2021).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention 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: Cung Biak Hum - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/baptist-pastor-shot-dead-in-myanmar/94210>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: desecration and serious damage - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/churches-bear-the-brunt-under-myanmar-junta/93967>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: third church - <https://www.catholicnews.com/third-catholic-church-in-eastern-myanmar-hit-by-military-strikes/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Two Catholic youths - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/rice-05272021191409.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Four Catholics died - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/four-die-in-military-attack-on-myanmar-church/92583>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: sought refuge - http://www.fides.org/en/news/69741-ASIA_MYANMAR_Two_young_people_killed_in_the_compound_of_the_Catholic_Cathedral_surrounded_by_the_military

- Specific examples of positive developments: ethnic Chin Christian - <https://rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com/2021/03/rlpb-589-ethiopia-pivotal-elections.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: high treason - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-regime-issues-arrest-warrant-crph-intl-envoy-treason-charge.html>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Myanmar

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/	26 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12990563	26 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-MMR.html	26 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burma/	26 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	26 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	26 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Myanmar is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/myanmar/freedom-world/2021	26 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/country/myanmar/freedom-net/2020	26 July 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/myanmar	26 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/myanmar-burma	26 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#mm	26 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	https://rsf.org/en/myanmar	26 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/mmr	26 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI 2020	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MMR	26 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burma/	26 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Burma%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf	26 July 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar	26 July 2021

Recent history

In 1948 Burma became independent from Britain. From 1962 to 2011 the country was ruled by an oppressive military junta. A gradual process of democratization then began, most notably visible in the elections won by Nobel Peace Prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi in November 2015. She had been re-elected for a second term on 8 November 2020 in elections which she won with a landslide majority of 80%. Apart from the fact that more than one million members from ethnic minorities were not able to vote due to security considerations, the elections were deemed free and fair. However, the Myanmar army (also referred to as the Tatmadaw) opposed the election results, although they had been confirmed by the country's election commission. On 1 February 2021, a [military coup](#) took place and the country has been in turmoil ever since (BBC News, 1 March 2021).

All talks and discussions with ethnic minority groups about their place in the country and a meaningful peace have been derailed by this coup; justice for atrocities committed and human rights violations (including crimes against humanity and even genocide) will remain elusive for the time being. One of the largest refugee crises of our times, concerning the Rohingya, continues to be unresolved. It has been decried worldwide and heavily affects neighboring Bangladesh. So far, no repatriation from Bangladesh has taken place as the Rohingya refugees did not receive any guarantees of safety and fighting in Rakhine State continues. Although the original repatriation program was aiming to repatriate 150 Rohingya per day - which is what

both sides had initially agreed upon - at that pace it would take 13 years for everyone to return who had fled to Bangladesh in 2017. And this does not include those who had fled earlier. For the time being, the refugees are stranded in Bangladesh. [Endorsed](#) by UN officials, the Bangladeshi government has relocated some of the Rohingya from Myanmar to a remote and flood-prone island called Bhashan Char (Benar News, 2 June 2021).

An immediate reaction to the coup was a Civil Disobedience Movement ([CDM](#)) with thousands of people, an estimated 40% of all civil servants, announcing they would not work for the military regime (New Mandala. 19 October 2021). This involved normal civil servants, but also teachers and medical staff, who are badly needed as the COVID-19 situation has been deteriorating. The author of the New Mandala report cited above also stated (page 14): "There is little or no room for dialogue, or neutrality, in post-coup Myanmar. The military, which sees the CDM as a major obstacle to maintaining its political power and coercive and centralised rule, will continue to take the strongest possible measures against the movement and its supporters. The targeting of healthcare workers and medical facilities associated with the CDM, even during the pandemic, is evident."

The elected parliament, which had been suspended, created an interim government in exile (CPRH); Aung San Suu Kyi was once more put under house arrest and charged with political and non-political crimes. As months have gone by, the resistance has taken a more violent turn, as can be seen in the creation of [People's Defence Forces](#) (The Guardian, 1 June 2021). These [groups](#) are not organized or coordinated as one might expect (yet), but they are nevertheless causing the Tatmadaw significant casualties (Crisis Group, 30 June 2021). According to reports, these forces have [matured](#) over time (Jamestown, 30 July 2021). In the meantime, the newly created "National Unity Government" (the government in exile), has called for a "[people's defensive war](#)" (CNN, 7 September 2021). Some of the [ethnic armed groups](#) decided not to join the general resistance against the army, banking on the latter being more willing to make compromises due to the current pressure ("New friends, old enemies: politics of ethnic armed organisations after the Myanmar coup", Australian National University, 10 June 2021). Another reason is that both army personnel and some ethnic insurgents are involved in producing and transporting [synthetic drugs](#) and there is too much money involved to let a civil war disturb such good business. The UNODC has estimated that such 'business' in Myanmar raked in more than \$100 billion in profits in 2020 through drug trafficking and associated crime, which is more than the GDP of Myanmar and Laos combined (Benar News, 6 July 2021). The exploitation of resources like jade and timber are lucrative, too; hence the fighting to gain control of towns like Hpakant in Kachin State.

Political and legal landscape

Before the February 2021 coup, the ruling National league for Democracy (NLD) had been focused on the Bamar people and did not reach out to ethnic political parties effectively. The peace process had also made no tangible progress. Despite this, the General Election on 8 November 2020 did [not go too well](#) for the ethnic parties, except in Rakhine and Shan State (Crisis Group, 12 November 2020) and the NLD won some 82% of all votes. However, in the wake of the military coup, issues like these have now taken a backseat, although the regime initially promised that the suspension of the government would only last for one year and then new

elections would be called. The regime backpedaled on this promise and now says elections may take place in 2023.

The ethnic minorities consist of several dozen groups making up more than 30% of the country's population, many of them being Christian or containing large Christian groups. No matter which government or regime is in power, building up trust with the ethnic minorities is a necessity, but has become a major challenge after decades of war. Aung San Suu Kyi, despite all her personal achievements, is basically regarded as a member of the Burmese (“Bamar”) nobility who is not seriously interested in the plight of ethnic and religious minorities, even more so since January 2020, when she [defended](#) Myanmar in person against the accusation of committing war crimes in the proceedings before the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Irrawaddy, 23 January 2020). This did not spare her from the military's wrath, however, and she has since been sentenced to 4 years' [imprisonment](#) (CNBC, 6 December 2021). The actual coup came somewhat as a surprise and there may be other political motives involved: Army leader and strongman [Min Aung Hlaing](#) was supposed to retire in 2021 and the growing tension between his views and those of freedom icon Aung San Suu Kyi had been well documented (BBC News, 1 February 2021).

Opponents of the coup regime have formed a [National Unity Government](#), NUG, (Reuters, 16 April 2021) which includes several ministers who are Christian, and aims to form a federal democracy by [uniting](#) ethnic Burmese with many ethnic minorities (The Irrawaddy, 16 April 2021). It is worth noting that immediately after the coup the generals tried to [transfer](#) one billion USD out of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (Reuters, 4 March 2021). They failed because procedures demanded greater scrutiny and, finally, a presidential order confirmed that the money should be blocked.

Radical Buddhists have been surprisingly quiet in the WWL 2022 reporting period, especially given that it covered the final stage of the campaigning period for the November 2020 elections. Cynics could say that radical Buddhist monks do not need to stir up sentiments against minorities anymore, since the army is doing that for them. It is no wonder that radical monks and the army are increasingly aligning; there is mutual endorsement and backing, as both sides share the overarching goal of keeping Myanmar pure and free from all perceived threats. However, the Myanmar Buddhist Association has sent [signals to distance](#) itself from the military coup as it sees similarities between the Buddhist understanding of compassion (*metta*) and the Civil Disobedience Movement and is calling for an immediate end to all violence. This move could further undermine the generals' justification for the coup and legitimacy of their leadership (The Diplomat, 18 March 2021). It is, however, unlikely that such statements become a game-changer.

Another development to watch more in politics than in recent years is the question of international relations and who may recognize the new leadership, even if only de facto. Arguably, the most important question is how big neighbor China will position itself. While it will definitely not be happy with a prolonged time of unrest (and even less happy about protestors succeeding in their goals), it is interesting to note that there have been nightly clandestine [plane flights](#) between Yangon (Myanmar) and Kunming (southwestern China). It is anybody's guess what the flight cargo contains; it seems unlikely that it is seafood, as claimed by the Chinese government when the unregistered flights (with transponders switched off, in violation of inter-

national aviation regulations) became known (ASPI Strategist, 23 February 2021). China took a further step in recognizing the Myanmar regime by referring to General Hlaing as “[the leader of Myanmar](#)” (The Diplomat, 7 June 2021). This might be seen as a decision dictated by ‘realpolitik’, but it is not helping find a solution for a country slowly sliding towards civil war.

With a growing [stream of refugees](#) from Myanmar, countries like India and Thailand also need to decide how to position themselves (ASEAN Today, 27 March 2021). [Myanmar airstrikes](#) in the border province of Karen, in particular, have caused thousands to flee the country (The Guardian, 29 March 2021). So far, these neighboring countries have positioned themselves quite clearly against the coup, although this does nothing to change facts on the ground (see below: *Trends analysis*).

Myanmar’s de facto leader, General Min Aung Hlaing, visited Moscow in June 2021. There is no doubt that he was not simply strengthening ties to a longstanding ally, but, by attending a meeting of ministers of defense, was also seeking to improve [weapon procurement](#) (RFA, 23 June 2021). Thus, it seems safe to predict that the country will be in for a period of prolonged fighting, much to the detriment of society in general, and especially for the ethnic and religious minorities.

Christians are in the midst of the ongoing fighting throughout the country and increasingly in the cities as well. The Tatmadaw airstrikes and fighting have caused scores more to flee, adding to the more than 100,000 Christians already languishing in IDP camps in Kachin State alone. There are more in Chin and Shan State and displacement camps have also been set up in Karen and Kayah State as well as abroad. Any quick solutions to their plight seem unlikely. Also, with the difficult COVID-19 situation throughout the country, conditions are becoming close to unbearable in IDP camp set-ups. As the USCIRF stated in a November 2021 [country update](#), Christian religious leaders and church buildings have been targeted by the Tatmadaw.

Kachin State and Northern Shan State (NSS) are in a state of protracted crisis, characterized by ongoing and sporadic conflict, unresolved political grievances and an array of competing interests over resources ranging from logging and minerals to illicit drugs. With the escalation in fighting between the military and the Kachin rebels, Christians are being killed, detained and forced to flee in Kachin. new refugee camps have recently been created in the majority-Christian Kachin State in order to handle the influx. The government forbids any international aid delivery and denies virtually all access for the United Nations and international humanitarian groups. These restrictions heighten the risk of abuse, exploitation and human trafficking.

A country expert summed up the situation in Myanmar as follows: "Myanmar is no longer a safe place for the people especially for the ethnic minorities as we have witnessed the collapse of civilian rule, arbitrary arrests and indiscriminate attacks against civilians by the military. Within 10 months, the security forces in Myanmar have killed nearly 1,300 and more than 10,000 have been arbitrarily detained. The military carries out violence against civilians and the communities are being uprooted as thousands flee violence and become refugees in neighboring countries."

Myanmar has a pluri-legal system, comprised of customary, religious and civil laws. Georgetown’s [Women, Peace and Security Index](#) 2019/20 identified 35 laws that were discriminatory towards women. It noted that legislation fails to protect victims from domestic

violence and marital rape ([OECD, 2019](#)). Positive developments include the passing of the Prevention of Violence Against Women (PoVAW) Bill in 2019, although this has been criticized for falling short of international standards ([Human Right Watch, 2019](#)). The recent military coup has thrown the future of women’s rights into uncertainty; policy makers [fear ongoing violence](#) against women in Myanmar (LSE, 11 February 2021). Despite the country's former leader being female, the exclusion of women from government positions has been cited as a factor that contributed to the coup, as the democratic party struggled to implement deep institutional change. Whilst female participation rate in parliament grew from 5% to 15% between 2015 and 2020, progress was reportedly ‘handcuffed by the embedded patriarchy of the military’ ([The Conversation, 21 February, 2021](#)). In a recent [CEDAW periodic review](#), it was also observed that military and security officials have long been granted impunity from human rights abuses (CEDAW, 2019).

Religious landscape

Myanmar: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,409,000	8.0
Muslim	1,989,000	3.6
Hindu	908,000	1.6
Buddhist	42,182,000	76.3
Ethno-religionist	4,492,000	8.1
Jewish	30	0.0
Bahai	86,000	0.2
Atheist	21,200	0.0
Agnostic	252,000	0.5
Other	928,900	1.7
<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 2021)

According to WCD 2021 estimates, Christians make up 8% of the population, Buddhists 76.3% and Muslims 3.6%. The 2014 government census (published in August 2016) puts Christians at 6.2%. Christians in Myanmar consider this figure far too low, as counting was not carried out in war-torn, Christian-majority Kachin State. Most Christians belong to the ethnic minorities and not to the Burmese (“Bamar”) majority. According to the contested government census, Buddhists make up 87.9% and Muslims 4.3% (around one million Rohingya had not been counted and it is estimated that up to 400,000 are still living in Rakhine State).

The adoption of the so called "Laws on the Protection of Race and Religion" in August 2015 was celebrated by nationalist Buddhist groups like Ma Ba Tha countrywide. Whereas these laws are

aimed chiefly at the Muslim minority in Rakhine State, Christians are affected as well: Conversion from one religion to another have to follow an administrative process including notification to different authorities. Any mixed marriages require in practice a conversion to Buddhism, thus protecting Buddhist women from Muslim men. However, there are few such cases.

Myanmar is predominantly Buddhist and Buddhists played a role in opposing the military regime in 2007. Before that, radical Buddhist groups had not been politically active. However, in 2012 when the movement “969” emerged (later called “Ma Ba Tha”), this quickly changed. This group has a nationalist agenda and calls fellow religionists to defend the country against any perceived threats. In August 2015, shortly before the first free and fair elections, Ma Ba Tha managed to introduce the “Laws for the Protection of Race and Religion”. Those are first and foremost targeted against the Muslim minority, especially the Rohingya of Rakhine State, living in the borderlands with Bangladesh. Ma Ba Tha was banned, but re-emerged under a different name, and was banned in 2018 again. However, it is very much alive and some local branches do not just simply ignore the ban, they also still use its old name.

Most in the Muslim minority do not have citizenship and the majority of them have left the country due to ongoing persecution. A deadly attack against a border post in October 2016, leaving nine guards dead and claimed by a radical Islamic group, led the authorities to become even more active against Muslims, pushing an estimated 700,000 across the border into refugee camps in Bangladesh in August 2017.

Radical Buddhism has been targeting Muslims more than Christians, but reports say that Buddhist monks continue to convert children of Christian minorities to Buddhism by luring them into temples. Stronger pressure and violence come from the army, however, where even the killing of Christians has been reported. Until now, persecution by monks and radical Buddhist groups has not increased - however, now that the majority of Muslims are out of the country or are sufficiently intimidated, radical Buddhists may start targeting other minorities more intensively.

The Myanmar army had issued a court case against the President of the Kachin Baptist Convention, Dr Hkalam Samson, after a meeting with US President Trump in which he had spoken about the lack of freedom of religion in Myanmar. The court summons was withdrawn in September 2019; Dr Samson met with the Tatmadaw leader and reminded everyone in an interview that [real peace always means sacrifice](#) (Irrawaddy, 18 September 2019). As long as all conflict parties profit from the fighting, solutions involving sacrifice will be hard to come by. In a rather pessimistic commentary, another analyst said that under the growing Chinese influence in Myanmar, the [peace process will go nowhere](#) (Irrawaddy, 27 September 2019).

The continued fighting with the Arakan army in Rakhine and Chin State is a reminder that the country's nationalism is not purely motivated by religious reasons, but has strong ethnic overtones as well. The fighters of the Arakan army are Buddhists but oppose what they see as the Bamar ("Burmese") dominance. Christians in Chin State were strongly affected by this conflict as well, but all this has been eclipsed by the Tatmadaw's battles with units of the Peoples Defence Force (PDF) in ethnic and religious minority regions.

Economic landscape

According to the [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 343 onwards):

- **Gross National Income:** 4,961 (constant 2017 USD PPP).
- **Rate of multidimensional poverty:** The rate of people living in multidimensional poverty is 38.3%, the rate of people vulnerable to it is 21.9%. 24.8% of the people are living below the national poverty line
- **Remittances:** 3.73% of the GDP

According to World Bank:

- Myanmar is classified as a lower-middle income country
- **GDP per capita (PPP constant 2017 international USD):** 4.544
- **GDP per capita growth rate:** -10.6%
- **Poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP):** Poverty almost halved, falling from 48% in 2005 to 25% in 2017. The poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP) is 16.2% (2017).

Myanmar is potentially a rich country as it holds vast natural resources, for example in oil and gas, but even more in timber, gold and jade, which is all worth billions of dollars. It also has a huge potential in exporting renewable energy in providing water power to neighboring countries. However, the military coup and the slowly unfolding civil war have jeopardized any economic development. COVID-19 brought the thriving development of Myanmar to a grinding halt and even reversed it, but the military coup and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) accelerated and deepened this decline. Internally, banks were closely brought to a [collapse](#) as clerks left to join the CDM and people formed long queues to withdraw their money; the banks started to run out of available cash (RFA, 12 May 2021). Activists called for and implemented a [boycott](#) against Chinese products (RFA, 10 March 2021) and some Chinese-owned factories were attacked and destroyed. In the long-term, more damaging may be the [withdrawal](#) of foreign investors like Telenor, which sold its operations in telecommunications in July 2021 (Channel News Asia, 8 July 2021). However, other investors (e.g. from Japan and South Korea) are still holding out. Most Christians live in rural areas which have not seen any fast economic development and often struggle to make ends meet, especially when they are living as IDPs. The arrival of the COVID-19 crisis has gravely affected the livelihood of most Christians, as they are often working in the agricultural sector.

Additionally, Myanmar faces many environmental problems and the government angered their big neighbor China by stopping the building of the large Myitsone dam in Kachin State, which China really wants to see built. It remains to be seen if the new military rulers will push the project through, maybe even using force. Meanwhile, the military regime has made sure that the dire economic situation of Myanmar will [stay manageable](#) by approving heavy Chinese investment in the construction of a 2.5 billion USD gas-powered power plant (Panda Paw Dragon Claw, 31 May 2021). Economic reasons seem to trump fears and reservations on both sides.

The military authorities still dominate some industrial sectors such as energy production. The timber industry is also managed by the army through private partnerships and illicit channels. Timber is mostly located in ethnic territories and as the logging is not being carried out in a sus-

tainable way, supplies are decreasing. But it is still an important source of income for both the army and ethnic insurgents and the former already allegedly sold illegally logged timber to China after the coup. Jade is another commodity the army exploits; it is a multi-billion dollar business and is in high demand, especially in China. If Christian settlements are in the way, since they belong to the ethnic minorities, the inhabitants will simply be chased away without anyone caring. The dangers of jade mining came back to public memory when [more than 200 jade "scavengers"](#) were killed by a landslide in July 2020 (RFA, 13 July 2020). Fighting [increased](#) in the jade mining areas after the military coup, showing how lucrative the mineral is for both the army and other armed groups (Global Witness, 29 June 2021).

Another illicit and allegedly growing source of income is drug production and trading. Myanmar is the second-largest producer of opium after Afghanistan and the Myanmar army (as well as ethnic insurgency armies) are involved in this business. The country's northern region is part of the famous so-called "Golden Triangle". Opium is not the only drug produced in Myanmar, although its cultivation is strongly increasing; methamphetamine is even more lucrative and its [production is increasing](#) even in the midst of the developing civil war (Benar News, 10 June 2021). The amount of drugs and precursors [seized](#) by the authorities in Shan State between February and April 2020 gives a good indication of the vast scale of this industry (ASEAN Today, 20 May 2020). A regional UN report has also indicated how the market is [growing and diversifying](#) and estimates the worth of methamphetamine trade in the Asia-Pacific at 61.4 billion USD (UNODC, 15 May 2020). Army generals and their family members are also directly benefitting from the war, e.g. by running companies procuring weapon systems, often channeled through Singapore (Reuters, 7 September 2021).

Women and girls are more economically vulnerable than men. Whilst both genders have equal rights of inheritance under law, in practice it is difficult for women to access inheritance following a divorce or the death of her husband ([OECD, 2019](#)). This is due to religious customary laws that attribute greater economic power to men (particularly in the Chin and Shan states), as well as the ongoing practice of widow inheritance, a custom whereby the brother-in-law of a widow is expected to care for a widow following his brother's death. This latter custom has [been heavily criticized](#) for objectifying women as property to be inherited, rather than individuals capable of inheriting and managing their husband's estate (Asian Development Bank, 2016). According to [UNESCO](#) (accessed 26 July 2021), Myanmar has succeeded in achieving gender parity in regard to enrolment rates in primary and secondary education. Female participation in the labor market lags behind men however, with just 47.5% of women in the labor force, compared to 77.4% of men (UNDP's HDI 2020). Such economic pressure restricts the freedom of Christians, especially female converts. Christian men, too, face challenges within the workplace such as forced labor or the denial of job opportunities.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 343 onwards) and the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Burman (Bamar) 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5%
- **Main languages:** Burmese (official). [This language](#) is spoken by two thirds of the population, minority languages - most of which are using the Burmese script are Shan,

- Karen, Kachin, Thamizh, Chin and Mon languages and dialects.
- **Urbanization rate:** 31.1% (2020)
- **Literacy rate:** 75.6% of population of 15 years and above (2016).
- **Mean years of schooling:** 5.0 years
- **Health and education indicators:** The number of physicians per 10,000 people is 6.8, the number of hospital beds is 10. The pupil-teacher ratio in primary school is 24:1.

According to World Bank:

- **Population/Age distribution:** Under age 14 - 25.5%; above age 65 - 6.2%
- **Education:** The primary school completion rate is 95.4%, the enrollment rate was 112.3
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 1.79%, the rate of vulnerable employment 62.4% (modeled ILO estimate)

As the UNHCR [Global Focus](#) estimates (Myanmar Emergency Update, 1 December 2021)

- **IDPs/Refugees:**
 - 638K people internally displaced as of 1 December 2021
 - 268K people additionally internally displaced since 1 February 2021, having a considerable impact in the south-eastern parts of the country, especially in Chin State and Magway and Sagaing regions
 - 980K people refugees and asylum-seekers in neighboring countries.
 - 22K people additionally refugees since 1 February 2021.

However, it should be kept in mind that these numbers are fluid and can be [added to by the fighting](#) in other parts of the country like Kayah State. According to the [IOM country profile](#) (accessed 26 July 2021), up to 4.25 million Myanmar citizens are living as migrant workers abroad, by far the most in Thailand, followed by Malaysia, China and Singapore.

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI 2020):

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.583, Myanmar ranks 147th out of 189 countries and is in the range of "medium human development". The country saw a constant improvement of indicators, although in the war-affected areas the situation is different.
- **Life expectancy:** 67.1 years
- **Median age:** 29.0 years
- **GINI coefficient:** 30.7
- **Gender Inequality Index:** Myanmar ranks 118th, with a score of 0.478.
- **Unemployment:** While the unemployment rate is very low at 1.6%, 59.1% of all people in the workforce are in vulnerable employment and 48.9% of the workforce is in agriculture. The percentage of youth between 15 and 24 neither in school nor in employment is 19.6%.

Myanmar's patchwork of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups has already been described above, as well as the challenges of the continued fighting and the politics of "Burmanization", strongly backed by the Myanmar army. Before being ousted from government by the coup, the NLD had been calling for a government of national unity with ethnic parties, which seemed back then a tall order and may have contributed to the army's decision to stage a coup. It should be

repeated here, however, that the armed conflict against the various minority population groups is not exclusively religious. An example is the most recent and violent conflict with the Arakan army in Rakhine State. The Arakan are Buddhist but this is an ethnic conflict, not religious.

As the data shown above makes clear, neither the economy nor the question of minorities are the only challenges, although many problems are inter-linked. For example, whereas the school enrolment rate is high, many students in the ethnic minority areas are facing difficulties in attending school or it is even made impossible if they are living in one of the IDP camps and higher education remains a far-off dream. This is all the more true as the WWL 2022 reporting period saw a rise in the number of IDPs due to increased fighting and also because the regime [put pressure](#) on academia and educators to fall in line (ASEAN Today, 20 May 2021). Many of these facilitators also participated in the CDM. COVID-19 added to this challenge.

Many people are forced to work in subsistence farming and are therefore very dependent on weather conditions and also on such factors as where battles are taking place. The comparably low unemployment rate has to be read against this background. There is little chance of improving the life of the general population as long as the peace process makes no tangible progress. When, as is likely, Myanmar becomes increasingly isolated internationally, it will rely more on China, even though this may be a relationship filled with mistrust. Finally, drug addiction is increasingly becoming a problem, also among Christians, and neither the authorities nor the churches seem to know how to handle this.

As the country report of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI 2020) states on page 21: "In September 2018, the government passed an amendment to the Virgin, Fallow and Vacant Land Management Law (VFV), which might further accelerate the expropriation of communal lands for large-scale private business purposes. Specifically, the law requires everyone farming or living on VFV land to apply for an official permit, a prerequisite that many uneducated local farmers are bound to be unable to fulfill. Approximately one-third of all land is considered VFV land and 75% of this land is located in ethnic states, where private businesses, such as Chinese plantation enterprises, are currently seeking to acquire huge areas of land for business purposes. Thus, the amendment to the VFV law bears the potential to aggravate existing ethnic conflicts." It remains to be seen if the army sticks to this policy or simply takes what it needs.

While Myanmar, like many countries in Southeast Asia, struggled with the third wave of COVID-19 in June/July 2021, the situation was made worse by the army holding back and even confiscating much needed [oxygen cylinders](#) (New York Times, 15 July 2021). While the number of deaths rose so much that some cemeteries were running [out of space](#) (RFA, 14 July 2021), the fact that many doctors and nurses joined the CDM has put the general public in a difficult position. The coup leadership is being accused of [politicizing the COVID-19 pandemic](#), by "attempting to use its public health response as a means to justify its continued grip on the country" (East Asia Forum, 14 September 2021). The army has forced prices for medical treatment to rise steeply, creating a black market for healthcare.

The COVID-19 crisis has made ethnic and religious minorities, which were [already struggling](#) (The Diplomat 15 July 2020), left further behind than before, and not just in the way they are being discriminated against in the distribution of relief aid and medical help. As Christians are living in areas particularly affected by the civil war and fighting (in Kachin, Chin and Shan states), they will feel the effects of these challenges, and even more so if the Myanmar army does not revise its policy of excluding certain areas from being accessed for aid distribution. Those living in IDP camps feel the consequences severely, too. An example from Karenni or Kayah State is given in the report "[Access denied](#)" (Fortify Rights, 10 November 2021).

Organizations like the World Food Program estimated in April 2021 that the [number of food insecure people](#) could more than double to 6.2 million people within six months (WFP, 6 August 2021). Meanwhile, large numbers of people (especially from ethnic minorities) have been fleeing both internally and abroad ([WWR, 16 April 2021](#)).

Whilst Myanmar once had a matriarchal system, it is now a deeply patriarchal society, in part due to the influence of the Myanmar army as a [patriarchal political actor](#) (Foreign Policy, 23 March 2021). Social norms expect men to assume the position of heads of the household and financial providers, whilst women are expected to bear greater domestic responsibility, often in addition to paid work ([OECD, 2019](#)). Gender-based violence – which has [worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (UNODC, 16 October 2020) - is broadly accepted in Myanmar culture; according to a state-funded [2015/16 Demographic and Health Survey](#), 51% of women and 49% of men believed that a husband was justified in beating his wife in set circumstances. This broad acceptance of gender-based violence and related impunity for perpetrators provides an avenue that can be exploited for the means of religiously-motivated persecution.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 52.1% penetration - survey date: June 2021
- **Facebook usage:** 37.5% penetration – survey date: June 2021

According to World Bank:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 113.8 per 100 people

According to the Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020 report:

- In 2019, the Internet penetration rate still was just over 40% but the speed and quality is very different in rural areas compared to major cities. In 2019, the number of mobile connections was around 68 million, however, those connections were held by around 50% of the population, where many people have multiple SIM cards.
- "Since 2017, subscribers must provide their name, citizenship ID, birth date, address, nationality, and gender to register for a SIM card; non-citizens must provide their passports."
- Freedom House categorized the country again as "Not free" and did not see improvements (its score decreased by five points).

Existing protective laws on media freedom and online activities enable the authorities to deny licenses to outlets whose reporting is deemed insulting to religion or a threat to national security. Communication is controlled by the authorities and blockages can be activated anywhere anytime. Targeted Internet pages have been blocked countrywide. Lawsuits and arrests against activists and journalists have led to an intimidating environment and self-censorship. However, even when the Tatmadaw blocks the Internet to intimidate critics, it will most likely fail in its efforts to create a countrywide "[Intranet](#)", roughly comparable to what China did many years ago (Crisis Group, 18 May 2021). The fact that the regime threatened to take anyone to court who refers to it as a "[junta](#)" (The Irrawaddy, 30 June 2021), may not come as a surprise in a country which recently [detained](#) (among others) both an American and a Japanese journalist (CNN, 26 May 2021).

Social media is widely used for communication and opinion-making, but it is also used by radical monks for slandering Christians and warning against the Christian faith. Social media users and those quoted in the media have faced prosecution for expressing their views on particular topics, particularly when they entail criticism of the authorities. They faced accusations of defamation and incitement filed by the army and politicians and were charged under Section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law, which includes bans on online activity deemed threatening or defamatory.

According to a now outdated 2015 GSMA report, women were [20% less likely](#) to own a mobile phone than men. This gender gap partly reflects the combination of low household income and traditional gender roles; the financial provider – usually the man – is granted priority for mobile phone access. This gender gap has however narrowed in the past years and as of 2020, [stood at 14%](#) (GSMA, 2020). This latter report noted, however, that a lack of knowledge about how to access the Internet remained a key barrier.

Security situation

The security situation in Myanmar changed in the aftermath of the 1 February 2021 coup and has become much more volatile. Except for the coup itself, the situation is complex and multi-layered. Therefore, the explanation written in the WWL 2021 Full Country Dossier is valid and is cited below, with the addition that fighting has returned in some parts of the country which had not seen military conflict for many years. This is especially true for regions in Kayah State and Chin State.

There has been one other noteworthy development: In a 21 minute video message, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri issued [threats](#) to Myanmar's leaders for their treatment of the country's Muslim minority (Long War Journal, 12 March 2021). In the conclusion of the documentary-style message, al-Zawahiri stated that the "criminal Buddhist government that has been pampered by the West shall not be deterred except by force and by making it pay the price of its aggression within and beyond Myanmar. This is a binding duty on the entire Ummah." Such calls for Islamic militant action against Myanmar have been issued before, although not from the top leadership, and have had only very limited consequences: i) Recruitment for Islamic militants in the country has been patchy at best; and ii) efforts to connect the plight of the Rohingya with international jihad have not been very successful. It is likely that al-Qaeda's intention with this new video is to highlight their own visibility and importance rather than to

change the situation on the ground in Myanmar. However, any action taken by Islamic militants could very well add to the chaos in Myanmar and give the generals (and even leaders in other countries) a welcome pretext to intensify their crackdown on them.

Security situation as presented in last year's WWL 2021 (with some minor updates):

The "Patriotic Association of Myanmar", better known under its acronym "Ma Ba Tha", was founded in January 2014 with the goal of defending Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar against alleged threats. First and foremost this meant against the Muslim minority, especially the Rohingya, but Christians have been put under pressure by Ma Ba Tha monks too. Ma Ba Tha was banned in May 2017, re-emerged under a different name, and was banned again in 2018. Although it remained quiet in the WWL 2021 reporting period, it is still active and has switched its focus to fight against the government; it enjoys the support of at least part of the army.

As already stated above, Myanmar is going through the longest civil war in the world with several ethnic insurgent armies fighting for independence (or more autonomy). Besides the "Arakan Rohingya Salvation army" (Muslim) and the "Arakan army" (Buddhist), the "Kachin Independence army" (KIA/Christian) should also be mentioned, the latter together with the "United Wa State army" (USWA) being the largest and best-equipped groups in Myanmar. The USWA enjoys a de facto autonomy and is notorious for its involvement in the drug trade. From September 2018 onwards, it has acted against the Christian minority in its territory in Shan State, bordering China, whose Communist government allegedly supports it. The most active insurgent group at the moment is, however, the Arakan army, which on 15 August 2019 - operating in combination with two other groups in the so-called "Brotherhood Alliance" - attacked a [military training academy](#), other Myanmar army targets and economically important roads and bridges connecting Shan State to China (Reuters, 15 August 2019). The Myanmar army removed the Arakan army from its [terrorist list](#) in March 2021 (Al-Jazeera, 15 March 2021), however, the Arakan army reportedly still participates in [attacks](#) against the Tatmadaw - for instance, an attack claiming 11 soldiers' lives in Northern Shan State in May 2021 (The Irrawaddy, 31 May 2021). However, officially, they keep their distance from the NUG, hoping to capitalize on the situation.

China's political pressure and influence cannot be underestimated. China is allegedly providing groups like the USWA and KIA with weapons and equipment. This explains why neither the Tatmadaw nor China will be particularly happy to have to get along with each other now. The security situation in certain regions of Myanmar remains dire and has even deteriorated and it cannot be excluded that more crimes against humanity will be committed in the future. Apart from the situation in Kachin State and the USWA, referred to above, Christians are also affected by the increased fighting with the Arakan army in Chin State.

Forced recruitment into militias remains an ongoing threat. Parents have gone so far as to [fake funerals for their children](#) before sending them off to China, to protect them from being forced to join these groups (Al-Jazeera, 17 July 2019). Young men are the primary target, but children are also vulnerable to enlistment. Trafficking also remains an issue of concern in Northern Shan and Kachin States where, driven by conflict and economic fragility, women and girls are lured to China under false pretenses, then sold as 'brides' and forcibly impregnated (HRW 2021). Law enforcement bodies in Myanmar and China have reportedly made little effort to recover traf-

ficked girls ([Human Rights Watch, 2019](#)).

The Myanmar army has an infamous record of systematically targeting and sexually abusing women and girls from ethnic minority groups, including in IDP camps. In light of the military coup in 2021, this situation is set to dramatically worsen ([Women's League of Burma, 2014](#); [Foreign Policy, March 23, 2021](#)).

Trends analysis

1) Myanmar seems poised on the verge of another prolonged military rule and civil war situation

The military regime proved the country observers right in thinking that the state of emergency would not be lifted after one year; they foresaw a [prolonged military rule](#), similar to what happened in neighboring Thailand in 2014 and what has happened in the country before (Benar News, 4 February 2021). The Tatmadaw announced that elections may take place in 2023. And while the number of civilians killed (as per AAPP of 15 November 2021: [1265](#)) is not particularly high (although higher than the number of people killed during the famous 8888 uprising), a prolonged civil war seems to be an increasingly realistic possibility. But there is one major difference to the wars being waged in the background against the ethnic insurgency armies. While those battles are being fought in the far-flung peripheral regions (like Kachin or Shan State), there are an increasing number of reports about fighting taking place in the Burmese heartlands involving such major cities as Yangon and [Mandalay](#) (RFA, 25 June 2021). With the economy and social services (such as health care) becoming affected, a humanitarian crisis of monumental proportions is developing and it will be ordinary families who will bear the brunt.

As the coup regime is digging in, so are the demonstrators. One protestor has been quoted as saying: "You messed with the wrong generation" (The Irrawaddy, 15 February 2021). These developments highlight the fact that civil resistance has the potential to bridge ethnic and religious divisions, although it may not be enough to reconcile the decades-old civil war between the Bamar majority and the many ethnic minorities. Although the conflict seems to be slow-burning, it has the potential to become a prolonged and violent one, also involving the Christian minority. In Myanmar's border province, Karen State, an ethnic insurgency group called the Karen National Union has been providing [shelter](#) and safe passage to at least one thousand people, many of them members of the resistance movement (UCA News, 5 April 2021). The Karen have a significant Christian minority. And some members of the opposition, who fled into Karen territory bordering Thailand, have taken up [military training](#), especially youths (Reuters, 27 April 2021).

A ray of light may be seen in reports about a growing understanding between the Bamar majority and the ethnic minorities. The April 2021 UCA News article of 5 April 2021 mentioned above, states: "Earlier, many Bamars have not believed in their army's abuses and considered it international propaganda. But now they are thinking: if the soldiers are able to kill unarmed demonstrators, women and children, under the eye of the cameras in the cities, what could they have done in these remote areas?".

The fact that the military regime in Myanmar has declared a [cease-fire](#) with the ethnic armed groups (EAGs) (RFA, 28 September 2021), will not stop or even curb fighting. This one-sided announcement, termed a 'goodwill declaration', naturally did not include the fighting groups of the People's Defense Force (PDF) which sprang up throughout the country following the February coup. It should be kept in mind that not all EAGs support the resistance movement and some are hoping to benefit as government forces now apparently want to concentrate on combatting the PDF.

The situation has been aptly [summarized](#) by the International Crisis Group in its report from 20 October 2021: "Since the 1 February coup d'état, Myanmar's military regime has brutally repressed the population as it tries to quash dissent and consolidate its grip on the country. A broad-based resistance movement is using non-violent and violent means to prevent the junta from succeeding. With no sign that the deadlock will end soon, vulnerable populations face a dire future. In addition to the insecurity, Myanmar's economy is in freefall, the national currency is crashing, health and education systems have collapsed, poverty rates are estimated to have doubled since 2019, and half of all households cannot afford enough food."

These are the immediate challenges the country is facing and there seem to be no easy solutions.

2) International reactions will hardly influence or solve the conflict

In a rare and at first sight encouraging reaction, ASEAN decided to hold an unprecedented emergency meeting in April 2021 at its headquarters in Jakarta. While the meeting was already a statement in itself, given the strong emphasis on non-interference in members' internal affairs, the outcome has been (predictably) small. Except for insisting on the immediate cessation of violence and the proposal for mediation by a special ASEAN envoy, there were no tangible results. Myanmar's military junta chief, General Min Aung Hlaing, did not immediately comment on the consensus reached but stated later that the ASEAN leader's recommendations would be considered after the country had [stabilized](#) sufficiently (The Irrawaddy, 27 April 2021).

When [ASEAN envoys met](#) with Myanmar's military regime in June 2021 in an effort to try and make progress with the five-point-plan agreed in April, this did not end well, but sent confusing signals, to put it mildly (Benar News, 6 June 2021). Since Brunei was heading the association of ten southeast Asian countries in 2021, the envoys were Bruneian. In what one commentary called a '[disastrous mission](#)' (Jakarta Post, 10 June 2021), the ASEAN envoys publicly used the titles General Min Aung Hlaing had given himself, thus endorsing his leadership. A press release along these lines has since been taken off the ASEAN website.

After ASEAN had finally named a special envoy, a deputy foreign minister of Brunei was not allowed to meet with all parties to the conflict and also not with Aung San Suu Kyi. In an exceptional move, ASEAN member states [excluded Myanmar](#) from its summit meeting in October 2021 (Associated Press, 23 October 2021), a decision Myanmar blamed on the influence of foreign forces. [Malaysia](#) was even considering setting up a meeting for dialogue with the opposition National Unity Government (Benar News, 8 October 2021). Nevertheless, ASEAN's decision, although noteworthy, will neither change the fighting nor the humanitarian situation. ASEAN's response is also made complicated by the fact that the special envoy will annually rotate together with the bloc's leadership, meaning that in 2022 it is up to Cambodia to find

ways to talk to all parties.

Further complicating the international response is the fact that several diplomats joined the CDM, among them also high-ranking ones. After Myanmar's representative to the UN in New York publicly announced that he would not work for the new government set up by the coup leaders, at least [ten diplomats](#) from several embassies joined him (The Irrawaddy, 5 March 2021). In the first month after the coup alone, the regime called more than 100 diplomats home.

3) Urgent issues have been relegated to "any other business"

In 2020, it was hard to imagine that anything would push the Rohingya issue from international interest concerning Myanmar, especially now that a case is pending before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, this is what happened and the plight of the more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh also seems to echo unheard. As a consequence of the military coup, Western governments have issued sanctions against military figures and businesses. While this may be a logical consequence, it will also drive Myanmar more and more into the arms of China, no matter how challenging this relationship may be. This in turn does not bode well for Myanmar's Christian minority, which is also strongly affected by the widening civil war, since China is rarely worried about human rights issues.

The questions about what direction the country should head in and about how lasting peace can be achieved have been relegated to a very distant future. In May 2019, a commentator named [four possible future scenarios](#) – secession, confederation, federalism and decentralization (Irrawaddy, 16 May 2019). For nationalists and the army, all of these scenarios are anathema. They will do their utmost to make sure that none of these scenarios will become reality.

A detailed report highlighting the [shaky basis](#) on which ethnicities have been distinguished throughout history and showing that the whole peace process has been setting false incentives (i.e. making ethnic groups think they need to have powerful armed groups before they can get a place at the conference table) now seems uncannily accurate (International Crisis Group, 28 August 2020). This has become the basis for more intense fighting. Christians cannot and do not put any hope in the political process.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: military coup - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-55902070>
- Recent history: Endorsed - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/island-endorsed-06022021175233.html>
- Recent history: CDM - <https://www.newmandala.org/the-centrality-of-the-civil-disobedience-movement-in-myanmars-post-coup-era/>
- Recent history: People's Defence Forces - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/01/rise-of-armed-civilian-groups-in-myanmar-fuels-fears-of-civil-war>
- Recent history: groups - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b168-taking-aim-tatmadaw-new-armed-resistance-myanmars-coup>
- Recent history: matured - <https://jamestown.org/program/briefs-355/>
- Recent history: people's defensive war - <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/07/asia/myanmar-nug-peoples-war-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Recent history: ethnic armed groups - <https://www.newmandala.org/new-friends-old-enemies-politics-of-ethnic-armed-organisations-after-the-myanmar-coup/>

- Recent history: synthetic drugs - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/commentaries/asean-security-watch/zachary-abuza-regional-drug-trade-07062021155717.html>
- Political and legal landscape: not go too well - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/another-landslide-victory-aung-san-suu-kyis-party-myanmar-what-cost>
- Political and legal landscape: defended - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/top-un-court-orders-myanmar-protect-rohingya-rights-end-genocide.html>
- Political and legal landscape: imprisonment - <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/06/myanmar-court-sentences-aung-san-suu-kyi-to-4-years-in-prison.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Min Aung Hlaing - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55892489>
- Political and legal landscape: National Unity Government - <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/opponents-myanmar-coup-announce-unity-government-2021-04-16/>
- Political and legal landscape: uniting - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/whos-myanmars-national-unity-government.html>
- Political and legal landscape: transfer - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-usa-fed-exclusive/exclusive-u-s-blocked-myanmar-junta-attempt-to-empty-1-billion-new-york-fed-account-sources-idUSKCN2AW2MD>
- Political and legal landscape: signals to distance - <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/myanmar-buddhist-association-signals-possible-break-with-military-junta/>
- Political and legal landscape: plane flights - <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/whats-on-the-clandestine-nightly-flights-between-myanmar-and-china/>
- Political and legal landscape: the leader of Myanmar - <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/china-steps-toward-de-facto-recognition-of-myanmars-junta/>
- Political and legal landscape: stream of refugees - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2021/03/arrival-of-myanmar-refugees-police-pushes-india-to-get-clear-on-coup/>
- Political and legal landscape: Myanmar airstrikes - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/29/myanmar-airstrikes-cause-thousands-flee-across-thailand-border>
- Political and legal landscape: weapon procurement - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/moscow-06232021211705.html>
- Political and legal landscape: country update - <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/2021%20Burma%20Country%20Update.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Women, Peace and Security Index - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/MM.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Human Right Watch, 2019 - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/myanmar-burma>
- Political and legal landscape: fear ongoing violence - <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/socialpolicy/2021/02/11/now-in-myanmar-the-military-coup-and-implications-for-women-rights/>
- Political and legal landscape: The Conversation, 21 February, 2021 - <https://theconversation.com/the-exclusion-of-women-in-myanmar-politics-helped-fuel-the-military-coup-154701>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW periodic review - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fMMR%2fCO%2fEP%2f1&Lang=en
- Religious landscape description: real peace always means sacrifice - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/no-peace-myanmar-without-sacrifices-kachin-christian-chief.html>
- Religious landscape description: peace process will go nowhere - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/under-chinas-direction-myanmars-peace-process-goes-nowhere.html>
- Economic landscape: UNDP's full 2020 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Economic landscape: collapse - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/banking-05122021183455.html>
- Economic landscape: boycott - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/chinese-goods-boycott-03102021183500.html>
- Economic landscape: withdrawal - <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/telenor-sells-myanmar-operations-to-lebanese-investment-firm-m1-15179514>

- Economic landscape: stay manageable - <https://mailchi.mp/00ec6b02be24/myanmars-junta-leader-gives-rare-interview-on-chinese-tv>
- Economic landscape: more than 200 jade "scavengers" - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/disaster-probe-07132020190611.html>
- Economic landscape: increased - <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/natural-resource-governance/jade-and-conflict-myanmars-vicious-circle/>
- Economic landscape: production is increasing - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/regional-meth-trade-06102021154443.html>
- Economic landscape: seized - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/05/record-breaking-myanmar-drug-busts-show-asias-crime-syndicates-still-on-the-rise/>
- Economic landscape: growing and diversifying - https://www.unodc.org/unodc/press/releases/2020/May/unodc-report-on-east-and-southeast-asia_-continued-growth-in-the-supply-of-methamphetamine-while-synthetic-opioids-spread.html
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/MM.pdf>
- Economic landscape: been heavily criticized - <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/209596/gender-equality-womens-rights-myanmar.pdf>
- Economic landscape: UNESCO - <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/mm>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP's full 2020 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: This language - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Myanmar
- Social and cultural landscape: Global Focus - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1016>
- Social and cultural landscape: added to by the fighting - <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-8-24-june-2021>
- Social and cultural landscape: IOM country profile - <https://myanmar.iom.int/en/iom-myanmar>
- Social and cultural landscape: put pressure - <https://www.aseantoday.com/2021/05/myanmar-military-resumes-its-repression-of-academia-educators/>
- Social and cultural landscape: oxygen cylinders - <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/15/world/asia/myanmar-covid-oxygen.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: out of space - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/coronavirus-07142021184826.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: politicizing the COVID-19 pandemic - <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/09/14/the-myanmar-militarys-politicisation-of-covid-19/>
- Social and cultural landscape: already struggling - <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/07/myanmar-shattered-hopes-for-peace/>
- Social and cultural landscape: Access denied - <https://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Access%20Denied%20-%20Fortify%20Rights%20-%20November%202021.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: number of food insecure people - <https://www.wfp.org/news/funding-gaps-hampers-wfps-lifesaving-operations-hunger-deepens-myanmar>
- Social and cultural landscape: WWR, 16 April 2021 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/myanmar-what-will-the-neighboring-countries-do/>
- Social and cultural landscape: patriarchal political actor - <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/myanmar-coup-women-human-rights-violence-military/>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/MM.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic - <https://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific/en/myanmar/2020/10/gender-based-violence-covid/story.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2015/16 Demographic and Health Survey - <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR324/FR324.pdf>
- Technological landscape: Intranet - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/314-myanmars-military-struggles-control-virtual-battlefield>

- Technological landscape: junta - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-regime-threatens-foreign-media-with-lawsuits-for-calling-it-junta.html>
- Technological landscape: detained - <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/24/world/myanmar-journalist-danny-fenster-intl/index.html>
- Technological landscape: 20% less - <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mobile-phones-internet-and-gender-in-Myanmar.pdf>
- Technological landscape: lik - <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mobile-phones-internet-and-gender-in-Myanmar.pdf>
- Technological landscape: ely - <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mobile-phones-internet-and-gender-in-Myanmar.pdf>
- Technological landscape: stood at 14% - <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2020.pdf>
- Security situation: threats - <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/03/al-qaeda-leader-threatens-myanmar-in-new-video.php>
- Security situation: military training academy - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-insurgency-idUSKCN1V50EH>
- Security situation: terrorist list - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/11/myanmar-junta-removes-rakhine-rebels-from-terrorist-list>
- Security situation: attacks - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/at-least-11-junta-troops-killed-as-ethnic-alliance-attacks-in-northern-shan.html>
- Security situation: fake funerals for their children - <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/7/17/how-myanmar-families-resist-armed-groups-recruiting-children>
- Security situation: Human Rights Watch, 2019 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/21/myanmar-women-girls-trafficked-brides-china>
- Security situation: Women’s League of Burma, 2014 - https://womenofburma.org/reports/if-they-have-hope-they-would-speak?_cf_chl_jschl_tk__=1a3c1575692a4db48b72f41e718db4e390c0ab46-1616689147-0-Aaty2uRUh3dFiWiUg4F2XbD5Jn5YhDXk61MmqKttR_XyrZDe_zxjx5g-qf6M2Y-vdV4uWHhggO1q-8rCf1P6UQ54QYfk2wM-6zK7zQ43AThSzNj1PkYr-vHAXqIVBqak-A6lBm2jWxgOizzNVLzai9EZxUJLbPqSbNRYizf3tIbuB1ieUL08Hkz4fPe0YlgsMY4gSMBACurDoMPVW3OOso5SMeH4pY1hYSiJxr7t85iRhfg7qRtJpL6F779ESfqaL5KkJCrw-lw2Ia-JBE7jsxRN8-HW-700n17ErQKSjNpCv7UwrUb6YfKegbLc0zIMpezAeAeTIPR3ovLoDxUiw-uLDj1jZ5NLWo1sfErScB4ABHWEto9pGQH7oN6mWMOw
- Security situation: Foreign Policy, March 23, 2021 - <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/myanmar-coup-women-human-rights-violence-military/>
- Trends analysis: prolonged military rule - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/commentaries/asean-security-watch/abuza-coup-02042021162755.html>
- Trends analysis: 1265 - <https://aappb.org/?p=18742>
- Trends analysis: Mandalay - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/warfare-06252021200429.html>
- Trends analysis: shelter - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/karen-refugees-mobilize-on-thai-border-to-fight-myanmar-army/91983>
- Trends analysis: military training - <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/youths-black-myanmar-protesters-train-fight-junta-2021-04-27/>
- Trends analysis: cease-fire - <file:///C:/Users/danielo/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/5JGALCVM/%20https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/cease-fire-09282021184553.html>
- Trends analysis: summarized - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b170-deadly-stalemate-post-coup-myanmar>
- Trends analysis: stabilized - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-says-aseans-views-will-considered-stability-returns.html>
- Trends analysis: ASEAN envoys met - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/sea-mn-meeting-06062021104533.html>
- Trends analysis: disastrous mission - <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2021/06/09/bruneis-disastrous-mission.html>

- Trends analysis: excluded Myanmar - <https://apnews.com/article/business-asia-myanmar-global-trade-southeast-asia-dd1b255ee4c5f429787647296c2a1bd6>
- Trends analysis: Malaysia - <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/malaysia-will-talk-to-myanmar-nug-if-asean-efforts-fail-10062021140331.html>
- Trends analysis: ten diplomats - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/10-myanmar-diplomats-refuse-work-military-regime.html>
- Trends analysis: four possible future scenarios - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/secession-confederation-federalism-decentralization.html>
- Trends analysis: shaky basis - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/312-identity-crisis-ethnicity-and-conflict-myanmar>

WWL 2022: Church information / Myanmar

Christian origins

Catholic missionaries first entered Burma in 1554. Not until 1613, however, was there a permanent presence with churches in Ava, Sirian, and about three hundred Roman Catholic believers in Rangoon. But growth was so disrupted by the wars between Burma and Siam in the next two centuries that a total membership of five thousand in 1800 had fallen to about three thousand in 1832. As British control widened in the first half of the nineteenth century, Protestant growth, chiefly Baptist, made great advances. In 1813, the famous American missionary, Adoniram Judson, arrived in the country to serve there for nearly 40 years. He translated the Bible into Burmese in 1834. (Source: Moffett S.H., Burma / 1813-1850 in: A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. 2, 2005, pp. 330-331.)

In 1966, the Burmese government expelled all foreign missionaries, but by then the churches had become self-supporting. As many Christians belong to the ethnic minorities such as Kachin, Chin, Shan and Karen, Christianity is viewed by many with some suspicion. This suspicion could increase now that the latest figures on religious affiliation (the 2014 census) have been published, which showed a strong growth in the number of Christians.

Church spectrum today

Myanmar: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	662,000	15.0
Protestant	2,740,000	62.1
Independent	684,000	15.5
Unaffiliated	322,000	7.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	4,408,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		

Evangelical movement	1,639,000	37.2
Renewalist movement	1,187,000	26.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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

The Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC, established 1865), a member of the larger protestant Myanmar Council of Churches, estimates its membership at about 1.6 million Christians, many of whom are among the Kachin and Chin people. Protestants comprise almost two-thirds of all Christians. Of these two-thirds, an estimated 50% are Baptist members in almost 5,000 churches. The MBC works with 16 regional language conventions around the country with its vision “to organize and engage all Baptists in Myanmar in proclaiming and witnessing.” The number of Catholics is smaller, but there are estimates of up to a million. Most Christians are from the minority ethnic groups such as the Chin, Karen, Lisu, Kachin and Lahu. However, there is no strong inter-denominational association among them; in controversial issues and concerning the (persecution) situation in the country, their reactions are not unified.

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Myanmar

Reporting period

01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

Myanmar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	79	12
WWL 2021	74	18
WWL 2020	73	19
WWL 2019	71	18
WWL 2018	65	24

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The increase in score in WWL 2022 by 4.9 points is mainly due to a rise in the score for violence, which went up 2.9 points to the extreme level of 14.8 points. The pressure on Christians across all *spheres of life* continued to slowly increase, most pronounced in *Community life* and in *Church life* with an increase of 0.8 and 0.7 points respectively. While the increase in *Community life* was

also due to an increase in reports of discrimination, e.g. in healthcare related with COVID-19, the increase of pressure in *Church life* reflected the fact that the army perceived churches more and more as being mere centers of support for the opposition. As a result, many could barely function. Converts (from a Buddhist, Muslim or tribal background) continue to face strong pressure especially from their family and community; the situation in Wa State continued unchanged.

It should be kept in mind that it has been becoming much more difficult to obtain reports from war-torn Christian minority areas, which is acknowledged by other international organizations and is shown in the detention and sentencing of reporters as well as in Internet and communication blackouts, e.g. in Chin State.

Persecution engines

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

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.

Religious nationalism - Buddhist (Very strong), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Strong):

Buddhism is embedded in the nation's culture; this is commonly emphasized by radical Buddhists and tolerated - and to some extent supported - by the national government and the army. The majority of Myanmar's population (an estimated 60%) are of Burmese ethnicity, also called *Bamar*. Being *Bamar* is equated with being Buddhist. Everyone deviating from this heritage is labelled as being outside the community and therefore potentially dangerous. Consequently, there are Buddhist communities which would like to remain purely Buddhist.

Pressure on Christians comes from two sides:

i) One side is society, which includes the radical Buddhist movement *Ma Ba Tha*. The fact that this movement was officially banned in 2017 and again in 2018 did not have real consequences. In July 2019, the Ministry for Religious Affairs announced that it would [take over regulating radical Buddhist groups](#) from the Buddhist leadership (the "Sangha") (The Irrawaddy, 31 July

2019). The implementation of the “Laws for the Protection of Race and Religion” is a sign of the continued influence of radical Buddhist groups.

ii) The other side is family. When a conversion takes place in a strongly Buddhist family, the convert will face high pressure to return to the Buddhist fold.

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

Myanmar has a long history of being ruled by the army and while the 2015 elected government could not be called paranoid (neither could the 2020 one), behind the scenes Myanmar is one of the very few countries where it has always been the army holding almost dictatorial powers, as was then apparent when the military coup took place on 1 February 2021. Even according to the country’s (old) Constitution, written by the Myanmar army itself in 2008, one quarter of parliament’s seats were reserved for military staff. Moreover, the army held the most important government offices, including the Ministry of Defense and the Ministries of Interior and Border Affairs. Hopes for democracy have been seriously dampened by the coup and the resistance movements, be it the CDM or the PDF, have contributed to the paranoia of the army leadership.

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, the Myanmar army has done everything possible to stay in control, including using most violent and indiscriminate means. For this, it is also calls upon Buddhist nationalism or ethnic heritage, when needed. The armed forces continue to run so-called “Border Areas National Races Youth Development Training Schools” (or *Na Ta La* - schools), which are attractive for minority people as they are boarding schools run without school fees. These schools are used to influence young people and to introduce them to Buddhism. *Dictatorial paranoia* is here to stay.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium):

In some of the states where most Christians live, like Kachin or Shan states, some of Myanmar’s most precious goods are to be found - such as jade and timber. According to a [UN report](#) published in August 2019, this and other businesses the army is involved in, yields enormous sums - an income which is sometimes shared with ethnic insurgency groups in exchange for ceasefires or other agreements (see Paragraph 99 of the UN report). One of Asia’s two largest opium-producing hubs covers large parts of that region, especially Kachin State (together with parts of Vietnam, Laos and Thailand), the famous “Golden Triangle”. Allegedly, government officials, the Myanmar army and insurgent armies benefit from the drug producing and trafficking at different levels and stages. Anyone who opposes this or is simply in the way of traders, exploiters and traffickers is in serious danger. This is true for the Christians in these regions as well. Since many commodities like jade, timber and various ores can be found in predominantly Christian territories like Chin and Kachin State, or in states with a sizeable Christian minority, like Shan State, these Christians face heavy pressure from the army (and not only out of economic interest). This takes the form of being harassed, attacked and being used as porters or guides.

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Weak):

Beginning at the end of 2018, the largest insurgency group, the Communist United Wa State army became violently active against Christians. Hundreds of churches were shut down, and

hundreds of Christians were abducted or expelled from the territory. Allegedly backed by China, the targeted Christian groups were perceived as "missionaries" - mostly Baptist groups like the Lahu Baptist Convention or the Kachin Baptist Convention. Although the pressure against Christians continues and reportedly only about half of the church buildings closed were allowed to be re-opened, the persecution engine is still mentioned here, as it helps understand the complex situation Christians find themselves in on the ground. This Communist crackdown resembles the one Chinese authorities have been instigating against Christianity in China for some years now. Since the Myanmar authorities do not have control in the de facto semi-autonomous Wa region with its 450,000 inhabitants, the persecution engine here is not *Religious nationalism*.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Religious nationalism - Buddhist, blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

- Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Buddhist monk leaders stir up the local population to act against Christians in predominantly Buddhist communities. The radical Buddhist movement behind the Ma Ba Tha groups continues to 'protect' Buddhism as the country's national religion at all costs. This is intertwined with the protection of the ethnic 'Burmese race' as well. The two bans on Ma Ba Tha activities have not changed anything as they have always found other ways to continue their influence.

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Local government officials, especially from rural areas, are often influenced by and biased towards Buddhist leaders, so minorities like Christians, who in many cases happen to be a religious and an ethnic minority, are disadvantaged and have no way of seeking justice. Particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture, the military-run Ministries of Border Affairs and Home Affairs, and the Burmese military itself are directly responsible for religious freedom. Last not least, the Myanmar army continues to fight against Christian insurgents and minorities as well.
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Ethnic community leaders can stir up communities to stop Christians from using resources and aid meant for everyone living in the community. Especially among ethnic minorities, each conversion to another faith is seen as weakening the group and threatening the struggle many ethnic groups find themselves in. Leaders will therefore put strong pressure against conversion and on converts.
- **Violent religious groups and ideological pressure groups (Strong):** Groups such as the already mentioned Ma Ba Tha not only call to protect and preserve Buddhist dominance, they also instigate violence. Whereas the main target has been the Muslim minority, Christians were affected by their call to take action as well. Insurgents sometimes also become drivers of persecution if they feel Christian churches are not supporting them strongly enough or when pastors are found advising young people not to join in the fighting. Lastly, fighting groups like the already mentioned ARSA act violently against all converts among the Muslim minority.
- **Extended family (Strong):** Buddhist, Muslim and Ethnic-animist families actively persecute family members who convert to Christianity, as conversion is seen as betrayal.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** If someone in a village converts to Christian faith, this is seen as a disturbance of the harmony and is strongly opposed. Communities will put pressure on converts to give up their Christian faith. Mobs are easily stirred up and villagers often exclude Christians from support or any help they may get.
- **Political parties (Medium):** All non-minority political parties stand for Buddhist supremacy in one way or another and the (pre-coup) ruling NLD turned out to be a disappointment for the Christian minority. The opposition USDP was closely connected to the Myanmar army and enacted the 2015 Law on the Protection of Race and Religion.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** The army is the main force behind this persecution engine. What has been said for *Religious nationalism* applies here as well.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The Myanmar army took over power directly and will do everything it sees necessary to protect and defend its position. Its decades-long experience in dealing (violently) with insurgency movements will help in these efforts.
- **Violent religious groups (Strong):** Groups such as Ma Ba Tha are at the forefront of supporting the constitutional status of the army and the predominance of the Burmese. They want this equilibrium retained at all costs.
- **Political parties (Medium):** What was said above for *Religious nationalism*, applies here as well.

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Where they are in power, leaders of ethnic minority groups and insurgencies tend to do everything to stay in power. Whoever is seen as a threat to this power will be fought against, even if it is a fellow Christian.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Revolutionary or paramilitary groups (Medium):** Most of Myanmar's landbound resources can be found in states which have a mainly Christian population or where Christians are a significant minority. The Myanmar army colludes with local strongmen, politicians and insurgents to take control of this wealth at the expense of the local population, it has also set up Border Guard Forces it cooperates with. Fighting continues and if Christians and minorities are in the way, they are simply driven away. If they dare to speak out against the prevailing injustice (or try to give young people a hope for the future), they may be actively targeted, particularly by those benefitting from the illicit drug trade.
- **Government officials (Strong):** As indicated above, certain branches of the army are involved in various forms of illicit trade; this is sometimes carried out by proxies such as the Border Guard Forces. If Christian settlements are in the way or they speak up against drugs and illegal trade, they are driven away to become IDPs. As the army dominates, the level of force is higher.
- **Organized crime and cartels (Medium):** Illegal trade is often organized by well-connected local strongmen, who can become drivers of persecution, too, if they see their profit threatened.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Some political leaders are likewise involved in illegal trade, especially those at the local level.

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression

- **Revolutionary or paramilitary groups (Strong):** Revolutionary and paramilitary groups became very visible drivers of persecution in September 2018, when the United Wa State army (UWSA), the largest insurgency group (estimated to have around 40,000 fighters) closed dozens of churches and detained almost a hundred Christians in a crackdown against "new churches".
- **Organized crime and cartels (Medium):** Reportedly, the UWSA is heavily involved in drug trafficking as well, so the 2018 crackdown may have had mixed motives.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Myanmar is arguably the nation suffering from the world's longest civil conflict, which began immediately after the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. The core of the conflict is that the central government has tried to impose its control over regions, which had been promised a certain measure of autonomy. When it comes to difficulties for Christians in the WWL 2022 reporting period, Chin State has to be named. The Tatmadaw indiscriminately attacked Christian villages, church buildings (sometimes hosting refugees or IDP camps) and killed Christian aid workers and pastors. Other hotspots are Kachin State in the north and Kayah State in the southeast. Fighting there continues, an increasing number of people - many of them Christian - are living in IDP camps, most of them have been there for years, and humanitarian access to them is blocked. Fighting continues as well in neighboring Shan State, which has a large

minority of Christians, especially in the north. Although the conflict with the Karen and Karenni is not in the focus of international attention, it is still smoldering and many have become IDPs (or refugees in Thailand). A not-so-different story could be told about the Chin, who are predominantly Christian, only that their choice of refuge is India.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: This category consists of groups such as the Roman Catholic Church, but also traditional churches among the Christian minorities like the Kachin Baptist Church. These Christians are facing everyday pressure and occasional violent attacks from the Myanmar army or from radical Buddhist monks (who have even been building Buddhist structures within church compounds in some areas) or sometimes also from insurgent groups.

Converts to Christianity: Converts from a Buddhist, Muslim or Ethnic-animist background are facing the strongest violation of rights both from the authorities and from families, friends and neighbors as well. Leaving Buddhism is not accepted for someone of *Bamar* ethnicity. In all the publicity about Rohingya refugees being forced to flee to Bangladesh, it is less well-known that there is a small number of Christian converts from a Muslim background among the Rohingya who stayed behind. (The converts who fled to Bangladesh are scored for Bangladesh.) These converts not only face persecution because of their ethnic affiliation, but also because their Muslim families and communities put them under enormous pressure to return to Islam.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Many Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are facing persecution from the community they live in, especially in rural areas. They are not just monitored, but are sometimes also hindered from gathering or holding Sunday school classes. Because of the prevailing perception that being a Burmese means being a Buddhist, outreach is especially challenging. Apart from this, as civil war unfolds, they are facing similar difficulties as the historical Christian communities.

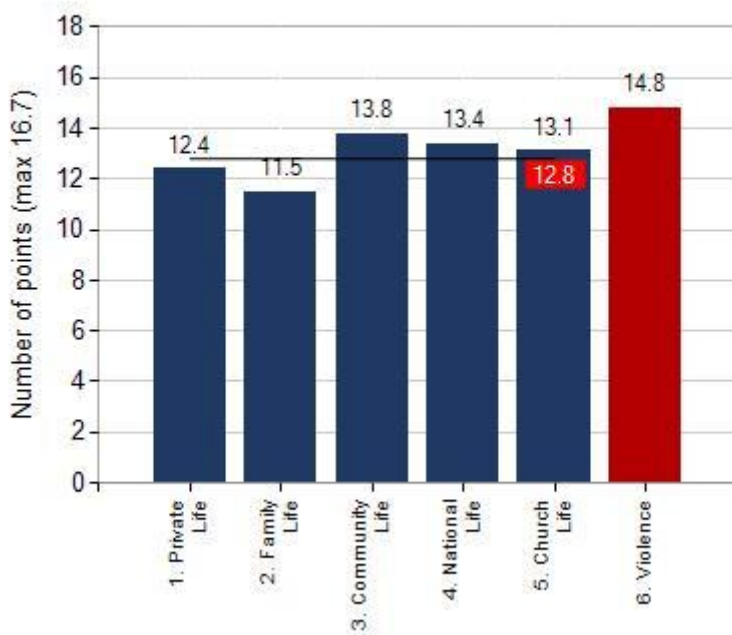
The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Myanmar shows:

- The overall pressure on Christians in Myanmar increased to an average of 12.8 points compared to 12.4 points in WWL 2021.
- Converts are particularly affected by the levels of pressure in the *Community sphere* (extreme pressure) and the *Family and Private spheres of life*. All Christians face pressure in the *National and Church spheres*. This pressure is fueled i) by an increasing emphasis on Buddhism, excluding all other minorities and ii) by the continuing and even increasing civil war, affecting - among others - predominantly Christian Kachin, Chin, Shan and Karen states. This war goes widely unnoticed, as news blackouts hinder and delay reporting.
- The score for violence against Christians increased from 11.9 points in WWL 2021 to 14.8 in WWL 2022 and is categorized as 'extreme'. There have been several killings of Christians assisting in IDP camps and pastors (only these have been considered for scoring; those who have been killed by indiscriminate shelling of villages or by being caught between battle-

lines have not been included in the scoring). In the WWL 2022 reporting period, many more Christian churches have been damaged and looted (whereas Buddhist monasteries are largely left alone), more incidents were reported involving detentions, attacks against houses where Christians live and rape/sexual abuse. Due to the growing civil war, especially in Chin, Kachin, Kayah and Shan States, it is very difficult to obtain accurate reports on faith-based attacks against Christians and on churches attacked. The real numbers are almost certainly higher.

WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Myanmar



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 2021 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)

Myanmar's current laws make it hard for an individual to convert. The Religious Conversion Law, part of the "Law for Protection of Race and Religion", requires that Myanmar citizens who wish to change their religion must obtain approval from a newly established Registration Board for religious conversion, set up in all townships. The potential convert must also undergo an interview and engage in religious studies for a period not exceeding 90 days from the date of

application, but extendable to 180 days at the applicant's request. If after that period the applicant still wishes to convert, the Registration Board will issue a certificate of religious conversion. During this period the application would be posted on a community board and converts are likely to be put under severe pressure by everyone around them to retract their application. Because of this, there are very few cases of this law being applied as conversion is usually done in secret without the complicated process (including public exposure) described above. Converts face even more pressure from their family and community and are sometimes disowned and expelled from the family home or brought before the religious authorities.

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

Depending on where a Christian is living and - for converts - depending on the family he or she is living with, it can be risky to display Christian images or symbols. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, there has even been a case in predominantly Christian Chin State, where the authorities ordered a Christian picture to be taken down. In other places, it is even more risky, especially for converts. Therefore, they would rarely have Christian images at home or wear jewelry displaying a cross, for instance. The latter could also be perceived as mocking Buddhist symbols, so Christians usually refrain from doing so.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

As soon as it is suspected that a discussion could be an attempt at proselytizing, it becomes risky. This is true for members of the Christian minorities discussing faith questions with members of the Buddhist majority and they also risk being reported to Buddhist extremist groups and/or (local) authorities, including the armed forces. A risk also exists for converts from a Muslim background in their communities when they mention their new-found faith. They need to be particularly cautious.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (3.00 points)

In some Buddhist villages, especially in Rakhine State and the central part of Myanmar, Christians are not allowed to be part of the community. In such places, Christian converts, who are usually first generation Christians, have to be very careful not to be discovered, especially when they are the only ones in the family. On being discovered, they are usually forced to leave the village. But even in other places, converts prefer to be cautious as conversion to Christianity is seen as bringing shame and any visible act of Christian worship would be met with harsh opposition from families and local communities. In most urban areas, the pressure is not as high as in rural parts.

Block 1 - additional information

Meeting with other Christians is usually not dangerous, but can pose a special challenge for converts, especially in strictly Buddhist villages. If they are not expelled from their family, known converts are closely monitored, ostracized and may face house-arrest in order to hinder them from meeting with other Christians. In villages with a strong Buddhist presence, pastors who come visiting Christians are often met with hostility. Such visits have become rare in the WWL

2022 reporting period due to pandemic restrictions.

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. (4.00 points)

In most schools, cultural and religious practice dictates that pupils recite some of Buddha's teachings prior to the beginning of the class. The national curriculum is dominated by *Barmar* and Buddhist beliefs and worldviews. Dhamma schools are operated by Buddhist monks in order to teach children about Buddhist doctrines and are spreading across the country. Children are required to participate and contribute financially to the Buddhist festivals of water and light. In Na Ta La schools, children are taught Buddhist prayers, their heads are shaven, and they have to beg for food every morning from homes in the local community. In those schools, all employees, from the teaching staff to the administration and the sweepers are Buddhist.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Christian children are regularly bullied by Buddhist children at school. In village schools it is normal to blame Christian children for anything bad that happens. Christian schoolchildren also receive fewer opportunities and are unlikely to be chosen for further education, scholarships or special honors. They are also seldom given the opportunity to correct mere administrative errors like the misspelling of a name or a wrong birthdate. As a consequence, they have been blocked from taking exams.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.25 points)

One voice from within the country sums it up best: "There are no restrictions for it, unless you baptize in public." Because of the anti-conversion laws and a society generally frowning upon conversions, churches usually carry out baptisms discreetly. For converts from a Buddhist or Muslim background, there is no other choice, it has to be done secretly. Baptist certificates cannot be issued and only few fellow Christians would be able and allowed to witness it. In regions where Christians are the majority, baptism is less problematic, however, only of non-Buddhists.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

Parents face difficulties in raising their children according to Christian values as they face pressure from neighbors in Buddhist majority areas. Parents are constantly told that if they remain Christian their child will have a harder future; by belonging to a religious minority they will be offered fewer opportunities. In convert families (from a Buddhist or Muslim background), it is often the grandparents who wield a great influence and make sure that the grandchildren are brought up in their original religion. One Christian stated that it is her biggest heartbreak that she has to send her children to a Buddhist monastery and cannot hinder them being forced to worship idols.

Block 2 - additional information

Converts do not necessarily face the threat of losing their inheritance or custody rights, but women converts may well face the threat of divorce (if married). The Kittima Adoption Act of 1941 allows only Buddhists to adopt a child. All other forms of adoption are not official and not legally-binding. Muslim converts are also subjected to the wider Muslim minority's problem of being denied citizenship. Muslim Rohingya - and with them the minority of Christians from a Muslim background - are perceived as being Bengalese and effectively lack any legal status. Most of them are currently residing in refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh. Especially in the remote areas of Chin, Kachin and Naga, Christians who want to ensure a good education for their children, have no alternative but to send them to the Na Ta La boarding schools and, hence, experience separation. However, due to the pandemic, schooling has been more disrupted than ever.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Christians, especially those gathering in house-churches, are monitored, and often pressured into renouncing their faith and sometimes excluded from communal decisions and resources. This pressure is also felt in everyday life in villages when they are refused help in gathering bamboo for repairing houses, denied access to water or community places. Another example is that Christians in Christian majority areas were not allowed to organize prayer rallies due to COVID restrictions, whereas for Buddhist processions there were no comparable limitations. Converts are often excluded to such a degree that villagers even refrain from talking to them. There have been cases where Buddhist monks have instructed communities to do this.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.50 points)

It is very common for Christians to be put under this sort of pressure, as the *raison d'être* of many government and community events is to display Buddhist supremacy. Some observers call this "Burmanization". This pressure involves daily prayers, contributing to (either in money or in kind) and participating in Buddhist ceremonies and cleaning Buddhist altars. It is hard to escape the pressure as it is deeply ingrained in the culture and is ubiquitous at school, workplaces and in the government. If Christians stop giving alms to Buddhist monks, refuse to contribute to the renovation or building of Buddhist temples, or desist from participating in Buddhist festivals, they are likely to experience harassment, be forced to make donations and be threatened with expulsion from the village, as they are acting against the community.

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

Converts are facing the strongest pressure in this respect. Out of fear of persecution, they do not normally announce their conversion. If converts are discovered, pressure usually starts

subtly, e.g. villagers will be prevented from giving help, but there have also been cases reported, where converts have been given extra help in order to lure them back to their old faith. In many cases, converts are also cut off from all contacts to fellow Christians and they are not allowed to receive visitors. Ultimately, converts can be expelled from the village, if all other efforts remain fruitless. There is even pressure on Christians who are not converts to convert to Buddhism. In an attempt to spread Buddhism, community resources are used to build pagodas in Christian areas and Buddhist monks are sent into Christian villages. Education - run by Buddhist monks - is sometimes offered free of charge to families of religious minorities.

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

Christians have less chance of being hired by firms if there are Buddhist applicants. Christians are also regularly by-passed for promotion, even more so in civil service. This discourages Christians from applying for such positions in the first place. On Sundays, Christians are not given leave to attend church services. The now dissolved and suspended parliament had seen an improvement as under the ousted government, one of the vice-presidents had been an ethnic Chin Christian and the Speaker of the Lower House was a Christian as well. However, Christians in the government, civil service and army are rarely found and will not usually be promoted beyond a certain level. With the military's view that many Christians are active in the CDM, their position will become even more precarious.

Block 3 - additional information

Areas with a high percentage of Christians are deliberately disadvantaged through poor infrastructure and health-care and the government prefers to build Buddhist Na Ta La schools instead of regular state-run schools. With the developing civil war and a quickly growing number of IDPs and IDP camps, health care and humanitarian aid to Christians is either not possible or not allowed or is only given in minimal portions and international monitoring (and sometimes even access) is blocked. The COVID-19 relief aid has not been an exception. Children of converts are facing discrimination by teachers and pupils at school, for example not being allowed to prepare for a test like the rest of the class and in extreme cases even expelled from class. Another problem Christians are facing are the local oral laws ("Gamma laws"), declared in several communities and villages by Buddhist monks and officials in order to restrict Christians. Preferential treatment given to businesses and companies owned by Buddhists for obtaining loans and government subsidies is common, and for Christian and Muslim business-owners registering their businesses is made complicated. At times, Buddhist monks call for a boycott of shops and establishments owned by Christians and Muslims. Even in the small things of daily life, Christians are facing discrimination, for instance: In many villages, it is normal to rent kitchenware for larger festivities from the community. Christians find they are charged more for it than other villagers.

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)

Section 361 of the now suspended 2008 Constitution reads: "The Union recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union" while also recognizing the presence of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism in section 362. Although the 2008 constitution is now invalid, the mindset behind the quoted section will prevail and re-appear in any new rules the Tatmadaw may implement. This "special position of Buddhism" has been abused by Buddhist radicals. In order to gain additional support from such groups and the *Bamar* majority in August 2015, the previous government adopted four religious conversion bills which aim to protect Buddhism by controlling conversion to other faiths, banning interfaith marriages and polygamy, and introducing birth controls. Buddhist women wishing to marry non-Buddhist men must first receive permission from their parents and local government officials and the non-Buddhist men would first need to convert to the Buddhist faith.

Concerning conversion, the law states that anyone seeking to change their faith needs to get permission from the Religious Conversion Registration body, which is comprised of local religion and immigration officials, a local administrator, the women's affairs chairman and a local education officer. Thus, the community knows if a person wants to convert and they are given 3-6 months to try to convince him or her to withdraw their papers. The law's first target is the Muslim minority, but all other minorities are affected likewise and it discourages both citizens considering conversion and converts from testifying about their new faith. In Myanmar, some tribes have their own additional laws which are used by some communities to drive Christians out of their villages.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (4.00 points)

The army and the Buddhist nationalist movement have been entirely unpunished and operate in a culture of impunity. If there is army involvement, neither Christians nor any other minority can expect fair treatment before courts or any international monitoring of their dire situation. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, the Baptist church vowed to [get justice](#) for the two female teachers murdered in 2015, but this was before the military coup took place and justice now is even more illusive than it was before (UCA News, 21 January 2021).

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

The Myanmar army and pro-military government officials are strongly influenced by Buddhist nationalist sentiment and often regard a Christian as a second-class citizen, therefore Christians face harder requirements when applying for government services. They would, for example, be required to file additional documents, asked to pay additional fees or their application would be delayed, sometimes indefinitely. Complaints referred to the police by Christians are ignored in most cases. Christians also have less access to loans and state benefits than non-Christian busi-

ness partners or customers. Even in Christian majority regions, authority officials are frequently Buddhist. However, it has to be said that in general, due to the developing civil war, the strains put on the administration by the CDM boycott movement and the pandemic, many parts of the administration seem to be at (or already over) the brink of being dysfunctional.

Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Christians are usually only employed by firms when there are no Buddhists available. If they are employed, they are frequently by-passed for promotion. There are a few Christians in public service, but they rarely get promoted to senior positions and are even told that this policy applies because they are Christian and/or hail from an ethnic minority background.

Block 4 - additional information

Young men conscripted into the Myanmar army (or being pressured into joining an ethnic insurgent group) face a lot of harassment, which can extend to their families. Media reporting about Christians is often distorted. Buddhist nationalists and hardliners broadcast a negative picture of Christians, claiming they use deception to force people to convert, and use converts to enrich themselves. With the arrival of COVID-19, Buddhist neighbors often claimed that Christians brought the pandemic into the country. Converts are often labeled traitors for leaving Buddhism. This is done via all media channels available - from sophisticated approaches on social media to public announcements via loudspeakers in villages. With the developing civil war, Christian aid workers and pastors are facing increasing accusations of being CDM or even PDF leaders and can be attacked by the army.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Dissent, especially any criticism about the situation of the ethnic and religious minorities, is dealt with harshly. Complaining is futile and whenever the army is involved, speaking out bears an even greater risk. With the military coup, the army is virtually involved all of the time and in a climate, where Christian leaders are accused of joining or even leading the resistance, be it CDM or PDF, speaking out is not only risky, but completely in vain anyway. The same is true when actions by radical Buddhist groups are addressed, but due to the changed situation in Myanmar, this has been eclipsed by other challenges.

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

As churches are suspected of being centers of opposition, local communities, authorities and especially the military monitor their activities. In a growing number of cases, this monitoring led to attacks against church buildings, staff and leaders, and has ended in killings. Buddhist monks connected with Ma Ba Tha also monitor Christian activities. For converts, this kind of pressure is even higher, and detection may mean they have to face very serious consequences, not just from the community, but from their own family too.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.50 points)

Obtaining permission for building or renovating church buildings was very difficult and often made impossible already before the military coup took place. While church buildings exist in various parts of Myanmar, especially in predominantly Christian regions, restrictions are in place to make it difficult and even impossible to obtain permission for building new churches. There are up to eight different levels of permission required to build a church, and applications must pass through various military-run departments and district and township-level administrative offices (often led by former army officers). As a result, permission for land ownership for churches almost never materializes. Applications are often filed away and not acted upon by officials entrusted with the task. "Grease money" is sometimes asked of Christians to expedite the process, without any guarantee that a permission will be issued in the end. In Christian majority areas like Kachin State, Chin State and the Naga area in Sagaing Region, the documents necessary are even harder to obtain and not giving them is seen as a good means to weaken the Christian minorities, as it will discourage them from trying to build new churches. Consequently, all over the country, many Christians are either meeting in private houses or in rented offices or shops (mainly in the cities). In Chin State, some Christians even say that there has been no official permission to construct a new church since 1997.

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

Churches need approval from the village head, whenever they want to carry out an activity outside their standard place of worship, even in predominantly or strongly Christian states. Since Christians are known to carry out outreach activities even when told not to, whatever they do is watched with suspicion. More often than not, approval is denied on the grounds that such activities may run in violation of the anti-conversion law. With the arrival of the pandemic, such activities have been limited in general, but as has been said earlier, Christian activities have been restricted where Buddhist activities have not.

Block 5 - additional information

Church leaders and pastors were already targeted frequently by radical Buddhists before the coup, since this has been seen as being an effective way of paralyzing church life. Now they are often suspected of being leaders of opposition movements. All religious publications are censored and reviewed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Some churches have started to print their own materials, but owning a printing press is made very difficult, publishing in minority languages remains out of the question and strict censorship rules apply. Importing Christian materials is very difficult and even impossible in minority languages.

Churches in ethnic minority areas face even more difficulties, as they are often regarded as being places for anti-government meetings and communication points for ethnic minority groups. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, church buildings were frequently targeted for attack as people used them for refuge from the fighting.

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.

Myanmar: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	13	3
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?	23	9
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	16	12
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	13
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	12
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	25
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	4
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1000 *	78
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?	43	12
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?	0	5
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	200,000	120,000
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	20,000	10,000

For the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- Christians killed:** The number of Christians killed in the reporting period is very difficult to count, even if one limits oneself to the number of civilians killed in attacks against churches and Christian villages. First, it is not clear that all civilians were Christian; and secondly, numbers of casualties are seldom stated. For the WWL 2022 reporting period it was decided to limit the number to the killings of Christian helpers at IDP camps and pastors. If counted in that way, 13 Christians were killed because of their faith in the reporting period. As one example, the case of Thantlang town shall be mentioned here: On 14 September 2021, a Baptist church in Thantlang town in Chin State was [attacked](#) by Myanmar army artillery (UCA News, 15 September 2021). When Baptist pastor Cung Biak Hum helped extinguish a

blaze that had engulfed 19 houses set on fire by artillery on 18 September, he was [killed](#) by soldiers, who also cut off his finger in order to steal his wedding ring (UCA News, 20 September 2021).

- **Christians attacked:** There have been dozens of Christians attacked for their faith, including converts from a Buddhist or a Muslim background. The attacks were sometimes carried out by family members, but also by ethnic insurgent armies. The Myanmar army is also launching indiscriminate attacks in some predominantly or strongly Christian states.
- **Christians arrested:** Many pastors and Catholic priests have been detained by the army, often suspected of supporting or even leading the opposition forces. In most cases, they were released after a few days, often after their churches had publicly reported such arrests. Examples are: [Mandalay, Chin State](#) and [Kachin State](#) (Fides, 14 June 2021; UCA News, 17 June 2021, Kachin News, 29 June 2021 and Fides, 31 July 2021).
- **Churches attacked:** Churches came increasingly [under attack](#) where they were considered to be centers of opposition (Al-Jazeera, 14 October 2021). As communication is often restricted by the armed forces, it is difficult to give a concrete number. Reports on file indicate at least 13 churches attacked, but the real number may be closer or even above 50.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** There have been dozens of attacks, in which houses and shops were destroyed. One of those attacks was the case of Thantlang township in which pastor Cung Biak Hum was killed and at least 19 houses of Christians were destroyed (see above).

5 Year trends

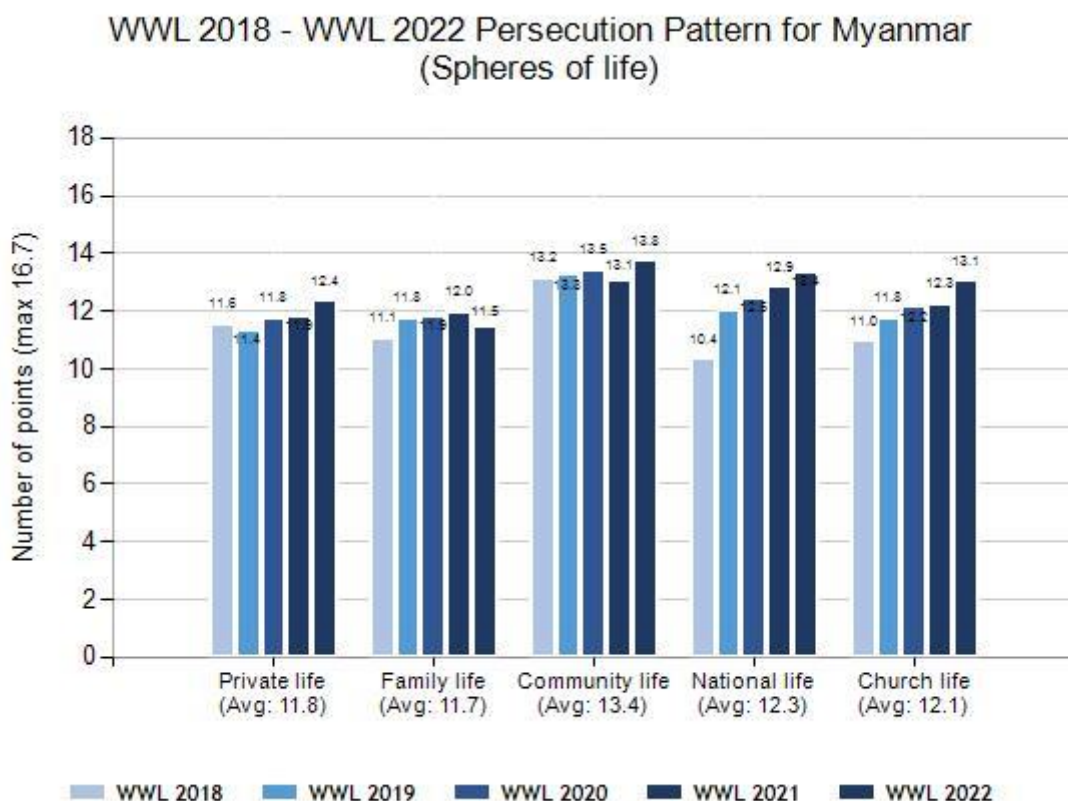
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Myanmar: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	12.8
2021	12.4
2020	12.4
2019	12.1
2018	11.4

The table above shows how the average level of pressure on Christians has increased steadily and reached a new high with a score of 12.8 points, as the unfolding civil war puts pressure on Christians over all *spheres of life*. While the ousted civilian government did nothing to improve the situation for religious minorities in Myanmar (including Christians), the military regime is making things unbearably worse. This not only affected violence levels, but also the levels of pressure over all *spheres of life*.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

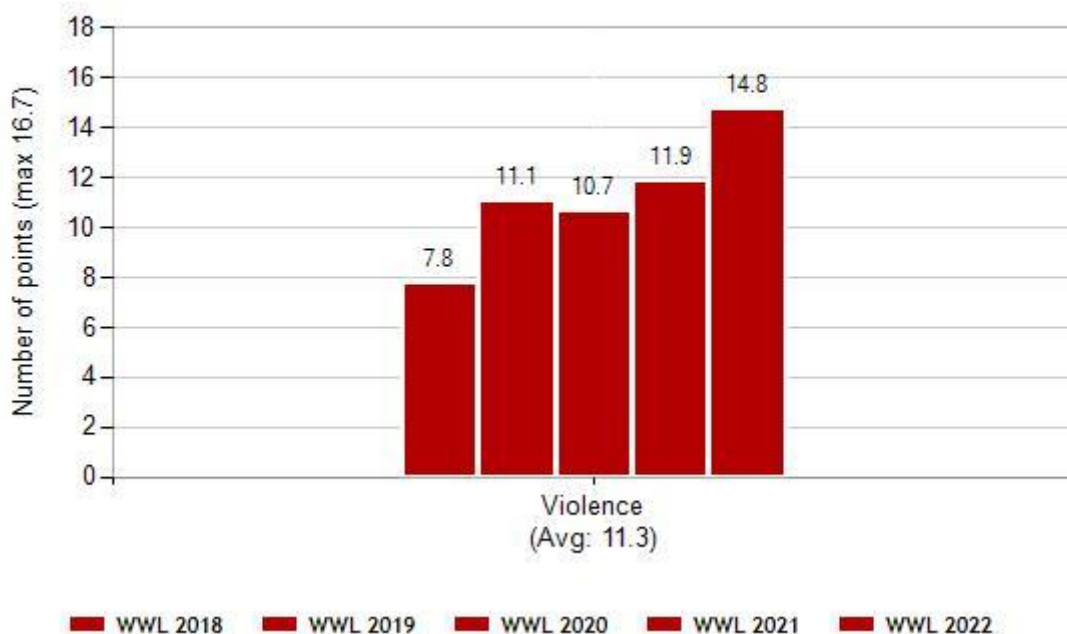


The chart above shows that the pressure in *Community life* has been highest throughout the last five reporting periods. The strong emphasis on Buddhism (and the nationalism connected with it) made the scores for *National* and *Church life* steadily increase, the increase of the latter also indicating that with the emerging civil war, church life is becoming hardly possible in many areas.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

As can be seen in the chart below, in the period WWL 2019-2021, the violence scores had more or less levelled off at the very high/extremely high point range of 10.7 - 11.9. With the unfolding civil war and the deliberate tactic of attacking churches and killing Christian aid workers and pastors, the level of violence climbed to a new high in WWL 2022. It should, however, be kept in mind that it is very difficult to get detailed information from regions like Kachin, Shan, Chin and Kayah states, so the real level of violence and pressure may be even higher. The Myanmar army has been quite successful in keeping these regions isolated.

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Myanmar (Violence)



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The military coup of February 2021 implicates fresh concerns for women in Myanmar. Over the last decade some progress has been made on women’s rights in the country which are at risk of reversal, and the army, which has expanded its already considerable power base, is a [known perpetrator](#) of gender-based violence (Foreign Policy, 23 March 2021). Women have been heavily involved in [the protests](#) for these very reasons (Al-Jazeera, 25 April 2021). Rape and physical assault by the armed forces is a significant threat to Christian women, particularly those belonging to ethnic minorities.

Christians feel they are viewed as second-class citizens across Myanmar, without the same legal protection and rights as the Buddhist majority. Thousands have become IDPs and refugees due to the coup. Women in Myanmar are also subordinate; reflecting this, a traditional Burmese proverb says: “Husband is god, son is master” (Burma Library, “Social Roles and Gender Stereo-

types”).

Women lack robust legal protection. Generally, victims of domestic violence lack legal cover. Specifically, Christian women married to non-Christian men can be legally pressured into following the husband’s religion, unlike Buddhist women. This law, which was mainly aimed at the Muslim minority, also acts as a hindrance to women converts to Christianity from a Buddhist background (especially secret converts). Within mixed-religion marriages, if the daughter decides to be a Christian, the non-Christian father often arranges for her to be married to a Buddhist. The mother and daughter have no power to prevent this. A country expert summarizes that women from Buddhist backgrounds are “vulnerable to forced abduction and forced marriage to Buddhist men and reconversion to Buddhism through marriage.”

Among the Muslim Rohingya minority, non-family members also utilize marriage as a means of cultivating Islam among Christian girls. Rohingya extremist groups reportedly abduct Rohingya Christian women, forcibly marry them to Muslim men and attempt to convert them to Islam. Additionally, there are instances when men have pretended to be a Christian – going so far as to be baptized – in order to find a Christian girl. After getting married, they then apply pressure on their wife to convert to Islam.

Female youth - in combination with a female converts’ lower status - means they are also vulnerable to house arrest and can face discrimination at school. This restricts their access to community life, including Christian fellowship. If married, they may also be divorced by their husband. External sources report that Christian women in the predominately Christian Kachin State continue to be trafficked to China to become 'brides', where they are raped with the aim of impregnating them to produce male heirs ([Human Rights Watch](#), 21 March 2019; [Family Research Council](#), 15 December 2020). Kachin Christians have been exposed to these atrocities for many years - they are even targeted within IDP camps where the Myanmar army inflicts further acts of abuse.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In Myanmar, men are culturally encouraged to find work as the [primary breadwinners](#) within the family unit; if they lose their job or are driven from their village or town because they are Christians, the whole family suffers and it causes emotional distress (Care International, “Rapid

Gender Analysis, Myanmar – Rakhine State”). Such persecution is real and tangible for male converts, who have fewer job opportunities available to them. Others find themselves in cycles of forced labor. Converts also face threats, ridicule and physical beatings.

It is especially difficult for Christian men to practice their faith within the context of the armed forces. The Myanmar army has been known to impose forced labor on Christians as a means of preventing them from attending Sunday services and accessing Christian community. Several men have consequently lost their faith. Men are also targeted for recruitment into militias, such as the Kachin Independence Army. As a country expert explained, those who refuse are subjected to "tremendous intimidation, threats and torture...Pastors and leaders who discourage young men from joining the rebels are also targeted by the insurgents". Targeting church leaders also serves to harm the wider Christian community, much like a family is made vulnerable without the family head.

Na Ta La schools aim to convert Christian children, which is an effective way of stopping Christianity from spreading to the next generation. The boys at these schools are raised to become Buddhist monks; when they start at the Na Ta La schools, their heads are shaved, they are given monks clothes and they also go around the local community begging for food.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department’s IRFR 2020 (page 1):

- "As during previous years, it was sometimes difficult to categorize incidents as based solely on religious identity due to the close linkage between religion and ethnicity. Violence, discrimination, and harassment in Rakhine State targeting ethnic Rohingya, nearly all Muslim, and other minority populations continued. Following the military’s commission of ethnic cleansing and other mass atrocities against Rohingya in August 2017 that displaced more than 700,000 refugees to Bangladesh, Rohingya remaining in Burma continued to face an environment of severe repression and restrictions on freedom of movement and access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods based on their ethnicity, religion, and citizenship status, according to the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Among the 163 Rohingya who reportedly fled the country between January and October, some cited ongoing abuses in Rakhine State; others reported continuing government pressure to participate in a residency verification campaign, which they said they did not trust."
- "During the year, several UN entities commented or released reports on the Rohingya crisis. In September, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar said the government was purposefully evading accountability and making it difficult for Rohingya refugees to safely return to Rakhine State as part of the government’s goal of "exterminating their basic identity." The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) began to interview witnesses and collect evidence for possible criminal proceedings for gross violations of human rights, including against Rohingya. Religious leaders and civil society activists reported some government and military officials continued to deploy anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim rumors and hate speech in official events. Rohingya, both in Rakhine State and those living in Bangladesh, faced mass disenfranchisement in November general elections because of discriminatory citizenship

policies. The government barred seven Rohingya politicians from running in the elections on citizenship grounds, while allowing five Muslim candidates from the Kaman minority to run."

The persecution of the Muslim Rohingya minority has been referred to in this country dossier several times. Their plight is now being discussed in front of an international audience in a court room in The Hague, but this will neither bring immediate relief to the refugees stuck in camps in Bangladesh nor to the Muslim minority left behind in Myanmar, mainly in Rakhine State. The whole court process may become much more of an uphill battle with the Tatmadaw taking over power in the February 2021 coup. It is unthinkable that Rohingya refugees will return willingly to Myanmar from Bangladesh, where they fled to save their lives, even when some of them have been relocated to a remote island. Driven by the Myanmar army and Buddhist religious leaders - and widely backed by many citizens - this policy fits the country's increasing *Religious nationalism*. Non-Rohingya Muslims in other parts of the country are also facing persecution and discrimination. Hindus sometimes also feel restrictions and pressure from Buddhist supremacy, but on a much lower level than other religious minorities.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Dictatorial paranoia and Organized corruption and crime

With the military coup, *Dictatorial paranoia* is increasing in strength and importance once again. While the motives of the army may not be fully apparent at the current time, one reason is that it is [deeply involved](#) in both legal and illicit trade (East Asia Forum, 2 February 2021), which mainly affects predominantly Christian areas like Kachin State. Trust-building will be impossible as the Tatmadaw is now also fighting against at least parts of the *Bamar* majority. Also, as long as the army continues to launch offensives against the largely Christian Kachin minority, fighting in Karen and Kayah State will persist. Casualties among Christians in Chin State are seen as mere 'collateral damage' in the fight against insurgents. The goal of the National Unity Government as well as the only loosely connected PDF is to dissolve the Tatmadaw and install a federal system instead, a goal which is anathema to the Tatmadaw and will send *Dictatorial paranoia* into overdrive. The quickly deteriorating COVID-19 situation will only add to this, as any form of complaint is regarded as being a criticism of the army.

Religious nationalism - Buddhist

Even the civilian government had employed a divide-and-rule strategy, which could be seen, for instance, when Thein Swe, Union Minister of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, said the government was unable to release the findings of the census 2014 due to confusion over who belonged to which ethnic group: "Taking the case of the Kachin, he said there could be between six and 12 sub-ethnicities depending on who you listen to. Others dispute claims the Chin have 53 sub-ethnic groups." The military rulers are expected to use Buddhist nationalism and supremacy as a motive for their efforts to stay in power.

Radical Buddhist groups like Ma Ba Tha are being watched carefully by fellow Buddhist groups and politicians, but their influence and rhetoric against non-Buddhist minorities is unbroken, even though they may be less visible for the time being. Their radical stance is still best reflected by a report which [quoted Ashin Wirathu](#), one of the most outspoken and radical Buddhist monks, as saying: "I am only warning people about Muslims. Consider it like if you had a dog that would bark at strangers coming to your house – it is to warn you. I am like that dog. I bark." (The Conversation, 7 November 2017). Given the proximity radical monks have with the army circles, *Religious nationalism* will continue to have a strong influence. Wirathu was [freed from prison](#) in September 2021, after charges of incendiary behavior have been dropped and it is not clear if and in what ways he will support the military regime (AP News, 7 September 2021).

Communist and post-Communist oppression

Although the situation for Christians in self-governed Wa State has partly relaxed, the damage is done, dozens of churches and Bible schools have been closed down and Christian leaders and students have been detained or expelled. It seems safe to say that Wa State - at least in religious terms - will be changed forever.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: take over regulating radical Buddhist groups - <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/religion-ministry-done-leaving-sangha-govern-ma-ba-tha.html>
- Persecution engines description: UN report - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/MyanmarFFM/Pages/EconomicInterestsMyanmarMilitary.aspx>
- Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (4.00 points): get justice - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/kachin-christians-determined-to-get-justice-for-murdered-teachers/91082>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: attacked - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/military-attacks-church-in-battle-ravaged-myanmar/94156>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: killed - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/baptist-pastor-shot-dead-in-myanmar/94210>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Mandalay, - http://www.fides.org/en/news/70316-ASIA_MYANMAR_Catholic_priests_arrested_and_released_by_the_army_violence_in_Mandalay
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Chin - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/myanmar-military-arrest-catholic-priest-in-chin-state/92910>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: State - http://www.fides.org/en/news/70606-ASIA_MYANMAR_Catholic_priest_arrested_by_rebels_and_accused_of_having_contact_with_the_regular_army
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Kachin State - <https://kachinnews.com/2021/06/29/christian-leaders-arrested-for-attending-prayer-service-in-northern-kachin-state/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: under attack - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/14/a-living-hell-churches-suffer-in-myanmar-military-attacks%20and%20https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/karenni-religious-leaders-cry-foul-as-churches-come-under-fire>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: known perpetrator - <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/myanmar-coup-women-human-rights-violence-military/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: the protests - <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/4/25/women-of-myanmar-stand-resilient-against-the-military-coup>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Human Rights Watch, - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/03/21/give-us-baby-and-well-let-you-go/trafficking-kachin-brides-myanmar-china>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Family Research Council - <https://www.frc.org/blog/2020/12/chinas-bride-trafficking-problem>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: primary breadwinners - https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/images/GiE_Learning_RGA_Myanmar-Rakhine-State_COVID-19_August2020.pdf
- Future outlook: deeply involved - <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/02/02/making-sense-of-myanmars-coup/>
- Future outlook: quoted Ashin Wirathu - <https://theconversation.com/militant-buddhism-is-on-the-march-in-south-east-asia-where-did-it-come-from-86632>
- Future outlook: freed from prison - <https://apnews.com/article/religion-myanmar-d8d7f1f0619fb9b59d76380b47ce2214>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Myanmar>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Myanmar>